



The New Zealand Scene

ERIC LEE JOHNSON, a collection of whose recent work is being shown at the Helen Hitchings gallery in Wellington, is a painter of outstanding merit. The characteristic of his work that strikes one immediately is that he has assimilated modern European painting, digested it and made it part of his own individual self. There is no imitation of the tricks of style of

other painters; a practice we see often with the meretricious purpose of giving a startlingly modern look. Johnson's modernity is the means he employs to interpret the New Zealand landscape.

The quality of an artist is his vision, and his worth and purpose lies in his ability to record and transmit it successfully. Vision is more than what falls on the brain by a casual glance of the eye. It is the realisation not only of what strikes the eye but of all those unseen powers and forces which account for what is seen. The "Maori House" is an almost straight record of a scene but with an added character as vital as a human being in its decrepit and shabby decay.

The "Cliff Face, Piha" still retains the record of a locality, but with more emphasis on the unseen power of the sea to destroy; the blind in-human wrestle of storm and water that sculpts a cliff face to a stone grotesque.

"'Twas Brillig" is a fine rendering of a scene too common in this country. The burnt-out stricken monsters of the forest trees writhe and twist their ghastly limbs. In life they had been trees, perpendicular and

gripping the earth, growing upward and outward. Now their roots and limbs are throat and head uplifted, legs and hoofs in mad career. Not trees, or fallen trees, or animals, but monstrous objects outside the range of natural things.

Much of Johnson's work is watercolour or pen and watercolour. It is a revelation of how watercolour can be successfully used in ways other than for sweetly pretty peaceful landscapes. This country is angular, wind-swept and eroded. Johnson has grasped and crystallised some of its many aspects, from its water-worn pebbles to its gaunt spaces. The best of his work should become a national possession in the permanent collection of our galleries.

—E. C. Simpson

ABOVE: "Maori House, Pakanae Settlement"



Sparrow Pictures

"CLIFF FACE, PIHA" (pen and watercolour)

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 28, 1949.

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