



HAND-COLOURED NEW ZEALAND

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF WHITES AVIATION

Every single photo coloured by hand?
Using cotton wool? Yes, such was the era of
hand-coloured photography – a painting
and photograph in one – the way you got
a high-quality colour photo before colour
photography became mainstream.

Some of New Zealand’s best hand-coloured
photos were produced by Whites Aviation
from 1945. For over 40 years, the glorious
scenic vistas were a sensation, adorning
offices and lounges around the land;
patriotic statements within New Zealand’s
emerging visual arts. Now, despite massive
changes in society and photography, the
stunning scenes and subtle tones still
enchant, as coveted collectibles; decorations
on screen; and as respected pieces of
photographic art.

But, until now, this inspirational story has
not been told; nor the full stories of Leo
White (company founder); Clyde Stewart
(chief photographer and head of colouring);
and the mission-critical ‘colouring girls’.
New Zealand’s first published collection
of hand-coloured photography is also now
enshrined, ready to enchant for decades
more. Nothing, it seems, can change the
appeal of an alluring hand-made craft.





CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
SCENE SETTING	8
MR AVIATION	20
UNSUNG HERO	66
ONE OF THE GIRLS	90
COLOURING BUSINESS	110
GALLERY	202
ENDNOTES	404



HAND-COLOURED ADDICTION PETER ALSOP

It has been a great privilege to write and curate this book, building on a deep personal passion for the hand-coloured photos of Whites Aviation.

For the book to have caught your attention, the photos wove their magic once more. For many, the pull from the past will have been strong: ‘we had one of those’. For others, it may have been admiration for the craft; interest in aviation; or the simple joy of New Zealand on show. Or was it the subtle tones in an otherwise saturated world? For some, there’ll still be a lingering doubt: was every photo really painted by hand? Such was the quality of Whites’ work, along with contemporary amnesia of photography constraints that hand-colouring used to work around.

Despite having collected the photos for some time, the book’s development brought new sparks. For a collector, new images are always a treat, as are pieces of ephemera that help fill research cracks. Of deepest significance, however, were personal connections – meeting those who were close to Leo White, the founder of Whites Aviation, and Clyde ‘Snow’ Stewart, chief photographer and manager of the colouring studio, who themselves have passed on.

Leo’s sons, Ross and Philip, shared important memories of their father and working for the firm. Clyde’s wife, daughter and granddaughter (Jocelyn, Claire and Jess) provided great help; Jocelyn’s enviable memory filling gaps across Snow’s company contribution for 37 years. Grace Rawson remembered the 1950s, colouring photos for Mr Stewart and Mr White, like they were yesterday. And Ron Meadows provided mission-critical connections and support.

All told, I’m in no doubt that Leo and Clyde were outstanding men. Reflecting on a generation different to my own, their lives reflected traits that seem less celebrated now: motivated resourcefulness, calm confidence and humble aspiration. Working together, the pair thrived; a potent mix of initiative and human-connection that near-guaranteed success. Accomplishments ranged from capturing landmark events and a new aerial version of New Zealand, to the breadth of personal relationships and devoted loyalty of their staff.

In such an inspiring environment, there was ample room for all to shine. Instrumental were the women in the

colouring studio who brought the colouring sensation to life. Steady-handed and meticulous, these were artistic women engrossed in work that they loved, working in a company that they cherished. Having worked industriously and successfully behind the scenes, it’s high time these creative women are revealed.

Now we look back, the contribution of the movement is clear: colour before colour photography, creating art before an art market. For many New Zealanders, the photos opened artistic horizons – in both residential and commercial settings – with a bold patriotic statement that available alternatives couldn’t provide. Even now, the photos feature in advertisements, music videos and feature films, tarring scenes up or dressing them down, still connecting with viewers over 70 years since Whites Aviation was formed.

Notwithstanding their enduring and mainstream appeal, Whites hand-coloured photos (and hand-colouring more generally) have sat patiently in the shadows of New Zealand’s art and social histories. The use of a Whites image (*Queenstown*, p. **XX**) on the title page of *New Zealand Photography Collected* (Te Papa Press, 2015) was a pleasing turn. The aim of this book is to encourage deeper evaluation of Whites’ work. A fuller history of New Zealand’s hand-coloured photography (forthcoming) will further help the hand-coloured cause.

Special acknowledgement is owed to Gary Stewart for his collaborative and ambitious approach to book design; the sixth time we’ve together gone to print. Our patient partners, Veronica and Airihi, are also owed huge thanks. Many others kindly helped, enhancing the outcome for greater good.

Thank you for your interest in the hand-coloured photos of Whites Aviation. I’m confident you’ll agree that, despite massive changes in photography, nothing can change the authenticity and aesthetic of a hand-made craft. Now, a permanent and comprehensive collection of work – decades in the making – can enchant viewers for many decades more. I hope you enjoy the show.



MR AVIATION

LEO WHITE'S LIFE OF THRILLS



Above: White was well-and-truly hooked on aviation, and aerial photography, capturing Charles Kingsford-Smith arriving in New Plymouth in January 1933 (ATL, WA-03250-G). One of White's obituaries referred to him as 'the happy pilot' (left, Private collection). Below: White joined the Auckland Aero Club in 1931 and enjoyed regular visits for club activities, besides his flying lessons that commenced in October 1931. In one of White's cars paid for by the *Herald* sit Fred North, Marion Bathgate, wife-to-be Irene Blakey and Doug Wood. Instructor D. M. Allan also provided aerobatic displays.

Leo also survived a plane crash, landing at Mt Ruapehu in 1933. Piloted by respected aviator Ron Kirkup, the right wheel of the plane struck a depression in the fairway of the Chateau Tongariro golf course – the substitute landing strip after the pair's plans were changed by low cloud – and the plane keeled over.⁴³ Neither Kirkup nor White were injured, with the damaged aircraft making a perfect foreground subject for Leo's photo with the majestic Chateau in behind (previous page).

FOR THE LOVE OF FLIGHT

While useful for photography, being a passenger wasn't enough for the adventurous White. On 16 October 1931, Leo had his first flying lesson with D. M. Allan, the instructor at Auckland Aero Club, which had begun operations in 1929 on a leased paddock. Leo didn't muck around, progressing to his first solo flight within a month, undeterred by it being Friday the 13th.⁴⁴ Only five weeks after his first lesson, Leo set 'a double record for the local club for the time required in learning to fly, both with regard to his first solo flight and gaining the A licence'.⁴⁵ Leo and his (then) girlfriend Rene were popular members of the club, with Leo's flying log book recording Rene as his first passenger on 14 May 1932.⁴⁶ The flight must have been

acceptable as Rene went up again the next day, with Leo's brother Ira and mother taking their turn on the 18th. Leo and Rene enjoyed plenty of time together as the flying club evolved into a country club, including an impressive two-storey clubhouse with a library, billiards room and dance floor and, outside, tennis courts, nine holes of golf and nearby swimming. D. M. Allan would treat Sunday visitors to aerobatics ahead of afternoon tea. Flying was 'in' and an exciting new sport for thrill-seeking Aucklanders. While now taken for granted, it also offered a promising end to New Zealand's isolation.

