

# CHILD ART IN NEW ZEALAND

## *Exhibition Begins Tour in Auckland*

MANY of us have known for some time that a new scheme of junior art education has been moving into operation in our schools during the past few years. We were aware that in its main lines it followed the practices developed in Britain, the

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United States and Continental countries in recent decades. But unless we were involved in some way in the education system we had little opportunity to judge the scheme, either by its methods or by its results.

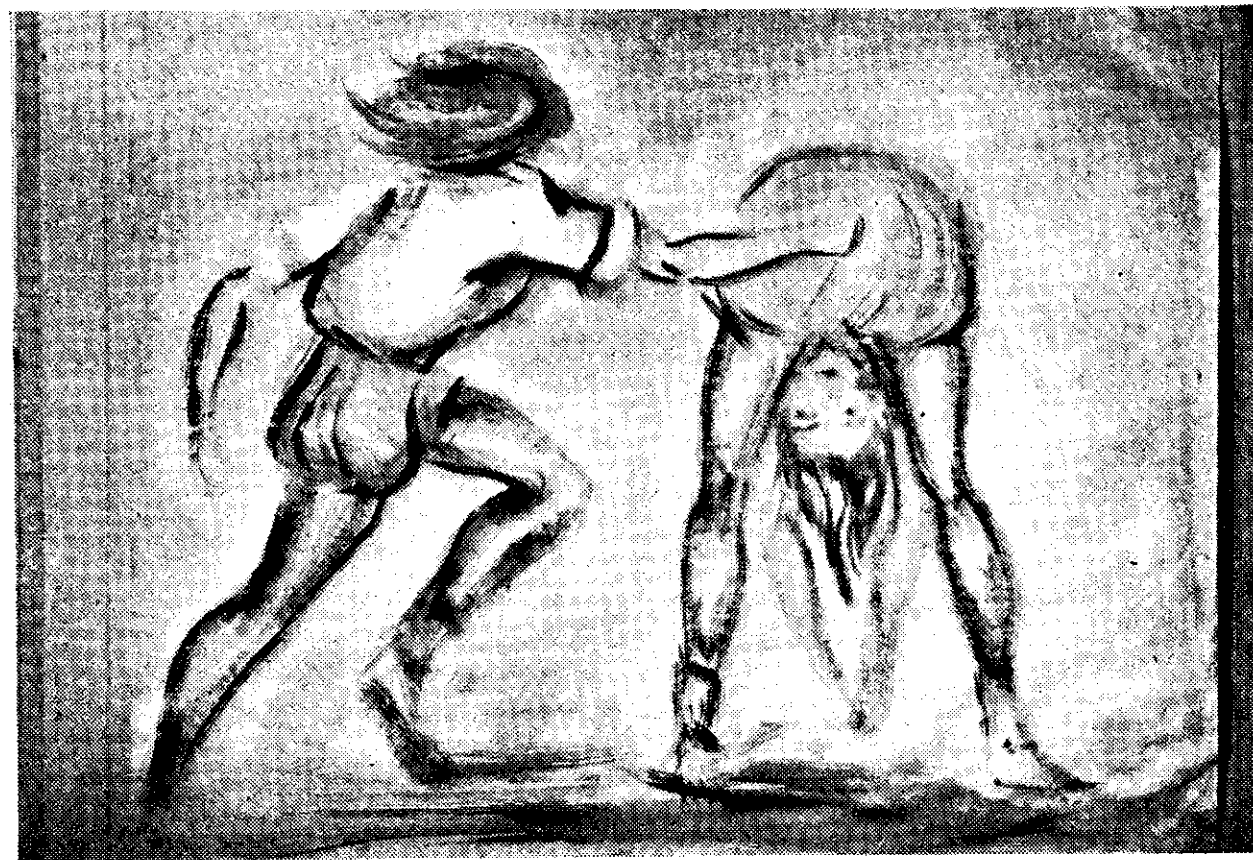
The Education Department has, I think very wisely, decided to let the public have a glimpse of what is happening in art education in New Zealand. It has sent an exhibition of child art on tour. Several hundred drawings done by children of 15 years and younger are at present on show in the Auckland Art Gallery, and they will go south to other towns when Auckland has finished looking at them in admiration and wonder.

