

Policing the boundaries: Establishing the scope of New Zealand's cultural collections in the 1930s¹

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Introduction

I want to begin this paper by describing the travels of a painting currently in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa's collection, an impressive portrait of *Dr Isaac Featherston and the Te Atiawa Chiefs (Hon Wi Tako Ngatata MLC and Honiana Te Puni)*, 1857-58 (Fig 1). The portrait was painted by William Beetham, a Royal Academy artist who settled in New Zealand in 1855. It had been paid for by public subscription, and was destined for the Wellington Provincial Chambers. It hung there until at least 1881, when it was deposited in the Colonial Museum by the Colonial Secretary. In 1912 the second director of what was now called the Dominion Museum, Augustus Hamilton, arranged for its restoration, but by the 1920s it was suggested that the 'large painting of Dr Featherston' should '... in view of the risk from fire, be removed to safer premises'. It was apparently '... impossible for room to be found in the Parliamentary buildings ... the Turnbull Library walls are not sufficiently high ... so the Academy of Fine Arts was ... asked whether they would be prepared to have the painting in the Art Gallery for the meantime'.² While the painting may have been on show for a short time in the Art Gallery, a handwritten annotation on a memo notes: 'Painting sent to the Art Gallery and subsequently stored in basement of Parliamentary Buildings Internal Affairs storeroom'.³ In 1927 it was asked if the painting could be stored in the Maori House at the Museum but its packing case, some eight feet wide, would not fit through the door.⁴

But the Featherston portrait was not the only item for which safer premises were sought in the early twentieth century. In the 1920 Annual Report, then director of the Dominion Museum James Allen Thomson recommended that the Historical Collection be transferred to the Library, and the report from the following year confirms that this occurred.⁵ This collection included letters, maps, photographs, drawings, prints, watercolours and historical manuscripts. The transfer of this material

from Museum to Library was not, it is important to note, the result of a typological or classificatory decision, but arose out of the limitations of the museum building. The museum was in a state of disrepair – in 1915 Thompson described the building as:



Figure 1: *William Beetham, Dr Isaac Featherston and the Te Atiawa Chiefs, (Hon Wi Tako Ngatata MLC and Honiana Te Puni)*, oil on canvas, 1857-58, Te Papa: 1.006857.

... not only slowly decaying, but unsuitable in design and lighting arrangements for the proper display of any collections.⁶

It seems that, by the 1920s, if an artefact remained on-site in the Museum proper, it was either unable to be displayed due to space limitations, the risk of borer, damp or fire. Consequently, the historical collections were not all that was relocated in the 1910s and 1920s. In 1921 it was advised that the inlaid writing desk, workbox and table, presumably the work of Anton Seuffert, 'be transferred to the Turnbull Library where they would be more safely kept than in the Maori store'. Johannes Andersen, the Chief Librarian, happily accepted the deposit stating '...I am glad to have them here as they harmonise well with the surroundings' (Fig 2).



Figure 2: Photographer unknown, *Entrance Hall of the Turnbull Library*, c. 1930s, photograph, ATL: G-3846-1/1.

My point of describing these travels is to offer a sense of how co-operative New Zealand's embryonic institutions – the Gallery, Museum, Governmental and Library organisations – were in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ They were, in a sense, an historical echo of what is now referred to as the GLAM sector – a co-operation of the Gallery, Library, Archives and Museum. The Colonial Museum (renamed the Dominion Museum in 1907 and the National Museum in 1973) had opened in 1865 under the direction of the scientist and geologist James

Hector. While Hector was not actively interested in collecting 'art', the museum nonetheless acquired works by gift or bequest as well as through active commissioning and purchase. Its collecting of colonial New Zealand art in the early years, at least, may be characterised as 'accidental', with more strategic approaches being taken by subsequent directors. The Alexander Turnbull Library, established in 1918, had an intertwined history with the Dominion Museum, but the nature and evolution of its collections followed a different path. Based primarily on the book collection of the bibliophile and collector Alexander Turnbull, the acquisition by Turnbull in 1915 of important works from the 1840s by New Zealand Company artists formed a solid basis for the collecting of works of art relevant to New Zealand's history. With its emphasis on 'art as information', the Library had a very different collecting agenda from the National Art Gallery. The founding collection of the Gallery consisted of works held in trust by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (Academy) and gifts or bequests from individuals, and its focus was on 'aesthetics'. The pre-history of the Gallery is consequently inextricably bound with that of the Academy.