Leo himself was well-and-truly caught up in the potential of flight, building on those life-changing events of 1921. In 1933, he covered the national tour of Australian Charles Kingsford-Smith, who had been the first aviator to fly from Australia to New Zealand in September 1928. 'Smithy' was a popular visitor, with his plane *Southern Cross* used for joy-rides as he toured around the country. Leo was there for Smithy's arrival in New Plymouth in 1933, capturing a majestic aerial photo of the 'old bus' in front of Mt Egmont (above). White reported: 'As the sun cast its last pink glow on the peak of Mount Egmont, "Smithy" eased the throttles ... to allow photographers in slower aircraft to obtain shots.'⁴⁷ Leo's logbook included a note: 'Ron's work







Left: Whites Aviation never owned a plane, instead forming long-lasting relationships with pilots around the country. In this photo, Stewart (left) and White (right) pose with Stan Blackmore of Blackmore's Air Services in Rotorua (ATL, WA-28825-F, 1951). In addition to his skill in aerial photography, Stewart was a first-class camera technician, building or modifying cameras to meet the company's needs. Below: Stewart sits in retirement with his purpose-built 'Big Bertha' camera (Collection of Ron Meadows). Top: A range of Stewart's cameras (Stewart family collection): Kodak Speed Graphic (1940-45); Kodak quarter-plate Graflex (1910-40); F24 Williamson (1930-50); and a Fairchild K20 (1910-45) – a camera also used extensively by Leo White.

valuation – for the protection of returned servicemen looking for land – meant people weren't keen to sell.³⁹ Even once land was acquired, it was an automatic decision for a hard-working man like Snow to dig the foundations and trenches and learn how to roof and do brickwork.⁴⁰

BIG BERTHA

Just like his handyman status building a home, one of Snow's key strengths for Whites Aviation was his industrious disposition. He built many of the firm's cameras and serviced or modified a wide range of equipment, such as enlargers, to suit the company's needs. 'Building a camera never appeared to me to be that complicated. All a camera is, really, is a box with a lens at one end and a focal plane at the other that you put a material in that's sensitised to take a picture – it didn't appear to me to be that complicated. ... We used ex-service cameras – for 5 pounds you'd get a camera that would have cost hundreds and hundreds. ... They proved the basis of our aerial photography really.'⁴¹ 'We had gear that suited the trade; it wasn't elaborate gear but it was reliable, thorough, we knew it and understood it.'⁴²

A favourite of Snow's – and the company's given its reliability and results – was 'Big Bertha' (right). 'I built it to house a lens which I got from Rabaul during the war. It wasn't actually stolen – it had been left lying around! I found a superb Japanese camera but I only wanted the lens, so I built a camera that accommodated it, which used glass plate negatives.'⁴³ Snow estimated that he took around 20,000 photographs with Big Bertha,⁴⁴ a mark of the camera's durability given the often challenging conditions of photographic work during flight. Even in 1982 when retiring, Snow lamented that they'd 'tried to find something more up-to-date to give more flexibility but without much success'.⁴⁵

Bertha took glass plates held in a 12-pack magazine: 'You took your picture and pulled the negative through into a little leather bag ... every 12th picture that was taken, you had to replace the magazine.'⁴⁶ Adding to the challenge was the very confined area in which to handle the heavy equipment and change the slides. In the case of early work in Tiger Moths and

Fox Moths, Snow was limited to four or five magazines for a day's flying (48–60 shots).⁴⁷ For some aircraft, given the size of the camera, it simply became necessary to remove the plane's door in order to hold and use the camera.⁴⁸ It was hairy work, requiring pilots to be well attuned to the photographer's needs: 'There was no means of speaking to the pilot in the Fox Moth. All I could do was look through the window and make signs.'⁴⁹

Leo touched on the criticality of good piloting for aerial photography when he diarised a compliment for Ron Kirkup's manoeuvring skills to help capture 'Smithy' in front of Mt Egmont. He also shared insights in his touring account in 1938 for the *New Zealand Observer*, including on the tricky sub-specialty of air-to-air photography: 'All the good photographs I have ever taken in the air routes in New Zealand have been



‘Every one of thousands of hand-coloured photographs that have gone out of Whites Aviation over the years (and which hang throughout the country) have been touched by me at some stage. A little bit of me has gone into everything that has been turned out here.’

A 1963 *Women's Weekly* story on the studio (reprinted on page xx) underscored Snow's careful approach: ‘When Mr Stewart has inspected the finished work as it comes from the artists, and as if by instinct has added the little details only he knows are missing, murals not under glass are sprayed with a cellulose lacquer that serves not only as protection but also enlivens the colour.’⁵⁷ Snow also printed the base black-and-white photos and, as necessary, retouched them as part of the developing process. In the case of *Kaikoura Coast* (p. xx), probably the most popular hand-coloured image produced, the negative was badly scratched and required retouching each and every time.⁵⁸

Snow hired and managed the women that made up the studio, sustaining a team of around eight for a lot of the time. Snow adored the women and the women adored Snow: ‘He was a lovely man; gentle, caring and just let us get on with it ... and he'd become one of the girls’, recalled Grace Rawson. According to Leo's son Ross, ‘it was a hen party in there all the time!’ Such was Snow's love for the product he even took work home; multiple hand-coloured images adorning his home, including a favourite image of Mt Ruapehu (illustrated at the end of this essay) in his bedroom. ‘The result was much superior to colour negatives.’⁵⁹

SIGNING OUT

Snow gave Whites Aviation the best part of 37 years’ loyal service, the last 15 as a steadying influence and calm leader, including as a trusted advisor to the firm's new owner, Shane Niblock, from 1972. Snow worked incredibly hard and there was

no aspect of the company's operations in which he couldn't lend a competent or expert hand. Even Snow's holidays often incorporated work. From his caravan at Lake Rotoiti, he'd motor across to Whakatane for a flight or take Stan Blackmore's plane from Rotorua.⁶⁰

In bowing out, Snow noted that he was ‘leaving a fully trained team to carry on. ... I feel I've contributed something; it's been satisfying. Every one of thousands of hand-coloured photographs that have gone out of here over the years (and which hang throughout the country) have been touched by me at some stage. A little bit of me has gone into everything that has been turned out here.’⁶¹ It was an understated exit by an understated man.

Snow died in July 2012, aged 90, his memories extensive and sharp until the very end. At the time of writing (2016) he was survived by his adorable wife Jocelyn, their four children and their respective families. Pleasingly, he enjoyed a 2009 book on the black-and-white aerial photos of Whites⁶² – in some ways a reincarnation of the 1952 and 1960 Whites Aviation *Pictorial Reference* publications. ‘It had always been my anguish that somehow or other the collection would be broken up and dispensed or dispersed’⁶³ – now safely in the hands of the Turnbull Library and extensively digitised for longevity and public use. What was dispersed however, intentionally and very successfully, was the thousands of hand-coloured photos that Snow pivotally helped create. And, now, a significant published collection of these can be enjoyed too.

