



Colin and Anne McCahon in their living room at their home at Titirangi, Auckland (October 1957). PHOTOGRAPH: BARRY MILLAR. BARRY MILLAR ARCHIVE

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DEBORAH SHEPARD

photographed in their home in the bush at Titirangi. They were positioned in front of two of McCahon's recent paintings, *Kauri Trees, Titirangi* (1955–57) and *Kauri* (1957), both of which were a response to the family's move from their home and roots in the South Island to a new, invigorating environment in the North and to the mighty trees that towered over their little rickety house in the Waitakere Ranges. According to the photographer, Barry Millar, the double portrait was captured at a social occasion at the McCahons' home and this probably helps to explain the intimacy of the image. Anne looks directly into the eye of the camera, a smile illuminating her face, while Colin, one arm protectively encircling his wife, tilts his head towards her, also smiling. It's a touching gesture. Anne at this moment seems so secure in her husband's admiration that she does not need to return his gaze. And Colin, who could be, at times, impossibly intense, is captured in an off-guard, quiet moment, his essential warmth and humanity recorded for posterity. You can feel the strength of their bond.

The two artists exude a calm confidence that suggests a sense of satisfaction with their lives, perhaps influenced by a recent significant improvement in their material situation. Colin had just been appointed deputy director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, thus ending fourteen years of hardship, poverty and intermittent separation for the entire family. He had a forthcoming Carnegie scholarship to America to study art museums and he was taking his wife with him. And he was pleased with his progress on the kauri paintings: 'I came to grips with the kauri and turned him in all his splendour into a symbol.'¹ Anne too was immensely relieved about the amelioration in their circumstances and was enjoying a slight lightening of her load with her fourth and youngest child off to school. Although she had abandoned her own painting in 1945, tragically squelching the promise she had shown at art school and choosing instead to support her husband's outstanding talent, she was at this time enjoying work in

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an alternative medium, illustrating stories for the New Zealand *School Journal*. And in terms of the kauri paintings in the background, Anne too would have been excited by them, for she was an ardent admirer of her husband's work, his best, most intelligent critic. For this, and her unwavering belief in his ability, Colin valued her.

The photograph wasn't extracted from the family archives and inserted into the discourse on McCahon until several decades later, well after he had been recognised in a series of exhibitions and a major biography,2 and canonised as New Zealand's foremost modern painter in several histories of New Zealand painting.³ When it was finally reproduced in two art catalogues – *Three Paintings* By Colin McCahon (1998) and Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith (2002) – there was no discussion of its possible meanings, no reading between the lives. Its inclusion suggested a cursory nod to feminist art history and its re-evaluation and validation of the women artists who had formerly been hidden from history, and perhaps to the biographical information divulged in a major interview with Anne McCahon in the New Zealand Listener following McCahon's death. There was, however, no recognition of the couple relationship and of the way in which Anne McCahon had helped facilitate her husband's work. The photo dangled there, slightly out of context and a puzzle to the reader, peripheral to the main area of investigation, which was of course the cataloguing and critiquing of the work of the great artist Colin McCahon. That was where the real interest lay, reflecting a tradition of art historiography and a conception of the artist as an independent, always male, genius which has persisted since the Romantic period (1790–1830).

The Romantic artist, in contrast to the medieval and Renaissance guilds of artists who worked under the direction of a master painter, was a solitary genius who struggled heroically against the odds, often misunderstood in his lifetime, often destitute, to express his singular vision. It's a notion of the artist that has survived tenaciously into the present, despite both the postmodern challenge to the idea of the artist as conscious agent of his own creativity and the work of feminist art historians that has brought women into the frame. As a concept, though, it denies the actual conditions of an artist's existence. Life is very rarely lived in a vacuum. People very rarely achieve extraordinary feats of artistic production without the sustenance of at least one significant other who believes in and supports the artist in his or her quest. Even in the Romantic period, those very artists who represented the Romantic movement, Gericault and Delacroix, relied on support and sustenance from family members. Gericault benefited from the financial support of a sizeable inheritance left to him by his loving mother, and Delacroix grew up and flourished in the attention of an artistic family.

