

JAMES NAIRN AND

JAMES NAIRN EDWARD FRISTROM

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY · AUGUST 1964

FOREWORD

THIS EXHIBITION of the work of James Nairn and Edward Fristrom is a contribution to our series on earlier periods of New Zealand painting. Both Nairn and Fristrom are much neglected now, although in their own time they were important stimulators of the modern movement in this country.

We must thank all those who have lent paintings for this exhibition; their generosity will, we hope, be rewarded by a renewed interest in these two artists.

The catalogue has been prepared and written by Mr Colin McCahon, Keeper of the Gallery. July, 1964 P. A. TOMORY

Front Cover: J. M. Nairn.

Back Cover: Edward Fristrom, from a photograph by the late Mr Gerald Jones, Auckland 1909.

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hibitor with this society. Both Oscar and Edward were painters of the Australian aborigines. The Queensland Museum owns one of Edward's aboriginal studies.

In 1903 Edward Fristrom was painting in Auckland (Cat. Nos. 37, 38), and in 1904 was exhibiting with the Auckland Society of Arts. His impact on New Zealand painting was apparently small and nothing seems to have been recorded about either the man or his work. We cannot even be sure that the influences we suspect we see in other painters of this period do, in fact, stem from Fristrom: they could more easily, and more certainly do, derive from other sources. This seems most probable when we consider the work of the more adventurous New Zealand artists of the time - Frances Hodgkins, Dorothy Kate Richmond, Margaret Olrog Stoddart, Owen Merton and Alfred Walsh, to name but a few. A peculiar variant of post-impressionist form and colour are common to these and to other painters at this period. Also in Australia, such painters as Sydney Long, Charles Conder, George Lambert, used this same antipodean post-impressionism, with its symbolist overtones and its preponderantly pink and mauve shadows, blues, often acid greens and simplified forms. (There is a nice story that Walter's early paintings always had some pink in them as he could not resist the colour (3).)

This was a period when no New Zealand, or

Australian artist stayed at home. Both the academic and the adventurous fled to Europe: to England (probably to Heatherly's or to Norman Garstin's classes). But by far the largest number went to Paris (to the Académie Julian). European visitors returned, and the International style of the period, culled from European sources, was adapted to suit a new landscape and light. Few, if any, of these people were innovators, and Fristrom must be counted among them. He was a practitioner of this particular new internationalism in painting. But it is Fristrom's rare simplictiv, his vigour and freshness, that tend to remove him from sharing the criticism Frances Hodgkins made of Margaret Stoddart's work, that it suffered from too much teaching and theorising and had lost its original 'vigour and freshness'. (4) The overtones of symbolism found in Fristrom's work are in no way literary; his post-impressionism is in no way theoretical.

It would now be fair to say of Nairn that he too was not an innovator, but was practicing a variant of an earlier international style when, in 1890, with his *artistic equipage* derived from Scottish impressionism, he arrived in New Zealand.

Scottish impressionism began in the early eighties when a group of young men in Glasgow, being out of sympathy with the techniques and pictorial ideals then prevailing in Scotland, turned to France for inspiration. Their technique was based upon the representation of reality in solid pigment, as opposed to the traditional system of painting the darker passages transparently, with impasto in the light. The former was the technique of the French impressionist painters and was not unique to the Scottish school although the Scottish painters tended to paint in a much lower key than the French impressionists. It was this particular impressionism that Nairn introduced to New Zealand.

To paint the thing as one sees it was the text of all that he taught, and he certainly saw all that was beautiful in the New Zealand landscape, whether it was the frosty dawns of his beloved Silverstream, or the first rays of light stealing across Wellington Harbour, or the blaze of noon or broken sunlight through the trees. (5)

Nairn's influence was exceedingly intense – the outcome of his virile, dogmatic, almost aggressive personality. Those he won, he won irresistibly – and held. But Nairn's authority was restricted: it was centered in and about Wellington. (6) Still, he had sown seeds, had sincere admirers and many friends in art and outside it. There was no-one in New Zealand who could take up Nairn's work where he laid it down. (7)

When Nairn died he was described as 'the most brilliant artist in New Zealand. His landscapes are not microscopic studies of trees, hills or plants – they are bits snatched out of the wide open day, with light and air palpitating through the picture.' Naim was a 'revolutionary' in the New Zealand scene, a lone Impressionist, aware of light and colour among a visually unaware and conservative community. That his direct teaching seems now to have borne little tangible result is an accident of time. The great exodus of painters from New Zealand had begun. In Europe, the post-impressionist and symbolist painters had supplanted the impressionists. When Naim died the Fauves were becoming the *avantgarde* of European art, and in New Zealand, postimpressionism, often with symbolist overtones, was providing a starting point for twentieth century New Zealand painting.

