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The Establishment of the Canterbury Society of Arts

FORMING THE TASTE, JUDGEMENT AND IDENTITY OF A PROVINCE, 1850–1880

HISTORIES OF NEW ZEALAND ART have commonly portrayed art societies as conservative institutions, predominantly concerned with educating public taste and developing civic art collections that pandered to popular academic British painting. In his discussion of Canterbury's cultural development, for example, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki commented that the founding of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) in 1880 formalized the enduring presence of the English art establishment in the province.[1] Similarly, Michael Dunn has observed that the model for the establishment of New Zealand art societies in the late nineteenth century was the Royal Academy, London, even though 'they were never able to attain the same prestige or social significance as the Royal Academy had in its heyday'.[2] As organizations that appeared to perpetuate the Academy's example, art societies have served as a convenient, reactionary target for those historians who have contrasted art societies' long-standing conservatism with the struggle to establish an emerging national identity in the twentieth century. Gordon Brown, for example, maintained that the development of painting within New Zealand during the 1920s and 1930s was restrained by the societies' influence, 'as they increasingly failed to comprehend the changing values entering the arts'.[3]

The establishment of the CSA in St Michael's schoolroom in Christchurch on 30 June 1880, though, was more than a simple desire by an ambitious colonial township to imitate the cultural and educational institutions of Great Britain and Europe. Re-examining the CSA's foundation allows us to question familiar perceptions about art societies. The motives for establishing such institutions were complex. Alongside the ambitions of an educated landed-gentry wishing to implement educational organizations as part of the Canterbury Association's settlement plans, the CSA was testament to a continuing belief in the virtues of knowledge and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the influence of late nineteenth-century liberalism and individualism, and a nostalgia for Britain's high culture. Moreover, as an institution founded to encourage the study, practice and cultivation of the fine arts in Canterbury, the CSA also nurtured a sense of identity and early signs of a spirit of nationalism.

By 1880, the buildings on Worcester Street and Rolleston Avenue that made up Christchurch's educational precinct were concrete signs that the colonial town was receptive to education and progressive thinking.[4] Canterbury College had occupied its first permanent building in 1877.[5] Two years after the formation of the CSA, Canterbury College School of Art was opened.[6]

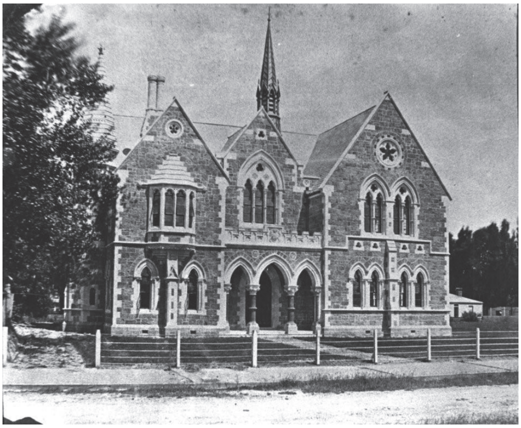

Figure 1. Christchurch Boys High School 1879, unknown photographer, Canterbury Museum, Ref. 19XX.2.775, The CSA held its first annual exhibition, January 1881, in Christchurch Boys High School on Worcester Street. According to the *Lyttelton Times*, reporting on 18 January, the building was spacious and light, 'all that can be wished for exhibition purposes'.

Elected to the CSA's first council were two figures who had long supported education and the arts: Sir Julius von Haast and Henry John Tancred. Haast's vision for higher learning was apparent in the institutions that he had already founded, most notably the Canterbury Museum in 1870.[7] This educational institution included a public library and a school of Technical Science, and had been financed with lease money from high country farming stations.[8] The role played by educated landowners in the establishment of the city's educational precinct was equally crucial to the formation of the CSA. Station owners Tancred, Henry Porcher Lance, Louis Neville, James Edward Parker and Edwyn Temple, were all elected to its inaugural council. The CSA's first president, Tancred, was a longstanding associate of Haast's. Like Haast he had achieved prominence through his contribution to culture and learning. Chancellor of the University of New Zealand in 1871, he was involved in the establishment of Canterbury College and was on the board of governors from 1873 to 1884.[9]

