

Back beach

1973

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

Back Beach, Centennial Park, New Plymouth was fifteen minutes walk from my studio in Mount View Place. The islands are the remains of cataclysmic volcanic eruptions and now the basis of a wonderful marine park. I have fished and dived all around them. Their relationship to each other being an intimate part of my experience it was a natural extension of this knowledge to include them in my art. The negative spaces isolated by the shapes of the islands became iconic motifs that I explored extensively and found satisfying echoes in the patterns of clouds and waves

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Back beach rock

1974

oil on board

Terry and Angela Boon collection, New Plymouth

Snapper Rock stands just far enough off shore to allow access to it at low tide. Wave action around it leaves with every set of tides a fresh pattern of tidal pools that act as mirrors for reflections of the island. The idea of a reflection sampled by a series of sand pools has an interesting parallel to certain subconscious processes.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Big occity

1970

oil on board

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington
gift of the Friends of the National Art Gallery, 1984

Bad weather often kept us inside. The children's games and inventions were a great foil to the sparseness of the landscape. The painting of these ephemeral moments usually developed from a quick drawing to fix the event in my memory, after which I found that I could reconstruct the moment because of my familiarity with the subject involved. We had one electricity point in Blarney Castle (a sun-dried brick cottage in Central Otago owned by my relative Nelly Cuttance). Thomas was fascinated by having power over dark and light. 'Big occity' was his name for this power and he regularly plunged us into the 18th century. I caught him at it one night and shouted at him and was moved by his reaction to make this record of the event.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Blowing out matches

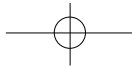
1969

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

Blowing out matches was a game abandoned only when the supply of matches ran out. I've long held a theory that smoking's most powerful and primal attraction is the making and carrying of fire. Certainly everyone's fascination with fire is evident in this picture.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Blue rock pool (light version)

circa 1974

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

This print was done for a printmakers' competition in Palmerston North. In it I advanced the spatial concept of the rock pool prints by overprinting the reflected rocks, thus separating the rock from its reflection in a very subtle way.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Boys fighting over pink plastic gun

1978

oil on board

Private collection

An event observed in an Auckland backyard from the street as I walked by. I transferred the scene into a street outside the weed killer factory Watkins–Dow where my father worked as the advertising manager. One of the few things my father and I argued over was Rachel Carson’s 1965 *Silent Spring*, a book he was forbidden to read by Watkins–Dow management.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Children at breakfast time

1969

oil on board

Hocken Library, Uare Taoka o Hakena

University of Otago, Dunedin

Charles Brasch Bequest

This work was bought by the poet and patron of the arts Charles Brasch, who later gifted it to the Hocken Library. I was proud to see it hanging in his collection alongside the English artist Ben Nicholson.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Christ driving money changers from the temple

1972

oil on board

Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection

I really admire El Greco's painting of this event. One day after a humiliating interview with a bank manager I went home and began this work. I modelled Christ on my friend John Maynard who as the first director of the new Govett-Brewster Gallery in New Plymouth, who was doing some serious butt-kicking himself.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Crucifixion

1966

oil on board

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

A modern Crucifixion. Salvador Dali was the epitome of acceptable 'modernness' at this time. I wanted to keep the realism of Matthias Grunewald and cover the lack of any hint of resurrection in the New Zealand Catholic Church's imagery. I was having trouble with the face when on a walk through Pukekura Park I saw clinging to the back of an old pine tree the empty shell of a cicada, so I let Jesus fly away renewed from this steel cross with its squabbling birds. As a child, seeing the auras and halos around saints and angels and Christ and the Virgin Mary was a big part of my existence. I was always looking for miracles, that's what I was after. But I never found any, to be honest. I think that's what influenced me to accept the ordinary. I was not looking for miracles elsewhere.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Dolphin and lovers, with onlookers

