

The recurrence of the Nelson landscape in Toss Woollaston's paintings chronicles the artist's intimate relationship with this part of the country. This superb panoramic representation of *Mapua* was part of a 1971 series. Having returned to this coastal port where he lived almost forty years earlier, a reframing of Woollaston's relationship with the landscape was inevitable, but it was actually Wellington dealer Peter McLeavey who persuaded him to discard the modest restraint of his previous works in favour of thinking big. Writing to a friend, the artist reflected on this request: *What is he trying to do to me... Make me conform to modern standard sizes? Release my potential? Anyway, it might be an interesting experiment.* It was undeniably so: spanning nearly three metres, *Mapua* is a landscape which seems to breathe a life of its own. Conceived in the regional modernist style of which Woollaston was a pioneer, the feverish brushstrokes and clashing muted tones which had previously been confined within his smaller works give way to an immersive energy.

A raw earthiness of palette and atmosphere invite the viewer into this painting, which is nothing short of sublime in its immediacy of form and colour. As one is drawn into the visual conundrum of a landscape which is cast in sharp perspective from the overlooking hill while appearing structurally flat, the triumph of Woollaston's skill is realised.

In the summer of 1971, *Mapua* was exhibited at Peter McLeavey Gallery. The exhibition was positively received and all three works sold quickly, but it is a classic photograph capturing McLeavey and Don Binney transporting *Mapua* across the Cuba Street intersection in Wellington which is most telling in this regard. This brilliant moment of public procession – Woollaston's large-scale regionalist triumph being quite literally carried by two of the great influencers of New Zealand modernism – is a visual metaphor which needs no further explanation. When asked about the photograph, Peter replied: *We were taking it (the painting) to show an interested party.*



Peter McLeavey and Don Binney with *Mapua* crossing Cuba Street - *Dominion*, 23 September 1971

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Mapua

Oil on hardboard 121 x 275

Signed

Inscribed verso

\$120,000 - 160,000

Provenance:

Ex Collection of John Casserley, USA

Ex Ron Sang Collection, Auckland

Private Collection, Wellington

Exhibited:

M T Woollaston Paintings, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, September 1971

M T Woollaston Works 1933 - 1973,

Touring Exhibition, Manawatu Art Gallery & others

Illustrated:

Dominion, 23 September 1971

p. 53 *M T Woollaston Works 1933 - 1973*, Luit Bieringa, Pelorus Press, 1973

p. 126 *Peter McLeavey: The Life and Times of a New Zealand Art Dealer*, Jill Trevelyan, Te Papa Press, 2013

p. 88 *Toss Woollaston An Illustrated Biography*, Gerald Barnett, National Art Gallery, Random Century, 1991