

Thursday Arts

Feast of life's fine things

THIS week is one of those times when art in Auckland is exceptionally rich in quality and variety.

At the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga is a long-overdue memorial exhibition of Nelson Thompson's work.

After war service from 1941-45 Thompson studied at the Central School and at the Chelsea School of Art in London. When he returned to New Zealand he became a teacher and eventually became a lecturer and Head of Department at the Secondary Teachers' College in Epsom where he had a considerable influence on the course of education in art. He retired in 1979 and died 10 years later.

Thompson was a fine draughtsman and his teaching went hand in hand with his artistic practice. His convictions about the value of art in society were unwavering.

He exhibited his work on a regular basis and his activity increased after his retirement. His work shows an interesting series of developments based on his skilful drawing and all clearly shown

in the handsome exhibition in the Fisher Gallery.

Earliest works go back to Gisborne where he was born. Deft pen and water-colour drawings of wharf scenes and the sculptural quality given to eroded sea forms show the kinds of attitude cultivated by the English Neo-romantics such as John Piper and, in New Zealand, by Eric Lee-Johnston.

As the work develops a quiet sense of local colour is replaced by stronger colour with more emotional loading as in *Desolate Kauri* in 1957, a fine example of the burnt-out tree which was such an evocative symbol for painters at that time.

Landscape remained the main source of his inspiration. By 1962 he was producing tightly knit, mature and painterly works such as *Northland Landscape*, a dark painting unified by the skill with which the brushstrokes are handled and give life to work.

Along the way there were such excellent works as the fine charcoal drawing of the refinery at Marsden Pt, done in a cubist manner.



Perspective on Art

by T. J. McNamara

Suddenly there was a change and, literally, a blossoming of Thompson's art.

Under the influence of Emil Nolde, the German Expressionist, the artist launched into a series of saturated watercolours in intense colour on wet paper. Subjects were close-up details of flower centres.

These energetic and vivid works, which required great experience in the making to bring them off, are represented by outstanding examples, notably *Purple Flower Centre* painted about 1966.

THOMPSON extended this technique to wide, rich landscapes, particularly of Fiordland, then to wide panoramas.

Then, in response to some need for system, his art changed to a very tidy and ordered pattern of estuarine scenes made with a very inventive use of templates.

He was on the point of combining the rich, loaded colour of the flower paintings with the order of the coastal scenes at his untimely death.

The exhibition is a welcome tribute to an involved and consistent painter and is accompanied by a very useful catalogue.