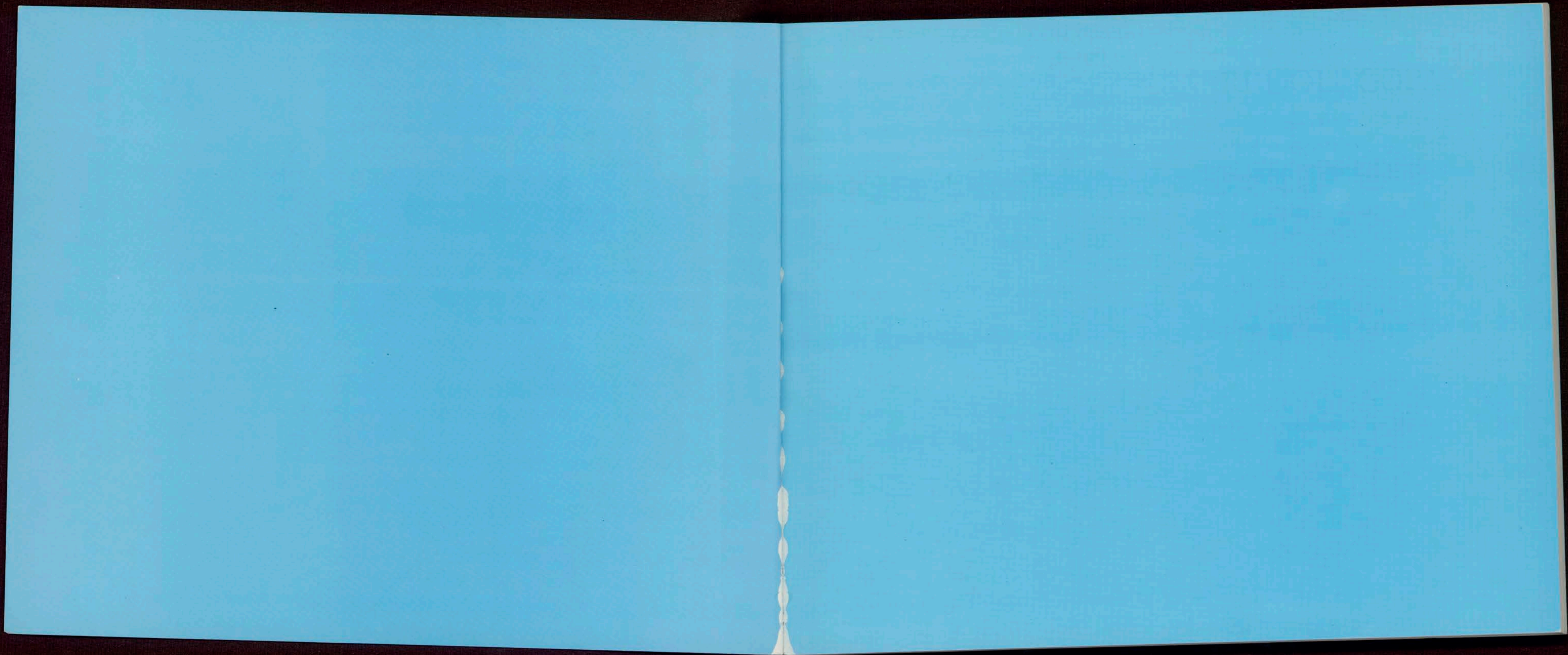


RUDOLF GOPAS

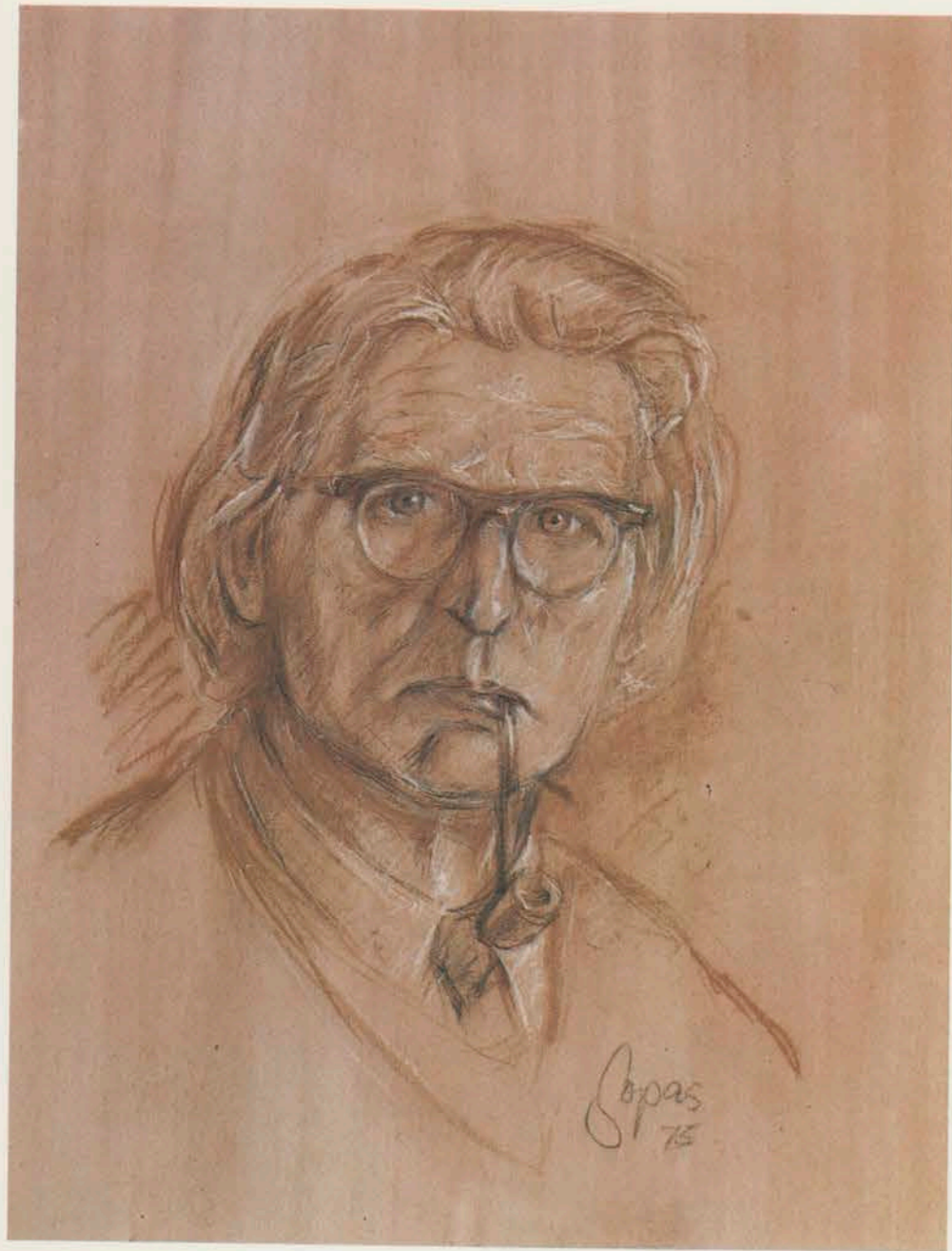






RUDOLF GOPAS





3 Self Portrait, 1975

## RUDOLF GOPAS

A retrospective exhibition curated by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery with the assistance of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand and toured under the auspices of the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors Council, July 1982.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rudi Gopas has long deserved a retrospective exhibition and the staff at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, are pleased indeed to be responsible for such an event. The exhibition and accompanying monograph/catalogue are the result of more than two years of sustained research.

We believe that what is presented here will highlight the importance of Rudi Gopas to the development of contemporary New Zealand painting and provide an access for the public to understand the complexities of Rudi Gopas as painter, poet and astronomer.

We wish to thank Rudi and Airini Gopas and family most sincerely for their help and understanding.

Our appreciation is extended to the many individuals, institutions and sponsors, who, without exception, have generously and enthusiastically lent works, offered advice and information and contributed funding and services.

Thank you on behalf of all at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

**Dick Bett**  
Director



## INTRODUCTION

An exhibition surveying the work of Rudolf Gopas, who has been a significant figure in New Zealand art since he arrived in this country more than three decades ago, is long past due.

He is widely respected and admired for his richly harmonised paintings, low toned and nourishing as pumpernickel, and for his influence on an important group of post-war painters.

In the mid-fifties, when I first knew him, Gopas was working as a photographic retoucher. He was then, as he is today, tall and impressive, with a strong-boned Slavic head, deep-set eyes and an intense way of scrutinising everything within range of his vision.

Christchurch's vigorous art community in the fifties included Bill Sutton, Doris Lusk, Leo Bensemann, Russell Clark and Olivia Spencer-Bower, all members of the Christchurch Group, which organised annual anthologies of advanced art.

The students too were a lively lot — Hamish Keith, Patrick Hanly, Trevor Moffitt, Quentin Macfarlane, Bill Culbert, Ted Bullmore and Nelson Kenny.

The exotic ingredient was Rudi Gopas, a central European product of a painting tradition far removed from the art schools of England and New Zealand.

His personality and intellect, as authoritative as his appearance, attracted many students to discussions which continued till the early morning. His conversation, peppered with Vs and Zs, dealt with art and life. But since with Gopas the two were the same, listeners had difficulty differentiating the topics.

What remains special about Gopas is that art is as essential to his existence as air or food. He communicates his values by example and argument, pressing his viewpoint by jabbing the air with the stem of his pipe as a kind of visual punctuation. As students, he seemed to us to be to painting what Billy Graham was to religion.

The Gopas message was that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the act of making art. When I told him of my intended marriage, his response was: "We will see if you are still painting next year."

Later, he became a lecturer at the Canterbury University School of Art and had a direct influence on a generation of gifted painters, notably Tony Fomison, Philip Clairmont and Philip Trusstum.

He guided the talented and committed, hovering with the watchful eye of the veteran showing the neophyte.

Many of his views were dogmatic. The darker hues were the expressive, substantial ones; light keys were for the lightheaded and lighthearted. Less able or dilettante students were either ignored or, on occasion, seared with comments that have become part of his legend.

To a student: "You should use more turpentine."

"Why, Mr Gopas?"

"Your paintings will burn better!"

To another: "You must make your paintings smaller."

"Why is that Mr Gopas?"

"They will fit better into the rubbish tin."

His teaching may have been idiosyncratic, but he effectively conveyed among a thousand practical tips, hints and aesthetic evaluations that worthwhile images are not made casually, but by sustained, concentrated, conceptual attack, and that an

artist's life must be arranged to make this possible.

His charismatic attraction to a younger generation of painters lay not only in the strength of his beliefs but also in the warmth, humour, sympathy and genuine personal interest he displayed in his relationships.

This exhibition celebrates Gopas's gifts and those he has given to New Zealand painting. Congratulations to him and to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery for this welcome exhibition.

**John Coley,**

Director, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 17/5/82.



# RUDOLF GOPAS

The return to subject matter as a major concern of painting, or at least as the springboard for new directions in abstraction, is one of the most unexpected turns of twentieth century art. Whatever the cause, and many are being put forward, it seems certain that one effect has been to stimulate interest in art at the crucial moments when it turned to abstraction. Two such moments are currently receiving attention. One is the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in the United States, and the other is the brief flowering of German Expressionism. Many young European artists are convinced that the explorations of the German Expressionists were cut short by war, and did not peter out because of lack of vitality and impetus in the ideas themselves.

As these young artists take up where the Expressionists left off, they will be unaware that far away, in a small group of islands in the South Pacific, one man has a thirty year start on them. Isolated in a country comparatively unaffected by contemporary art trends, he has continued to work from where the Expressionists left off, finding a lifetime of inspiration in this development.

## BEGINNINGS

Rudolphas Gopas was born in Lithuania and this, with its accompanying geographical vulnerability, was to be a critical factor in the development of his life and art. Lithuania no longer exists as an independent country, but it has had a very long and proud history. It was first mentioned in historical records in the second century AD, and it reached its zenith as one of the largest states in medieval Europe. Unfortunately, Lithuania had no defined natural features to make for safe frontiers and this, coupled with its strategically vital position on the Baltic Sea, sandwiched between the ever-changing spheres of influence of Poland, Russia and the states of Germany, made it a keystone in the power struggle in Central Europe.

By 1560 Lithuania had lost its independence and became part of Poland. Two centuries later it passed to Czarist Russia after successive partitions of Poland. Harsh attempts at Russification failed in the face of an upsurge in nationalist sentiments as the Lithuanians clung tenaciously to their language, their Roman Catholicism and their sense of national identity. Still part of Russia at the outbreak of World War I, Lithuania was quickly occupied by the Germans. At the end of the war Germany withdrew, but Russia, in the midst of the Bolshevik revolution, was unable to reassert its sovereignty. Along with the other small Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania declared itself an independent republic with a democratic constitution in 1918. Although Gopas was not born until just before the outbreak of war in 1913, the political instability of the new republic and its territorial insecurity born of these centuries of expansionist competition, formed an increasingly tense backdrop to his youth.

Gopas appears to have had a happy childhood in the small town of Silute. His mother died when he was ten or so, but he was fortunate in his father's choice of a second wife. She was a well-educated, cultivated woman with an intense interest in poetry and music. This interest in poetry may have been what drew her and her husband together, for although he was in the

exporting and importing business, Gopas's father had wanted to be a poet as a young man. Not being able to fulfil this ambition himself, he was keen for his son to do so. Gopas recalls that when he was ten years old his major preoccupation was indeed poetry, to his father's delight, but it was soon submerged by a twin passion for painting and for astronomy and was not to resurface until some fifty years later.

Gopas comments that he did not know what he did first — a painting or astronomical observations<sup>1</sup>. His interest in astronomy was aroused when he was twelve by the gift of a good lens for his first telescope, and from an even earlier age he had been fascinated by the perception of images and he used to construct little cameras for his friends out of plywood with cheap bi-convex lenses. Yet it was astronomy that captured his imagination. The young boy read everything on the subject that he could find and began the systematic observations that have continued throughout his life. Even at this young age Gopas did not regard astronomy as a hobby; it was already the beginning of his effort to grasp mentally the totality of the galaxy. This passion for coherence of knowledge dictated who were to be his heroes: da Vinci, Shakespeare, Goethe and von Humboldt. All were men who searched throughout their lives for a unified knowledge of the world, the universe and of man's place within it.

Accompanying his interest in astronomy was a growing love of painting. Although Lithuania was far from the avant garde centres of Paris, Munich and Berlin, a fortuitous combination of geography and philosophy enabled the young Gopas to experience the influence of a major art movement of the early twentieth century and to see professional painters at work. Silute was close to the Baltic Sea and about fifty kilometres from Nidden which had become popular as an unspoiled, remote place in which painters could work. Here a long spit extends some sixty miles towards the south-east, forming a large lagoon. The spit itself was too sandy for a proper road to be built, so the isolation of the area was undisturbed by motor traffic. A number of small traditional fishing communities worked from the narrow sandy beaches in the distinctive high-prowed boats of the Baltic.

The attractions of Nidden had been recognised by some members of the German Expressionist group of painters, Die Brücke. Die Brücke was formed in 1906 and only remained a tightly knit group until 1913, the year of Gopas's birth. Clearly he could have had no direct contact with it, but many of those it influenced continued to visit Nidden and it was they whom Gopas would have met in the late twenties.

The concerns of Die Brücke itself are important for their subsequent influence. Along with the other major group of German Expressionists, Der Blaue Reiter, they changed the direction of twentieth century German painting and discussions of German Expressionism usually refer to the members of these two groups. Die Brücke emphasised the importance of individual experience and was profoundly influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche. Indeed the name Die Brücke was possibly taken from Zarathustra's fourth prologue: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge (eine brücke) and not a goal".<sup>2</sup> The group included Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, although



## RUDOLF GOPAS

membership fluctuated. The artists worked and lived together for most of the year, first in Dresden and later in Berlin. As one of their aims was to express their inner experiences through the profound presence and unity of Nature, each year they separated to spend the summer working independently. They chose various remote places largely on the Baltic, in line with their emphasis on the power and strength of the Germanic, northern artistic tradition. It was in Nidden that Max Pechstein painted each year from 1906 to 1914 and Schmidt-Rottluff spent the summer of 1913. In the bare isolation of the Baltic coast these painters found inspiration. Nolde wrote of that coast: "... and often I stand contemplating the landscape, so grey, so simple, yet so splendidly rich with the animation of sun and wind and clouds".<sup>3</sup>

By the time Gopas began painting in the late twenties and early thirties, many Expressionist theories and stylistic techniques had been incorporated into the mainstream of serious painting in Europe. Because of its emphasis on youth, passion and personal experience, it has appealed since to many young painters but the general assessment of Expressionism has been that its over-riding emphasis on powerful emotion, even ecstasy, in an intuitive response to the essence of things over their mere existence, was a limitation. In this view Expressionism was taken as far as is possible and thus exhausted as a viable direction. This has recently been questioned by a number of young painters.