However, these collections were far from static entities, and instead were separated by highly unstable and permeable boundaries. As they were all nominally 'state' collections, problematic objects that refused to 'fit' could be passed between institutions, resulting in value shifts and changing evaluations. A fourth space of a more transitional nature through which works of art from the state collections also passed was the Parliament Buildings, specifically the General Assembly Library. As others have suggested, this was a rational practice, often borne of practicality and necessity, as growing communities attempted to both build collections and make them available to the public.⁹ It made sense to share resources, skills and knowledge in this environment, but in the emerging modern period, this all began to change. This paper seeks to pay close attention to that moment, considering how, as each institution sought to define their own boundaries, so too, was the logic of classification revisited and debated amongst key figures.

Defining 'our respective fields'

With the imminent opening of the double-barrelled institution, the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum in 1936, as well as a change in management of the Library, clear criteria for the division of material between the three state institutions – Library, Museum and Gallery – needed to be established. In most cases the call for boundaries was

instigated by Clyde Taylor, who, after a period as understudy from 1933, had taken over from Johannes Andersen as Turnbull Librarian in 1936. Taylor quickly formed a close allegiance with the influential Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, Joseph William Allan Heenan.¹⁰ The Museum asked for the historical collection, transferred to the Library in 1921, to be returned for the opening of the new Museum building in 1936, a request that was promptly challenged by Taylor. Taylor sought Heenan's clarification of the situation asking him to give 'a ruling as to the definition of our respective fields'.¹¹ Taylor wrote that Andersen understood that the historical collection had been handed over permanently, having organised much of the collection to be sorted, bound and catalogued in the Library. While the writing desk and Maori artefacts had already been returned to the Museum, Taylor felt that all historical documentary material, manuscript or printed, should be housed in the Library. Further, he stated:

... although it is not exactly relevant, the Museum has benefited greatly in the past from Mr Turnbull's extensive gifts of Maori and historical relics, and to take them into consideration would be a fitting acknowledgement.¹²

Heenan agreed with Taylor and notified Oliver that '... obviously the proper place for documentary historical records is the Turnbull Library, and it is proposed to retain in the Library the historical material referred to in the memo'.¹³ This paper-versus-object divide seems a very straightforward, if somewhat literal division of the roles of the two institutions, but the typology of the pictorial collections was less easily determined.

The historical documentary collections in the Turnbull were not all that was enhanced by this decision, for the National Historical Collection had also consisted of pictorial material and this too stayed in the Turnbull, along with the manuscripts, letters and ephemera. Included were several collections of works that have assumed increased importance as works of art as well as for their historical interest in the later twentieth century. For example, a selection of works by John Williams and Cyprian Bridge, New Zealand's earliest military topographers, were acquired for the National Historical Collection in 1920. Thomson had approached Delmar Williamson in England in 1919 to enquire whether he wished to donate or offer watercolours from the 1840s known to be in his possession to the Collection.¹⁴ Williamson replied that the drawings were '... made by a Sergeant I think in my Uncle Col. Bridge's regiment in the Maori wars. They

are very well done and I should think would be very interesting. There are also drawings of Auckland fort and the fields where the campaign took place'.¹⁵ Thomson asked James Cowan's opinion as to what action this description could be referring to, who replied that '... they are no doubt drawings by Sergeant J. Williams of the 58th Regiment. The subjects are most probably the fights of Puketutu (Okaihau), Ohaeawai and Ruapekapeka in the north of Auckland, in 1845'.¹⁶ The High Commissioner was then asked to inspect the pictures and report on their value, and concluded that '... a number of the watercolours were likely to be of interest to New Zealand from a purely historical point of view, although they had little or no artistic merit'.¹⁷ Nine pictures, including at least one by Lieutenant-Colonel Cyprian Bridge and an acknowledged copy of this work by Williams, were purchased for £10 and were promptly transferred to the Turnbull for inclusion in the National Historical Collection.¹⁸

As no works by Williams or Bridge exist as part of the Museum Fine Art collections, it can be assumed that they remained in the Library after 1936. At least one of these can be positively identified in the current Library collections, that titled 'Warship and burning bush' in the group of pictures purchased by the Government; identified in the Library collections as *H.M.S. North Star, destroying Pomare's pa Otuihu, Bay of Islands, 1845*, watercolour, (ATL: A-079-032) (Fig 3). The value that these works have, both from an historical and an aesthetic point



Figure 3: John Williams, *H.M.S. North Star, destroying Pomare's pa, Otuihu, Bay of Islands, 1845*, watercolour, purchased for National Historical Collection 1920 and transferred from Museum to Library the same year, ATL: A-079-032.

of view, is indicated by the inclusion of this work in the exhibition, *Two centuries of New Zealand art* in 1990 at Auckland City Art Gallery, and the more recent appearance of Williams' *Storming of the Pa at Ruapekapeka, 11th January 1846* 1846 (Te Papa) in *Icons Nga Taonga*.¹⁹ This work was purchased in 2000 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board Funds and reflects the integration of collections under The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act of 1992, which brought together material that had been divided according to an 'illustrative' versus 'fine' rationale, informed by both colonial priority and modernist ideology. This integration was accompanied by a shift in collecting policies to 'incorporate significant historical material', such as works by Williams and other noteworthy colonial artists.²⁰

