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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 movement during the 1930s and 1940s, and was one of the first New Zealand-born artists to achieve such stature.

Born in Dunedin on 28th April 1869 to the distinguished watercolourist William Mathew 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 Normandy and Picardy with her group of students, sketching in the villages of Concarneau, Le Havre and St Valery-sur-Somme. It was on these teaching trips that she met and befriended some of her most loyal companions, one of the most significant of whom was Jane Saunders. She 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, most of which are now in public art gallery collections.

Hodgkins continued to paint and teach and hold regular sketching classes in France until the outbreak of the First World War (1914 -1918). Her works were 'hung on the line' in the Royal Academy in 1915 and 1916. She 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 she continued her teaching practice as well as working intensely in order to be able to exhibit at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. In 1927 she exhibited a work with the New English Art Club, where she caught the attention of prominent London dealer Arthur Howell, who subsequently offered Hodgkins a contract. This in turn led to her association with the Lefevre and Leicester Galleries - a professional relationship that was to last until the end of her life. In 1938 she signed a new contract with Lefevre that guaranteed her a fixed minimum annual income.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) Hodgkins was in her 70s 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. Following a particularly industrious period she experienced the unexpected success of her exhibition held at Lefevre Gallery in 1940. This marked the turning point in her 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's 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, the Victoria & Albert Museum, The Manchester City Art Gallery and the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

As the British critic Giles Auty wrote "The artist picked her way patiently through a background of academic tradition and found release later in a fluid, intuitive style no matter what the medium. Hodgkins belongs properly to the group of artists who sought the poignant, dramatic and lyrical in their rediscovery of nature.... she was not only an idiosyncratic woman but also a singular artist."¹

1. Giles Auty. *The Spectator* 14th November 1987 "A Tribute to Frances Hodgkins"



Frances Hodgkins at Corfe Castle, Dorset
Felix Man Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington N.Z.

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

Frances Hodgkins

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Maori Girl in Blue

Watercolour on paper, 29 x 21 cm
Signed *FH* and dated '99 upper right

Provenance

Collection. William Matthew Hodgkins
Gifted by W. M. Hodgkins to Mrs E. C. Reynolds
Mrs E. E. McMillan M.P., Dunedin
Private Collection, Dunedin (purchased at E. E. McMillan estate auction 1987)

Literature

E. H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* (Auckland 1954) p. 149, No.103

Illustrated

E. H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* (Auckland 1954) plate 11a

To Rachel Hodgkins, 18 September 1899; from F. H., Moeraki

The Maoris have come from all parts and I have renewed acquaintance with a lot of old models, they are ... hugely interesting from an artistic point of view.... The weather still holds good, yesterday it blew a good deal but it is gloriously fine today and we are going to take our lunch over to the Kaik [Maori settlement near Moeraki] and sketch Maoris.

Linda Gill (editor), *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, 1993, p. 62

Images of Maori, painted in the period 1896-1900, occupy a prominent position in Hodgkins's oeuvre. The original New Zealander had long held a fascination for European artists, the best known and most prolific of whom was probably Bohemian Gottfried Lindauer (1839-1926). In 1893 Hodgkins began lessons with visiting Italian artist Girolamo Pieri Nerli, and it is highly likely she knew of his recent paintings of Pacific subjects, in Samoa and Fiji, while he also produced some based on the Australian Aboriginal.

Hodgkins' paintings of Maori are almost entirely restricted to portrait studies of women and children. She discovered that there was a market for such subjects, while they were also well received by critics. During the closing years of the nineteenth century she travelled with painting companions to various locations, including Moeraki on the east coast of North Otago, where she was able to engage and work with Maori models. The above letter to her mother described such a visit to Moeraki which coincided with the *tangi* for a chief.

Three years later, and now in France, Hodgkins recalled the appeal of painting Maori subjects:

I must say the idea of town life when I return does not attract me – I am more than ever set on painting Maoris & the thought that I am going back to a whole island full of them gives me infinite comfort – they are still to me so much more beautiful than anything I have seen on this side of the world....¹

Maori Girl in Blue is typical of Hodgkins' approach, depicting head and shoulders only, which 'float' against the paper. It was executed quickly, using the wet-on-wet technique by which new layers of watercolour pigment were applied over those which have not yet dried, a method ideal for outdoor and on-the-spot painting and which was popular with the Impressionists. Similar to the earlier *Maori Girl*, 1896 (collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery) the subject of *Maori Girl in Blue* evokes a childlike innocence, smiling, and with large eyes and pronounced lips. This sentimental appeal has been likened to that which was popular in late Victorian paintings of children, as by John Everett Millais and Edwin Landseer.²

While Hodgkins was aware of the social circumstances of her Maori subjects, her interest was purely artistic. Thus, by detaching her sitters - attractive young Maori women in European dress - from any background or social context she was able to focus instead on informality and liveliness. And because they were free of ethnic references, Hodgkins' works stand apart from those of three other artists who were painting Maori at this time: Charles Frederick Goldie, Gottfried Lindauer and Louis John Steele.