Der Blaue Reiter's members included Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, August Macke and Paul Klee. It saw painting more as an expression of Romantic self-identification with nature or the universe. Die Brücke strove to look beyond the mere appearance of objects but it was still very definitely tied to specific subject matter, while the painters of Der Blaue Reiter moved in varying degrees to a dematerialised conception of the universe and abstraction. Expressionism, in terms of general style, showed a simple, direct, pictorial style based on large areas of unbroken colour, dramatic brushwork and structural deformation.<sup>4</sup>

Gopas's absorption at this time of Expressionism is impossible to assess as none of his early work has survived. However it can be stated with assurance that the existence each summer of a colony of committed painters so close to his home must have made the young man very aware of contemporary art early in his painting life.

Whenever he could, Gopas took his materials and sketched and painted outdoors. He recalls that he used watercolours because oils were expensive and his family was not rich. His precise portrait drawing was already much praised and while still at school he held his first exhibition. He was sixteen years old. Here he showed big, colourful watercolours drawn in Indian ink. He himself recalls an Expressionist quality to them. Apart from the Expressionists, Gopas was also particularly impressed at this time by the letters of Vincent van Gogh, which he discovered during his voracious reading. This was a presence that remained strongly in his painting for many years.

With the encouragement of his stepmother, in 1933 Gopas applied to the art school at Kaunas in Lithuania. He was accepted into the third year of the five year course on the basis of the work he had already done. However, despite what appears to have been his intellectual and artistic precocity, the state of his development should not be over-estimated. The

artist recalls of himself during those early years, "At that time I didn't know what made art tick"<sup>5</sup> and, judging from the directions his work took later, it was only with intellectual understanding and growth that Gopas's natural facility and energy could be channelled effectively.

The Kaunas Art School has left few traces. In the present day Soviet Union it no longer exists, although Kaunas now boasts in its stead a Polytechnic Institute which specialises in, amongst other things, machine construction, automation and sanitary engineering. It appears that the art school in Gopas's time operated on traditional academic lines, emphasising the drawing and painting of set subjects. Although the Bauhaus was well-established by 1930 and was to influence art schools around the world, the school at Kaunas concentrated on technique. "We came to art school to study art, the foundations of art, the techniques, in a fairly realistic way, knowing that later on, if we became successful painters, we would branch out in a more individual way and develop our own style." This comment is also illuminating as showing the source of Gopas's painstaking reworking of his artistic education and practice after his arrival in New Zealand, and of his own teaching style.

It appears that Kaunas gave Gopas a good grounding in art history and techniques, which he supplemented and perhaps brought up to date with his own wide reading. He was also able to travel and visit Germany, Austria and Greece. Although he was advised to continue his studies in Paris, he could not afford to do so and left the art school in 1938. The expectation that a successful student like Gopas, who graduated with honours, would go on to develop steadily as a painter, presupposed stable political and social conditions. These were becoming more and more remote in Lithuania.

The effect of increasing political instability on the mid-war generation to which Gopas belonged has been much discussed. Stephen Spender wrote: "From 1931 onwards, in common with many other people, I felt hounded by external events."<sup>6</sup> Spender was writing from the relative security of Great Britain, so how much more disturbing this critical decade must have been for the young artists of the new and tenuous Baltic states. Gopas recalls that for him his art school days were followed by "a long and drab time with the disastrous building-up of political tensions". The world-wide depression battered Europe in the late twenties and early thirties, to be followed by political deterioration in Germany, culminating in the chancellorship of Adolph Hitler. In Lithuania the hopes for a democratic republic had been finally extinguished in the face of the continuing instability of the parliamentary system. A virtual dictatorship was established along increasingly National Socialist lines. Germany's expansionist aims became evident in 1935 with the taking of the Saar, to be followed the next year by the invasion of the Rhineland. It became painfully clear that the independent nations established and national boundaries redrawn following World War I would be transient, especially with the failure of their defender, the League of Nations. The probability of war became part of European consciousness. Lithuania declared itself neutral, but its pivotal strategic position meant that this was likely to be only a gesture. It was during this period that Gopas underwent two years compulsory military training.

War finally broke out in 1939 and by 1940 the Baltic States had lost their brief independence with the invasion of the Soviet



Union. The next year Germany declared war against the Soviet Union and occupied Lithuania in June. The Germans remained until 1944 when they were ejected by the USSR and a communist government was reinstated. Lithuania is today a constituent republic of the Soviet Union.

Against this catastrophic backdrop, Gopas struggled to survive. His strategy was "to make oneself as small as possible". His draughtsmanship stood him in good stead and he got a job with the Department of Agriculture making instructional drawings of cows, sheep and pigs in an educational programme for the peasantry. He tried to continue his own painting as well and a split of his artistic personality began with this concurrent work on his own and commercial projects. These two strands co-existed for the next twenty years, with the balance sometimes weighted in favour of one, then the other. It was during this tense and difficult period that he met and married Natasha in 1942.

Towards the end of the war he left with Natasha, their six month old daughter, Sylvia, Natasha's mother and 50,000 other Lithuanians to join the stream of refugees into Austria. They lived in a refugee camp in the township of Ehrwald in the Tirol District from August 1945 until 1949, when they were admitted into New Zealand. They lost all their family, all their possessions, indeed almost all their past, and now they had lost their country. It was during this period that Gopas was most drawn to the deterministic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. After the destruction and horror he had witnessed, it is little wonder that it was a book of Schopenhauer he recalls carrying with him everywhere. Schopenhauer stated: "Therefore let even the young be instructed betimes that in this masquerade the apples are of wax, the flowers of silk, the fish of pasteboard, and that all things — yes, all things — are toys and trifles."<sup>7</sup>

Yet even in the refugee camp some kind of normal life was gradually established. In its relative security he was able to continue his astronomical studies. His painting life was dominated by need as he worked on landscapes and portraits for money. It is interesting that even as a refugee he always regarded himself as a painter. In his New Zealand visa, the City Council of Ehrwald testified that this was his occupation in its declaration of his residence there. At thirty-six, despite war and the insecurity of refugee life, Gopas had declared his commitment. He was a painter, a painter who had been left with none of his early work to nourish his development, a painter who had to start again in a new country.

## DUNEDIN

Gopas, his wife Natasha, and their young daughter Sylvia arrived in New Zealand in mid-June 1949 with Marté Seeberg, Natasha's mother. They were first placed in a transit camp at Pahiatua while jobs and housing were found. Gopas was fortunate. Because of his art experience, he and one other were selected to work in the reproduction unit of Coull, Somerville and Wilkie in Dunedin. He had the further advantage of having become reasonably fluent in English while in the refugee camp in Austria, although his accent was always to mark him as a foreigner. So it was in Dunedin that a new life began for Gopas, who could now put into practice his serious commitment to art. He himself has stated, "My involvement



4 Dunedin Harbour, 1950



with painting begins in New Zealand". It was to be an involvement that took many forms, some hesitations, some backward-looking, before it found its direction.

Like most artists who come or return to New Zealand, Gopas felt the impact of the bright undiffused light. He was not overawed by it. "There was an exceptional clarity in the air. But still, it's the same sun that shines on you all over the world." For Gopas had not lost the grand perspective of astronomy. Indeed he had brought with him to New Zealand the optics for a six inch telescope, the largest he could obtain and carry with him, and he continued his studies and observations from the new viewpoint of the Southern Hemisphere.

As already mentioned, the emphasis of his pre-New Zealand work was on realistic portraits and landscapes, probably showing an Expressionist influence. Where war and the struggle to survive it had caused him to leave off, he began again. He instinctively turned to the New Zealand landscape but his efforts to make it his own were severely handicapped. His job took most of his time and energy, and a more practical consideration also disadvantaged him. Owning a car was out of the question financially. Opportunities to improve his familiarity with and understanding of the isolated areas which he seemed always to be drawn to as the quintessence of Nature, were limited to occasions when he was offered a lift into Central Otago. These times were too few to allow him to make rapid progress and he therefore decided that he was having to spend a lot of time and energy with little likelihood of a satisfactory result. He continued to paint but his subjects were mainly scenes of Dunedin and its environs. These paintings were usually done in a short time and, although competent, seem to be a reworking of themes frequently seen in Art Society exhibitions.

Most of these Dunedin paintings are realistic landscapes or the first in what was to be a series of remembered Baltic scenes. John Berger has written of this inevitable backward-looking of a refugee, "... there is a time when every refugee lives in a no-man's land. He must. Yet his mind is not there. It is backwards in regret, forwards in fear or hope .... A refugee is nothing until he ceases to be one."<sup>8</sup> Gopas's solution to this problem of belonging was not found until much later, and then it was typically grand in scale and perception as he put not just New Zealand, but the Earth itself in the perspective of the universe and so found a place for himself.

The earliest work by Gopas which has survived is a pencil drawing of his first wife Natasha, done in the Austrian refugee camp. It clearly shows the high level of technical skill he had already achieved, with its simple composition focussing attention on the wedding ring. It should also be remembered of course that at this time he was thirty-two, an age when many painters have found their distinctive voice, and so it is a good example in its clear but unremarkable style of what he later referred to as the arrest in his development.

*Fisherman with a Pipe* (c.1951) is illuminating in the context of this search for a place to stand. The fisherman is almost certainly a self-portrait, perhaps an attempt to see himself imaginatively among the familiar boats and bustle of the Baltic. The pose is one Gopas was to use many times: the pipe held in the mouth, the eyes fixed in an ironically detached gaze.

Not illustrated

Gopas used the self-portrait as a means to assess where he was, literally to place himself. He seemed to punctuate phases of development or periods of difficulty with self portraits. The background features a group of fishermen and one of the high prowed Baltic fishing boats. It appears to have been drawn up on the beach, just as the fishing boats were on the flat sands of Lithuania where there were no natural harbours. The long pole the man in the foreground is holding also ties the scene of the painting directly to those Gopas knew so well. The poles were used in Lithuania for transporting fishing nets to and from the boats after they had been winched ashore. The colouring is confident and the paint quality immediate. The expressively applied paint is highlighted by touches of black pen to emphasise the structure.

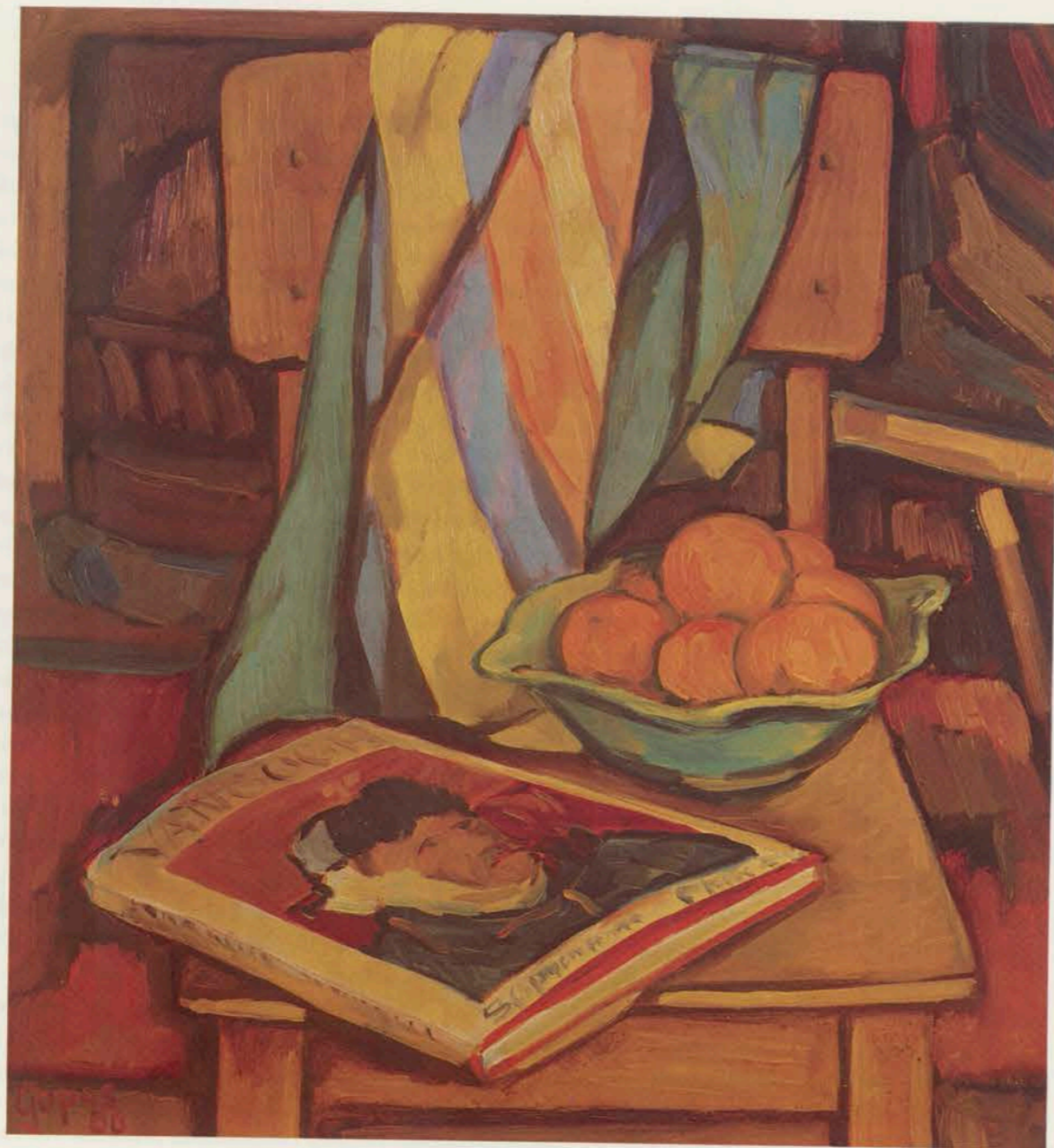
In the early 1950's the artistic life of Dunedin was, like that of the other cities in New Zealand, largely under the control of an Art Society. Gopas joined. It was the only practical venue for him to display his work and it was important to him, after so many years of silence, that he should again have an audience. The Christchurch Group also asked Gopas to exhibit with it as a guest. The Group had been formed in 1927 and, although by the fifties its most energetic days had passed, it still offered Gopas the opportunity to get to know the work of painters like Colin McCahon, Rita Angus and Toss Woollaston.

Much of his work in this Dunedin period is competent in the Art Society manner. He could not devote much time to painting but his immediate success must have bolstered his confidence, for Gopas was quickly accepted by the art community in Dunedin, and indeed in New Zealand. His work, mainly of Expressionistic landscapes, sold readily in the Art Society shows. Two of his paintings were reproduced in the Art Yearbook of 1950, and two more the following year in the annual survey. After this the Yearbook ceased publication. All this was achieved by a man who had only arrived in the country in mid-1949. A further measure of the rapid recognition his work gained was the glowing reception of the "Independent Group", of which Gopas was a member. It was heralded as "likely to provide one of the strongest groups in the Dominion".<sup>9</sup> Apart from Gopas, the members were Frank Gross (a fellow European refugee), Alan Howie, Edward Murphy, F.G. Shewell, W. Reed and M.J. Wren. The stated aims of the Independent Group suggest that Gopas was a leading influence: "A well-based technical knowledge of the fundamentals of visual art is necessary, but not of over-riding importance in the production of work of artistic merit. That is to say, that the creative faculty, its exercise and development, takes precedence over the *means* of expression"<sup>10</sup> (our emphasis). This typically Expressionistic emphasis on the validity and supremacy of the individual's creativity echoes that archetypal German Expressionist declaration of intent almost half a century before: "Everyone, everyone belongs with us who, directly and without dissimulation, expresses that which drives him to create".<sup>11</sup>

Gopas was keen to explore the possibilities offered by abstraction in his work, but he wanted to avoid its becoming merely a mannerism. His art school training had prepared him to develop his potential in his own way. "I was not interested in merely hacking up objects and then putting in some colour. That is not abstraction. That is an easily learnt and superficial technique." His early experiments with abstraction can be seen clearly in *Dunedin Harbour* (1950). Gopas painted this work in the studio from sketches made outdoors as he set himself increasingly complex compositional problems. The elements of its



10 My Chair, 1956



12 Landscape, 1960



strongly vertical structure can be grouped according to the extent to which they have been abstracted. In the immediate foreground, the confusion of rocks, water and shoreline debris has been reduced to a careful exploration of essential line, volume and tone. The middle section of the painting is more specific with its focus on two piles set among more realistically rendered rocks. These two piles are the central point of the entire painting. High up at the rear of the painting, wharves and ships seize attention, their importance signposted by another pile on which a boat is moored diagonally up from the central twin piles. The clearly-painted ships pull the composition to the far right, counter-balancing the weight of the main bulk of rocks on the left and in the foreground. It is a sophisticated and coherent composition expressed in subtle and muted colours. But Gopas is also interested in using colour in an expressive fashion and he has boldly emphasised the structure by dark shadows and luminous highlights.

Gopas's period in Dunedin was the real beginning of his painting life but his progress was slow. In 1953 he shifted north to Christchurch, leaving his wife and daughter behind. Although the move was largely due to personal circumstance, it is in Christchurch that he has remained ever since.

