

# From the Collection



*Judy Cassab (b.1920), Portrait of VC Colin Maiden, 1982*  
*The University of Auckland Art Collection*

Like royalty, judges, politicians, bishops and vice-chancellors of universities are all prime candidates for having their portraits painted from life. It is usually a time-consuming business.

Sir Colin Maiden has kept the record of the six occasions he sat for Australian artist Judy Cassab, travelling to Remuera on consecutive days in early March of 1982. Renowned as having twice won the prestigious Archibald Prize in Australia and completed portraits of Princess Alexandra and the Maharani of Jaipur, Judy Cassab was proposed as the best artist available by Chancellor Lindo Ferguson. The portrait was completed long before Colin Maiden retired from his 24-year term as Vice-Chancellor, and during the intervening years he kept the painting at home, returning it to the

University in 1994. He was 49 years old at the time the portrait was painted and his youthful appearance in it surprised viewers at the unveiling 12 years later.

Judy Cassab herself was considerably older than her sitter, and the entry for 13 March 1982 in her published diaries records how fatiguing the process of painting a commissioned portrait (with its attendant socialising) was for her at the age of

62 years: "I am in Auckland for two commissions. It evokes the old London days of portrait manufacturing. Except I am 20 years older now, and to conserve energy I haven't set a foot outside. Make breakfast, wash dishes, prepare coffee on a tray for the sitter, do my exercises. Paint two hours, make lunch, have a siesta, paint two hours, rest and read, have a bath, go to different people's houses for dinner." She insisted that her sitters talk to her, explaining to one judge: "Your personality exists at the end of my brush. Every word you say comes through my ears and through my mind down to my hands and onto the tip of the brush."

Colin Maiden, who published his autobiography *An Energetic Life* in 2008, was at the peak of his powers. He had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, a research engineer in space and defence scientist in Canada and a leading General Motors executive in America. He was still quite handy on the tennis court, winning the over-45-year-old category doubles in the Waikato the same Saturday that he and his wife Jenefor threw a dinner party in Cassab's honour. Cassab accentuates his golden quality, blending a luminous background behind his cap of neatly parted and combed blonde hair. Yet she also focuses attention on his hands with their unusually long, slender fingers tentatively crossed as if uncomfortable in repose. The image is of a restrained and careful man, animated by a startlingly blue eye colour which is matched to that of his official robes. Eyes were Cassab's thing, as she writes: "The eyes are where I return always, like a ship to the lighthouse. Whereas I probably wouldn't place a highlight on a china cup, I mostly paint one in the eyes. It's a magic moment when the eyes come alive and look back at me."

Linda Tyler