1971

oil on board

Private collection, Tauranga

This painting was one of a massive spin-off of six oils and thirty or forty drawings based on the commission to make a book cover image for Maurice Shadbolt's 1969 novel *This Summer's Dolphin*. I discovered Maurice's work in the Anglican Chaplaincy in Wellington while taking a spell from a coloured glass window of the transfiguration of Christ witnessed by his apostles, which I'd accidentally just broken. In the Chaplain's library I read *The New Zealanders: A Sequence of Stories* 1969 and was moved to write to Maurice and tell him how much I enjoyed it. I sensed in him a kindred spirit and a great story teller and we began a long a fruitful friendship.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Domestic interior

1968

pencil on paper

Chartwell collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

The confusion of the domestic situation: Sarah sucks her fingers until they have dents in them, Elizabeth is well and truly trapped, and surrounded by domesticity.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

East End roundabout

1979

oil on board

Courtesy of John Leech Gallery, Auckland

East End Reserve was a short walk from my home, in Buller Street and I played there on a regular basis. My mother sent me a photograph out of the local newspaper of the old witch's hat roundabout and the story of its removal for safety reasons. It was like removing the social centre of my childhood. I can still hear the conversations swirling around its centre. I decided to paint my own version of the Venus emerging witnessed by the pre-pubescent audience of boys.

This large version was a commission from Robert Jones for the foyer of his building in Wellington.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Elizabeth in polka dot dress, Sarah with spoon

1967

oil on board

Williams/Sinclair Collection

It wasn't long before I began to see another side to painting children which in everything I'd seen to date exuded crass sentimentality. I saw that, like so many women, Elizabeth was a good mother but often wondered what she was doing there.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

The family in the van

1971

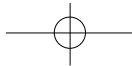
oil on board

Private collection, New Zealand

This image has found its way into our imaginations. Who are these people? Where are they from? Where's the driver? The painting is based on a photo I took of my family in the old ambulance.

(A poster and a card of this painting are available from the gallery shop)

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



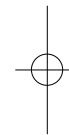
Grandparents at the door

1969

oil on board

Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

Seeing my children crowding the door to let my parents in made me aware of their frailty. As the observer inside the door I received the first intimation of my parent's absolute mortality.



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition





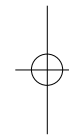
Grey sky

1975

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Hamilton Diggings, Central Otago

1969

oil on board

The Fletcher Trust collection

Views of ranges of mountains seen over undulating golden hills with old dirt roads still following the early horse and wagon tracks. Water races built by miners reflect the blue sky. Sadness and exhilaration brought on by vast spaces. Everything is so simple. A land very close to desert in nature. Farmed by tough sly people whose largesse is legendary.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Hapuka head on plate

1979

oil on board

Private collection, New Zealand

This hapuka head was my third share according to the toss of a coin, the only fish we caught that day with Phil and Kev off the coast of Taranaki. I kept my third share in the fridge as Elizabeth was away at the time. I drew it every day until its pong required burial in the garden. Afterwards while working on the four paintings that I developed from the drawing, the story of John the Baptist's beheading crept into my mind. I have long since abandoned the idea current in my youth that fish feel no pain.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Harry, Thomas and Sarah on bed

1969–1970

oil on board

Dunedin Public Art Gallery

gift of Sam Neill

The trampoline was invented by children on spring beds. Drawings for this work were made at the Gables, but the painting happened in Dunedin while I was Frances Hodgkins Fellow. Now it is in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, a gift from actor Sam Neill as a memorial to his mother, who loved it.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Hills at Tongaporutu

1972

oil on board

The Fletcher Trust collection

Always an exciting part of the journey by road from New Plymouth to Auckland is the winding down from Mount Messenger to burst out onto the coast of Tongaporutu. It's been one of those landscapes I'm always passing through. This painting was based on drawings done one late afternoon when the light was so dramatic I just had to stop. The sheep and cattle had terraced with their hooves deep tracks around these fragile hills. I'd rather see trees and I'm glad to report that this is one spot where the bush has been allowed to return, for now.

