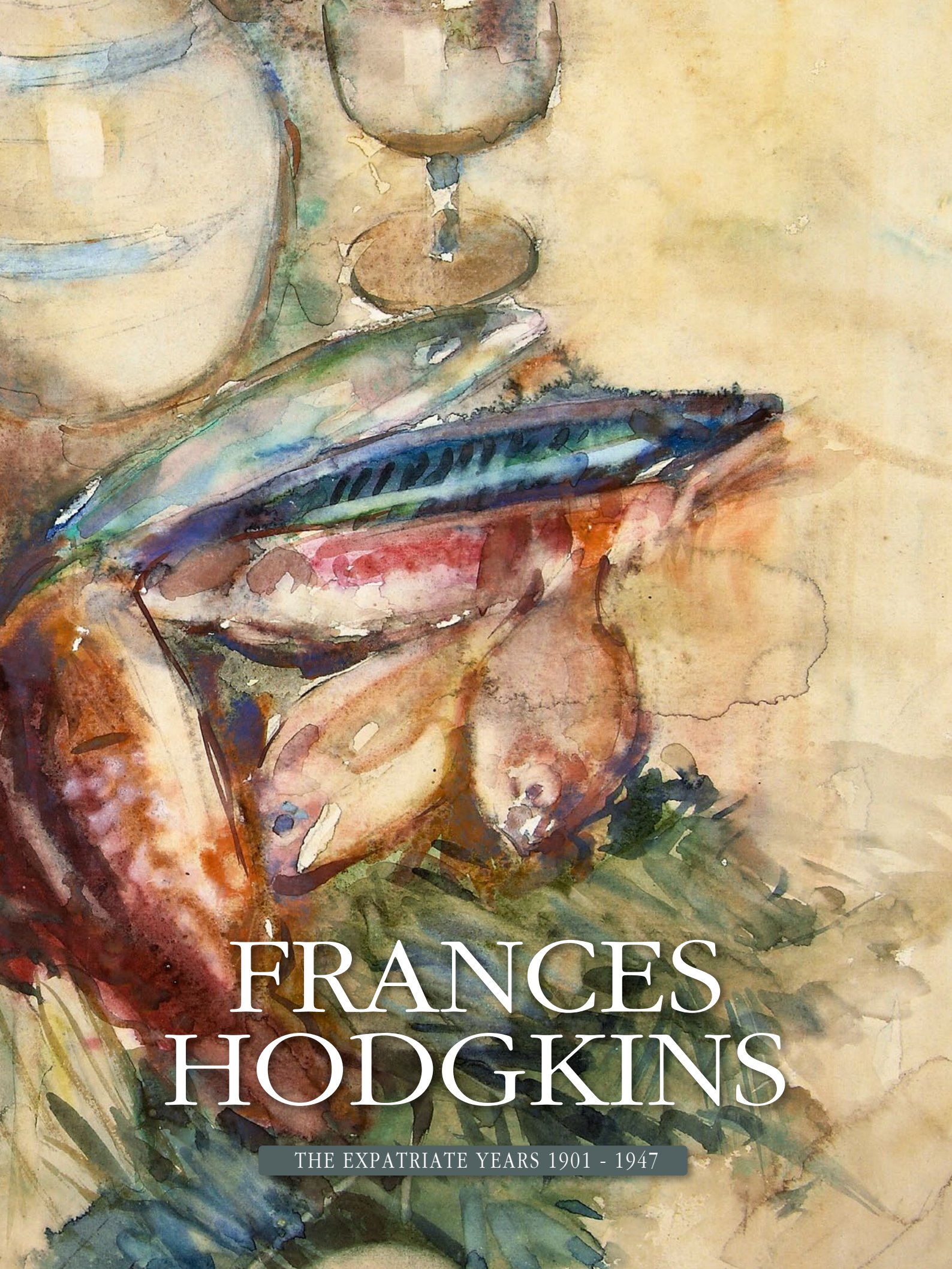


FRANCES HODGKINS

THE EXPATRIATE YEARS 1901 - 1947

Frances Hodgkins at her studio in the village of Corfe Castle, Dorset.
Felix Man Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.

Frances Hodgkins (1869 - 1947) is regarded as one of New Zealand's most renowned artists. Her works capture the spirit of an era greatly influenced by Impressionism and the beginnings of *en plein air* painting, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and two World Wars. With a professional life that spanned fifty-six years, Hodgkins was one of the foremost artists of her generation. During her time in Britain she became one of the leaders of the English avant-garde during the 1930s and 1940s, and was one of the first New Zealand-born artists to achieve such stature.