Right: Coinciding with an earlier book on the black and white aerial photos of Whites Aviation, Clyde Stewart was interviewed by the *Sunday Star Times* in October 2009 (Fairfax Media NZ, 623924074). His late-life interviews, including those with MOTAT and Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, are an important record of the work of Whites Aviation and aerial photography in New Zealand (along with other content, such as his father Frank's role as a pioneer cinematographer and partnership with Leo White in Stewart and White, a photography company that, in practical effect, Whites Aviation reincarnated after the war). Following pages (album): A selection of photos from Stewart's life. Subsequent pages: One of Stewart's favourite hand-coloured images that hung in this bedroom for decades (*Mount Ruapehu*, c.1965, 380x685mm, Collection of the Stewart family, Negative: similar to WA-62906-G, ATL, 1964).





Turpentine would allow paint to be removed and it could be painted over, with more success if going darker as opposed to lighter. Razor blades were also sometimes used for paint removal: 'heavy-handed girls could never do this job!'⁵ Large surface areas needed special attention, with sky in particular requiring a consistent and quick hand to avoid patchiness.

During her time at the company - because sizes did change - Grace recalls the standard sizes of the 'Scenic Series' photos as 20 x 16 or 16 x 12 inches. A 20 x 16 inch image would take about one morning to complete. 'It was surprising how proficient we got. Once we learnt how to do the colours and how it looked, we could be pretty quick about it.' When the girls painted large murals, it wouldn't be uncommon to work as a team, standing, sitting or climbing up on stools (left). Even then, big pieces could take many days to complete, nine in the case of a large Lake Taupo photograph worked on by four girls in 1963. Each girl had their favourite aspect - for Grace it was colouring mountains - but big pictures carried special enjoyment for their variety and added camaraderie. There was also a special interest in doing something absolutely new.

For cityscapes - which Grace found the hardest to get right given intricate building detail - notes were taken of the colours of roofs and special buildings, 'otherwise we were free to use



Left: Grace Rawson, Lorraine Sutton and Nola Mann work on colouring a large photographic mural for H & J Smith's store in Gore in 1955 (WA-39940). Large murals like this took a number of days for a team of colourists. Nola Mann worked as a colourist at Whites from around 1955 until around 1998, likely making her - given the popularity of Whites' work - the most extensive hand-colourist in New Zealand's history. Above: Grace at work on one of the smaller scale-images that Whites initially sold mounted on a cream matte (Collection of Grace Rawson). Following pages: The centrefold of a Whites Aviation brochure advertising the 'Glorious New Zealand' series (c.1960, altered for display).



Above: A set of Winsor & Newton paints for hand-colouring photographs. A bottle of turpentine can be seen on the right of the tray, with cotton wool and sticks in the bottom to be used as the 'brush'. The instructions noted that 'this range of high-grade oil colours provides an effective, yet comparatively simple, means of colouring non-glossy photographic prints and enlargements. The series has been intentionally restricted to a small number of colours, but from these a wide range of tones and shades can be obtained without fear of chemical interaction.' Right: In 2016, Grace Rawson hand-coloured a contemporary photo of Queenstown, about 50 years after she last coloured a photo. The hand-colouring was done for a short documentary about Grace and Whites Aviation called *The Colourist* (Co-directed by Greg Wood & Peter Alsop). Following pages: The final version of Grace Rawson's *Queenstown* (2016). Further appreciation is recorded for Grace's support of both the documentary and this book.

As romances blossomed, the girls also attended each other's weddings, with Mr and Mrs White and Mr and Mrs Stewart always present 'as an important part of our lives'. Grace's own marriage to Eugene 'Buster' Rawson in 1958 was no exception and all the staff were guests. The honeymoon was planned to visit all the places that Grace had painted in both the North and South islands. 'For 4 weeks we explored in our small Thames Ford van, sleeping in a tent. I really learned to love this beautiful country of ours.'

ENDURING POPULARITY

Reflecting back, Grace explained her theory on the Whites sensation and the orders coming in thick and fast: 'It was very important for people to have photographs of New Zealand on their walls in those days. And once Whites started selling, they went bezerk everywhere. In my view, everybody bought them because there was nothing else like them at the time. There were some prints of Van Gogh's sunflowers, Brugal's paintings, Constable's hay wain - but suddenly Whites was different. It was real; and the country we lived in; and hand coloured. It absolutely took off' At that time, the market for coloured farm photos was also driving demand. Grace recalls salesmen travelling extensively to show farming families small photos, and hand-coloured samples, to entice them into an order.

Grace finished with Whites Aviation in around 1963 (her otherwise-sharp memory hazy on this fact), ending a decade's loyal service and, for her, extremely enjoyable employment. 'I feel very privileged to have been part of that.' Buster owned a clothing manufacturing business and, from one creative outlet to another, Grace spent the next 20 years designing clothes: 'woman's dresses, suits and many ball gowns, selling throughout New Zealand which meant many more trips around the country keeping my memories of the photos alive.' In late life, Grace turned back to oils, reigniting her passion for painting and selling many scenes of New Zealand. The memories of the miniatures were also still strong; this time around the Old Masters were reproduced at scale. As she said as a young girl, 'I will be an artist!'

More widely, Grace knows first-hand that the hand-colouring legacy lives on. 'I love to come across the photos 60-odd years later: a majestic mural of the Remarkables in a Queestown café; several in Russell and many in a café in Taupo.' All locations, it so happens, of special significance in Grace's life. Wherever she goes, the popular Whites Aviation scenes are never far away ... and, given the sensation, nor are photos that she personally coloured herself.



COLOURING BUSINESS THE LEGACY OF WHITES AVIATION

In March 1945, an optimistic Leo White, undeterred by the war, opened the doors of Whites Aviation in downtown Auckland. Amongst the company's offerings were photographs coloured by hand, which they produced for over 50 years; the best known examples – both then and now – of hand-coloured photography in New Zealand.

The story of Whites Aviation is an interesting combination of different threads. The development of aviation and aerial photography set the context, within which an innovative White – with plenty of helpers – could forge his fame. To many his fame was advancing aviation through promotional services, including magazines and books. To others, aerial photos fuelled development and presented a new angle of national pride. The environment was also ripe; identity-hungry New Zealanders, post-war, were keen to display their favourite scene. And they were keen on something more than black-and-white.

The passage of time has been both kind and unkind to Whites' hand-coloured work. That it stands today as a defining feature of the company's legacy is at odds with its initial sideline intent. In contrast, the lack of serious consideration of hand-coloured photography in New Zealand's art and cultural histories – both Whites and more generally – defies its importance, such as putting a 'colour' New Zealand on show; the predominant role of women in the colouring craft; and the long-running appeal of such work in popular culture. This deficit is not unique to New Zealand; the attention accorded to hand-coloured photography internationally is just as sparse.

