

From the collection

Art

Described as “a woman of mettlesome and sparkling personality, with passionate intellectual and philosophical interests”, Gabrielle Hope had a career as a painter that lasted just two short decades.

Enrolling in classes at the Elam School of Fine Arts the day after her younger child began school in 1946, she said she chose watercolour as her medium because it dried quickly, meaning she could get her work cleared off the kitchen table before the family came home. Stylistically, her approach to painting wavered between Fauvism, Surrealism and Cubism before settling into a gestural Expressionist course.

Motifs and composition came from her surroundings. Absorbing lessons in paint from Frances Hodgkins, she loosened her brushwork and dissolved still life into landscape. Dreams surfaced in her work. She studied Chinese calligraphy, the Tao of painting, the poetry of W.B. Yeats, Buddhism and the mystic teachings of George Gurdjieff, and she went on painting excursions around Auckland with Robert Nettleton Field, Geoffrey Fairburn and Lincoln Lee.

By 1955, her work had been collected by the influential patron, Charles Brasch, and published by him in *Landfall*, as well as being acquired for public collections from the Auckland Society of Arts and from her dealer, Peter Webb.



Her inclusion in Colin McCahon’s nationally touring exhibition of five watercolour painters, which began at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1958, indicates how well-regarded her painting was in its time.

With her older friend, the painter Peggy Spicer,

she set up camp at Mt Tauhara near Taupo, in 1962. Captured by the spectre of the dormant volcano – its Māori name translates as “lonely mountain” – which rises to a height of over a thousand metres on the eastern side of Lake

Taupo, both artists painted many versions of the subject. Milled in the early twentieth century, Mt Tauhara’s second generation forest cover of kanuka, kamahi and bracken fern had been regenerating until a disastrous fire wiped out the regrowth.

This devastation is recorded here in one of the artist’s last works, with a palette of Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber and Lamp Black used to reveal the structure and colour of the volcanic landscape.

It has been suggested that Gabrielle Hope’s early death at the age of 46 years has led to her becoming one of the most unjustly neglected painters of her generation.

This work is included in the exhibition *Lyric Watercolours: Gabrielle Hope (1916-1962)* which will be on display at the Gus Fisher Gallery until 7 April.

Linda Tyler

Gabrielle Hope, Mount Tauhara after fire, 1962
Gouache on paper, 440 x 565mm
The University of Auckland Art Collection.