

# The Architect and the Artists

## *Hackshaw, McCahon, Dibble*

BRIDGET HACKSHAW



\$65

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### HOW CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ART AND MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE WERE FUSED

Shortlisted for the 2022 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards illustrated non-fiction award.

A beautiful and important book about the remarkable collaboration between the modernist architect James Hackshaw (a member of the famous Group Architects), the painter Colin McCahon and the then young sculptor Paul Dibble on 12 New Zealand buildings — from churches to houses.

Drawing on interviews with James Hackshaw before his death and on the McCahon archive, this book brings into the light a body of work and a collaboration that has been little known or examined, even by old McCahon hands.

Richly illustrated with Hackshaw's plans, McCahon's drawings, letters and journal entries, and contemporary images of the surviving buildings and artworks, expert essays by Peter Simpson, Julia Gatley, Peter Shaw and Alexa Johnston complete the package.

'A rewarding investigation into one of the great artistic collaborations of twentieth century New Zealand' — John Daly-Peoples, *New Zealand Arts Review*

'This is a meticulously crafted chronicle describing a symbiotic relationship between art and architecture ...' — Maggie Hubert, *HOME*

### SALES POINTS

- A striking contribution to the history of both New Zealand art and architecture
- A new insight into a relatively unknown aspect of Colin McCahon's practice
- Of great interest to fans of modernist architecture
- Expert contributing authors
- Stunning design package

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Bridget Hackshaw** is the daughter of James Hackshaw. Before her father's death in 1999, she talked with him about this body of work and has researched and photographed the buildings and artworks resulting from his collaboration with Colin McCahon and Paul Dibble. Bridget previously worked as an English teacher then as an advisor and lecturer in teacher education, following which she established and managed a travel business. In 2019 she completed a course in architectural photography at the London College of Communication. She is the producer of a film directed by Christopher Dudman about the Hackshaw, McCahon and Dibble collaboration.

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Mā whero, mā pango ka oti ai te mahi.  
With red and black the work will be done.

This book explores the creative collaboration between an architect, a painter and a sculptor. The work they did together spanned the years 1965 to 1979, a critical period in New Zealand's modern cultural history, and resulted in a dozen buildings. Most of the buildings were designed to serve diverse local communities, and, in three instances, families. However, much of the work from the collaboration has been virtually invisible and, in some cases, badly neglected. This might not be surprising nor warrant much attention were it not for the fact that the painter was Colin McCahon and the sculptor was Paul Dibble.

By his own account, the series of windows McConah designed for more than a half-dozen—eight churches and chapels, three private houses and one school building—were not only important in their own right but also critical to the development of his painting. Yet until now, McConah's windows have been barely mentioned in the great mass of commentary about his art and about the life and work of his accompanying documentary film, *Bring McConah's Unknown Glass Works Into the Light*.

My part in telling this story began in 1990, the year my father, the architect James McConah, died. We began our conversation when he was already quite ill, and we talked over several days. I took notes, but I don't have as much detail: the work he undertook with McConah and Dibble across their 34 years

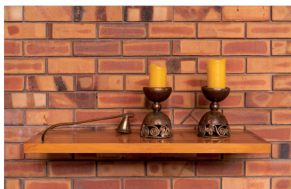
After my father died, I shelved the handwritten notes for a long time—I had young children and for me it wasn't the right moment. However, I must have known I would come back to this subject one day. I was interested in my father's legacy, but more than that, I was intrigued that this collaborative work had remained largely unrecorded.

At the time of his death in 1967, McCahon was recognised as one of New Zealand's most influential modern artists and had a growing international reputation. Dibble's career had gained momentum since his collaborations with my father and McCahon, and by the 1960s his work was well represented in private and public collections. His *Southern Stand* New Zealand war memorial, unveiled in 2006 at Hyde Park Corner in London, cemented his

I was puzzled that their work together remained hidden in plain sight in buildings dotted around suburban Auckland and appeared to arouse next to no curiosity. My father gave a talk entitled 'McCahon and Church: Architects at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1989' in association with the *Gates and Journeys*