(A poster and a card of this painting are available from the gallery shop)

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Hostages

1978

oil on board

Private collection, Auckland

This image was the last of the *Paintings for the Revolution*. It is based freely on a news photo of the Irish troubles. I used the faces of friends. Tom Mutch has always seen me giving him a bloody eye in this work as some sort of demonic wish fulfilment. About this time he became a studio assistant, wanting to learn to paint. This was my way of saying that painting is often a painful business.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Interior with child

1971

oil on board

The Fletcher Trust collection

Two completely different incidents. One my first viewing of Magritte's lovers embracing under a cloth. The other a news photo of a car covered in a tarpaulin at the scene of a murder investigation. This enigmatic painting was, as is usual in my work, an observed event. Thomas had draped a toy car with a cloth and on my entering the room tossed his chewy rag over his head and gestured towards his little game.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Joseph Smither as Lone Ranger

1973

oil on board

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

When questioned about who he was, Joseph, in his fair-isle jersey, with his hobby horse, ray gun and bike helmet, replied “The Lone Ranger”.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Joseph with bear and bottle

1972–1973

oil on board

Private collection, New Zealand

It always amused me the interpretations that are made of my work, for in fact, with the exception of my 'religious' images, all my paintings stem from some spontaneous and direct observation of a moment that I then try to reconstruct. In this case Joseph points to the kitchen, he is ready for his breakfast, while we lie in.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Large blue pool with wave invading

1969

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

The wave invading the stillness of the tidal pools is an event that repeats itself with each tide. I used to sit there waiting for the moment when the rising tide finally lifted its first wave high enough to enter. It represented for me the inevitable disturbance that always comes to any period of calm. The small ripples that speak of the larger event to follow.

(A poster and a card of this painting are available from the gallery shop)

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Large composition with Harry folding napkin

1968

oil on board

Chartwell collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Alterations are all part of a painting. In this actual scene the rug was a Turkish design. I couldn't get it to work. There was enough going on without a hectic pattern.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Low tide at Kawaroa

1964

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

This is a direct translation from a simple ink drawing based on a series of photographs taken by photographer Kirby Wright at twilight along the Taranaki coast.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Mother and child

1965–1966

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

Elizabeth at the Gables kitchen table and Sarah in her high chair waiting impatiently for her bottle to warm, is a good example of a work that sits somewhere between earlier loose oil sketches and later paintings informed by my understanding of the solid forms of Taranaki stones.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

New Plymouth Railway Station

1967

oil on board

Friedlander collection, Auckland

After the initial terror of seeing a real city like Melbourne, whose lights on our ship's arrival described the curvature of the earth, New Plymouth was easy to get my brush around. I knew every building and often the people who worked in them.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Nude on a green couch

1975

acrylic on hardboard

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

I have always found this an uncomfortable image. It followed a series of nudes in blue armchairs, Elizabeth was not pleased with. To redress the situation I did two more nude portraits of her in an armchair she had recovered in a blue fabric for the occasion. We couldn't afford to recover the sofa so I did a small study of her reclined in the grey sofa and later changed it to green in this larger work. This painting was a commission from the astrologer who did my chart for me at that time and its outcome was not good concerning the chances of our marriage surviving.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Portrait of Elizabeth Smither

1972

oil on board

Hocken Library, Uare Taoka o Hakena

University of Otago, Dunedin

This portrait of Elizabeth is in the Hocken Library, as it should be. She has worked in a library most of her life, between being awarded large grants for her poetry and travelling overseas. Her reply to my query as to what I could get her on my frequent trips away was 'a fur coat'. Her fantasy was to live in a hotel and have everything done for her. I'm sorry I never bought her the coat.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Portrait of Hilary McLeavey

1975

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

Hilary and Peter McLeavey were extremely supportive and generous in their hospitality often accommodating myself and my daughter Sarah, on our trips to Wellington for exhibition at Peter's gallery. This work became part of an exhibition of several portraits of my friends and family.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Portrait of my mother