1. Letter to Rachel Hodgkins, 8 July 1902, Hotel des Voyageurs, Dinan, Cote du Nord, France, in Gill, p. 131

2. Gill, p. 61; Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, pp. 13-14



Calves for Sale, Les Andelys, Normandy

Watercolour on paper, 20 x 15.5 cm

Signed *FH* and dated 1901 lower right

Exhibited

Auckland. Gus Fisher Gallery, *The Expatriates. Frances Hodgkins and Barry Bates*. September - December 2005

To Rachel Hodgkins, 26 August 1901; from F.H., Hotel de France, Caudebec en Caux, France

It is very beautiful country all around this neighbourhood and the peasants are a real joy... some of the old men wear such beautiful blue corduroy bags that make me ache to paint them, it is a great sight to see them on Market day (every Saturday) the whole town is covered with little canoas booths and with the different goods displayed and the babel of noise that goes on, each stallholder crying up their own particular wares.¹

Frances Hodgkins left New Zealand for the first time in February 1901, and from July that year spent five months in France, joining the painting classes of Penzance-based Norman Garstin at Caudebec-en-Caux. It was here that she met and made friends with English artists Maud Nickalls, Mrs Ashington, Peter Moffat Linder, Norman Garstin and his wife, and Auckland-born Dorothy Kate Richmond. These painting classes enabled her to immerse herself in her art for the first time, without the distractions of family, domesticity and teaching obligations. However, she needed to supplement her modest savings with sales, and assuming that everyday life in turn-of-the-century rural France would appeal to New Zealand buyers, she sought suitable subject matter in the open countryside and towns.² Subsequently all these paintings came back for exhibition in New Zealand.

They were produced *en plein air* and rapidly, as reflected in the fluidity of her brushwork, capturing a sense of the colour, action and informality of village life. But such an approach was not without its challenges, for Hodgkins was mindful that a lady artist at an easel in the market place was guaranteed to attract comment and the curiosity of the locals.

To Isabel Field, 15 September 1901; from F. H., 21 Av. de la Grande Armée, Paris

Tomorrow I am off to a place called Les Andelys about 60 miles from Paris where Miss Nickalls is to join me for a fortnight. If we report very favourably on it Mr. Garstin will most likely join us and I will wait there for Miss Richmond.³

Some three weeks later Hodgkins wrote to her mother from Arles, mentioning her time in Les Andelys. As planned, Dorothy Kate Richmond had joined her, and the pair were now en route to Italy.

To Rachel Hodgkins, 9 October 1901; from F. H., Hotel du Forum, Arles, Bouches du Rhone, France

Les A.[ndelys] proved a capital sketching ground and three weeks didnt half exhaust its beauties ... but the cold weather drove us South. Miss Nickalls & Mr. Garstin joined me there and we were a very merry party and it was a very happy wind up to our summer's sketching.⁴

Calves for Sale, Les Andelys, Normandy depicts a farmer in blue - perhaps the 'beautiful blue corduroy bags' Hodgkins referred to in the letter to her mother of 26 August 1901 - examining a pen of animals in the foreground. Using her rapid wet-on-wet technique she captured the general atmosphere of the scene, in particular the patchwork of colour and activity in the background. The following year Hodgkins reflected on 'those market scenes', describing them as the outcome of 'great mental strain, with nerves at a tension & eyes bewildered with an ever moving crowd ...'⁵

In August 1902 Hodgkins exhibited 37 watercolours of France at the McGregor Wright gallery, Wellington, and three months later several of her watercolours painted at Les Andelys, and also Dinan in Brittany were shown at the Otago Art Society.⁶ Her market scenes are represented in the permanent collections of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery and the Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa.

1 Gill, p. 97

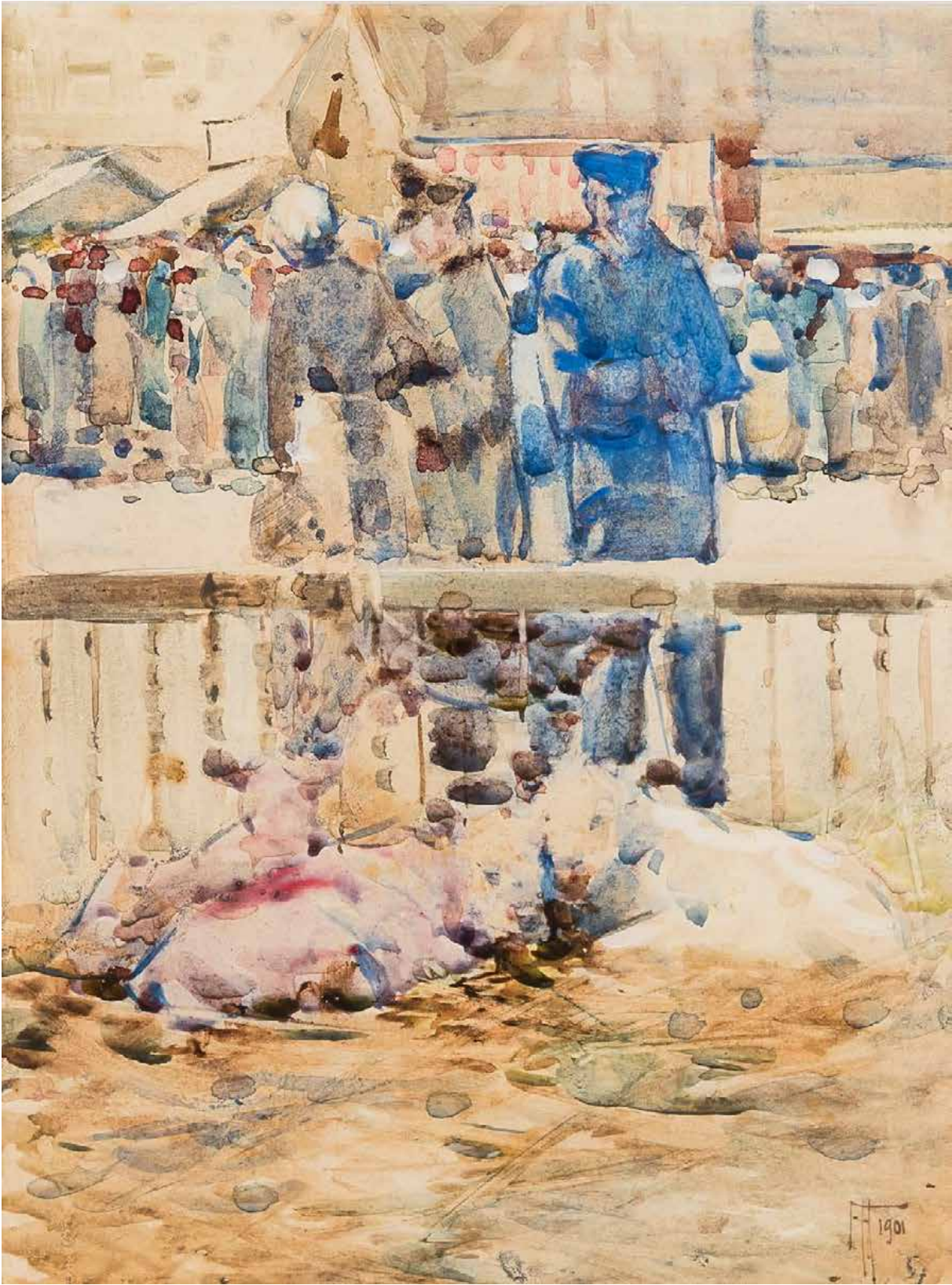
2 Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, pp. 62-3