Today, the Whites Aviation photographic collection is housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library; more than 75,000 images offering a rich record of New Zealand's development (and some of the Pacific and Australia) for around 70 years (c.1920–c.1990). As the library has noted: '[The] collection was built and maintained with loving care by a company committed to documenting the country, and we are proud to continue their work of preserving it and making it available to the people of New Zealand. [The photos] have been widely used by historians, geographers, iwi historians, and others researching land use in New Zealand.'¹ While aerial scenes (unsurprisingly) dominate, almost a third of the images in the collection are taken from the ground,² reflecting White's history of press photography that

he and the company could never fully shake. Despite Whites' prolific production of hand-coloured photos over a long period, only about 80 form part of the collection (around 45 if counting unique images); a trivial slice of the hand-coloured portfolio Whites produced. Small but important holdings are also found in Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Outside institutional collections, the networked portfolio of Whites' hand-coloured work is strong. Several collectors have supported this book, allowing a comprehensive collection to be enjoyed and permanently recorded in print. More generally, the photos are a regular decorative feature in popular culture and appear – based on Te Papa's 2015 publication, *New Zealand Photography Collected* – to be on the cusp of more serious appraisal in the evolution of New Zealand photography (and, one would hope, in the study of New Zealand art as boundaries in the visual arts further subside). Hand-coloured photography has also influenced some aspects of contemporary New Zealand art, and the alluring aesthetic of such photography has been reincarnated – globally – through digital means. Building on this publication, pieces of the neglected hand-coloured puzzle will be easier to find and, bit by bit, can fall more easily into place.

BUILDING AN AERIAL STUDIO

To appreciate Whites Aviation photography, it is important to understand the aerial environment within which the company set about its work. A comprehensive history of aerial photography in New Zealand is documented in *No Clouds Today*,³ but some important points and new information need traversing here.

While aerial photography debuted globally in 1858, from a balloon above Bièvre in France, it would take about another 30 years – a balloon ascent in Dunedin in 1889 – for New Zealand



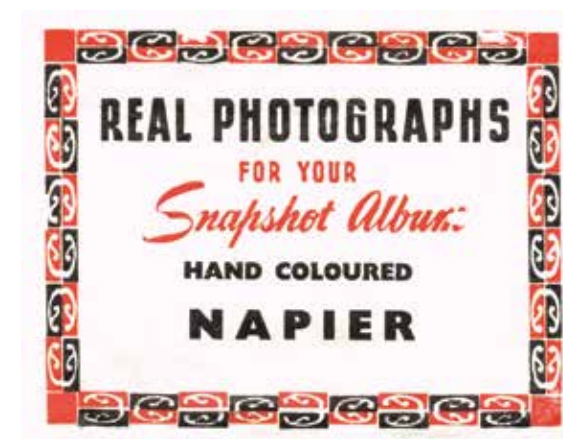
‘staff photographer’ that was almost certainly Bourne. A record-setting flight for altitude also occurred on 25 January 1919, with Bourne taking ‘a number of oblique photographs of Auckland, as well as of the machine’s altimeter so that the altitude reached was not in dispute’.¹⁰

During this period, the first aerial photography flight in the South Island was recorded on 8 January 1918, with Cecil Hill at the controls and Lieutenant Colonel Sleeman taking the shots.¹¹ Along more official lines, the Air Force made its aerial photography debut in 1925,¹² a hint to what it would later see as ‘the eye of modern warfare’.¹³ The First World War had actually unleashed the potential of aerial photography and, even then, photography was seen as ‘a powerful weapon’.¹⁴ Out of that war, ‘the stage was set for the widespread use of aerial photography’, including ‘a highly important and helpful instrument for surveyors and mappers’.¹⁵ Sensing further troubled waters ahead, a German military leader stated in 1938: ‘The nation with the best photo-interpretation will win the next war’.¹⁶

Getting back to Bourne, it is likely that his own aerial photography debut was in 1917 or, at latest, on the January 1918 flight. In papers held by Auckland Museum, Bourne refers to a camera he used that was ‘especially altered to withstand the great wind strain’, while also referring to the first Walsh experiment ‘seven years ago’ (either the 1910 construction of the Walsh Brothers’ plane or its inaugural flight on 5 February 1911).¹⁷ Altogether, Bourne could well have taken the first aerial photo in New Zealand but there are perhaps two scenarios for how things played out. On one hand, with Bolt being the pilot, it seems likely he would have taken photos and proudly shown

Below: An aerial camera being handled with care by Air Force staff (ATL, WA-21486-G, 1939).
Right: Airmen loading an aerial camera into a Vickers Vildebeest (RNZAF, HbP117, 1938).





Hand-coloured photography has had a number of applications over time. New Zealand's early tourism drive was promoted internationally using glass lantern slides (left, collection of Barry Hancox) and pocket-sized hand-coloured photos of attractions in different cities (above). Hand-coloured slides were also used extensively, over decades, in cinema advertising (below).

of making photographs in a process that was able to represent natural colours'.⁴¹ However, Mitchell notes that, despite the enthusiasm for the process, 'there are few recorded uses ... and it seems to have remained largely within the realm of amateur photographers and the camera club movement. The inability to reproduce images, ... alongside the awkwardness of viewing the plates with an illuminated light source, hindered the popularity of the process. ... [That] there are so few examples held within public collections in New Zealand is perhaps a combination of several factors, among them the fragility of the glass plates and a reluctance to address photography from the Pictorialist era as a serious art form.'⁴²

