

# AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI

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**Friends of Gallery gift important artwork in first-time exhibition of paintings by senior Auckland artist**



Robert Ellis, *Turangawaewae Maehe* 1983, 1983, acrylic on canvas, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Friends of the Auckland Art Gallery to celebrate their 60th anniversary, 2014



Opening on **Saturday 9 August** at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, **Robert Ellis: Turangawaewae / A Place to Stand** is the first solo exhibition in a public museum by senior Auckland artist, Robert Ellis in his 'hometown'. Including many of his most important paintings, the exhibition will present *Turangawaewae Maehe* 1983, painted in 1983, a gift from the Friends of the Auckland Art Gallery to mark their 60th anniversary this year.

'Together with Auckland artists Colin McCahon, Milan Mrkusich, Pat Hanly and Gretchen Albrecht, Ellis is nationally regarded for producing ambitious paintings on a large scale,' says Auckland Art Gallery Senior Curator New Zealand and Pacific Art, Ron Brownson. 'As a major figure, Ellis' art addresses many cultural issues. His subjects range over tensions between transport and urbanism, contrast ecology with spirituality and look at the on-going nature of Māori–Pākehā relations.'

The namesake and focus of the exhibition is *Turangawaewae Maehe* 1983, a pivotal work by the UK-born Ellis. At almost four and half metres wide and close to two metres in height, the imposing mural-sized work was previously displayed short-term in Auckland and Wellington, and has not been seen in public since the 1980s. Painted in Auckland when Ellis returned from a year-long journey working and travelling through North America and Mexico, *Turangawaewae Maehe* 1983 expresses Ellis' realisation that New Zealand had become his home.

The Friends of the Auckland Art Gallery recently gifted this painting to celebrate their 60th anniversary. 'We are delighted to gift to the Gallery this significant work by a major Auckland artist,' says Friends of the Gallery President, Raymond Scott. 'Ellis' work is a fitting gift from the Friends in many ways. Not only does his enduring contribution to New Zealand art stem from the period in which the Friends were formed 60 years ago but it also considers and reflects on our "home".'

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‘Sincere thanks are due to the Friends for their unending generosity,’ says Auckland Art Gallery Director Rhana Devenport. ‘Through their gifts of art for the Gallery’s collection and with their support of events such as the Pat Hanly Awards for secondary students, the Friends make a significant contribution to Auckland and its people. Not every relationship lasts 60 years – reaching this milestone is testament to the benefits enjoyed and shared by all involved.’

Accompanying the major work are two other substantial works: the 1986 painting *Rakaumangamanga 24 Maehe 1986*, from the artist’s private collection and *Megalopolis*, 1966 from the Fletcher Trust Collection. *Megalopolis* is the largest example of Robert Ellis’ Motorway paintings and has never been publicly exhibited.

Ellis’ City and Motorway paintings of the 1960s reflected his work as an aerial photographer with the Royal Air Force in Britain and were inspired by the introduction of new motorways to Auckland. This unique interpretation of the new landscape helped to establish his reputation as a major artist.

*Robert Ellis: Turangawaewae | A Place to Stand* coincides with a publication written on Ellis’ 57-year-long New Zealand career and his significance as a painter. The book, *Robert Ellis*, published by Ron Sang and written by Hamish Keith, and Elizabeth, Hana and Ngarino Ellis, contains a comprehensive illustrated overview of the painter’s life and art, and comments on the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand.

Entry to *Robert Ellis: Turangawaewae | A Place to Stand* is free.

### ENDS

Accompanying image credit:

Robert Ellis, *Turangawaewae Maehe 1983*, 1983, acrylic on canvas, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Friends of the Auckland Art Gallery to celebrate their 60th anniversary, 2014

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#### For more information please contact:

**Tae Allison**

Communications Officer

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

**P** +64 9 307 7706

**M** +64 27 291 9953

**E** [tae.allison@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:tae.allison@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)