I say "admiration and wonder" because if Auckland people are at all sensitive, that will be their response to this show. And if I know anything about it, more than one of our working artists will be found moving around the gallery with wistful expressions: and, if pressed, will admit to their envy of such directness and spontaneity, such fine colour, and such liveliness of spirit.

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IT must be kept in mind that child art is something different from adult art. The child, especially at the younger stages, is giving unsophisticated expression to its feelings. It is aware, in an unselfconscious way, of the shapes and colours and objects in the external world; and also of its own impulse to make pleasing patterns of line and colour on a bit of paper. The two aspects of its awareness are brought together in a variety of ways, and in different ways at different stages of development. But there is little or nothing of the calculating, self-conscious approach of the adult artist. The child is not much concerned about literal accuracy of representation. It is the feeling of the subject that it is impelled to translate into a drawing. And so we get these sometimes almost miraculous perceptions of movement and character and formal relationships. We get, as it were, the essence of a tree, or a house, or a man, or a horse galloping—put down on paper with a directness and a liveliness that make us envious of those who are still living in the age of innocence.

There is one picture in this show of a girl with a wooden spade in her hand standing beside a sand-castle on the beach. At least, if I had done the thing that is what it would have been, with luck. But this child has cast a noose round the whole experience; the waves and the wind are there, and the spray, and the smell of salt—all suggested in



"LEAP FROG," A 15-YEAR OLD'S PAINTING  
"The amount of sheer movement suggested in them is quite amazing"

Sparrow photograph

the most lyrical way you can imagine, and in a way that defies analysis. There are some other drawings of children playing, and the amount of sheer movement suggested in them is quite amazing. Wherever one looks, throughout the several hundred pictures on the walls, one is pleasantly astonished by the expressive use of line, by the excellence of some of the compositions, by the freshness of the colour.

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IT will be a great mistake for anybody to go along to this show with the intention of comparing it with adult art. The "quaintness" of some of the drawings is something that must not be regarded with a patronising eye. Although children are not as a rule worried about refinements of technique, there is (in my opinion) enough good drawing, good colour and good design in this show to make many an adult exhibition look dull and amateurish. But to let one's attention be fixed on these qualities in themselves, and to make comparisons with adult art, is to miss the point.

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IT must be kept in mind constantly that these drawings are the fine flower, as it were, of an art education scheme whose primary intention is *not* to make artists, but to give aesthetic education. There is a difference. Some of the children whose work appears here will no doubt become practising artists in later life. But even if they don't, the purpose of the scheme will have been

fulfilled. For this work is only a small part of what could have been collected together, from all over the Dominion. And what it says—collectively, not individually—is not that a sudden crop of great artists is about to appear in this country. Not at all. What it says is this—that the art education of *all* the children in New Zealand (or of as many as have so far been brought under the scheme) is being carried out in such a way that their native perception, their sense of wonder and delight in looking at the external world of colours and shapes, and their creative instincts, are being liberated and made fruitful under really intelligent guidance. Looking at this exhibition, and knowing the purposes with which it is connected, one cannot help feeling pleased, and a little excited, that our children should be undergoing such sound basic training in one important branch of the art of living. Under its director, Gordon Tovey, the scheme is working with wonderful success—of that there can be no doubt whatever, on the strength of this impressive body of evidence.

There is no more important work than this being done in the field of art in this Dominion. For it is laying the foundations of something without which art, at its higher levels, can hardly come into existence—a sound, uncorrupted and sensitive taste among a large body of the public. In this scheme of aesthetic training the Education Department ought to be given the strongest encouragement not only by parents, but also by artists and art societies.



Sparrow photograph  
EFFORT OF 8-YEAR-OLD  
"Creative instincts are liberated"