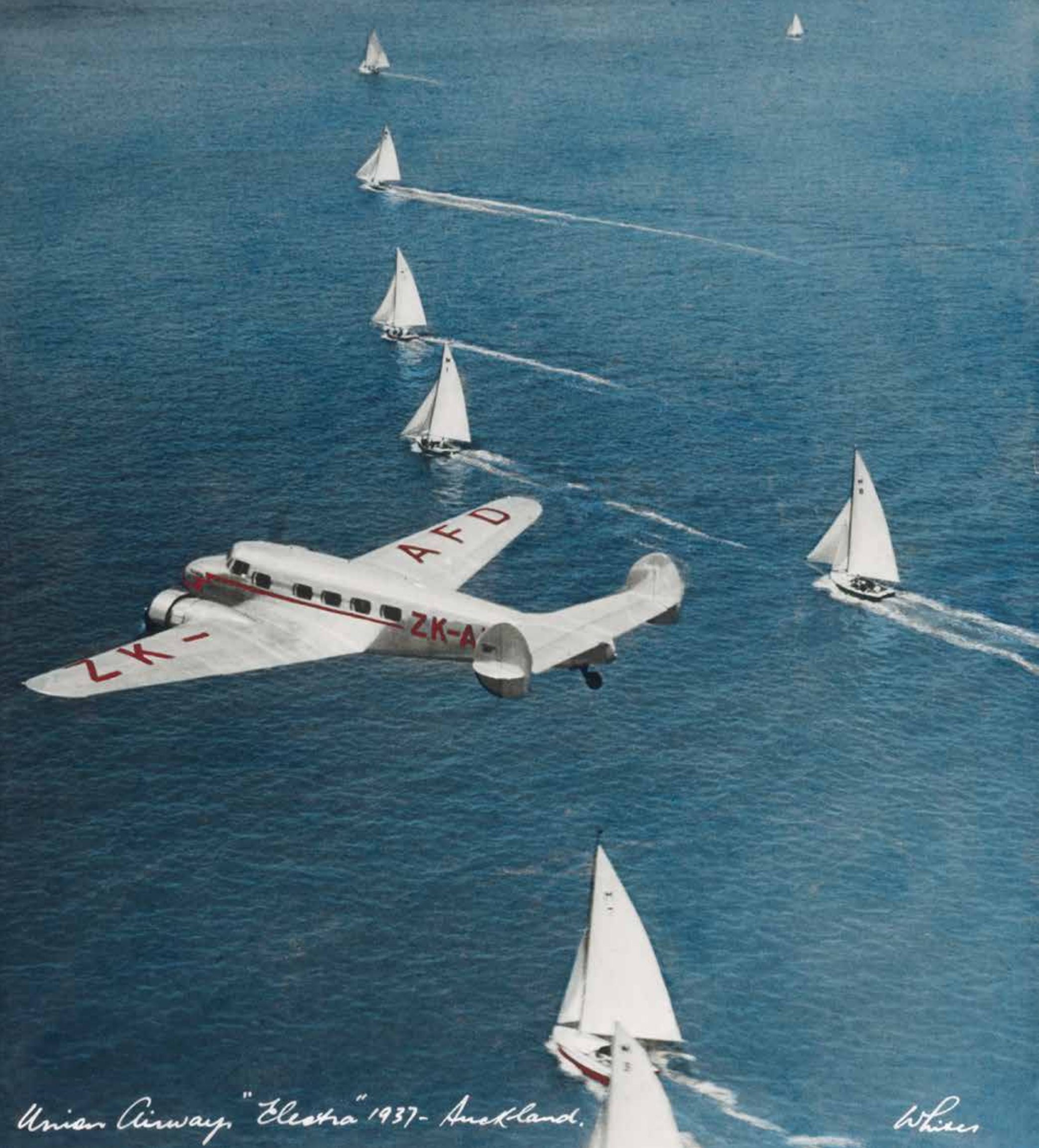
The arrival of colour through the autochrome, while exciting, was also far from the end of hand-colouring. Autochromes were not user-friendly and the colour, while an undisputed breakthrough, was far from perfect. As in any market, the incumbent - hand-colouring - also had much to lose and,

therefore, much to gain from hanging on. Not long after the autochrome came along, an article noted that 'the interest recently attracted to the various forms of colour photography has in turn revived interest in the hand colouring of monochrome prints'.⁴³ The article went on to describe the ins and outs of colouring photos to further entrench interest and help readers master the craft.

This was just the start of an enduring debate about, in effect, 'real' and 'unreal' colour. 'Some photographers believed that to artificially colour a photograph was to alter its truth-telling nature and was considered blasphemy to the profession. Artists saw colouring photographs as an uncreative way to create works of art, and they saw the downfall of traditional [fine art] portraiture in the rise of photographic works.'⁴⁴ Proud proponents of colour photography, and also colour film, also put the alternative down: 'The marvellous natural colouring taken from life by the camera, not hand tinted or







Leo White photographed a number of important aviation milestone events in New Zealand, including visits of flying boats. Top: A Pan American Boeing 314 Clipper landing in Auckland (Private collection, Negative WA-00322-G, 1940). Below and left: Aviation-related hand-coloured photos held in MOTAT's collection (Negative for left image: WA-00324-G, ATL, 1938, Lockheed Model 10 Electra monoplane). Following pages: Whites' 'photographic print price list – May, 1982', with detailed information about colouring and ordering options (Collection of the Stewart family). A third owner of Whites, Air Logistics (NZ) Ltd, took over in late 1988. The sale of Whites' hand-coloured photos came to a final close in about 1998, running for a lot longer than many people have assumed.

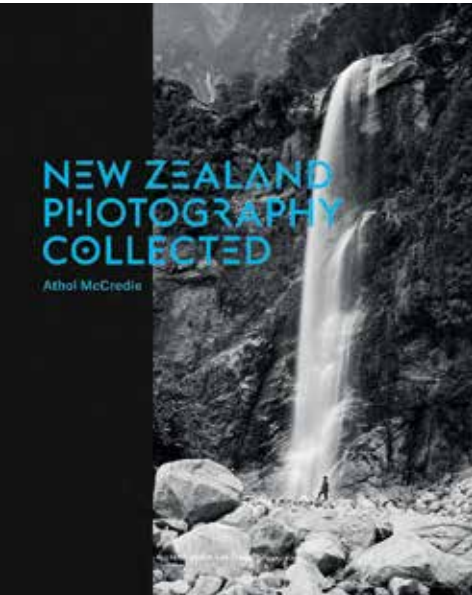
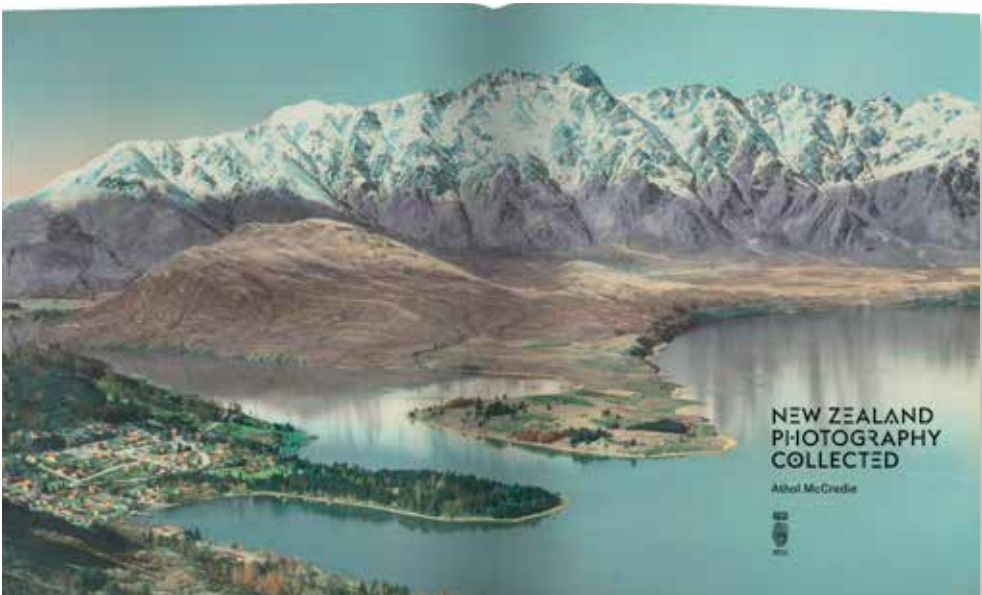
how long the service ran. Based on various threads, it seems the service pertained mainly to the Auckland area, and petered out around 1960 or shortly thereafter. Clyde Stewart's notes recorded that it kept the team of colourists busy 'for a few years'.⁹ Research by Halena White, based on a 1998 interview with Stewart, recorded that the farm photos were 'only in selected areas – Bay of Plenty, Auckland and Northland, because it was getting too expensive to fly up and down the country, and gradually ... they concentrated more on Auckland'.¹⁰ It seems plausible that the farm photos helped build the hand-coloured side of the business but became, relatively speaking, commercially unattractive once the broader scenic work – holding wider appeal and without the need for direct marketing in sparsely-populated rural communities – had built up sales speed.