## CHRISTCHURCH

Gopas began work for a photographic firm using his knowledge of reproduction techniques, but he still did two or three portraits most weeks to make ends meet. These slight studies were largely of children, commissioned by proud parents. Gopas's own assessment of these competent but unremarkable paintings, and his concern to keep them distinct from what he regarded as his real work, is demonstrated by the two signature styles he consistently used: GOPAS on work he acknowledged and R. Gopas on "works of a commercial nature".<sup>12</sup> These parallel forms of working continued into the sixties and it was not until he could financially afford to give up the more commercial works that he was able to reach maturity as an artist. However this fulfilment lay in the future, as Gopas struggled to paint as well as holding down a full-time job.

By the mid-fifties the situation had improved. Gopas had a proper studio above a stone cutter's shop in the suburb of Sydenham and was now able to set to work in earnest. The move to studio space was important to Gopas's development on a number of levels: by constant work he improved his natural facility for painting, by reading and thinking he began to develop his own ideas and paint through, in a consistent way, many of the stylistic influences he had experienced as a young man. Then, as he grew more confident, he concentrated on how he could best express himself and his vision of the world.

Although Gopas believed that he would never come to terms with the New Zealand landscape, nonetheless he persevered with painting it. To him it was an expression of the forces of nature. Landscape painting was also an important part of his European heritage and art education and so, for the next twenty years, regardless of what other new directions his painting might be taking, he returned to it again and again. However it was not the landscape in general that fascinated him, but the

sea, the coast and the fishing boats. "I was born among fishing boats. The fishing harbours, the fishermen have always been a favourite scene." Thus a decade after this departure, although reference was found in New Zealand harbour scenes, he was still painting remembrances of his native Lithuania. John Berger has analysed the imaginative return many refugees make to their homeland when trying to adapt to a new country. "You arrive somewhere, alone. And then you want to take out your memories, which are also dreams, and hang them around your room — like pictures. And between each picture you think of an imaginary mirror with your own face in it. That is how you furnish a room with the past. And for a little while it would even be an inspiration."<sup>13</sup> Gopas continued to paint both "memory" pictures and pictures of his new home, seeming to find in this, the parallel reinvocation of the Baltic and examination of the New Zealand coast, a fusion of past and present he was unable to create in any other way. The common theme of the sea and boats acted as a bridge between the old and the new although the interfaces were very different coastlines: the flat, sandy beaches of Lithuania contrasting with the rocky hills tumbling to the sea at his favourite haunts, Kaikoura and Lyttelton.

Lyttelton, close to Christchurch with easy access by train, found Gopas often painting there. However it was to the small fishing port of Kaikoura, some 190 kilometres north of Christchurch, that he returned for holidays year after year, sketching, drawing, painting and looking. Often he worked up sketches made there into paintings when he got back to the studio. Such was the case with *Boats at Kaikoura* (1955). This oil is on a bigger scale than most other paintings he had done previously, reflecting his growing self-assurance. The viewpoint is from above with an unrealistically high horizon. This gives great weight and dominance to the foreground without bringing it too close to the viewer. What was to become Gopas's central concern, a quest for totality of space, is already inferred by the unity of the elements within the landscape format. Here a concentration on spatial relationships seems to be possible because of his familiarity with the subject matter. Visually the eye is swept on a curve, taking it in a movement from the boats beached in the foreground round to those moored on the top left. This placement of elements, coupled with the dynamic nature of the horizon line, holds the composition together against the perceptual tendency for it to flatten out. To ameliorate this powerful sweep toward the sky, a number of strong verticals in the form of masts have been placed in counterpoint. The shapes of the elements in this painting are to recur many times in Gopas's work, in particular that of the group of boats in the bottom centre which are early steps towards abstraction.

Gopas continued to exhibit regularly with the Group in Christchurch and enjoyed the stimulus. It provided an exhibition venue beyond the Art Societies and it was interested in experimentation and attracted the most lively painters of the time.<sup>14</sup> This involvement with a more active art community, although still numerically small, must have further helped Gopas settle down; however he was to remain a European and an outsider. Unconvinced by most New Zealand painters, he deprecated their predominantly English heritage and to a large extent he worked outside the mainstream, drawing his own sources of inspiration directly from Europe. "English people as a whole do not credit artists with any kind of higher intellect. They prefer them to do pleasing picture postcards." Yet there was one painter who had worked in New Zealand whom Gopas greatly admired. Not surprisingly, this was the Dutchman Petrus van der Velden. The similarities and differences between



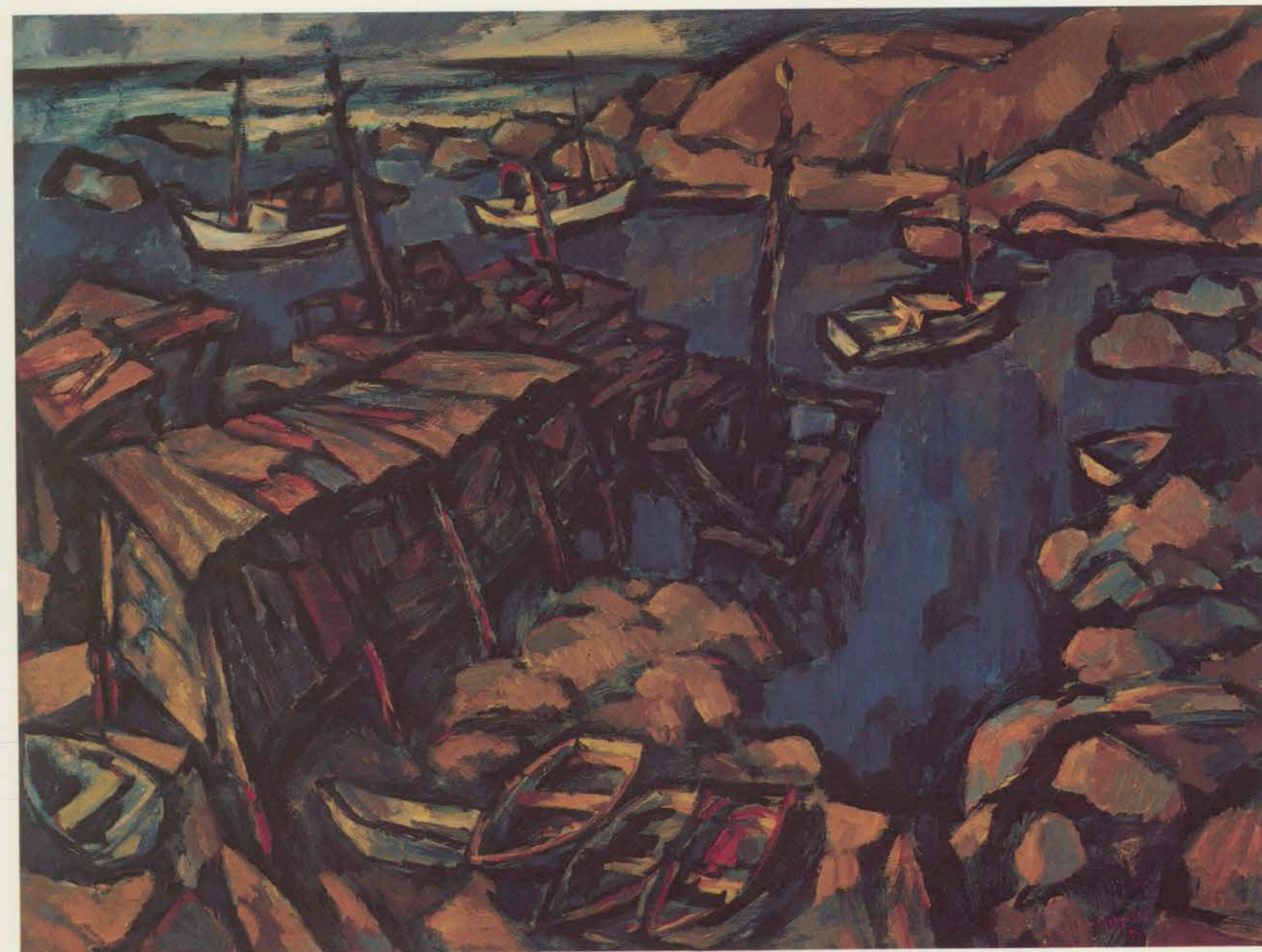
van der Velden and Gopas are illuminating. Van der Velden came to New Zealand in 1890 as a mature and experienced painter of fifty-three; Gopas came as an artist of thirty-six who, although he had shown exceptional precocity as a student, had had his development arrested by the political upheavals of Europe. The Dutchman had looked at the New Zealand landscape and was inspired by it; Gopas gazed and was overwhelmed. Later he was to turn his vision upwards and be similarly inspired, but initially he was only able to deal with the landscape imaginatively when it could be set in the context of what he already knew — his beloved sea and harbour scenes.

Gopas was deeply impressed by what he called van der Velden's grasp of "expressive reality", of nature speaking. It was this quality that Gopas tried to capture in his own work. He was also interested in exploring the intellectual concerns of the German Expressionists. He hoped to devise a personal style of painting which, while it drew on this European tradition, would be capable of development beyond it. This conception of the relationship of nature and artist is put well by Marc: "Nature is everywhere, within us and without us. Something exists that is not completely concerned with nature, but reaches beyond it and interprets ... this is art. Art was and is at every period the boldest departure from nature and 'naturalism', the bridge to the world of the spirit."<sup>15</sup>

Catalogue 10

As well as being influenced intellectually by the German Expressionists, his study of their work and that of the Fauves and other painters working in Paris in an Expressionist way, like Rouault and Soutine, also gripped him. It is graphically illustrated by the painting *My Chair* (1956). This work is clearly a homage to van Gogh, a painter whom Gopas greatly admired both for his Expressionist style and his intense commitment to his work. The use of a chair as the central image is a reference to van Gogh's painting of a similar subject in 1888 while in the hospital in Arles. Van Gogh painted his chair during the period when he mutilated his ear, and the self-portrait on the cover of the book resting on Gopas's chair was painted a month later, as the bandages show. The choice of a book of reproductions as an image in Gopas's work is poignant. Gopas would have been well aware that it was only through such books that he would be able to experience the paintings of the artists he held in such high regard. On the chair is a bowl of seven oranges. This may be both a reference to the importance of the still life in European painting (Gopas's background) as well as to Cezanne, the founder of the modern movement of which Gopas saw himself a part. As with earlier works the main image is placed against a dark background, in this case a moodily painted firegrate, and contained by typically dark outlines. It is an interesting work in its evocation of both time and place as well as style.

Thus, throughout the fifties Gopas tried to recapture the progress he had made as a young painter and to prepare himself to strike out in his own direction. Although hampered by lack of time, he made considerable progress in defining his stance with regard to German Expressionism and the Expressionists in Paris. He had also improved his painting in a purely technical sense. In 1958 he married Airini Grennell and his continuing progress gave his painting career a new impetus recognised by his appointment to the Ilam School of Fine Arts in 1959, where he was to teach for almost twenty years. This appointment



15 Boats at Kaikoura, 1955



gave Gopas the essential condition he needed as a painter, the freedom to apply all his energy to art.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Once he was established at the Ilam Art School as a lecturer, Gopas's painting flourished. He was secure financially and could spend time on his own work during the long summer holidays. Gopas was at last able to concentrate on *art*, and his painting soon reflected this new unity of purpose.

Gopas also responded positively to the activity of teaching. He regarded himself very much as a learner and was eager to share his experiences with his students as he retraced his own development. Further, he regarded it as part of his responsibilities as a painting lecturer to continue his own painting.

He now had the opportunity to work from the models hired for life drawing classes, but he shied away from a detailed study of the human body. He was convinced that, at this point in his development, intensive work from the model would be counterproductive, that he would become "a slave to the model". He did however produce a number of figurative works at this time, mainly in his own studio. *Sleeping Woman* (1959) shows an Expressionist quality again in both mood and painting style. The composition is constructed on a strong diagonal, a device lending voluptuous weight to the figure which seems to bear down on the frame.

Catalogue 13

His painting class was titled rather prosaically "Materials and Techniques", but Gopas went far beyond these confines. He was exploring, and he urged his students also to examine intellectually and emotionally what art was about. He could be harsh and impatient so the anecdotes about his teaching are legendary, but the comment of one of his students is revelatory: "He never told lies". He might upset hopeful and perhaps talented painters by his forthrightness, but he never told lies. His impact on his students was profound and for many he was a formative influence on their lives and their work. They admired his painting but more importantly they learned from him that a painter had to think and to have a strong emotional commitment to his work.

True to his own art school education, Gopas was convinced that the way to learn the technique and the craft of painting was to follow the masters. He applied this dictum to his own students who each had to copy a selected painting by a modern master. Many of these exercises were never completed, the students being overwhelmed by the complexities of the work they were trying to reproduce. The value of undertaking such an exercise in New Zealand from printed reproduction is uncertain, although the humility it occasioned by failure was instructive. Gopas himself was at a considerable advantage as he had his knowledge and memory of the originals which he tried to transmit to his students.

Of his students it is probably Philip Trusttun and Philip Clairmont who have been the most closely associated with the influence of Gopas. They proclaimed their gratitude to their teacher in a 1979 show at the New Vision Gallery. What has often been taken as an extension of Gopas's influence has been the so-called Expressionist school in Christchurch. It is

interesting to quote a Group Show review in 1961, only two years after Gopas started at the Art School, which makes a clear distinction even at this stage between the work of Auckland painters (Susan Goldberg, Hamish Keith, Tim Garrity and Graham Mudge) and their Christchurch contemporaries. "Whereas the Aucklanders are largely concerned with static arrangement of preconceived imagery, the local painters deal in strong movement, freely expressive colour and form and a greater degree of realistic figuration."<sup>16</sup> The differences between style in Christchurch and Auckland are clearly more profound than can be attributed simply to the influence of Gopas, and an analysis of them would be valuable. However, although the extent of his influence would benefit from being placed in such a wider and as yet undefined context, it is undeniable on his own students. One particularly interesting attitude that Gopas transmitted was his unselfconscious acceptance of a painter's debt to his predecessors. This has been a particular feature of the work of Trusttun.

Gopas himself was extending the intellectual and philosophical sources of his painting. Although the influence of German Expressionist writing continued to be profound, as shall be discussed below, he was also impressed by the philosopher of art, Etienne Gilson. Gilson ascribed to painting the high ambition of *adding* new beings to the beings of nature as opposed to the other art he called picturing, which *represents* actual beings, not new ones. Sustained by the lofty ideas of the German Expressionists, Gopas was excited by this conception of the role of painting. Gilson was also an interesting theorist of abstraction in painting and his philosophical approach to the problems painters face was a stimulus to Gopas for many years.

Gopas's work from these early art school days clearly recalls the direction and progress of his re-education. He was unconcerned about revealing which painters interested him, for he believed he must follow an established path some of the way to find his own. *Lyttelton Landscape* (1959) is a rather uneasy amalgam of two major approaches to painting: Cubism and Expressionism. Gopas certainly had Braque's work of the early 1900s in mind, and perhaps specifically *Road near l'Estaque* (1908). The painting was worked up from a sketch Gopas completed at Port Levy and is a very condensed view of the landscape. The hills loom up above the trees and foreground almost to eclipse the sky, while the painting of the sky itself echoes the hill shapes. The Expressionist conviction of the unity of nature is reaffirmed.

Catalogue 11

A painting that is a firm step on the way to his more individual style is *Landscape* (1960). If Gopas's final goal as a painter was to be the examination of space as a unity, this painting must be regarded as only being at a preliminary level, but it has its own energy. It rejoices in what the early Expressionists of Die Brücke conceived of as the dynamics of nature. It was through such dynamics that they tried to reach the essence of being, to find the universal in the particular. To do so they used heightened reactions to objective reality expressed in intensified colour and distorted forms. Gopas explored these techniques in *Landscape* (1960). A storm of greens in the foreground trees leads up to the exaggeratedly high sea, acting as a moody centrepiece to the glowing hills. The composition is well balanced, easily containing the drama of the predominantly diverging diagonals. To the right there is a swirl of trees around a solid centre that gives a primitive eye shape — a shape that is to reappear in Gopas's later galactic paintings. Its presence in this work, so prominently signposted by a trough of trees, is one of

Catalogue 12





23 475, City Lights, 1962



25 Red and Blue, 1964



the talismans for the future which unify the diverse directions Gopas has taken. Colour has been chosen freely. Gopas states, "Any painter of capacity paints the musical colours he wishes to see rather than imitating the colours he does see". Members of Der Blaue Reiter would have agreed. They were fascinated by the theory of colour and Kandinsky wrote extensively on it. He wanted to define its psychological effects for he was convinced that through such effects spirituality, that is "spiritual vibrations" which were the essence of his work, could be stimulated. Gopas was similarly interested in the profound associations aroused by colour, believing that colour had direct access to the spirit in man.

