

# From the art collection

At first blush, this painting from Ian Scott's *Authentic Traditions* appears to be textbook postmodernism. Combine "low" art (beer advertising) with "high" art (a photograph of Colin McCahon, twentieth century New Zealand art's biggest gun) with a conventional painting of iconic South Island scenery and a cluster of punga trees for ironic effect.

Back in 1993, not only was the New Zealand landscape tradition in art thought to be exhausted, painting itself was thought to be obsolete. Freighted with history, painting had been superseded by video, performance and installation as contemporary media. How better to memorialize the end of painting in New Zealand than with a nostalgic pot pourri of kiwiana, an artistic *mélange* of redundant cultural references from a time when beer was a dollar a can?

Yet despite all the elements in Ian Scott's painting being representational and recognizably symbolic, their dissonance emphasizes abstract, formal properties in painting in a modernist way. Colour blocks are pushed to the surface but there is no logic to the distribution, no cohesion to the pattern. Loud and important, a square of yellow is balanced with one of green above, and a floating rectangle of red hovers supernaturally over a predominantly blue and green landscape. Is the recently deceased modernist master, Colin McCahon (1919-1987) an angel heralding new beginnings for the landscape?

All the imagery is copied or appropriated. Rather than invent his own version of the Great New Zealand Landscape, the artist has repainted a classic Douglas Badcock original of Central Otago. Worthy of inclusion in a collection of table



mats of New Zealand scenery, this view is carefully, and conventionally, composed. It gives the viewer a bird's eye perspective of a ploughed field with a stone church and autumnal poplars reflected in the glassy surface of the Clutha River which flows diagonally across the foreground. A dramatic sky casts shadows on the snowclad peaks behind. Timelessness is the painter's aim, with the work a celebration of bucolic agricultural life in the hinterland, or as South Islanders prefer to call it, the heartland.

Commercially successful, Douglas Badcock (1922-2009) once sold 42 paintings in an afternoon at Smith & Caughey's, and published three books on his art in the 1970s. Badcock frequently aced the Kelliher Art Award, an art competition which ran annually in New Zealand from 1956 to 1977 with a prize of £500.

Established by the beer baron Sir Henry Kelliher (Dominion Breweries was his company, as heralded by the beer advertisement silkscreened on this work), its aim was "to encourage artists to paint the essential character of the New Zealand scene and the ways of life of its people". With missionary zeal and considerable capital, Kelliher, who was from Otago himself, had hoped to stem the tide of modernism and abstraction in the 1950s. As a twenty year old immigrant from Bradford in Yorkshire, Ian Scott had entered the competition, winning the junior section with *Low Tide*, Anawhata in 1965 while in his second year at art school. Colin McCahon, who was Ian Scott's lecturer at the Elam School of Fine Arts in the mid 1960s, had nothing but contempt for the Kelliher with its "aesthetics of the cake tin or tea towel" and called it the Kelliher prize for calendar art.

Rather than a postmodern critique of authorship with a random collection of copies arranged non-hierarchically, Ian Scott's *New Zealand Evening* is a serious consideration of the twilight of a tradition. He emulates the way American painter Robert Rauschenberg encouraged his viewers to tease out the links between seemingly unrelated imagery. He asks us to consider not only the status of this mode of landscape in the contemporary art world, but also the relationship between abstraction and representation in modernism. This continued as the theme for his work with recourse to combining imagery from pornography and minimalism until his recent death from cancer on 27 June 2013.

**Linda Tyler**

*Ian Scott (1945-2013) New Zealand Evening (Central Otago) 1993, acrylic, enamel and silkscreen on canvas, 1160 x 1270mm*