However, it is unlikely either work would have been perceived as suitable for exhibition in the 'fine art' context of the National Art Gallery in 1936. Instead, Williams and Bridges' work was far more likely to have been displayed in the Turnbull Library. As well as seeking clarification of the collecting priorities of institutions, Clyde Taylor also sought to refresh the policies regarding the accessibility of the library and its collections. He began opening the Library door, both 'literally and figuratively', extending the opening hours and publicising the notion that the library was the only public state library in New Zealand.²¹ Rachel Barrowman suggests that these changes were not just the result of his personal vision, but reflected the ideals of the democratic culture he encountered in America on his Carnegie library tour.²² No doubt it was also a response to the opening of the Museum and Gallery, the first state cultural institutions to have been supported by the New Zealand government. The holding of temporary exhibitions from 1936 replaced Johannes Andersen's idiosyncratic personal tours of the Library and also enabled increased and easier public access to collection items.²³ By 1938, the Library had held exhibitions on themes such as 'Old New Zealand', 'First Explorations in New Zealand', 'Early New Zealand Pictures' and 'The Maori in Early Art'. They found that this 'method of using rarities is apparently effective' and also secured the 'ready co-operation of the press'.²⁴ These articles, submitted by the Library, actively publicised the Library's collections as well as its intentions towards the public. In December 1937, a report drew attention to these exhibitions, stating:

The Turnbull Library, Wellington, has many historic documentary pictures, and the present policy is to show as many as possible to the public, by means of monthly exhibitions in addition to the exhibitions of rare books.²⁵

The framework of interpretation for those works, did, however, remain one of historical appreciation, whereby the pictures were understood in terms of the information they conveyed, not their aesthetic quality. However, they did, on occasion, showcase works that did have aesthetic potential. In 1939, for example, an exhibition of Charles Decimus Barraud's sketches was held at the Turnbull Library; long before solo shows of colonial artists were held in any major art gallery.²⁶

Defining 'Art'

An example that considers the third cultural party in this late colonial dance serves to explore the relationship between the authenticity and aesthetic or historic value attributed to works of art, and their consequent place in the National Collections. When Mrs W. Turton gifted a collection of drawings by William Swainson to the National Collection in 1916, she insisted that the works would be valued both for their 'intrinsic merit and as accurate records'.²⁷ Much as these are delicate, well-executed drawings, it is Swainson's status as an artist that imbues his work with its intrinsic merit, and the perceived historical 'accuracy' of his works, their value as a record of place, depends on his reputation as naturalist, an individual who could produce a faithful imitation of nature. Works from the collection were initially placed on exhibition in the Museum Library, but in October the Minister of Internal Affairs, G. W. Russell instructed that the Swainson and Chevalier collections were to be exhibited at the 1916 Annual Academy exhibition, to be held later that month in their newly extended premises.²⁸ The alterations were well-received for apparently 'having the watercolours in a room to themselves seemed to allow the best points in these pictures to be better seen'.²⁹ The Swainson collection, installed on screens in the centre of the main gallery, consisted of pencil and ink sketches made in the Hutt Valley between 1841 and 1850 and was, as predicted, praised for being of 'historic as well as of artistic interest' (Fig 4).³⁰

A small collection of lithographs by Swainson's daughter, Edith, or Mrs Arthur Halcombe, illustrating the development of the Manchester Block in Fielding, was also donated by Turton in 1916 (Fig 5). Halcombe was a skilled artist, whose style was highly comparable to that of her father, yet the medium of the work, its subject and the fact it was by a relatively unknown female artist meant it was credited with historical, not aesthetic value.³¹ Thus the lithographs took their place in the National Historical Collection and their gifting was used as an example to encourage further philanthropic gestures from the public who might

'possess articles of historic or artistic interest in connection with the early history of New Zealand'.³² In contrast, Swainson's collection was always destined for the National Art Gallery, based on his status as an artist as much as the calibre of the works. A commemorative exhibition of Swainson's work in 1989 claimed that his 'reputation in posterity stands



Figure 4: William Swainson, *Silver Leaved Fern, Hutt Forest*, 1847-8, pencil and graphite, gift of Mrs Turton, 1916, Te Papa: 1916-0001-24.



