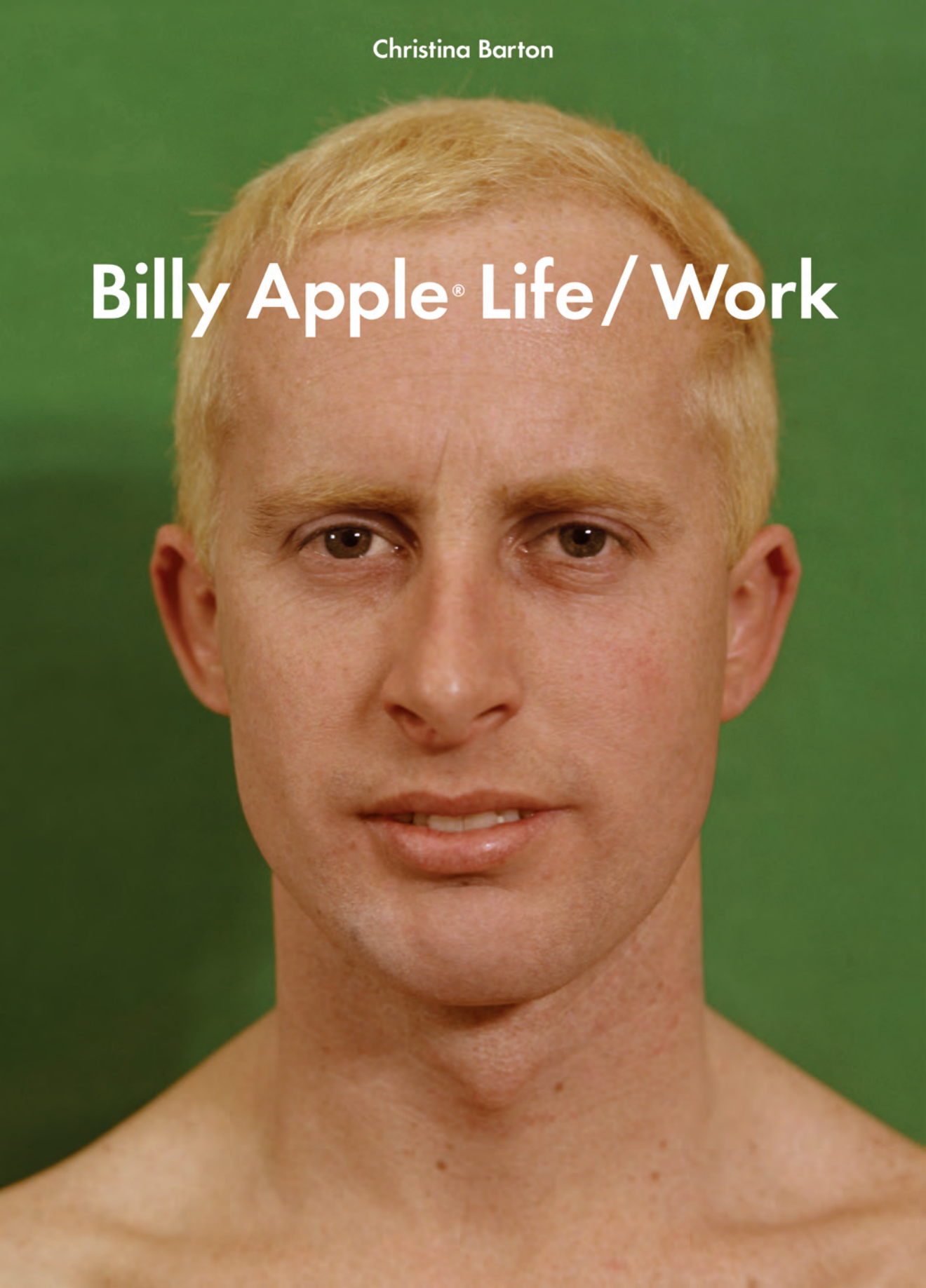
Christina Barton

Billy Apple® Life / Work



Billy Apple® Life / Work

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AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Chapter One

1935–1963
From Barrie Bates to Billy Apple

Billy Apple at the *Young Contemporaries* annual exhibition, RBA Galleries, London, 1961, silver gelatin print, Billy Apple® Archive

1935–1963
From Barrie Bates to Billy Apple

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.[1]
—Oscar Wilde

Billy Apple was born Barrie George Bates at 6.15 a.m. on the last day of December 1935 in Auckland, New Zealand.[2] His parents were of modest means. Their first home was a state house at 27 Peach Parade in the suburb of Remuera, adjacent to the Ellerslie racecourse just south of the central city.[3] They moved in 1943 to a property at 57 Reihana Street in Ōrākei, another working-class enclave. Albert, his father, was a first-generation New Zealander of English stock. He was a telephone exchange mechanician for New Zealand Post & Telegraph by day, but had a great love of sport and was a self-taught masseur with a set-up at home for sportspeople who could come and be manipulated. He helped out with the boxing on offer at Boystown (a venue for underprivileged kids in the inner city) and was good enough to be selected as the masseur for the New Zealand boxing team at the British Empire Games that were held in Auckland in 1950. He also painted seascapes in watercolour as a hobby and encouraged his son's artistic endeavours, going so far as to enrol him in drawing classes on Saturday mornings at Elam School of Fine Arts from the age of eight. At an even earlier age, Apple recalls instructing his father to make a simple construction from a piece of wood and two differently sized nails. He describes this as representing father and son standing at a public urinal (one he had visited at the top of Durham Lane West in central Auckland), a scene for some reason the boy was determined to capture, which he now thinks of as his earliest sculpture.[4]

His mother, Marija (née Petrie), was a New Zealand-born Croatian. She was homemaker to the family of three sons and one daughter (Apple was the oldest). In this role she was meticulous and she always dressed impeccably with an eye for what was fashionable, using a dressmaker to sew her clothes so she could look smarter than the family's income would otherwise allow. Her strictures about keeping clean and tidy meant Apple lived without the usual mess of toys and books,

1 Oscar Wilde, 'The Preface', *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890, full text online at www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm, accessed 30 June 2016.

2 Although Apple was born Barrie Bates, I shall use 'Billy Apple' throughout this text to avoid confusion and because this is the name the artist now ascribes to his entire output. The exact details of the time and date of his birth are contained in a letter from his mother dated 29 January [1961]. The artist probably sought this information in preparation for applying for a Harkness Fellowship in November 1961. Mary [Marija] Bates, handwritten letter to Barrie Bates, artist's archive.

3 From the 1930s, the New Zealand government, fulfilling its mission to provide affordable housing for all New Zealanders, embarked on a programme to intersperse low-cost, state-owned social housing into affluent suburbs like Remuera.

4 This account of Apple's childhood is compiled over several years through many conversations with Apple and his partner, Mary Morrison, and from taped interviews I conducted with the artist (in August 2011). It also draws from the account by Erl Chesterman in his master's thesis, 'Billy Apple: The Connections Between Advertising and his Art: Whose Line Is It Anyway?' (University of Auckland, 1999), especially chapter one: 'Student Days in New Zealand', pp. 1–13; and from videotaped interviews included in Leanne Pooley's documentary *Being Billy Apple*, Spacific Films, 2007.

and he was not allowed to play like normal children, resorting to the kitchen cupboards to find packaged goods he could arrange for fun. With so few distractions, he had time on his hands to give free rein to his imagination. He remembers sitting on his bed in his bare room looking out through the window and counting the bricks on the house next door, and sneaking out to steal a small pot of brilliant turquoise paint and a brush from a neighbour's garage to paint the small, maroon-coloured wooden door that gave access to the subfloor basement of his family property, an act he calls his first painting.

Apple's mother's obsession with order was likely symptomatic of the stress of being at home alone with four small children. From the age of three until well into his teens, Apple was sent for lenghty stays with his father's sister and her family, the Merritts, in Rūātoki, a predominantly Tūhoe rural community at the base of the Urewera valley in the pastoral hinterland of the central North Island. This was a happy time, when he formed a lasting friendship with his cousin Cherry. Later, as a teenager, he took over a small shed in the family's Auckland backyard where he set up a makeshift laboratory. He brought home chemicals stolen from school or purchased in the city and mixed them to produce 'funny colours' and explosive reactions that were experimental rather than strictly scientific.[5] His other forms of escape were bike racing – a sport he undertook competitively until he turned nineteen, working on his bicycle to improve its looks and performance and relishing the long training rides – and motorsport, when he spent many hours helping on the circuit at Ardmore, the converted airstrip that was home to the New Zealand Grand Prix, intrigued by the mechanics, design and branding of the high-performance cars that raced there.

As Apple tells it, he was a loner who had a difficult time at school. His earliest memories include finding a hiding place under the floor of his classroom and 'bunking' there

Billy Apple with his parents, Auckland, c. 1937, silver gelatin print, Billy Apple® Archive

Reconstruction of Billy Apple's first 'sculpture', made by his father on Apple's instruction, c. 1940/c. 1993, timber and two nails (photo: Jennifer French), Billy Apple® Archive

as often as he could, and having his father intervene to warn off the bullies who were teasing him.[6] At high school, though disinclined to study, he demonstrated an aptitude for drawing and, due to his personal curiosity, to his teacher Len Castle's surprise he topped his class in chemistry. Looking back on his three years at Mount Albert Grammar School (1949–51), the one thing he says he learnt was how to get around the system. This he achieved by convincing the principal that he should be allowed to arrive late and leave early, to avoid the ribbing he would otherwise receive from his classmates.

Leaving college at fifteen without formal qualifications, he spent his first year living with his grandparents and helping out around their property in Mount Albert, taking pride in mowing the lawns with dead-straight precision.[7] After he abandoned plans to undertake an engineering apprenticeship, Apple's first job, in 1953, was as a laboratory technician at a paint factory in Fanshawe Street in the central city, which, as Erl Chesterman notes, suited both his artistic and scientific aptitudes.[8] At Austral Super Paints, Apple spent his time mixing pigments in the large paint vats, producing samples for the company's colour range and undertaking viscosity tests. Though he distinguished himself by devising a system that standardised the colour mixing process, his career here was short-lived, especially since he lacked any formal qualifications as a chemist. But his love of colour and contemporary style found an outlet at home when he helped his mother to decorate and modernise their Ōrākei home, replacing the front door and painting the interior 'forest green' – a colour he mixed himself – to offset her pink-and-blue Poole china dinner service and a Danish-designed table and chairs from Brenner's, one of the few outlets for modern design in Auckland.

Assisted by Alan Stonehouse, a neighbour who owned a silk-screening studio used by local graphic designers and who knew everyone in the business, Apple secured his first position in the advertising world as a messenger for Charles Haines. He quickly went on to find short-term appointments and freelance work with various agencies. By the time he left New Zealand in 1959 he had undertaken assignments for Carlton Carruthers du Chateau and King, W. Haythornthwaite, and Cassells Advertising and Commercial Art Services. These agencies were staffed by talented artists like Linwood Lipanovic, Arthur Thompson, Nobby Clark and Ron Stenberg, to whom Apple gravitated. For a time Apple shared an office with Thompson and Lipanovic in an old house in Hobson Street in central Auckland.[9]

In 1956, Apple joined the Farmers' Trading Company, one of New Zealand's major retailers, as a trainee graphic designer in their advertising department. During his time with Farmers, among other assignments, including preparing newspaper copy and the marketing materials for in-store displays, Apple redesigned the company's trademark corporate nameplate. His jaunty 'Western'-style logotype remained a key identifier of the stores until the late 1980s, when the company was taken over by Chase Corporation and it was replaced with the classic Swiss Helvetica typeface in their later effort to update and sophisticate the brand.

5 See Apple's comments in John Harlow, 'Backyard Chemistry Leads to Way-out Art', *New Zealand Herald*, Saturday, 22 March 1969, magazine section.

6 Apple first attended Cornwall Park District School, then from 1943, Orakei Primary School.

7 An undated newspaper clipping in the artist's archive states that B. G. Bates passed the preliminary examinations for the diploma of fine arts offered by Elam School of Fine Arts in four subjects: drawing from the common object, design in colour, painting from still life, and Roman lettering. This could only have been after 1950 once the school became part of the University of Auckland and established this qualification. Apple sat for these in his final year at school (1951), but chose not to pursue further study.

8 Chesterman, 'Billy Apple', p. 3.

9 It was here that he worked on the competition to design the graphics for Auckland's Easter Show, which, to the surprise of some of his colleagues, he won in 1957. Conversation with the artist, 28 October 2011.

Polaroid of subfloor door at 27 Peach Parade, Remuera, Auckland, the scene of the artist's first 'painting' in the early 1940s, taken by the artist in c. 1993, Billy Apple® Archive

This retail giant, whose multi-level store on Hobson Street was a highly visible Auckland landmark, is a fascinating analogue for the transformations New Zealand was undergoing as it moved forward into the modern era. The Farmers' Trading Company was founded by Robert Laidlaw in 1909 as a mail-order business servicing rural customers, but by the 1950s Farmers had grown into a much-loved institution with 'friendly family stores' in urban centres throughout the country, offering everything from underwear to household appliances, with a 'satisfaction-or-your-money-back guarantee' – the first of its kind in New Zealand.[10]

Such were the signs of postwar prosperity, urban expansion and emerging consumerism that shaped Apple's early career in Auckland. His work in advertising – notably posters for Auckland's Easter Show and TEAL (the national carrier for trans-Tasman air travel), and a neon sign, logo and menu for the Bel-Air Restaurant – served the needs of an expanding economy and are suggestive of new urban lifestyles and the possibilities offered by advancing technology to improve and streamline domestic life.[11] In their visual succinctness and witty panache they also identify the artist as a precocious talent who learnt quickly from the very best in the business.[12] This is verified by recent arrival Kees Hos, a Dutch artist specialising in printmaking, who, with his wife Tine, opened the New Vision Craft Centre in Takapuna in 1957 and briefly taught at Elam. He singled Apple out for the 'economy and efficiency' of his designs, and as one of a select few seeking to raise the standards of this art form in a field expected only to satisfy the 'lowest denominator'.[13] As a keen modernist, Hos was in a good position to judge Apple's abilities; indeed, he used the occasion to call for clean and simple (read contemporary) design standards as a 'social necessity' sorely lacking in 'young New Zealand'.[14]

Apple started out on his professional career at a time when commercial artists were absorbing new trends in contemporary design and beginning to advocate modernist aesthetic values, to the extent that poster design, like art in general, registered a shift from representational modes of depiction to abstract graphics that used typography and stylised visuals to convey their messages. This was made possible through greater exposure to international developments, with the postwar influx of European émigrés – especially Dutch, German and Eastern Europeans – who brought a continental sophistication into the cultural scene, and because of increased ease of travel and the arrival of good-quality European and American publications.

Despite his lack of formal education, Apple soaked up what he could of this new atmosphere, early on manifesting an ambition to rise above the local norm and match his work to that of his international peers. In this he achieved some small success. For example, his design work was included in the *Art in Advertising* exhibition staged at the Auckland Society of Arts in 1959, and his posters were selected for publication in the 1958–59 edition of *Modern Publicity* and the 1960 edition of the *International Poster Annual*, two prestigious international

Business card, Bel-Air Restaurant, Auckland, 1958, Billy Apple® Archive

journals published in Switzerland, the capital of advanced typography and design.

