

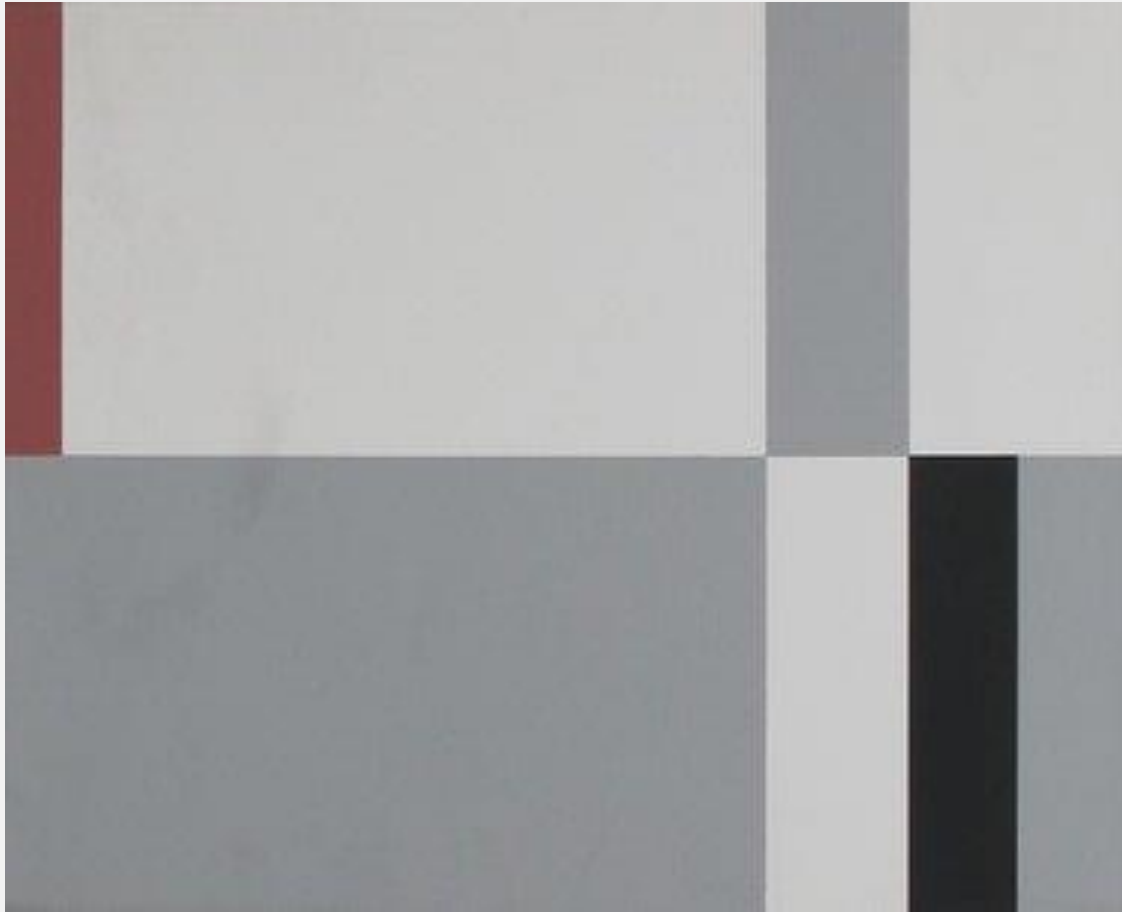


**PIONEERING
ABSTRACT ARTIST:
GORDON WALTERS**

BY: SHANNON MURPHY

GORDON WALTERS

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE



Untitled, (undated), acrylic on canvas, 610 x 490 mm, private collection

Abstraction is a synonym for abstract art in general. Strictly speaking, it refers to art unconcerned with the literal depiction of things from the visible world. Artwork that reshapes the natural world for expressive purposes is called abstract. In the 20th century the trend toward abstraction coincided with advances in science, technology, and changes in urban life. Later still, abstraction manifests in more purely formal terms, such as color, freedom from objective context, and a reduction of form to basic geometric designs.

Who Is Gordon Walters?

A brief biography of his life

----- BY: SHANNON MURPHY

Pioneering abstract artist Gordon Walters is a respected figure in New Zealand, recognized for a long and productive career spanning five decades. The Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki presented *Gordon Walters: A Retrospective Exhibition* in 1983 and a survey exhibition, *Parallel*



