



COLIN McCAHON, *OTAGO PENINSULA* 1946-1949. OIL AND GESSO ON BOARD. COLLECTION OF DUNEDIN PUBLIC LIBRARIES Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti, RODNEY KENNEDY BEQUEST. COURTESY OF THE COLIN McCAHON RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION TRUST

7 MARCH - 18 OCT 2020

DART
DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY

FREE ADMISSION: OPEN 10AM-5PM DAILY
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CRAIGS
COMMUNICATIONS

OTAGO HAS A CALMNESS, A COLDNESS, ALMOST A CLASSIC GEOLOGICAL ORDER. IT IS, PERHAPS, AN EGYPTIAN LANDSCAPE, A LAND OF CALM ORDERLY GRANITE. ...BIG HILLS STOOD IN FRONT OF THE LITTLE HILLS, WHICH ROSE UP DISTANTLY ACROSS THE PLAIN FROM THE FLAT LAND: THERE WAS A LANDSCAPE OF SPLENDOUR, AND ORDER AND PEACE. [COLIN McCAHON, *REDEFINING LANDFALL* 80 P.303-04 DECEMBER 1990]

**A LAND OF
GRANITE:
McCAHON
AND OTAGO**

This guide was originally produced as a double-sided A1 poster for the exhibition *A Land of Granite: McCaHon and Otago* (Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 7 March – 18 October 2020). Above is the front side of the poster and following are the texts and images from the reverse side of the poster. The reverse side has been reformatted to this A4 document for either reading online or downloading and printing.

The image above is:

COLIN McCAHON

Otago Peninsula 1946-1949

Oil on gesso on board

Collection of Dunedin Public Libraries Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti,
Rodney Kennedy bequest. Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and
Publication Trust

A LAND OF GRANITE: McCAHON AND OTAGO

A Land of Granite: Colin McCahon and Otago was developed by Dunedin Public Art Gallery. This exhibition was presented at Dunedin Public Art Gallery from 7 March – 18 October 2020.

Curators: Lucy Hammonds and Lauren Gutsell.

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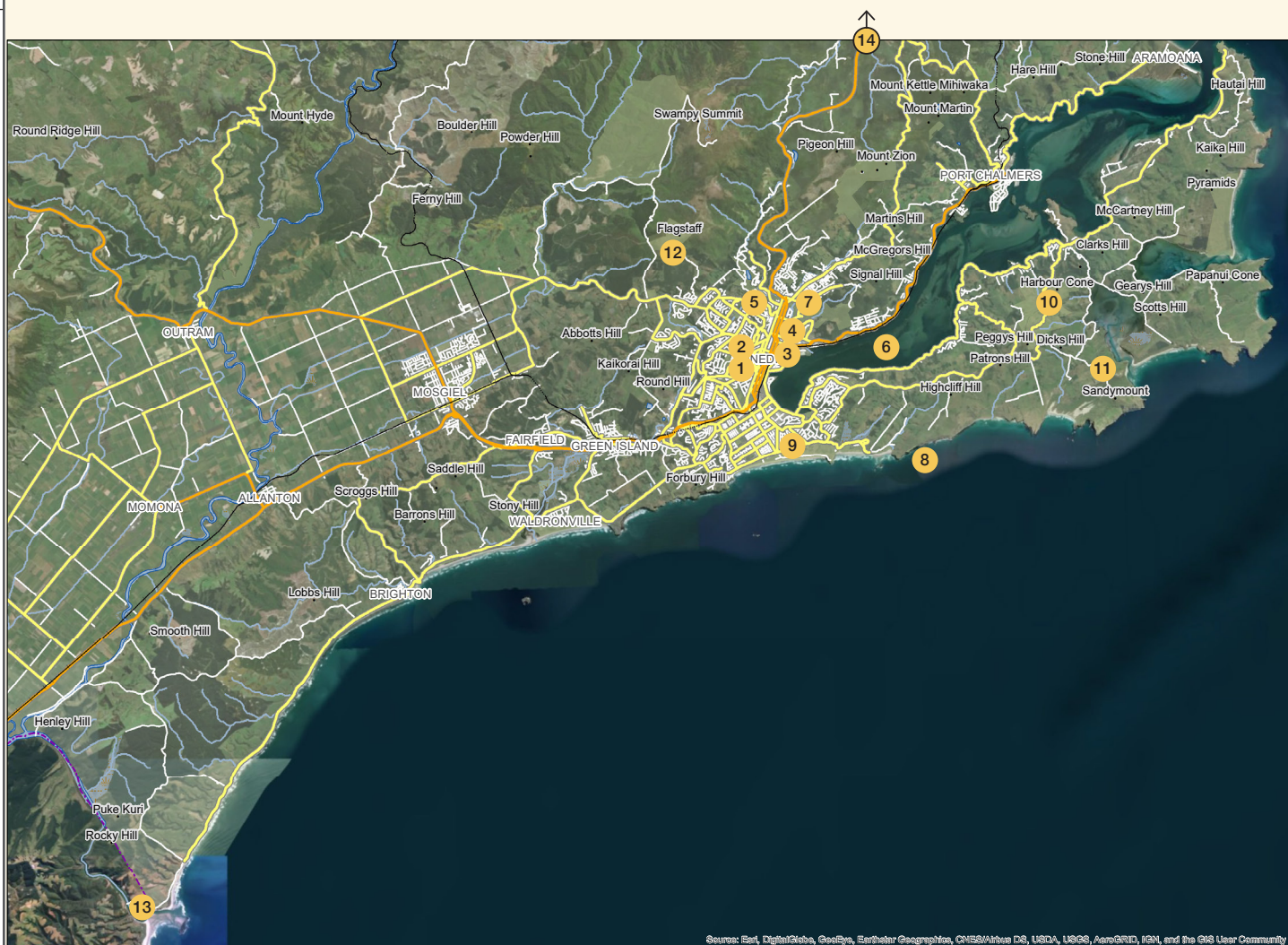
Otago has a calmness, a coldness, almost a classical geological order. It is, perhaps, an Egyptian landscape, a land of calm orderly granite. Driving one day with the family over hills from Brighton or Taieri Mouth to the Taieri Plain, I first became aware of my own particular God, perhaps an Egyptian God, but standing far from the sun of Egypt in the Otago cold. Big Hills stood in front of little hills, which rose up distantly across the plain from the flat land: there was a landscape of splendour, order and peace.