1972

[also titled: Mary Smither]

oil on board

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

My mother's face began to turn into a landscape as she got older. It was a dignified stage before the skin finally began to decay in a rest home. Here she wears a cloche hat a bit like a World War II German helmet and the little pearls I gave her from my first pay cheque.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Portrait of Peter McLeavey

1975

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

On his first visit to my studio in the Gables, Peter arrived in a crimson corduroy suit with a bloody paper parcel of meat under his arm. His intention to become my dealer. At that stage he still worked days in insurance and dealt in art, nights and weekends from his flat on the Terrace. Later I planned to paint him against a backdrop of railway carriages as I learnt his family had been railway people. I did some drawings of the carriages but somehow never got the two elements together.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Railway Station bridge and old step

1967

[previously titled: Railway overhead bridge and steps]

oil on board

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

I was told that these aggregate rock steps were the oldest set of concrete steps in New Plymouth. Both the overhead bridge and steps are gone now beneath a new stone wall that supports a popular promenade and a Len Lye sculpture.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rock painting

1974

oil on board

Chartwell collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

This is a concrete block cast for the sea wall off New Plymouth. The angularity is an absolute contrast with the sea worn boulders, the anomaly of the hole in it full of pebbles is echoed by the limpets that cling to the boulders. The rectangular shape at the oblique angle to the convention of the rectangular frame is a compositional element I was to use again in the 1990s with the Kawaroa paddling pool paintings.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rock painting with grasshopper

1975–1978

[also titled: Grasshopper on stones]
oil on board

Private collection, New Zealand

This lonely grasshopper was a chance to do my St Francis thing, for as I lent down to observe him, he jumped onto my sleeve and when I carried him up to the grassy bank of the cliff he jumped off without a word of thanks. On the back of this I wrote: I have laboured over this work and it is probably my last rock work.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rock pool with Neptune's necklace

1968

oil on board

John and Trish Gribben, Auckland

Neptune's necklace, or *hormosira banksii*, was a seaweed I studied in biology class at New Plymouth Boys' High School. I spent a lot of my youth exploring the rock pools. That I should go on to paint them was a completely natural and satisfying development and a great way to express my love of the environment.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rocks with mountain

1968

oil on board

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1969

A lot of my paintings are associated with political events, with man's inhumanity to man. The tractor is my reference to the Czech revolution which was happening at the time.

(A poster and a card of this painting are available from the gallery shop)

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rocks, concrete and iron

1967

oil on hardboard

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 1967

I grew up witnessing attempts to keep the sea at bay after the depletion of the sand flow along the coast by the introduction of breakwaters and dredging for harbours that transferred the sand out to sea. I slowly began to recognise the whole process and became involved in battles to save beaches. While this scene of chaos was of great aesthetic interest, it is also the recognition of our aggressive responses to the powers of nature.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Rubber gloves

1977

[also titled: Yellow rubber gloves]
oil on board

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

There are actually two gloves here. This arrangement of them was made by Elizabeth tugging them off after doing the dishes. I put a barricade around them with 'don't touch' signs while I worked on drawings. Things were getting pretty tense at this stage. Perhaps I should have taken more notice of the dishwasher than her gloves.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sarah eating baked beans

1967

oil on board

Private collection, New Zealand

I tried to interest Watties in the purchase of this painting. It was influenced by *Bubbles*, the Pears soap ad by Millais. After all, my father was in the advertising game.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sarah with ball

1970

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

This print is a translation of an earlier painting of *Sarah with a yellow ball*, 1970, done to celebrate the International Year of the Child. I recall how disappointed I was at the time that none of my domestic paintings were considered suitable to be shown for this occasion by any gallery.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sarah with grandfather and great grandmother

1965

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

In this image I record the sensation of seeing three generations of family interacting.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sarah with yellow ball

1970

oil on board

Te Manawa, Palmerston North

While in the Gables I made a painting of *Sarah with a yellow ball*. Elizabeth expressed a liking for it and a regret that it had been sold. So while on the Frances Hodgkins fellowship in Dunedin I made a small second version in secret and presented it to her only to find she didn't like it. Perhaps the first larger version had some features she preferred. I know in the second version I connected an impossible hand position that also became a feature of a print version I made with my father as printer for the International Year of the Child. Anyway, this smaller version was eventually bought by the Manawatu Art Gallery and was one year judged by the public the most popular painting in the gallery.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Self-portrait

1975

oil on board

Private collection,

This self-portrait is one of a series. They were shown at Peter McLeavey's gallery in Wellington shortly after the Rita Angus crosses. The intensity of them as a group was startling. They seemed to pose the question – “who am I?”