COLIN MCCAHON



NAIRN Barrett's Reef, Wellington Cat No 22

CHRONOLOGIES

James McLachlan Nairn

1859 18 November. Born Lenzie, near Glasgow.

Studied under Robert Greenlees at the Glasgow School of Art and later on the Continent (see Scholefield, *Dictionary* of New Zealand Biography, Wellington, 1940).

- 1880 Address: 248 West George Street, Glasgow.
- 1880 First exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (one work) and subsequently in 1882 (one work), 1883 (two works), 1884 (three works), 1885 (four works), 1886 (two works), 1887 (three works), 1888 (three works), 1889 (three works), 1890 (one work).
- 1882 Address: Ormidale, Bearsden, Glasgow.
 1882 First exhibited at the Scottish Royal Academy (one work), 1883 (one work), 1884 (one work), 1885 (one work).
- 1882 Probable visit to Holland (In the Glasgow Institute exhibition of 1883 Nairn showed two paintings, Fish Sale, Zandroost (cat no. 872) and A Fresh Breeze – Coast of Holland (cat no. 715). A sketch by Nairn of this last

work is shown in the illustrated catalogue for the exhibition and dated 1882.

- e1885 Possible journey to Harwich during this year. Glasgow Institute exhibition 1885, Harwich Green (cat no. 637) Shrimpers off Harwich (cat no. 890). These works could derive from an earlier trip, perhaps in 1882, to Holland via Harwich.
- 1887 Address 144 West Regent Street, Glasgow.
- 1888 Exhibited, Kirkcudbright Fine Arts Association, Dumfries: Younger Scottish Artists section (Scottish Art Review August 1880).
- 1889 Autumn: Left for New Zealand (Forfarshire) (s)
- 1890 Arrived in Dunedin where he exhibited and lectured. After a short stay he moved to Mataura (a visit to relatives), then to Wellington.
- 1890 or 91 Exhibited in Wellington, Manners Street.
- 1890 30 December. Elected to Council of New Zealand Acaremy of Fine Arts, Wellington (Nairn was on the Academy Council until his death). Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (seven works).
- 1891 Appointed instructor in art, Welling-

ton School of Design (later Wellington Technical College), taking classes in life, antique and still life painting. Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (four works).

1892 Founded the Wellington Art Club. Exhibition held in Academy Rooms, Whitmore Street, Wellington (9) (10) First club meeting 21 September. A paper was read by Nairn: "The Progress of New Zealand Art'.

Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (nine works).

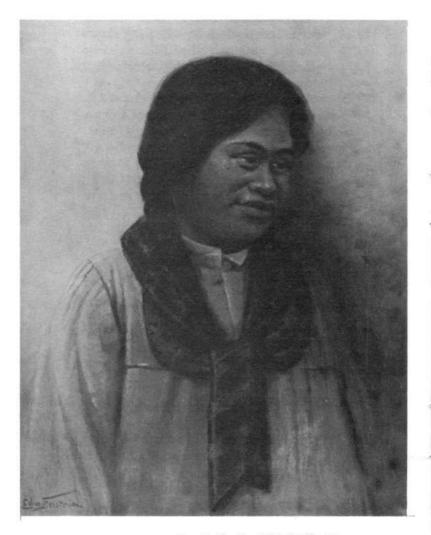
- 1893 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (six works).
- 1894 No exhibit with Academy.
- 1895 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (seven works).

1896 (No Catalogue available).

1897 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (four works).

1898 (No catalogue available).