The Canterbury Association's initial intentions to reproduce an English class structure, based on land ownership and an agricultural economy, included the establishment of educational and artistic institutions. Its guide to settlement noted the importance of 'a good college, good schools, churches, a bishop, clergy, all those moral necessaries, in short, which promiscuous emigration of all sects, though of one class, makes it utterly impossible to provide adequately'.[10] However, rather than faithfully reproducing Great Britain's class structures, Canterbury suffered from shortages of labour and a lack of money from land sales that constrained essential public work programmes and also challenged class distinctions.[11] By 1852 the *North British Review* warned the landed gentry in England that 'many a scene of grievous disappointment on the shores of New Zealand is known to us .... Among them might be found college-bred gentlemen acting as sawyers to carpenters.'[12] Instead, self-reliance gave a dignity to labour that conferred a stature upon it distinct from that in Britain.[13]

While the reality of colonial life may have been different from that initially anticipated, it did not deter Lyttelton resident Charles J. Rae from writing to the *Lyttelton Times* in March 1852, wishing to address 'the absence of those means for social intercourse which binds man to man, and of those amusements which tend to make the individual cheerful and virtuous, and society happy'.[14] Rae wished to establish 'a Working Man's Literary and Scientific Institution' and offered a selection of his own books to form a Mechanics' Institute. His letter was supported by a like-minded correspondent, who maintained that a 'useful institution …. cannot fail if conducted properly to confer a great benefit on the operative class'.[15] By the 1850s, Mechanics' Institutes were well known throughout Great Britain. The first organization was founded in Scotland in 1823 with the intention of bringing art and higher learning to working men.[16] By 1850 there were 610 such associations throughout Great Britain, with membership around 600,000. Their aim was to educate and improve the quality of life of working people.[17] The Victorian belief in self-improvement also encompassed the more practical concern of sobriety. In his letter Rae suggested that the formation of a Mechanics' Institute would 'assist in producing some means of weaning my fellow men from the degrading influence of the "grog shop," ere the all-damning sin of drunkenness has taken too deep a root'.[18]

Rae's unease about the 'operative class' reflected widespread contemporary anxieties in Europe. During this period of rapid change the threat of civil unrest never seemed far away. In Britain the rapid economic and social development of the industrial revolution had generated a powerful need for guidance and support.[19] Architect and Catholic convert Augustus Welby Pugin, and craftsman and social reformer William Morris, maintained that education and the arts would provide moral guidance to an individual, and thus contribute to the wider betterment of society.[20] Such ideas were also apparent in William Gladstone's assertion that 'the highest instruments of human cultivation are also ultimate guarantees of public order'.[21] As David Thomas has argued, the influence of this ideology in the latter half of the nineteenth century meant that 'Various ideas about cultivation — understood …. as self improvement and as social amelioration — drove many famously "Victorian" contexts, from self-help manuals to educational reforms and philanthropic interventions'.[22]

The premise that individualism and self-improvement could resolve problems of social disorder were undoubtedly valued by Rae and his contemporaries. They belonged to a settlement that was less than two years old in which essential services like transportation, bridges and roads were still largely absent. Moreover, Christchurch was a 'howling wilderness', populated almost entirely by tall flax and scrub.[23] According to John Cookson, for 'twenty years or so [Christchurch] belonged categorically to the frontier'.[24]

Although a Mechanics' Institute was not established in the region until 1859, Rae must have been pleased that, to a certain extent, his intentions to improve the behaviour of Lyttelton's residents were addressed a few months later at a public meeting attended by almost 150 people. In May 1852, the aristocratic and soon-to-be first superintendent of Canterbury, James Edward FitzGerald, put forward a motion to dissolve the settlers' Land Purchasers' Society and establish a Society of Canterbury Colonists.[25] FitzGerald's proposal included provision for 'intellectual amusements'[26] and was seconded by fellow Canterbury pilgrim Thomas Cholmondely,[27] who noted that 'We had hitherto contented ourselves with laying out towns, erecting stores and houses, forming roads, establishing schools, and had laid the foundation of a church …. But this was not all that was required …. the proposed society would have for its objects to promote the cultivation of the mind.'[28] Accordingly, at its meeting in September 1852, while the Lyttelton Colonists' Society dealt with the urgent and practical needs of extinguishing fires in a township constructed entirely of wooden buildings, the importance of receiving a portrait of the chairman of the society was also acknowledged.[29] The presentation of a painting of Dr William Donald[30] by his wife, portrait artist Mary Townsend (Mrs Donald),[31] was greeted with tremendous excitement. As the *Lyttelton Times* observed: 'A portrait of their Chairman, Dr. Donald was the donor (hear) and he (Mr. Birch) was assured that the gift would be duly appreciated under any circumstances, and the more so when he added that the portrait was painted by Mrs. Donald (cheers)'. [32]