Figure 5: Edith Stanway Halcombe, *The Halcombe's house, 'The Pines', at Feilding*, from *The Feilding Settlement*, Manchester Block, Manawatu, New Zealand by A W F Halcombe, lithograph, 1878, (Te Papa: 1916-0001-51).

primarily as that of an artist, (not as a scientist, as he himself would undoubtedly have preferred).³³ This bias undoubtedly resulted from the fact his collection was gifted to the future National Art Gallery, as it is for his 'pencil drawings of New Zealand scenery' now in Te Papa's collections that Swainson has become best known.³⁴ Further, while there are vast holdings of his natural history output in the Turnbull collection, its focus on foreign material means that its prominence in those collections has been sidelined due to the predominantly nationalist impulse that has driven their establishment and exhibition strategies.

The proposed typological boundaries of the institutions were questioned in 1936 by Taylor, when he caught wind of the fact that the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum were planning to create a graphic art collection. In 1924 the Library had prepared mounts for Turnbull's collection of some 200 examples of etching by Australasian artists and in the same year the Monrad Collection was transferred into its care from the General Assembly Library. The graphic art collection was further enhanced by a donation of 46 original etchings by William Francis Barraud in 1925, which was hoped to form a 'nucleus for a collection of work by New Zealand artists'.³⁵ In defence of maintaining and developing the Library's graphic art collection, Taylor argued:

... graphic art primarily associates itself with books, though to some extent it has long been separate as regards such works as etchings, woodcuts etc... Now, because the book is so essentially the province of the Library, so graphic art and especially the art of printing come more within the scope of such an institution.

To carry the reasoning a stage further, it appears more worthwhile to develop a collection already existing, than to inaugurate a new one. ... The foundation of such a collection should be representative in both ancient and modern achievement and this has been fairly realised in the results of the late Mr Turnbull's untiring activity.³⁶

The Monrad collection was subsequently returned to the Gallery along with other works in the Library. In the Board minutes dated 30 April 1936 Heenan also referred to the "Barraud Collection" of pictures at present in the Turnbull Library' and proposed that 'the Board of Trustees to make a selection from the collection for inclusion in the National Art Gallery'.³⁷ While there is no evidence of Barraud's works being transferred to the National Collection, the Monrad collection was exhibited at the National Art Gallery in 1937, one year after opening. Recent research by Mathew Norman has revealed, however, that the collection was not returned as a whole, with 56 works retained by the Library, 29 of which had previously been unrecognised as having a Monrad provenance.³⁸ Of these 29, 27 are by Rembrandt, and while the details of the transfer remain unclear, Norman questions the rationale for the division of the collection between institutions, noting that the card catalogue entry



Figure 6: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self portrait leaning on a stone sill*, 1639, etching, Gift of Bishop Monrad 1869, Te Papa: 1869-0001-396.

stating they were kept 'as examples of significant development in the history of printing' does not explain the need to have all the Rembrandts retained in the Turnbull³⁹ (Fig 6).

In 1933, four months into his job as understudy to the librarian, Taylor had taken a year-long Carnegie travelling fellowship to spend a semester studying Library Science at the University of Michigan and visit the 'library treasures of the world'.⁴⁰ Taylor aimed to focus on libraries with collections similar to Turnbull's, while paying special attention to a study of modern graphic art. He had intended to form a New Zealand Graphic Art Society on his return, but this never eventuated.⁴¹ On the basis of the focus of this research trip and his correspondence, Taylor may have felt left out of Gallery and Museum discussions regarding a national graphic art collection, and this may have had a hand to play in the division of the Monrad collection. After all, if the Gallery and Museum were unaware of the incomplete nature of the collection they received, it would only reinforce Taylor's belief that the Library was the preferred site for the really valuable works.

This and other examples draw attention to the difficulty experienced in establishing the boundaries of national collections, especially when their interests seemed to overlap. Taylor stated that in the countries he visited on his tour graphic arts were invariably considered part of library collections, citing the Public Library of Bristol, England; the California State Library and the Deutsche Bucherei of Leipzig, Germany as examples,⁴² while carefully omitting the example of the British Museum which housed both the national graphic art collection as well as the national library.⁴³ Indeed, the relationship between the British Museum and the National Gallery in London had been much debated in the nineteenth century, when it was uncertain whether the gallery would be an independent institution or incorporated under the museum's roof. Conceptual debates centred on the possibilities of all forms of Art – painting, sculpture, architecture, antiquities and engravings – being juxtaposed in displays so that they might throw light on one another.⁴⁴ Such a heterogeneous display tactic was compared to the Great Exhibition in its conception, which might be tolerated for a temporary exhibition, but not in a permanent museum, as such arrangements tended to foster amusement over instruction. Most participants in this debate supported the notion of placing paintings and graphic art in close proximity to enable frameworks of influence and historical comparisons to be established. But this proposed system of juxtaposition did not eventuate and in 1857 it was decided not to unite the collections. Consequently, the gallery collected 'fine art', primarily two-dimensional paintings,

the museum collected prints, drawings and archaeological art, and also housed a library collection of manuscripts and maps along with other printed matter, while a third institution, the South Kensington Museum, advocated equality of artistic media, attributing equivalent use-value to a 'salt-cellar or an altar-piece'.⁴⁵ Christopher Whitehead maintains that this separation of collections resulted in the consolidation of 'the conceptual and hierarchical distinctions between museum objects that we have inherited'.⁴⁶

