

“Rita Angus was a painter I could relate to. I felt very close to her and when she died I was very sad. I felt that I had lost something. And I painted this personal memorial to her in the shape of a cross. It had a landscape inside it, a part of Central Otago, a part of New Zealand that she used to love painting.” – Michael Smither page 136. Jill Trevelyan Peter McLeavey, the life and times of a New Zealand art dealer, Te Papa Press. 2013.

As one of New Zealand’s most renowned artists, Michael Smither’s works can be seen in all major collections including Te Papa, the Christchurch and Auckland Art Galleries, and Govett-Brewster. Known for his bold regionalist style, with heavy tonal undulations and strong colour choices, Smither’s subjects range from religious iconography, domestic scenes, mountainous landscapes to rocky shores.

Here Smither cuts into his recognisably rich and contrasting landscapes, dissecting their fluid rolling forms and suspending them within the Latin cross. Smither painted 14 of these memorial tributes to Rita Angus, representing the 14 stations of the cross. Here Smither signifies the New Zealand landscape as a holy land upon which to reinterpret religious symbols and practices separated from us by thousands of kilometres and two millennia. The Otago landscape takes on a religious relevance of life and purity, while the cross symbolises the death and loss of an artist who represented this region like no other.

Francesca Shaw



EXHIBITED: ‘Michael Smither: Paintings (14 Stations of the Cross, in memory of Rita Angus)’, 29 September - 16 October 1970, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.

LITERATURE: Jill Trevelyan, Peter McLeavey: the life and times of a New Zealand art dealer, Te Papa Press. Paintings pictured with Peter McLeavey page 135 (above), September-October 1970, photographed by John B Turner.



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Michael Smither (b 1939)
14 Stations of the Cross, in Memory of Rita Angus
oil on hardboard
pen mark "W.11."
75 x 76cm
\$35,000 - 435,000



71
Michael Smither (b 1939)
14 Stations of the Cross, in Memory of Rita Angus
oil on hardboard
pen mark "W.1."
75 x 76cm
\$35,000 - \$45,000