Colin McCahon - *Beginnings*, Landfall 80, 1966, p.364

This guide takes a journey through Ōtepoti Dunedin using works by Colin McCahon included in the exhibition *A Land of Granite: McCahon and Otago* (Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 7 March – 18 October 2020). The exhibition explores aspects of the Otago landscape in McCahon's work, from his earliest paintings of the late 1930s through until the *North Otago* series of the late 1960s. This guide connects readers with places of significance that are easily accessible from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, some by foot and others by a short car journey. From the galleries of Dunedin Public Art Gallery, to the heights of Hereweka/Harbour Cone, this map takes a tour through McCahon's Ōtepoti Dunedin, illuminating key sites and landscapes that shaped his artistic journey.

The accompanying exhibition *A Land of Granite* looks at McCahon's exploration of the Ōtepoti Dunedin and Otago landscapes with a focus on works held in the collections of this region: Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena; Forrester Gallery Oamaru; Dunedin Public Library Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti; Dunedin Public Art Gallery; as well as other national collections. McCahon was raised in Ōtepoti Dunedin, had family in Oamaru, and lived in both centres during his childhood. Some of his earliest paintings record familiar locations such as Woodhaugh, the Dunedin Botanic Garden and Tomahawk Beach. These works lead into a group of McCahon's most significant early paintings; a series of large-scale depictions of the Otago Peninsula that reveal what he referred to as the 'anatomy of the landscape', asserting key characteristics of his treatment of the natural environment.

The Otago Peninsula paintings, the last of which was begun prior to McCahon's 1946 departure for Nelson, record the relationship that the artist was forging with the landscape of his youth. The final section of *A Land of Granite* sees McCahon return to the landscape of Otago in the late 1960s in his *North Otago* series. Painted from the distance of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, these *North Otago* paintings offer both an articulation of McCahon's strong and enduring connection to these southern lands, and his artistic journey in the decades since.