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Self-portrait

1971

oil on board

Sarjeant Gallery

Wanganui

What can an artist say about his own self-portrait? This is obviously a pre-beard work. Of all the works in this exhibition it is the most telling about who I was at the time of these paintings. I recognise myself in it with trepidation and some admiration, a rather scarred survivor of my own passions.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 3, page 11a

1962

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

I drew this particular moment of the wave crashing onto the rock over and over. Later I did a series of watercolours and several prints of this moment. It is a drama repeated endlessly all over the planet where the sea meets the land. Its significance is almost beyond understanding yet it is the basis of time itself and somehow describes the predicament of life for me, the often repeated attempts at understanding, and perhaps the smallest piece of the rock absorbed with each wave.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 11, page 17a

1966

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

Recently the painting that this drawing inspired came back to me to be repaired and signed. I enjoyed doing it and was tempted to do another improvised version of it. This particular drawing spawned the first of the rock paintings that were to become the bane of my life in their popularity when in reality it was done while I was suffering serious toothache.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 22a, pages 28 and 29

1966

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

These drawings document the relentless squirming battle between mother and child. In one the energy contained but about to burst out, in the other a frustrated bid for freedom. Is it play or is it serious stuff?

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



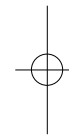
Sketchbook 22 page 40

1965

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Sketchbook 23, page 51a

1966

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

This drawing is made from inside the Gables. I rotated the viewer to outside looking in. The gardens at Pukekura Park make the brick pattern which I admired in this drawing. The painting superimposes the child in the swing over the pattern of the bricks creating a great sense of movement.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 25, page 14

1965

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

This is the site of the composition for the 1967 painting owned by the Auckland Art Gallery *Rocks, concrete and iron*. There is a surprise in it, can you spot the sunbather I eventually left out?

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Sketchbook 26, page 28

1965

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Sketchbook 28, pages 23a and 24

1967

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

I was very interested in how, early in her life, Sarah exhibited the self absorbed gestures of a woman admiring herself, but in her case as a child, completely unselfconscious about the process.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 29, page 35

1967

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

I've always had a particular love for this drawing. Thomas wants out of his cot. It's a paralysing moment. How could I resist, yet I obviously did long enough to make this drawing. How embarrassing it is for me now to realise that my role of the observer was more powerful than my role as parent?

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 31, page 44

1968

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

Thomas with his chewing rag in place. He was often to be found lurking in situations that provided shelter from the bigger wider world, places he could look out from and observe without being got at. We have both always understood each other as observers.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 32, pages 29b and 30a

1967

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

There are two artists at work here. Sarah supplied the swirling comment over the top isolating with her eye the important parts of the drawing underneath.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 33, page 39

1968

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

The Kawaroa Baths in New Plymouth were a favourite spot for me to make drawings of bathers. I especially liked the poses they adopted while showing off their physique or just being in casual poolside conversations between swims.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 46, page 13

1972

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington
gift of Michael Smither

Joseph was born in Dunedin while I was gallivanting around being the Frances Hodgkins fellow. Elizabeth who had great difficulty in breast feeding managed with this our third child to get the knack of it at last. I'd just completed a series of nine small oils of a model in a blue arm chair and had as a consequence a reasonable working knowledge of the female form, which I was able to apply to this new phenomena in my domestic life. The drawing was so successful it translated almost directly into a larger oil. There is a tenderness in this drawing that I never imagined I was capable of; the mother's hand with its wedding ring, the echoing child's hand, the indentations in the breast of the fingers directing the flow of milk, the serene face of Elizabeth.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 47, pages 45b and 46a