Born in Dunedin on the 28 April 1869 to the distinguished watercolourist William Matthew Hodgkins and his Australian wife, Rachel Owen Parker, Frances Hodgkins's artistic education continued outside the sphere of influence of her family. In 1893 she studied with the renowned expatriate artist Girolamo Pieri Nerli, (1860 -1926) who encouraged her in portraiture and figure painting, and then from 1895-96 she attended Dunedin School of Art.

Having left New Zealand for Europe in 1901, Hodgkins finally settled in England in 1913, where she spent most of her time in London. She took it upon herself to further her career in Europe and Britain by holding regular exhibitions of her work and becoming one of the first female teachers at the prestigious Académie Colarossi in Paris. Hodgkins toured around Brittany with her group of students, sketching in the small, picturesque villages of Concarneau, Le Havre and St Valery-sur-Somme. It was on these teaching trips that Hodgkins met and befriended some of her most loyal companions, one of the most significant of which was Jane Saunders. Hodgkins first met Saunders and her partner, Hannah Ritchie, in 1911 at Concarneau and friends such as this pair, continually supported her throughout her life. Saunders and Ritchie also collected a number of major works by Hodgkins, some of which are exhibited in this collection.

Hodgkins continued to paint and teach and hold regular sketching classes in France until the outbreak of the First World War (1914 -1918). Hodgkins spent the war years based in St Ives, Cornwall, where fellow artists Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett Haines became her close friends. After the war Hodgkins continued her teaching practice as well as working fervently in order to be able to exhibit at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. In 1927 Hodgkins exhibited a work with the New English Art Club, where she caught the attention of the prominent London dealer Arthur Howell, who subsequently offered Hodgkins a contract. This in turn led to Hodgkins association with the Lefevre and Leicester Galleries - a professional relationship that was to last until the end of her life.

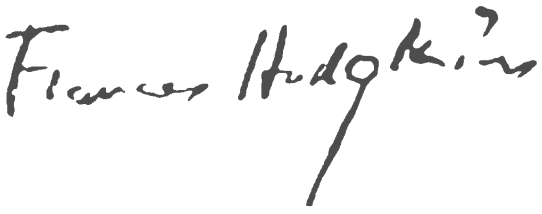
During the Second World War (1939 -1945) Hodgkins was in her 70's and less resilient both physically and emotionally to the strains imposed by war. Consequently, she moved to a small studio at Bradford-on-Tone in Somerset where Geoffrey Gorer's cottage was made available to her. Hodgkins continued to work ardently during this period and as a result she experienced the unexpected success of an exhibition held in 1940. This marked the turning point in Hodgkins career and from that time on her paintings were increasingly sought after. Following on from her success, Hodgkins was chosen in the spring of that year, to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. Further accolades followed in 1942 when she was honored with a Civil List pension for her services to art and in 1944 when the Tate Britain bought one of her works. This was undoubtedly a highpoint in her career.

In November 1946, to enthusiastic critical acclaim, the Lefevre Gallery held a retrospective exhibition of Hodgkins works. The exhibition included 64 paintings and 17 drawings ranging from 1902 to 1946 and the exhibition received a warm and positive response from the London press. Today, Frances Hodgkins is hailed as one of New Zealand's most preeminent artists and her work is held in consistently high regard. Her works can be found in the permanent collections of most major New Zealand public galleries and in numerous British galleries including the Tate Britain, the Victoria & Albert Museum and The Manchester City Art Gallery.

FRANCES HODGKINS

THE EXPATRIATE YEARS 1901 - 1947

"I feel that if I had known what was before me, I should never have had the courage to begin."



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Mother and Daughter Preparing Flowers c. 1901/02

Watercolour 29 x 22 cm
Signed with initials *FH* lower right

Provenance:
Private collection, Auckland

Literature:
Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing* (Auckland, 2005), p. 63. Illustrated

Patisserie Taffats, Rue de l'Apport, Dinan. 30th September 1902

'Those market scenes are the outcome of great mental strain, with nerves at a tension & eyes bewildered with an ever moving crowd & ones senses all alert & linx eyed for effects & relations one thing to another'.[1]

Between 1901 and 1903, during her first trip to Europe, Frances Hodgkins joined the Penzance-based artist Norman Garstin's sketching classes in Caudebec-en-Caux in 1901 and Dinan in 1902. There she met and befriended fellow artists; Maud Nickalls, Mrs Ashington, Peter Moffat Linder and Norman Garstin and his wife. Partaking in the art school afforded Hodgkins, for the first time, the opportunity to immerse herself in her art, unhampered by the distractions of family, friends, domestic life and teaching. Her paintings from this period reveal her interest in the local street scenes of villages such as Caudebec, Honfleur and Dinan.

