



Jonathan Grant Gallery

## Eion Stevens

1952 - 2021

Eion Stevens was one of New Zealand's most distinctive and original painters. Over a career spanning more than four decades, he developed a highly individual visual language characterised by bold colour, simplified forms, recurring motifs, and an enduring sense of wit, mystery, and invention.

Born in Dunedin, Stevens graduated with an Honours Diploma in Fine Art from the Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 1973 before continuing his studies at Exeter College of Art in England. Returning to New Zealand in the late 1970s, he established a lifelong painting practice that saw him exhibit regularly throughout the country and build a devoted following among collectors, artists, writers, and poets alike.

Stevens' paintings occupy a unique space between abstraction and narrative. Boats, ladders, figures, animals, houses, and symbolic forms appear and reappear throughout his work, inviting interpretation without ever offering a definitive explanation. Frequently playful, occasionally enigmatic, and always intelligent, his paintings function less as statements than as conversations, encouraging viewers to bring their own experiences and imagination to the work.

A voracious reader and celebrated conversationalist, Stevens maintained a deep connection to literature throughout his career. His work inspired poems by many of New Zealand's leading writers, while Stevens himself created paintings in response to literary works. This ongoing dialogue between visual art and poetry culminated in the 2007 exhibition *Painted Poems: One Artist, Twenty Poets* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Stevens exhibited with many of New Zealand's leading dealer galleries and his work is represented in numerous significant public, corporate, and private collections. His paintings have been included in major publications including *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective* by Elva Bett and *100 New Zealand Paintings* by Warwick Brown. In 1999, a survey exhibition of his work was presented at the James Wallace Trust Gallery in Auckland.

Today, Eion Stevens is remembered as one of New Zealand's most recognisable and imaginative painters. His work continues to captivate audiences through its humour, originality, and remarkable ability to suggest stories without ever fully revealing them.