Although Canterbury did not yet possess even the most elementary cultural infrastructure, the importance of the fine arts to this settler community should not be underestimated.[33] Just as the *Lyttelton Times* was pleased to report the warm reception of Townsend's portrait of a local politician, in 1856 the newspaper was equally receptive towards the exhibition of a panoramic view of Akaroa by surveyor Edward Norman and architect and surveyor Charles C. Farr. Its editorial commented: 'After testifying to the exquisite accuracy of the delineation and colouring, and reminding our readers that the spot selected for representation by the artist is scarcely equalled in all New Zealand for beauty, we need add no assertion as to the merits of the painting as a charming picture .... We venture to suggest to our fellow citizens that, if this painting was purchased by subscription and displayed in the Town-Hall, it would both give great encouragement to the artist, and form a permanent ornament to the Town of Lyttelton.'[34]

Like Townsend's portrait, Farr and Norman's painting of Akaroa documented and assured Canterbury residents of the settlement's progress, recording its landscape through familiar conventions of high art. Moreover, Farr later recalled that it represented 'the first delineation of our adopted land in oil, being determined upon in the early part of the year 1850 …. The design in painting the scene was to convey to future generations (although ever so briefly) that which was once the glory of the province. I refer to the wooded spurs and valleys as seen by us who landed just upon twenty years since.'[35]

Farr's pleasure in documenting Akaroa prior to its transformation into farmland revealed an enduring faith in the principles of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. His survey of the natural environment confirmed the potential of the landscape for colonization under the watchful presence of God, re-affirming that the 'world was knowable through the application of human reason'.[36] In the colonization of both Australia and New Zealand this belief anticipated the introduction of farming and transportation infrastructures and the establishment of education and cultural institutions. Australian historian Bernard Smith observed that during the early period of settlement 'All values were, ultimately, moral values — reflections of the inscrutable way of God …. a mixture of utilitarian philosophy and a belief in progress, under the watchful eye of the Deity, which was to prevail in ecclesiastical circles and polite society throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in Australia, as in most Anglo-Saxon countries. This meaty and formidable blend of the useful and good determined the taste within which art was cautiously savoured, art societies formed, and finally, art museums established.'[37]

The foundation of numerous recreational institutions in Canterbury in the 1860s occurred during a period of relative optimism and prosperity. Sheep runs were extended across the Canterbury plains, and an accompanying economic boom encouraged the provincial council to build the Port Hills tunnel, providing better transport from the plain to port.[38] This transformation of the land was accompanied by the establishment of organizations such as the Mechanics' Institute (1859), the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association (1863), the Canterbury Medical Association (1865), and a number of musical societies.[39] A notable highlight was the first performance of Handel's *Messiah* in Bonnington's Musical Hall in 1864.[40] When the inaugural meeting of the Mechanics' Institute was held at the Christchurch Town Hall in August 1859, it included an exhibition of copies of the Old Masters and a display of 'weapons and implements of New Zealand and South Sea island manufacture' from the collections of prominent run-holders H. F. Worsley and William Sefton Moorhouse.[41]

However, of greatest significance to education in Canterbury during this period was the foundation of the Philosophical Institute by Haast. After working as a geologist in Nelson, Haast travelled to Canterbury and examined the strata of the Port Hills where the proposed tunnel between Lyttelton and Christchurch was planned. He took up residence in the township, was appointed provincial geologist in February 1861, and assumed a leading role as an advocate for science and the arts.[42] As Colin J. Burrowes noted: 'Julius Haast fitted well into the society of colonial Canterbury, helped by his musical talents and his sociable nature as well as his scientific standing. He befriended many of the notable settlers of the province, among them run-holders Samuel Butler and John Acland.'[43]