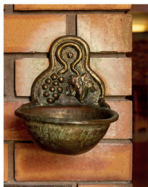
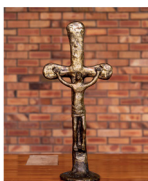
McCaughy's extraordinary windows in the convent chapel were removed in 1989. The *amalgams* of memory and myth had sold the

Paul Elkins, cardiology and cardiac surgeon, 2020



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Paul T. Pomeroy and John W. Meyer, 2000



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In 1982, James Hackshaw reflected

And these people [Frank Sargison, Maurice Dugan, Bob Lowry and others] were living off the smell of an oil rig, trying to develop a New Zealand culture in their own field. And that is exactly what Bill [Wilson] inspired me to do. Now, the question is, how has it affected us now? Well, I have sort of carried that through, since leaving the Group, in other work, which is basically being designed on the principles of the Group, bred mainly for economy, you save materials and so forth. I've also used people like McCaughan, Dibble, artists who have made our buildings far more meaningful within our social context. And I insist that the reason Bill gave me the Group was to give people who wanted it, was this terrific urgency to give New Zealand an identity in the architectural field — its own unique identity.

The Group member among the most important and influential New Zealand architects of the mid twentieth century. Hachewah's time with them in the 1940s and 1950s was formative, influencing his thinking long term and providing the context for his later collaborations with artists. It was also as a member of the Group that Hachewah earned the New Zealand Institute of Architects' highest honour – the Gold Medal –

The member "the Group" encompasses four formations: the Architectural Group, the Group Construction Company, Group Architects and Wilson & Jones. The Architectural Group were a collective of second-year architecture students, who, in 1946, wrote a constitution and published a manifesto and the first issue of a magazine, *Planning*. Hackshaw was a member of the Architectural Group in 1945.



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Above: Cardinal Rinaldo Ossiego,  
Catholic (Diocese of Acapulco)

robust construction all express the origin of its manufacture here in New Zealand. The materials, colours and iconography used by my father, McCahon and Dibble can be said to define our own heritage and landscape.

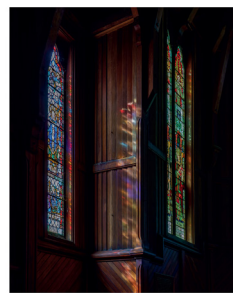
McCahon's response to the landscape was deeply spiritual. In 1966, the poet Charles Brasch wrote to the writer and art curator Hamish Keith, saying, "I suppose one could say that landscape is the chief language of his [McCahon's] paintings; and of course, he is saying something about it that doesn't come only from the landscape itself.... What he says about it is at the same time an interpretation of the state of man, the nature of our life on earth."<sup>10</sup>

McCahon wrote something similar nine years later to the Wilmington art dealer Peter McLeamy: "I paint to tell people of the beauty of the land I love and of their relation to it and the love they all ask of for help."<sup>11</sup>

It is intriguing that the Catholic Church in 1960 and 1970s New Zealand gave these three men such latitude to decide how to design churches and make their artworks. I have not been able to find any written directives to them from the bishops in the Catholic archives, despite much church life being conspicuously organised through letters. My father designed buildings at 10 Catholic schools and nine churches, and it does seem that while budgets were largely determined by the Catholic Diocese of Auckland, decisions about the build and adornment were made at a local level. Maybe Delany and his colleagues

A letter from McCaugh to Christchurch City Librarian, collector and long-term supporter Ron O'Reilly in November 1969 documents a conversation he had with Archbishop James Laidlaw. McCaugh had written O'Reilly asking to meet McCaugh on site at Upland Road. At that meeting, Linton told McCaugh that he disagreed with the order of the panels, but in effect McCaugh was left to make up his own mind. McCaugh thought that Linton was not understanding following their discussion, and was surprised to learn much later that Linton was shocked by his work and had withdrawn from being involved, leaving it up to the more liberal O'Reilly to try to get the work accepted. McCaugh recalls one attempt at resistance from the Church to a tabernacle that he had made the priest, and his father saying, "They don't know what he's doing. Wait, just give it to me. Put it on this shelf they'll take it."

Years later, both my mother and McCaugh acknowledged how open the sisters at Upland Road had been to their work. At his Auckland



(St Mary's in Holy Trinity, Farnell, Auckland), was one of the church interiors that inspired James Mackintosh.