Not illustrated

In *The Bridge* (1961) the influence of the German Expressionists and the Fauves is explicit. The painting was worked up from a sketch, this time made on a trip south to Roxburgh, and shows a bridge across a river with its reflection. Again the skyline is high with looming hills but it is in the handling of the violent colour contrasts that Gopas shows his new-found confidence and skill. Red, as in the bridge, tends to leap optically from a painting, but here it has been well-placed in the composition and tonally contained so that it stands as solidly within the picture plane as the hills behind. An interesting feature is the blazing sun in the top left — a pointer to the future.

Gopas's landscapes became more abstracted but he again followed Kandinsky. He was not interested in relinquishing the landscape for formal non-objective abstraction, but wished to retain it as the basis for expressing his ideas. Kandinsky puts it well: "The artists must have something to communicate, since mastery over form is not the end but, instead, the adapting of form to internal significance."<sup>17</sup> It was in this way Gopas approached abstraction through naturalism.

Catalogue 21

Just as Gopas was becoming clearer and more confident in his ideas, so was he exploring a wide range of painting techniques. *Boats* (1961) is particularly interesting as it shows Gopas beginning to build up the surface of his boards before working on them. He rejected canvas as a medium because of the expense and the long preparation time required for stretching and priming, but he wanted to give his boards a comparable surface as they were too smooth for the thin washes of oil paint he wished to use. In *Boats* he sprinkled sawdust over two undercoats. He liked the result but continued to experiment with different surfaces as he became increasingly fascinated by texture.

*Boats* is as interesting for its subject matter as for its technique. It is a further recollection of the Baltic Coast he painted so often but, in contrast to earlier works on this theme, the subject is treated in a highly abstract fashion. Gopas continued to use harbour scenes, either from the Baltic or in New Zealand, as his leitmotif, the subject he knew and on which he could best assess his growing technical skills. As he took these important steps to greater abstraction it is as though he needed to measure this progress against something he knew he could handle well. It was also a form that had been well-received critically: "... Gopas has again found his best form of expression in his favourite small boats, which he treats boldly in vibrant colour".<sup>18</sup> However, in many ways such praise was constricting on Gopas who, when he began to step beyond these "favourite small boats", met increasing incomprehension, as well as relief when he returned to the subject "... after some stylistic flirtations".<sup>19</sup> In *Boats*, although the composition is abstract, the boat shapes are clearly delineated with the masts

rearing up into the sunset over a sharply stated horizon. Again the composition is based around slashing diagonals with the lighter areas blazing out from the surrounding darkness.

*Shoreline* (1962) is a further illustration of abstraction developing from the observation of nature. The sky, hills and sea can still be discerned readily for the painting has been based on outdoor sketches, yet this recognisable structure has been overlaid and filled out by vigorously applied paint. Gopas is trying to express the inner reality of nature in true Expressionist style by brushstrokes and colour rather than by representing it, and so defining and limiting it. Here the intensity of the sunlight on the rocks and small boats flashes out, the effect heightened by the lowering sou'wester above, weighing down on the land. Gopas clearly stated his intention: "The composition of *Shoreline* is by movement and tension rather than by tangible enclosed forms. Nature is dominated by the same forces no matter if it is labelled New Zealand, Australia, Austria or Lithuania."<sup>20</sup>

Catalogue 22

In this progression towards abstraction an important milestone was certainly 475: *City Lights* (1962). Although Gopas had moved into an abstract form, his concern with expressing the dynamics of nature remained. The inspiration for this work is clearly plant forms, but Gopas tried to reach a universality of expression by abstracting from specific organic forms and drawing an analogy with man's urban life, thus co-ordinating the various elements of life. The numerals 475 can be read as man's efforts to define and calculate the dynamics of nature. Gopas believed he had selected these numbers randomly (perhaps as a comment on the fragmented nature of the twentieth century scientific enterprise he was later to criticise so vehemently) but when he had completed the work he discovered the building opposite to him in Colombo Street was in fact No. 475, bearing the numbers on its window. Thus, even in selecting symbols of randomness, a powerful need to impose order and meaning has asserted itself. Apart from the numerals already mentioned, the painting contains other symbolic elements. At the top right is the barrel of a gun, a red ball of flame mushrooming from its muzzle, pointing at a divided sun. Perhaps this is already an expression of Gopas's concern at the destructive course mankind was choosing to pursue with atomic weapons. There is some suggestion in his organization of these elements of his later preoccupation with depicting the totality of space, but, although he had already advanced it to some degree in his more realistic landscapes, he was not yet confident in his abstract work. Yet this change of emphasis happened quickly.

Catalogue 23

*Red and Blue* (1964) is an important painting in Gopas's development of his abstract identity and the expression of space as a theme clearly asserts itself. The composition is based on deliberately anonymous shapes with the large dark ones to the left and right holding the pictorial space together. These shapes extend the painting visually as they are truncated by the frame. Here Gopas has tried to enliven the surface both by the use of hessian and by fairly dense painted abstract imagery. The musicality of colour tone in Kandinsky's sense is clearly important. "Generally speaking, colour directly influences the soul; colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to creative vibrations in the soul".<sup>21</sup> The musical analogy has been chosen carefully and Gopas himself uses it in talking about his work.

Catalogue 25



27 Movement, 1965



31 M 42 Orionis, 1966





Catalogue 26 and Catalogue 27

Two paintings continue this direction in colour, texture and imagery. They are *Ageing Galaxies* (1964) and *Movement* (1965). They share a number of concerns. The earlier painting emphasises texture with its hessian surface. The colour is dark and muted, although enlivened by flashes of red, and is distributed evenly. The composition focuses on boldly sweeping lines which extend movements into space in all directions. In the latter painting, both colour and structure have been heightened considerably and this has been skilfully handled. Rough canvas has been used so that texture is again important, but it is the rhythm of the movements across and beyond the picture plane that is arresting. They suggest the delicate trajectories of spaceships entering and extending into outer space.

Gopas's exploration of texture benefited from the introduction of PVA or acrylic paints to New Zealand in the early sixties. They offered painters increased flexibility and Gopas quickly adapted to them and eagerly explored their potentialities. He was now able to build up a painting's surface layer by layer in the traditional technique of oil painting, without long delays between each coat while the paint dried. Both underpainting and overglazing became practical. "PVA gave me the chance to paint a modern theme in traditional ways." He could also use PVA as a fixative for whatever material he wanted to add to the surface of the painting. Because of the liquid nature of this paint and the large quantities he was using, he had to leave his easel and work with the board lying horizontally. The PVA could then be poured onto the surface in swirls and manipulated as he walked around the edges. An example of his use of this method is *Painting for the Sun* (1965) where the swirling galactic form has been built up over layer upon layer of paint. This technique freed him from the brushstroke and resolved for him, as an Expressionist painter, the dilemma Kozloff has proposed as central to the limitations of Expressionism: the mutually excluding relations of colour and surface.<sup>22</sup> Kozloff asserts that after van Gogh, Expressionist painters tended either to develop fairly even surfaces and concentrate on colour, or to lower the colour tones and work up the surfaces. He regarded this split as a limitation on the development of Expressionism. Certainly Gopas's colour now became much softer and more muted, but he still included strong colour in individual accents. He gradually reduced the amount of white in his paint for what he had become really interested in was producing light from reflections on the pigments. The colours gained more and more depth as he emphasised brown, earth colours. Tangible texture had become his focus.

At this critical period from 1963 to 1965, Gopas still applied his new techniques and knowledge to more specific landscapes on Earth. *Oaro* (1965) is one such painting. Here the influence of Colin McCahon can be seen, and in particular *Six days in Canterbury and Nelson*. Gopas's painting is split into four landscape sections, each based on sketches he made while staying near Kaikoura. The line of the hills has been transformed into graceful arabesques. The sun hangs high above one horizon, symbolising the universal life force, and a small red mark hovers near it, an often-used motif to indicate the presence of life. The repeated horizons can be read as depicting a simultaneous point in time at different places and point up the imaginative abilities of man: "We see one horizon, yet in our minds we may see many".

Many of Gopas's paintings of the early sixties seem to luxuriate in the new-found technical freedom offered by PVA. Their

Not illustrated

Catalogue 29  
Not illustrated

surfaces are often heavily textured, a texture built up of many layers and other material. Gopas himself noted that in these paintings he wished "to use very tangible texture in order to suggest something intangible".<sup>23</sup> And, as he worked on the specific surface of the paintings, the "something intangible" began to emerge. An outstanding characteristic of German Expressionist artists had been their desire to submerge themselves in some force or power greater than themselves,<sup>24</sup> so it is not surprising with his background that Gopas should find his paintings increasingly turning his mind to what he studied at night in the sky, that other powerful strand in his intellectual and artistic life brought to him by astronomy.

A theme that links these new works with Gopas's earlier paintings was that of the relationships of light and darkness — chiaroscuro. While most painters are concerned with this effect to an extent, to some its obvious moral as well as aesthetic implications are crucial. "I was intent to have light come out of the darkness as with the paintings of Rembrandt. He realised a cosmic fact that at first there is darkness." It has already been discussed that in Gopas's realistic landscapes from the late fifties and into the early sixties the emergence of light from the darkness increasingly became more clearly stated. As his painting lost an obvious image, this concern became much more evident. Now Gopas was concentrating on the ultimate relationship of light and dark, the stars in the universe.

In 1967 Gopas held an exhibition in the New Vision Gallery as part of that year's Auckland Festival. It was titled "Galactic Landscapes" and although a number of Gopas's star paintings had been exhibited earlier in Christchurch, this was the first time these new paintings had been specifically grouped together as a series. Gopas had taken a gigantic leap from the landscapes of the Baltic and Kaikoura into those of the galaxy. He has always been at pains to emphasise that the paintings drawn from his astronomical studies in no way try to represent the phenomena sometimes referred to in the title. They are in fact a continuation of his abstract concerns. Here Etienne Gilson's reconstruction of the painter's creative process was important to Gopas's conceptualisation of what he was doing. He quoted from Gilson in the catalogue to the "Galactic Landscapes", "Most of the time, the plastic form causes the picture and, in turn, the picture causes the title".<sup>25</sup> The title, the objective definition of a work, comes only after its plastic form has been defined.

The scale of the galaxy is difficult to grasp. The Earth is situated in but one of many galaxies and to try to visualise it, it would have to be observed from a distance of a few hundred light years. To view Earth in its galactic perspective, we would have to enlarge a photograph of the galaxy the size of this catalogue until it covered all of North America. In such a representation our solar system, if we could locate it, would be about 5cm in diameter. The Sun and the Earth would be two pinpoint dots fractions of a millimetre apart. Indeed, the Earth would not be visible without further magnification. Gopas, an experienced astronomer, became fascinated by how the infinities of space could be expressed. Of course he used photography as part of his astronomical technique, but photography at whatever level of magnification is clearly inadequate for a comprehensive vision of space. Imaginative reconstructions of phenomena are a common tool in astronomy to show them in perspectives not limited by our position on the Earth. They are made by extrapolating from known phenomena and



37 Dark Planet, 1965



39 That Narrow Zone of Life,  
1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 2)



That narrow Zone of Life  
in which the SUN sustains us, if it stops what's there?



observations, although they are being greatly improved by outer space exploration. We can of course observe other galaxies from Earth, remote though they may be, but Gopas asserted that photographs cannot define space accurately. They cannot match the physical immensity. What painting could do was express a condensed parallel. It was the German Expressionist Marc who was once again the precursor to what Gopas was doing: "The art to come will be giving form to our scientific convictions. This is our religion, our centre of gravity, our truth. It will be profound enough and substantial enough to generate the greatest form, the greatest transformation the world has ever seen."<sup>26</sup> In his new direction Gopas was still faithful to the intellectual tenets and ambitions of the German Expressionists, even though in style and form he was now moving away from them.

In the "Galactic Paintings" the rhythmic distribution of texture and light effects were central. In preparing for the exhibition Gopas gave precise instructions on how the paintings were to be hung so as to attract the maximum reflection of light across their subtly coloured surfaces. "Lighting will cause some difficulty as all the "Galactic Landscapes" work on Reflection and are designed to change with the mood of the daylight (or the pass of the sun)."<sup>27</sup> Gopas was particularly concerned as the usual lighting systems used by galleries are designed to minimise reflection. Accordingly, he sketched out a "lighting-device" to produce "fleeting highlights" as it slowly moved in the currents of air across the space. This concern with light and its transient effects has greater implications beyond the presentation of the paintings. Gopas asserted in his catalogue notes that one of the main aims of the "Galactic Paintings" was "to suggest a state of Emergence and Becoming, rather than to interpret finalised form".<sup>28</sup> He tried to achieve this by a very ambiguous texture, often enriched by a metallic sheen and flecks of brilliant colour, as well as the receptivity to reflection.

A painting which is a good example of this investigation of the transience of matter both in its technique and content is *M.42 Orionis* (1966). Here Gopas is concerned with cosmology, that branch of astronomy which sums up and includes all the rest, which deals with the mysteries of beginnings and endings. As Kant put it: "In the same way worlds and systems perish and are swallowed up in the abyss of eternity; but at the same time creation is always busy constructing new formations in the heavens, and advantageously making up for the loss."<sup>29</sup> *M.42 Orionis* is a gaseous galactic nebula (*M.42* is its classification in the star dictionary) and as such the epitome of Kant's "constructing new formations in the heavens". Galactic nebulae can be described as stellar birthplaces since fresh stars condense there out of the nebular gas and dust. This is analogous to the way Gopas saw form emerge from matter and define itself in his paintings. As Gopas shows in *M.42 Orionis*, the universe is not a clear-cut, finalised statement of being, but an endless progress of becoming. The broad sweep of the textured area relates strongly to the swinging form of Orionis, although Orionis itself is extremely rarefied. In the centre of the painting four of the new stars, collectively termed Theta Orionis, can be discerned. Gopas's preference for a moving light source also has resonances in astronomy. *M.42 Orionis* shines by reflecting the light of nearby stars as well as because of the very hot stars embedded in it. If a nebula has no suitable stars in or near it to cause luminosity, it remains dark and can only be

identified because it blocks out what lies behind. Gopas's painting is a poetic version of an astronomical observation for "who can imitate the universe"?

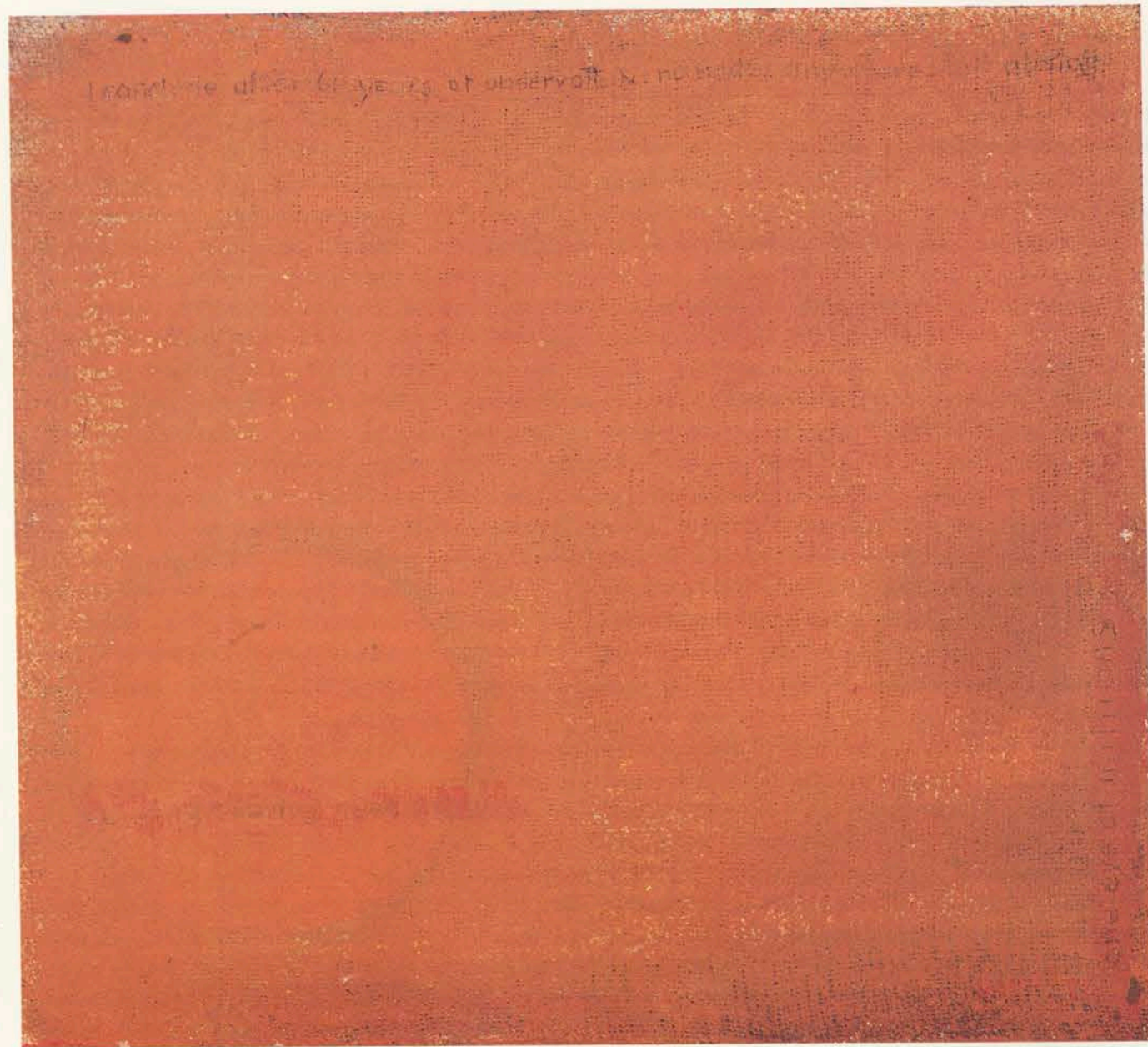
The "Galactic Landscapes" exhibition was received on the whole with bemused respect. It was praised in general terms and then the reviewers moved on to a more malleable subject. Michael Dunn has already noted the stereotyped critical reaction to Gopas's work, which has defined him as a German Expressionist in its most limited, stylistic sense and which regarded anything that did not fit easily into this mould as an aberration and thus removed from serious consideration.<sup>30</sup> Dunn himself discussed Gopas's development into abstraction and considered that concentrating on Expressionism, and German Expressionism in particular, was a limitation in assessments of his work. However, if the writing and stated aims of the German Expressionists are taken into account, as well as the styles of painting they developed to express these aims, it can be seen that in fact Gopas remained faithful to the influences of his youth. As a mature artist he reached the point where he had taken what he wanted from the German Expressionist style, but continued to be committed to his personal development of its spiritual and intellectual passions which to him had not yet been fully explored.