The nature of his efforts is intriguingly alluded to in a letter from a friend and professional photographer, Leon Lesnie, writing from Auckland in 1961 to Apple, by then a student at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London:

> Advertising & TV here smell. Not many opportunities open, & even fewer openings for INITIATIVE or TALENT … As for your graphics – nothing, boy, the big round zero … overseas design-graphics-advertising is about 30 years behind, man, & I've really looked into this. . . . The hippest agencies here use pix and layouts from, at the nearest, Sydney, but mainly Europe or the USA … I think you'll agree with me that it just isn't worth my time, expense, & sweat to help pull this lousy country onto its great bloody webbed feet advertising-wise with the advanced ideas I know I have. Let them screw along in their own antipodal fashion. AND the same applies to you. Brother, you'd starve before you put over any ideas or formats here![15]

Lesnie is an interesting character who emerges in his letters as a lively man-about-town. He had travelled overseas and, on his return, worked as a designer for the *New Zealand Herald* and freelanced as a fashion photographer.[16] From his correspondence with Apple we glean the shy boy had found a milieu in which he felt comfortable: one that was full of parties, drinking and sexual encounters, where he could mould an identity based on how he dressed, what music he listened to, which movies he watched, and whom he hung out with at the pubs and coffee bars of the inner city. Others who lived through this era have captured the excitement of the scene in Auckland in the 1950s, where artists, architects, poets, musicians and other bohemian characters created a social life to accompany their efforts to evade the suffocating narrowness of New Zealand society and grasp the possibilities of contemporary life as it was taking shape in the nascent modern metropolis.[17]

Despite Lesnie's characterisation of the situation in 1961 for commercial artists with advanced ideas, it is fair to say that things had improved and Apple was a beneficiary, through his access to the best working designers and his enrolment in evening classes at Elam and the Auckland City Art Gallery. With Elam's incorporation into the University of Auckland in 1950 and the establishment of a diploma course, new emphasis was placed on design as a means to attract students and prepare them for future employment (in reality few artists could support themselves as purely 'fine' artists). The head of Elam, Archibald Fisher, a firm believer in the essential role of good drawing, had introduced the teaching of lettering and design into the programme, with a view to training students specifically for fashion and poster work and magazine and newspaper illustration. This instruction gained further stimulus through the appointment in 1954 of Michael Nicholson as lecturer in design. Nicholson came from an extended English family of modern artists, among them Ben and William Nicholson,

10 See the Farmers advertisement designed by Billy Apple and published in the *Auckland Star* on 26 December 1956, reproduced in Chesterman, 'Billy Apple', fig. 1.

11 The Easter Show was the local Agricultural & Pastoral Association's annual showcase for handmade goods and produce that displayed the home-making and farming skills of the Auckland district as an entertaining diversion for city-dwellers.

12 Hamish Thompson notes that designers like Linwood Lipanovic, Arthur Thompson, Nobby Clark and George Moore, all of whom were employed by Bill Haythornthwaite, and who together worked on the influential TEAL contract, brought poster design to a pinnacle in the 1950s. See Thompson, *Paste Up: A Century of New Zealand Poster Art*, Godwit, Auckland, 2003, p. 9.

13 Kas [sic] Hos, 'Barrie Bates: Painter or Designer?', *Home and Building*, 1 July 1959, pp. 52–53, 87–89.

14 Ibid.

15 Leon Lesnie, letter to Billy Apple, 14 July 1961, typescript, artist's archive.

16 Lesnie died tragically after a fall from a balcony in 1962. He was only twenty-five.

17 See Anna Hoffmann, *Tales of Anna Hoffmann*, parts one and two, Bumper Books, Auckland, 1998, 1999.

and had studied at London's Central School of Art and Design. He was appointed to develop a diploma course in design, taking a cross-disciplinary approach based on the Bauhaus model which drew on the resources of the schools of art and architecture. He was a lively and provocative figure, who quickly aligned himself with advanced artists like Colin McCahon, Louise Henderson and Milan Mrkusich, and with them (and others) staged ground-breaking shows: *Object and Image* (1954) and *Unit Two* (1955) at the Auckland City Art Gallery. Typical of his practice was the 'ultra-modern' mural *Coloured Light Modulator*, which was commissioned for the Trieste Coffee Lounge in Wakefield Street, one of the new breed of coffee bars that offered a convivial and stylish meeting place for an emerging generation of urban sophisticates.

In 1957, Nicholson was joined by another Englishman. Born in 1929 and a graduate of the RCA, Robert Ellis came from a post at the Yeovil School of Art in Somerset, where he had been teaching since 1952, and went on to head the design department after Nicholson left for Sydney in 1959. According to arts critic John Daly-Peoples, under Ellis's leadership new emphasis was placed on typography and printing processes and 'there was more awareness of the need to develop creative ways of seeing'.[18] Ellis also made his mark as a painter of considerable talent, with a graphic approach to his urban subject matter that was clearly in line with modernist moves away from conventional depiction. Apple was not taught by Ellis,[19] but he looked to him as a serious modern artist and an encouraging mentor whose manner of painting he emulated.[20]

At Elam, Apple's aspirations to be an artist were nurtured. In addition to his commercial work he made pencil and gouache drawings of various observed and imagined subjects, most often men, women and children standing in isolated and awkward poses, with darkened and accentuated eye sockets, staring towards the viewer, all rendered in sketchy and angular pencil lines against roughly brushed areas of smudgy colour and juxtaposed among the fragmentary traces of their urban and rural settings.[21] As Kees Hos observed, these were in striking contrast to Apple's graphic work, demonstrating an expressive intensity suggestive of inner turmoil (what Hos calls 'strong forces and emotions of fear and solitude') that was belied by the young artist's savvy posters, but which accorded with contemporary understandings of what constituted a unique artistic vision.[22] As well as showcasing his poster work, Apple had shown examples of these drawings in the annual exhibitions of the Auckland Society of Arts, where on at least two occasions they were singled out for favourable mention.[23]

In their figurative focus and anxious intensity, these works bear little relation to the landscape tradition that had been granted striking new life by Colin McCahon, M. T. (Toss) Woollaston and Rita Angus in the 1940s and 1950s. Nor do they owe any overt debt to the constructive logic of an older artist like John Weeks – who, as a teacher at Elam and as a practising artist, had inculcated a semi-abstract formalism based on his admiration for Cézanne and his studies with André Lhote, whose atelier in Paris was a popular destination for

18 John Daly-Peoples, *Elam 1890–1990*, Auckland, 1990, quoted in Chesterman, 'Billy Apple', p. 3.

19 Apple was instructed in life drawing by A. W. S. ('Mac') McLaren and introduced to lithography by Michael Nicholson.

20 See H. M., 'Art Exhibition Shows Little Sign of Spring', [*New Zealand Herald*, 1958]. This undated newspaper clipping links Apple to Ellis; the reviewer writes: 'Ellis' method of placing figures in a spacious scene is followed by Barry [sic] Bates in "Quay Street Cleaner".' Artist's archive.

21 One group of drawings was undertaken on a visit to Te Rangiita marae at Nukuhau Pā near Taupō on one of Apple's road trips to visit his aunt in Rūātoki; they show isolated single figures and small groups of adults and children with quick sketches of old houses and vehicles surrounded by broad areas of bright, mixed colour broadly applied to the surface of the paper.

22 Hos, 'Barrie Bates', p. 89.

23 Undated newspaper clippings, artist's archive.

24 Mark Young, 'Painting 1950–1967', in Hamish Keith, Peter Tomory and Mark Young, *New Zealand Art: Painting 1827–1967*, A. H. & A. W. Reed, Auckland, 1968, p. 4.

aspiring artists in the 1920s and 1930s – or the painters who clustered around him. Indeed, it is hard to place their influences. Apple's subjects, with their worked-over outlines and awkward compositional arrangements, owe more to the early figurative paintings of Robert Ellis, which in turn demonstrate the influence of his teachers at the RCA: Francis Bacon and Henry Moore. This style was closer in kind to some of the work beginning to be shown at the Auckland City Art Gallery under the directorship of Eric Westbrook (1952–56) and then Peter Tomory (1956–64), both of whom sought to drag the institution into the twentieth century by staging exhibitions of international contemporary art from Britain, Europe, America, Australia and Japan, as well as from around New Zealand.

In the 1950s Apple would have been exposed to the sculptures of Henry Moore, drawings by Polish-born British social realist Josef Herman, and prints from the École de Paris, all in 1956. If he had visited the gallery in 1957 and 1958 he would have seen Georges Rouault's *Miserere* series; the biting social observations of Australian artists Charles Blackman, John Brack, Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan; and Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi's *Hiroshima Panels*. These would have fed the new outlook which poet and writer Mark Young identified in 1968 as stemming specifically from the urban environment that he characterised as the driving inspiration for artists of the 1950s and 1960s. He noted that 'intensive urban development [had] produced painters who [were] concerned primarily with the mental landscape or the universality of human relationships and tensions'.[24] This is very much in line with Apple's alienated and fretful approach to the surroundings he grew up in and from which he was attempting to distance himself.

Untitled, c. 1957, gouache on paper, 190 × 280 mm, artist's collection

The stark split between these personal drawings and Apple's work in advertising exemplifies the discreteness of the two worlds of art and design as they were understood in the 1950s. Despite the tertiary qualifications in design offered by Elam and efforts to raise its aesthetic standards, entrenched attitudes relegated commercial art to the status of technical skill rather than the special gift of the 'true' artist.[25] Kees Hos betrays such prejudice in his article on Apple, when he opposes art and design as a 'hopeless struggle between freedom and responsibility', with the commercial artist's creative individuality compromised by having to work to

Poster, Vocational Guidance Association, c. 1958, Billy Apple® Archive

a client's brief. He ends his essay by asking: 'will he surrender and let himself be commercialised . . . or stay independent, free and true . . . ?', leaving the reader with a clear sense of what was at stake.[26] Yet, it is exactly this dilemma that Apple had begun to tackle in his practice and which forms the basis of his ultimate contribution to contemporary art history. While he was willing at this early point to keep the two trajectories separate, there are signs even here that his working procedures would complicate any too-easy determination of their distinctiveness and question the hierarchy of values that favoured one over the other.

For already Apple's efforts to develop a new, pared-back aesthetic that entailed the use of simple visual cues to convey key messages to capture the essence of the brand were propelled by a desire to push local design towards the international cutting edge. He was thus treating such work with absolute seriousness; this was no soulless meal ticket, but creative endeavour of a high order. No clearer sign of his ambitions is the unusual inclusion in even these early designs of his name as a prominent graphic element. That Apple should insist a lowly poster, menu or business card be identifiably 'authored' is a sure sign that he would not surrender to the anonymity expected of the commercial artist. Equally, the willingness with which he embraced the challenges posed by client-driven projects suggests that he was prepared to relinquish the so-called freedom of the creative artist. Rather than fear the compromises of commercial work, the young man seemed to accept the necessity of '[playing] many different roles in many different styles', as Hos described it. Thus, his relation to both high and low art forms was self-consciously equivocal. It is fitting, perhaps, that the poster he designed for the Vocational Guidance Association (c. 1958) shows an anthropomorphised 'square peg in a round hole'. Was this recalcitrant schoolboy an unconscious self-portrait of an artist well aware of the complexities entailed in his pursuit of the twin trajectories of his emerging practice?[27]

Working on the fringes of the art school and finding his feet amongst Auckland's design fraternity set Apple on his career path and propelled him into a creative scene that was a striking contrast to his parents' world, and the rough-and-tumble of a childhood in suburban New Zealand. As was natural for any ambitious young artist in this era, Apple set his sights on Britain as a better place to further his career. In late 1958, with the urging and assistance of Robert Ellis, he prepared a portfolio to accompany an application for the diploma course in graphic design at the Royal College of Art, and applied to the National Art Gallery in Wellington for its annual travelling scholarship, which was then being offered to hopeful artists seeking to gain international experience. In his letter of support, Ellis described Apple as 'one of New Zealand's most promising young artist/designers having not only a natural ability to quickly master a variety of media, but also considerable sensitivity as a creative artist', praising him as a 'shrewd, businesslike and talented' individual who would 'make full use' of the opportunity to 'further his knowledge and develop even further his ability as a designer'.[28]

25 Evidence of the improving status of commercial art in Auckland in the 1950s includes the fact that the Auckland Society of Arts regularly made space for applied and commercial arts (aided perhaps by the fact that designer Ron Stenberg was on the ASA committee). And Auckland City Art Gallery, through the efforts of its first professional director, the 'entrepreneurial' Eric Westbrook, staged an exhibition of advertising art in 1953, which proved a popular success and aided his campaign to make the gallery a relevant and vital contemporary institution. See Charles Brasch's characterisation of Eric Westbrook: 'Art Gallery Policy', *Landfall*, vol. 3, no. 2 (June 1949), pp. 298–301.

26 Hos, 'Barrie Bates'.

27 This poster design was submitted to an international competition in Belgium in August 1958 where it was awarded third place. See John Weeks, letter in support of Billy Apple [Barrie Bates]'s application for the 1959 travelling scholarship, to E. Hogarth-Hill, National Art Gallery, Wellington, dated 4 February 1959, Te Papa Archive, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

28 Robert Ellis, letter to E. Hogarth-Hill, National Art Gallery, 15 February 1959, Te Papa Archive.

Billy Apple (left) with his friend, Trevor Morris, Auckland, c. 1958, silver gelatin print, Billy Apple® Archive

This, however, was not sufficient for the judges in Wellington (artists E. Mervyn Taylor and R. N. Field, and National Art Gallery director Stewart Maclennan), who decided not to award a scholarship for 1959, despite there being four candidates. It was only after his talents were appreciated by the RCA and Apple was accepted for the October 1959 intake that he was granted financial support by the National Art Gallery's management committee.[29] He was awarded a lesser amount of £400, a sum equivalent to that normally paid to government bursars overseas, which would be paid monthly for the three years' duration of the diploma course.[30] This was eagerly accepted by the artist, who was too afraid of losing his place to wait another year to apply again for the full scholarship.[31]

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We didn't say this is Pop Art, we just said 'This is Now'.[32]
—Allen Jones

Apple set sail on 17 July 1959, taking the *Monowai* to Sydney, where he was forced to spend a month due to a dockyard strike, then on to England on the *Fairsea*, arriving in early September. Armed with an introduction from Robert Ellis to the parents of Derek Boshier, one of his Yeovil School of Art students who had secured a place in the painting department at the RCA, Apple was kindly collected by them on his arrival at Southampton and put up at the Railway Arms, the pub they ran in Basingstoke, staying with them for a fortnight before heading on to London.[33] He set forth on the next stage of his education armed with Stewart Maclennan's advice to contact fellow New Zealanders studying in London (John Drawbridge, who was studying at the Central School of Art, and Bill Culbert, who was nearing the end of his studies at the RCA) and to seek digs near the college in South Kensington or around Gloucester Road.[34] But he now had the advantage of also knowing an English student, so he and Derek Boshier found a flat in Warwick Road in Earl's Court in time for the start of term on 30 September.

The timing of his arrival was well-nigh perfect. London was emerging from the trauma of war and the privations of rationing into an era of unprecedented affluence; its population swelling with the arrival of thousands of immigrants from Commonwealth nations and former British territories (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the West Indies, parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent), exercising their rights as British subjects before immigration laws came into force in the 1960s that were designed to curb access for unwanted foreigners, a move spurred by the extraordinarily rapid decolonisation that ended Britain's status as one of the world's great imperial nations. Though the 'swinging' scene that London became in the 1960s was not yet fully under way, the city was an exciting destination, especially for artists, designers, musicians, literary and theatre people, as well as all the popular tastemakers who would make the city a hub for consumer culture. Above all, London functioned as a magnet for the young, who brought new life to the city and

29 According to the RCA registrar, J. R. P. Moon, Richard Guyatt, head of graphic design, thought Apple 'really quite outstanding in view of his virtual lack of any Art School training'. Letter dated 18 March 1959 to S. B. Maclennan, Te Papa Archive.

30 Correspondence between Billy Apple and the New Zealand government records that this amount was increased in 1960 to £500 per year after Apple made a case on the basis of the high cost of the materials he needed on top of his basic living expenses. Letter from Apple [Bates] to unidentified correspondent, Te Papa Archive.