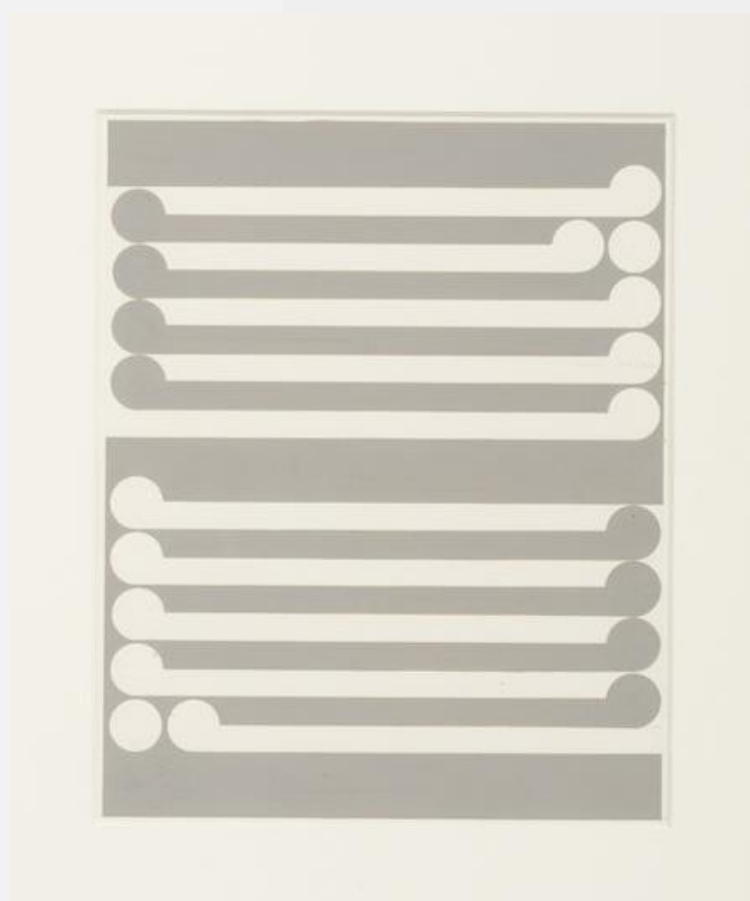
Untitled, 1990, gouache on paper collage, 190 x 155 mm, Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery

Lines: Gordon Walters in 1994. Walters has been included in many other shows, including *A Very Peculiar Practice: aspects of recent New Zealand painting* at the City Gallery, Wellington in 1995. He was represented in the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2006 and in 2014 Starkwhite and the Walters Estate presented a small survey show of his koru paintings at Art Basel Hong Kong. Walters is represented in the country's major public collections and his place in our art history is memorialized in the bi-annual Walters Prize exhibition and award at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

Study for No.2 – Tirangi, 1979, acrylic on paper, 250 x 200 mm, private collection



Untitled: 5 - 9 - 84, 1984, acrylic on paper, 760 x 565 mm, private collection

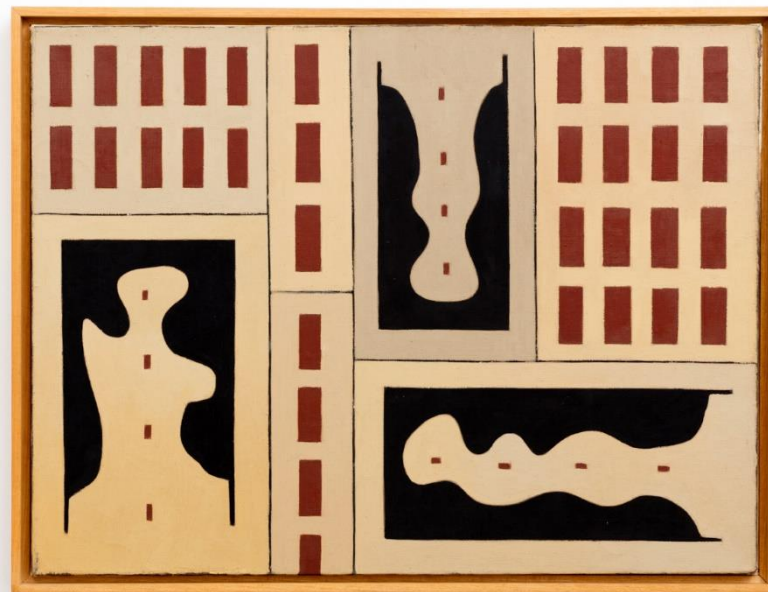


Early Years -

Walters was born in 1919 in Wellington, New Zealand. As a child, he was fascinated by the Māori and Pacific collections in Wellington's Dominion Museum. In 1935, Walters enrolled at Wellington Technical College to become a commercial artist. During World War II, he worked as an illustrator for the Ministry of Supply.

Influences -

In 1946, Walters travelled to Australia where he met the artist Theo Schoon, who was photographing Māori rock art in South Canterbury. In 1950, Walters travelled to London and Paris where he was influenced by the works of artists such as Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, Auguste Herbin and Victor Vasarely.



Untitled, 1956, acrylic on canvas, 495 x 645 mm, private collection



Untitled, 1949, acrylic on board 460 x 385 mm, private collection

Themes -

Throughout his career, Walters was deeply interested in the ways shape, repetition, tonal value, and color are experienced, and the visual consequences of even subtle modifications to an image.