- c1898 Married Miss Mary Smith of Greytown.
- 1899 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (five works).
- 1899-1904 Vice President of Academy of Fine Arts Council acting President on several occasions.
- 1900 No exhibit with Academy.
- 1901 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (eight works). 13



FRISTROM Portrait of a Maori Girl Cat No 36

- 1902 No exhibit with Academy.
- 1903 Exhibited, Academy of Fine Arts (four works).
- 1904 22 February. Died, Motueka, Nelson (of peritonitis).
- 1904 April: memorial exhibition, Wellington.

Claus Edward Fristrom

Born near Carlskrona, Sweden.

An elder brother, Oscar Fristrom (1856-1918) is known to have studied at the local branch of the Royal Art School, Stockholm. After practicing portrait painting, followed a seafaring life for a time, and finally settled in Brisbane. One of the founders of the Queensland Art Society His brother, Edward Fristrom, who resided for a time in Brisbane, was a clever painter. He subsequently spent a few years in New Zealand and afterwards went to America. William Moore The Story of Australian Art Angus & Robertson, 1934. Married (probably in Brisbane) to a daughter of Captain Johnson, the Master of a tug. Another daughter of Captain Johnson's married Oscar Fristrom.

12

- 1896 Member of the council and exhibitor, Queensland Art Society.
- 1903 In Auckland (see Cat. Nos. 37 and 38)
 1904 Exhibited, Auckland Society of Arts, three paintings of Brisbane, two of Piha (Cat. no. 35?), one of Northcote and a portrait of a Maori woman (Cat. no. 36?)

Studio: Mutual Life Building, Queen Street, Auckland. Residential address: Yarboro Street, Ponsonby, Auckland.

- 1905 Exhibited, Auckland Society of Arts, paintings of Paradise, Otago, Dunedin, Christchurch and Auckland. Studio: 58 Queen Street, Auckland. Residential address: Yarboro Street, Ponsonby.
- 1906 Exhibited Auckland Society of Arts, two portraits, Mr S. Slack (now in the possession of Mrs W. K. Francis, Papakura) and Mr Gerald Jones; An Australian Bush Humpy; paintings of Auckland and Gisborne. Address as above.
- 1907 Exhibited, Auckland Society of Arts, eight paintings of Marsden Point, Whangarei, Warrington, Otago, Rotorua and a nude. Studio, 47 Queen Street. Residential address: 6 Yarboro Street, Ponsonby.
- 1908 Exhibited, Auckland Society of Arts, one portrait, Miss M; paintings of

Auckland, Nelson, Kaikoura, Picton. Committee member of the Society of Arts. Address as above.

1909 The Auckland Society of Arts' catalogue of June 9, lists Fristrom as living in Brisbane. This year he exhibited only one work *Portrait of the Violinist Bloy.* The 1909 catalogue of the Society of Artists, Brisbane, lists fourteen paintings by Fristrom, mostly New Zealand subjects, and including two portraits, one of a Maori Woman.

Address as above.

1910 Fristrom is not listed as a member of the Auckland Society of Arts for this year, nor is he an exhibitor in the 1910 exhibition.

Fristrom's name does not appear in the Post Office Directory for this year.

- 1911 Listed as a working member of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, but did not exhibit in their 1911 exhibition. Not listed as a member, Auckland Society of Arts, nor did he exhibit. The Academy catalogue lists Fristrom's address as Auckland but the Post Office Directory as 9 Bowen Street, Wellington.
- 1911? This date has been given as the year when Fristrom joined the Staff of the Elam School of Art, Auckland (11).

The Elam School records having been lost, a more accurate date is not known, but the Auckland Society of Arts' 90th Anniversary Retrospective Exhibition catalogue (1959) states – 'about 1910-16 [Fristrom] was a painting instructor at Elam.'

1912

Exhibited, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, six paintings of Wellington, Rotorua and Auckland. Not listed as a member of the Academy. Exhibited paintings of New Zealand subjects with the Society of Artists, Brisbane. The Post Office Directory gives Fristrom's address as Bellevue Road, Mount Eden, Auckland, and his occupation as 'Art Master'. The Auckland Society of Arts lists Fristrom's studio as Elam School of Art: he exhibited 8 paintings with the Society this year: Auckland, Wellington and Rotorua.

1913 The Post Office Directory gives Fristrom's address as View Road, Mount Eden; the Auckland Society of Arts' catalogue as Elam School of Art.

