mapping auckland

Auckland Museum.

co-developer of a major new exhibition at school of Architecture and planning is Auckland academic Kathy Waghorn, from the awarded 2004.


As a young science teacher living and working on the Auckland volcanic field, Len Castle made great use of lava tubes and caves, and took field trips to Rangitoto. He was delighted when Ruapehu’s boisterous activity for several months in 1945 briefly eclipsed war reports from the Pacific theatre. Like the painter Colin McCahon who was studying the line drawings of landforms produced by Charles Cotton at this same time, Len married aesthetic sensibilities with an interest in geomorphology.

Compelled by the perfect symmetry of Mt Ngauruhoe, Tongariro’s main active vent, Len visited the volcanic plateau on holiday, taking the opportunity afforded to climb to the summit from the traverse crossing route. Ngauruhoe’s cone is shaped by frequent eruptions and its steep, scoria-laden sides make for a difficult scramble to the top, but Len achieved enough stability for photographic snapshots documenting the trip. The following year, 1948, the volcano sent many cubic metres of rock skyward sporadically. This showy display turned out to be just building momentum for a lava eruption in February 1949 which lasted three weeks and sent out a plume of ash six kilometres long. Colour photography was still rare at that time, but six years later in 1954 when Ngauruhoe erupted again, amateur photographers had access to Kodachrome to record the drama. This time the volcano produced six million cubic tonnes of lava, expelled as energetic fountains of red magma spurtng above the summit. Compelled by images of this wondrous natural spectacle, Len felt there was an analogy to the combination of fire and clay in his nascent practice as a potter. Although the volcanic series of bowls did not eventuate until 50 years later, his approach to the subject was galvanised by his youthful close encounters.

Len’s achievements with glazes in recreating the intense red of lava or the turquoise blue of a crater lake also owe a debt to his early enthusiasm for nature photography. He began photographing in colour himself in the 1960s, using his library of photographs to guide his own work.

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“You are here” MAPPING AUCKLAND explores 200 years of Auckland’s planning and evolution using 40 maps from the museum’s 10,000-strong collection as the lens.

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“The boundaries and internal divisions of this city have been re-drawn many times and there have been many different motivations and rationales for changing them. Maps are always made from a specific point of view. This exhibition doesn’t just show that these plans and boundaries are subject to change over time, it shows they are subject to change depending on who it is that is doing the planning or making the map,” says Kathy.

Auckland Museum exhibition developer Georgina White says the exhibition works on multiple levels to draw in different audiences. “In the exhibition we explain how Bean Rock got its name, and we describe how the lighthouse keeper’s son kept in touch with his father by standing outside his family home in Devonport at night and sending messages in Morse code across the harbour.”