Traversing the centuries, there are numerous examples of the role of partnership in the formulation of great art. Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Henry Lewes and George Eliot were interested in one another's art and provided professional understanding and endless emotional nourishment for one another. Leonard Woolf offered crucial support to Virginia Woolf, not just as a protective partner but through their own Hogarth Press which provided the means to publish her experimental novels and forward-thinking pamphlets. Otto Modersohn needed Paula Modersohn-Becker reassuringly near him in order to paint: 'Otto seems to need my face to look at several times a day,' wrote Paula to her sister.⁴ Frida Kahlo thought Diego Rivera the greatest painter in the world – she called him the 'architect of life' – and he in turn admired her very personal and revealing subject matter, urging her over the pain barrier which resulted from an early streetcar accident to keep on painting despite her constant physical pain.

In the New Zealand context, all the artists represented in this collection benefited at times from a close relationship with another artist. Frances Hodgkins and Dorothy Kate Richmond could barely believe their luck when, painting together in Europe, they found in each other the perfect professional colleague, mentor, nurturer and endearing companion with whom to share the hours and days of their joint painting expeditions. For Toss Woollaston, Edith's stoical support of his career was a blessing he never stopped acknowledging. He appreciated that she had been forced to divert her artistic talent into the decorative arts, into weaving, sketching, photography and gardening, pursuits that could be dovetailed around the housework and raising four children. In the early years of Kendrick Smithyman and Mary Stanley's relationship, the two poets sparked off one another. Kendrick - the modernist poet concerned with worldly and academic themes - wrote some of his most personal and moving poetry under Mary's emotional influence. Then when Mary grew too ill to write, the burning pain of rheumatoid arthritis draining her creative energy, she still ran the home and mothered three children, enabling Kendrick to continue his academic career and writing poetry.

There was an equally important interplay of roles and exchange of gifts between Jacquie Sturm and James K. Baxter. Jacquie gave Jim the space to write while she remained the constant caregiver at home; and Jim in turn, by his exceptionally dedicated example, working, thinking, breathing, living lines of poetry – Jacquie talked of the 'dopey look' that appeared on his face when he was in the middle of conceiving a poem – provided a model for her, inspiring her to take the leap from academic study to writing short stories and later poetry.

Rudall Hayward recognised Ramai Hayward's acting ability, giving her a part in his film and initiating her career as a film-maker, while she supported him financially and emotionally, admired and revered him. And for Meg and Alistair Campbell, throughout the shared raising of their blended family, they urged each other on, talking to each other through their writing, transforming the agony of lives turned upside down by mental illness into poetry of exceptional beauty and power. For Pat and Gil Hanly there was a long period when Pat's art was in the ascendant and Gil's went into hibernation as she filled in all the spaces of housework and child rearing around him. But she never forgot her art, and finally in the late 1970s the partnership underwent a reconstitution, and it was Pat's turn to support Gil as she returned to art school and developed a career as a documentary photographer. This book closes on Peter and Sylvia Siddell, the most modern couple of all, brought together through their love of tramping and the New Zealand outdoors, who base their independent explorations in paint on a solid base of mutually supportive partnership.

Traditionally biographical studies of artists, perhaps reflecting the Romantic idea of the artist as solitary genius, have favoured the monograph format. But in recent decades a new wave of biographers has begun to consider the significance of relationships between artists and their impact on the creative process. Leon Edel's Bloomsbury: A House of Lions (1979) was one of the first group biographies of nine of the major artists associated with the Bloomsbury group. Phyllis Rose's study of five creative Victorian couples in Parallel Lives (1983) was one of the first to consider the importance of the couple relationship. The text that provided the vital inspiration for this project was Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership (1993), edited by the art historians Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron. In this thought-provoking study of thirteen towering international artist couples – including Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Anais Nin and Henry Miller – the writers mounted a major challenge to existing notions of 'heroic individuality', exploring instead the endless complexities of partnership and its impact on the life and work of both members of the artist couple.