3 Gill, p. 100

4 Gill, p. 100

5 Gill, p. 138

6 Roger Collins & Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890-1950*, Hocken Library, 2000, p. 33



Study of a Soudanese

Watercolour on paper, 35.5 x 25.5 cm

Signed FH and dated '03 lower right

Provenance

Exhibited: McGregor Wright Art Gallery, Wellington, February 1904, No.18

Collection: Mrs R D Todd

Private Collection, Auckland

Literature

Ascent. *Frances Hodgkins, Commemorative Issue* (Caxton Press with QE II Arts Council, Christchurch 1969) p. 14

Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890 – 1950* (Hocken Library 2000) p. 35

E.H McCormick, *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins* (Auckland University Press 1981) p. 51

I Buchanan, E Eastmond and M Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings* (Auckland University Press 2001) p. 18

Illustrated

E.H. McCormick, *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins* (Auckland 1981) p. 47

Frances Hodgkins 1869 – 1947 Queen Elizabeth Arts Council of New Zealand (Auckland 1969) No. 6

E.H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* (Auckland 1954) plate 15

E. H. McCormick, *The Path to Impressionism* (Art New Zealand #16, Auckland 1980) p. 31

To Dorothy Richmond, 3 December 1902; from F. H., Hotel Bristol, Tangier.

Salaams from Morocco! We've arrived..... Heavens! how beautiful it is! Why aren't you here you foolish and misguided woman... I am never going back to New Zealand – I am going to turn Moslem – I am going to wear a haik – I am going to lie on a divan for the rest of my days with a handmaiden called Fatima to wait on me....¹

In late 1902 Frances Hodgkins travelled to Morocco, accompanied by her friend Mrs Ashington, whom she had met at a summer sketching school in Caudebec. The trip can be seen as a continuation of her search for exotic subject matter, and in the old Moorish walled town of Tangier she was able to respond to the effects of sunlight, captured *en plein air*. In choosing to go to North Africa Hodgkins was following a path well-worn by English and French artists – including Delacroix, in 1832 – drawn by a romantic hankering for the exotic and the vogue for Orientalism.

In a letter to Dorothy Richmond, Hodgkins described the arrival at the port of Tangier:

Directly the boat stopped – some way from the landing pier – a thousand or so Moors hurled themselves on deck & began fighting violently over our baggage – some of them such magnificent looking men, bronze giants, others wizened up, wicked looking little brigands and a few coal black Nubians with plunging eyes.²

In addition to the architecture and the market places of the city, Hodgkins was attracted by the dark skin and flowing garments of the local people. She told Dorothy Richmond of one of her models, a 'ducky little Arab girl who we captured & painted in an aloe grove', and who agreed to return the next day.³

The sitter for the 1903 watercolour *Study of a Soudanese* has been identified as Absolom, Mrs Ashington's Arab guide. Hodgkins informed Richmond that 'Absolom the trustworthy' was their main source of Tangier gossip; 'he knows everything, and what he doesn't know he guesses at.'⁴ His knowledge of Tangier proved invaluable, while he also dispersed crowds of curious onlookers when Hodgkins and her companion painted in the market place, and shielded them from the Moroccan sun with an umbrella.⁵ In her portrait, strong sunlight falls directly on the faithful Absolom, whose eyes are downcast. Bold strokes of fluid colour flesh out the background, while the details of his garments are merely hinted at under the glare of the sun, all serving to draw attention to the face and the sitter's dark brown skin.

