



# Theo Schoon

## *A biography*

DAMIAN SKINNER



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A Biography  
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### THE IMPORTANT BIOGRAPHY OF A SIGNIFICANT FIGURE IN NEW ZEALAND ART AND CULTURE

Émigré artist Theo Schoon was fascinating, unorthodox, controversial, pioneering and at times reckless. His life intersected with important cultural periods and places, where what it meant to be modern in New Zealand was being debated and articulated in art, literature, music and theatre.

The art he pioneered and promoted – Māori rock drawings, the drawings of a psychiatric patient, Māori moko and kōwhaiwhai, the abstract patterns of geothermal activity in Rotorua – were decisive for many other New Zealand artists, including Gordon Walters. And his example, as an academically trained artist with a good knowledge of modern European art and a commitment to do whatever it took to pursue his artistic projects, was both an inspiring and a cautionary tale.

Schoon's is a life less well known now than it deserves to be. This superb, highly illustrated biography by one of New Zealand's best art writers corrects that imbalance and examines Schoon's claims on the development of art and culture in Aotearoa in the twentieth century.

*'The biography draws on a huge resource of written and recorded interviews and archival materials. It is a phenomenal piece of work, gone about not only with zeal and forensic precision, but also with an eye constantly on the bigger picture.'*

— Greg O'Brien

*'The book is full of new revelations and details that let us see Schoon afresh. This is a far richer, more nuanced, more complex Schoon than we have seen before — and for this, we have to acknowledge both subject (for an extraordinary life lived) and writer (an extraordinary life told).'*

— Aaron Lister

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Damian Skinner** is an art historian, writer and former museum curator. He is interested in the history of cultural contact between Māori and Pākehā and the relationship between art and politics in Aotearoa New Zealand. He is the author of numerous well-regarded books. Damian lives in Gisborne.

### SALES POINTS

- A superb and significant biography by an accomplished art historian
- Fills a gap in the market: this is the first biography of Theo Schoon and it firmly establishes his place in New Zealand art and culture
- Generously illustrated to show aspects of Schoon's life and art
- A fascinating insight into the development of art and culture in New Zealand
- An exhibition of work by Schoon will open at the City Gallery, Wellington, in November 2018