As a geologist, enthusiastic singer and violinist with a passion for music, Haast contributed greatly to Canterbury's cultural and educational institutions through his energy and perseverance.[44] The Philosophical Institute, for example, represented the colony's highest aspirations. Haast summarized its objectives in his inaugural address at the Royal Hotel on 30 September 1862: 'Investigations were to be undertaken in the natural history and geology of Canterbury, and in matters of economic importance, nor were literature and art to be neglected.'[45] As its economy developed, more substantial and ornate architecture appeared in Christchurch; Gothic and Classical revival buildings in both timber and stone were built. In the absence of an art gallery or a more complex arts infrastructure, FitzGerald applauded the presence of such designs, maintaining that, in the interim, local architecture fulfilled an educational role, improving the taste and morality of the residents of Canterbury. Commenting in an editorial in the *Press* in April 1862,[46] he observed:

> Perhaps the point in which a colony most differs from an old country is in the almost entire absence of art. Art can only flourish in communities where great accumulated capital places

> a considerable number of persons in a position of ease, independence, and leisure; where the necessities of life being provided for, men turn to the cultivation of those tastes which constitute its ornament, and enhance its enjoyment …. Everyone can do without paintings and sculpture, but every one must live in a house …. In our towns, buildings have been recently erected, which for the first time display some pretensions to architectural design. For example, the Government Buildings, the new Club, St. Luke's Church, and the Bell turret of St. Michael's in Christchurch; and the Church in Lyttelton. Every man, woman, and child amongst us, as he walks abroad on his daily business, is compelled to contemplate these objects. Insensibly they operate on his mind, and help to form his taste and to mould his judgment. He may think them beautiful or ugly, but they, seen every day, cannot fail to leave an impression of some sort which becomes a part of his mind, and has its influence in forming the public taste of the community. As in morals, a sin degrades the man by habituating him to the contemplation of vice, so in matters of taste, the contemplation of what is ugly helps to degrade and pervert the judgment of the spectator…. An artist and his age mutually act and re-act on each other. The artist educates and refines the popular taste, and the popular taste so elevated becomes better able to appreciate lofty designs, and less satisfied with mean ones.[47]

However, in spite of such sentiments, FitzGerald was far from sympathetic towards plans in 1863 to establish an art society, art school and gallery in Christchurch.[48] Possibly, his contrary position reflected his enduring support for Robert Godley's founding vision for Canterbury. Following his retirement as superintendent of the province in 1857, FitzGerald returned to London, remaining absent from the colony until 1860.[49] He arrived back in Christchurch critical of Canterbury's economic expansion, which he maintained undermined Godley's higher principles. Instead, FitzGerald called for a return to 'economic and political sobriety'.[50] The vision of those proposing to advance the arts in 1863 probably seemed overly ambitious to FitzGerald. He called for greater economic prudence and protested in a *Press* editorial:

> By an advertisement appearing in this paper it will be seen that an attempt is about to be made to get up a Society for the promotion of the Fine Arts. It is a matter of curiosity that so many societies should be organized for kindred if not identical objects, when one would be sufficient …. For example, it is proposed to make a permanent 'gallery of works of Art.' In our opinion that is an institution which ought to be combined with the general museum, for which a sum of money was voted last year to the Philosophical Institute. A public museum is an institution which ought to stand at the summit of the whole educational edifice of the country.[51]

FitzGerald's objections were directed at a committee made up of the province's leading churchmen, run-holders and educationalists, many of whom were on the boards of the Mechanics' and Philosophical institutes. Amongst those in FitzGerald's firing line were Tancred, Dr Alfred Barker, the Reverend Charles Frazer, and William Rolleston. Barker had been educated at King's College in London and, keen to make a modest fortune when he arrived in Canterbury, acquired a high country station.[52] The first Presbyterian minister in the region, Frazer had trained at Marischal College in Aberdeen and occupied a prominent role in education throughout his life, being elected a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and secretary of the Philosophical Institute in Canterbury.[53] Rolleston had graduated from Emmanuel College in Cambridge and taken up the Mount Algidus sheep station in the Rakaia in the late 1850s.[54] However, in spite of the remaining committee members' well-intended ambitions, FitzGerald was probably right to protest. Certainly, *Punch in Canterbury* understood the irony of cultivating the arts in a community that lacked many basic amenities. The magazine lampooned the pretensions and reality of high art in a township well known for its poorly constructed streets and sanitation:

> The amount of artistic cultivation among the population of this province has been, *Mr. Punch* thinks, very much underrated. It has been his fortune (good or bad) to meet lately several eminent professors of High Art, whose talents, in their respective lines, are scarcely inferior to those which gain the attention of the authorities (chiefly police) in Great Britain. A few instances are brought forward for the satisfaction of critics. PAINTING.— A very successful picture was exhibited on Oxford Terrace early last week. The Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of Hokitika, as he walked towards St. Michael's, met a youth, in whose countenance it was not easy to distinguish the marks of latent genius. Nevertheless, the youth produced almost instantaneously a striking effect on his Lordship's Gaiters, with no better material than street mud. His Lordship addressed him in appropriate language, and passed on. The young man then, with great rapidity, drew a remarkable face, and as His Lordship turned round, began colouring with marvellous intensity. The group was viewed with great admiration by several gentlemen on the other side of the street.[55]

The fine arts did receive a degree of support in 1866, though, with the arrival of travelling artist, Nicholas Chevalier.[56] The provincial council decided to allocate £200 towards Chevalier's travels as he completed a body of watercolours of the South Island for the Paris Exhibition of 1867.[57] Chevalier's arrival and his picturesque views of New Zealand were timely, anticipating a regional pride in the landscape and the first stages of the development of a local tourist industry. Art historian Gordon Brown observed that 'Throughout the 1860s "Cobb and Co" expanded its coaching operations to link the major towns from Christchurch south. Then, in 1866, a service was begun over Arthur's Pass to the goldfields of Westland. Among the visitors arriving to view the southern lakes and alpine scenery were many artists, some like Nicholas Chevalier and Eugen von Guérard from beyond New Zealand, but others from within the country taking advantage of summer vacation.'[58]

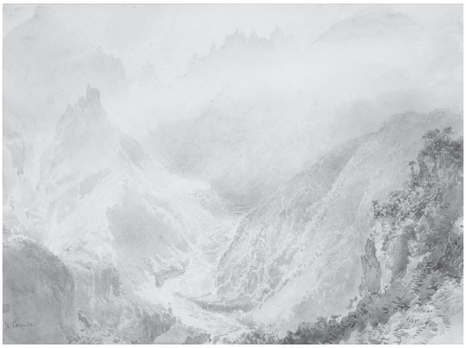

Figure 2. Nicholas Chevalier, *Otira Gorge*, c. 1866, watercolour, 350 x 475mm, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. On his 1866 journey through Canterbury and Westland, artist Nicholas Chevalier completed more than 200 sketches and watercolours, including this romantic painting of the Otira Gorge, where a road had only just opened.

When the motion was put to the provincial council 'that a sum of money not exceeding £200, be placed on the supplementary estimates, for the purposes of defraying the expenses of Mons. Chevalier …. while taking sketches for an illustrated work on New Zealand' there were a number of objections. Critics claimed that the funds could be better spent on 'Municipalities and Road Boards'.[59] In spite of the objections, the motion was carried. An exhibition of more than 200 drawings in the Christchurch Town Hall less than six months later drew favourable comment. The *Press* acknowledged the historical merit of the drawings and a request was made that Chevalier's work should be purchased and that a permanent art collection should be established in the Canterbury Museum.[60]

Chevalier's artistic record of the province, and the warm reception that it received, was indicative of his superb skills as a surveyor and artist, documenting the unspoilt landscape while offering a reassuring sense of ownership to the settlers. Moreover, the popularity of his work resided in his capacity to evoke the presence of the Divine through romantic landscapes of the South Island that equally revealed its potential as a tourist attraction and described something of its economic advancement.[61]

Chevalier's synthesis of topographical accuracy, the sublime and a faith in both religion and economic development, was fundamental to landscape painting in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. John Ruskin's fourth volume of *Modern Painters* (1856) gave primacy to geology, scientific observation and topographical accuracy as a means to reveal God's presence in nature.[62] Haast shared such beliefs with fellow countryman and emigrant artist Johann Josef Eugen von Guérard.[63] Both believed that science and art were allied, partly because it was common practice for professional artists to accompany explorers on expeditions documenting the landscape through sketches, but more importantly through ideas about landscape painting that had also found popular expression in Germany.[64] This romantic sentiment was evident from a lecture by Haast in 1868 on the 'Physical Geography and Geology of New Zealand': 'Nowhere is the wisdom and sublimity of the creative power more manifest than in the hidden recesses of alpine chains, and the philosopher who wishes to investigate the present state of the globe has to wander thither, where, in high walls of snow-clad mountains, in deep precipices and wild gorges, the rocky leaves of the earth's history are opened before him.'[65]