Fristrom exhibited nothing with the Society this year.

1914 Exhibited one painting, Auckland Society of Arts. Studio listed as City Council Chambers. Residential address, View Road.

1915 This date has been suggested by Mr Marcus King as the year of Fristrom's departure for the United States of America (12). From 1915 Fristrom is not listed in the New Zealand Post Office Directory. It has been suggested that he went to Wellington for an unspecified time, possibly actually sailing in the early part of 1916.

> This is the last year that Fristrom is listed as a member of the Auckland Society of Arts: he exhibited nothing. Exhibited, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington: two paintings of Silverstream, Wellington.

1942 Living in San Anselmo, California. Died Carmel-by-the-Sea, near Los Angeles.

1917

REFERENCES

1 Charles Wilson, James McLachlan Nairn: from an article attached to the back of a painting by Nairn.

2 M. E. R. Tripe. James McLachlan Nairn (some personal reminiscences). Art in New Zealand, Wellington, volume 1 number 2 1928.

3 [Walter Wright 1866-1933] Una Platts Frank and Walter Wright. Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition catalogue December 1954.

4 E. H. McCormick. Frances Hodgkins and her Circle, Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition catalogue May 1954.

5 M. E. R. Tripe, as above.

6 Interview with Archibald F. Nicoll Van der Velden's Influence on New Zealand Art, Art in New Zealand, Wellington, volume 1 number 1 1928.

7 A. St C. Murray-Oliver. Brief notes on James Nairn, artist. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, July 1939.

8 After practising art, he left for New Zealand, on account of bad health, arriving in Dunedin in the 'Forfarshire' on 2 January, 1890. There he lectured on art, and exhibited sketches executed on the voyage. On his arrival in Dunedin, he was met by McGregor Wright, to whom the captain confided that Nairn was 'stark, staring mad'. His cabin was a bizarre colour scheme in gold, blue and green – an impressionist decorative design that would have appealed to Whistler: but the captain complained that the cabin would have to be repainted. (Nairn once rented a Wellington house, in which he painted weird pictures on the walls. On his leaving, he received a bill for damages from the landlord, for, said the latter noone would live in it. A. St C. Murray-Oliver, as above.

9 Then came the time when, depressed by the state of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, he founded the Art Club, and an opposition and most successful show was held, with John Baillie as secretary. The annual show of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts of that year was a dull affair, as Nairn took with him all those who were worth while. M. E. R. Tripe, as above.

10 It was at Pumpkin Cottage that Nairn spent so much of his time and gathered about him that little band of students who have tried, in their several ways, to carry on the work that he inspired. For two or three seasons, he went away to Silverstream, to a little lonely shack that he christened 'Ye Sign of Ye Golden Pumpkin'. Here art students forgathered, and lived in Arcadian simplicity, assisted thereto by the presence of a Maori dug-out canoe and much bathing. At these times the artist, happy beyond words, painted and piped, wore the kilts and made the bush resound to the skirl of the 'chanter'. With the pipes, Nairn became instinct with life and animation; head up, shoulders back, eyes ablaze, he trod martially. At New Year time especially did he forget any troubles he might have, and celebrate the dawning of another year that should be worth living. A. St C. Murray-Oliver, as above.

11 Letter from Mr Marcus King, June 30, 1964. 12 It seems that Fristrom had been promised a salary increase for organising extra classes at the School of Art; apparently this did not materialise and was the direct cause of his leaving Elam. It is said that several students left with him (by way of protest on behalf of a greatly admired teacher?) Verbal information from Miss I. G. Eise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For so readily supplying information on Nairn or Fristrom we would like to thank the following: His Excellency, Mr Olaf Ripos, Royal Swedish Legation, Wellington.

Mr Marcus King, Nelson.

Mr A. St C. Murray-Oliver, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

Mr Robert Smith, Queensland Art Gallery, Australia.

Mr E. Fristrom, Caloundra, Australia.

Mr Karl Erik Larson, Ethnographical Museum, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Miss C. M. Hynes, Secretary, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington.

Mr Andrew Dempsey, University of Glasgow.

THE PAINTINGS

Measurements are given in inches; height precedes width.