1

Dunedin Public Art Gallery

30 The Octagon, Dunedin

Monday – Sunday 10am – 5pm

Born in Timaru in 1919 to parents Ethel and John McCahon, Colin McCahon was raised in Ōtepoti Dunedin, the middle child of three. He had a childhood affinity with art and the family were regular visitors to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. McCahon wrote about visiting the Gallery as a young person in *Landfall* in 1966: ‘The Dunedin Art Gallery offered a Russell Flint...a large still-life with excessive detail, but fascinating; a huge, dark shipwreck; a Laura Knight; ... It [the Gallery] had a very special smell and a more sacred feeling than the Art Society could ever achieve.’ He went on: ‘There was one painting in the Gallery I loved above all else, Frances Hodgkins’s ‘Summer’. It sang from the wall, warm and beautiful...’¹. Over time, major paintings by McCahon, such as *Pohutukawa Tree*, *High Tide* (1958) and *The Five Wounds of Christ No 3* (1977-1978), now sit in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection alongside Hodgkins’s *Summer*, a painting he loved so much as to paint his own version from memory when he moved to Oamaru as a school boy.

1. *Beginnings*, *Landfall* 80, 1966, p.362

2

Dunedin Public Library Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti

230 Moray Place, Dunedin

Monday – Friday: 9.30am – 8.00pm

Saturday – Sunday: 11.00am – 4.00pm

Alongside the Art Society and Art Gallery, the McCahon family also frequented Dunedin’s Public Library, which was at this time situated in the Carnegie Library on Moray Place. Throughout his life, McCahon looked to the public library to feed his interest in art and other subjects. It was here he first encountered *Geomorphology of New Zealand* (1921) by Sir Charles Cotton, a book that proved deeply influential on McCahon’s developing approach to the Otago landscape. When McCahon was working in Ōtepoti Dunedin in the 1930s and 40s, the public library also provided exhibition space and other support to the city’s artistic avant-garde. Now, the library is home to an important art collection built by donation and bequest, including works by Annie Baird, Ralph Hotere, Robin White, Colin McCahon, Jeffrey Harris and many others.

3 Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

90 Anzac Avenue, Dunedin. Monday – Saturday 10am – 5pm

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, is one of the major repositories of art works and archives recording McCahon's career. This collection has been built primarily from gifts and bequests made since the 1950s, many originating from key McCahon supporters such as Charles Brasch, Rodney Kennedy and Patricia France. The collection has also been built through gifts from the artist and his family, acknowledging the important place Ōtepoti Dunedin holds in his life story and the educational role of the Hocken Collections. The Hocken's McCahon collection includes over 190 paintings and preparatory studies, as well as personal archives and correspondence relating to the artist's life and art. Among the highlights are works such as *The Virgin and Child compared* (1948) and *The Wake* (1958) – a monumental sixteen panel painting drawing on a poem by friend, poet and artistic collaborator John Caselberg.

The Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena is presenting a companion exhibition to *A Land of Granite* at Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Titled *A Constant Flow of Light*, this will open in August 2020.

Waterfall theme & variations 1966

Mural, University of Otago Central Library

4 The mural is located on the 1st floor of the Central Library, 65 Albany Street, North Dunedin

With their stark contrast of light into dark, McCahon's *Waterfall* paintings are strongly metaphorical; reflecting the concerns of spirituality, land, art and the human condition. Initially he considered his waterfalls as a painted conversation between his work and that of artist William Hodges RA (1744 –1797), whose paintings of Dusky Sound from the second of Cook's Pacific voyages had been displayed at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki during McCahon's tenure there.

In 1965 McCahon was approached to submit a proposal to the University of Otago for a large-scale mural for the new library building. While his primary submission was for a numeral-based composition reflecting systems of teaching and learning, it was his alternative *Waterfall* proposal that was selected. McCahon developed his final, multi-panel waterfall mural in 1966, painting the work from his home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and travelling south to oversee its installation. On finding one section damaged in transit, McCahon painted a replacement panel in Ōtepoti Dunedin, always retaining some reservations about the last minute change: 'the first version was much better than the final one now in situ, the first, much more austere and beautiful....'². Despite this, *Waterfall Themes and Variations* (1966) remains one of McCahon's major public works, positioned as a backdrop to a place of study and learning.

2. Quoted in Bloem, Maria and Martin Browne, *A Question of Faith*. Craig Potton Publishing / Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2002). p. 205

5 Woodhaugh Gardens

Enter from George St, Dunedin, between Malvern St and the Leith River.

COLIN McCAHON

Looking down on Woodhaugh, Leith Valley 1939

Oil on cardboard

Collection of the Forrester Gallery

Gifted by the Parsloe Family Trust

McCahon's painting *Looking down on Woodhaugh, Leith Valley* (1939) once hung in the home of Colin McCahon's parents, John and Ethel McCahon, in Prestwick Street, Maori Hill. The perspective of the painting and family recollection indicates the view is from the 'Bullock Track', a steep walking track that links the suburb of Maori Hill to Woodhaugh Gardens below. It later passed into the collection of McCahon's sister, Beatrice Parsloe and her husband Noel, and later to the collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru.