The "Galactic Landscapes" series had not exhausted Gopas's creative response to his astronomical studies. *Cluster* (1968) takes the "tangible texture" he was exploring in these paintings to its extreme. He used small ceramic tiles to build up the surface. The tiles were to have been used in a church mural by a fellow lecturer at the art school, Russell Clark, but much of the consignment was damaged when it arrived in New Zealand. Clark gave some of the brightly coloured tiles to Gopas who immediately saw their possibilities as reflectors of light. He used PVA to glue them directly to the board and thus was able to build up a fair impression of a global cluster. However mosaic was a very limited technique. An enormous amount of PVA had to be applied to stick down the tiles, which was very expensive, and the weight of all these additions imposed great strains on the board.

It has been noted that a presumption of the mainstream of German Expressionism was that the artist was trying to discover truth within himself rather than in the outer world. A corollary of this has been the observation that it is just not possible for any artist to remain at a fever pitch of emotion over a whole career and that inevitably some degree of role-playing must enter into the expression and thus undermine the sincerity of the whole.<sup>31</sup> Gopas certainly painted the "Galactic Paintings" in an effort to investigate his widening ideas about the cosmos, but also to try to grapple with his own inner reality and his place in the universe as a man. In a paradoxical way it is a credit to his sincerity and intensity that, instead of becoming comfortable with his visions and devising more attractive ways of presenting them, he was overwhelmed by the increasing pressures on him during the late sixties which led to a breakdown. For the next five or so years his output was small, although it is interesting to note that during this period he returned to two themes he had worked and reworked as he reached critical points in his life: self portraits and paintings of boats. The two self portraits (1970 and 1975) and the untitled boat painting (1972) break no new ground but show an artist taking stock. They were but the precursors of Gopas's most powerful creative phase.



44 **I Conclude**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 7)



46 **You Bastards**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 9)





## PAINTINGS FOR THE SUN

The "Paintings for the Sun" burst out in a surge of energy from December 1975 to January 1976. From the first, Gopas envisaged them as a coherent series of works "Presenting a New Realist Image".<sup>32</sup> More than just a series though, they were arranged in the same numbered sequence at each exhibition of them, a sequence which indicates the logic Gopas has devised for his theories.

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*Name the Three Stars* was originally intended as a test painting for the series but was later admitted as an introductory work. It is a new departure, for in it Gopas has tried to render the disposition of the stars in a diagrammatic way: tiny points of light in melodically modulated black. It is an effort to signpost man's home, the Earth. At the bottom right is the Sun of our solar system and near it hovers the tiny dot of the Earth. The Sun forms a vast triangle through space with the other two points marked by the triple star system Alpha Centauri and Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, twenty-three times more luminous than our Sun. A very thin line has been drawn through our solar system to stand for the distance in light years. Yet Gopas is as concerned to indicate the infinities in the depth of the work, for the triangle also marks out the base of an immense pyramid, its apex reaching far into deep space. Written on the painting is: "At an estimated speed  $\frac{3}{4}$  that of Light it could have reached us — that 'Disc in front of the Sun' ". Gopas uses writing on his paintings as an added method of reasoning with his audience, to reason with compassion.

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The second stage of this carefully organised series of paintings is best represented by *That Narrow Zone of Life in Which the Sun Sustains Us*. The sequence of paintings acts like a zoom lens, drawing up closer and closer to our solar system and its centre, the Sun. Here the Sun is surrounded by a series of haloes, making it look like an eye and seeming to indicate through the circles the vast distance beyond. In order to emphasise the Sun, its size has been exaggerated. Gopas has further developed his efforts to create a very tangible surface with waves of motion rippling out across the solar system from the all-important Sun. In expressing the vastness of the universe, Gopas wanted to point out the immense loneliness of life within it. But he does not want mankind to be crushed by the surrounding emptiness. All areas of life are very small and therefore very precious. Each has its own special quality. Mankind's quality is that of movement, for even the omnipotent Sun cannot move about as Man can. "Does the Sun have legs?" But special qualities bring with them special responsibilities. Man must strive for harmony, the harmony of man and nature. Gopas found the same lesson, although on a very different scale, in the stars as he had found in his harbour scenes. The inner reality of a man, his potential for spirituality which sets him apart, is also precious in the cosmos.

The first four paintings of the series are executed in moody tones indicating the power and vastness of space. As the series continues, the colours become warmer as the life force of the Sun is approached.

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The Sun itself comes into sharp focus in the intellectual culmination of the series, *I Conclude*. The Sun at the bottom left symbolises the affirmation: *I Conclude After 60 Years of Observation: No God(s) Anywhere — But a Living SUN — Living — Loving —*

*Seeing*. An ironic aside typical of Gopas sets even the Sun in perspective, *One Eye of Millions?* From the Sun light and energy pulse out to the stars, a flow indicated in this painting by a thin line. The Sun is the absolute master of our solar system; it controls the movements of the planets to an extraordinarily precise degree for their paths can be predicted to hundredths of a second. Earth can be seen at the top left, obscuring its moon. The rich colour of the painting is its own homage as, Expressionist in everything, Gopas pours out his love and admiration in a rich and beautifully wrought surface. Glints of light point up the texture yet, beyond the glowing influence of the Sun, the darknesses of space can be seen encroaching.

Within this majestic precision and scale, this grandeur, is Man, the mite of the universe whom Gopas sees strutting across the surface of the earth as though his footsteps could be heard on the other side of the galaxy. *Self portrait as a Flea* is harshly ironic. Within the half-moon, balloon-like structure is the face of a scientist. He sadly surveys the surrounding inflation of man's puny knowledge. Disillusioned with the power of science, Gopas sees its practitioners today as people of limited vision and grand pretensions. He reserves his admiration for men like Alexander von Humboldt, whom he considers to be the last man to have a co-ordinated vision of the world. But this is also a self-portrait. Gopas does not exclude himself from this scathing assessment: "Who is me/ but a flea/ on the brow/ of a giant/ called/ ignorance". Earth gently curves below the insubstantial illusions of science, but it too has been affected. A cross shape rears up, perhaps a reference to the TV of the poem, or to obviously religious significances. A small collage element states Gopas's conviction that the American moon landing was a massive fraud set up in the Arizona Crater in India.

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In *You Bastards* Gopas arrives back on earth after his journey through the universe. Now he vents his rage at the stupidity of man and his potential for self-destruction. As in 475: *City Lights*, the focus of the painting is a symmetrically divided globe, one side the glowing red of life, the other the black of death. It also refers to the Moon and its assiduously hidden dark side. For Gopas the choice is clear, this or this: life, or destruction by the atom bomb.

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"Paintings for the Sun" were completed over a two month period and left Gopas exhausted. He had done what he considered to be the best paintings of his life, the culmination of all he had learnt, artistically, intellectually and emotionally. "And when I painted the paintings for a living Sun, I thought, these are the greatest paintings a man has ever done." He had tried to show that it was to the Sun we owe our lives — "(Consider) if she stops just for 1 hour!" — and that even though our effect on the solar system is small, it can in the long term be damaging. He knew the Sun and the solar system could withstand some conflict, but the prospect of atomic explosions terrified him. In the atom he had found the link between all matter — the galaxy, the Sun, Earth, mankind — and to see its potential perverted into destruction enraged him. When the paintings were received largely with incomprehension, Gopas retreated. In 1977 he sent the paintings to Ehrwald — the small town in Austria where he had lived in the refugee camp. Along with the "Paintings for the Sun" he sent six of the Galactic series and some drawings. This dramatic gesture is an indication of how important to the world he considered these paintings to be: "I really used it as an excuse to bring them away from the ignorance of Kiwis. There is a greater message." That





49 Anatomy of a Star, 1976  
 (Paintings for the Sun, no. 12)



56 So Spoke Christ, 1978



Austria was the closest he could get to his real homeland, Lithuania, poignantly illustrates the strong sense of dispossession, of the dislocation he had experienced in New Zealand which could only be assuaged by setting himself in a context beyond that of nations.

Gopas still regarded his philosophy of the "Qualitative Universe" to be of primary importance and in 1977 he turned away from painting. He resigned from the art school in May of that year and returned to the medium which had been submerged by his struggle for expressive painting; he again began to write poetry. For this he needed no studio and he could communicate his ideas, which had now become dominant, in quantity for very little cost. He began to compile *Nature Speaks*.

## NATURE SPEAKS

Throughout his career Gopas had become increasingly reticent about presenting himself as an artistic personality. He often did not attend openings of his shows, feeling that the work should be able to speak for itself. In this he followed the Expressionist painter Max Beckmann but, also like Beckmann, Gopas's faith in the work alone communicating his ideas faltered. Beckmann wrote: "I have always on principle been against the artist speaking about himself or his work. Today neither vanity nor ambition causes me to talk about matters which are generally not to be expressed even to oneself. But the world is in such a catastrophic state, and art is so bewildered that I, who have lived the last thirty years almost as a hermit, am forced to leave my snail's shell to express these few ideas which, with much labour, I have come to understand in the course of the years"<sup>33</sup>.

Although *Nature Speaks* is essentially a collection of poems, Gopas could not abandon the involvement with the visual arts that had lasted most of his life. These are illustrated poems.<sup>34</sup> It was as "Rudolf William Gopas<sup>35</sup>: Poet, Painter, Astronomer" that he worked. The order of the activities is revealing. Although astronomy was the means by which he made his discoveries regarding the nature of the universe, it is preceded by the two means he used to express these theories. Further, he is now first a poet, second a painter. This is a return to the order of precedence he had struck as a child. Poetry gave him a new medium for expressing the same message as the "Paintings for the Sun", that man was threatening himself and the cosmos by atomic weapons.

In *Nature Speaks* Gopas frequently adopts another persona, William Pusch. He chose this name as a humorous adaptation of that of Wilhelm Busch, changing the surname because he liked its aggressive connotations. Busch was born in Germany in 1832 and by the 1860s his humorous drawings were widely published. His innovative techniques of graphic narration evolved into the comic strips of the late nineteenth century, but it was in his books for children that he found his best means of expression. The dreadful adventures of Max and Moritz were his most famous creation and his method of telling stories in verse with illustrations was the dominant mode in German picture stories up to the 1940s. Gopas is sure to have read them as a child. Busch's work emphasised wit and precise drawing with the humorous verses and it was these qualities Gopas also

sought in his first major poetic venture.

Gopas wrote out his poems and then often illustrated them by freely drawn images surrounding and even encroaching on them. Despite some immediate similarities to the work of William Blake, Gopas has always been at pains to point out the considerable differences of scale. "After all, Blake put a lifetime into his work. This in a way is just a side effort of one and a half years — some one hundred poems, fifty graphic works and a couple of paintings." Further, Gopas's drawings responded emotionally to his poems. They were a result of the free association of ideas with the biro moving almost of its own will across the page. This dominance of the word over the image is an indication of Gopas's despair at his lack of success in communicating the urgency of his views.

Many of the German Expressionists were extremely interested in graphic work of all kinds and most of the dominant stylistic modes were ideally suited to it. Gopas had never worked in the graphic field before, but the medium came easily to him and his capacity for drawing from memory had always been good. "I rather let the pen guide my hand ... (saying) come on little atoms, here's your chance." Often the drawings would begin with a scribble and then build up into a form that was the basis of a recognisable image. This approach bears some obvious similarities to the way he had earlier allowed form to emerge before trying to pin it down intellectually with a concept or a title. Gopas found that too much deliberation over the content led to the suppression of ideas and could also spoil the freshness of the drawing style.

Gopas devised a sophisticated technique of creating and duplicating his poems and their amplifying images. The original drawings were hand-coloured and then photocopied. In the copies the colours provided Gopas with the shading and grey areas he required and were added to and changed as each new print was taken. In photocopying, the artist had found a cheap and effective way both to publish his work and see it in quick proof form before making further changes to the drawings or colour. He found through experimentation that deep browns went to black on the duplicating process, while other colours tended to go shades of grey. While it was Gopas's aim to add a new dimension to the *printed* work with this colour, it has also meant the originals are extremely beautiful in their own right. *Nature Speaks* was originally printed and distributed throughout the art school and later photocopied by Gopas in full and presented to a number of libraries and people who he hoped might help in his efforts to spread his message.

The theories, which Gopas expounds explicitly in *Nature Speaks* and implicitly in the "Paintings of the Sun", are backed up by accusations aimed at contemporary scientists. These are particularly acidic in *Nature Speaks*. In this essay, *Nature Speaks* will be considered mainly as a work of art in its own right and for the insights it offers into Gopas's artistic and emotional development. No attempt will be made to assess his theories or criticisms of contemporary science.

The cover of *Nature Speaks* sums up the content. A large drawing of the Sun dominates, a sun that gives a warning to the Planet Earth. "You bloody well behave or else!" Nature speaks, and a living Sun speaks too in these poems of reason and disgust. Gopas believes that if people would just listen, they could hear nature speaking.





The artist himself is introduced by a scribble extended to a self portrait. Self portraiture has always been important to Gopas both as a guide to his developing skills and as a periodic self-assessment. In *Nature Speaks*, self portraits appear a number of times making Gopas the visual interlocutor to the poems his image helps to decorate and elaborate on.

*Cash — Dollar — Cash* is a good example of intensely developed image, rendering many of the words it illustrates illegible. In principle Gopas asserts the pre-eminence of his words, but when the pen starts to move across the paper the artist's strong artistic sense take over. To the left is a mad monster with gloved hands indiscriminately heaving atom bombs. The poem is addressed to the USA. Gopas had intended to clarify this over-worked image a little by removing some of the areas of drawing. Although the original drawing in biro was clear, Gopas saw that the photocopying had blunted the sharp graphic quality.

Gopas's intention to clarify the image in *Cash — Dollar — Cash* explains why there are a number of variants of *Nature Speaks*. The master version is in Gopas's possession and is a pasted together compendium of the latest stage of amended photocopies. It is still in a state of change. The originals, that is the master drawings from which the copies were made, have been exhibited a number of times.

In *So Spoke Christ* Gopas places the responsibility for halting the race to nuclear destruction on the Christian nations, the dominant culture. Gopas had some difficulty in arriving at a convincing image for the Christ figure. "I wanted something that stayed away from the beautifying image that is usually depicted. I was looking for a neutral face, but with dignity." Gopas worked through the night on the illustration. "I was working on the piece and then found I had torn a piece out. I began to tear out other pieces and pasted them back again until the head of Christ began to emerge." It is important to bear in mind that these images are not the result of trying to tap subconscious thoughts, as practised by the surrealists for example, but are a conscious amalgamation of elements that emerge because of the technique used. Even when he is most intellectually engaged, Gopas still believes that plastic form can speak its own truth. Christ is garbed in a Roman toga and takes a typical orator's pose. Gopas regards Christ above all as a great speaker and he has presented him thus. On the left a woman can be discerned. She represents the crowd. Gopas did not want to overpopulate the work, still being interested in suggesting space. "Here stands a man. One cannot give a realistic image to Christ but when you read the Bible you realise that he was a very powerful speaker." The obliteration of some words by drawing and collage does not worry Gopas, who also provides separate typed transcriptions of the text.

Although Gopas reiterates that New Zealand has been good to him, some bitterness is expressed in a number of the poems, notably *Be A Local Boy*. "Born elsewhere?/ Bloody well!/ Try again — or go to hell." A frenzy of images crowd in on the poet's words seeming to want to overwhelm, to bury them. Faces, vehicles, buildings emerging out of seemingly random lines appear often as biting caricatures.