Frances Hodgkins believed that in order to sell works she had to extend her repertoire to include *en plein air* paintings. She assumed that this technique would attract more buyers for her works, thus, on her first trip to France she ventured into the open countryside and local markets to capture these vibrant locations.

Her letters contain many references to the difficulties of painting out of doors. She felt that a lady artist at work in small town market places excited local curiosity and comment. These difficulties added their own unique influence to Hodgkins's work. A rapid fluidity in her brushwork is visible in her watercolours of this period; as if she was trying to capture a multitude of colours, light configurations, shadows and people in a single swift brushstroke.[2]

The present watercolour, *Mother and Daughter Preparing Flowers* from 1901/2, features a mother and child at a market stall, enlivened by the vibrant colours of the market place. Manipulating the wet-on-wet painting technique, Hodgkins cloaks the figures in an air of mystery as she leaves their forms undefined and offers only the briefest of allusions to the identity of a peasant mother and child. Between 1902 and 1903, Frances Hodgkins painted numerous watercolour scenes of the market stalls in Dinan and Arles, which she subsequently sent back to New Zealand for exhibition. Similar paintings to the present piece are held in the permanent collections of Theomin Gallery, Dunedin, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, the Auckland Art Gallery and the Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

Market scene in Concarneau, Brittany, France.
Katherine Ritchie Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.

[1] Linda Gill (ed.), *Letters of Frances Hodgkins* (Auckland, 1993), Letter to Isabel Field, p.138.
[2] Joanna Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private viewing (Auckland, 2005)*, p.63.

Still Life with Fish c. 1910

Black chalk and watercolour on paper, 52 x 58 cm

Provenance:
Private collection, Montfort-l'Amaury, France
Mathieu Néouze, Paris

Concarneau. 28th July 1910

> *'I eat at a little café where I get large platefuls of soup & sardines & crabs & veal & beefsteaks very raw & red & nearly always green peas stewed with onions & lots of sugar which taste much better than they sound- all washed down with copious quantities of red wine & very sour cider…'*[1]

In 2007, twenty previously unknown watercolours by Frances Hodgkins were purchased by the Auckland Art Gallery from the Parisian art dealer Mathieu Néouze.[2] Néouze and his associate, who discovered the collection at Monfort-l'Amaury, retained one work each for their own private collections: *Tunny Boats in the Harbour, Concarneau* c.1910 and *Still Life with Fish*. In 2009 these two valuable watercolours were located in Paris by Jonathan Grant Galleries, where they were promptly purchased and returned to Auckland. These two important paintings are now offered for sale for the first time on the New Zealand market.

The present painting, *Still Life with Fish* that was painted around 1910 is most likely to have been painted as a 'teaching demonstration' for one of Hodgkins's Concarneau art classes. During 1910, Hodgkins chose the small fishing village of Concarneau as the location for her summer school. The town was a well known, but still unspoilt haunt for artists and it attracted well-established French painters, students and amateurs alike. In this idyllic location Hodgkins found the ideal subject matter, not only for her own artwork, but also for her eager students. She later wrote of her teaching experience from Paris on the 27th of November 1911 saying:

> *'My Class is a real going concern now & a great success. I am refusing pupils on account of lack of space. I can only take 16 altogether – 8 in each class as the Studio is not large. Also I have several private pupils at a guinea an hour'.*[3]

Hodgkins's *Still Life with Fish* is an excellent example of the artist's working methods and clearly displays the influence of the watercolourist Arthur Melville (1858-1904). Hodgkins greatly admired Melville's exotic market scenes and still lifes of food and pottery, in which he used a saturated palette and a loose, fluid line.

In her Concarneau works, Hodgkins utilised the 'wet-on-wet' technique - a technique that she developed in Europe, in order to bring her watercolours to life. This method saw a flurry of line, broad washes of colour and often large expanses of untouched paper that serve to highlight the confidence of the composition and the rapidity with which these works were executed. An example of this is seen in *Still Life with Fish*, which possesses a vibrant immediacy as though the work has only just been finished. As a result, the work is palpably real and is a supreme example of Hodgkins's skill at capturing fleeting moments in time.

