

# MacDiarmid Arts Trust

## DOUGLAS MACDIARMID, PARIS, FRANCE

*"I regard myself as an expressionist painter, one who expresses the visual rhythm of things."*

Douglas MacDiarmid (1922 – 26 August 2020) was an acclaimed New Zealand expatriate painter, known particularly for his mastery of colour and diversity of approach.

Douglas Kerr MacDiarmid was born in Taihape on 14 November 1922, the younger son of Dr Gordon and Mary (nee Tolme) MacDiarmid. He attended Taihape School, Huntly Preparatory School, Marton, and Timaru Boys High School. Douglas drew and painted from a young age, enthralled by sensuality and the beauty of landscapes and the human form, and has a fervour for the ancient world as the source of our civilisation, culture, language. These are influences that imbue his work.

He graduated from Canterbury College, Christchurch with an arts degree in Music, English Literature, Languages and Philosophy, around World War II home military service. Douglas "came alive" there in an older circle of creative thinkers, his self-taught appetite for painting fired by mentors Evelyn Page, Rita Angus, Theo Schoon and Leo Bensemann and his view of the world increasingly shaped by exiled Jewish intellectuals from Europe.

In 1946, MacDiarmid left New Zealand to "devour the world", paying serious attention to master artists whose work he admired – from Giotto and El Greco to Matisse, van Gogh and English discoveries such as John Piper. He returned in 1949-50, before settling permanently in France to dedicate his life to paint. Gradually, through hardship and tragedy, Douglas forged an international reputation but came home regularly. Between 1949 and 2018, were 41 solo exhibitions in New Zealand alone.

His paintings are owned by French and New Zealand governments, the City of Paris, 20 New Zealand public art galleries, and are found in private collections across the world, including New Zealand, Australia, the United States, France, Portugal, Belgium, England, Scotland, Greece, Switzerland, Morocco, Scandinavia, South Africa, China, Hong Kong, South America, Korea, Tahiti and Georgia.

In 1990, Douglas was brought back to New Zealand as an official guest and a solo exhibiting artist for the nation's Sesquicentennial celebrations at Wellington. He was declared a 'New Zealand Living Cultural Treasure' on that visit, and his portrait was one of the first five painted for the fledgling New Zealand Portrait Gallery.

The last of his extraordinarily creative post-war generation, he painted every day in his Montmartre, Paris studio and exhibited regularly well into his nineties. In his 98<sup>th</sup> year, he continues to live in Montmartre, Paris and remains inquisitive about the world beyond his door. At the time of his death, aged almost 98, he was recognised by art historians as New Zealand's longest-lived and longest-working painter, he is also considered to be one of the most technically and formally accomplished, imaginative, and intellectually and philosophically sophisticated artists to emerge from this country, as well as a published novelist and poet.

His illustrated biography, *Colours of a Life: The life and times of Douglas MacDiarmid* by Anna Cahill was published in Auckland in 2018. An earlier art history monograph *MacDiarmid* by Dr Nelly Finet appeared in 2002, in English and French editions, to coincide with Douglas' 80<sup>th</sup> birthday exhibitions in Paris and New Zealand.

Apart from the great masters, modern painters he esteemed include Atlan, Alechinsky, Nicholas de Staël and Zao Wou-Ki. Refusing steadfastly to be pigeonholed, his work is varied, colourful, evocative.