On the boat to Tangier, Hodgkins encountered wealthy friends from Dunedin, David and Marie Theomin. Patrons of the arts and admirers of Hodgkins' work, they commissioned a watercolour, *Orange Sellers, Tangier* (collection of Theomin Gallery, Olveston, Dunedin).⁶ In this market place scene the intensity of the sunlight has reduced a foreground display of fruit and vegetables to mere blobs of colour, in contrast to the shimmering whiteness which distinguish other areas of the composition. Here Hodgkins sought a general effect, the unique atmosphere of a street market, whereas *Study of a Soudanese* captured the character of an individual.

1. Gill, p. 149

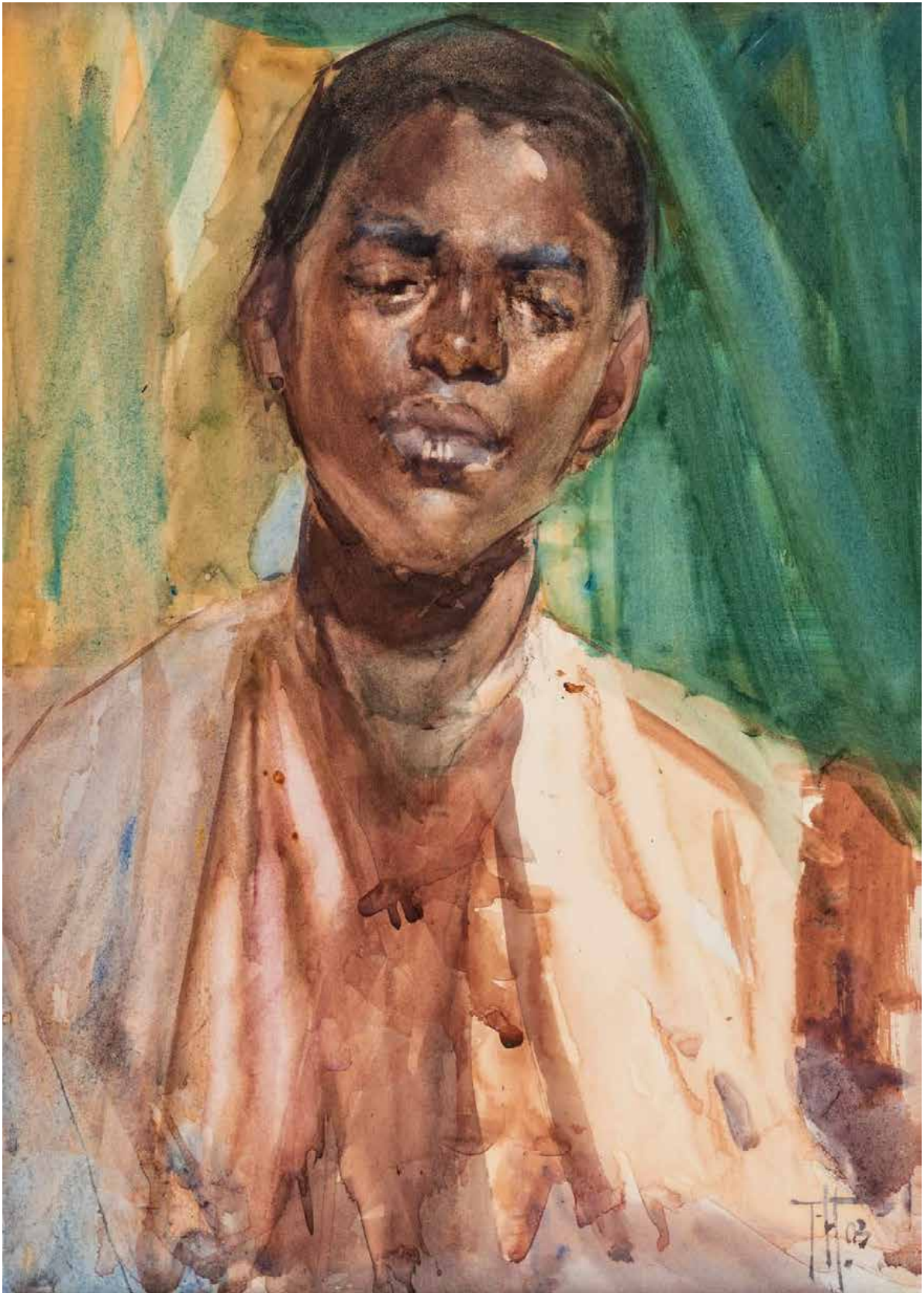
2. Gill, p. 150

3. Gill, p. 151

4. Gill, p. 154

5. Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, pp. 79, 84.

6. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, pp. 92-3.



Ibiza, 1933

Watercolour on paper, 35.5 x 48.3 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* lower right, inscribed *Ibiza* lower left

Provenance

Collection: Mrs Anne Carlisle, Cambridge, U.K.