Hodgkins's focus on the independent forms of the serving utensils and fish combines to produce an almost abstract patterned effect. Combined with her use of multiple viewpoints and tilting planes, the watercolour acknowledges the two-dimensional reality of the paper and in doing so pays homage to the father of modern art and the abstracted still life: Paul Cézanne.

The Hotel des Voyageurs, Concarneau, where Frances Hodgkins stayed with her students.
Katherine Ritchie Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.

[1] Gill, p.254, Letter to her mother, Rachel Hodgkins.
[2] Exhibition: *Frances Hodgkins Colour and Light,* Auckland Art Gallery, November 2011 – March 2012.
[3] Gill, p.258.

Tunny Boats in the Harbour, Concarneau c. 1910

Black chalk and watercolour on paper, 59 x 60 cm

Provenance:
Private collection, Montfort-l'Amaury, France
Mathieu Néouze, Paris

Concarneau. 3rd October 1910

> *' . . . I have been very busy getting off my 6 watercolours to Paris. Did I tell you I had been asked to send up 4, then 6 . . . & the fear of death was upon me in case I couldn't get them finished, having ordered frames etc. . . . & now they are off to frame - (& fame) I hope'.*[1]

Tunny Boats in the Harbour, Concarneau c.1910 was painted at a pivotal time in Frances Hodgkins's career. Between 1908 and 1912 she made a determined bid to position her art and her reputation in Paris. Besides providing a stimulating environment, France provided Hodgkins with the varied light, colours and subject matter that she wished to translate into her art. Indeed, Hodgkins's awareness of French art, and the considerable amount of time that she spent in France, was a formative influence on her identity as a painter.

While living in Paris, Hodgkins became inundated with requests for tutoring, and in the winter of 1909-10, against the wishes of her mother, she cancelled her return trip to New Zealand in order to teach at one of the foremost private academies in Paris: the Académie Colarossi. It is notable that Hodgkins was one of the first female artists to teach at this prestigious institution. With the coming of the summer sketching season, she moved with her class of pupils to Brittany, and eventually settled in the sheltered fishing village of Concarneau.

The boats and harbour of Concarneau were popular subjects for artists at the time and regularly featured in the paintings of the Fauves and the Newlyn School. It is likely that the Newlyn artist, Norman Garstin, introduced Hodgkins to Concarneau. Before arriving at Concarneau, Hodgkins had painted a number of works in Europe that featured fishing vessels - several of which can be found in the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

In *Tunny Boats in the Harbour, Concarneau,* Hodgkins's animates the composition through the dynamic juxtaposition of the two boats in the foreground. This dynamism is cleverly tempered by a predominantly sombre palette that works to produce a piece of notable calm and visual interest. The visible lines of Hodgkins's brush serve to emphasise the flatness of the picture plane as they form a geometric patterned effect, which is characteristic of her watercolours at this time. *Tunny Boats in the Harbour, Concarneau* and other such works are compelling in the way in which they simultaneously portray the ebullience of the water and the heaviness of the sea vessels.

Frances Hodgkins sketching at Concarneau.
E. H. McCormick Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.

[1] Gill, p.255. Letter to her mother, Rachel Hodgkins.