6 Otago Harbour (specific location unknown)

Walk or cycle the harbourside path, which runs approximately 6km from the mouth of the Water of Leith through to St Leonards.

COLIN McCAHON

Untitled study of Otago Harbour c.1938

Oil on board

Collection of the Forrester Gallery

Gifted by the Parsloe Family Trust

Untitled study of Otago Harbour (c.1938) is one of many sketches and working drawings that McCahon made of the Otago Harbour and Peninsula in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It dates from the period McCahon was attending Dunedin School of Art and experimenting with materials, styles and painting techniques. While this study is clearly a developmental work, its use of line, colour and subject illustrates McCahon's early steps towards major paintings of the Otago Peninsula landscape.

7

Dunedin Botanic Garden

12 Opoho Road, North Dunedin

COLIN McCAHON

[Botanical Gardens glass house] c.1939

Oil on cardboard

Collection of the Forrester Gallery

Gifted by the Parsloe Family Trust

The Dunedin Botanic Garden was a popular subject for students of the Dunedin School of Art, and several of McCahon's early paintings and sketches record sites within the garden. In *[Botanical Gardens glass house]* (c.1939) the Botanic Garden glasshouse emerges from behind a stand of trees, sketched quickly in a muted palette of green, grey and black. Other artists from McCahon's circle also painted the garden, including fellow-student Doris Lusk, whose painting *Fountain, Gardens* (c.1938), in the collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery, is directly contemporary to that of McCahon's.

8

Tomahawk Beach

Access from Tomahawk Rd, Dunedin

COLIN McCAHON

From the north end of Tomahawk Beach 1935

Watercolour, pen & ink

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

Tomahawk Beach appears regularly as a subject within McCahon's circle of Ōtepoti Dunedin artists, featuring in paintings by McCahon, R.N. Field and Toss Woollaston among others. It was an accessible and well-known landscape to these artists, with Field living nearby on Tomahawk Rd where he regularly hosted artists and others in the city's creative community. McCahon's *From the north end of Tomahawk Beach* (1935) is a very early example of his painting, yet shows confidence in both colour and line.

9

Tahuna Park

35 Victoria Road, Lawyers Head

COLIN McCAHON

Dunedin Summer Show at Tahuna Park 1936

Tempera on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

The bright and dynamic form of *Dunedin Summer Show at Tahuna Park* (1936) reflects a young artist experimenting with material and technique. Its date indicates it may have been painted in the time preceeding McCahon's formal education at Dunedin School of Art. Many of the early works by McCahon held in Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena show the artist looking to Ōtepoti Dunedin's city centre and immediate surrounds for subject matter, as is seen in this view of the annual A&P Show at Tahuna Park.

10

Hereweka / Harbour Cone

Hereweka / Harbour Cone Reserve, Highcliff Road, Otago Peninsula.
Walk from Highcliff Road, 3km return; start at Bacon St 6km return.

COLIN McCAHON

Harbour Cone from Peggy's Hill 1939

Oil on board

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

COLIN McCAHON

Otago Peninsula 1946-1949 (cover image)

Oil on gesso on board

Collection of Dunedin Public Libraries Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti,
Rodney Kennedy bequest. Courtesy of the Colin McCahon
Research and Publication Trust

COLIN McCAHON

Otago Peninsula 1946

Oil on hardboard

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,
purchased 1992 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Boards funds

Harbour Cone looms large in McCahon's early paintings of the Otago Peninsula. It first appears prominently in *Harbour Cone from Peggy's Hill* (1939) – the painting McCahon referred to as a 'landmark' encapsulating both his ideas and his faith, underpinned at the time by the onset of the Second World War. He wrote to his friend Toss Woollaston of his aspirations for this painting: 'I imagined people looking at it then looking at a landscape & for once really seeing it & being happier for it & then believing in God & the brotherhood of men & the futility of war & the impossibility of people owning & having more right to a piece of air than anyone else'³. It was controversially rejected from Otago Art Society's annual members exhibition in 1939, resulting in a number of other artists withdrawing in protest.

