Front Matter

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About the Artist

Colin McCahon was born in Timaru, New Zealand in 1919. He was educated in Dunedin and enrolled as a part-time student in the King Edward Technical College Art School in 1937. He began exhibiting paintings in 1939. In 1942 he married fellow painter Anne Hamblett. From 1944–1948, they lived in Mapua, Tahunanui, and Nelson, and moved to Christchurch in 1948, by which time McCahon was exhibiting regularly.

Later, McCahon traveled to Melbourne for six weeks and saw the collection of European paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria. He studied with the artist Mary Cockburn-Mercer for two weeks as a paying student in her Collins Street studio. After moving to Auckland in 1953, McCahon worked at the Auckland City Art Gallery, and by 1956 he was Keeper of the Gallery and Deputy Director until his departure in 1964. From 1964 to 1971, McCahon lectured in painting at the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts, leaving to concentrate on painting full-time. In 1972, the Auckland City Art Gallery organized a survey and national tour of his work.

McCahon was invited to exhibit a selection of his works as part of the Fifth Biennale of Sydney in 1984. The exhibition "I will need words: Colin McCahon's word and number paintings" contained twenty-two paintings and drawings and represented the first opportunity for an international audience to see a comprehensive and coherent group of McCahon's works. The exhibition traveled to the 1984 Edinburgh Festival. Writing in Studio International on McCahon's presence in the Sydney Biennale, the Australian curator Judy Annear declared that: "McCahon's work placed him at last, after nearly fifty years within the isolation of his home country, as a major painter in a global context." McCahon produced no new work after 1980 due to debilitating illness. He died in Auckland in 1987.
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