Baby with Abacus

Oil on canvas, 44 x 44 cm
Signed *Frances Hodgkins* lower left

Provenance:
Ferner Gallery, Auckland
Private Collection, Auckland

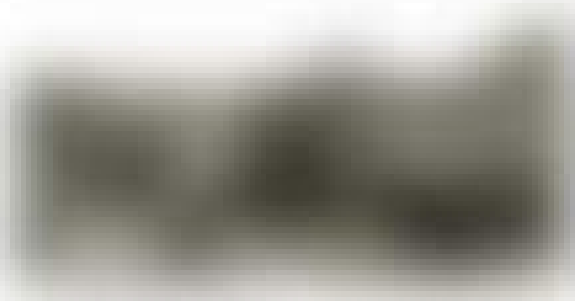
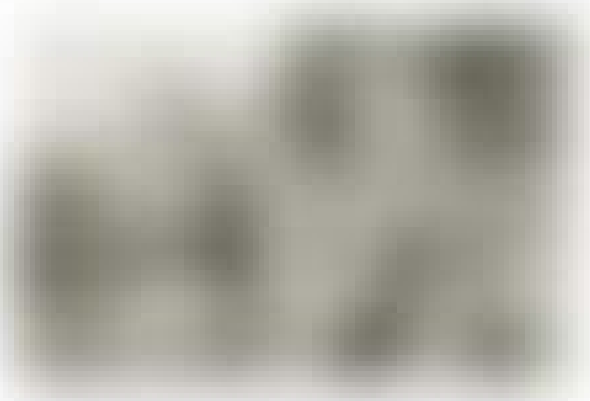
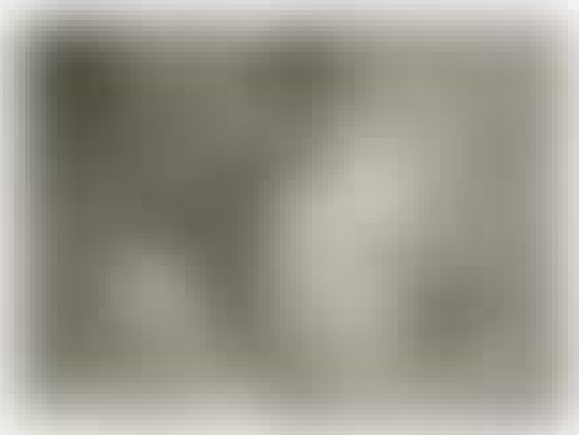
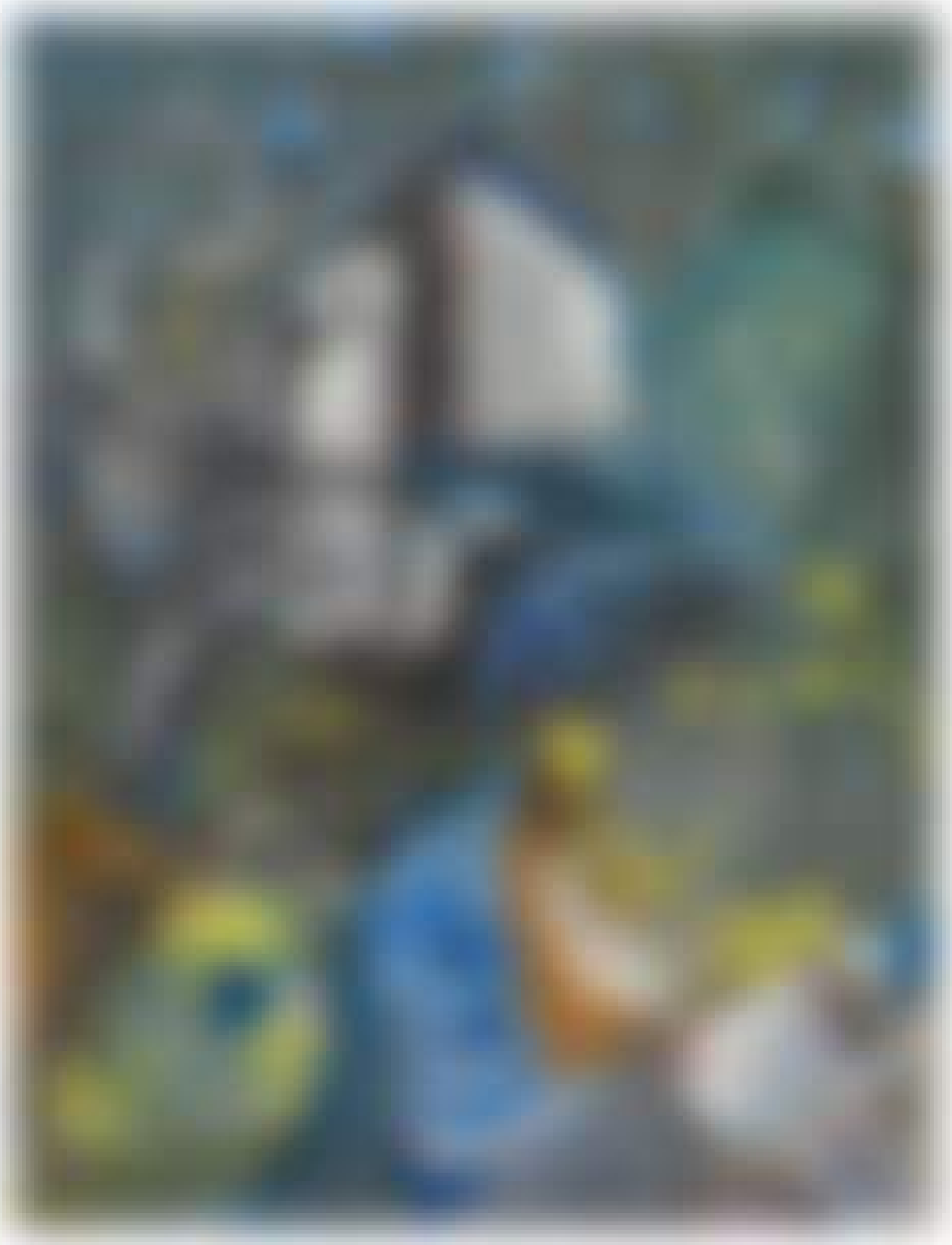
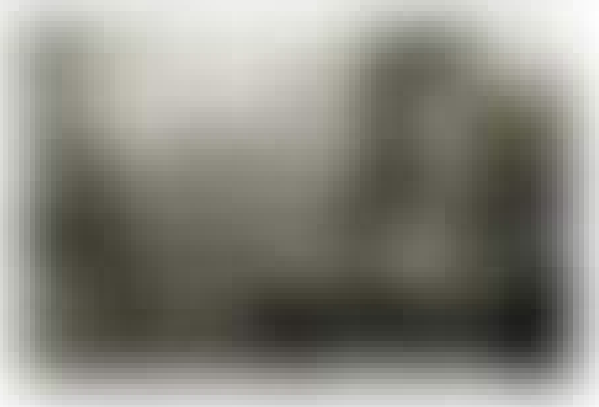
Wharf Studio, St Ives, March 30th 1918.