This was followed later by two major paintings of Otago Peninsula begun in 1946. The first was originally commissioned by Mario and Hilda Fleischl and is now in the collection of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand. At the time of its completion this was McCahon's largest painting to date, supported by a large number of working drawings of the peninsula landscape. He immediately began on a second of the same subject, made this time for Rodney Kennedy. An early version of the second *Otago Peninsula* (1946-49) was shown in an exhibition at Modern Books, Dunedin, before he returned to repaint the work. Between the two peninsula landscapes there is a significant progress in McCahon's style, with the first showing strong, structural outlines and more representational colour, and the second reflecting a more tonal and modulated approach to palette and composition. Both paintings strip the landscape of traces of modern life, no houses, no powerlines or no human occupants. *Otago Peninsula* (1946-49) was later bequeathed to the collection of Dunedin Public Library Kā Kete Wānaka o Ōtepoti by Rodney Kennedy, where it is usually on view as part of the library's art collection.

3. Quoted from correspondence between the artist and Toss Woollaston, reproduced in Simpson, Peter. *Colin McCahon – There is only one direction*. Auckland University Press. (2019) p.50

11 Sandymount

The Sandymount walking track begins at the end of Sandymount Road, Otago Peninsula

COLIN McCAHON

Otago Peninsula landscape with Sandy Mount c.1940

Oil on board

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

Painted in the years between *Harbour Cone from Peggy's Hill* (1939) and the two panoramic views of Otago Peninsula from the late 1940s, McCahon's *Otago Peninsula landscape with Sandy Mount* (c.1940) reflects the artist's developing approach to the landscape. In this painting the landscape is articulated in strong, dark outlines, the hills beginning to appear stacked, anticipating the form of later works. The sharp contrast in the painting reflects the drama of the landscape itself, which features steep hills, bright white sand dunes and volcanic rock formations. It was a landscape McCahon knew intimately, travelling over the length and breadth of the peninsula on foot and bicycle as he researched this series of landscape paintings.

12 Flagstaff

Walk the Flagstaff loop from the Bull Ring car park on Flagstaff-Whare Flat Rd, the loop walk is approximately 2.5km.

COLIN McCAHON

Sketch for landscape from Flagstaff 1942

Oil on board

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

When McCahon recalled his early memories of the Otago landscape for *Landfall* he wrote of the moment when steep hills made way for the flat expanses of the Taieri Plains. In *Sketch for Landscape from Flagstaff* (1942) McCahon begins to explore this space between hill and plain, a compositional device that he repeats and amplifies in later series such as his Takaka landscapes of the late 1940s. From the ridgeline of Flagstaff, McCahon could easily access a view extending from the coast across to the Taieri Plains and beyond, giving a clear sense of the ancient landforms of the region.

13 Taieri Mouth

COLIN McCAHON

Saddle Hill from Taieri Mouth 1937-1938

Pencil and gouache on paper

Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago

McCahon's watercolours from the late 1930s often display a loose, sketchy style, used to quickly recall the nature of an experience or place. *Saddle Hill from Taieri Mouth* (1937-1938) carries this sense of immediacy, of a view quickly mapped out as a marker of a particular time and place. This painting is a more representational view, including features such as fences, shelterbelts and powerpoles that McCahon soon began to strip out of his landscapes.



14 North Otago

COLIN McCAHON **North Otago landscape 2** 1967 (above)
PVA paint on hardboard
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,
purchased 1969 from Wellington City Council Picture
Purchase Fund. Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and
Publication Trust.

McCahon's family connections to the region saw him travel frequently to Oamaru and its surrounding landscapes. North Otago emerged strongly as subject in the mid-1960s when McCahon was working from the distance of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. In 1966 he embarked on a series of paintings and prints that depicted severe and abstracted views of the region, drawing heavily on his memories of the land and a series of return visits around that time. He presents the landscape as simplified bands of colour – driven by a desire to highlight enduring relationships with the land and its emotional and spiritual weight. In October 1967, exhibiting the *North Otago* series at Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland, McCahon wrote of the series:

In painting this landscape I am not trying to show any simple likeness to a specific place. These paintings are most certainly about my long love affair with North Otago as a unique and lonely place, they are also about where I am now and where I have been since the time when I was in standards four and five at primary school and living in North Otago. These paintings stand now as part of a search begun in Dunedin, continued in Oamaru and developed by the processes of normal erosion since then. The real subject is buried in the works themselves and needs no intellectual striving to be revealed – perhaps they are just North Otago landscapes.⁴

4. Quoted from Barry Lett exhibition catalogue, in Bloem, Maria and Martin Browne, *A Question of Faith*. Craig Potton Publishing / Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2002). p. 208