Another text that confirmed the value of studying reciprocal influence between artist couples was *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and their Silent Partners* by the literary scholars Ruth Perry and Martine Brownley. In her introduction Ruth Perry wrote about the absolute necessity of there being someone in an artist's life who fosters the creativity, someone who helps create the conditions, the inspiration, the atmosphere in which an artist can create. She called this process 'mothering the mind' and likened the scenario of the artist working securely in the knowledge of a partner's support to that of a child experimenting

in games and imaginative play, safe in the mother's presence. The mother in this context may not necessarily be attentive or fully present, but she is near and she functions as a crucial background, a 'sheltering canopy' who enables the child to experiment and play. While in many respects this notion translated into artistic partnership might be an ideal, a situation many artists might appreciate and only some achieve, it does deflate the myth of art forged in isolation and points to the importance of connectedness, of having a supportive, appreciative partner who helps, as Perry says, 'to fill out [the artist's] psychic universe.'6

The crucial difference between Perry's study and this collection, however, is that very few of Perry's silent partners were also artists. They were sisters, mothers, family friends and muses, occasionally a husband or wife, but very rarely a fellow artist. So what happens when neither partner is silent, when both members of the partnership are vigorous, ambitious, determined, and in competition for the space in which to create? Could each partner possibly achieve the necessary degree of devotion? Could they provide that essential, respectful atmosphere from which the art could flow throughout the entire length of the partnership? Might there be times when the needs of each artist were not always matching and thus not always fulfilled? And what happens when it is not a level playing field, when both artists are competing for space to express their creativity in an unfair world structured on narrowly defined gender roles that extract an unbalanced toll of domestic labour from the female artist, while leaving the male artist freer to pursue his art?

The history of art contains instances of artistic couples falling apart under the competition and pressure. As Camille Claudel's sculpture matured and began seriously to rival the work of her lover Rodin, he ended the relationship; and when her brother later committed her to a mental institution, Rodin made no attempt to rescue Camille or her art. Scott Fitzgerald flew into a rage when he discovered that his wife Zelda had written a novel set in the very period he was trying, unsuccessfully, to write about. He attempted to halt its publication and, when that failed, insisted on so many changes and cuts to the text that the manuscript was seriously compromised. Sylvia Plath envied the adulation Ted Hughes received from his students, and wanted her work treated as seriously as her husband's. She struggled with the impossibility of writing poetry while caring for her two children without support, and when Ted Hughes left her she lapsed into clinical depression and ended her life. In a recent essay in Granta, writer Kathryn Chetkovich argues that it is so much easier to admire a writer's work when unconnected and not in competition. She describes the distressing, unbearable envy she felt when the publication of her own book went unnoticed

while her writer partner's third book was greeted with a storm of applause: 'I refused to let myself form the question, but I know it was in there, all the more powerful for going unasked: If I couldn't do that, what was the point of my doing it at all? With that peculiarly severe egotism of the insecure, I could not believe I would ever be the best, and I could not bear to be anything less.'⁷

For the partners represented in this collection, there were moments of symbiosis when the needs of each artist were met and the art flowed forth. But equally the combination of two artists in the family could also be volatile; and sometimes the competition was so intense that, in the end, tragically something had to give and one artist gave up. It is for this reason that the collection includes - controversially, perhaps, because it was so brief - the marvellous period of artistic and intimate partnership that existed between Frances Hodgkins and Dorothy Kate Richmond from 1901 to 1906. In their story is a glimpse of the ideal, of the tremendous potential inherent in a close and mutually supportive artistic relationship. They were only together five years, two in Europe and three in New Zealand, but as they embarked on a kind of gentlewomen's grand tour of Europe, they found in each other the perfect combination of mutual respect and encouragement, professional understanding and tender felicity that released the creative flow. It was a stunning moment in their lives, and for New Zealand art history. Liberated from the constraints of their Victorian patriarchal households in New Zealand, the painting expedition to Europe legitimised by the quest for greater artistic enlightenment, Frances and Dorothy existed for a time in an in-between space, unchaperoned, operating outside expectations and able to follow their hearts' desires and their creative journey. They were mentors and nourishers, wives and mothers to one other, and out of those ideal conditions the art and writing flourished. Of course it couldn't last. Frances and Dorothy had to return to earth. Dorothy reinserted herself, to a large extent, into the restrictive straitjacket of a woman's role in Victorian-Edwardian society, and Frances broke away, but without the support of her dear friend. Their brief catalytic connection remains a poignant example of the possibilities of close creative partnership.

