

## From the collection



There is a lot that is familiar in Peter Siddell's landscape paintings. Long horizons, Victorian architecture, waterways and volcanic cones. They all look like bits of Auckland we know, although you can't quite finger where.

Probably not the suburb you grew up in but possibly one you visited a few times. Perhaps it was before the old mansion was pulled down, or the new tower went up? Even the way the light plays across the landscape. This is the artist's city and his scenes have become so familiar that the real Auckland sometimes looks a lot like his paintings.

Siddell's works are so vivid and detailed, they appear to be careful studies, but are usually composite images, drawn from a carefully cultivated vocabulary of architectural and landscape forms that are collectively very much

of a place, even if they don't exist anywhere in particular in the depicted configurations. Nevertheless, they derive from a long career of carefully observed and crafted scenes, usually of Auckland, that have accumulated into a visual language that always looks like Auckland, even without specific landmarks. His landscapes are usually unpopulated and still, with big hanging clouds that float lazily across blue skies, lending a dreamlike quality to his images. The effect is to produce a landscape of the mind, of memory or dream, where some details have absolute clarity, particular houses or windows or trees, but is never quite fixed in reality.

As Michael Dunn, former Art History and Elam Head, notes in the handsome book on Siddell's work published by Godwit last year, Siddell is also well aware of the Māori legacy in

Auckland's landscape and the recurrence of significant volcanic cones acknowledge this history.

Not surprisingly, Siddell was born in Auckland (Grey Lynn) and schooled at Mount Albert Grammar, where he was good at art but finished school when he was 16 and spent ten years as a tradesman. He also became a keen trumper and mountaineer, which might explain the mountain views and panoramic views that are often a feature of his paintings, even if only glimpsed through a window. As he recalls in his book, it was through the Auckland Tramping Club that he met his future wife, Sylvia, after rescuing her in the Coromandel Ranges.

In the 1960s he attended a short course at Auckland Teachers College and also began painting again, influenced by W.A. Sutton's iconic depictions of Canterbury. Sylvia also painted and introduced him to the work of Rita Angus, Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston and Don Binney. A long and distinguished career followed and he was awarded the Queen's Service Order (QSO) for services to art in 1990, and then made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (DCNZM) in 2008 (Sylvia became an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2002).

An exhibition of Sir Peter Siddell's paintings is currently on show at Lopdell House in Titirangi until 21 August.

*Peter Siddell (b.1935)  
Northern Shore, 1995  
Alkyd on canvas, 800 x 1200mm  
The University of Auckland Art Collection*

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