Orchestrating such changes within an image obsessed him to explore ideas such as optically 'transparent' planes; grids of repeated curved motifs - the effect of tonally matched chromas; optically unrestrained colored koru works; and colored gouache versions

The Walters

Estate -

After Walters passing in 1995, the Walters Estate was established by the artist's wife Margaret Orbell, to ensure that the artworks retained by the artist during his lifetime and his archives were catalogued and cared for. The Estate is administered by lawyer and art patron Gregg Schneideman.



Untitled, (undated), acrylic on canvas, 510 x 410 mm, private collection

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ON GORDON WALTERS

Gordon Walters: Gouaches and a Painting from the 1950s by Laurence Simmons, published online by [Starkwhite, 2015](#)

Gordon Walters: the mystery years in Australia by Sue Gardiner, published by Art News NZ. Printed with the permission of Art News NZ and the author.

Gordon Walters / Five Paintings from the Estate of Gordon Walters (1919-1995) by Laurence Simmons, published by Art and Object, Catalogue 65, *Important paintings*

"Acting on behalf of the Walters Estate has been a most rewarding exercise. Following the retirement of gallerist Sue Crockford it was necessary to secure the extensive body of Estate works in a public art gallery and appoint a competent dealer gallery to represent the Walters Estate.

"Both have been achieved with the cataloguing, housing and care of the Estate works and archive at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery ensuring the proper care of and access to the works and legacy of one of New Zealand's greatest artists. Further, the appointment of Starkwhite has ensured the exhibition of Estate works both in New Zealand and overseas which has resulted in Walters' work not only receiving International exposure but also being placed in international art museums."



Both images sourced from Auckland Art Galleries official website - [Learn about Gordon Walters' dynamic visual language](#) | [Auckland Art Gallery](#)



WALTERS IN THE ART CLASSROOM

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

ART PROMPT 1 - Students can emulate artist Gordon Walters by creating abstract paintings that explore the way shape, repetition, tonal value, and color are experienced. Students would be encouraged to choose a piece of Walters work that is of interest to them. The subject or lack thereof can be completely derived from the student's imagination as long as the work is broken down into basic shapes and wide color sections. Students will be encouraged to do research on abstraction while also looking specifically at Gordon Walters work. This art prompt allows for a wide range of outcomes and gives students full choice in both its formal and conceptual ideas. For students who may need an extra push, providing examples of other abstract artists in addition to Gordon Walters could be beneficial. This art prompt can be applied with middle to high school students. It could also be adapted to upper elementary by focusing on abstraction as a general theme as opposed to emulating a specific artist.

ART PROMPT 2 - Students can emulate artist Gordon Walters by creating abstract paper collages that explore the way shape, repetition, tonal value, and color are experienced. Students would be encouraged to choose a transparency or collage works of Gordon Walters work that is of interest to them. The subject or lack thereof can be completely derived from the student's imagination as long as the work is broken down into basic shapes and wide color sections. Students will be encouraged to do research on collage while also looking at Gordon Walters work specifically. This art prompt allows for a wide range of outcomes and gives students full choice in both its formal and conceptual ideas. For students who may need an extra push, providing examples of other collage artists in addition to Gordon Walters could be beneficial. This art prompt can be applied with middle to high school students. It could also be adapted to upper elementary by focusing on collage as a general theme as opposed to emulating a specific artist.

NATIONAL VISUAL ART STANDARDS

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

CREATING - Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. **Enduring Understanding:** Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals. **Essential Question(s):** How does knowing the context of [abstraction], and traditions of an art genre help us create works of art and design? Why do artists [like Gordon Walters] follow or break from established traditions? How does [Gordon Walters] determine what resources and criteria are needed to formulate artistic investigations? Students will emulate artist Gordon Walters in order to comprehend the historical and formal context of abstraction.

PRESENTING – Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation. **Enduring Understanding:** Artists, curators and others consider a variety of factors and methods including evolving technologies when preparing and refining artwork for display and or when deciding if and how to preserve and protect it. **Essential Question(s):** What methods and processes are considered when preparing [to emulate an artist] for presentation? How does refining artwork affect its [connection to Gordon Walters]? What criteria are considered when selecting work for presentation, a portfolio, or a collection?

CONNECTING – Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. **Enduring Understanding:** People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art. **Essential Question(s):** How does [Gordon Walters] art help us understand [him as an artist and abstraction as a whole] ? How is [abstract] art used to impact the views of a society? How does [abstract] art preserve aspects of life

RESPONDING - Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. **Enduring Understanding:** People evaluate art based on various criteria. **Essential Question(s):** How does one determine criteria to evaluate the [success of emulating an artist]? How and why might criteria vary? How is a personal preference different from an evaluation?

REFERENCES

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE

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