*Spaceship Moon* is a good example of a strong narrative thread by which Gopas tried to make his theories as easy to

Catalogue 54

Catalogue 55

Not illustrated

Not illustrated



understand as possible. Various astronomical phenomena, including the moon and the Van Allen belts, have been personified to act out the drama of the moon hiding its back from the curiosity of man. Yet behind it irrepressible man, perhaps a self portrait, holds up a mirror reflecting its familiar face. Another representation of the moon above looks on, dazed by all the satellites circling it. At the bottom "Mister van Allen" reaches out to enclose the earth. The Van Allen belts are two zones surrounding the Earth in which electrified particles, probably originally emitted from the Sun, are concentrated and trapped by the Earth's magnetic field. Although books on astronomy attribute the discovery of the belts to James van Allen in 1958, Gopas believes they were in fact discovered some thirty years earlier in Germany. This is a good example of the sort of contentious points that are included in Gopas's cosmic theories but which cannot be discussed in substance without wide scientific knowledge. To the left of Earth is a sea of crosses from the cemeteries of World Wars I, II, and III.

Catalogue 52 Another in the series *Spaceship Moon* is *Dear Moon*. Here Gopas's urge to explain and convince has supplanted his interest in illustrating the poem, and the diagrams are covered with arrows, words and figures as he propounds his view that it is possible for the moon to be a spaceship. Of particular interest though, for his earlier work, is the division of the moon. He has used this motif a number of times before as an illustration of the choices man is confronting. Here a literal meaning is also stated: "Side visible to us"; "invisible side of Moon".

In *Nature Speaks* Gopas is expressing the outrage of nature at what man is doing, particularly the danger he is courting with the development of atomic weapons: "Atomic explosions are a privilege of the Sun". Throughout the collection he is trying to explain in poems and diagrams and drawings what he had earlier expressed in his "Paintings for the Sun" — to be or not to be, that is the question — / To see and understand — / THAT IS THE ANSWER".

## CONCLUSION

Gopas has himself summed up his life:

"What have I done?  
but painting Paintings for the Sun —  
writing Shakespearian poetry —  
Teaching and thinking  
and seeing the Stars —  
and the Sun —"<sup>36</sup>

The "Paintings for the Sun" were the culmination of his work, for in them he was able to fuse his intellectual and didactic concerns, which subsequently came to dominate *Nature Speaks*, with his painterly interests which had dominated the "Galactic Paintings", making in the unison his unique statement.

Gopas is an outsider, an exception in New Zealand art. He himself has never felt that he belonged socially or culturally. From

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Europe he brought the sources which animated his intellectual and artistic life and, when confronted with New Zealand, he chose to pursue those sources directly.

From the German Expressionists, and indeed from a powerful theme in German philosophy, he was convinced of the value and uniqueness of each individual's perception and expression of the world around him. Gopas widened his perception of infinity, not as a metaphor for man's condition but for its own grandeur and unity. Like Nietzsche he recognised in the Sun the essence of life, of joy in existence, of joyful self-sufficiency to which men should also aspire. For sixty-nine years Rudolph Gopas has tried.

"Thus spoke Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains."<sup>37</sup>

Jim and Mary Barr 15 May 1982.

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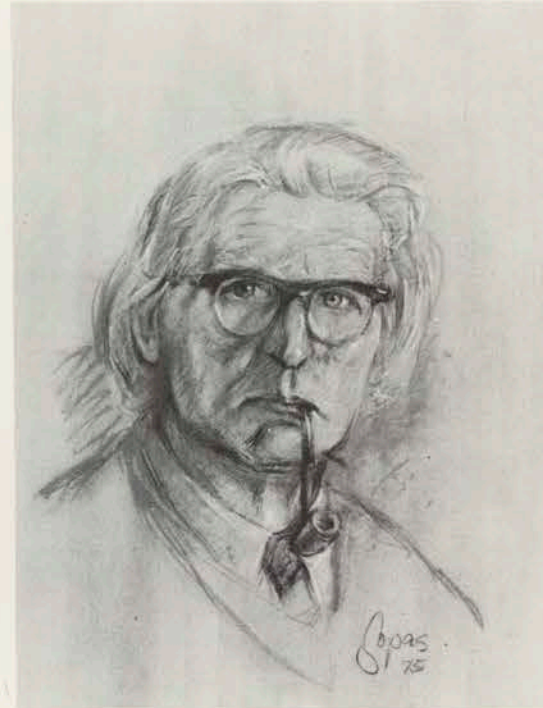
1 Self Portrait, 1947

Pen and ink on paper, 380 x 280  
Collection: Frank Knowles, Auckland.



2 Self Portrait, 1970

PVA on hardboard, 600 x 535  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Canterbury University, April 1976; Robert McDougall Art Gallery, June 1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976.  
Collection: Airin Gopas, Christchurch.



3 Self Portrait, 1975

Conté and charcoal on brown paper, 540 x 415  
Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



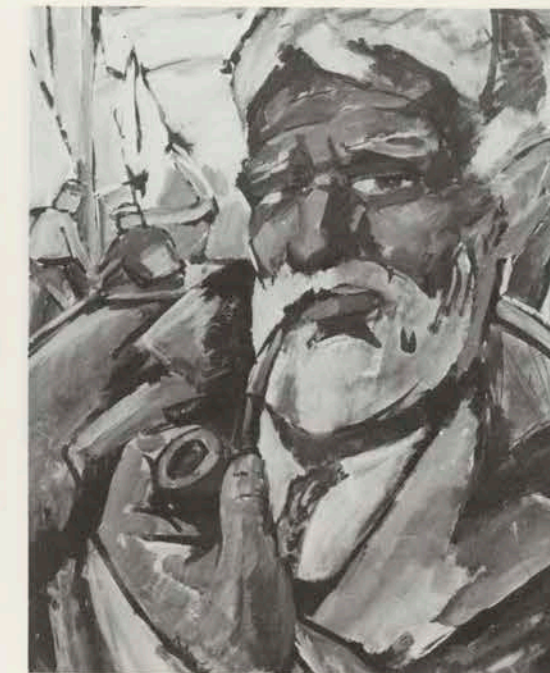
4 Dunedin Harbour, 1950

Watercolour and black ink, 550 x 445  
Collection: Peter Trumic, Invercargill.



5 Boat Harbour, 1961

Watercolour, 250 x 250  
Exhibited: One Man Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch. 1962  
Collection: Canterbury Public Library, Christchurch.



6 Untitled (Bearded Fisherman), c. 1952

Watercolour, 580 x 480  
Collection: Frank Knowles, Auckland.





7 Boats at Kaikoura, 1960

Watercolour, 440 x 555

Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



8 Backyard Gloucester Street, 1957

Watercolour, 525 x 730

Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



9 Still Life 2, 1955

Oil on canvas on pinex, 750 x 600

Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



10 My Chair, 1956

Oil on hardboard, 612 x 562

Collection: Joyce and Martin Brinkers,  
Christchurch.



11 Lyttelton Landscape, 1959

Oil on ivoryboard, 640 x 775

Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.





12 **Landscape**, 1960

Oil on ivoryboard, 708 x 915  
Exhibited: The Group Show, Durham Street Art  
Gallery, Christchurch, 1960.  
Collection: Canterbury Public Library,  
Christchurch.



13 **Sleeping Woman**, 1959

Oil on hardboard, 875 x 785  
Exhibited: The Group Show, Christchurch, 1959.  
Collection: Canterbury Public Library,  
Christchurch.



14 **Prometheus Descending**, 1959

Oil on hardboard, 1220 x 762  
Exhibited: The Group Show, Christchurch 1959;  
Galactic Landscapes, New Vision Gallery,  
Auckland, 1967.  
Reproduced: Black and white, *New Zealand Art —  
Painting 1827-1967*, Keith, Tomory and Young.  
Collection: private collection.



15 **Boats at Kaikoura**, 1955

Oil on hardboard, 915 x 1225  
Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



16 **Harbour Nocturne**, 1970

PVA on chipboard, 1220 x 1220  
Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery.



17 **Untitled (Boats)**, 1972

Oil on chipboard, 615 x 690  
Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.





18 **Boats at Lagoon, Brooklands, 1961.**

Oil tempera on ivoryboard, 807 x 920  
Collection: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wellington.



19 **Coast Landscape, 1959**

Oil on hardboard, 810 x 1048  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting, touring exhibition, 1960.  
Collection: Cashmere High School, Christchurch.



20 **Hillside Lyttelton, 1961**

Oil and grit on hardboard, 982 x 805  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting, touring exhibition, 1961.  
Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



21 **Boats, 1961**

Oil and sawdust on ivoryboard, 890 x 1090  
Exhibited: Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



22 **Shoreline, 1962**

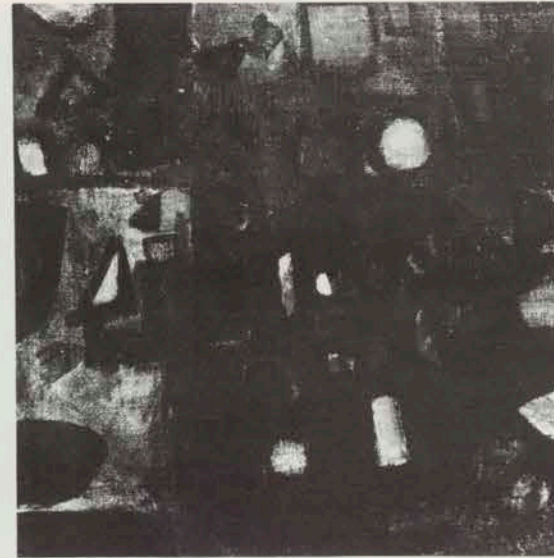
Egg tempera on ivoryboard, 857 x 1092  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture, touring exhibition, 1962; Galactic Landscapes, New Vision Gallery, Auckland, 1967; New Zealand Art of the 1960's, touring exhibition, 1970.  
Reproduced: Colour, *New Zealand Art — Painting 1827-1967*, Keith, Tomory and Young; in black and white, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*, Docking.  
Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery.





23 475, City Lights, 1962

Egg tempera on ivoryboard, 913 x 1426  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting  
and Sculpture, touring exhibition, 1962.  
Collection: Airini Gopas, Christchurch.



24 Orange Centre, 1964

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 863 x 863  
Exhibited: Contemporary Painting in New Zealand,  
Commonwealth Institute, London, 1965; Petar  
James Gallery, Auckland, 1972.  
Reproduced: In catalogue for *Contemporary Painting  
in New Zealand*, touring exhibition, 1965.  
Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery.



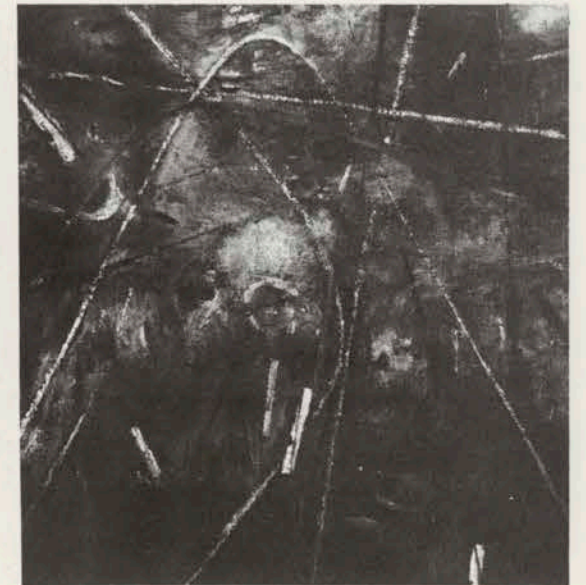
25 Red and Blue, 1964

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 960 x 885  
Exhibited: Group Show, Christchurch, 1964; Group  
Show, Christchurch, 1968.  
Collection: Christchurch Teachers College.



26 Ageing Galaxies, 1964

PVA and oil on hessian on ivoryboard, 970 x 1082  
Exhibited: Contemporary Painting in New Zealand,  
Commonwealth Institute, London, 1965; One Man  
Show, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch,  
1971.  
Reproduced: Colour (under the title "Movement in  
Space"), *Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, Jim and  
Mary Barr.  
Collection: The Robert McDougall Art Gallery,  
Christchurch.



27 Movement, 1965

Acrylic on canvas on hardboard, 955 x 910  
Collection: private collection.





28 **Pacific Coast III**, 1965

PVA on hessian on hardboard, 725 x 768  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting,  
touring exhibition, 1965.  
Collection: Hocken Library, Dunedin



29 **Oaro**, 1965

PVA on hessian on Swedish hardboard, 1030 x 907  
Exhibited: Contemporary New Zealand Painting,  
touring exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965;  
New Zealand Art of the 1960s, touring exhibition  
1970.  
Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery.



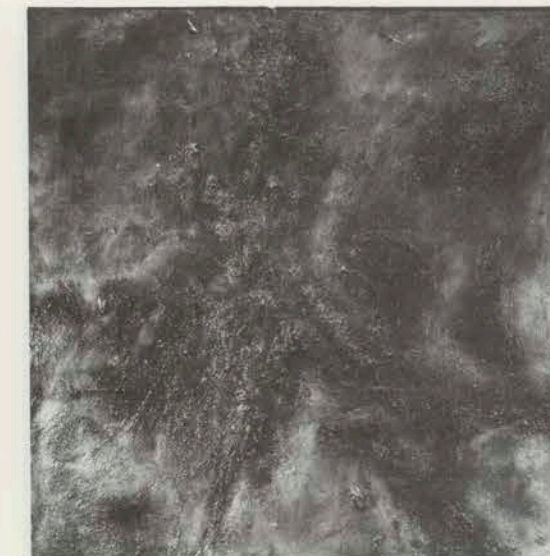
30 **Dollars o Dollars**, c. 1976

PVA and paper collage on ivoryboard, 1070 x 913  
Exhibited: Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



31 **M 42 Orionis**, 1966

Oil and Metalex on hardboard, 1205 x 1205  
Exhibited: Galactic Landscapes Exhibition, New  
Vision Gallery, Auckland, 1967.  
Collection: Anna Dalgarno, Auckland.



32 **Galactic**, 1966

PVA, wood and grit on hardboard, 1200 x 1207  
Exhibited: Galactic Landscapes Exhibition, New  
Vision Gallery, Auckland, 1967; Bosshard Galleries,  
Dunedin, 1976; Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



33 **Golden Past**, 1965

PVA and grit on ivoryboard, 1210 x 1210  
Exhibited: Group Show, Canterbury Society of  
Arts, Christchurch, 1965.  
Collection: Canterbury Society of Arts,  
Christchurch.





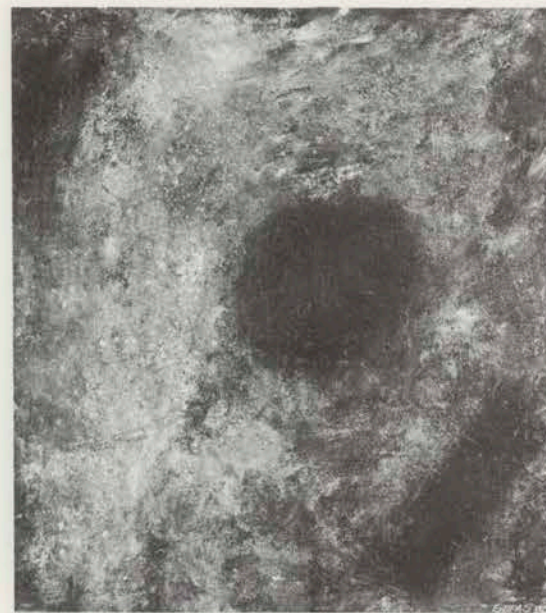
34 **Nebula**, 1969

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 933 x 1066  
Exhibited: Petar James Gallery, Auckland, 1972.  
Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery.



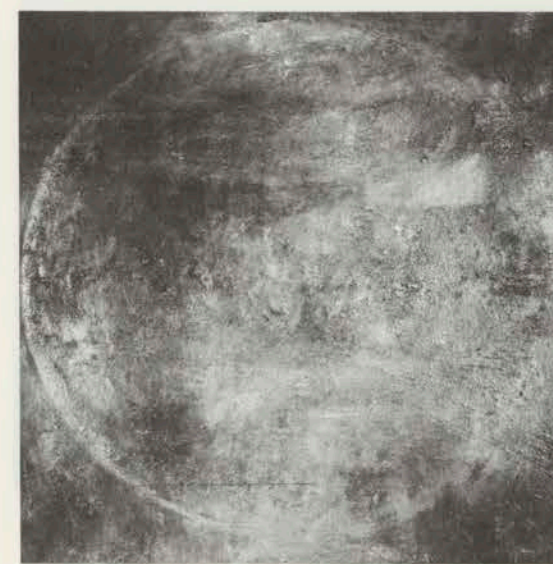
35 **Cluster**, 1968

Oil, PVA, ceramic chips, grit and iron filings on  
ivoryboard, 678 x 644  
Reproduced: Black & white, *Artis*, Dunn, June 1971.  
Collection: Ngaire and George Hewson,  
Christchurch.



