

26 **RALPH HOTERE**

*Black Painting VII* from *MALADY, A Poem* by Bill Manhire  
Acrylic on canvas 178 x 71  
Signed, inscribed & dated 1971 verso

\$45,000 - 65,000

Provenance:  
Acquired directly from the artist by  
present owner, 1971

Of the many gifts offered by Hotere to New Zealand art, it would be remiss not to acknowledge his contribution to the mediation between different art forms. Ekphrasis is an ancient Greek term which refers to literary descriptions of art. The modern definition of ekphrasis, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is a *detailed description of a work of visual art as a literary device*. Not only did Hotere engage with the notion of ekphrasis, but actually turned it on its head: opening up a dialogue between art and literature and affirming the potential of painting to describe the beauty of the written word. For the first time in New Zealand's art history, works such as *Malady* accomplished the great task of describing and illuminating literature.

The *Malady* series is iconic and instantly recognisable. This work is a meditation; a study in the graduation of words and colour. It is striking to encounter, and as viewers we cannot help but

feel some sense of release in following the work's southwards trajectory of colour and gravity. Each word imprints itself on our mind: less as an echo than as a meaningful exercise in repetition, which alternates between bold and light. Of course, this is the essential melody of *Malady*. It lies in the interplay between each step, the inevitability of brightness and shadow.

The compelling red-orange zip which vertically penetrates the canvas cannot be ignored. It pulsates and seems to pierce through the canvas, as if we are being offered a glimpse into the fiery centre of the earth's core. And, of course, there is the nuance of black. The deeply gorgeous and inviting subtlety which offers darkness and luxuriating comfort, and without which we would not know of this work as Hotere's own.

