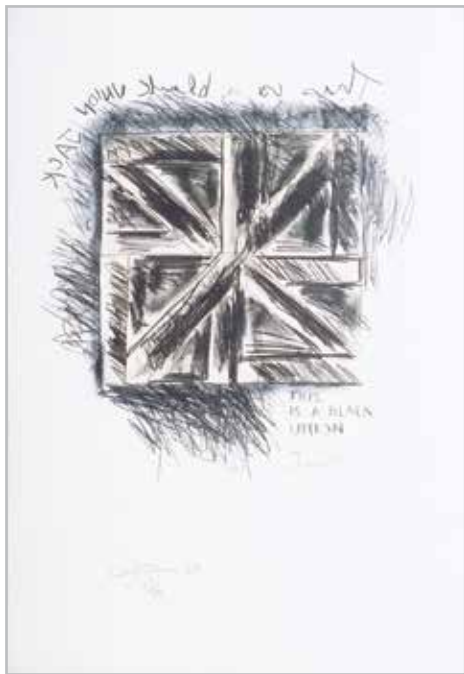


From the collection



Well-known for his use of black and his collaboration with New Zealand writers, the celebrated New Zealand artist Ralph Hotere died of pneumonia in Dunedin on Sunday 24 February.

Born in Mitimiti, Northland, in 1931, Hotere was one of 15 children in a Roman Catholic family. His name, Hone Papita, translates as John the Baptist, the name of the most famous Catholic bishop of the North, Jean-Baptiste Pompallier. In 1952 he moved to Dunedin to specialise in art, and within ten years had left for Europe where he studied until 1965. He travelled widely, visiting the grave of his brother Jack, buried in the Sangro River War Cemetery in Italy, and took up a residency in Vence, near the Matisse Chapel in the south of France.

“Everything Hotere touches turns to black,” writer David Eggleton once said, noting that Hotere’s use of both the colour and the word “black” are key characteristics of many of his works. There are 13 works in The University of Auckland Art Collection and ten of them have the word black in the title, including this one, *Black Rainbow* 1987, painted to commemorate the sinking of the Greenpeace boat *Rainbow Warrior* at Matauri Bay in 1985. He was particularly outraged at the sequestering of the perpetrators of the bombing, French secret service agents Dominique Prieur and Alain Mafart, on an atoll in the South Pacific before their return to France.

Often motivated to make his works as a response to political and social issues, Hotere was outspoken in his opposition to the huge aluminium smelter proposed during the Think Big years to take advantage of cheap electricity to process bauxite due to be located on the precious bird nesting grounds in the sand dunes at Aramoana. An active protestor in the marches against the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981, he commemorated Steve Biko, and other heroes of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in works on corrugated iron. The on air reference to Kofi Annan as a “cheeky darkie” resulted in a “*White Drip*” painting, which addressed Mister Paul Holmes directly using roofing iron as the support. In the *Black Window*, *Black Phoenix* and *Black Rainbow* works, “Black” is a contextual symbol, a form of protest against colonialism, imperialism and repression. It has been suggested that black for Hotere symbolises anger, annihilation and apocalypse.

Commissioned by The University of Auckland to create a wall sculpture in corrugated iron for

the new Music School in Symonds Street in 1985, Hotere worked on site to create *Black Drop*, an enormous eight-metre enamel on corrugated iron work. Dame Jenny Gibbs, the University’s Pro-Chancellor, visited Port Chalmers to bestow Honorary Doctor of Literature degrees from the University on both the artist and his friend the poet Hone Tuwhare in 2005.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Stuart McCutcheon, noted: “In choosing his subject matter, Ralph Hotere has been true to the University’s obligation to act as a ‘critic and conscience of society.’ But even more than this he has fostered a new generation of visual artists, who hopefully will carry on his strong social commitment.” The Vice-Chancellor also observed how fitting it was that they were being honoured jointly, as Ralph Hotere had incorporated Hone Tuwhare’s poetry into his work, and the poem “Hotere” is one of Tuwhare’s most famous poems. It ends:

But when you score a superb orange
circle on a purple thought-base
I shake my head and say: hell, what
is this thing called aroha

Like, I’m euchred, man. I’m eclipsed?

Linda Tyler

Ralph Hotere, Black Rainbow 1987, acrylic on board, 960 x 580mm