Collection: Sir Edward Marsh (1872 – 1953) London

Exhibited

London. Lefevre Gallery, *New Watercolours and Drawings*, October - November 1933, No. 12. Sold to Mrs A Carlisle
City of Manchester Art Gallery, No. 16

C.E.M.A. exhibition, *Contemporary Watercolours and gouaches*

C.E.M.A. exhibition, *Sir Edward Marsh Collection*

Arts Council of Great Britain *Touring Exhibition*, sponsored by Isle of Purbeck Arts Club, Swanage, Bournemouth,
Totnes, St Ives. March – May 1948, No. 30

Literature

Arthur R. Howell, *Frances Hodgkins: Four Vital Years* (Rockliff, London 1951) pp. 101, 118, 128

Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890 - 1950* (Hocken Library 2000) p. 68 No. 12

To Karl Hagedorn, 29 January 1933; from F. H., Hotel Balear, Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain

I must say, in this clear ivory light every common object looks important and significant ... things appear in stark simplicity minus all detail – nothing corked up (bouchée) or hidden in grey, or brown light of the North. Of course, later on, this intense sun light will convert colour & form into absolute negation but at the moment there is complete loveliness. The pale coloured flat roofed houses without windows give a blind restful feeling, of immense space.¹

Rée Gorer, mother of social anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, became a great patron of Hodgkins' work, and it was her purchase of a painting that enabled the artist in late 1932 to escape the British winter and fund the last of her long continental journeys, south to Ibiza in the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean. Following the establishment of a tourist trade and the opening of the first hotels in the 1930s, Ibiza became increasingly popular with artists, writers and architects who came to study its indigenous building tradition.²

Hodgkins was in Ibiza from October 1932 until the following July, meeting up with English artist Gwen Knight and New Zealander May Smith. She painted a large number of images of the town's architecture and the local animals, observing a special breed of long-legged dog, as well as mules, horses, asses, cats and 'caged birds by the dozen'.³

To Karl Hagedorn, 3 January 1933; from F. H., Hotel Balear, Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain

The show is the thing – I must set London talking – they expect it of me – my Dealers - & it is a rotten bad thought to fill one's mind – but down here I forget all about it & think only of the jolly things I see round me and the awful urge to get at them...⁴

By early May 1933 Hodgkins was feeling the pressure of her work, and 'straining' to complete a commission, she sought temporary respite by travelling to the other side of the island of Ibiza. In a letter to her friend Dorothy Selby she suggested she lived 'too close to [her] work', while her accommodation was far from ideal she lived and painted in a 'smallish badly lit room'. At that stage spare rooms were unobtainable in Ibiza on account of the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany. Hodgkins was observing developments that would be of increasing international concern as the decade progressed, reporting a 'war scare' and, among other things, a 'tightening up of passports'.⁵

The 1933 watercolour *Ibiza* was painted from an elevated viewpoint. It shows the town dominated by the Puig des Moulins (Hill of Windmills), while one such structure, prominent on the right, appears to have had its sails 'deconstructed' and thereby been reduced to essential elements, much as Hodgkins did with other subjects. Elsewhere, old stone buildings appear in outline only, reflecting the intense Mediterranean sunlight, while foreground vegetation is reduced to calligraphic squiggles. This liveliness of the scene continues overhead, where the sky is captured economically as a series of slashes of bright blue pigment.

Because of the various pressures she was experiencing at Ibiza, Hodgkins decided to postpone her next exhibition in London, planned for the spring, until autumn. Works produced on the spot on the island were eventually included in *New Watercolour Drawings*, in October-November 1933. This was her first solo exhibition with the Lefevre Gallery, which she shared with Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.⁶

1. Gill, p. 456

2. Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, p. 227

3. Gill, p. 456

4. Gill, p. 455

5. Gill, p. 457; Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, p. 228

6. Gill, p. 455



Figures in Mediterranean Landscape

Watercolour on paper, 48 x 36 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* lower right, inscribed below mount *garden scene*

Provenance

Charles Lambert Rutherston (Rothenstien) (1866-1927)

Jeanette Powell née Rutherston

Thence by family descent

Exhibited

London. Lefevre Gallery (label verso)

To Karl Hagedorn, 29 January 1933; from F. H., Hotel Balear, Ibiza, Balearic Islands, Spain

*It seems hard to remember that I recently lived in the Lambolle Road. [Hampstead, London, NW3]
so completely do I feel absorbed into this setting – the one thing calculated to bring me
down to reality is rent day ...¹*

By mid-July 1933 Hodgkins was back in her Lambolle Road studio, in London, and among the watercolours painted whilst she was in Ibiza was *Figures in a Mediterranean landscape*. The first owner of this painting was Bradford businessman Charles Rutherston (aka Rothenstein), older brother of artist Sir William Rothenstein, who was a keen collector and supporter of the arts and played a key role in the careers of such leading English artists as Gwen and Augustus John, Paul Nash and Henry Moore.

In certain respects *Figures in a Mediterranean landscape* is similar to another of Hodgkins' watercolours from 1933, *Spanish Woman Washing in the Garden*. A tree separates the two figures in the Mediterranean landscape, whereas the Spanish woman is framed by a pair of trees which merge to form an arch. The latter individual also bears a resemblance to one of the figures in the Mediterranean landscape. Both paintings were executed with Hodgkins' usual fluidity, with the elements only loosely connected to one another, and include the geometric white forms of the local vernacular architecture.

Although one figure dominates the other in the Mediterranean landscape, the painting is one of a number of Hodgkins' double (and triple) portraits produced between the early 1920s and the late 1930s. Compared to an earlier (1930) oil, *The Bridesmaids* (collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki), the Mediterranean pair are described with much less detail, although there is still sufficient to indicate that they are locals, and the larger figure's grasp on the central tree suggests a strong connection to the region. Elsewhere, the scattering of small tree motifs across the composition is suggestive of a patterned textile.