Whites scenic work was epitomised – and made most popular – by the 'Scenic Series', a collection of Leo White's photos that were hand-coloured and a long-running commercial success. White explained in 1965 why he felt these photos were so popular: 'Of the 60,000 views in our reference library, 18 scenes are forever in demand. The public has been choosing

these scenes over and over for 20 years. Their popularity never diminishes. Why? The secret is that every one is placid, restful; no angry skies, no arty approach. All were taken just as anyone would see them from the roadside or some popular vantage point.'¹¹ One of White's obituaries noted the 'special and understandable affection' he carried for these photos, 'which he sold by the thousand. Like a good showman, he thoroughly understood the principle: 'Never change a hit'. He used to say, 'I don't need to market more; these pay the rent'.¹²

As discussed in *Mr Aviation*, such comments could be construed as White having a photographic philosophy acutely driven by commercial gain (with different views on whether that is 'good', 'bad' or somewhere in between). It seems more likely, however, that White's love for photography came first, with a calm confidence that profit would follow passion. None of the commentary on White's career suggests a ruthless approach to commerce and, instead, paints a picture of a convivial entrepreneur. Unlike earlier in his career, White was also his own master. The fact that there were 'days of waiting' to capture the perfect wave for *Kaikoura Coast* (p. xx) supports this view.¹³





The photograph of Whites Aviation has received relatively sparse attention in various histories of New Zealand photography. In 2015, greater recognition was received in Te Papa's publication *New Zealand Photography Collected*. Whites' *Queenstown* featured on the title page of the book (above, images courtesy of Te Papa Press), and was also used at scale in an article profiling the book in the *Herald*. Whites photos have continued to have a presence in popular culture in multiple ways, including in cafes. A large version of *Queenstown* hangs in Vudu cafe in Queenstown (left, image courtesy of [Paul Green](#)), while Replete in Taupo has made an extensive collection of Whites images an inherent part of its café culture.

be downgraded as a painter who had dabbled in this somewhat despised field'.⁵ Even by the late 1960s, 'only one art gallery in the country [included] photographs in its art collection, and that [was] the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui' – and even then the photographic collection was the result of gifts.⁶ Richard Thomson has reported that Auckland Art Gallery 'held its first exhibition devoted to photography only in February 1957, displaying the work of Brian Brake. The National Art Gallery did not begin to collect photographs until 1976.'⁷

Published histories of New Zealand photography have tried to make up for lost time. And with lots of ground to cover, it's no surprise that hand-colouring has only featured in a minor way. The histories by Knight⁸ and Main and Turner⁹ feature no hand-coloured photographs and only give fleeting reference to hand-colouring in their text. Paul Thompson included Whites' *Clearwater* (19xx) in *New Zealand: A Century of Images*; one of four hand-coloured images in the 100-year survey (during which colouring was prime content). Eggleton also featured *Clearwater*, with a short commentary about the Whites' colouring craze, along with three other fleeting references to hand-colouring.¹⁰ These cameo published outings for hand-coloured photography (and Whites Aviation) are noteworthy but, in the context of both the publications and significance of hand-colouring in New Zealand photographic history, extremely modest.

While not a published text, the *New Zealand History* website includes a collection of 20 photographs that 'sketch out a history of photography in New Zealand';¹¹ a collection that includes *Waikato River*, a hand-coloured image by Whites Aviation.¹² Compiled by photographer Andy Palmer, the collection is caveated as not being 'comprehensive or objective' but, nonetheless, Whites is part of the club. *Waikato River* is attributed to Leo White, which is probably correct but by no means certain

given the extent of photography carried out by Clyde Stewart. The choice of attribution to White, and not Whites Aviation, also seems purposeful for him to join the 19 other individuals named; a choice that speaks to the awkwardness within art histories of crediting companies, even before consideration of whether colourists should share the stage. The image is referenced '1940s', though a search of the Whites Aviation collection confirms it was taken in October 1950.¹³

The biggest breakthrough for hand-colouring came in 2015 with the publication of *New Zealand Photography Collected* by Athol McCredie, a senior photography curator at Te Papa Tongarewa. The book used Whites' *Queenstown* (1950) as the double-page title image (above), along with inclusion of other hand-coloured images by Whites (*Mackenzie Country*), Spencer Digby and the National Publicity Studios. There was also accompanying commentary for those images, such as regarding the enduring significance of hand-coloured portraiture noted earlier in this essay. In profiling the book, the *Herald* in its Canvas magazine, reproduced the *Queenstown* image in large format – another major public outing for Whites – and the photo sits atop the article online.¹⁴ The album that contains the image was also displayed in the book's accompanying exhibition at Te Papa Tongarewa.¹⁵ It is noted that this album was likely produced as a special one-off promotional aide or bespoke gift, as Whites never produced a publication of hand-coloured photos (even as prints).

While the broader exposure accorded to hand-colouring by McCredie is most important, he also underscored the importance of Whites Aviation: 'In the 1950s and 60s, the company's hand-coloured scenic images ... were a familiar item in homes and corporate foyers. Their popularity established the Whites "look" as the standard photographic representation of New Zealand landscape through the 1950s – so much so that