'Truly living is a fine art these days. Yesterday I sold a 12gn. Baby. Item: Paint more babies! In fact keep the cradle full . . . '[1]

The mother and child theme is one of the most time-honoured subjects in the canon of art history. Hodgkins own mother and baby works were first seen as early as 1894. In these early works Hodgkins depicted New Zealand subject matter in works such as *Baby on Beach,* 1894, and *Maori & Baby,* 1899.[2]

Notably, babies were also a common theme during the French Impressionist movement and Hodgkins would undoubtedly have been familiar with the work of Mary Cassatt (1844 -1926) and Lucien Simon (1861-1941), who painted scenes of mothers with babies in intimate domestic scenes. Hodgkins's own mother and baby works evolved out of a response to the French Impressionists and to the work of the French *Intimiste* painters Vuillard (1868-1940) and Bonnard (1867-1947).

There are two distinct periods in Hodgkins's oeuvre when she seems to have been enchanted by the subject of babies. In 1908 she was asked by Mr John Baillie, who owned a gallery in Bond Street, London, to contribute a work to his 'Children's Exhibition' that was scheduled to open on the 1st of January 1909. Hodgkins wrote of the exhibition to her mother saying that the show was to '*consist of pictures of babies & children & ought to be rather charming*'.[3] Hodgkins later returned to the theme of babies in 1918 when she sold a work depicting a baby for 12 guineas. The following year, at her exhibition at Grafton Galleries in London, Hodgkins donated half of the proceeds of the sale of her painting *Lullaby* to the Child Welfare Fund.

The present painting *Baby With Abacus* is a brilliant example of Hodgkins's 'baby' works, but is also a rare work in that it has been painted in oils. Like Hodgkins's other paintings that depict babies such as *Summer* c.1912 in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, the composition is dominated by the baby's head, while the rest of the baby's body is not clearly defined. In *Baby With Abacus,* Hodgkins pays particular attention to form, echoing the circular shape of the abacus beads in the roundness of the baby's face, the plump rosy cheeks, round button nose and the large dark circular eyes. For the most part, Hodgkins uses a subdued palette, which works to impart an air of gentility to her young sitter. Touches of pink are used to highlight the healthy glow of the baby and to etch out the floral expanse of fabric that is draped across the baby. Hodgkins's careful attention to the unity of form, combined with her harmonious use of colour, results in a painting that is lively and animated yet simultaneously endearing.

[1] Gill, p.329. Letter to Will Field.
[2] E.H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* (Auckland, 1954), p.131.
[3] Gill, p.239. Letter to Rachel Hodgkins.