The moment was fleeting. The ideal enacted by Frances and D. K. Richmond was a difficult model to emulate as around the middle of the twentieth century life became more restrictive for New Zealand women. Following the relaxing of roles because of the Second World War and manpowering, women were catapulted out of the workforce and back into the home to make way for the returning soldiers. They were enjoined to make a career out of housework and parenting. The *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* featured images of smartly dressed women off to town with four little peas in a pod, all dressed in mother's hand-knitted cardigans and

in trousers and skirts whizzed up on the sewing machine. But what happened if a mother didn't want to knit and sew, darn and crochet, bake and preserve? And what if she loathed the idea of reproducing in signficant numbers? What if she wanted to paint, or write, or photograph, or make films instead?

Earlier in the century, in 1929, Virginia Woolf had mused on the plight of the female artist and argued that there were several conditions that had to be met if a woman was to pursue her art. She needed an education, patronage (at least £500 a year), freedom from domestic chores, and a room of her own – not a kitchen table or an armchair in the living room, but a designated, sacrosanct space where she could work. It was a wonderful scenario, still relevant today, and important because it validated the practical arrangements that had to be resolved before a woman could begin to contact that inner space from which the creative energy emerges. As Janet Malcolm identified in her study of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, 'Writing is a fraught activity for everyone, of course, male or female but women writers seem to have to take stronger measures, make more peculiar psychic arrangements, than men do to activate their imaginations.'⁸

Surveying the working lives of the female artists in this collection, it is evident that even when women like Frances Hodgkins and D. K. Richmond managed to achieve the optimum conditions, they could rarely sustain them. Certainly the artists had all benefited from the first condition – the crucial education that inspired them and gave them a set of skills which put them on the road to further artistic development. After that, the ideal conditions slipped elusively out of reach. Not one of the artists had a private income; most existed on a much reduced budget. This remains a problem, even for regularly exhibiting artists like Sylvia Siddell, because women's art, in general, still sells for so much less than work by male artists.

Some, artists however, had it a little easier. Frances Hodkgins, D. K. Richmond and Ramai Hayward were childless, which gave them the uninterrupted time for creative production and a huge head start on the others. For Edith Woollaston, Anne McCahon, Mary Stanley, Jacquie Sturm, Meg Campbell, Gil Hanly and Sylvia Siddell, children were part of their lives – an important, rewarding part – but the constant selfless giving that parenting demands could deplete the artistic energy. Some, however, were creative in their solutions. Sylvia Siddell drew rather than painted when her children were small: 'I could hand out the peanut butter sandwiches and mop up the blood with the pencil in the other hand.'9 Some snatched at any opportunity for relief from the domestic grind and a space in which to create. Both Edith Woollaston and Anne McCahon returned home to Dunedin for the births of their children, and while Anne was staying

in her mother's house she accepted her first book illustration commission. Meg Campbell, like the writer Robin Hyde, began writing away from her children in the quiet, controlled environment at Porirua Hospital.