1972

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

This brace of drawings illustrates well my approach to the moment, followed by a more detailed study from a different angle, that would later give me those little extra bits of information that are the essential part of the 1973 painting, *Joseph Smither as Lone Ranger*.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 48a page 36a

1973

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

This rather romantic study of a local girl leaving the sea beneath the very phallic representation of Paritutu Rock became a small oil some time later, in which I included some gulls wheeling about her head. It was her 'I'm here but not available to you' stare that brought on the drawing.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Sketchbook 52a, page 35a

1975

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither

Prior to doing this drawing of Thomas standing on an isolated rock, his own little island, conducting the symphony of the sea, I had done many drawings of the waves engulfing and reacting to rocks. The child made a game out of what was for me a serious study.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

The spring night of Kirby Wright

circa 1967

oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

A chance allocation of desks at high school introduced me to Kirby Wright. Our friendship survived school days and became a mutual exchange of imagery and ideas, Kirby as a photographer and myself as a painter. This work is based on the view from Marshland Hill Lookout. We often parked here to listen to radio broadcasts of rugby games or the latest Goon Show. It expresses a certain envy that arose, Kirby remaining free to roam the streets at night while I became confined by marriage. It is a romanticised view of New Plymouth made from memories rather than an attempt at realism.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Springtime at Pukekura Park, New Plymouth

1965–1970

oil on board

Hocken Library, Uare Taoka o Hakena

University of Otago, Dunedin

While at Elam and living free-lance as an artist, Auckland Art Gallery acquired the beautiful Pieter Bruegel painting, *A Village Fair*, an overall scene with lots going on. It opened the eye of God approach for me. While living in the Gables we had easy access to Pukekura Park. I spent happy hours there with my family and on solitary rambles with paints and drawing book. I did many small and intimate studies of the lake and trees and four larger compositions for which I employed Bruegel's compositional techniques. An additional emotional connection to the park exists in it being the scene of many childhood adventures.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

St Francis receives the stigmata

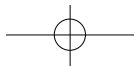
1967

oil on board

Williams/Sinclair collection

St Francis has always been my favourite saint. I was very pleased when the Church finally appointed Francis the patron saint of ecology. That's the way I saw him seeing all creatures and things as brothers and sisters. I think he would have agreed with Gandhi's saying that Christianity was a great idea if only someone would try and practise it.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



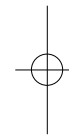
Summer evening in Taranaki

1974

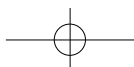
oil on board

Private collection, Wellington

Living under the mountain on hills and land made by volcanic activity seems very risky behaviour but it is something I grew up with, regarding it as normal.



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



St Francis rolling in the thistles

1968

oil on board

James Wallace Arts Trust Collection

I felt that the story of St Francis overcome by lust on an evening stroll through a valley resonant with the sighs of local lovers and throwing himself into a bush of thorns needed a Taranaki interpretation. No pain, no gain?

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Thomas and Joseph with red chair and piano

1972

oil on board

Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui

I had been playing the piano perhaps improvising some of my children's pieces. Thomas as usual observes and wonders, Joseph decides to have a go at this piano playing business. No doubt he would become a composer himself.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Thomas and the rubber suit

1970

oil on board

The Dowse, Lower Hutt

The kitchen of Musselborough Rise, Dunedin. We stayed here while I was Frances Hodgkins Fellow. The clothes drying rack could be raised and lowered by rope and pulley. Thomas had an acute imagination that seemed stimulated by a mixture of delight and terror that went way beyond mere monsters under the bed. I often saw him, head cocked to one side, as though listening or waiting for some revelation from the dark side. In this case, the phantom shapes of my rubber suit.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Thomas under table