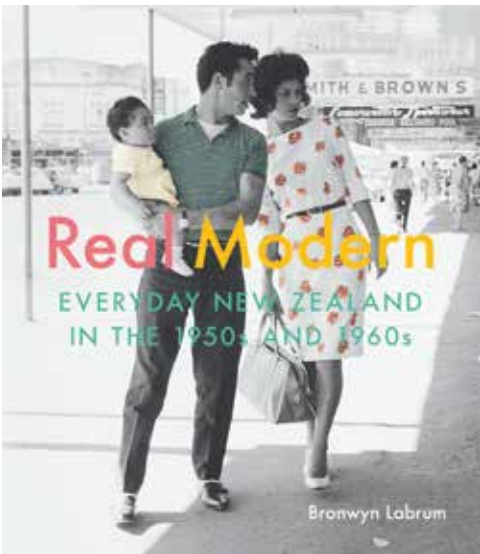
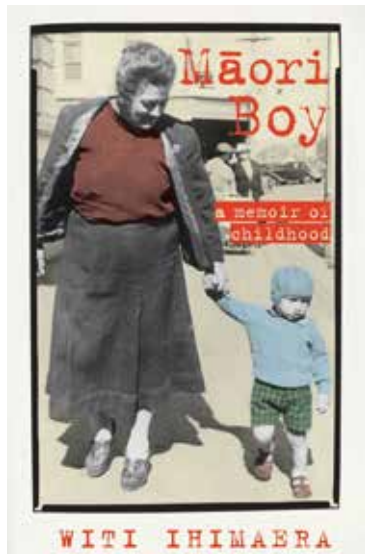
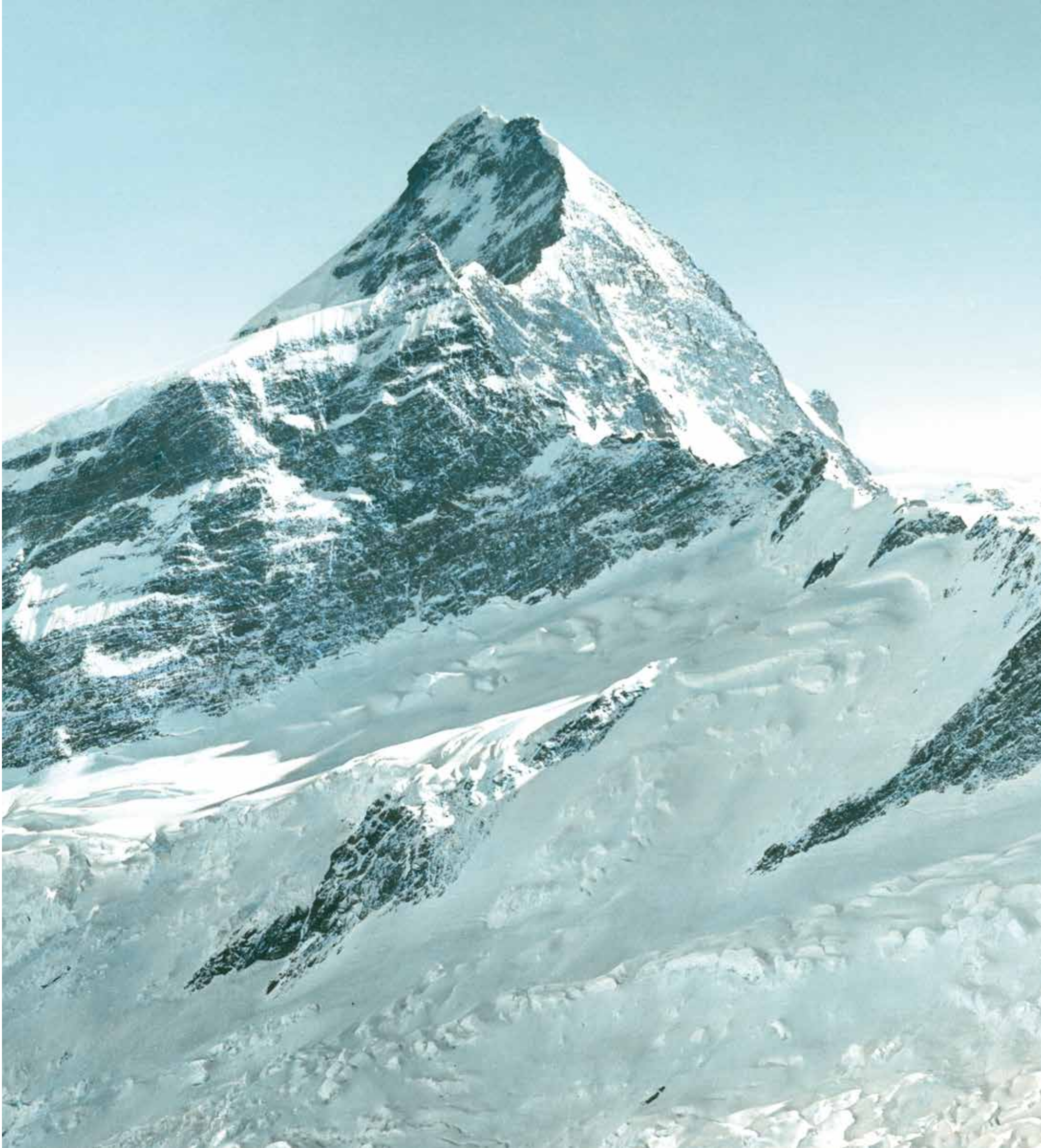


Whites Aviation made the big screen in 2016, with multiple hand-coloured photos used in a dining room scene in *Mahana* (above, courtesy of Jump Film & TV). Whites' photos have also been used in a large number of TV advertisements, as well as music videos. Singer Brooke Fraser used *Mt Aspiring* as a background prop in her 2009 hit *Something in the water* (below, courtesy of Sony Music). Right: A detail of Whites' *Mt Aspiring* (1947, 500x750mm (detail shown), Negative WA-08857-G, Collection of Peter Alsop). Another influence of hand-colouring in contemporary culture is digital colouring, a worldwide trend that gained profile and momentum through adding colour to important historic events recorded in black-and-white (see examples on the following pages). Digital colouring has also been used for book covers (below: images courtesy of Penguin Random House and Te Papa Press).

Even without manipulation, Whites' hand-coloured photos have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, extensive display in popular culture. Besides display in public establishments like cafes – including Replete Café in Taupo that has partly defined its reputation through a Whites' display – the photos have featured regularly in television commercials, including for Subway, Mighty River Power, Sealord, TV2, Speights, Tui, Kiwi Bacon and Hyundai.⁵³ Whites photos have also had important outings in other popular media. Leo White's photo of a lazy wave, *Kaikoura Coast*, hung in Dave Dobbyn's 2015 music video *Tell the World* (p. xx), while Brooke Fraser chose *Mount Aspiring* (right) for prominent use in her 2009 video hit *Something in the Water* (below right). In 2016, multiple images graced a family dining room in Lee Tamahori's film *Mahana* (above); Whites' majestic *Te Araroa*, a sweeping pohutukawa-framed bay, hanging prominently above the mantelpiece as the perfect image to help bring Witi Ihimaera's emotional East Coast tale to life.

Ihimaera was at the centre of another outing for colouring in 2016, being the cover of his memoirs, *Maori Boy: a memoir of childhood* (below left).⁵⁴ The book went on to win the general non-fiction category of the 2016 New Zealand Book Awards,⁵⁵ ensuring wide exposure of the coloured image of a young Ihimaera being walked down the street. The cover of Bronwyn Labrum's *Real Modern: Everyday New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s*⁵⁶ also employed colouring to further liven a mid-century Ans Westra photograph (below centre).