In the debates over territory in the history of New Zealand's state institutions, arguments are less well aired than this British scenario, but Taylor's letters to Heenan suggest that he, at least, was greatly troubled by questions of proper typology of collections. There is also a feeling that, as much as expounding a particular philosophy of collecting or display, Taylor (and those in charge of other institutions), were keen to police their turf in the embryonic cultural terrain of New Zealand. Taylor was concerned to attribute historical 'use-value' to a graphic collection that would illustrate the development of form from:

... early calligraphy and illuminated manuscript ... through the great printers of England, France, Holland, Germany and Venice of the 15th and 16th centuries, through beautiful illustrated books, rich with the engraver's art, down to the great presses of modern times of these latter ...⁴⁷

This represented a different focus from the primarily aesthetic value that a graphic art collection would hold in a Gallery, and reinforces Whitehead's proposal that historical institutional boundaries have acted to reinforce distinctions between high and low, between informative or illustrative and aesthetic. This indeed, was the recommendation made by the Gallery's graphic committee, which suggested that the best way to overcome Taylor's concerns was for the 'National Collection to confine its exhibits to the illustration side of graphic art and for the Turnbull Library to attend to the printing aspect of graphics'.⁴⁸

Avoiding Duplication

The Museum and the Library also overlapped in their collections of photographs, which were recognised as an important part of their collections early in their respective histories. As noted, photographs were especially suited to the early Museum collections both for their ability to represent progress and convey information as well as their use in display. For the Library photographs were valued as part of a 'working

historical collection' for their ability to illuminate the 'development of New Zealand' rather than '... their status as indicators of the artistic and technical development of photography'.⁴⁹ According to Library acquisition guidelines, the cut-off point for collecting original works of art—watercolours, sketches and so on—was about 1880, when photography took over as the dominant medium for recording and capturing the topography and social history of New Zealand.⁵⁰ Considering that the 'touchstone for acquisition is historical and topographical truth' it is unsurprising that photography became the preferred medium for preserving visual knowledge of New Zealand and New Zealanders in the Library.⁵¹

The photography collection was formally recognised as a separate facet of the Turnbull collections in 1944 when attempts at cataloguing the collection were begun.⁵² Despite this, even in the 1980s the photographic archive was likened to a 'national attic, where most of the material is waiting to be found, and exciting discoveries and new connections are made daily'.⁵³ The collection had been added to in a largely ad hoc manner by gift and purchase from 1919 and on at least one occasion efforts to secure works had resulted in the Library and Museum competing for the same items. For example in 1933, photographer Richard J. Thomson offered photographs of early Wellington for sale, resulting in both Andersen and Oliver seeking government approval to purchase works from this collection. It seems that Malcolm Fraser, the Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs at the time, chose to resolve the matter on a 'first in, first served' basis; Andersen's request was dated 8 September 1933, and Oliver's 26 September 1933.⁵⁴ Fraser wrote to Oliver on 5 October 1933 to notify him that he had recently approved the purchase of ten photographs for the Library 'several, apparently, being similar to those you now wish to obtain'. He continued:

It is not desirable that the Government should have a duplicate collection of photographs such as this, especially as consideration will have to be given later as to whether photographs and pictures would be retained there, or transferred to the Dominion Museum.⁵⁵

While no evidence of any future discussions relating to such a decision have been found, aside from the correspondence initiated by Taylor already referred to, it is interesting that the Government potentially envisioned the Library collection of pictures and photographs as having a future home in the Museum. Further, Fraser's comment also suggests that while institutions may have felt a sense of 'ownership' over certain

typological territories, the view of government officials was that all material, whether it was held in Museum, Library or Gallery, was the property of the state.

Conclusion

I would like to return, by way of concluding, to consider the fate of the Featherston portrait in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For this portrait continues to challenge the classificatory and interpretive boundaries, as well as the storage and display facilities, of New Zealand's state institutions. As the boundaries between the collections of the Museum, Gallery and Library were tightening, with works being more clearly assigned to different classificatory camps, this impressive painting, rather miraculously given its size (almost three metres high) dropped out of sight and mind.