36 **Galactic**, 1978

PVA on ivoryboard, 960 x 875  
Exhibited: New Vision Gallery, Clairmont,  
Truttum and Gopas, 1979.  
Collection: P.S. and M.L. Truttum, Christchurch.



37 **Dark Planet**, 1965

PVA on ivoryboard, 1025 x 1030  
Exhibited: Group Show, Canterbury Society of  
Arts, Christchurch, 1965.  
Collection: private collection.



38 **Name Three Stars**, 1975  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 1)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 1108 x 1062  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



39 **That Narrow Zone of Life**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 2)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 1101 x 1162  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.





40 **Solar Explosion**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 3)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 808 x 891  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



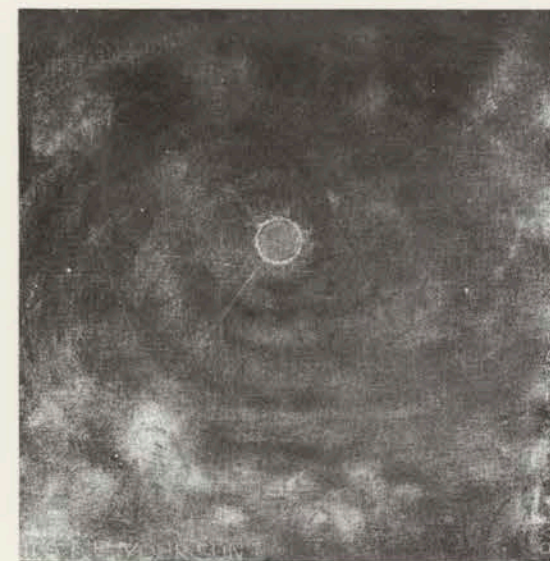
41 **Perhaps You Can Talk With The Weather**,  
1976 (Paintings for the Sun, no. 4)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 865 x 800  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



42 **Homage To Astronauts**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 5)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 1067 x 1201  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



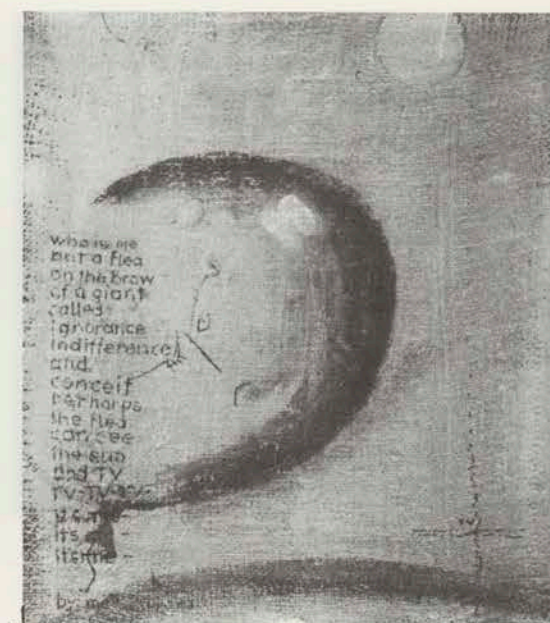
43 **Dedicated to the Living Sun**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 6)

PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 1222 x 1216  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



44 **I Conclude**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 7)

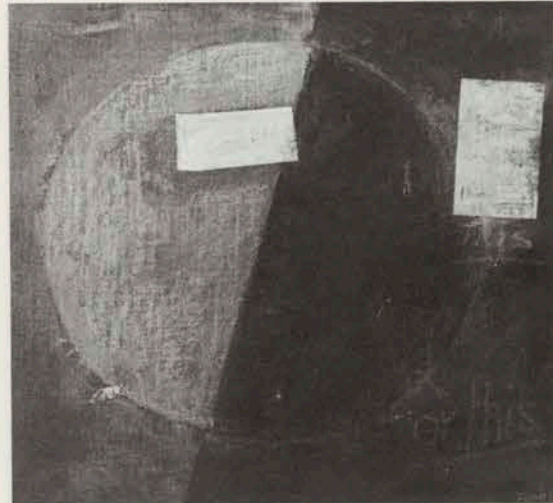
PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 433 x 474  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



45 **Self-Portrait as a Flea**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no.8)

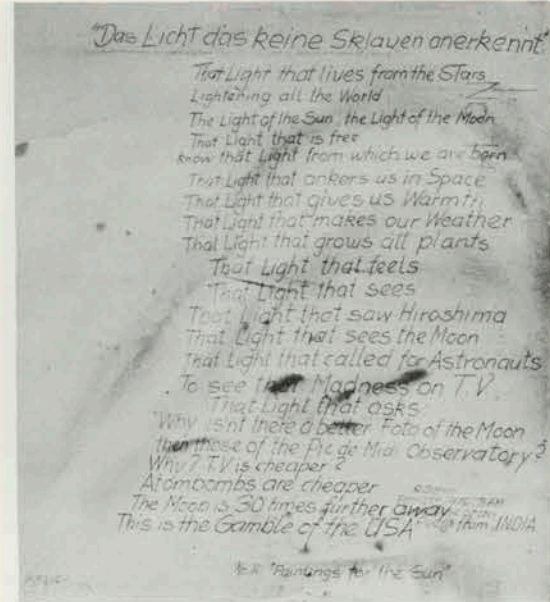
PVA on hessian on ivoryboard, 430 x 380  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.





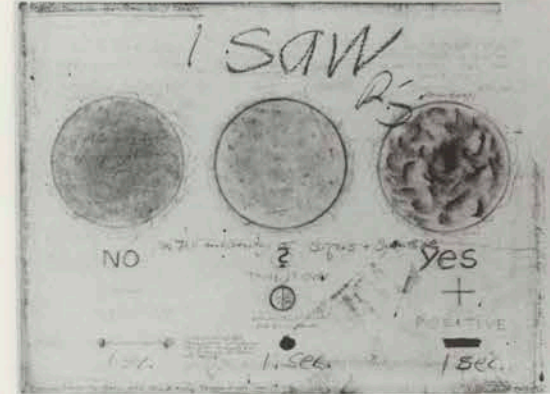
46 **You Bastards**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 9)

PVA and paper collage on ivoryboard, 805 x 886  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: Country Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



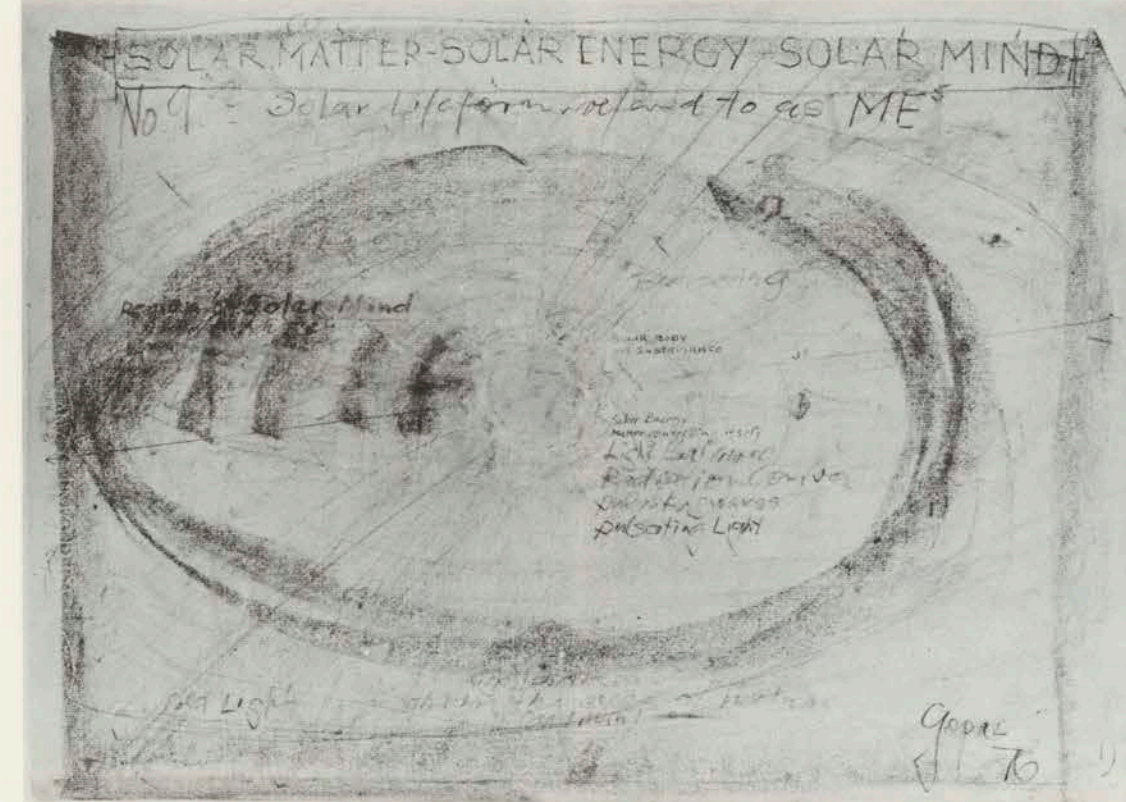
47 **That Light of Freedom and of Peace**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 10)

Ball-point and watercolour on ivoryboard,  
600 x 553  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



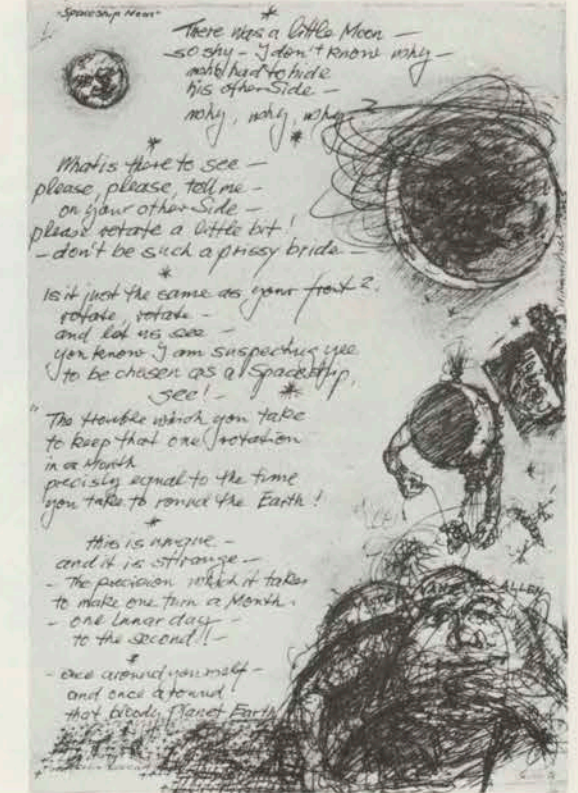
48 **I Saw**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 11)

Ball-point, crayon, conté and pencil on ivoryboard,  
455 x 609  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



49 **Anatomy of a Star**, 1976  
(Paintings for the Sun, no. 12)

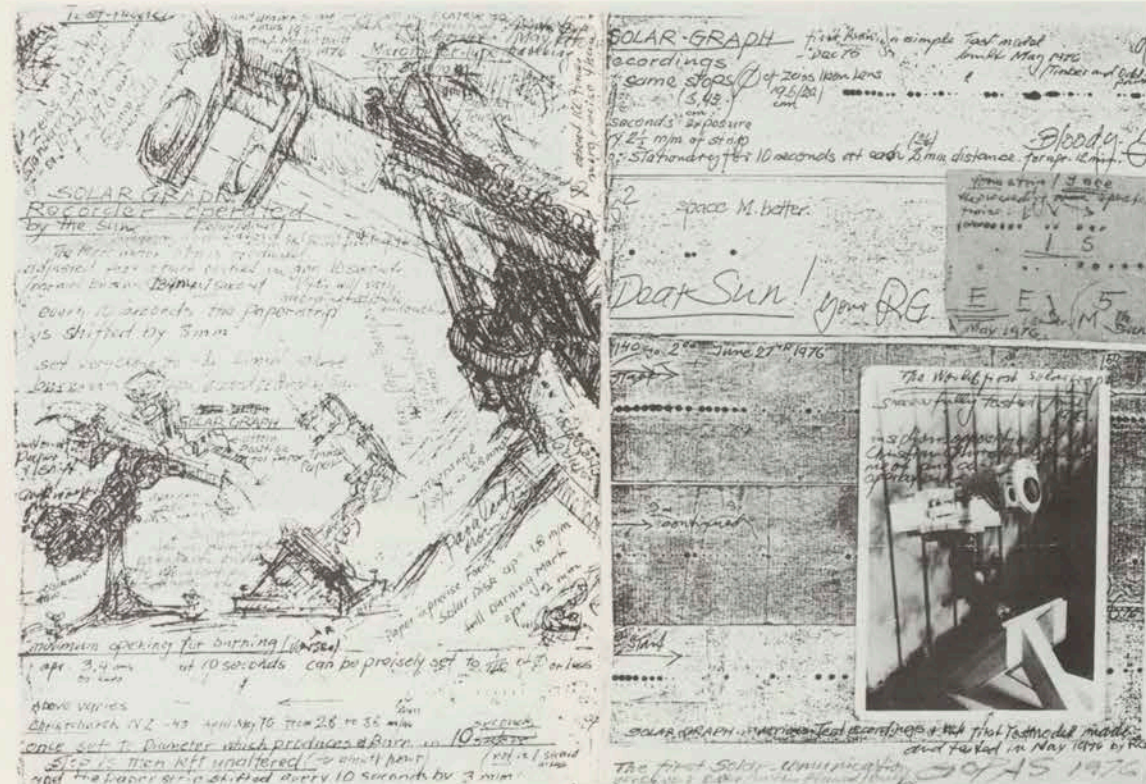
Ball-point, crayon and conté, 440 x 610  
Exhibited: James Hight Library, Ilam, April 1976;  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, June  
1976; Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, October 1976;  
Ehrwald, Austria, 1977.  
Collection: County Council, Ehrwald, Austria.



50 **There Was A Little Moon**, 1976

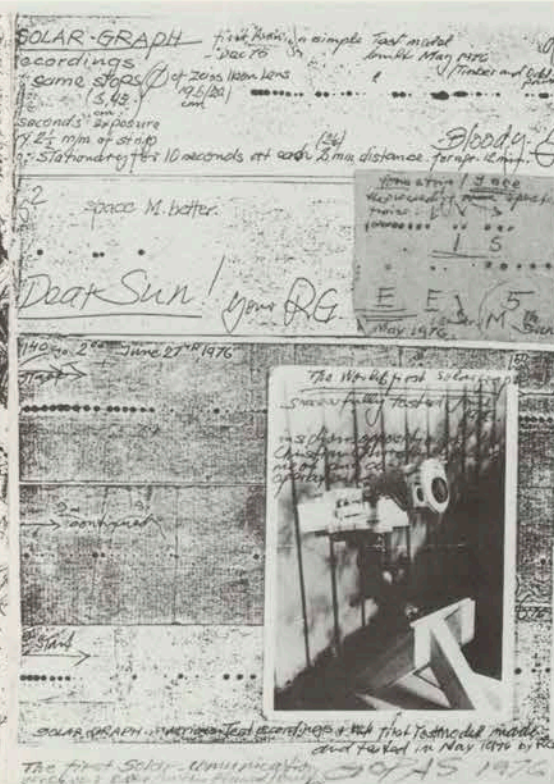
Original ball-point and coloured pencil drawing,  
285 x 200  
Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The  
Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury  
Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington,  
1979.  
Collection: the artist.





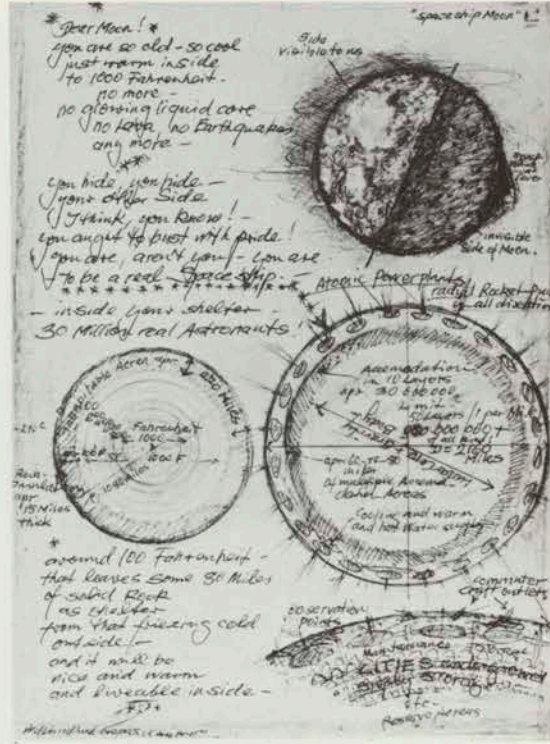
51 I See, I See (The Sun), 1976

Carbon print, photograph, paper collage, ball-point and pencil, 275 x 400  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: the artist.



