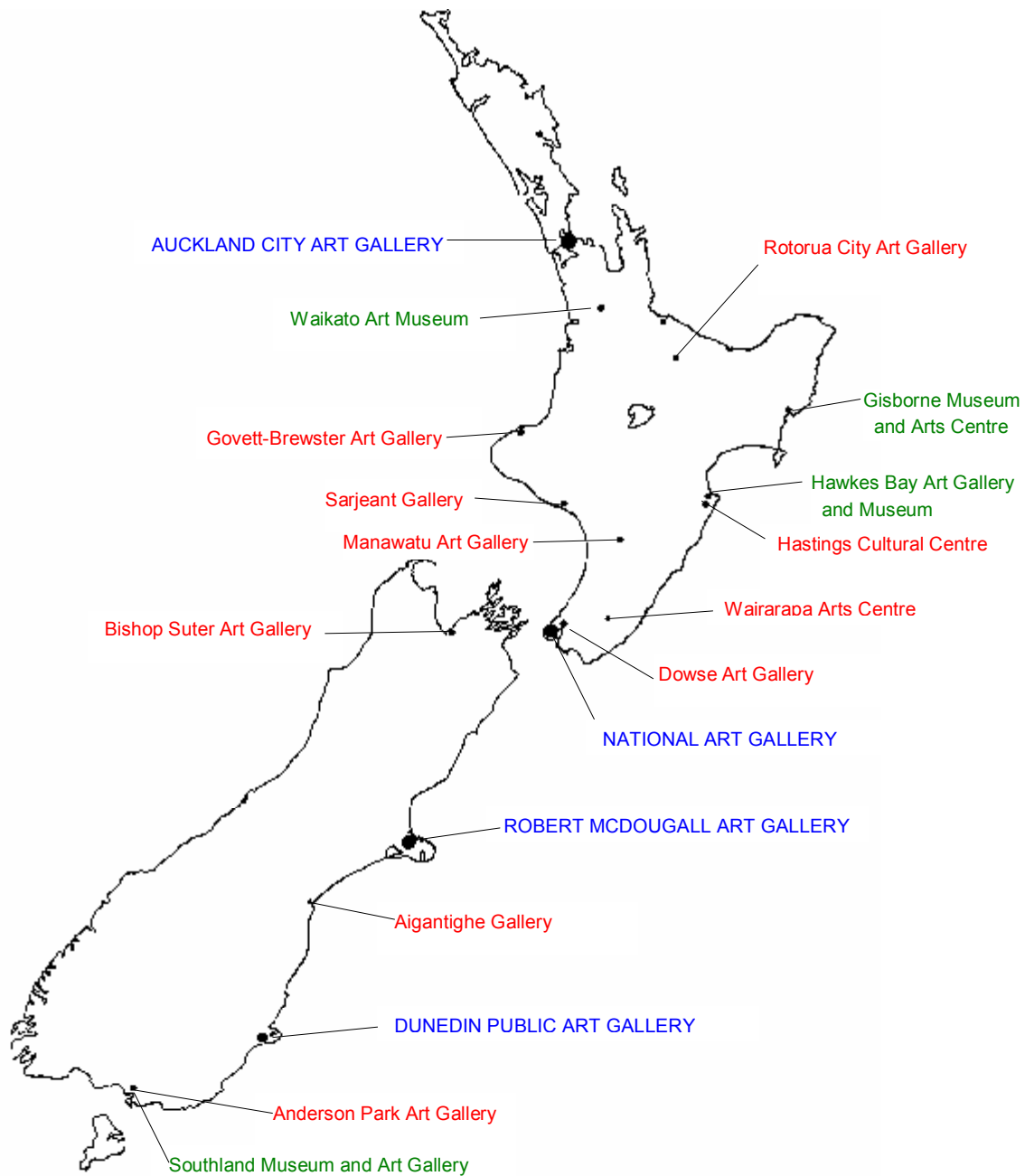


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## New Zealand Public Galleries as at 1979



Blue = Metropolitan Galleries  
Red = Provincial Art Galleries  
Green = Combined Museums and Art Galleries

# **Going Public**

**New Zealand Art Museums  
in the 1970s**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Museum Studies at Massey University

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reprinted 2006 with corrections

## Abstract

This thesis examines the reputation the 1970s have as a renaissance era for New Zealand public art galleries.

It does this by considering the formation and development of galleries in the period as well as their approaches. Public and community involvement, energy, innovation, activism, and engagement with contemporary New Zealand art are key areas of approach investigated since increases in each are associated with galleries in the seventies.

The notion of a renaissance is also particularly associated with provincial galleries. In order to examine this idea in detail three “provincial” galleries are taken as case studies. They are the (then named) Dowse Art Gallery, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Manawatu Art Gallery.

The seventies are revealed as a “culture change” era for public art galleries in New Zealand. New ones were founded, many were rebuilt or substantially altered, and there was a shift from the rule of the amateur to that of the professional. The majority of existing galleries went from being static institutions with few staff, neglected collections, and unchanging exhibitions, to become much more publicly oriented and professionally run operations. Moreover, while change occurred across nearly all institutions, it tended to be led from the provinces.

Several reasons are suggested for the forward-looking nature of the three case study galleries. One is that they reflected the energy and flexibility that goes with new, small organisations. Another is that all three existed in cities with little appreciation of art and culture and so had to strenuously prove themselves to gain community acceptance and civic support.

Other galleries, particularly the metropolitans, are shown to have followed the lead of the progressive focus institutions. Influencing factors on changes in all New Zealand galleries are therefore also sought. They include the growth in new, well educated, sophisticated, and internationally-aware audiences; greater production and public awareness of New Zealand art; interest in exploring a New Zealand identity; world-wide revolutionary social changes in the ‘60s and ‘70s; and increased government funding for building projects.

The changes that took place in New Zealand art galleries in the 1970s are shown to sit within the wider contexts of increasing trends towards public orientation by museums internationally, both before and during the decade, and in New Zealand since the seventies. However, the very notion of public orientation is also suggested to be historically relative and, ultimately, politically driven.

## Preface

This thesis is a project that grew beyond all expectation. One of the reasons for its length follows from the paucity of published information on art galleries and their contexts in the nineteen seventies. I had to start from scratch in uncovering information from many primary sources as well as pulling together scattered facts in published material. It seemed worthwhile to present a good deal of this material not only in order to argue my thesis but also to provide a record others could use.

Even the unpublished records were not always abundant and I would like to make a plea here for better record keeping by galleries and their archive repositories. Several times in during my research I found individuals with better records of institutions than they had themselves. It was not necessarily that records were not well kept in the first instance, but rather a case of poor subsequent care. If nothing else, care of archive material is a gesture of respect for the efforts of those who came before.

This printing of the thesis includes corrections for typographic errors, as well as occasional tidying up of wording for clarity. No updating of content has been made. However, given that the names of many institutions today have altered since the thesis was written, a table of name changes (*fig 10.1*) has been added for present-day readers new to the field.

## Acknowledgements

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– Athol McCredie

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