In the years prior to *Figures in a Mediterranean landscape*, Hodgkins had been receiving positive responses to her work when shown at various venues in London. In May 1928 she was included, along with John Nash, William Roberts, Ukraine-born British artist Bernard Meninsky and others, in an exhibition of watercolours at the St. George's Gallery in Hanover Square, London. A reviewer noted that the use of that medium to 'capture light while defining structure and configuration with the minimum of labour and material' was a relatively recent development, and referred to Hodgkins' *Mother and Child* as one of several watercolours of 'remarkable ability'.² In March 1929, when included with Winifred Nicholson and Christopher Wood in an exhibition of the Seven and Five Society at Tooth's gallery, New Bond Street, Hodgkins was identified as the artist who was 'most sure of her ground'.³

A year later, when she exhibited oil paintings and watercolours at the Claridge Gallery in Brook Street, Hodgkins was described as 'primarily a colourist' and likened to Cézanne, engaged in trying to 'make of Impressionism something of the old masters'.⁴ And she also received a positive review to her November 1929 exhibition at the Bloomsbury Gallery:

The paintings by Miss Frances Hodgkins ... have a freakish character that is so evidently constitutional that it becomes an added attraction ... Miss Hodgkins is an admirable colourist, bold and at the same time subtle in her arrangements, and her system of painting is a sort of free translation of natural forms so as to bring different objects into the same category for the purposes of design.⁵

Figures in a Mediterranean landscape can be seen as a celebration of youthful innocence and vitality, the latter reinforced by the inclusion of the central plant motif. And while the dominant foreground figure echoes Hodgkins' earlier portraits, as of young Maori, the inclusion of an impressionistic background now hints at the combinations of figures (and still lifes) and landscape that would follow.

1. Gill, p.456

2. *The Times*, 24 May 1928

3. *The Times*, 8 March 1929

4. *The Times*, 24 April 1928

5. *The Times*, 26 November 1929



Still Life, Arrangement of Jugs, c. 1937

Watercolour, 46 x 61 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* lower right

Provenance

Gillian Jason Gallery, London

Exhibited

London. Gillian Jason Gallery, *A Tribute to Frances Hodgkins*, November - December 1987

To Rée Gorer, 23 July 1937; from F. H., Sea View, Worth Matravers, Dorset

*My fate has fixed me in Worth. I hope you & Geoffrey will come here one day when I get fixed properly.
Rather than continue a homeless wanderer I am settling down here in a somewhat negative mood,
neither liking nor disliking the place, but thankful to have it & call it a home.¹*

Frances Hodgkins spent much of 1936 and 1937 in what Joanne Drayton describes as 'an itinerant whirl'. After taking a studio in Hampstead for a period she travelled to Wales, then moved to Dorset and spent Christmas 1937 in Wiltshire. It was around 1937 that she produced the watercolour *Arrangement of Jugs*, which can be seen to have its origins in the still life compositions painted earlier that decade. *The Green Urn*, (private collection, New Zealand) and *Cut Melons* (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa), both c.1931, juxtapose various vessels with fruit, producing unconventional still-life arrangements which merge with the landscape. Hodgkins' use of the jug motif goes back to 1931, at least, as in the oil painting *Red Jug* in the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki (which also has an undated pencil drawing, *Jug*). Here the dominating jug is placed in front of a strangely spartan landscape relieved by a single barren tree, the overall effect being somewhat surrealistic and evoking what Drayton identifies as a sense of quiet and unease.²

A drawing from around 1937, *Arrangement of Jugs* (private collection, UK), predates the 1938 lithograph of the same name, and has elements in common with it and a circa 1937 watercolour, *Still Life* (also private collection, UK).³ It includes, for example, the staggered pair of modernist glass vases with the watercolour, and the lamp with the lithograph. Obviously experimental, it is more fluid than the two images that followed, and the various elements appear to float freely in space, untethered to a horizontal plane.

Hodgkins' circa 1937 watercolour *Arrangement of Jugs* can be seen as an extension of her approach to the depiction of colour and form. The individual elements have undergone extreme simplification, and are defined by varying degrees of outlining and bright splashes of colour. There is minimal overlapping of the objects, and their positioning on an undefined surface provides a modest sense of depth to the composition. Despite the title, only one of the seven individual elements is a jug. It is accompanied here by two (yellow) round ceramic vases and a pair of rectangular modernist glass vases, the larger of which contains sprigs of plants. There is an absolute economy of means throughout, with pigment used sparingly to define the objects and, in the case of the two yellow vases, their applied decoration.

1. Gill pp. 473-4

2. Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, pp. 236, 239

3. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 150



Arrangement of Jugs, 1938

Lithograph, 45 x 60 cm

Signed lower right

Provenance

Published by Contemporary Lithographs Ltd, London 1938

Exhibited

London. Leicester Galleries, September 1938

Literature

I Buchanan, E Eastmond and M Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings* (Auckland University Press 2001) p. 150

Janet Bayley (editor), *Frances Hodgkins: Kapiti Treasures* (Mahara Gallery, Waikanae 2010) p. 36

Illustrated

E.H McCormick, *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins* (Auckland University Press 1981) p. 123

I Buchanan, E Eastmond and M Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings* (Auckland University Press 2001) p. 151

Janet Bayley (editor), *Frances Hodgkins: Kapiti Treasures* (Mahara Gallery, Waikanae 2010) p. 3

To Myfanwy Evans, 15 May 1940; from F. H., Studio, West St, Corfe Castle, Dorset

*I was made so happy by what you & John wrote about me and I owe you
very particular thanks – it gave to my show all the success I could hope for it ...¹*