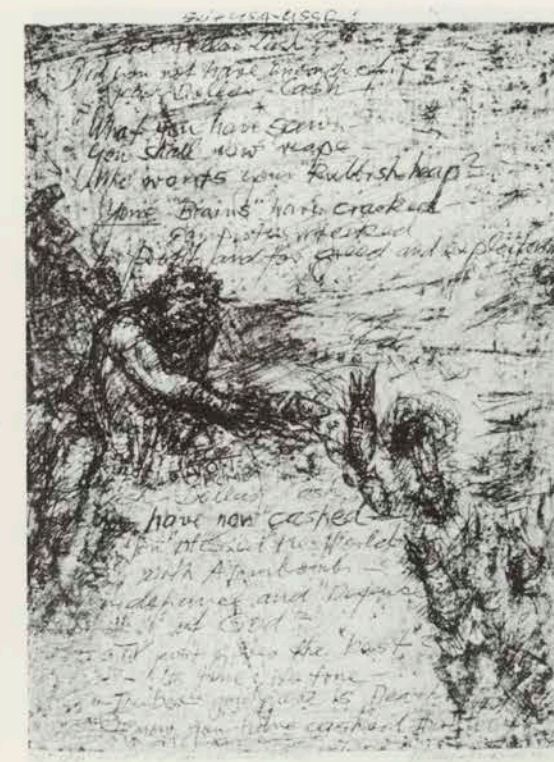
52 Dear Moon, 1976

Original ball-point and coloured pencil drawing, 280 x 200  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: the artist.



53 All Atoms Are Against Atom War, 1976

Original ball-point drawing, 290 x 210  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: the artist.



54 Cash — Dollar — Cash, 1976

Original ball-point drawing, 275 x 210  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: the artist.

CASH — DOLLAR — CASH

Cash — Dollar — Cash —  
 did you not have enough  
 of it?  
 Cash — Dollar — Cash —  
 "what you have sown  
 you shall now reap —  
 Who wants your rubbish heap  
 your brains and cracked  
 computer — wrecked  
 for profits and for greed  
 and exploitation.

Cash — Dollar — Cash  
 You have now cashed —  
 you "blessed" the world  
 — with Atombombs —  
 in defiance and defence  
 of God?  
 "TV just gives the best?"  
 it's true — it's true  
 the best you gave is Death!  
 now you have cashed  
 that too!  
 — for yourself!





55 So Spoke Christ, 1977

Carbon print, ball-point, coloured pencils and collage, 295 x 195  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Reproduced: A print from this original is reproduced in black and white in Jim and Mary Barr's book *Contemporary New Zealand Painters*.  
 Collection: the artist.

"SO SPOKE CHRIST"

Don't wait for the year 2000 —  
 oh Kosmonauts — don't wait

Atombombs — Atombombs!  
 — and Moon fraud murder!

Did I preach for that?  
 Did I teach for that?

Your Judgement day is now upon you!

\*

"That bloody Planet Earth!"  
 shall it fall prey to that kind of pest?

When Peace and Love I preached  
 Where was the U.S.A.?

\*

it wasn't there yet — nonexisting —  
 and so shall it be now again! —  
 forever, Amen!

— your Judgement day?  
 this time I came prepared for this —

erase that Pest!

Oh, Kosmonauts be blessed —  
 be blessed you came  
 be blessed you came!

\*

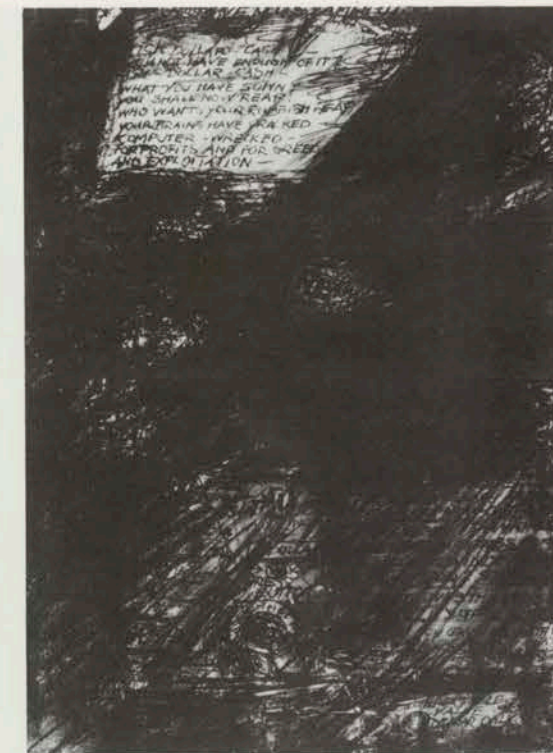
"I feared you might have come too late!"  
 oh Kosmonauts, don't wait  
 — and teach the others on Mars, Venus and  
 Moon fraud — and Moon-murders!"

\*



56 So Spoke Christ, 1978

Carbon print and crayon, 380 x 260  
 Exhibited: Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Reproduced: Black and white, Jim and Mary Barr's book *Contemporary New Zealand Painters*.  
 Collection: Canterbury Society of Arts.



57 Amen USA — USSR, 1978

Carbon print, ball-point and black crayon,  
 280 x 200  
 Exhibited: Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: Canterbury Society of Arts.



58 Rembrandt, Where are You, 1976

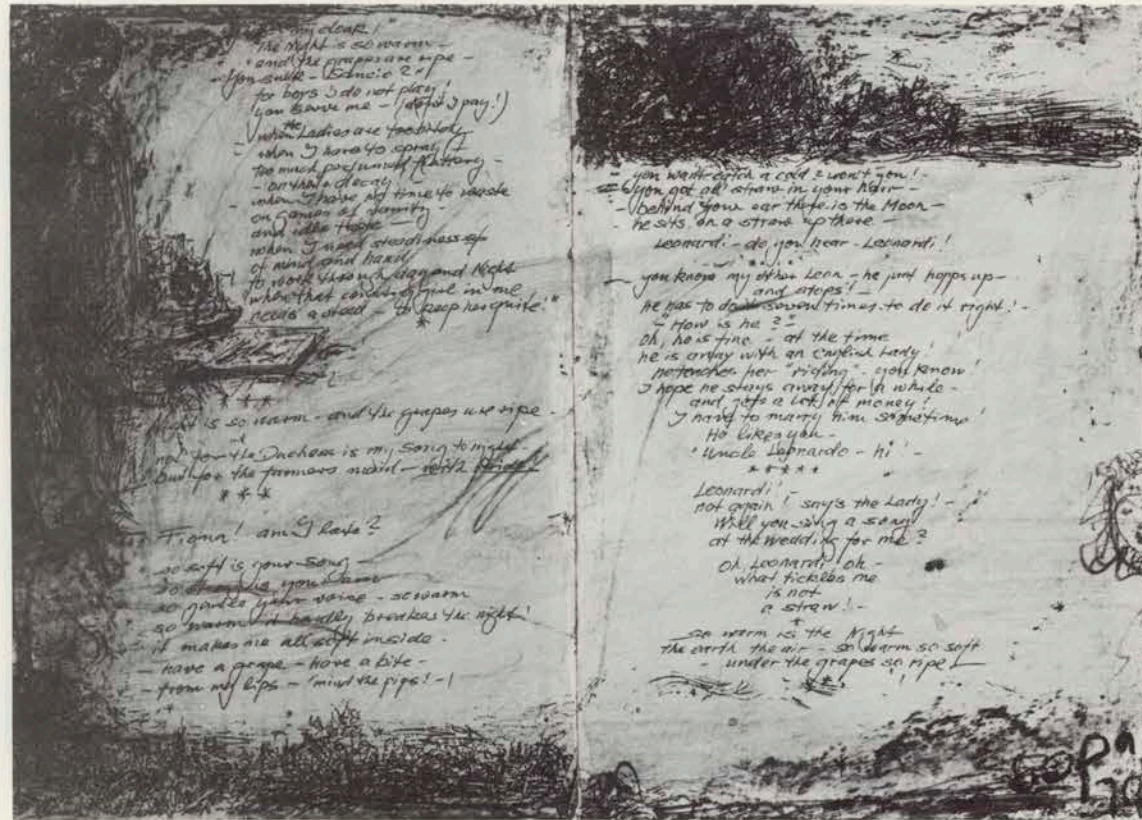
Carbon print and coloured pencil, 312 x 210  
 Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
 Collection: Canterbury Society of Arts.





59 The Masterpiece, 1976

Carbon print, ink and watercolour, 370 x 255  
Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
Collection: Hocken Library, Dunedin.



60 Leonardo da Vinci, 1976

Carbon print, oil wash, conté and crayon, 370 x 515  
Exhibited: Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976; The Group Show, Christchurch, 1976; Canterbury Society of Arts, 1978; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington, 1979.  
Collection: Elva Bett, Wellington.



## INDEX CHRONOLOGY

- 1913 Born, Silute, Lithuania.
- 1923 Major preoccupation, poetry.
- 1925 Given first telescope, commenced a life-long observation of the stars. Developed a love of painting.
- 1933 Entered art school, Kaunas, Lithuania. Travelled to Germany, Austria and Greece.
- 1938 Graduated from art school with honours.
- 1939 World War II. Invasion of Baltic States. Worked as draftsman for Department of Agriculture.
- 1942 Married Natasha.
- 1944 Sylvia born.
- 1945-1949 Lived in refugee camp Ehrwald, Austria, painting landscapes and portraits for income.
- 1949 June Arrived in New Zealand. Sent to transit camp at Pahiatua with Natasha, Sylvia and Natasha's mother, Marté Seeberg.
- 1950 Commenced work as photo-processor for Coull, Sommerville and Wilkie, Dunedin. Built 6" telescope and began astronomical observations of the Southern Hemisphere. Painted a large number of portraits and landscapes, as well as remembered Baltic scenes of his youth.
- 1951 Exhibited with Art Society and the Independent Group of Dunedin.
- 1953 Moved to Christchurch leaving Natasha and Sylvia behind. Commenced work for another photographic firm. Continued portraits, including many of children. Exhibited with The Group, Christchurch, which he continued to do intermittently until 1977.
- 1955-1956 Moved into a proper studio. Frequent trips to Lyttelton and Kaikoura, developing his coastal paintings, e.g. *Boats at Kaikoura, 1955*, catalogue 15.
- 1958 Married Airini Grennell.
- 1959 Appointed to Ilam School of Fine Arts as Painting Lecturer. Used vacations to concentrate on art. Painted nude series including *Prometheus Descending, 1959*, catalogue 14.
- 1960-1962 Landscapes became more abstracted, e.g. *Shoreline, 1962*, catalogue 22 and 475, *City Lights, 1962*, catalogue 23.
- 1965 Paintings developed in abstraction to express astronomical observations, e.g. *Movement, 1965*, catalogue 27. PVA and acrylic paints offered new possibilities. Concern with texture, light and dark, e.g. *Golden Past, 1965*, catalogue 33.

## MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

- 1967 Major exhibition in New Vision Gallery, *Galactic Landscapes*.
- 1968-1974 Continued Galactic paintings, e.g. *Nebula, 1969*, catalogue 34, occasionally returning to boats and self-portraits. Output decreased from pressure and emotional stress.
- 1975 December Produced *Paintings for the Sun* in a period of two months. These were exhibited three times in 1976 and met with general incomprehension.
- 1976 Separated from Airini.
- 1977 Resigned from art school. Took twelve *Paintings for the Sun*, six other paintings and some drawings to Ehrwald, Austria. Returned to Christchurch.
- 1977 June Commenced *Nature Speaks*, his hand-coloured, carbon prints.
- 1978 September Exhibited *Nature Speaks* at Canterbury Society of Arts and again the next year at Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington. As with his *Paintings for the Sun*, they met with general incomprehension.
- 1979 June Exhibited with his students, Clairmont and Trusstum, at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland.
- 1982 July Retrospective Touring Exhibition opened at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.



## MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

- 1951 Independent Group Show, Dunedin.
- 1953 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1954 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1958 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1959 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1960 July Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1960 November Group Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1961 Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1961 October Group Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1962 January Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1962 July One Man Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1963 November Group Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1963 Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1964 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1964-1965 Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Ceramics, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery to Japan, India and Malaysia.
- 1965 November Group Show, Canterbury Society of Arts.
- 1965 November Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1965 Contemporary Painting in New Zealand, toured by QE II Arts Council to Commonwealth Institute, London.
- 1966 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1967 May One Man Show, *Galactic Landscapes*, Auckland Festival Exhibition, New Vision Gallery.
- 1967 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1968 One Man Show, Several Arts Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1968 November Group Show, Christchurch.

## EXHIBITIONS

- 1969 February A Group Show, Several Arts Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1970 May One Man Show, Victoria University Library, Wellington.
- 1970 New Zealand Art of the 1960s, a Royal Visit Touring Exhibition.
- 1970 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1971 One Man Show, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch.
- 1972 June A Group Show, First Exhibition — Petar James Gallery, Auckland.
- 1972 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1973 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1976 April One Man Show, *Paintings For the Sun*, James Hight Library, Canterbury University.
- 1976 June One Man Show, *Paintings For the Sun*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1976 September One Man Show, *For a Living Sun*, Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin.
- 1976 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1977 September Ehrwald, Austria.
- 1977 November Group Show, Christchurch.
- 1978 September One Man Show, *Nature Speaks*, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch (also shown at the Artist's home in December 1978).
- 1979 March One Man Show, *Nature Speaks*, Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington.
- 1979 June Clairmont, Trusttum and Gopas, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.



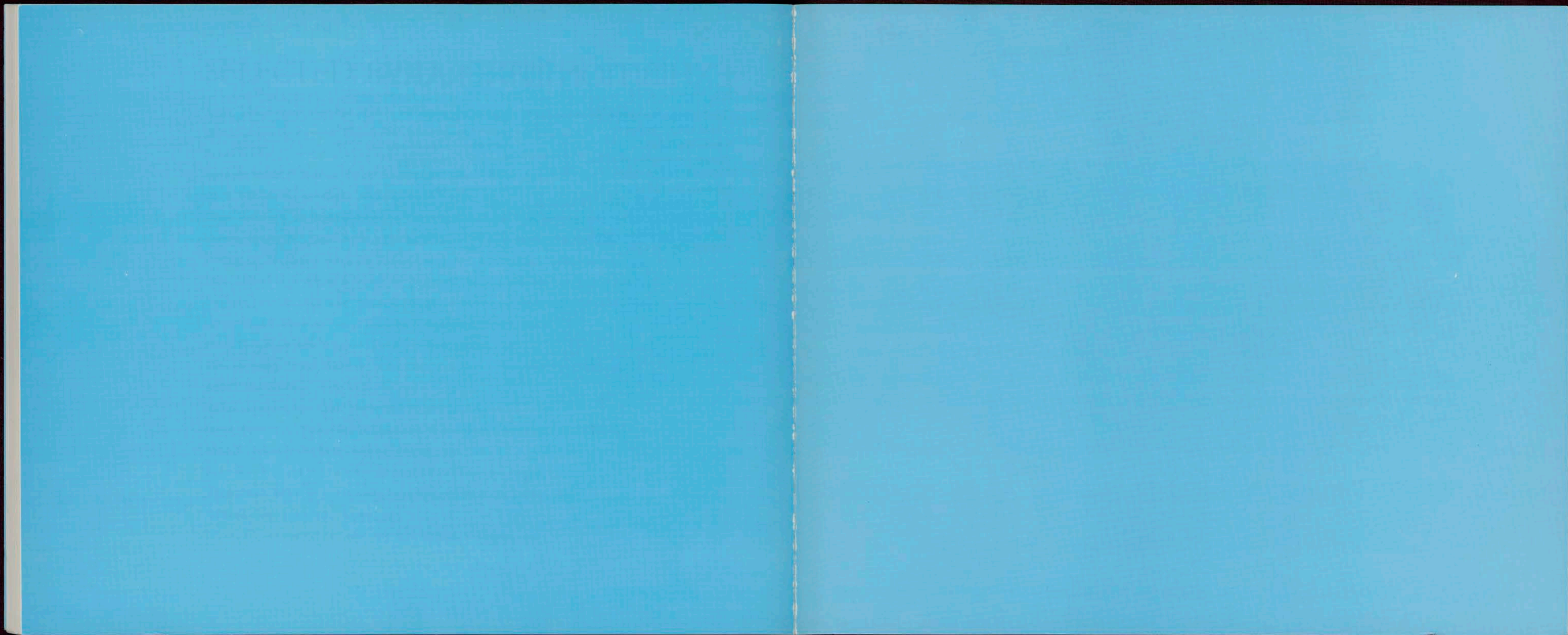
## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## EXHIBITION ITINERARY

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|--|-------------------------|
| Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth  | July — August 1982      |
| Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui                 | October — November 1982 |
| Rotorua Art Gallery                        | December — January 1983 |
| Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton               | February — March 1983   |
| Wellington City Art Gallery                | April — May 1983        |
| Manawatu Art Gallery                       | May — July 1983         |
| Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch | August — September 1983 |
| Dunedin Public Art Gallery                 | October — 1983          |
| Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson           | November — 1983         |
| Auckland City Art Gallery                  | May 1984                |







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