J. M. Nairn

1

WELLINGTON HARBOUR Oil $9\frac{1}{2} \ge 13\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Jas M. Nairn '94 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

2

GIRL WITH CATTLE Oil $15\frac{1}{2} \ge 17$ Signed Jas M. Nairn '93 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

3

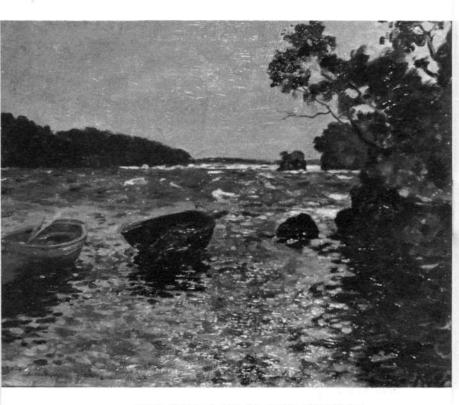
HARVEST Oil 12¹/₄ x 17¹/₄ Signed Jas M. Nairn '93 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

4

SILVERSTREAM Oil 11¹/₄ x 17¹/₂ Signed Jas M. Nairn '96. Christmas National Art Gallery, Wellington.

5

EVAN'S BAY, WELLINGTON Oil 21³/₄ x 28¹/₂ Signed Jas M. Nairn Evan's Bay, 1893 National Art Gallery, Wellington.



NAIRN Patterson's Inlet, Stewart Island Cat No 25

LADY WITH VEIL Watercolour 20 x 14 Signed Jas M. Nairn '95 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

7

SUMMER

Watercolour 10 x 14 Signed Jas M. Nairn '98 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

8

PORIRUA HARBOUR Watercolour $10\frac{1}{2} \ge 18$ Signed Jas M. Nairn '94 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

9

EVENING Watercolour 8[‡] x 13 Signed Jas M. Nairn '93 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

10

CHANGING PASTURES Oil 40 x 34 Signed Jas M. Nairn '99 National Art Gallery, Wellington.

11

WELLINGTON HARBOUR Watercolour 10 x 14 Signed Jas M. Nairn Mrs Winn, Wellington

12

TINAKORI ROAD Watercolour 14³/₄ x 10³/₄ Signed Jas M. Nairn '98 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

PASTORAL SCENE Oil 18 x 23¹/₂ Signed J. M. Nairn '93 Dunedin Public Art Gallery

14

NEW BRIGHTON BEACH Watercolour $15\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{1}{2}$ Signed J. M. Nairn '93 Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

15

SUMMER IDYLL Oil 13¹/₄ x 17³/₈ Signed J. M. Nairn '98 Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

16

HOEING THE CROP Oil 10¹/₈ x 14¹/₈ Signed J. M. Nairn '94-'95 Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

17

SUNLIT ESTUARY Watercolour 10 x 14¹/₈ Signed Jas M. Nairn '98 Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

18

SILVERSTREAM Watercolour 17 x 11 Signed J. M. Nairn '96 Mrs A. D. McIntosh, Wellington.

19

KING OF THE MENAGERIE Oil 15½ x 20 Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui.

SUNSET Oil 8 x 10 Signed J. M. Nairn Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui.

21

SUNRISE Oil 8 x 10 Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui.

22

BARRETT'S REEF, WELLINGTON Oil 11³/₄ x 18 Auckland City Art Gallery. 62/43

23

WHARF AT KAIKOURA 1903 Oil 10¹/₄ x 13¹/₄ Signed Jas M. Nairn Auckland City Art Gallery. 61/46

24

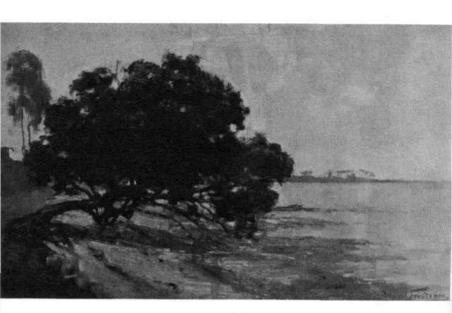
A SCOT IN A TAM O'SHANTER Watercolour and body colour 5[‡] x 4[‡] Mrs Kydd, Auckland

25

PATTERSON'S INLET, STEWART ISLAND Oil 14 x 18 Signed Jas M. Nairn Mrs P. D. Smallbone, Hamilton.