In May 1940 Hodgkins thanked writer and art critic Myfanwy Evans and her husband, the painter John Piper, for their encouragement and support. Two years earlier she had produced a lithograph, her only surviving print, which was commissioned by a venture founded by John Piper and Robert Wellington, and which aimed to make quality and reasonably priced original prints available to the public. The actual printing was carried out by Curwen Press, in Plaistow, East London, where the artists drew their images on the lithographic stones and were able to receive technical assistance from Piper. Hodgkins' *Arrangement of Jugs* was one of fifteen prints in the second series, launched in March 1938, which also included images by Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Piper.² Although an edition of 300 was planned, only about half this number was achieved due to the outbreak of the Second World War. Further to this, few of the completed lithographs were signed by the artists.

Arrangement of Jugs represents an extension of Hodgkins' interest in the possibilities of colour and form. In addition to a trio of jugs (blue, red and green), this composition includes the two familiar yellow ceramic vases and a modernist green glass vase, a lamp and another less easily identifiable object. As with the earlier watercolour of the same name, elements are reduced to simple forms or outlines, with areas of colour which may relate only loosely to the objects they are describing. As before, the overlapping of objects and the suggestion of their placement on a flat surface adds a sense of depth to the composition. Otherwise, the objects appear to 'float' free from the surface of the paper, much of which is left untouched, while in parts – such as on the foreground glass ornament – it shows the granular effect characteristic of the lithographic process. John Piper was complimentary about Hodgkins' print, considering it 'the best in the series.' The artist herself was also pleased with the project – finding it 'interesting and remunerative as a side line' – and no doubt especially so when the series, which included her print, was purchased by the British Museum.³

In January 1938 Hodgkins exhibited nine works at the Lefevre Galleries, and in September her lithograph, *Arrangement of Jugs*, was shown at the Leicester Galleries.⁴ During the year she also showed single works or small groups of works at three other galleries (including one in Manchester), and two paintings at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in November, but her health was suffering and she feared 'a complete breakdown'.⁵

To William Hodgkins, 15 October 1938; from F.H., Worth Matravers, Dorset

.... Another bit of news is that Peep Bowes only daughter has been married... As Alice was supposed to have artistic leanings I sent her a picture – or rather an auto-lithograph, a new process which a group of 20 artists, myself included, has just produced & exhibited at the Leicester Galleries with very great success. My lithograph was one among a set chosen by the Brit: Museum. I find it interesting & remunerative as a side line to my other work⁶

1. Gill, pp. 503-4

2. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 150

3. Gill, p. 483; Buchanan etc, *ibid*

4. Gill, p. 483

5. Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, pp. 241

6. Gill, p. 483



River Tone, Somerset c. 1939

Watercolour and gouache on paper, 53.5 x 37.5 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* lower left

Provenance

Leicester Galleries, London. Purchased by Mrs B C Fitzgerald, 1941

Private collection, Auckland

Exhibited

London. Leicester Galleries, *Paintings & Watercolours*, Oct. 1941, No. 107. Sold to Mrs B C Fitzgerald

Literature

Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890 – 1950* (Hocken Library 2000) p. 81

Arthur R. Howell, *Frances Hodgkins: Four Vital Years* (Rockliff, London 1951) pp. 121, 130

To William Hodgkins, 26 May 1940; from F. H., The Croft, Bradford-on-Tone, Taunton, Somerset

I have moved over here to the Croft from Corfe Castle not because it is any safer. No place is safe but it is rather more away from it all than on the S. coast where the coastal gunfire rattled my big studio windows – very worrying. Geoffrey gave me the use of the Croft for the summer & I shall stay here so long as the Gov: doesn't fill it up with evacuees . . . I have dispensed with the Housekeeper & am doing my own work & cooking in a sort of a fashion . . .¹

In the summer of 1934 Frances Hodgkins gave up her Hampstead studio to spend time in Cornwall, and then Somerset, where she was offered the use of a cottage owned by anthropologist and writer Geoffrey Gorer. In a letter to Duncan Macdonald, director of Lefevre Gallery, she explained that having the use of The Croft was 'a godsend', and that she had been having a difficult time with the 'unresponsive English landscape'. A week or so later, in another letter to Macdonald she admitted:

I have been eaten alive by the too tedious character of this country – so backless – formless. Doubtless there is a right spot if only I could strike it -²

Hodgkins returned to The Croft in the summer of 1939. These were 'dark days', and she sought to escape the coastal gunfire that had regularly rattled the windows of her previous studio at Corfe Castle. In a letter to Geoffrey Gorer she described the garden at his cottage as 'so pleasant . . . scented & radiant', and that she was eating her way 'locust like' through produce from the garden.³

From 1938 to around 1940 the bulk of Hodgkins' work was mainly landscape-orientated,⁴ and included this painting of the River Tone in Somerset, one of several on the subject. It was executed in watercolour and gouache, the latter being an opaque and fast-drying medium that needed to be applied quickly and confidently as it provided little opportunity for alteration. Further to the fluidity of the brushstrokes, Hodgkins' highly personalised interpretation of the Tone is distinguished by large areas of dark brown which contrast with the smaller and lighter patches of yellow, green, pink and blue.

