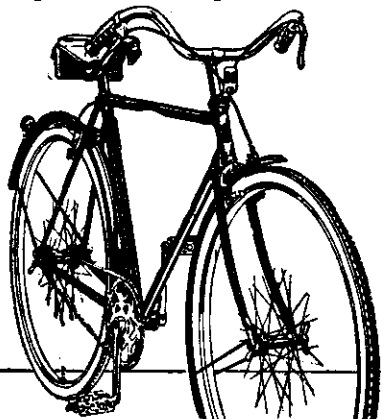


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I FIND A STUDIO

(Written for "The Listener" by
NORA SLANEY)

A NEW piece of sculpture in New Zealand sounded like news to me. So when I heard that the Government had commissioned Alexander Fraser, A.R.C.A., to do a head in bronze of Sir Apirana Ngata, I went to find out about it.

But it wasn't as easy as that. To begin with the studio shares an entrance with a billiard parlour, and billiard parlours do rather more advertising than sculptors. I couldn't see the name-plate either, because the door at the top of the stairs was opened back. Then at the very top was a little hall and a bust of Andersen Tyrer of the NBS, so I guessed I'd found the right place.

Mr. Fraser came out then and we went into the studio and there in the centre of the floor was what I'd come to see—hardly recognisable at first because of the damp cloths piled on it. But the cloths came off and the Maori leader looked out at us. Not the Ngata of debate, hair ruffled, argument in his face, but Sir Apirana, the leader, very stern and dignified as, I suppose, future generations should know him.

"People approach sculpture," he said, "as they would going to be photographed. They put on their best clothes, and their best expressions, but sculpture is a different story." It seemed to have been Mr. Fraser's experience that to a lot of people the word sculpture means museums, or cemeteries even. He told me about the time some people were looking round the studio. At the bust of Johannes Andersen they stopped, very impressed.

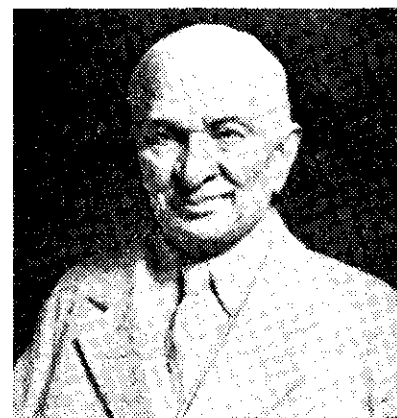
"Oh, yes," they breathed, "it's Johannes Andersen all right, but we didn't know he was dead!"

To prove his point that sculpture was very much alive Mr. Fraser pulled out a photograph of a bronze of Gillie Potter, the BBC artist (his voice had conjured up something different to my mind). It was exhibited at the Royal Academy the last time Mr. Fraser was in London.

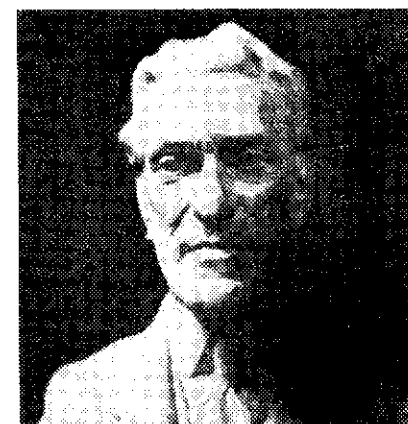
It would take more space than I am allowed to tell about the rest of the things in that studio—plaques, busts, figurines; models of Mr. Fraser's larger works, or bits and pieces picked up in his travels. They jostled each other on shelves and brackets and sprouted up out of corners, things in plaster and clay and bronze and marble and wood and—yes, even in silver, for Mr. Fraser believes in trying everything once.

Soda with the Scotch

Alexander Fraser is a Scot, but the greater part of his youth he spent in this country, some of it in the Ohau district near the Ku-ku Pa. It was there, I imagine, he got the knowledge of Maori physique and gesture that resulted in his pearwood statue of a Maori warrior. Mr. Fraser went to London to study for three years, but it was 25 before he got back. The New Zealand National War Memorial at Le Quesnoy shows his work, and he was responsible, too, for a memorial to our men in Amiens Cathedral.



SIR APIRANA NGATA



JOHANNES ANDERSEN



ANDERSEN TYRER

In London he was associated for many years with Sir W. Goscombe John, R.A., brother to the painter. When he first arrived in London, a young man with not only ideals to attain, but a wife and family to keep as well, the man who held the yea or nay of the affair—a little, wizened old man behind a desk (Mr. Fraser explained)—listened to his qualifications in silence. At the end he pursed up his lips.

"You're Scotch," he stated.

"Yes, I am."

"H'm! Don't like Scotch!" And the interview was apparently over. But you can't keep a good Scot down, and as much to Alexander Fraser's surprise as anyone else's he heard himself saying: "Then why don't you try a little soda with it!"

He got the job.