And what about the essential room of one's own? Frances Hodgkins and D. K. Richmond achieved it psychologically in the sketching grounds and literally in the hotel rooms and pensiones of Europe. In 1954 when Ramai Hayward put a deposit on a large villa in Mt Eden and with Rudall Hayward transformed several rooms into a film studio — the preserves were swept off the pantry shelves to make way for darkroom chemicals, the lounge was turned into a theatrette, a bedroom into a cutting room — she had rooms to share with her film partner. When Gil Hanly returned to her art in the 1970s, she built a studio among the ferns and palms of the garden she planted. And Sylvia Siddell has always had a room of her own, although she has had to be flexible and move about the house and even to a room outside, depending on the extended family arrangements of the moment.

In contrast, Jacquie Sturm did not have a private study during her years with James K. Baxter. There was no room of her own for Mary Stanley either. After the birth of her first child and the onset of rheumatoid arthritis, she wrote from her bed. Edith Woollaston did finally have a studio to work in, but that wasn't until 1972–73 when she and Toss built a new home at Riwaka, and by that time she was in her late sixties. Up until then she made do with a tiny bach at Mapua barely big enough for a married couple, let alone a family of four children, and later an old, dilapidated house in Greymouth, where she did the only work she could: she poured her creativity into household decoration and the occasional sketch for the local art society.

Supposing the women artists had been fortunate enough to have all the conditions identified in Woolf's splendid theory working for them, would that have been sufficient? Drusilla Modjeska in her study of two Australian women artists in *Stravinsky's Lunch* has suggested there was still an element missing: '... it's not only a room of her own and an income that a woman needs – though that is often hard enough to come by – but the place in herself, the space in her soul from which she can withstand the onslaught of a world that cannot, or will not, take her seriously.'¹⁰ This perception seems important. It links with Janet Malcolm's recognition of the 'stronger measures' and the 'peculiar psychic arrangements' women have to take to activate their imaginations.¹¹

It also helps to explain the puzzle of why, two years after the photo of Anne and Colin McCahon was taken, the promise of Anne's grin was suddenly extinguished when she inexplicably gave up her art altogether. There was no artist's statement explaining her decision. But the abrupt ending, just when the material conditions

and practical arrangements in her life seemed to be getting easier, may have been a response to living in a 'world that cannot, or will not take her seriously.' Perhaps the impact of living in the shadow of the great artist Colin McCahon had eroded her confidence. Perhaps she was demoralised by the comparison and the sense of not matching up that Kathryn Chetkovich identifies so well: if she couldn't paint like McCahon, what was the point of doing it at all? The question arises, then: if the book illustration that Anne was engaged in had received support from the wider critical community, might she have continued working? Traditionally book illustration, along with the decorative arts, have been considered feminine pursuits and rated low on an art hierarchy which positions painting and sculpture at the top. If the values had been different and she had been awarded a scholarship to study book illustration in the States while Colin was touring art museums, might such an affirmation have kept her going? We cannot know for sure, but it seems likely that for all the women who gave up or gave in, this essential validation of their work might have ensured their survival as artists.

There is an etching, Sleep of Reason (1984) by Sylvia Siddell, that articulates so very well the experience of the female artist trying hard to juggle domestic demands and the myriad expectations placed upon her with the desires and cravings for peace and quiet and oceans of time and space in which to create. Sylvia has always maintained that this theme emerged in the 1970s out of her personal experience as a young mother suffering from sleep deprivation. Then the women's movement seized on this series of images and saw in them representations of the female, maternal struggle. You can see why. The female artist in this etching is slumped in her pyjamas over her desk, exhausted. She's been working in the only quiet time she can grab – through the middle of the night. You can see the cost of her determination, but also the victory – the drawings are propped against the desk. Now that she has finished, her mind is racing; the trappings and symbols of her domestic life swirl around her in an hallucinatory jumble – a wild vacuum cleaner sucks into its belly a feather duster metamorphosing into a duck, lobsters climb into kettles, fish lie trapped head down, tail up in her saucepan, toothpaste leaks dots . . . out of a tube, the cord of a blowdryer writhes above the artist's head, scissors point towards her arm, a cat stares out coldly at the viewer beside a large, graceful groper with its head upturned, gasping perhaps for breath.

