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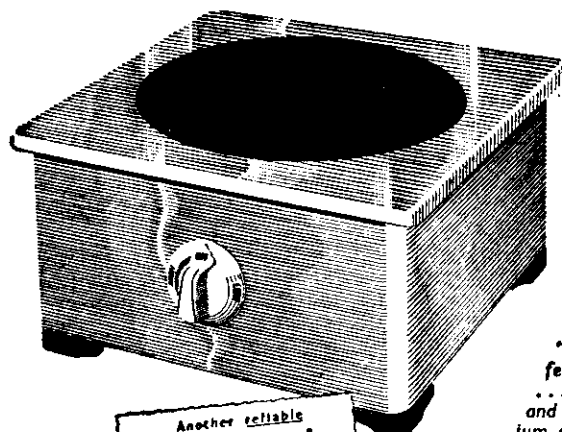


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A Creative Enterprise

THE seventh number of the *Arts Year Book** has a circular notice announcing that no further issues will be published. High costs and the small number of people "interested in the publication of a book of this standard" are reasons given for the decision. Even though in 1950 the publishers received a subsidy of £250 from the New Zealand Literary Fund, the loss in that year was £212/12/9. The first issue appeared in 1945, and the edition of 1000 copies is now out of print. In 1946 a larger edition—1500—was printed, and although all copies were sold, not necessarily in the same year, the issue for 1947 was reduced to 1250. Editions for the next three years were 1400, 1250 and 1250, and copies of all three are still available. It seems probable that only about 1000 people are prepared to buy a volume of this kind; the sales are not large enough to meet the costs of production.

The latest issue is so good that it is hard to believe the enterprise must come to an end. Earlier weaknesses of selection and layout have been overcome; the contents now have a variety of subject wide enough to justify the title; the book really illustrates, with an amplitude reached in no other publication, a year's activity in the arts. As always, the greater part of the space is given to painting, drawing and engraving. There is perhaps no better way of revealing the scope and variety of what is being done in the visual arts. A collection of representative plates, reproduced with admirable clearness, cannot tell us all that we need to know (only a few reproductions are in colour), but it is a guide to new work, and it has the proper blend of orthodoxy and experimentation which is not always to be found in exhibitions. There may seem to be little point in discovering the virtues of the *Year Book* now that the final issue is before us. The truth is, however, that the book has always received ample notice: it has been reviewed

and discussed extensively, though it may have suffered sometimes from being published on the edge of the holiday season—a time when people outside the inner circle of enthusiasts are not much interested in art. Yet it could have been supposed that, if so many people are actively painting in New Zealand today (the activity can be judged from the number of artists whose work has been thought worthy of inclusion), an even larger number would be interested enough to buy a book which conveniently shows what is being done. One explanation, of course, may be that potential buyers include younger people who cannot afford large prices.

The core of intellectual interest and appreciation may seem at first sight to be too small in a population of nearly two millions. Nevertheless, before we decide that the country is in the hands of the Philistines, it may be necessary to remember that books aimed at an educated public have very small sales in markets much larger than our own. Even in England, the "little reviews" have short and precarious lives; and although art publications are now coming freely from English presses, they have their market overseas as well as at home. The significant and impressive fact is that the *Arts Year Book* has been published in New Zealand. Its seven-year life has been a little miracle of perseverance and devotion. There were forerunners, and no doubt there will be successors. But the seven issues of the *Year Book* prove that some people in this country are doing good work in the arts, that other people believe enough in this work to make great efforts to bring it to public notice, and that throughout these efforts the aim is to reach and hold the highest standards of production. The end of the enterprise will be noted with genuine regret, but there should be congratulation as well as sympathy. Seven *Year Books* are in our literature. Their influence will be felt and respected long after individual copies have become items for collectors.

* *Arts Year Book 7*, edited by Eric Lee-Johnson; the Wingfield Press, Wellington; 30/.

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 11, 1952.