26

TESS Oil 47¹/₂ x 59 Signed Jas M. Nairn Silverstream 1893 National Art Gallery, Wellington.



FRISTROM Pohutukawa, Manly Beach Cat No 37

Edward Fristrom

27

OLD THORNDON QUAY

Oil 9¹/₄ x 13 Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs A. D. McIntosh, Wellington.

28

CORNER OF A HARVEST FIELD, MASTERTON Oil 9 x 13³/₄ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs A. D. McIntosh, Wellington.

29

NARROW NECK, AUCKLAND

Oil $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs P. Bloy, Wellington.

30

EASTBOURNE CHURCH, WELLINGTON

Oil 111 x 61 Signed Edward Fristrom

Mrs P. Bloy, Wellington

31

A HOMESTEAD, QUEENSTOWN

Oil $9\frac{1}{2} \ge 13\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Edward Fristrom Mr G. Osborne, Wellington.

32

AUCKLAND HARBOUR

Oil 11[‡] x 15[‡] Signed Edward Fristrom

Mr G. Osborne, Wellington.

33

WHIUA, A MAORI GIRL

Oil 19¹/₂ x 15¹/₂ Signed Edward Fristrom '04 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

THE AMERICAN FLEET, AUCKLAND HARBOUR Oil 18 x 25 Signed Edward Fristrom 18/8/08 Mrs M. Townsend, Wellington

35

LION ROCK, PIHA Oil 12[‡] x 19 Signed E. Fristrom Auckland City Art Gallery.

36

PORTRAIT OF A MAORI GIRL Oil 20 x 15 Signed Edw. Fristrom Auckland City Art Gallery.

37

POHUTUKAWA TREE MANLY BEACH, AUCKLAND Oil 9[‡] x 16 Signed Edward Fristrom 1903 Auckland City Art Gallery.

38

GUM TREES, GREAT NORTH ROAD, GREY LYNN Oil 10 x 14 Signed Edward Fristrom '03 Auckland City Art Gallery.

39

LANDSCAPE NEAR NEW PLYMOUTH Oil 9 x 13 Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Moller, Auckland.

40

LAKE KANIERE

Oil 11³/₄ x 16 Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Moller, Auckland.

LANDSCAPE NEAR WELLINGTON Oil 8[‡] x 11[‡] Signed Edward Fristrom Mr R. P. Hunt, Auckland.

42

THE WASHING LINE Oil 13³ x 9³ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Beadle, Auckland.

43

LANDSCAPE Oil 9³/₄ x 13¹/₂ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs McClelland, Auckland.

44

CONTEMPLATION Oil 14³ x 11¹/₂ Signed Edward Fristrom Mr Firth, Auckland.

45

SILVERSTREAM, WELLINGTON Oil $9\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Edward Fristrom Mr G. R. Wilson, Auckland.

46

AUSTRALIAN GIN AND PICANINNY Oil 20¹/₂ x 12 Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Jorgensen, Auckland.

47

LANDSCAPE WITH CATTLE Oil 15²/₄ x 9³/₄ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Jorgensen, Auckland.

31

LANDSCAPE WITH TELEGRAPH POLE Oil 8 x 9 Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs Mildon, Auckland.

49

HEAD OF A MAORI WOMAN Pastel 13¹/₂ x 11³/₄ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs May, Auckland.

50

FROM PAEKAKARIKI HILL Oil 9 x 13 Signed Edw. Fristrom Mr E. Andrews, Raglan.

51

A LANDSCAPE STUDY Oil $11\frac{1}{2} \ge 7\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs E. McHugh, Christchurch.

52

IN THE WELLINGTON GARDENS Oil 11[§] x 9¹/₈ Signed Edward Fristrom Mrs E. McHugh, Christchurch.

53

THE WAIKATO NEAR CAMBRIDGE Oil 8³/₄ x 11³/₄ Mr W. H. Gummer, Auckland.

54

A COASTAL LANDSCAPE Oil $9\frac{1}{8} \ge 14\frac{1}{2}$ Signed Edw. Fristrom

Mr E. Andrews, Raglan.