31 See the exchange of letters between Stewart Maclennan (12 March 1959) and Apple [Barrie Bates] (16 March 1959), Te Papa Archive.

32 Allen Jones, quoted in Robert Brown, 'Conversation with Allen Jones July 2013', in Marco Livingstone and Amanda Lo Iacano, *When Britain Went Pop: British Pop Art: The Early Years*, Christie's Mayfair, London, 2013, p. 303.

33 Details concerning Apple's stay with the Boshiers were provided by Derek Boshier. Email to author, 2001.

34 Maclennan was a graduate of the college. See Maclennan's letter to Apple [Bates], 4 May 1959, Te Papa Archive.

35 Youthful protesters also made up the numbers of those protesting in CND rallies against the nuclear arms race, a product of the cold war, that were also a feature of life in London in the 1950s and 1960s.

36 Wystan Curnow notes the impact of shows like the Jackson Pollock retrospective at Whitechapel Gallery (1958) and the *New American Painting* exhibition at the Tate (1959) on the British art scene around the time Apple arrived in London. See Curnow, 'Blond Ambition: Barrie Bates to Billy Apple 1959–1963', in *Sold on Apple: The Complete Wystan Curnow Writings*, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, 2015, pp. 158–67. Apple would have missed these, but he may have seen some of the solo shows by American artists at Whitechapel Gallery: Mark Rothko (1961), Mark Tobey (1962), Philip Guston (1963) and Robert Rauschenberg (1964).

37 Apple recalls that Power purchased two works (made up of three bronzes), *William Tell Jnr* (1961), a cast and painted bronze apple with a brass arrow suction-cupped to its surface, and *Smile, Slim, We're Having Our Photo Taken* (1962), which combined his cast and painted bronze orange adjusted by the insertion of false teeth with a cast bronze half-peeled and eaten banana, which were included as Apple's contribution to the *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibition in 1961. Conversation with the artist, August 2011.

'Travel *Monowai*', Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand poster, c. 1950, reproduced by Drumahoe Graphics with permission of P&O SN Co.

whose reactions against the mores and politics of the previous generation were a defining feature of the era.[35]

For the art world, too, doors were opening, with access especially to exciting new developments emanating from the US, where the abstract expressionists were producing canvases on an unprecedented scale that eclipsed the milder forms of abstraction which had dominated British art in the 1940s. They were followed by the next generation of painters, like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who introduced the new taste for 'common-object' imagery that would soon be labelled 'pop'. While the Tate and Whitechapel galleries showcased the new American art during Apple's time in London,[36] he would also have seen such work in the private collection of electronics manufacturer Ted Power, one of the few collectors of the new art, who bought two of Apple's early bronzes.[37]

According to American art historian Thomas Crow, many in the emerging British art scene would have visited Power's Hanover Square flat:

> In that setting, the most striking impression made on young artists was the fact that a single painting could occupy the entire wall from floor to ceiling. For them, the sheer physical impact of the canvases invited comparisons with the cinema screen, or with the architectural environment, encouraging modes of attention that slipped sideways into place and context.[38]

After the war, the RCA attracted an older, more assured and experienced cohort of students, some of whom had been called up for military service. Being a graduate school, students were already qualified, knowledgeable and opinionated; and given the college's reputation as one of London's more prestigious art schools, applicants came not only from every corner of Great Britain but also from throughout the Commonwealth. In many commentators' eyes the 1950s and 1960s were the RCA's heyday, with the 'pop generation' – Apple's cohort, which included Derek Boshier, David Hockney, Allen Jones, Peter Phillips, Pauline Boty (who enrolled in 1958), R. B. Kitaj and Patrick Caulfield (who first enrolled in 1960) – at the vanguard of what would become known as the 'third wave' of this new artistic development.[39]

Robin Darwin, the college rector between 1948 and 1971, had restructured the school to revitalise its teaching: bringing in more part-time teachers who were practising artists and a string of visiting lecturers; opening the way to cross-disciplinary linkages between departments; instituting a 'general studies' course that encouraged students to develop knowledge of 'ideas that have shaped the modern world'; easing the hierarchical divisions between fine art and design; and expanding course offerings by the introduction of new media such as film and television, which were first taught in 1958.[40] He was aided by energetic and forward-thinking teachers like Carel Weight, who headed the painting department and was responsible for founding the annual *Young Contemporaries* exhibitions in 1949, thus launching an important platform for emerging talent. Richard Hamilton, a well-respected artist who had been a leading participant in the Independent Group – a gathering of artists, architects, critics and writers who had paved the way for pop art's embrace of mass culture in their discussions and exhibitions at London's Institute of Contemporary Art between 1952 and 1956 – worked part-time in interior design; and Richard Guyatt, who was responsible in 1948 for revamping the various courses associated with typography and 'publicity', ran the new School of Graphic Design.

In addition, the student magazine *Ark*, the college's annual contributions to the student exhibitions that showcased the best work from London's various art colleges, and the many guest lectures, jazz sessions, film screenings and social events all encouraged a permeability between the

38 Thomas Crow, 'London Calling: The Sixties Art Scene in London', *Artforum*, vol. 31, no. 10 (Summer 1993), pp. 80–85.

39 See Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop', in Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art* (1966), Thames & Hudson, London, 1996, pp. 27–28. Through his writing and work as assistant director at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), Lawrence Alloway was a key figure in the definition and characterisation of pop art, both before and after he left London to take up the position of curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in mid-1962. He was one of the first to develop a history of British pop that divided its development into three waves: the first being Eduardo Paolozzi and others who were involved with the Independent Group and the discussions and exhibitions they staged at the ICA; the second being painters like Peter Blake, Robyn Denny and Richard Smith; and the third being the 1959–62 intake at the RCA.

40 See *Royal College of Art Calendar*, 1962, RCA archive, London.

school and the outside world, blurring boundaries between art and the broader culture and fostering relationships with the professional art and design scenes that enabled students access to industry leaders, critics, dealers and collectors. Alumni such as Peter Blake and Richard Smith retained contact with the college and regularly came to see what the current crop of students were doing, as did the influential critic Lawrence Alloway. Not only was the school located in an exciting metropolis that was at once a thriving commercial hub and a cultural showcase of the highest order, but also, through a system of summer internships and assisted travel, students were able to gain professional experience and access to the wider art scenes in England, on the Continent and in the US.[41]

Apple's reports back to the New Zealand government reinforce these broad characterisations of the RCA and provide specific details about his studies.[42] For example, he notes the assistance of painting tutors Carel Weight and Ceri Richards; lists visitors like the American artist Larry Rivers and designers Charles Eames, Saul Bass, Robert ('BJ') Brownjohn and Bob Gill as stimulating guest lecturers; outlines various internships that enabled him to work in advertising agencies both in London and New York; and describes his trips around Europe and to New York. These contacts and opportunities proved invaluable. In particular, an invitation from Bob Gill to work over the 1960–61 Christmas period was a vital stimulus.[43] Gill had moved from the US in 1960 and was then working as creative director at Charles Hobson's agency on Conduit Street in London. Here Apple learnt 'at first-hand how large communicative problems are solved not by pushing a pencil over paper, and hoping for a solution to appear, but thinking of the idea, before putting the pencil to paper'.[44] Apple also attended the evening classes Gill ran in his graphic workshop, gaining confidence in his thinking and practising his graphic skills under Gill's guidance. It was Gill who encouraged Apple to go to New York, the source of the new conceptual thinking that was galvanising the design world. Apple followed his advice and over the summer of 1961 he spent six weeks interning at Sudler, Hennessey & Lubalin, one of the leading agencies on Madison Avenue. This was one of the studios spearheading the 'golden age' of American advertising, which ambitious young designers flocked to as a sure means to establish themselves in the industry. Here Apple came into contact with Herb Lubalin, one of the best graphic designers of the day, who taught him about the visual semiotics of typography and how to put words together with pictures to communicate ideas.

Overall, the impression gained of the RCA at this time is of a prevailing pragmatism, where skills and knowledge were developed, along with critical thinking and individual creativity, regardless of the subject in which a student was specialising. This was certainly true in Apple's case. Though enrolled in graphic design, he was given a special dispensation by Richard Guyatt to use the resources of all the college departments, a rare opportunity that was crucial to the development of his practice, as it taught him the invaluable lesson that he could develop an

41 At the end of the first term, in April 1960, Apple travelled to Spain, and over the summer of that year he toured France, Switzerland and Germany. In April of his final year he visited his mother's family in what was then Yugoslavia. In addition he spent the summers of 1961 and 1962 in New York City. (His visits to New York are discussed in more detail on pp. 53–56, 65.)

42 At the end of each term Apple was required to supply a written report in fulfilment of the requirements of his government bursary. These are now held in the Te Papa Archive and provide valuable information about Apple's experiences at the RCA. But the viewpoints expressed, that vary considerably over the three years of his study, should not be relied upon as verbatim, as he often had friends write the reports, allowing them considerable latitude to say what they liked. While it is unclear to what extent these texts paraphrase Apple's thinking or are works of fiction, they conform closely to his emerging practice of outsourcing the manufacture of all his outputs.

43 This internship was enabled by the 'Creative Circle', a group of advertising and business people who provided work experience for students between terms. See Billy Apple [Barrie Bates], 'Progress and Activities Report of the Third Term at the School of Graphic Design, Royal College of Art', [1960], typescript, Te Papa Archive.

44 See Billy Apple [Barrie Bates], 'Progress and Activities Report of First Term, Second Year at the School of Graphic Design, Royal College of Art', [1961], typescript, Te Papa Archive. Typically, Apple remembers asking one of the illustrators (Charlie Watts, who would go on to become drummer for the Rolling Stones) who worked at the agency in what they called the 'bullpen' to draw him a men's tie with a Union Jack on it. Conversation with the artist, December 2016.

Untitled, 1960, gouache on paper,
280 × 190 mm, artist's collection

idea and then find the appropriate technical expertise to realise it in whatever relevant medium. This exception ensured he could continue to develop both his design work and his fine-art practice and produce everything from advertising and poster work to sculptures, paintings, photographs and prints, all of which tested available media and explored their suitability as vehicles to convey his thinking. Indeed, making use of other people's skills and experimenting with different materials and processes quickly became his modus operandi.

Of course, it was not always easy for the artist. In his first year he remembers feeling very homesick, and the drawings in the notebook he kept on his first trip to Europe register a deepening sense of alienation as he was confronted by the barriers of language and cultural difference.[45] No doubt being from New Zealand was an impediment, especially in the face of British class and cultural snobbery. As a consequence, he made friends with others from outside London: Derek Boshier, David Hockney and another painting student, Reg Fisher, who, like him, were 'provincials' of modest means or from working-class backgrounds, and at the same time he attempted to downplay his antipodean origins. His reports home reveal him vacillating between developing a career in design or seeking to become a serious artist; a dilemma that was still an issue, despite changes to the college curriculum, because fine art retained its pre-eminent position above the other creative disciplines. His indecision is confirmed by Apple's teachers in internal correspondence compiled in his student file. In a memo dated 30 October 1961 the assistant registrar wrote:

> [Apple] has a personality which will always put people's backs up and I think it is interesting that whereas he will, if allowed, sit for hours wasting Andrew Vernay's, Franki's and my time discussing his ideas for the future and his inmost thoughts about his work and his life, he obviously cannot talk to people who know about his subjects and therefore are in a position to criticise. In fact, he has an outsize inferiority complex and this results, as it does in many people, in making him self-opinionated, rude and his own worst enemy.[46]

Likewise, Michael Kullman – who was responsible for the general studies course that all students were required to complete – called him 'difficult', but put this down to the fact that Apple was dealing with a personal 'crisis' caused by his late decision to change direction from advertising to, as Apple put it, being an 'Ideas Man'.[47] Even Guyatt, who was Apple's strongest ally, calling him his 'private pin-up boy', admitted to Robin Darwin that he was 'the only member of the entire staff, including craftsmen' who warmed to his student, stating that 'on all accounts [Apple was] the most abominable pain in the neck to everyone'.[48] Yet, these tough evaluations were tempered with recognition that Apple was, in Kullman's words, a 'worthwhile and stimulating student'.[49] And after encouraging Apple to stay on when he threatened to go home, counselling him that if he went back to New Zealand he would never return,

45 Artist's sketchbook titled 'My Trip Book', artist's archive.

46 Memo from assistant registrar to registrar, 30 October 1961. Typescript, Barrie Bates student file, RCA student records, RCA, London. I am grateful to Anthony Byrt for access to this and other correspondence in Apple's file. Byrt visited the archive and made copies of these memos in May 2017.

47 Memo from Michael Kullman to the registrar, 6 February 1962. Typescript, Barrie Bates student file, RCA student records.

48 Memo from Richard Guyatt to the registrar, 16 May 1960. Typescript, Barrie Bates student file, RCA student records.

49 Memo from Kullman to registrar, 6 February 1962.

Guyatt helped him knuckle down to see out his studies, noting at the end of his second year that he had become 'the quirky star turn of the school'.[50]

As Apple became accustomed to London he realised the potential it offered for reinvention. He started to style himself as an American: getting a crew cut, wearing Brooks Brothers button-down shirts, Keds sneakers and drip-dry suits, and cultivating the tastes of his Beat generation – American jazz, novels and movies – though the look he achieved was more Ivy League than bohemian.[51] Just as Leon Lesnie had written to Apple from New Zealand complaining about Auckland as a hopeless backwater, so Apple wrote to Lesnie from London:

> Saw the Monk [Thelonius], yesterday. Things are happening so fast I cant [sic] keep abreast. Working on all types American ads . . . need you . . . split New Zealand and the natives, man, leave, leave! . . . Can hardly wait to get some clothes . . . going N.Y. naked, returning loaded . . . if I come back (seriously).[52]

There is a photograph that shows Apple standing beside David Hockney at the wedding they attended of fellow students Michael and Maggie Adams on the Heligan estate near Mevagissey in Cornwall in October 1961, soon after they both returned from their first trip to New York, which captures well the character he was learning to convey. The two had travelled to America on a cheap chartered flight laid on specially for students during their summer vacation, spending time together as excited tourists visiting the sights, exploring the art and advertising scenes, and enjoying the nightlife. At the Long Island home of fellow RCA student Mark Berger they watched the television ad for Lady Clairol® hair dye that declared 'blondes have more fun', which led them both to test the product.[53] They stand together in this snapshot, Hockney with his bleached hair wearing a waistcoat patterned with the Union Jack, Apple with his jacket unbuttoned to show a jauntily striped version, his trousers casually crumpled, their bottoms slightly rolled to reveal he is not wearing socks. There is a casual arrogance to the set of Apple's mouth and his sunglasses add a quotient of 'cool'. Both seem to enjoy the camera's attention, their cavalier poses belying the idea that they were posing to produce a collaborative 'self' portrait.[54]

Hockney has written that he and his peers were a 'bolshy' lot. Despite Darwin's liberal leadership and the college's increasing openness, there was still room to revolt against the system.[55] Faculty noted this rebelliousness, complaining of a lack of respect for teaching staff and a questioning of older beliefs and conventional approaches to art-making. They deplored the new generation's fascination with style, their appetite for the superficial trappings of mass (and in particular American) culture, and their raw ambition to make it in the art world, all of which were definitional of 'pop'.[56]

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50 Guyatt's student report in the RCA archive, quoted by Anthony Byrt in 'Billy Apple's Art Transactions and the Universal Human Right to Exist', *Billy Apple®: The Artist Has to Live Like Everybody Else 1961–2018*, The Mayor Gallery, London, 2018, p. 9.

51 Apple records that his favourite novel at the time was William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) and he remembers being impressed by Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men* (1957) and *The Connection* (1962), an avant-garde film by Shirley Clarke based on the stage play of the same title, which was set in one room with a group of jazz musicians including one who was a heroin addict waiting for a fix. Conversation with the artist, 4 December 2001.