Haast's commitment to art and science and his belief in the capacity of these disciplines to provide religious or intellectual enlightenment were shared by a number of early CSA council members. Lawyer and councillor William Richard Fereday was widely recognized as an authority in the classification of species of New Zealand moths and butterflies. He published numerous scientific papers and acted as chairman and president of the Philosophical Institute from 1883 to 1884.[66] However, his passion for detailing the natural environment was also apparent in paintings that he exhibited in 1883 in the CSA's annual exhibition. These works were described in the *Press* as 'remarkably faithful to nature'.[67] Frederick Hutton, who was also a member of the inaugural CSA council, was appointed professor of biology in 1880 at Canterbury College. Charles Cook, who became the Chair of mathematics and natural philosophy in 1874, was another inaugural council member.[68]

In 1863, members of the Philosophical Institute formed the committee that provided recommendations for the New Zealand Industrial Exhibition in Dunedin. Haast and Tancred oversaw the selection of work to be sent to Dunedin for exhibition in 1865.[69] The exhibition's success, and the enthusiastic reception of Chevalier's 1866 exhibition in Christchurch, encouraged the institute to more actively nurture Canterbury's cultural development. In 1869, Fereday wrote to the *Press* expressing his desire for an exhibition of paintings, engravings, photographs and works of art to be held in Christchurch: 'Upon inquiry I am led to believe that an extensive and very creditable collection might be obtained. I mean of such articles as really possess merit, for I would exclude any other; the objects to be arrived at being in my opinion to elevate the public taste.'[70]

On 8 February 1870 an exhibition was held to coincide with the opening of the Canterbury Museum.[71] Significantly, the committee that selected the work on show included future CSA council members Fereday, Haast, Benjamin Woolfield Mountfort and Tancred.[72] The works they selected included paintings from practising Canterbury artists, including William Henry Raworth and John Gully, as well as works on loan from individuals such as Haast, Fereday and Dr Donald (the first president of the Lyttelton Colonists' Society) and from the Philosophical Institute's collection.[73] In his opening address, Rolleston reflected on Canterbury's progress and principles of industry and determination. He also drew attention to the important role that the arts occupied as a civilizing and moral influence on the activities of mankind:

> The founding of a new Colony, the overcoming of material difficulties, the opening out of the country for settlement have hitherto furnished the principal occasions for congratulations on the success of our undertaking as colonists, and it is admitted on all hands that our material progress in the nineteen years that have elapsed since the foundation of the settlement does great credit to our industry and perseverance …. The problems which are now agitating the minds of earnest men throughout the civilised world is how to better the social, moral and intellectual condition of our fellow-men …. We may well congratulate ourselves if, even in a small degree, our efforts are permitted to tend in the age in which we live, to the removal of social estrangement, to the cultivation of the intellect, to the refinement of manners, and to the elevation of character, by the study of all that is beautiful in Art and in Nature.[74]

The *Lyttelton Times* reiterated Rolleston's sentiment, noting that as the colony matured, its residents were increasingly receptive to higher education and the arts: 'The Exhibition derives a great part of its value, as being an index of what is silently gaining ground among us, growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength — the pursuit of higher knowledge, higher pleasures, and higher tastes.'[75]

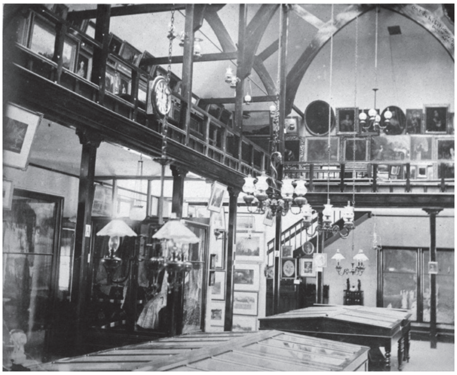

Figure 3. Canterbury Museum interior, 4 April 1870, Dr A C Barker photograph, Canterbury Museum, Ref. 1958.81.16. The art exhibition that began on 8 February 1870 to accompany the opening of the Canterbury Museum included oil and watercolour paintings, jewellery, engravings and photographs, with works loaned either from the collections of prominent Canterbury residents or by local artists.