When the new Dominion Museum and Art Gallery opened in 1936, W. R. B. Oliver wrote that the Featherston painting had been 'transferred to the new building where it is stored in a space on the ground floor opposite the lift'.⁵⁶ I have not found any record of the painting exhibited in the Dominion Museum and, despite a designated portrait gallery in the new National Gallery, the unique group portrait was excluded from the entirely Pakeha occupants of Gallery M. Two inquiries, both written in 1939, confirm that the painting was not exhibited and had faded from public consciousness. The first asked after a painting in the museum 'of a group that includes Te Puni, the Petone chief and Sir George Grey',⁵⁷ while the second, from Clyde Taylor at the Turnbull, asked:

I have been told of a picture that was thought to have hung in the entrance of the old building, and should like to know if you still have it. I understand Barraud is the artist, and that it depicts a group which includes Colonel Wakefield, Te Puni, and one or two other notabilities of Wellington's early days.⁵⁸

Taylor was wrong on all counts bar one, the presence of Te Puni, mistaking Beetham for his artist peer Charles Decimus Barraud and Featherston for his rival Wakefield. Oliver corrected him, but wrote in reply 'I do not know the name of the artist'.⁵⁹ In an unpublished conference paper, Jane Vial describes how this portrait was 'found' in the 1980s on a dirt basement floor at Buckle St alongside some 'fearsome African spears'.⁶⁰ It was resurrected for the sesquicentennial celebrations of 1990, and initially its return to the stage was a welcome one. It made its debut in the exhibition 'Treasures and Landmarks from the National Collection',

the first collaborative exhibition between the Museum and Gallery in the stirring of what would evolve into the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Then, it was hung alongside Colin McCahon's Northland Panels, 1958, oil-based house paint on canvas (Te Papa), and Paratene Matchitt's Te Wepu, 1986, mixed media (Te Papa), in the gallery foyer. An accompanying pamphlet described how this portrait was:

... on public display for the first time in over a hundred years. This portrait is perhaps the most important 19th century oil painting in the National Collection and has been specially restored and reframed for this exhibition.⁶¹

This installation had the potential to raise the portrait to iconic status. However, it was not long before Dr Featherston was given a 'good rap across the knuckles', in the spirit of postcolonial reconciliation. As one of a series of debates on art and politics, Brian Easton raised a number of points that were to serve as the basis for the interpretation of the work in subsequent exhibitions at Te Papa. The wall panel for 'Made in New Zealand: Ko au te whenua, te whenua ko au Stories of art and identity' was titled 'Portrait with height advantage'. While it acknowledged that the grouping of Maori and Pakeha leaders was rare, it attributed the phrase 'smoothing the pillow of a dying race' to Featherston and concluded:

Featherston was a short man, nicknamed 'the Little Doctor'. The height advantage William Beetham gave him over these Maori rangatira is extremely suspect!⁶²

While there may well be a height discrepancy, the fact remains that this portrait is remarkable for its inclusion of two Maori rangatira alongside a pakeha leader, but it is arguably this that has made it problematic as a national icon. However, for this, and other reasons, such as the fact that public subscriptions were sought for its execution, and that it was by a Royal Academician, the portrait remains deserving of a more balanced interpretation. Redressing this at Te Papa is currently difficult, as the height of the walls in the galleries typically devoted to historical art will not accommodate the portrait. But for a moment, coinciding with the occasion when this paper was originally presented in 2013,⁶³ Beetham's portrait was reunited with the artist's oeuvre, in an exhibition curated by Jane Vial, *Te Rū Movers and Shakers: Early New Zealand portraits by William Beetham*.⁶⁴ Here it was returned to a context that emphasised its nature as one of a body of works of art, from a very particular historical moment.

My final point then, is that the individuals who attempted to define institutional boundaries and establish classificatory systems were, at best, involved in a temporary and artificial process. The twentieth-century modernist identities of the Library, the Museum and the Gallery were short-lived and have been complicated in the past few decades, spurred on by changing paradigms and the digital revolution. The result is, as Paul DiMaggio predicted in 1987, that:

Much of the Western world has entered a period of cultural declassification – the unravelling and weakening of ritual classifications. Artistic classification systems are becoming more differentiated and less hierarchical, classifications weaker and less universal.⁶⁵

Indeed, it could be argued that the status and place of colonial art in the postmodern and postcolonial period closely reflects its nineteenth and early-twentieth-century origins. But perhaps the biggest shift, particularly in the case of Te Papa, is that the boundaries that formerly ‘protected’ art from its other, safe within the confines of the ‘Gallery’, have significantly eroded. Art, as is the case with any other cultural artefact, is susceptible to re-evaluation, to reinterpretation, to reclassification. In the case of the Featherston portrait, it is arguably both its history – as a work of art which never had a settled home – as well as its subject – an unusual group portrait – that have rendered it vulnerable to those processes. Nonetheless, in the way that this portrait continues to evoke strong responses and interpretations it stands as proof that it is often the eccentric, that which persistently challenges classifications and boundaries, that emerges as the most interesting.