52 Billy Apple [Barrie Bates], letter to Leon Lesnie [1961], typescript, artist's archive. Like all such documents, it is possible that Apple had someone else compose this letter under his direction.

53 This was coined by leading copywriter Shirley Polykoff for Doyle Dane Bernbach's famous campaign for Clairol.

54 The constructed nature of this persona can be gleaned by comparing this photograph with a publicity shot of Apple also taken that year, on the occasion of his winning the Layton Student Award. Here the artist appears formally attired in a tidy suit and tie, his expression thoroughly demure and serious, the very image of an ambitious young achiever. All photographs are in the artist's archive.

55 Indeed, Hockney maintains that theirs was the first generation to develop a new approach to art-making that bore no relation to what had come before. For this and the previous reference, see Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney* (1976), Thames & Hudson, London, 1984, p. 42.

56 For accounts of the RCA in these years, see Christopher Frayling, *Art and Design: 100 Years at the Royal College of Art*, Collins & Brown & Richard Dennis Publications, London, 1999 (especially pp. 158–76), and Paul Huxley (ed.), *Exhibition Road: Painters at the Royal College of Art*, Phaidon & Christie's, London, 1988, especially Marco Livingstone, 'Prototypes of Pop', pp. 41–53.

Billy Apple (right) and David Hockney, Mevagissey, Cornwall, October 1961, silver gelatin print (photo: Ron Fuller), Billy Apple® Archive

Poster, *Shelly Manne and His Men Play Peter Gunn*, RCA Jazz Society, c. 1960, offset lithograph on paper, Billy Apple® Archive

With Apple exposed to the stimulus of the RCA and the doors it opened onto the world, his design work developed in leaps and bounds. He exercised himself by producing quickly conceived and executed posters for in-house events, loosening his style and playing with simple graphic forms that would capture the attention of passers-by even if they were pinned up on the college's crowded noticeboards. Relying on a simple idea to convey the message, these were typographic or hand-lettered and cleverly used the page as an active ground against which shapes could be arrayed. For example, when the college's jazz society – which Apple ran – announced it would play a new recording by well-known American jazz drummer Shelly Manne and His Men, Apple's poster consisted of no more than two boldly brushed lines above two crudely painted circles (with the details quickly penned by hand).[57] These wittily referred to the drumsticks Manne played, but toyed with the synergy between their appearance and the linguistic sign for an exclamation mark, using their visual effect to evoke in the viewer's mind something like a burst of sound. Or alternatively, for the Junior Common Room Election Dance, Apple drew an empty rectangle on a sheet of paper, with a caption that read 'make your mark', inviting students to draw in the box in anticipation of creating a stir on the night. Here, the artist characteristically used the polysemy of language to orchestrate a slippage between what was going on in the image and what might occur in the world, invoking a synchronicity between the visual, the linguistic and the performative to deliver his punchline.

Even though these were quickly made, sometimes only the day before the event, often on cheap paper stock and in very small print runs, Apple took this work seriously and sought and received critical attention for it, as he had done in New Zealand. In 1961, examples of these posters were published in a special report on European design in *Print Review*, the leading American graphic design journal,[58] and later that year, while in New York, he deposited examples of his work at the Museum of Modern Art.[59] His winning competition entry to the inaugural Layton Student Award, again in 1961, for an advertising campaign to sell tea, was also recognised by the *Advertiser's Weekly* and in the RCA's own review of the best of its graphic design.[60]

This project bears out Apple's working methods and points to how far his design work had come in the short time he had been in England. Riffing on the copy he conceived for the competition: 'we all love tea', he had the accoutrements of tea drinking – cup and saucer, tea caddy, teapot, teaspoon and tongs – adjusted by the metalwork and ceramics technicians at the college so that they sported a heart shape somewhere in their form (the handle of the cup, the lid of the pot, and so on). These objects were then photographed and the images juxtaposed with the headline, under which he positioned the text provided by the organisers that argued the case for the relevance of tea as a thoroughly 'modern' drink. Apple's solution to the brief entailed transforming an everyday object into a sign (the heart shape) that visually enacted a snappy phrase ('we all love tea') that seamlessly connected his audience to the product. His success depended on the

57 Apple recalls that for the jazz society he ran he relied on borrowed records from a keen jazz enthusiast, Ahmad Jarr, a friend and student at the London School of Economics who imported Blue Note records from the US and lent them one at a time for the society's sessions. Conversation with the artist, 2017.

58 See 'Top Drawer: Design by Music', *Print Review*, vol. 15, no. 11 (March/April 1961), p. 14.

59 See Apple's 'Progress and Activities Report of Third Term, Second Year at the School of Graphic Design, Royal College of Art', 21 October 1961 (typescript, Te Papa Archive), in which he notes, 'while in New York, I had some work accepted by the Museum of Modern Art'. The fate of these works is unclear, as no record of work by Barrie Bates or Billy Apple appears in the museum's online catalogue.

60 See 'New Zealander in London wins Layton Student Prize', *Advertiser's Weekly*, 26 May 1961, p. 7, and '"Keep Design Simple – and Don't Overlook the Obvious", interview with Barrie Bates', *Advertiser's Weekly*, 2 June 1961, p. 16. Also *Graphics RCA: Fifteen Years' Work of the School of Graphic Design, Royal College of Art*, Lion & Unicorn Press, London, 1963, pp. 66–67.

61 See 'Amber Tips Tea Advertisement', Ministry for Culture and Heritage, http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/amber-tips-tea, accessed March 2007.

Advertisement for Amber Tips Tea, *Mirror: The Home Journal of New Zealand*, December 1959, back cover, courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, ½-1/2-126978-F

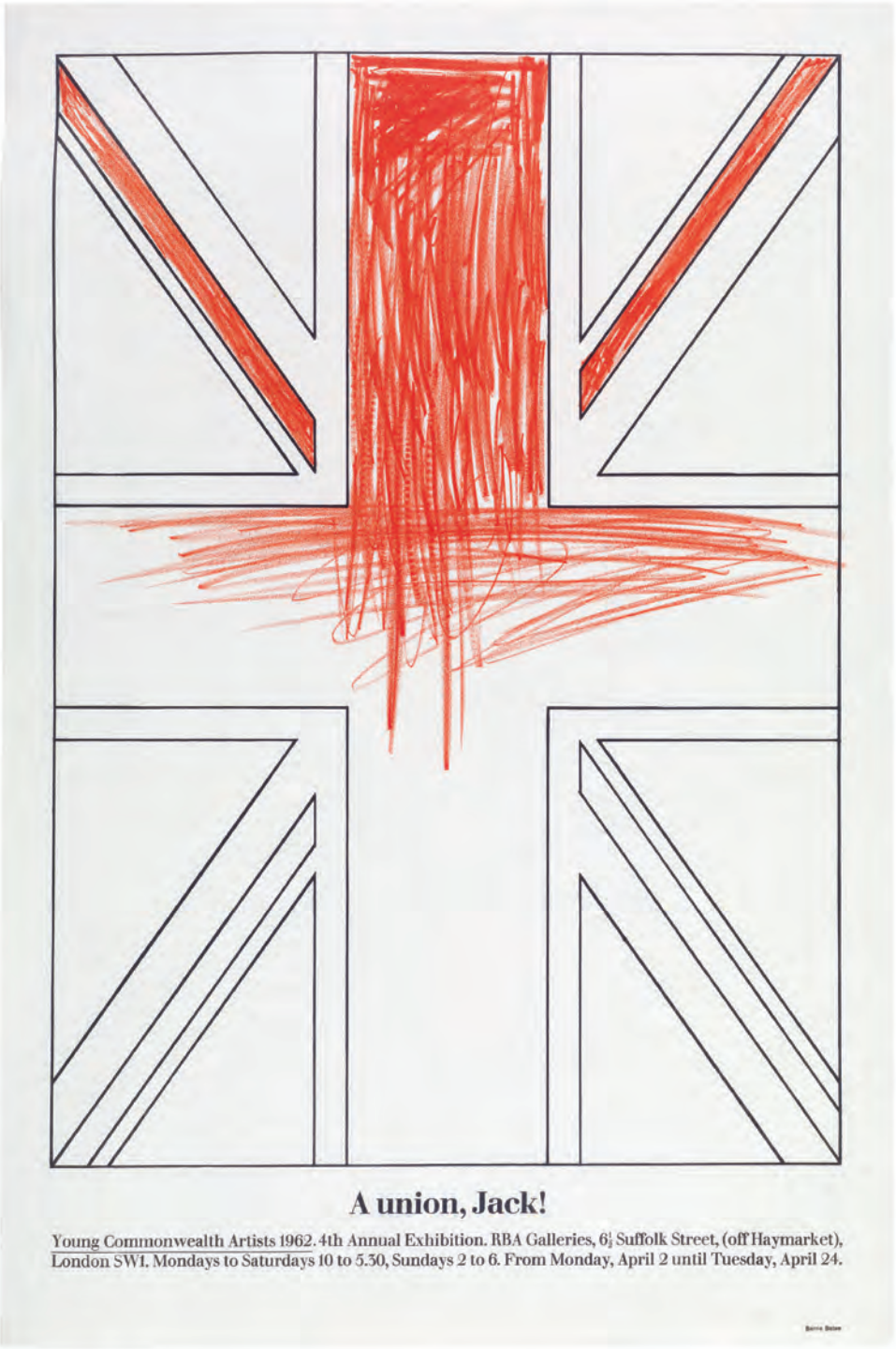
We All Love Tea, 1961, artwork for Layton Student Award, Billy Apple® Archive

simultaneity of all three elements: familiar objects, visual images and linguistic signs, which meant the reader 'got' the message instantaneously. How different this is to the kind of work he left behind in New Zealand, like the advertisement for Amber Tips Tea from a campaign developed in 1959, which relied on a faithful illustration of a well-dressed couple drinking tea to support the advertising copy, where the picture is merely a backdrop to the words floating incongruously around them.[61]

On the strength of such work, Apple was invited to design the posters for the annual exhibitions of student work that were a feature of the era. Thus, in 1961 and 1962 he produced all the graphic material for both the *Young Contemporaries* and the *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibitions that were staged at the RBA Galleries in Suffolk Street and which showcased the work of students from London's various art schools. Especially interesting here is the slippage that occurred between Apple's design assignments and the art works he was also making at the college, since it signals his ongoing negotiation of the borders between painting and design, advertising and its products, art and its frames, originality and quotation, the unique artefact and its mechanical reproduction.

Every project Apple worked on offered a variation on the dichotomies just described. For example, his designs for the *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibitions in 1961 and 1962 called on the paraphernalia and techniques of art to convey the character of these exhibitions, which had been set up specifically to showcase the work of art students from Commonwealth countries as a means to identify and promote their contributions within London's expanding art scene. In 1961 the poster featured

Exhibition poster, *Young Commonwealth Artists 1961*, 1961, offset lithograph on paper, Billy Apple® Archive



Exhibition poster, *A Union, Jack! Young Commonwealth Artists 1962*, 1962, offset lithograph on paper, Billy Apple® Archive

hand-drawn tubes of paint that each squirted white and black pigment, signalling the racial diversity of Commonwealth countries, a motif his classmate Derek Boshier playfully reworked in his toothpaste paintings of the following year.[62]

This was followed in 1962 by a poster that delineated the outlines of the Union Jack as it might have appeared in a children's colouring book, with parts of the flag's design progressively and increasingly loosely coloured in, as if a child had taken to it with typically clumsy enthusiasm, or a modern artist had decided to break out of the constraining lines in a gesture of expressive freedom, or a vandal had attacked some official sign. Here the poster, with its tag-line 'A Union, Jack!', cleverly announced the Commonwealth's unity, at the same time as it undercut British authority by irreverently toying with what, until then, had been a sacrosanct symbol; inserting a colonial larrikinism by something as subtle as the introduction of a discrepant comma in the caption to the image.[63]

This poster is acknowledged as one of the earliest instances of the creative (mis)use of the British flag for marketing purposes in England in the 1960s, a notable achievement given how ubiquitous the Union Jack would become as an object of ironic quotation in sixties pop culture, let alone the punk scene that followed.[64] It is particularly interesting that it was used to advertise an exhibition by artists from outside England, and specifically from Commonwealth countries, for this points to their potentially disruptive effect, especially when those countries that had tangible links based on a relation of subservience began to clamour for independence.[65] Here, Apple's New Zealand identity – as much as he was keen to downplay it – was a vital ingredient in the playful creation of a subversively iconic British pop symbol.

Alternatively, for the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition of 1961, Apple featured a motif that had already appeared in a number of the artist's canvases of the same year and which even appeared on a postcard he sent to his parents when he was in Europe.[66] This was a strangely lopsided circle that was at once a staring eyeball (floating free from the body, it hovered just above the ground, over which it cast a shadow) and a foreshortened target, with its rings branded in the distinctively British colours of red, white and blue. This was the artist's personal take on the popular target motif made famous a few years earlier by the American artist Jasper Johns, signalling his desire to stake his claim within the volatile field of contemporary art.[67] However, it also functioned as a loaded personal symbol. Recalling the disembodied eye he remembered seeing in the Masonic Lodge where his father was a member, it may have unconsciously referenced his situation as alienated observer.

The following year, Apple's *Young Contemporaries* poster similarly blurred the lines between art and design. In this case, he appropriated and enlarged the official label organisers used to identify works in the exhibition that was normally adhered to the back of submitted items, slightly adjusting the wording to announce the details of the occasion. He then printed multiple copies that were fly-posted around the city. As he explained in one of his reports, the effect of this poster was startling, in that

62 See, for example, Derek Boshier, *First Toothpaste Painting* (1962), oil on canvas, 1380 × 776 × 34 mm, Museums Sheffield Collection VIS.4585.

63 According to Apple, once the poster was distributed around the city, people took it upon themselves to finish the colouring in. Conversation with the artist, January 2004.

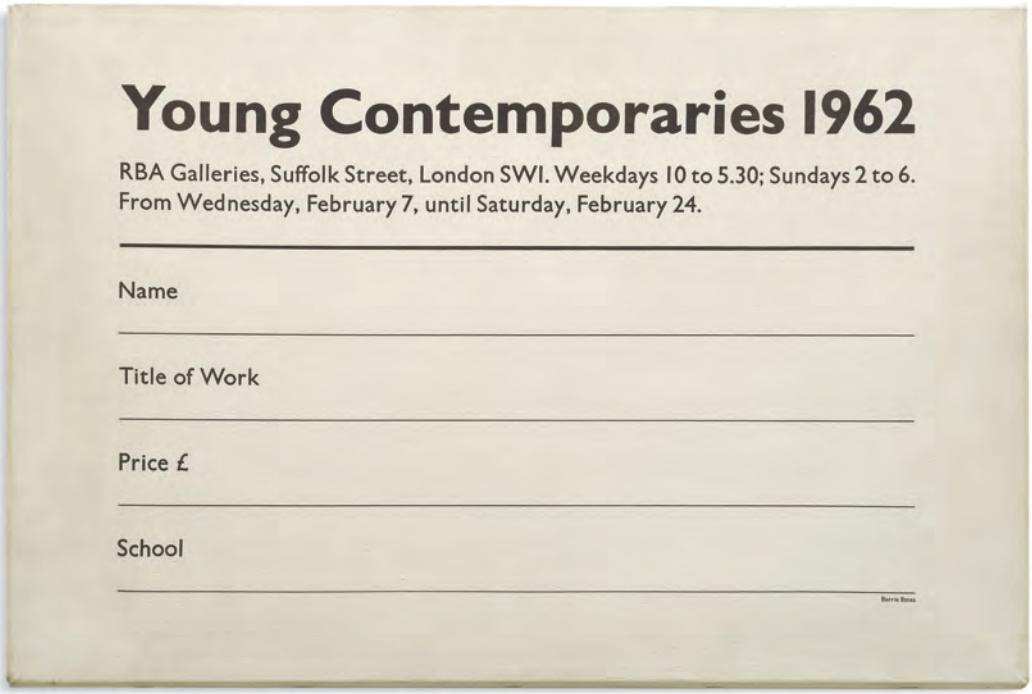
64 This poster won one of twelve silver awards at the inaugural Design and Art Direction Awards in 1963. Jeremy Myerson and Graham Vickers, in *Rewind: Forty Years of Design & Advertising* (Phaidon, London, 2002), caption an illustration of this with the statement: 'Once the British flag was a sacred thing. This poster design is one of the earliest attempts to put it into the services of commerce' (p. 16).