1970

oil on board

Te Manawa, Palmerston North

For how long have children escaped into their fantasy worlds in the shade and shelter of the kitchen table? When I became a painter, the most common image of the children in the average New Zealand home was the bare bottomed child on its stomach, on a sheepskin rug in front of the fire-place. I was determined to redress these maudlin and suspect manipulations of the way we wanted to see children, with something at least approaching the truth.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Thomas with blue plastic ring

1969

oil on board

Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

Often as the observer of an event such as this I saw the potential for a dramatic interpretation. The piano has teeth, the door ajar to the darkness behind the innocent child who struggles to reach its teething ring.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Thomas with light cord

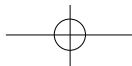
1970

oil on board

Dunedin Public Art Gallery

After we moved from Central Otago into Dunedin, Thomas continued his fascination with the power he could exercise over the illumination of his world via light switches. He also has the same fascination with matches which had its downside. Little Lucifer, but then not many children enjoy being in the dark

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Thomas' first jump

1974

oil on board

The Dowse, Lower Hutt

The child has to jump. He still believes in the possibility of flight. His grandmother and mother both on their knees know just how hard the floor can be.



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Thomas' second birthday

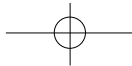
1970

oil on hardboard

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

One of my favourite paintings in the Auckland Art Gallery during my art school days at Elam was William Hole's *The Cotters Saturday Night*. The small sun-dried brick cottage we lived in Patearoa in Central Otago was probably contemporary with that painting and at this Thomas's second birthday party I recognised a moment of family coming together to celebrate an occasion in a similar way. Many of my most successful paintings arise from my admiration of amateur artists and kitsch imagery.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



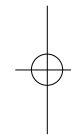
Toys' tea party

1969

oil on board

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

The children were an excellent foil to the spareness of the Central Otago landscape. I was always pleased to see the inventions and arrangements of the children's toys. I did several works based on their indoor activities.



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Untitled (Grey Back beach with large green wave)

1976

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

Back beach was 'my' beach for many years. I walked it every day, after the light precluded any further painting in the studio. Many print images grew from these twilight walks. The islands off the beach provoked many amazing reflections from the sea.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

Untitled (squid lights on horizon)

1976

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

From the late 1960s into the 1970s the Japanese and Taiwanese squid boats descended on the waters of Taranaki in their thousands to fish for squid. Their arc lights designed to attract the squid lit up the horizon like a huge city offshore. It was frightening and at the same time beautiful, as destructive phenomena often are.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Wave circa

1967

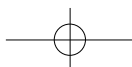
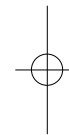
screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither

This image achieved its spatial effect from the juxtaposition of clear hand cut lines and torn edges of the tissue paper stencil. For its economy of means it gets first prize in my career as a printer.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition





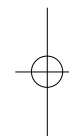
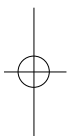
Untitled (Back beach - yellow)

1974

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Alfred Road bridge with trout

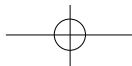
1968

oil on board

Private collection

This is the second version of the Alfred Road bridge. This bridge is markedly different from the first painting. So unless there remain plans or photos of the actual bridge, we'll never know which version is correct. Anyway, now it's replaced with a reinforced concrete slab that no doubt in its turn will be replaced by a culvert when this area becomes a suburb of the New Plymouth metropolis.

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Back beach

1973

screenprint

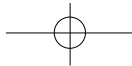
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition





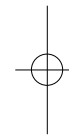
Back beach

1975

screenprint

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



The artist's mother

1970

oil on board

The Dowse, Lower Hutt

At the time of writing I am still too close to the grief I felt at the death of both my parents to say much about them except that they were a constant source of support to me and to my children. Without making any demands or fuss they took a serious interest and delight in my work and their criticisms, if any, were always of a constructive nature. They were both very private people and I soon learnt that the best way to show my love for them was to respect their privacy

Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition



Sketchbook 3 page 11a

1962

paper

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

gift of Michael Smither



Michael Smither The Wonder Years an Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Touring Exhibition