Undoubtedly, such claims reflected nostalgia for the recreation of British and European institutions. Haast's plans for the Canterbury Museum included an art gallery with the intention of collecting works of artistic merit that would act as examples for teaching. He singled out either original works or copies of the Old Masters and casts of European sculpture.[76] Similar intentions also lay behind patronage by prominent local businessman George Gould who, in 1873, secured casts of Greek, Roman, Renaissance and Baroque sculptures for the museum's art gallery.[77] The collection covered Western art from antiquity to neo-classicism, including casts of *The Dying Gladiator*, the *Venus de Milo* and Antonio Canova's *Perseus*.[78]

The gallery in the museum established a benchmark for curating and displaying high art in colonial New Zealand: 'The statuary arrived and was placed in the upper room of the new building, a well-lit room 36 x 54 ft., the walls painted a deep chocolate colour, thereby throwing out in excellent relief the collection of casts …. Large crowds filled the Gallery to inspect the statuary, the first many of them had ever seen.'[79]

The presence of this collection, as well as that of the casts later held at the Auckland Museum, highlights the importance of classical art as a measure of serious culture in New Zealand's colonial society. Art historian Ian Cooke has observed that copies of Greek and Roman sculptures such as the *Apollo Belvedere* in the Auckland Museum demonstrated 'the persistence of the classical tradition, as exemplified most vividly in North America, Australia and New Zealand, all colonized by the British and lacking a European artistic heritage. In such locations, the classical tradition served as a touchstone of "high" culture and as a reference for long-established standards in artistic excellence.'[80] Such intentions certainly contributed to the fine art exhibition held in the museum to accompany the opening of Canterbury College's buildings in 1877. That exhibition included paintings by John Constable and Francis Danby, as well as works by Chevalier and James Peele.[81] With an estimated audience of 30,000, attendances exceeded expectations and the museum opened until 10.00pm on Saturday evenings with free admission.[82] The *Press* observed: 'As might be expected, the crowd of visitors was very great, so much so that many of them were unable to obtain admission. This was more particularly the case on Saturday evening.'[83]

By 1880, as well as the museum's gallery displays of art works, there were a number of professional artists exhibiting their work in studios in Christchurch: Thomas Cousins in Manchester Street, John Gibb in Barbadoes Street, and Gottfried Lindauer in Cashel Street West.[84] The presence of such a fundamental, but important, arts infrastructure further encouraged the establishment of an art society. Accordingly, at a meeting in St Michael's on 30 June 1880, William Henry Wynn Williams proposed that a society be established to be called the 'Canterbury Society of Arts'.[85] The motion was seconded by Haast, and Edward Temple was elected to draw up rules for the society.[86] Within a few days, a provisional committee drafted the CSA's constitution and laws, working from the model of the Otago Art Society (OAS).[87] The successful example of the OAS may have provided further impetus to the CSA's establishment. Certainly, Temple seemed conscious of a need for Canterbury to equal Otago in the lead it had taken in the fine arts in the South Island. His draft letter seeking CSA council members encouraged provincial rivalry: 'The Otago Art Society has now been established about four years and met with every success the contributions to the annual exhibitions having become of greater merit year by year [and] since there are many amateurs and professionals in the Province of Canterbury, there can be no reason why an annual exhibition in Christchurch under the direction of a local Society should not meet with every success.'[88]

Other than the obvious alterations in place names from those in the OAS's document, the CSA's constitution and rules were virtually identical. The principal objective was to promote 'study in the Fine Arts, and for the periodical exhibition in Christchurch of original Works of Art'.[89] The society's administrative structure provided for two levels of membership, working members and ordinary members, with working members having to provide evidence of artistic ability for acceptance. Annual subscriptions were set at 10s. 6d.[90] However, although the CSA's early constitution and rules were succinct in terms of the breadth and detail of their ambitions, almost from the outset these were extended. Following the first annual exhibition in 1880, it was formally decided to establish a permanent art collection with the purchase of John Gibb's *Shades of Evening — The Estuary.*[91] In addition, to encourage student participation in the arts, the CSA proposed a system of medals in 1885. Prizes were given for figure pictures from life, landscapes from nature, design in architecture and still-life.[92]