65 Indicative of this relationship in the context of the art scene at this time, the *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibitions were never well supported (indeed, they began in 1959 and survived only until 1963) and always suffered as the 'poor cousin' to the much higher profile *Young Contemporaries* exhibitions. Chair of the selection committee Robert Hyde pleaded in the catalogue to the 1962 exhibition that, 'without governmental help, this Group may not be able to survive in a hand to mouth fashion'; this, according to the reviewer in *The Observer* (15 April 1962), resulted in an 'annual hugger-mugger on a financial shoestring'. Catalogue and typescript of press clipping, artist's archive.

66 For example, *Two Cobbers in Central Park, New York on Wednesday 19 July 1961 at 2pm* (1961). It also appears more prominently as the main motif of a painting (c. 1961, destroyed) over which the words 'I must write' were scrawled, which hung behind Apple in a photograph of the artist in front of his works at the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition of 1961. This could be *Big Love, Be Brave*, catalogue no. 12. The postcard is in the artist's archive.

67 Jasper Johns' target paintings, such as *Target with Four Faces* (1955, Museum of Modern Art, New York) were notoriously reworked by Peter Blake in *The First Real Target?* (Tate Britain), notably painted the same year as Apple's poster in 1961.

Exhibition catalogue, *Young Contemporaries 1961*, 1961, offset lithograph on paper, Billy Apple® Archive



it turned everything it was attached to into a work of art, extending the reach of the exhibition out into the world at large.[68] In addition, he printed one of these blown-up 'labels' onto canvas and presented it to the selectors as a painting for inclusion in the exhibition.[69] Three of Apple's submissions were chosen for the show, but this was not one of them.[70] As the artist recalls, Lawrence Alloway, one of the selectors, told him that turning the poster for the show into an authored work of art went just too far. What he meant, of course, was that Apple had crossed a line, allowing design to invade art's terrain and thus to collapse the crucial distinction between work and frame.

This is an important touchstone in the artist's work to date. Although it was never exhibited at the time, it has since become a key marker of the self-reflexive and critically conceptual nature of his work. By transferring the poster to canvas, *Young Contemporaries 1962* (1961) has a subversive force. Neither handmade nor manifesting any expressive brushwork, with empty lines waiting to be filled, this painting still refuses to comply with the norms of artistic expression. Yet this work *was* signed (in small, printed text in the lower right of the canvas), suggesting Apple's deeper need to have the authenticity of the idea acknowledged. Here the artist's ambivalent attitude to the creative act was unequivocally stated: art was more (or less) than a signature style; it had no need to be a picture 'of' something; it bore with it no special power, other than the strength of the concept. This was art about art, which drew attention to the administrative and framing structures that granted art its identity, which in turn made art disappear – and this is what the selectors could not tolerate.

68 See Billy Apple [Barrie Bates], 'Progress and Activities Report for First Term, Third Year at Royal College of Art's School of Graphic Design', 15 February 1962, typescript, Te Papa Archive.

69 Apple's title for the work in 1962 was *Label Painting (with Space for Cynical Remarks)*.

70 The catalogue lists three works by Barrie Bates: *A Kiwi in New York* (cat. no. 13), *Two Cobbers in Central Park* (cat. no. 14), and *Self-portrait with Mirrors and Tie* (cat. no. 15). See *Exhibition Catalogue Young Contemporaries 1962*, RBA Galleries, London, 1962, artist's archive.

Young Contemporaries 1962, 1961, offset lithograph on canvas, 515 × 765 mm, private collection, London.

Despite the judges' decision, Apple's determination to treat his design work seriously and on a par with his art practice is borne out by photographs of his end-of-year submissions that show his even-handed presentation of posters and advertising work alongside photographs, paintings and sculptures. These prove the interdisciplinary nature of his output at the college. If his design work demonstrates a fascination with the new media of mechanical reproduction, a predilection for clever wordplay, a playful redeployment of everyday motifs and symbols, and a self-consciousness about how images and texts function within the conditions of consumer culture, so his art practice developed concurrently with a similar set of investments. Here, though, the consequences led to his deeper questioning of art's central investment in the idea of authorship and a growing inclination to identify and expose the workings of the art system.

Two Cobbers in Central Park, New York on Wednesday 19 July 1961 at 2pm, 1962, oil on canvas, UV-impregnated ink on canvas, two panels, 1800 × 1200 mm and 500 × 900 mm, artist's collection

Apple continued to draw and paint after he arrived in London, retaining his interest in figurative work and focusing on the appearance of objects in his immediate environment. Two factors, however, led the artist away from drawing, other than as a crucial preparatory stage in the evolution of his thinking. One was the purchase of a Voigtländer camera on the voyage to England, which turned the artist's attention to photography as an effective means of image capture, and the other was his willingness to hand over the production of his works to others – friends with whom he associated, technicians in the various workshops of the college (such as Roy Crossett, who ran the lithographic proofing press in the printmaking department and would become a long-standing collaborator), and professionals working in the city. In all instances these shifts were driven not by any lack of ability, but rather by a willing deferral to the automatic mechanisms of the camera or the practical skills of a specialist. One of his earliest connections was to fellow student and keen draughtsman Reg Fisher, who worked with him on the production of his first canvases. With Fisher it was something of a game, where the two would sit together sketching on a single sheet of paper, allowing one to complete the work of the other in the interests of free association and with a wilful disregard for the expectations of original authorship.

Two Cobbers in Central Park, New York on Wednesday 19 July 1961 at 2pm, one of the few paintings to have survived from the period, is a product of just this kind of collaboration. Completed soon after Apple's visit to New York over the summer of 1961, it was shown in the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition of 1962, where it was singled out for praise, and from which it was selected as one of 49 works to tour England in an arts council exhibition showcasing the achievements of that year's crop of art students.[71] Working together, Apple and Fisher produced what could be thought of as a double portrait – a fitting companion, perhaps, to the photograph of Apple and Hockney already discussed. Fisher drew the outlines of the figures, showing Apple as a disembodied profile head with trilby hat and distinctive nose tattoo (copied from British artist, amateur ethnologist and ex-soldier Horatio Robley's 1896 book on the ancient art of Māori tattooing), beside a New York policeman on street patrol, next to a self-portrait in which Fisher appeared as another floating bust sporting an English boater. Apple's contributions were the swathes of muddy pink, blue and acid green printer's ink applied with a roller, the partially concealed disembodied eye/target that had become something of an autographic emblem, and the cop's upraised hand, crudely drawn on a separate, smaller canvas that was abutted to the larger stretcher. In every sense this painting bucked convention: made by two artists rather than one, on an already-primed canvas that Apple had found discarded in one of the painting studios, it compromised compositional integrity by splaying paint across two surfaces and presented cartoonish figures without any regard for perspectival correctness; there were even additional collage fragments (an American postage stamp and a torn label) stuck to the paint, a further nail in the coffin of painting's purity.

71 The reviewer in *The Times*, for example, describes the RCA student work as 'the raspberry-blowing "new surrealist school"', which manifested a 'weird mixture of impudence, whimsicality and beautifully tender painting … well exemplified by Derek Boshier, Michael Upton, Barrie Bates and, in a somewhat different vein, by Malcolm Macleod'. See 'Art Students' Brilliant Exhibition', *Times*, Tuesday, 13 February 1962, newspaper clipping, artist's archive. The Arts Council of Great Britain's *Young Contemporaries 1962* exhibition toured to Cambridge, Kingston upon Hull, Swansea, Birmingham and Newcastle upon Tyne. Apple's painting is listed in the catalogue (cat. no. 5) that accompanied the show.

David Hockney, *I'm in the Mood for Love*, 1961, oil on canvas, 1285 × 1015 mm, (photo: Prudence Cuming Associates), Royal College of Art Collection, London, © Royal College of Art

2′8 per lb, *Love for Sale*, 1961, painted wood with butcher's shop price-tag, 921 × 305 × 255 mm, courtesy of The Mayor Gallery, London

Such irreverence was typical of the painting emanating from the college. In manner and attitude it can be closely linked to David Hockney, Apple's fellow traveller on that first influential trip to America. For example, Hockney's *I'm in the Mood for Love* (1961), which was also a response to New York, shows a crudely sketched horned figure standing pointing between two skyscrapers with the words 'to Queens uptown' – a playful homosexual reference – written on his sleeve.[72] Both paintings were personal responses to the artists' circumstances, executed in a manner expressly designed to challenge conventions around drawing, that captured the attributes of urban life as experienced by young men for whom the sophistications of the city were relatively new pleasures. Both works precisely encapsulated the challenge posed by their generation: they speak of unconventional young men, who sought escape from the dead-end smallness of their home towns, and whose heads were turned by the seductions of postwar consumer culture and the freedom the big city provided as a place where middle-class values and repressive mores could be challenged.

Hockney and Apple, along with Derek Boshier, Peter Phillips, Pauline Boty and others, were identified as a 'group' who, according to Lawrence Alloway, 'connect[ed] with the city' and combined 'real objects, same size representation, sketchy notation, printing, and writing'.[73] But, unlike his peers, Apple did not limit himself to painting. He also produced sculptures, such as *Love for Sale* (1961), a rectangular plinth painted white with three blue stripes like those found on a butcher's apron, on which sat a red-painted wooden heart with a ready-made sign appropriated from a real butcher's shop announcing a price of two shillings and eight pence; or *Britain's Number One*

72 David Hockney, *I'm in the Mood for Love* (1961), oil on canvas, 1285 × 1015 mm, Royal College of Art Collection, RCA_CC138.

73 Lawrence Alloway, 'Juror as Witness', *Young Contemporaries 1961*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1961, p. 3. Alloway played a further role in enabling viewers to generalise about this group by advising the organisers (Allen Jones and Peter Phillips) to rehang the work of RCA students as a group prior to the opening of this exhibition. This allowed their shared characteristics to be more readily perceivable, and for their work to be set apart from the different efforts of students from schools like the Slade, the Central School of Art and Design and Saint Martin's School of Art.

Big Mouth, 1962, painted cast bronze, 152 mm overall, collection of Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, gift of Walter P. Chrysler Jr

Citizen-Astronaut (1962), a quirky assemblage combining a crudely constructed rocket topped by a boater hat and an old school tie.

Towards the end of his studies Apple also started casting real fruit (apples, bananas and slices of watermelon) in bronze.[74] These were uncanny takes on the tradition of the still life, literalising the genre by being life casts rather than hand-modelled forms, which of course turned the perishable object into a permanent representation with no initial artistic intervention. These were further worked on by being either painted naturalistically or adjusted to perform as anthropomorphic ciphers for their patently silly titles – like the orange with a grinning set of false teeth called *Portrait of a Raspberry Blowing Orange Blonde* of 1961, or *William Tell Jnr* (1961), a green-painted apple with a child's toy arrow suction-cupped to its side, or *Big Mouth* (1962), a cast bronze slice of half-eaten watermelon, realistically painted with visible bite marks and a scattering of bronze seeds sitting on a bronze plate.[75]

Stranger still was the photographic work Apple also realised while at the college, which seems at odds with the pop-derived imagery of his paintings and sculptures and unlike anything his fellow painters were undertaking. Apart from one roll of film he took on his first trip to Europe in April 1960, like much else the artist produced, this work was made by professionals under Apple's supervision. The exception is now of special interest, as it combined the contemporary inclination to capture the mundane dimensions of everyday life with a prescient reflexivity about the nature of art. This is the series of photographs Apple took of a man getting a haircut and being shaved in a barber shop in Alicante, Spain. While the set of images exist as a proof sheet that captured the action as a series of single frames, functioning in effect like stills from a film, at least two of these photographs have been printed as single images and granted telling titles: *Art Declared Found Activity (Lathering, Alicante Spain, April 1960)* and *Art Declared Found Activity (Shaving, Alicante Spain, April 1960)* (both 1960).[76] Shot in black and white, these images focused closely on the action of the barber working with his brush and razor over the face of his customer. Looking back, Apple sees these images as ready-mades that substitute the real-life activities of soaping and shaving for the creative work of painting and sculpture. They were the last photographs he took.

Soon after his return to London he sold his camera to a fellow student, and from that point engaged others (Frank Apthorp and Robert Freeman in particular) to take pictures under his direction. By then he was flatting in Cornwall Gardens with two Australians, Phillip Russell, a pharmacist, and BBC journalist Peter Bell-Smith. Bell-Smith became the protagonist in another photographic series in which Apple documented him bathing, washing, and pimple squeezing, and getting drunk on a night out on Earl's Court Road with the jazz aficionado Ahmad Jarr.[77] These photographs were printed as contact sheets, the grid sequence of nine photographs reminiscent of film rather than the singular images of classic photo-journalism. This association was heightened by accompanying 'storyboards',

74 Some of these were cast by the Bronze Art Foundry in Fulham, where many artists, including Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, had their works produced. Others were made in the foundry at the RCA.

75 Billy Apple, *Big Mouth*, 1962, painted bronze, 152 mm overall, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, gift of Walter P. Chrysler Jr, 71.1084.

76 The titles of these photographs were adjusted with the addition of *Art Declared Activity* when they were shown in Apple's survey at the Serpentine Gallery in 1974; this language was in keeping with his, by then, thoroughly conceptual practice.

77 Titles for these works are as follows: *Body Cleaning: Bathing and Shampooing (35A Cornwall Gardens, London. Winter 1960)*; *Body Cleaning: Subtraction/ Extraction (Pimple Squeezing, 62 Lillie Road, London. Winter 1960)*; and *Drunk (Earls Court Road, London, Winter 1960)* (all 1960), artist's collection.

Art Declared Found Activity (Lathering, Alicante Spain, April 1960), 1960, silver gelatin print, 365 × 460 mm, artist's collection

Art Declared Found Activity (Shaving, Alicante Spain, April 1960), 1960, silver gelatin print, 365 × 460 mm, private collection

Relation of Aesthetic Choice to Life Activity (Function of the Subject), 1961–62, offset lithograph on primed canvas with neon gas, 9 mm coated ruby glass tubing, 951 × 749 × 128 mm, Tate Collection, London, presented by Tate Members, 2013

parallel texts authored by Bell-Smith that responded to the actions.[78] These read as a stream-of-consciousness narrative full of eccentric expressions, verbal repetitions, ellipses, and so on, all designed to give the effect of an almost involuntary flow of thought. Reviewed today, these images look like scenes from a movie, with their dramatic lighting, unconventional camera angles, staged action and self-conscious voice-overs; but they were designed to document quotidian routines to which the human body is regularly submitted. Now the body was the object to which things were done, displacing sculpture's central subject to a real-world context and to the flattening effects of two dimensions. In this capacity, they are less mini-films than examples of performance documentation *avant la lettre*.[79]

Photography was another distancing device for Apple that avoided handcraft and was linked to the commercial world of product placement. It was an important bridge between his design and art practices. A particularly telling instance of this is *Relation of Aesthetic Choice to Life Activity (Function of the Subject)* (1961–62). Here Apple printed a grid of four images made from a found lithographic plate of a photograph published in *Ark*, of a British ticket collector aboard the MV *Royal Daffodil*, adding a neon tick to one he deemed the 'best' in the identical line-up. To him this was a statement about decision-making being as important as the original production of the picture.[80]

Another telling image is a portrait he made with professional photographer Robert Freeman, in which we see Apple from behind, a head-and-shoulders shot in a smart suit, with the uncanny addition of a coathanger poking above his collar. *Portrait of the Artist in a Drip-Dry Suit* (1962) was a play on the notion of ready-to-wear fashion, where the artist donned a costume that granted him a straight-off-the-rack identity as a slick businessman. It was inspired by a red-ballpoint pen drawing of the same subject he had been given by Hockney (*Madison Avenue. Lie$, Lie$, Lie$*, 1961).[81] Hockney's drawing was his response to visiting Apple in what he thought was the shallow world of advertising, when Apple was an intern with Herb Lubalin during their first trip to New York in 1961. By inhabiting the guise that Hockney had created for him, Apple proved willing to envisage himself as an empty vessel, ready to adopt a persona that would enable him to blend in with the commercial world around him (harking back, perhaps, to those early words of Kees Hos).