Sleep of Reason was based on an etching with a longer title, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (1796–98), by the Romantic artist Francisco Goya. In his image, Goya contests the Enlightenment faith in the ultimate rationality and goodness of humanity. Sylvia Siddell pulls the image into the present, replacing the male artist with a female artist and particularising the artist's inner world,



Sylvia Siddell, Sleep of Reason (1984) etching.

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naming her demons. In the process she speaks for those women – Mary Stanley, Edith Woollaston and Anne McCahon – who were eventually subsumed by the juggling act and a world that didn't take them seriously. But she also represents the women whose lives were touched by contemporary feminism and its validation of domestic subject matter, and by the campaigns for a woman's right to control her fertility, and for equal employment and adequate child-care facilities. Sylvia Siddell's *Sleep of Reason* encapsulates the experiences of artistic women everywhere in a powerful image that speaks better than words of a woman's right to have it all – the artistic life, the family and the home.

Feminist analysis has provided an overarching structure upon which to position this book. It draws firstly upon the earlier, 1970s feminist history project to reclaim the women artists who have been 'hidden from history', but also

embraces more recent feminist thought, which has recognised the need to bring race and class into the analysis and to venture beyond the purely celebratory, acknowledging the contradictions, the darker unconscious forces, the pleasures and dangers operating within close relationships. But with a degree of caution. The representations of each artist couple have been reconstructed delicately within the complex confines of the biographical project, the individual perspectives and memories of living artists or artists' families negotiated with care. Within this framework, the biographers have explored, for instance, the impact of Mary Stanley's debilitating rheumatoid arthritis, which took her away from her work while her husband's writing and academic career rocketed ahead. By highlighting the poems in which Mary expresses her frustration and disillusionment, and Kendrick his rage at being misunderstood and maligned, the biographer compassionately records the erosion of that relationship. In the chapter on James K. Baxter and Jacquie Sturm, the biographer in collaboration with Jacquie Sturm has explored, among other themes, the shadow side of living with a great and tortured poet, revealing the impact of his personal actions on the female partner and family. The story of the Hayward partnership extends beyond a purely feminist recuperative account of Ramai Hayward's filmmaking achievements, and considers the impact of mixed-race marriage and the personal politics of power and representation within the relationship both during and after Rudall Hayward's lifetime.

With the aim of reaching towards a more fully human and balanced understanding of both artists' experience, the chapters also delve into the male side of the equation. In the 1980s, historian Jock Phillips published a series of essays on the theme of *Biography in New Zealand* (1985). In that collection, Shelagh Cox and Charlotte Macdonald challenged the traditional biographical pursuit and its focus on the public life of famous men. They called this approach 'the biography of the eight-hour day' and argued that it ignored and skimmed over the other sixteen hours in which the personal and familial lives, the personal politics, are worked out. That may be why the photo of Colin and Anne McCahon is so appealing, for in the turn of Colin's head and the smile there is a hint of a rarely explored emotional dimension, a vulnerability that invites us to penetrate beneath the facade and pose the question: Was it so very easy for the male artists to create within the context of partnership and family life? The marital institution and the splitting of gender roles is structured to enable the male to work, and society supports the male artist in his quest, but did that really smooth his path?

The stories in these chapters suggest the male artists were involved in a complex balancing act. As Janet Malcolm points out, the creative act is a fraught

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activity for both male and female,¹³ and for the male artists in these partnerships a high level of singlemindedness was required to realise their artistic vision. More than that, they had to have extraordinary self-belief because in many respects they were working against the tide, within the context of a society and a culture that worships the sportsman and even now ennobles the exploits of the macho Kiwi male. Peter Siddell, whose artistic practice spans from the 1960s to the present, insists that for a long time a view persisted that it wasn't manly to be an artist, and it wasn't a proper job.