Endnotes

1. Initially presented at the seminar “A GLAMorous Future? Reflecting on integrative practice between galleries, libraries, archives and museums”, Victoria University, Wellington, 6 September 2013
2. James McDonald, Acting Director to Under-Secretary, Internal Affairs, 6 December 1921, Te Papa Archives (TPA): MU1, folder 2, item 6.
3. Unsigned annotation, probably McDonald, on McDonald, Acting Director to Under-Secretary, Internal Affairs, 6 December 1921, TPA: MU1, folder 2, item 6.
4. Under-Secretary Internal Affairs to James Allan Thomson, 18 July 1927, TPA: MU2, folder 11, item 4. Thomson replied that the painting could be stored in the Museum shed on Sydney St.
5. James McDonald, “Annual Report of the Acting Director, Dominion Museum, 30 June 1921,” *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives* H-22 (1921): 18.
6. James Allan “Report of the Director of the Dominion Museum 1915-16,” AJHR H-33 (1916): 1.
7. Johannes Andersen to McDonald, Acting Director, 15 September 1921, TPA: MU1, folder 2, item 17. A 1930s photograph of the entrance hall of the Library shows the Seuffert writing desk in situ. See fig 2.
8. The Colonial Museum was founded in 1865 under the directorship of geologist, James Hector. In the absence of a state-supported Gallery, the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, founded in 1889, acted as the caretakers for the National Art Collection, first committed to by the Government in 1905. In the meantime both the Museum and the Academy housed works destined for a future National Art Gallery, which would finally open in 1936, upstairs from the Dominion Museum on Buckle St, Wellington. The Alexander Turnbull Library was founded upon the bequest

- of Alexander Turnbull's collections to the state in 1918, and consisted of a significant collection of early material, including artworks, relating to the South Seas and New Zealand's colonial history. See William McAloon (ed), *Art at Te Papa*, Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2009, for an overview of the establishment of the National Art Gallery. For a more in-depth consideration of the entwined evolution of these institutions and collections see Rebecca Rice, 'The state collections of colonial New Zealand art: intertwined histories of collecting and display', A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010.
9. See, for example, Shannon Wellington's PhD thesis 'Building GLAMour: Converging practice between Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum entities in New Zealand Memory Institutions', A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2013.
 10. See Rachel Barrowman's study of Heenan's influence on culture in the 1930s and 40s. "'Culture-Organising': Joe Heenan and the Beginnings of State Patronage of the Arts." *New Zealand Studies*, July, (1996): 3-10.
 11. Clyde Taylor to Joseph Heenan, 17 July 1936, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL): MS-Papers-0006-28
 12. Ibid
 13. Heenan to Director, Dominion Museum, 20 July 1936, ATL: MS-Papers-0006-28
 14. Thomson to Delmar Williamson, Gloucestershire, England, 27 June 1919, TPA: MU2, box 11, file 4, part 2.
 15. Williamson to Thomson, 27 August 1919, TPA: MU2, Ibid.
 16. James Cowan to Thomson, 13 November 1919, TPA: MU2, Ibid.
 17. High Commissioner to Department of Internal Affairs, 15 September 1920, TPA: MU14, box 3, file 19.
 18. McDonald to Librarian, ATL, 4 December 1920, TPA: MU2, box 11, file 4, part 2.
 19. Te Papa Curatorial Team, *Icons Nga Taonga: From the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2004), 72-73
 20. <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/CollectionsAndResearch/CollectionCareAndAccess/HistoryOfCollections/Art+and+Visual+Culture.htm> accessed 28 July 2006
 21. Rachel Barrowman, *The Turnbull: A Library and Its World* (Auckland: Auckland University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1995), 62-3.
 22. Ibid., 63.
 23. Andersen had proposed such a scheme in 1926, but there is no evidence any short term exhibitions were held until the 1930s. He wrote of his desire to hold exhibitions 'from time to time, of pictures representative of certain artists, or of certain kinds of work, or of historical subjects'. Andersen to Hislop, 4 June 1926, TPA: MU2, folder 11, item 4, part two.
 24. Clyde Taylor, "Turnbull Library Annual Report," *AJHR* H-22 (1938): 23.
 25. 'Early settlement of New Zealand: history in pictures. Exhibition at Alexander Turnbull Library', *Dominion*, 22 December 1937, 13.
 26. Clyde Taylor, "Turnbull Library Annual Report," *AJHR* H-22 (1939): 25. There is no evidence of exhibitions of historical or colonial New Zealand art held in New Zealand's art galleries prior to the tour of the Centennial Exhibition of 1940-41.
 27. Mrs W. Turton to G. W. Russell, Minister Internal Affairs, 2 June 1916, TPA: MU1, box 3, item 6.
 28. 'Academy of Arts Annual Exhibition, opened by Hon G. W. Russell', *New Zealand Times*, 10 October 1916, 8.
 29. 'N.Z. Academy', *New Zealand Times*, 10 October 1916, 9
 30. 'Academy of Arts Annual Exhibition', *New Zealand Times*, 10 October 1916, 8.
 31. Anne Kirker provides a brief account of Halcombe's work in Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, revised ed. (Tortola: Craftsman House, 1993), 18-21.
 32. 'Academy of Arts Annual Exhibition opened by Hon G. W. Russell', *New Zealand Times*, 10 October 1916, 8. Despite their early twentieth-century placement in the 'historical' collections, the online description of Te Papa's collections describes Halcombe's prints as one of the 'highlights' of the New Zealand print collection. See <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/CollectionsAndResearch/Collections/ArtAndVisualCulture/Paper/Prints/>, accessed 16 January 2008.
 33. Phil Parkinson, "Introduction," in *William Swainson, F.R.S., F.L.S., 1789-1855: A Commemorative Exhibition* (Wellington: National Library of New Zealand, 1989).
 34. Ibid.
 35. Johannes Andersen, "Annual Report for the Alexander Turnbull Library," *AJHR* H-22 (1925): 10.
 36. Taylor to Heenan, 30 April 1936, Archives New Zealand (ANZ): AA03 6015, 1936/94/4
 37. 'National Collections', 30 April 1936, National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum Board of Trustees meeting minutes 1929-1940, TPA: MU97, folder 1, item 1.
 38. Mathew Norman, "The Print Collection of Bishop Monrad (1811-1887)" (MA in Art History, Victoria University of Wellington, 2006), 69-92.
 39. Ibid., 85. Te Papa's website acknowledges this recent development. See 'Theme: Bishop Monrad and his Collection', <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Theme.aspx?irn=533>, accessed 22 April 2009.
 40. Barrowman, 1995, 61.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Taylor to Heenan, 30 April 1936, ANZ: AA03 6015, 1936/94/4
 43. The British Library is a relatively young National Library, whose collections consist primarily of those that were housed in the British Museum until the 1970s. See <http://www.bl.uk/about/history.html>, accessed 28 August 2006. The Prints and Drawings collections remain part of the Museum collections, while the library houses the Map and Manuscript holdings.
 44. Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate

- Publishing, 2005), 70.
45. Ibid., 82-83.
46. Ibid., 82.
47. Taylor to Heenan, 30 April 1936, ANZ: AA0J 6015, 1936/94/4
48. Minutes of the National Art Gallery Management Committee, 29 April 1936, TPA: MU226, folder 1
49. John Sullivan, "The Photograph Collections," *Art New Zealand* 9 (1978): 49.
50. See Marian Minson, "The Pictorial Collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library," *New Zealand Libraries* 45, no. 8 (1987), 163 and Minson, "The Drawings and Prints Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library," *AGMANZ*, no. 16 (1985), 24.
51. Janet Paul, "The Art Collection in the Alexander Turnbull Library," *Art New Zealand* 9 (1978), 41.
52. Clyde Taylor, "Annual report of the Alexander Turnbull Library", 1944, AJHR: H - 22.
53. Walter Cook and John Sullivan, "Alexander Turnbull Library: Photograph Section," *AGMANZ* 19, no. 1 (1988): 18.
54. See Andersen to Under-Secretary, Internal Affairs, 8 September and Oliver to Under-Secretary, Internal Affairs, 26 September 1933, ANZ: AA0J 6015 1933/94/4
55. Malcolm Fraser to W. R. B. Oliver, 5 October 1933, ANZ: AA0J 6015 1933/94/4
56. Oliver, 23 April 1936, Ibid.
57. A. Mulgan, National Broadcasting Service to Oliver, 5 October 1939, Ibid.
58. Taylor to Oliver, 12 October 1939, Ibid.
59. Oliver to Taylor, 19 October 1939, Ibid.
60. Jane Vial, "The Burden of Collections - Caring for Art" (paper presented at the South Island Curator's Seminar, Akaroa, August 2004).
61. National Art Gallery, *Treasures and Landmarks from the National Collections: Nga Taonga Me Nga Tohuwhenua Tawhito a nga Tupuna*, (Wellington: National Art Gallery and Museum of New Zealand, 1990).
62. Wall text, 'Made in New Zealand: Ko au te whenua, te whenua ko au Stories of art and identity', Wellington: Te Papa, 17 October 2001 - 13 April 2008.
63. This paper was originally presented at *A GLAMorous Future? Reflecting on Integrative Practice between Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums*, Victoria University of Wellington, 6 September 2013.
64. The exhibition was hosted by the New Zealand Portrait Gallery, 27 June - 9 September 2013.
65. Paul DiMaggio, "Classification in Art," *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (1987): 452.