The final component of Apple's practice at the RCA that he combined with his painting, sculpture and photography was his use of text. This was clearly learnt from his work in advertising, where word and image were combined to sell a product. Apple's facility for clever wordplays and sound and sight gags that distinguished his design work found outlets in his fine art through his titles and captions. Then there were the scripts that accompanied his photographic sequences. On several occasions, text also became the content and subject of the work. This was the case with *Young Contemporaries 1962*, the canvas that was notoriously turned down for the annual exhibition in 1962, but it also occurred in another work made

78 Typescripts of these are held in the artist's archive.

79 It is exactly this function of photography the artist would take up when recording his activities at APPLE, the not-for-profit space he ran in his loft at 161 West 23rd Street in New York between 1969 and 1973. See chapter three.

80 The photograph was by Keith Branscombe and featured in 'Twist Drunk a Picture Story by Keith Branscombe' in *Ark*, no. 33 (Autumn 1962), pp. 18–26. This documented a dance party that took place on the vessel as they sailed across the English Channel. The *Royal Daffodil* was notorious for such trips, during which passengers were able to drink outside normal licensing hours, up until the vessel was scrapped in 1967.

81 Apple subsequently sold the drawing to Sidney R. Solomon, a New York collector (conversation with the artist, October 2008). It was very close in style and focus to the etchings Hockney produced for *A Rake's Progress* (1961–63), the series that chronicled this eye-opening trip by updating Hogarth's comedy of errors in terms of Hockney's own fictionalised encounter with the pleasures and vices of the city.

with Hockney's help in the typography department. This consisted of the simple phrase 'For Sale' printed in red ink with movable letterpress type on primed canvas. Though registering the fate of painting, this phrase was in fact inspired by shopkeepers' and real-estate agents' signs that peppered the cityscape. Again, this was never exhibited at the time, but it became for the artist a key starting point for his thinking about the brutal fact that art, like almost everything in contemporary society, is a commodity to be transacted.

Apple had a facility as a copywriter, as his work in advertising attests, but more often in his art work and in the accompanying documents he produced during his time at the college he outsourced the production of words, as he did so much else of his practice. For example, he had his then girlfriend, Ann Quin, who was a budding writer with a day job as a secretary at the college, write his dissertation for the general studies course.[82] 'Pop Corn', as the thesis was titled, was conceived by Apple as a conversation between Vincent van Gogh and Larry Rivers staged at the Five Spot Café, a famous jazz club in New York.[83] This whimsical idea was inspired by Van Gogh's letters, Rivers' visit to the college (when he gave a lecture in which he drew connections to his Dutch predecessor),[84] Apple's conversations about his life in London and trips to New York, and Quin's wider reading on art and the artists who were her subject. While the end result bore little relation to Apple's thinking or practice, the fictional conversation made a more general case for the artist's dogged persistence in the face of society's general indifference.

Miraculously, this thesis secured his diploma, despite its topic changing mid-course and his lecturers bemoaning

82 Ann Quin is recognised by Jennifer Hodgson, among others, as an important avant-garde writer whose works have been compared with French exponents of the *nouveau roman* and modernists like Samuel Beckett. Her first published novel *Berg* (1964) was greeted with acclaim and led to her receiving a D. H. Lawrence Scholarship from the University of Mexico. After suffering bouts of serious depression Quin drowned in the sea at Brighton in 1973. See Quin, *The Unmapped Country: Stories and Fragments*, ed. Jennifer Hodgson, And Other Stories, Sheffield, 2018.

83 See Billy Apple [Barrie Bates], 'Pop Corn (Being a Conversation between Vincent van Gogh & Larry Rivers at "The Five Spot" Jazz Club, New York, 1962)', typescript, artist's archive.

84 See ibid., pp. 17, 37. Anthony Byrt has confirmed the reference to Van Gogh in Rivers' talk. This was recorded and presented on the BBC's Third Programme on 24 December 1961. The recording is in the British Library, where he transcribed key passages on 3 May 2017. I am grateful to Byrt for sharing his notes with me.

For Sale, 1961, letterpress on canvas, 463 × 613 mm, collection of National Galleries of Scotland, acquired by exchange through the Dr Allan B. Jamieson Bequest, 2014

Apple's inability to clearly articulate his position in oral presentations. They may have suspected its authorship, but they decided to accept it, perhaps knowing how much it meant to Apple, despite appearances.[85] If he was secretly relieved, in the spirit of dissent that marked his intake at the college, his parting shot on finishing his studies was to dramatically rip in two the letter he received from registrar John Moon telling him that, despite earlier correspondence, he had passed the general studies course and would therefore be awarded his qualification.[86]

Apple's gesture was in keeping with the general unruliness of his cohort. He never went to the convocation ceremony – the one where Hockney bucked convention by wearing a gold lamé jacket that got the media talking, and helped him into the limelight that he enjoyed on graduation.[87] With positive notices in the mainstream press on the strength of his presentations at the annual student exhibitions; established contacts in the advertising world following the awards he received for his design work; three works acquired by London's leading contemporary art collector; and interest from New York dealer Sidney Janis, who had come to London to select works for an international show of pop art,[88] Apple must have thought the college had served him as a springboard. Again, his situation was typical, with many of his peers – notably Hockney, Kitaj, Boshier and Phillips – enjoying professional opportunities that were unheard of for students of their age only a generation earlier.[89] He left the college ready to grapple with the dual drives of this period, which Thomas Crow, in *The Rise of the Sixties*, identifies as being, on the one hand, a questioning of the heroic idea of art as an expression of the 'sovereign self' and, on the other, the need to negotiate what he calls 'a new and aggressive global marketplace'.[90]

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On 10 July 1962, as soon as his final term finished, Apple left London for his second summer in New York. Though vastly more exciting than the still staid London scene, the art world he encountered was much smaller than it is today, and making connections was, by comparison, much easier. By this stage, the abstract expressionist establishment was beginning to fracture and diversify as artists turned towards new ways of working, moving into the old industrial neighbourhoods of Manhattan that had not yet succumbed to the developers. One of these was Coenties Slip, a small cluster of streets near the East River almost at the southern tip of Manhattan filled with abandoned sail lofts and ship chandleries, to which artists were attracted – despite the lack of basic amenities – for their cheap rent and large spaces. On the recommendation of Richard Smith, Apple made contact with a number of artists who lived there: James Rosenquist, Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman and, in particular, Robert Indiana, with whom he established a brief friendship. This was before the neighbourhood was levelled for the high-rises that grew up around Wall Street.

85 Memo from Kullman to registrar, 6 February 1962.

86 The torn halves of this letter (dated 22 June 1962), like all the correspondence relating to this situation, are held in the artist's archive. Apple asserts that the tearing of the letter had a performative dimension. Conversation with the artist, 2014.

87 Apple also remembers volunteering cheekily to design the certificate of 'failure' that Hockney had ironically sought from the administration at a meeting where students were called to account for their poor performance. This offer perfectly encapsulates the differences between the two artists, which ultimately may have determined their very different fates. Apple conceived his rebellion by deferring to his friend, duplicating the administrative processes of the college to undermine its authority; Hockney more directly used his personal charisma to buck the system.

88 Janis visited the RCA in 1962 while researching for an exhibition of the new 'factual' art he was beginning to see in the US. His aim was to bring together an international line-up of artists who represented this manner of working. It resulted in the defining *New Realists* show that opened in November 1962, which included artists from America, Britain, France, Sweden and Italy. Apple recalls Janis was unimpressed with much of the work he encountered in London and the show featured only one British artist: Peter Blake. Conversation with the artist, 2016.

89 Carel Weight (1908–97) remembered the London of his youth as an 'artistic backwater boasting about a dozen dealer galleries, none of which would seriously consider giving an exhibition to a young painter emerging from art school', and compared it to the situation in the 1960s where there were 'at least a hundred' galleries catering increasingly to the new and up-and-coming. Weight, quoted by Christopher Frayling in Huxley, *Exhibition Road*, p. 159.

90 See Thomas Crow's introduction to *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent 1955–1969*, Everyman Art Library, George Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1996, especially pp. 12–13.

Robert Indiana in his loft with *Eat/Die*, 1962, colour photograph (photo: William John Kennedy), © William John Kennedy, courtesy of Morgan Art Foundation, Artists' Rights Society, New York

... doors do open for blondes, yes.[91]

—Billy Apple

According to art dealer Mildred Glimcher, Indiana was living at 25 Coenties Slip, in a building 'emblazoned with words' like the ships, tugs and trucks that passed by daily,[92] and was making assemblages and paintings from scavenged materials collected from the streets and featuring numbers and words made with found brass stencils, the kind of work he showed in his first solo exhibition at Eleanor Ward's Stable Gallery in October 1962, only a month after Apple returned to London. He remembers being struck by a diptych in which the words 'EAT' and 'DIE' were boldly painted inside floating white circles on red and black rectangular canvases, forming a pair that hit him with the economy and toughness of their message.[93] Indiana may well have also sparked Apple's thinking about the possibilities of reinvention, as he had changed his name from Clark early in his career. Born in the Midwest and enduring an unsettled childhood, Indiana abandoned his family name for the state where he was born, a move that meshed well with the then-current fascination for all things American.

On this same trip in 1962, Apple met Andy Warhol. They knew each other by reputation, and Apple looked him up in the phone book and called to arrange a meeting. At this stage Warhol's work as an artist was only beginning to surface. Apple recalls their first encounter at one of Warhol's favourite hang-outs, Serendipity 3, a tiny, stylish café-cum-shop on the Upper East Side, which critic Calvin Tomkins has described as catering 'to the kind of taste that had not yet been identified as camp', and which sold items like Tiffany glass and Warhol's original drawings of shoes with which he had made his name as an illustrator for I. Miller.[94] Warhol brought along art critic Gene Swenson and Metropolitan Museum curator Henry Geldzahler, who at this stage was Warhol's daily companion. This led to a number of visits to Warhol's townhouse at 1342 Lexington Avenue (where he had lived with his mother since 1960).

91 Billy Apple, quoted in William Paton, 'Conversation with Billy Apple July 2013', *When Britain Went Pop: British Pop Art: The Early Years*, Christie's Mayfair, London, 2013, p. 279.

92 Mildred Glimcher, 'Coenties Slip', *Indiana, Kelly, Martin, Rosenquist, Youngerman at Coenties Slip*, Pace Gallery, New York, 1993, pp. 10–15.

93 Robert Indiana, *Eat/Die* (1962), oil on canvas, two panels, 1829 × 1524 mm, courtesy of Morgan Art Foundation, Artists' Rights Society, New York.

94 See Calvin Tomkins, 'Raggedy Andy', in *The Scene: Reports on Post-modern Art* (1970), reprint, Viking Press, New York, 1976, pp. 41–42.

Billy Apple (right) and David Hockney, Coney Island, New York, 1961, silver gelatin print, Billy Apple® Archive

Apple remembers a small front room where he was ushered in to see paintings of a candlestick telephone and Campbell's Soup cans, one with a painted can-opener attached to the top. He in turn showed Warhol an image of the repeated photograph of the British ticket collector he had appropriated and adjusted with the addition of a red chinagraph pencil check mark.[95] This was before Warhol took up silk-screening or found a New York gallery that would take his work;[96] when he still sold directly from his home to artists, collectors and curators who visited, having heard about his work on a grapevine that operated by word of mouth through talent scouts like Karp and John Weber.

In addition to seeking out artists, Apple got to know the dealers and their galleries, visiting Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery, Martha Jackson, Sidney Janis, Stable Gallery, Betty Parsons, Allan Stone, Kornblee, Pace and, importantly, Leo Castelli, run by the eponymous dapper Italian who had opened his space at 4 East 77th Street in 1957, and had staked his reputation on Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who broke with abstract expressionism and provided a vital bridge to pop.[97] The galleries were all clustered either on the Upper East Side around 77th Street, or in Midtown, especially on 57th Street. The ones Apple frequented were the pick of the crop of those devoted to contemporary art, modelling the kind of clean, spare spaces that would become the norm for the presentation of new art. Here, each gallerist put together a stable of artists based on their particular taste and outlook, and ran a well-managed programme of regular exhibitions, which were advertised in the local media. Gravitating together in favoured locales, these galleries formed a scene where the art world could congregate in the weekend ritual of exhibition openings; they were few enough to emerge as powerful brokers of what was considered important.[98]

On his return to London in September he moved in temporarily with Richard Smith in the Bath Street warehouse he lived in and which he used as a studio, in Clerkenwell in London's East End. Smith was a slightly older artist, an RCA graduate who had recently spent twenty-one months in New York on a Harkness Fellowship. Since his return in 1961 he was producing large-scale shaped canvases based on abstractions of consumer products (such as cigarette packets) that registered his exposure to the eye-popping panoramas of America's urban environments, with their billboards, neon signs, drive-in cinemas, skyscrapers and burgeoning retail outlets. His studio became a social hub for the art scene.[99]

It was here, on the afternoon of 22 November 1962, that Apple and Smith effected the physical transformation that accompanied his decision to change his name from Barrie Bates to Billy Apple, and thus reinvent himself. To launch his new identity, Apple bleached his hair and eyebrows and Smith documented his transformation in a series of colour slides. Together they had settled on the name in a brainstorming session that had them playing with various options. 'Billy Apple' stuck because it was simple and catchy and sounded like a fresh product rather than a person.[100] It drew on the wholesome properties of the fruit, as well as its multiple

95 This work would later become *Relation of Aesthetic Choice to Life Activity (Function of the Subject)*, with the red check mark replaced with neon.

96 An exception, before Castelli invited Warhol to join his gallery in 1964, was a solo show at Eleanor Ward's Stable Gallery in November 1962.

97 Apple recalls being introduced to Castelli by Jasper Johns (whom he had met through Robert Indiana). Conversation with the artist, March 2009.

