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In 1938, a crucial year, he joined The Caxton Press as a partner with Denis Glover, and participated fully in Caxton’s important contribution to the development of New Zealand literature, through publishing writers such as Curnow, Bethell, Sargeson, Fairburn, Baxter and Frame. In the same year he was awarded the Friedlander residency. This was a request that needed little encouragement.

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In 1938, a crucial year, he joined The Caxton Press as a partner with Denis Glover, and participated fully in Caxton’s important contribution to the development of New Zealand literature, through publishing writers such as Curnow, Bethell, Sargeson, Fairburn, Baxter and Frame. In the same year he became a member of The Group, the most significant art collective in the country in the middle decades of last century, to which he contributed in almost every annual exhibition until it disbanded in 1977; he also from 1940 designed all The Group’s annual catalogues, now regarded as a masterpiece of design.

In 1938 he and his Nelson friend Lawrence Baigent joined Rita Angus at 97 Cambridge Terrace, a place which became the epicentre of the vital arts scene in Christchurch at that time. Leo was a pivotal go-between who linked the worlds of literature and the visual arts.

Seung Yul Oh graduated Master of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts in 2005, one of a new generation of migrants drawn to study in New Zealand from South Korea, also including Jeena Shin, Hye Rim Lee and Jae Hoon Lee (no relation).

Oh moved to New Zealand in 1997 and, at time of writing, has just opened his first solo exhibition in his home town of Seoul, where he is currently undertaking a residency in an artist-run space founded and managed by well-known artist Chai Jeong Hwa, who shares Oh’s playful sensibility.

It has been an eventful year for Oh. Last February he opened a solo public gallery exhibition, Bogle Bogle, at the Dowse Art Museum in Porirua as part of the Wellington Arts Festival, and in June his first public sculptures were unveiled in Newmarket. In December he was awarded the Harriet Friedlander New York Residency, an all-expenses paid eight months in New York City, which he will take up later this year. And early last month he had his first Wellington commercial gallery exhibition, oioioioio, which develops the highly finished egg forms he is now renowned for.

In the midst of this activity, The University of Auckland purchased a pair of Oh’s sculptures, based on a commission he produced for Te Papa in 2009. The five pieces he produced for Te Papa’s wind-blown sculpture terrace are named Oddooki after weighted self-righting toys he remembers from Korea. Their forms are part-bird, part-egg, recalling the conundrum over whether chickens or eggs came first, and contain a bell that jingles when the sculpture is rocked.

Hidden workings and folksy motifs are recurring designs for Oh, exemplified by jingling eggs and vibrating boxes. Oh’s works celebrate the joy of creativity and surprise. Sometimes messy, usually bright and boisterous, they recall folk-art, DIY or children’s toys. It is this mix of familiarity and fun that captures the viewer’s imagination. His recent works may appear as simple, streamlined forms with a highly-polished finish but, despite the complex processes that go into their production, it is their effortless appearance that provides a very immediate appeal.

One explosive video work captured the uncontrollable glee of people blowing up balloons until they burst, an activity he had the well-heeled audience repeat to conclude the Art Foundation’s ceremony when he was awarded the Friedlander residency. This was a request that needed little encouragement.

Oddooki and Oioio feature in the Gus Fisher Gallery exhibition, Top Ten: new acquisitions for The University of Auckland Art Collection, which concludes on Saturday 5 March with a celebration of ten years of the Gus Fisher Gallery.

Andrew Clifford