For those male artists who were ahead of their time, experimenting with abstract concepts and forging new territory while living in a society with narrowly defined gender roles, the going could be tough. Often the work was greeted with incomprehension, intolerance and vicious criticism, and the artist had not only to weather the derision but also to pick himself up and keep going. It didn't help that the unpopular, unpaying art meant sacrifice and impoverishment for the family. The artists were not immune to the pressure of expectation concerning their duties as husbands and fathers. Often they were burdened by their inability to fulfil the male provider role. There were no Arts Council grants when Toss Woollaston was carving out his career, and in 1949, in desperation, he moved the family to Greymouth and became a door-to-door travelling salesman for Rawleighs. But this left little time for painting, and he became so disillusioned and depressed with, 'the struggle to make a living - which is quite enough on its own!' he almost gave up his art.14 When Rudall Hayward returned home to New Zealand, after six years of documentary film work in England and Australia, the lack of opportunities and his inability to provide financial security nearly ended his career. That his wife provided the deposit for their Mt Eden home was a relief, but it would also have been regarded as emasculating for a man in 1950s New Zealand, when gender roles were so rigid. He was fifty-four, desperate for a subject for a new film, and he panicked as he became aware of time slipping by and younger, better-educated men like John O'Shea leaping ahead with fresh ideas and energy and the technical competency to achieve their dreams.

James K. Baxter found the combination of working at his day job at the *School Journal* and living up to the expectations of marriage and fatherhood, and to romantic notions about the life of a poet, impossible. Writing to his mother in 1954 he articulated the dilemma precisely:

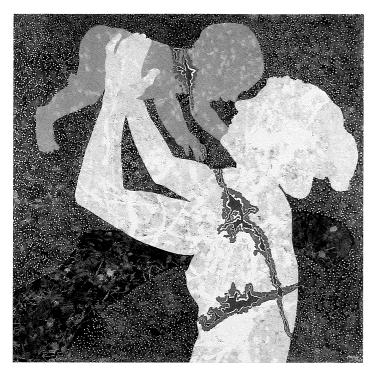
... I never seem to have a settled and full grip of the various problems of work, life with Jacquie and the children, and actual or potential writing. There is much one can be thankful for in personal relationships. But I do not easily find peace of mind

and some such peace is necessary to build work and marriage securely. It comes, I think, from having 2 minds - the one careful, considerate and awake to necessary obligations; the other egotistical, erratic and much at the mercy of feelings. Love in marriage I know is pretty central; but it seems to be a product of many things including one's own perseverance . . . I have always perhaps expected happiness on too easy terms. The ready-made schemes – to drink only tea; to work to a set routine – are about as useful as firm resolves to control one's temper. I think I will always have on my hands more than I can conveniently deal with. A clearer vision and a lack of egotism are what I need most, more than money, artistic reputation, or a first-class job. It is difficult to whittle down egotism when one's line of country in art requires a close, even solitary preoccupation with one's own feelings. It is difficult to keep the rules, even the basic ones, when one is concerned often so much more with the 'feel of things' than with the rules.¹⁵

He ends this passage of insight on a note of humility: 'To want to be a good man is one thing; to want to be a good poet is another. I hope they are not incompatible, for if so I may well not make the grade.'

There is a story, recounted in Russell Haley's monograph *Hanly: A New Zealand Artist*, about Pat's experiments with painting and sensory deprivation that illustrates the male artist's dilemma. If It was the late sixties and Pat had reached an impasse in his work. In desperation he decided to undergo an 'undisciplining' process. So he left home, rented a studio in Grafton where he proceeded to shut out the light, and in the blacked-out studio experimented with throwing paint around. While he was working he avoided smoking, tea-drinking and food. The radio was switched off and the family were shut out, although they did visit with gifts on his thirty-fifth birthday. According to Russell Haley, the 'Chance Lawless' experiments opened the floodgates to a new body of work. In the meantime, 'Gil was involved in practical concerns during this year of revelation for Pat. She took a part-time job at the University Book Shop . . . '17