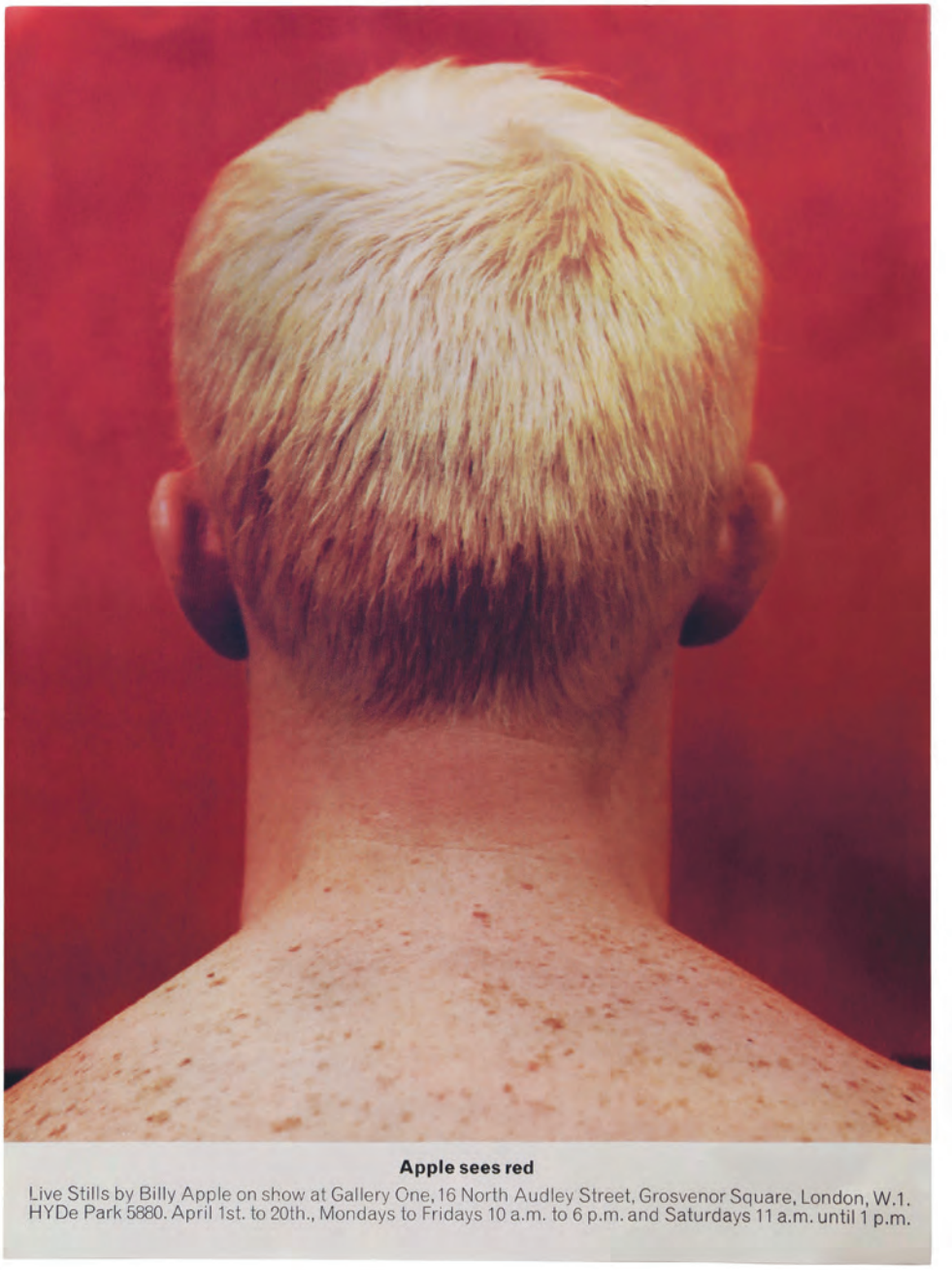
98 Apple's firsthand contact paid off. In December 1962, several of the bronzes he had produced at the RCA were included in *Nuts and Bolts!*, a group show at Allan Stone's gallery at 18 East 82nd Street (11–29 December 1962). Apple was included as Barry [sic] Bates, though by the time the show was launched, he had become Billy Apple. Other artists in the exhibition were Steve Antonakos, Bruce Breland, George Deem, Irwin Fleminger, Wayne Nowack, Gerd Stern and Helen Stoller.

99 It was here that Ken Russell shot the wild party with which *Pop Goes the Easel* – his experimental documentary about British pop art – ended. Screened on BBC television in 1962, this followed four young artists – Pauline Boty, Peter Blake, Derek Boshier and Peter Phillips (all from the RCA) – as they worked and played in London's streets, studios, shops and bars, effectively capturing them as freewheeling contemporary flâneurs.

100 Apples were one of New Zealand's primary exports to the UK at this time and to secure its hold in this market the New Zealand Apple & Pear Marketing Board made New Zealand's first television commercial. This was a series of three short animations made by Goldberg Advertising and produced by Morrow Productions; with a catchy tune featuring the line 'Fresh up with an apple', they showed a young man cheered up and made well by grabbing and eating an apple, or posing with one on his head that is speared by an arrow. This was screened on British television c. 1960. See https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/set/item/40, accessed July 2019.

Andy Warhol (left) and Stephen Bruce at Serendipity 3 café, 1962, silver gelatin print (photo: John Ardoin), courtesy of Serendipity 3

Billy Apple Bleaching with Lady Clairol Instant Creme Whip, November 1962, 1962/2002, gold-toned silver gelatin print from 35 mm colour slide, 408 × 575 mm (photo: Richard Smith), collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2015



Exhibition poster, *Apple Sees Red: Live Stills*, 1963, Gallery One, London (photo: Robert Freeman), Billy Apple® Archive

linguistic and narrative associations. For example, 'apple' is the word we associate with the letter 'A' when learning the alphabet; and apples play common roles in origin stories, such as those of Adam and Eve and Johnny Appleseed. Though undertaken privately with no other witnesses, Apple always understood this as an artistic appropriation of the workings of the marketplace, where restyling a product was commonplace. He spoke of this as Barrie Bates's 'last work', a move that would require him to live as his own art work from that day forward.

Something of the nature of this conundrum is embodied in the photograph Apple now treats as the principal document of this moment: *Billy Apple Bleaching with Lady Clairol Instant Creme Whip, November 1962* (1962/2002). This is a black-and-white print made from the original 35 mm colour slide taken by Smith showing the artist with his newly bleached hair looking at himself in a mirror, his blond pate illuminated by the almost divine glow of a partially visible light bulb. Here we witness the transformation of Bates into Apple as a curiously humdrum Immaculate Conception. We see the subject split, literally, by the act of representation. The clue to the photo's uncanny effect is the mirror into which Apple so piercingly stares. Because of the angle of the shot, from the viewer's perspective there is no reflection, so Apple is presented as a miraculous original, an intangible presence within the image. As well as a record of the event that would shape Apple's career from that day forth, this photograph is a telling analogue for what happened to the artistic subject in the era of mass consumption; it makes 'Billy Apple' an emblem of his times.

Apple's use of bleach to dye his hair to restyle himself recalls his and Hockney's first encounter with the American television commercial they saw in 1961. Hockney recorded his own transformation into a blond in *The Arrival*, the first plate of *A Rake's Progress* (1961–63), the suite of etchings he produced to document his trip; and it became a recognisable feature of his artistic persona, an attribute, like his distinctive glasses and tongue-in-cheek waistcoats, that identified him as a new breed of artist. In contrast, Apple's change of hair colour was an integral component of a more radical gesture, whereby the artist completely walked away from his old self in the interests of a total and incontrovertible rebranding. From that day he taught himself to not respond when people called him by his previous name. He stopped writing home and cut himself off from his old friends, especially fellow antipodeans like the New Zealand artist Jeanne Bensemann and her Australian sculptor husband, Neil Stocker.[101]

As the final step in his reinvention, just before Christmas 1962, Apple had himself photographed by Robert Freeman (who was then working on the new *Sunday Times Magazine* and, the following summer, would begin a long association with The Beatles, producing art work for five of their album covers).[102] Freeman shot Apple in close-up from front and back, focusing alternately on his facial features and his bleached and closely cropped hair; portraying him by turns as pin-up and product.

101 Conversations with the artist and Jeanne Macaskill, c. 2010.

102 A comparison between Freeman's photographs of Apple and his first cover for The Beatles, *With The Beatles* (1963), is instructive. Both feature close-up head shots of their subjects that focus on their distinctive facial features. There is also a striking resemblance to Freeman's back-view head shot of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev taken on a visit to Moscow in late 1962 for a story that was published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* (Apple has kept the page from the magazine, which is stored in the artist's archive).

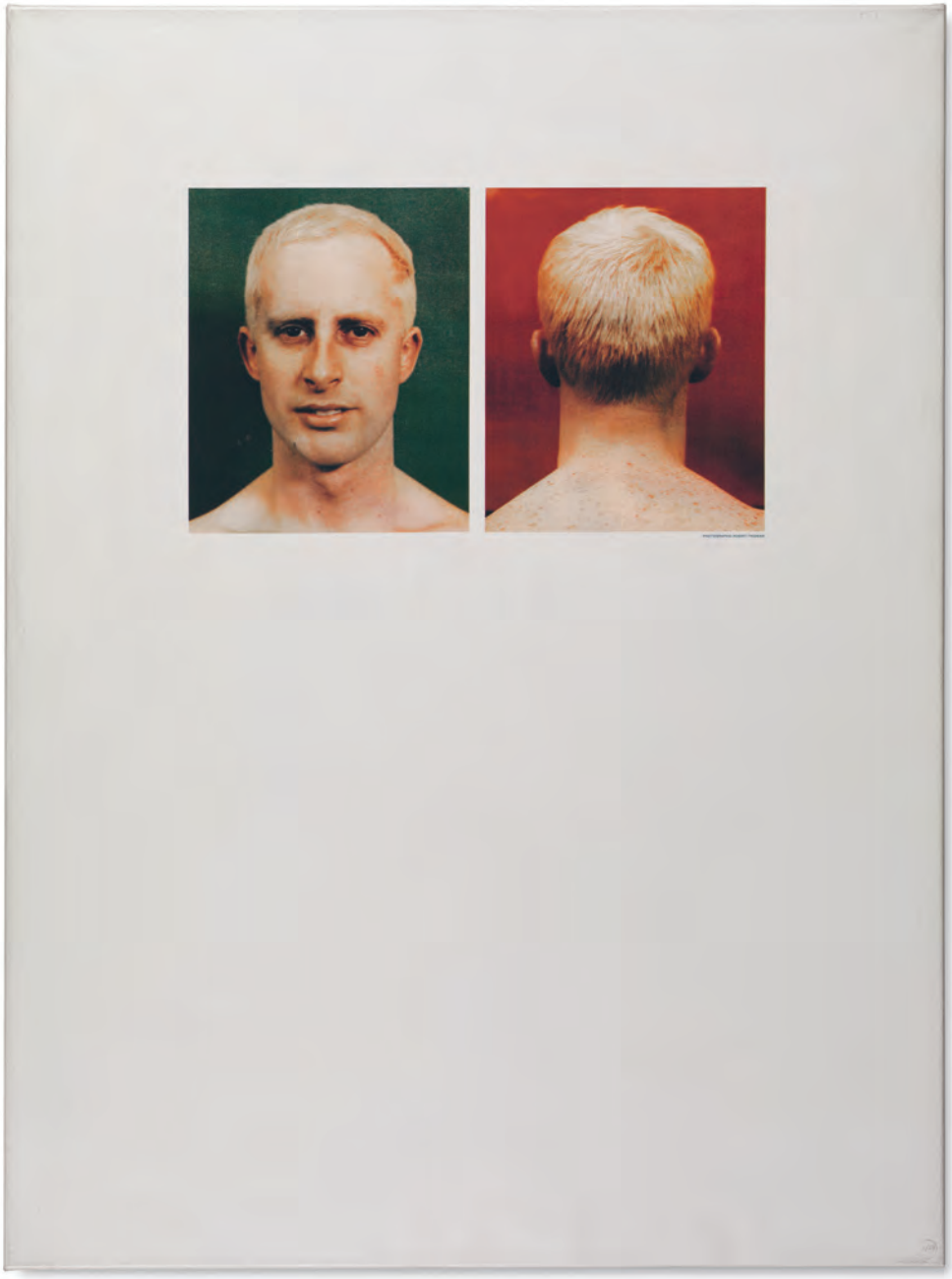
Apple used this reinvention as his own new product as the subject of his first solo exhibition, *Apple Sees Red: Live Stills*, at Gallery One in North Audley Street near Grosvenor Square in April 1963. This show launched him onto the London art scene, though not by the name he was previously known. Securing a show here was hard won, given it was one of a select few commercial spaces dedicated to new art. Its owner, Victor Musgrave, was an early champion of contemporary art and his gallery was recognised as one to watch, along with newly opened venues like Kasmin Gallery, where Hockney had his first sell-out show, and the Robert Fraser Gallery, which launched in 1962 on Duke Street. Musgrave's stable included British artists like Robyn Denny, John Latham and Bridget Riley, and Europeans including Yves Klein, Henri Michaux and Enrico Baj. He also went out on a limb by supporting artists like Francis Souza, who was born in Goa, India, and the 'extreme international avant-garde' – Gustav Metzger, Robert Filliou, Daniel Spoerri and Ben Vautier.[103] Apple fitted Musgrave's agenda; indeed his antipodean origins may even have been an advantage, given the dealer already knew writer Kevin Ireland and painter Michael Illingworth, fellow New Zealanders then sojourning in England, whom Musgrave had employed at different times in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[104]

Apple seized the opportunity, taking over the entire space by painting the walls black to create an overall effect. Along one whole wall he hung twelve canvases at exactly his head height all printed with the front-and-back-view portraits by Robert Freeman of the artist with his newly bleached hair. He called these *Self-portraits (Apple Sees Red on Green)* (1962–63), riffing on the red and green backgrounds to colour-code his image to the two most common varieties of apple.

103 Interestingly, these last artists were grouped together as *The Festival of Misfits*. See *Gallery One: Ten Years*, exhibition catalogue, Gallery One, London, 19 August – 6 September 1963, n.p.

104 Ireland and Illingworth got their jobs through John Kasmin, who worked at Gallery One before establishing his own space; he had met Ireland while living for a time in New Zealand in the 1950s.

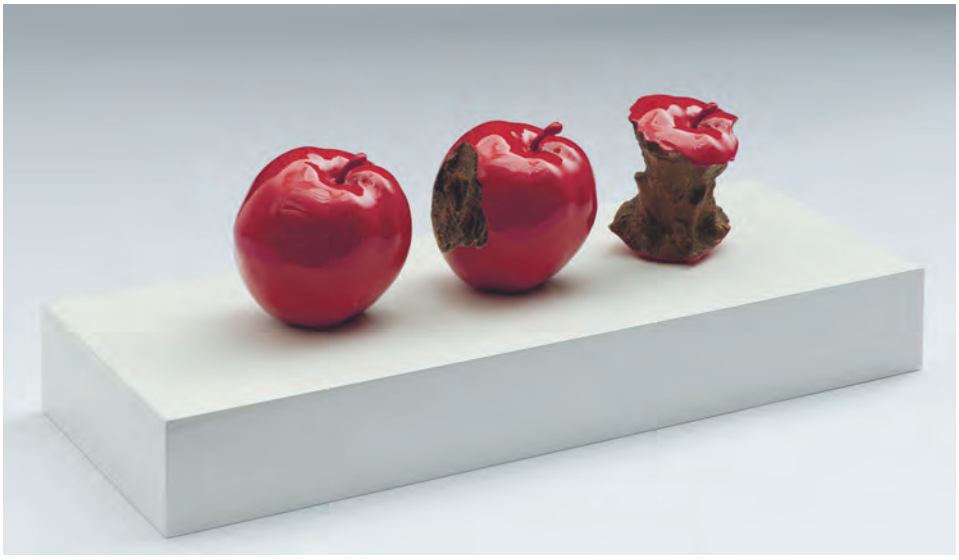
Installation view of the exhibition *Apple Sees Red: Live Stills*, Gallery One, London, 1963, Billy Apple® Archive

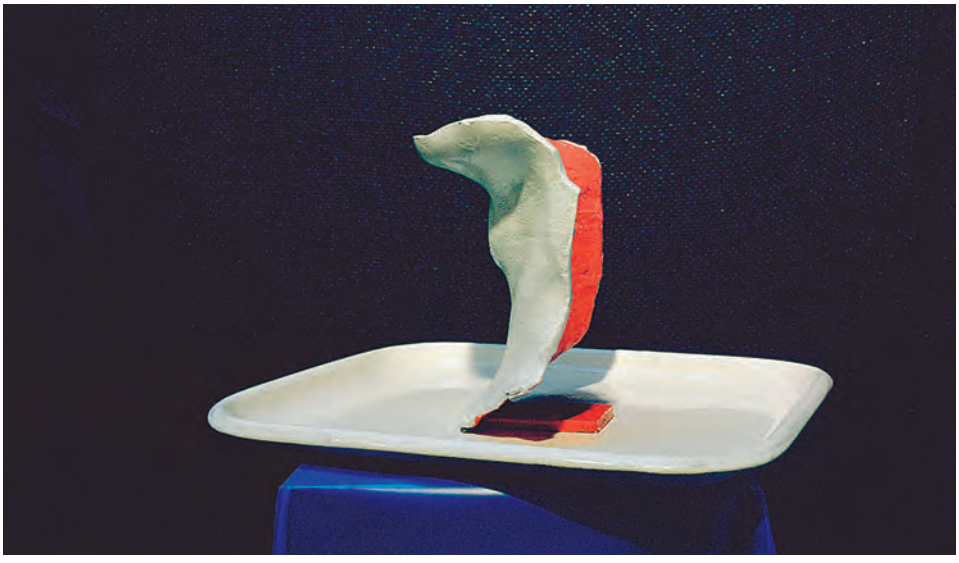


Self-portrait (Apple Sees Red on Green), 1962–63, offset lithograph on canvas, one of twelve, 1020 × 770 mm (photos: Robert Freeman), artist's collection

2 Minutes 33 Seconds (Red), 1962, painted cast bronze, edition of three, 132 × 356 × 152 mm, private collection, New York

Billy's Apple, 1962, painted cast bronze, 165 × 133 × 102 mm, artist's collection





Repeated a dozen times, these were less portraits of their unique subject than serial reminders of the multiplying effects of mass production, the artist appearing like a commodity hot off the production line. Elsewhere in the gallery, Apple's image further proliferated. *Signature Piece* (1962–63), another offset lithograph transferred to canvas, was a version of his portrait surrounded by text appropriated from the photo page of an official passport, with Apple's very first attempt at his new signature. Another set of three offset lithographs on paper deconstructed the colour printing process, to present Freeman's photographs of the artist as a series of ghostly misregistrations in yellow, red and blue. Even the exhibition poster featured the back of the artist's head on a red ground to render literal the show's title.

