

Likeness and Character

portraits from the collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

27 October 2007 to 20 April 2008



Tony Fomison *The Ponsonby Madonna* 1982-83 Oil and alkyd on hessian laid on medium density board
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki Purchased with funds from the Charles Lyndsey Garland Bequest.



Tony Fomison *From a photo of Patara Te Tuhi* 1968
Oil on board Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Gift of Marc and Nicole Rands in memory of their father Richard Rands

Tony Fomison

My paintings are not illustrations of events any more than they are illustrations of dreams

Tony Fomison

Tony Fomison (1939 – 1990) was one of our key post-war visual artists. In a career that spanned three decades, he helped shift the direction of New Zealand's painting by representing the significance that narrative and myth have for contemporary art. Other artists like Charles Goldie or Rita Angus employed story telling in their portraits and landscapes, while Colin McCahon showed biblical stories and characters within a New Zealand environment. Fomison brought stories from history into everyday life as a beacon for what we are becoming as a people.

The Ponsonby Madonna, on display in [Likeness & Character](#), is, unquestionably, one of Tony Fomison's grandest religious paintings. Commissioned during 1982-1983 by St Paul's College, a Roman Catholic Boys school in inner city Auckland, this painting celebrates a Pacific Mary as the mother of a teenager shown as the Pacific Jesus, a contemporary Christ Saviour. Few other New Zealand artists have attempted such an ambitious religious figure painting, only Colin McCahon's own religious works (also on display in *Likeness & Character*) share such a determination to express the reality within Catholic faith.

Ron Brownson