These covers, while oozing a hand-coloured aesthetic, were actually digitally-coloured on a computer. This worldwide trend – through sites like *Dynamichrome*,⁵⁷ *Past in Colour*,⁵⁸ *History in Color*⁵⁹ and *Colorized History*⁶⁰ – underscores the pervasive and durable nature of people's propensity to enjoy a hand-coloured aesthetic. Significant world events of the past are now being analysed or enjoyed in colour and, in the case





At that time, Te Papa in partnership with Air New Zealand launched the exhibition *Air New Zealand 75 Years: Our nation. The world. Connected*, a celebration of Air New Zealand's operation for 75 years.⁶⁸ In addition to the cockpit of a Boeing 737 plane, a billboard-sized coloured photo was installed outside Te Papa: a Whites Aviation photo of a flying boat (left). The photo symbolised an important event, 'reflecting Air New Zealand's origins, starting in Mechanics Bay on the Waitemata Harbour'.⁶⁹ The image was digitally-coloured⁷⁰ – though easily mistaken for a hand-coloured version – and used by Air New Zealand in some of its own exhibition marketing.⁷¹ The coloured photo also decorated the in-flight cup (below) used by Air New Zealand on domestic flights throughout 2015 and 2016, a close encounter with Whites Aviation for hundreds of thousands of people. The exhibition at Te Papa was attended by 388,000 people, 'one of the most popular in Te Papa's history';⁷² and at the time of writing was proving popular at the Auckland Museum – 25,000 attendees in one week alone⁷³ – ahead of a third showing in 2016/17 at Canterbury Museum.

IN THE END

From its opening in 1945 to produce a magazine, the journey of Whites Aviation has been remarkable. Leo White's landmark decision paved the way for a significant contribution to the advancement of aviation and photography in New Zealand. Their combination – aerial photography – also helped social and economic development across the country, a boost to New Zealand far beyond the scenic photos

A major contemporary outing for Whites Aviation started in December 2014 with the exhibition of *Air New Zealand 75 Years: Our nation. The world. Connected*. A partnership between Te Papa and Air New Zealand, the exhibition attracted 388,000 visitors, before touring to Auckland Museum and Canterbury Museum. As part of an entry display involving the cockpit of a Boeing 737 plane, a gigantic mural of a TEAL flying boat (left) symbolised Air New Zealand's origins, starting in Mechanics Bay on Auckland's Waitemata Harbour. The same image was used on an in-flight cup throughout 2015 and 2016, a close encounter with Whites for hundreds of thousands of people.







Milford Sound
1955, 400x500mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-39507-F



Milford Sound
1956, 500x750mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-41571-F



Kyeburn (Otago)
1926, 38x685mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-58738-F



Wairoa River
1953, 56x1010mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-32810-F



Avon River
1955, 56x1010mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-38366-F



Lake Hayes Cottage
1954, 38x685mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-35533-F





Muriwai Beach, NZ.

W.K.



Auckland Wharves
1963, 300x400mm (approx.)
Private collection
Negative WA-59500-F



Mataura Paper Mill, Southland
1949, 750x1000mm (approx.)
Matuara Historical Society
Negative WA-21010-F



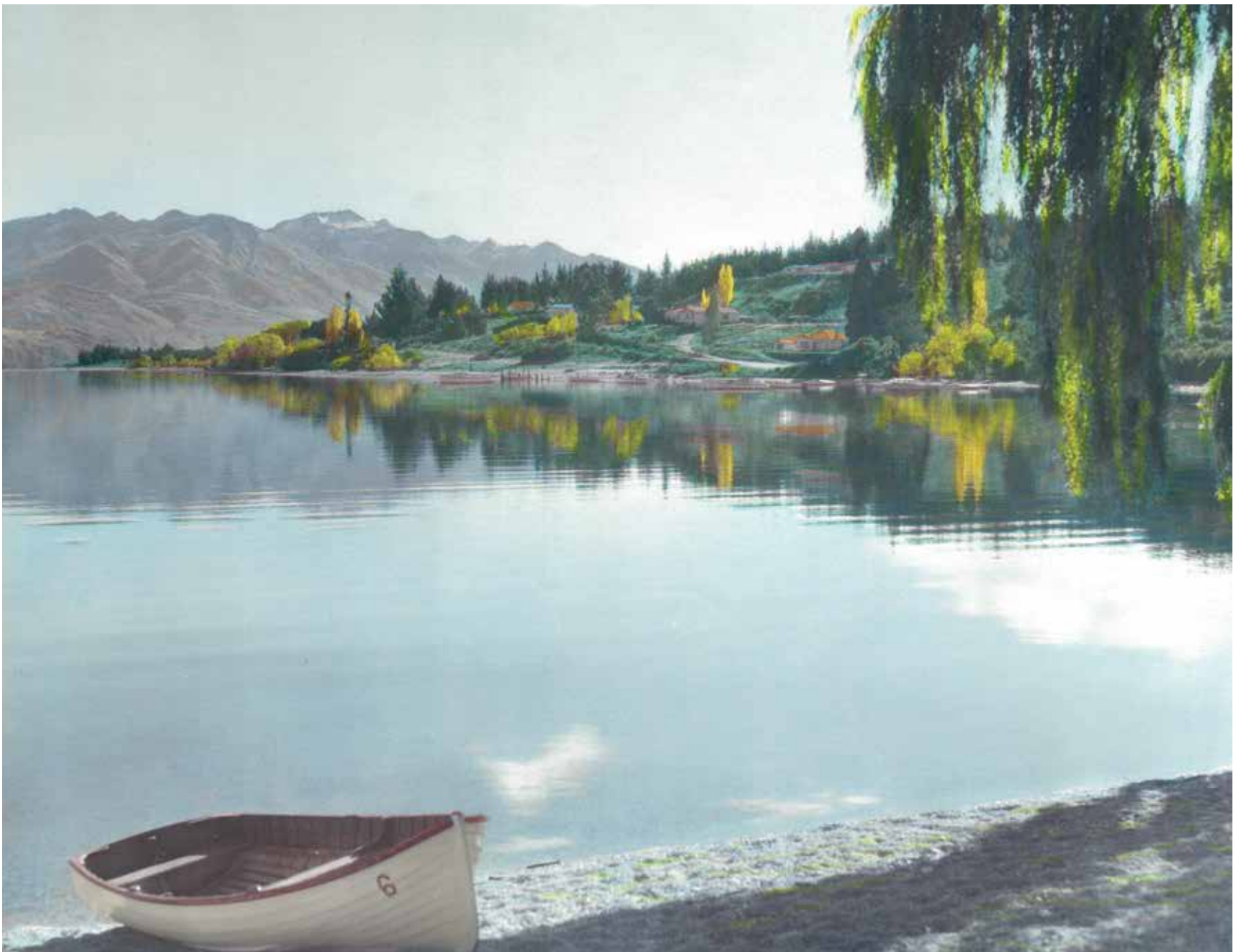
Te Anau
c.1950, 385x485mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative unknown



Lake Wakatipu
1947, 285x370mm
Collection of Peter Alsop
Negative WA-08967-G



Virginia Lake, Whanganui
c.1975, 375x580mm (approx.)
Collection of Chris Johnston (Replete)
Negative unknown



Lake Wanaka
1954, 285x370mm
Collection of Museum of Everyday
Negative WA-35658-F