To further reinforce his new identity, the artist also included several sculptural pieces that toyed with the play of sign and referent engendered by his new name. These included *A for Apple* (1962–63), which combined a neon letter 'A' with a cast bronze apple; *Billy's Apple* (1962), a bronze cast of the artist's throat painted white and red (on the inside) and placed on a small tray;[105] and *2 Minutes 33 Seconds (Red)* (1962), a sculpture consisting of three bronze apples, the skins of which were brightly painted, cast at various stages of being eaten. These 'apple portraits' were integrated with other cast objects and mechanically reproduced images, some of which he had made while still at the RCA, such as cast fruit (banana, orange, lemon, watermelon and tomato), processed products (tomato sauce and French fries), and body parts (like *Love for Sale*'s red-painted heart set on a plinth). Mimicking the way commodities are manufactured, marketed, displayed and consumed, the whole event conceived and presented Apple as a product for sale, a consumable like any other.

The show received considerable coverage as one of London's first solo exhibitions in the new pop genre. However, reviews were mixed and nothing sold. It seemed that commentators were puzzled, even alarmed, by what they found in it. Norbert Lynton, for example, described the works as 'frightening', suggesting that Apple's self-portraits rendered explicit the '*memento mori* impulse that hides behind all art'.[106] And a commentator in *The Times* thought them 'chilling', writing: 'what impresses is their sudden remoteness from us. . . . Painted to kill, they are so obviously the inhabitants of another dimension.'[107] These critics' efforts to understand the works in the context of a much older still-life tradition foundered on the fact that Apple was not thinking compositionally or seeking to demonstrate his representational skills, but instead was treating his work as a vehicle of and showcase for his new identity.

A complex pattern of displacement was in operation, where works functioned directly and without feeling as simple reproductions of everyday things that simultaneously stood for the artist, though they were produced with a singular lack of expressivity. No wonder critics were concerned about their 'deadly' consequences, for what they were witnessing was the disappearance of a 'real' person (Barrie Bates) – who could be thought of as an original creator – and his replacement with an idea, pitched as a product and embodied only as a play of signs.

105 Apple subsequently removed the paint from *Billy's Apple* and drilled a hole and welded a shaft so the bronze could be directly attached to the wall at his chin height. This is how it was exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in 1974, in Apple's first career survey: *From Barrie Bates to Billy Apple*.

106 Norbert Lynton, 'London Letter', *Art International*, vol. 7, no. 5 (25 May 1963), p. 60.

107 From a Correspondent, 'Things Seen: Live Stills and Still Lives', *Times*, Tuesday, 7 May 1963, p. 8.

Rather than a living person into whose character viewers could delve, Apple presented himself as an object, made memorable only because of the uncanny three-way match between his name, what we know of a thing in the world that shares this moniker, and the graphic or visual signs that bring them both into the realm of language. The gallery's press release made connections between Apple and the 'common object' artists – Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine and Tom Wesselmann – across the Atlantic; what was under way across multiple fronts was the demise of the modern artist as autonomous, self-knowing subject and his 'return' in representation.[108] This was a prescient post-modern gesture; the first of a series of interventions designed by Apple to collapse the distance between gallery and marketplace that would punctuate his output in the 1960s.

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Apple's appropriation of Gallery One for the launch of his new identity was followed later that year with a one-night event at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) on 29 October. *Motion Picture Meets the Apple* was another faux marketing occasion staged just four days after the opening of *The Popular Image USA*, an exhibition of twelve American artists all working in the new pop idiom.[109] Along with Oldenburg's oversized plaster *Ice Cream Cone* (1962) and several of Andy Warhol's screen-printed portraits of Marilyn Monroe (1962), Apple's event would have seemed in perfect synch. At its centre was *Billy's Apple and Friends* (1963), the artist's short film of his cast bronze fruit shot in the open-air market in Fulham where they were originally purchased and set to a jaunty soundtrack of the old popular song 'Yes! We Have No Bananas'. He presented this along with found footage borrowed from various sources to make up a playful show-reel of apple-related material, treating

108 This conforms with Hal Foster's idea of the 'homo imago' who is produced in the era of early pop. See Foster, 'Homo Imago', *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2012, especially pp. 6–14.

109 *The Popular Image USA*, 23 October – 23 November 1963, was organised by the ICA with Ileana Sonnabend Gallery, Paris. It included Dine, Allan D'Arcangelo, Johns, Mel Ramos, Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Wayne Thiebaud, Warhol, John Wesley and Wesselmann. See Anne Massey and Gregor Muir, *Institute of Contemporary Arts 1946–1968*, ICA, London, 2014, pp. 138–40.

Billy Apple (right) and Faith Shannon with *Green Apple Pile*, 1963, serigraph on unstretched canvas, 804.8 × 1829 mm (photo: Patrick Tofts), Billy Apple® Archive

his audience to free apples and cider and distributing a 'press kit' with information about the screening along with a recipe for apple pie. This was his second substantial boundary-crossing self-branding exercise, this time at an even more public venue than Musgrave's modest premises and in the company of the American artists with whom he had been associated.

Yet, other than a couple of group shows in and out of London, it too did not yield major opportunities for the artist.[110] Now that his New Zealand bursary had run out, the hard reality of making a living hit home. Life after art school did not seem to be delivering on its early promise. The creative consultancy he started with a fellow design student, Patrick Tofts, neatly called Toffee Apple, was too 'conceptual' even for his professional colleagues, let alone potential clients.[111] Hockney helped as best he could, having him to stay for a while, then suggesting he rent the garden shed at the back of the property where he was then living in Earl's Court Road.[112] He also recommended Apple for a teaching position at the Maidstone School of Art. Here, Apple got his students to help him print a series of unstretched canvases featuring triangular piles of coloured oranges and apples. Apart from this, his output was sporadic, producing only the occasional canvas, such as *North by Northwest* (1963) – an almost blank surface, with a small image of the aeroplane from Hitchcock's eponymous film printed in the corner, which the artist required to be hung in the right compass coordinates. With few serious exhibition opportunities on the horizon, these works mostly remained unstretched and unseen.

In May 1964 he again visited New York. On this trip he recalls rolling out one of his self-portraits from his *Apple Sees Red* exhibition for Leo Castelli, placing an unpainted bronze apple upon it squarely below the front and back views of his head to hold down the curling edge of the canvas where it lay on the gallery floor. Castelli seemed impressed with the work. So was Robert Rauschenberg, who happened to be visiting, and who remarked on the offset lithography technique, which was new to him.[113] He also had four of his British works included in a group exhibition at Pace Gallery, on the invitation of the dealer Arne Glimcher, who had newly opened a space in New York after establishing his first gallery in Boston in 1960.[114] Apple returned to London heartened by his reception; it was the final spur to his decision to leave London for good. Three months later he again travelled to New York, joining the exodus of British artists to America as a new field of opportunity.

Reflecting today on the situation in 1964, the question arises as to why he was not able to secure the same opportunities as his RCA peers. He had been singled out by reviewers in almost every exhibition; he had enjoyed attention through solo projects at Gallery One and the ICA; he was as determined to succeed as any of his contemporaries. Perhaps a combination of factors militated against him. For one, he had changed his name so audiences were confused about his identity; for another, he did not leave the college with a clearly defined style in a single, familiar medium; and his outsider status as a young artist from New Zealand meant that he lacked deeper connections to the English scene, through friends, family and old-school networks. But perhaps most of all,

110 Apple had one work (*New Zealand Visions*, cat. no. 222) included in the *London Group* annual exhibition, 8–20 March 1962. He also was one of ten artists in *Pop Art* at the Midland Group Gallery in Nottingham, 25 May – 15 June 1963 (which also included Peter Blake, Pauline Boty, David Hockney, Peter Phillips and others).

111 Apple recalls being greeted with incomprehension by Malcolm Hart, creative director at Gillies Advertising in Golden Square in Soho, when he showed him *Homonym* (1963) and suggested this might be a model for a ploy to attract clients who could be convinced of the value of cross- or co-marketing. This was a photographic diptych – one image showing a tin of peas beside a packet of cigarettes, the other a single cigarette and pea – that played on the fact their brand names sounded the same (Batchelors Peas, and Player's Bachelor Tipped Cigarettes). Apple's inability to pitch his thinking to the agency, in his words, 'tipped the photographs over the wall' to function as they now do as art. Conversation with the artist, February 2019.

112 Apple chose not to take up Hockney's offer, moving instead, in January 1963, into the studio previously used by British artist William Scott at the back of a property in Lillie Road in Fulham. Conversation with the artist, 2001.

113 Conversation with the artist, May 2016.

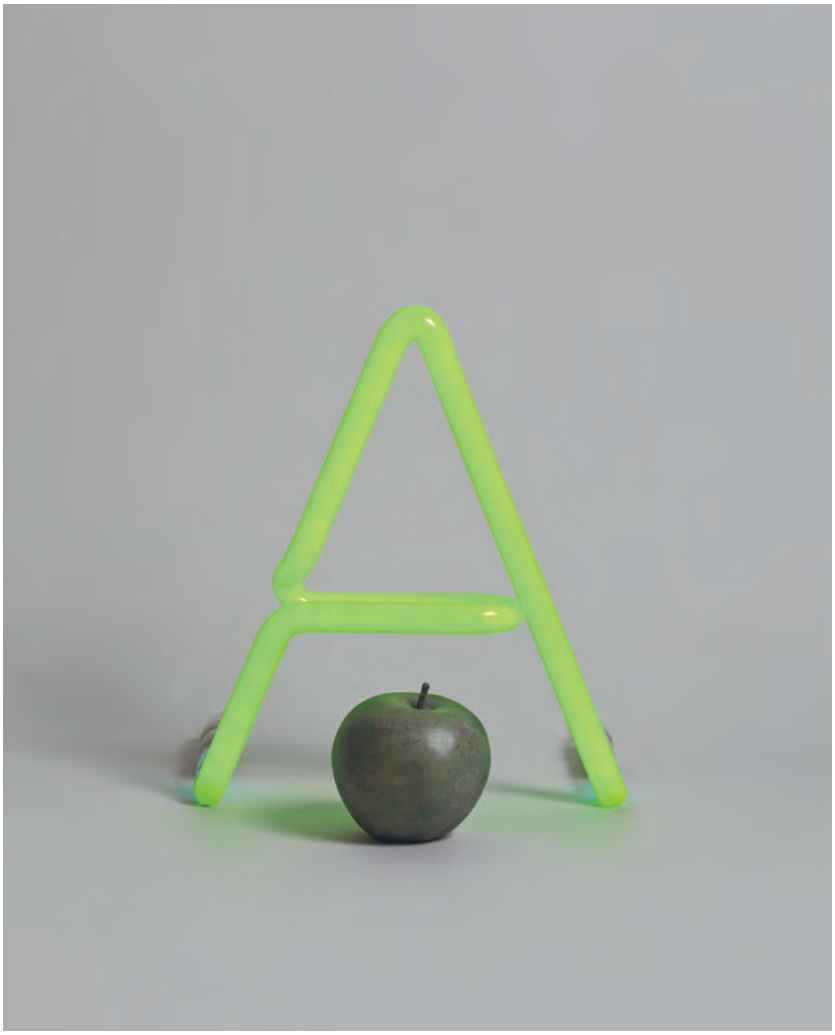
114 Arne Glimcher opened Pace Gallery at 9 West 57th Street in October 1963. *Group Show of Gallery Artists* (19 May – 13 June) included Apple's *Seven Day Suntan, Revlon's Low Down Pink*, his *Squashed Tomato*, and a sculpture pairing a painted cast bronze lemon and orange on a marble base. See installation photograph at https://www.pacegallery.com/exhibitions/group-exhibition-of-gallery-artists/, accessed January 2020.

Still from *Billy's Apple and Friends*, 1963, 16 mm black-and-white and colour film, 2 minutes, 45 seconds, courtesy of Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington

the very basis of his practice, as it had evolved, was challenging to even the most flippant of his pop colleagues.

Where artists like Hockney drew on mundane and commercial sources with an irreverence that poked fun at art's formal and expressive pretensions, they nevertheless still maintained the distinction between art and advertising. They treated everyday sources as subjects *for* their painting. But Apple made marketing and commerce his very subjects. In a new age of mass consumption, he collapsed the distance between art and its material conditions in ways that refused art's specialness; he even took the principles of design and the tactics of advertising seriously as the basis for his conceptualism.[115] And in all of this he treated himself as his own 'client', creating works that some thought trivialised their subject, and left others with a chilling sense that something had been lost in the translation of subject to object, person to image, symbol to sign. This of course was Apple's intention; but he also had to live with the consequences.

115 As the press release for his Gallery One exhibition stated: 'The purpose behind Apple's work is a serious one. Adapting the advertising man's approach to visual art in a search for the "elusive obvious", he believes that advertising art can be raised to the same level as the best in the fine arts.' Gallery One press release, typescript, artist's archive.



A for Apple, 1962–63, argon gas, mercury vapour, 15 mm coated yellow glass tubing, cast bronze, 243 × 210 × 150 mm, courtesy of The Mayor Gallery, London

Billy Apple
presents 'A' (for Apple)
a film produced by
Cammell Hudson Associates Limited,
'The Apple'
produced by
TV Cartoons Limited,
'Billy's Apple and Friends'
produced by
Apthorp/Craddock,
Tuesday, 29th October, 8.15 p.m.
Institute of Contemporary Arts,
17/18 Dover Street,
London W.1.

Poster, *Motion Picture Meets the Apple*, 1963, offset lithograph on paper, 587 × 460 mm (photo: Robert Freeman), Billy Apple® Archive