There are two ways of reading this story. We can gasp at the self-centredness of the male artistic ego and the assumption that the art must and can take priority while the family has to accept the situation and wait for his return. We can empathise with the artist's wife and fume at the way she could be relied upon to stifle her own need for creative expression while she ran the home, cared for the children and got a part-time job to pay the bills. But there is an alternative interpretation of Pat's actions, and it involves an acknowledgement of his strength of purpose and the exceptional measures he had to take in order to create the conditions for his art to flow. The dedication implicit in his



Pat Hanly, Mother and Child (1969), oil and enamel on hardboard.
GOVETT BREWSTER GALLERY, NEW PLYMOUTH

act, that he was prepared to leave the comforts and warmth of the family and home he so enjoyed in order to extend his art, is impressive. Few of us would have the determination and the energy to put up with such a degree of self-imposed discomfort for the sake of an artistic experiment that may or may not be successful on its own terms, that may or not may not be understood by the public, and (an ever present concern) that may not produce some revenue.

Years later when Gil retrained and established a niche as a documentary photographer, she did so with Pat's full support. His generosity in this respect draws attention to another, less commonly acknowledged dimension that existed within many of the couple relationships. Among the men, there were moments of tender appreciation for their wives and families. Alistair Campbell carefully gathered Meg's early poems together, forged her signature and sent them to a publisher while she was ill in Porirua Hospital. Kendrick Smithyman idolised his wife in early poems. When Jacquie Sturm and James K. Baxter's first child was born, Baxter pinned a poem 'Charm to Hilary' above her cot, invoking

the Pleiads seven for protection. Through the experience of fatherhood and teaching young school students he wrote a collection of very fine poems (The Tree House, published posthumously in 1974) which revealed an extraordinary empathy for children: 'Look out, look out Jack Frost's about, He'll nip your ears and chap your snout, He'll chap your knees and make you sneeze, Your fingers and your toes he'll freeze.' Toss Woollaston captured the tenderness of Edith's bond with her newborn in paintings and sketches. Colin McCahon planned a series of portraits of his entire family, but the emotional effort exerted as he studied his daughter with more intensity than ever before resulted in just one beautiful painting of Victoria. Pat Hanly observed and painted Gil many times over, and there was one joyful, pointillist-like painting of a spontaneous moment of delighted connection between Gil and her baby Tamsin as she tossed her playfully in the air. Peter Siddell, an actively involved father who washed clothes, changed nappies and carried the baby in a backpack on expeditions, painted his whole family on the beach, beside the sea, capturing their love of the New Zealand outdoors and the strength of the family bond (see page 221).

It is with the Siddells that this book closes. Their relationship, which is characterised in the 'Symbiosis' title of their chapter, illustrates the enabling possibilities of a mutually supportive sharing of roles. They have always shared the domestic tasks, planning the timing of exhibitions so that one of them is always available to, 'keep things ticking over, to take up the slack, answer the phone'. They work harmoniously in the same environment, physically separate but, as Peter says, 'within calling distance' – Peter in his attic room floating above the Auckland cityscapes he transforms in paint, and Sylvia downstairs in the front room, nearer the kitchen, the hub of the house and the garden and all the creatures that she has at times rendered in paint. In a sense they have created the conditions, the inspiration, the atmosphere for creativity to flourish that Perry describes in *Mothering the Mind*, and in their own way they have interpreted Woolf's theory to suit the various stages and phases in their lives.

Finally, returning to the photograph of Anne and Colin McCahon, there is a resonance between this image and Colin's *I AM* painting (1954). On one level, *I AM* explored a passage from the Old Testament, but on another it represented an assertion of his role as an artist in a ruggedly pragmatic, down-to-earth, sports-oriented society that was still struggling to accept and value the artists and poets in its midst. The photo does something similar. It asserts the importance of the couple relationship and its interconnectedness with the art that flows forth. It says firmly, resoundingly, 'We are.' In this capacity it functions as a totem for all the artistic partnerships explored in this book.