The establishment of a public art collection of works of the highest aesthetic quality was integral to the CSA's vision for the arts. When it purchased Gibb's *Shades of Evening — The Estuary* in 1881, the CSA declared that it was forming 'the nucleus of a gallery of art belonging to the society which may hereafter develop into one of some importance'.[93] Gibb was one of the country's most respected painters. He had arrived in Christchurch in 1876, having exhibited at the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts.[94] *Shades of Evening — The Estuary* typified his romantic-realist treatment of its subject; the twilight seascape and derelict rowboat revealed evidence of the transient nature of humanity's existence through familiar, sentimental painting conventions. However, for residents in Canterbury prior to the opening of the Lyttelton Tunnel in 1868, the estuary was also known as a dangerous waterway, bridging an essential transportation gap between Lyttelton and Christchurch. In the early 1850s, settlers arriving in the port who wished to transport furniture and heavy items to Christchurch were required to traverse the deep waters of the Heathcote.[95] In his interest in twilight and the passing of the day, Gibb quietly alluded to such dangers, but he also evoked a period of Canterbury's history that by 1881 had changed significantly.[96] Moreover, the reassurance that Gibb's aesthetic conventions offered denied the reality of colonization and the dislocation of Ngai Tahu's settlement over the previous 30 years. Although Canterbury became the most economically and culturally progressive province in the country by the 1870s, its development had taken place with an accompanying belief that the extinction of Maori was 'a mere question of time'.[97] As arable farming intensified and educational institutions were established, Ngai Tahu's population was crowded onto dwindling reserves and, due to measles and whooping cough epidemics, its mortality rate increased: 'In sheltered places where kainga noahanga might once have nestled, there now rose the mansions of the colonial gentry.'[98]

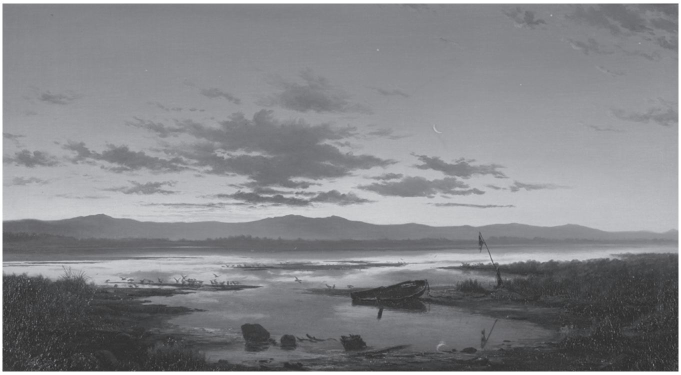

Figure 4. John Gibb, *Shades of Evening — the Estuary*, 1880, Oil on Canvas, 543 x 1002mm, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. As a CSA council member from 1881 until 1893 and a working member until 1909, John Gibb, Canterbury's most admired and popular painter, exhibited regularly in the society's annual exhibitions. *Shades of Evening — The Estuary* was purchased from the CSA's first annual exhibition in 1881 for £23 12s 6d.

Just as European purchase of the land established geographical tenure of the province, Gibb's painting conferred cultural and intellectual possession. This was implicit in the review of the painting by the *Lyttelton Times* critic in 1881. The reviewer praised Gibb's description of the local landscape: 'Night's mantle is falling quickly, and moon and stars are already gleaming in the half-darkness. The picture is harmonious throughout, and forms a fine example of subdued colouring.'[99]

As a work that drew from English conventions of painting, *Shades of Evening — The Estuary* was ideally placed as the foundation work in the CSA's permanent collection. It and subsequent acquisitions reflected a vision for cultural development that had been central to discussions about the arts in Canterbury throughout the early years of settlement. That vision included a commitment to education in the arts and the betterment of both its practitioners and the general public. The purchase of Gibb's painting also reflected a self-conscious awareness of grand intentions to cultivate and collect art works that exemplified a community committed to an emerging high culture. Yet in its interpretation of a familiar local landmark it recorded something of the community's history and identity in a settlement geographically removed from Great Britain. Christchurch was now ready to maintain its own institutions of high art and education. Although based on the model of the Royal Academy, and principles of Enlightenment and nineteenth-century reform, the way in which the CSA was realized ensured that it represented the distinct response and ambitions of a particular community during its first 30 years of settlement. As the fine arts developed in Canterbury, the CSA provided not just a simple replication of British and European aesthetics and philosophies, but a benchmark of the region's progress, confirming a sense of belonging and place, and initial signs of a self-assured local identity.

WARREN FEENEY

Canterbury

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