

37 **EVELYN PAGE**

1899 - 1988

*Nude in a Doorway*

Oil on canvas board 90 x 61

Signed

130,000 - 170,000

Provenance:

Purchased by Diana and Bruce Mason from the artist in 1974

Private Collection, Auckland

Exhibited:

*Paintings since 1972 and a few others*, Cat no. 9

Brett-Duncan Studio Gallery, Wellington, 1974

Original exhibition label affixed verso

*Selected works*, Cat. no 45, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, 1982

*Evelyn Page - Seven Decades* Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1986

*Evelyn Page - Seven Decades* National Gallery of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, 1987

Illustrated p. 50 Evelyn Page *Seven Decades*, Janet Paul and Neil Roberts, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Evelyn Page - Seven Decades*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1986

In 1970 the outstanding achievements of Evelyn Page were recognised and celebrated with a major retrospective exhibition of 98 works at the National Art Gallery in Wellington. Douglas Lilburn, a close friend of the artist, wrote a brief introduction to the exhibition catalogue in which he paid particular tribute to Page's perpetual appetite for innovation and creative development. Lilburn drew attitudinal parallels between Page and the Japanese print maker, Hokusai, who he quoted saying: "by the age of 80, I shall have made further progress, and by the age of 90, I shall see into the mystery of things". This proved to be prophetic as Evelyn Page, who was 71 at the time, continued to experiment and extend the boundaries of her painting practice for another 17 years.

*Nude in a Doorway*, painted in the artist's 74th year, was Evelyn Page's last major nude, before the onset of arthritis curtailed her ability to work in a large scale, and remains as a glowing testimony to her sustained creative energy and enthusiasm to innovate. At the age of 66, Page set off for Salzburg to attend Oscar Kokoschka's 'School of Seeing' and although quite conspicuously older than the majority of much younger students, persisted with the unfamiliar prerequisite methods of working and soon won the admiration of many around her. "What I learned at Salzburg" Page recalled, "was to let the subject impress as simply as possible." Works painted after she returned to New Zealand in 1968 and throughout the 1970s demonstrate a reduced essentialising of detail and increasingly broad yet highly painterly treatment of backgrounds. This enabled the form of the main subject, particularly in the case of a figure, to be presented without distraction as the primary subject of the work.

*Nude in a Doorway* demonstrates her concerns with the essence of form as she began experimenting with the stylized 'pattern-making' of compositional elements developed by Matisse during his Nice period. Like the modern French master who inspired her, Page created this exotic fantasy by assembling favourite pieces of fabric, foliage and familiar objects.... the ewer, the punchbowl the striped tablecloth and the antique chair appear in most of her larger paintings of nudes. These objects are assembled into an intoxicating blend of pattern and colour that would both compliment and intensify the luscious flesh tones of a favourite model. In this case the model was Kate Farquahar, the daughter of the late Radiya and Professor David Farquahar, professional associates and close friends of Evelyn and her husband Frederick.

Once again the subject poses against familiar glowing foliage of the ornamental grape and lime tree dappled by sunlight at the Page's garden at Waikanae.

For many years her friend and gallery owner, Elva Bett had tried to persuade Page to exhibit her work and in 1974 she held the second of only two exhibitions of her career (the first being at the John Leech gallery in Auckland in 1972). The major work of this show was *Nude in a Doorway*, along with some new still lifes and several watercolour nudes.

*'She will be a painter with whom future historians of art will have to reckon'* Professor James Shelley, September 1929