During her first (1934) stay at The Croft Hodgkins explained her working method to Duncan Macdonald:

I go out into the fields every day, among the red cattle, strike an attitude and paint a composite picture - a sort of wish fulfilment of a picture.⁵

River Tone, Somerset represents a significant and substantial development in Hodgkins' career, illustrating her shift from representation to abstraction. Her earlier interest in Impressionism had now given way to an appreciation of Modernism, evident in the new economy of form and the flattening of the picture plane. The dynamically-executed elements – the foreground river and a scattering of frost (or snow) on the ground beyond, and a house (probably The Croft) among the calligraphic trees – are here drawn together in a harmonious whole. Hodgkins demonstrates her mastery of colour and form, and it was recognition of her highly personalised and idiosyncratic vision that led to her selection to represent Britain at the 1940 Venice Biennale (unfortunately the exhibition was cancelled with the onset of World War II).

The present painting was included in a selection of *recent works in oil and gouache* shown at the Leicester Galleries in October 1941. Whereas the review in *The Times* credited Hodgkins with achieving 'rich and strong colours' but considered the general impression to be 'one of confusion',⁶ The Spectator considered the exhibition 'an event of importance'⁷

1. Gill, pp. 504-5

2. Gill, pp. 461-2

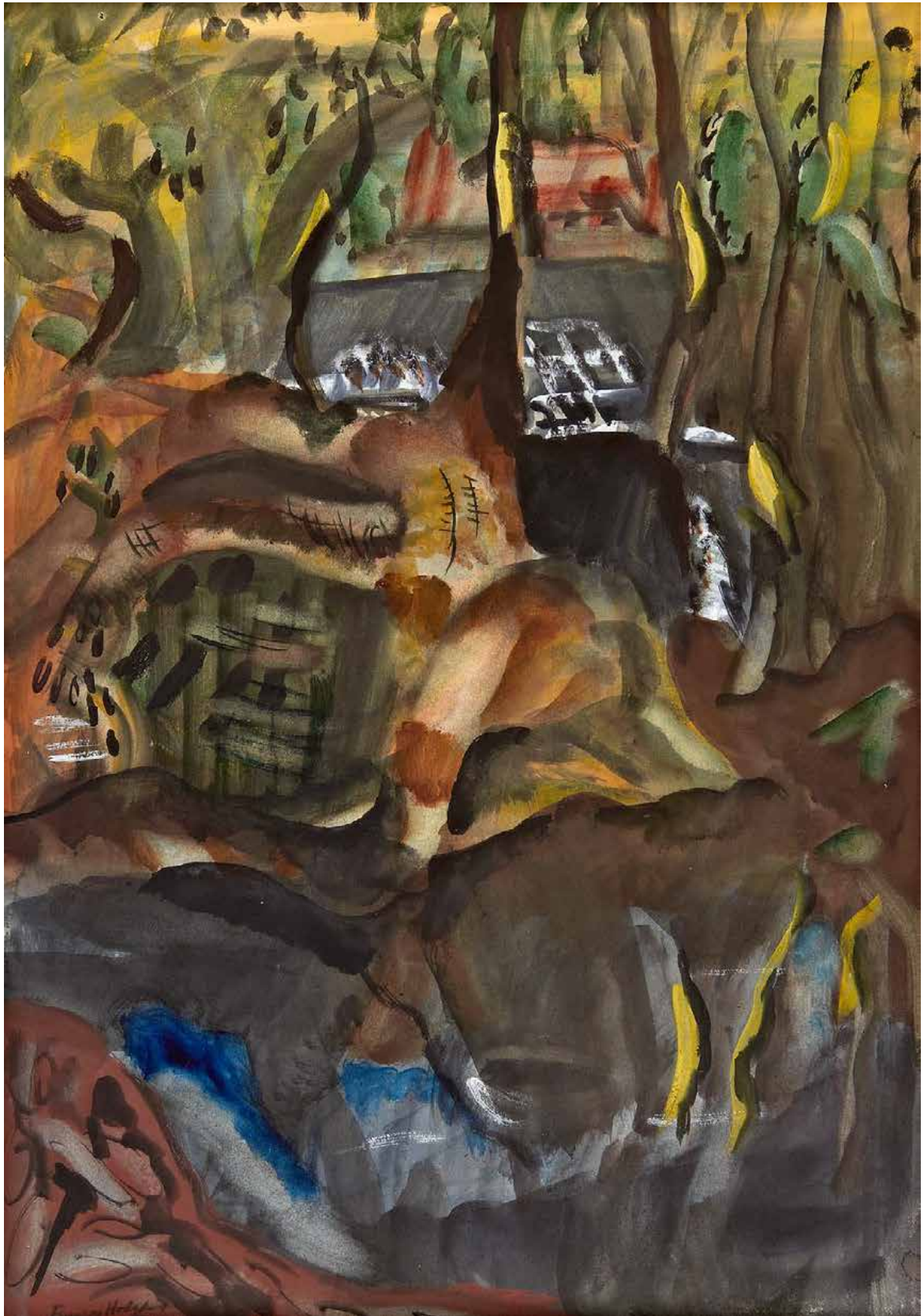
3. Gill, p. 505

4. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 70

5. Gill, p. 462

6. *The Times*, 30 September 1941, quoted in Gill, p. 518

7. *The Spectator*, 16 October 1941



Welsh Emblem

Gouache on paper, 37 x 54 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* and dated 1942 lower right

Provenance

Collection: Raymond Drey, Belsize Rd, London

Thence by descent

Exhibited

London. Lefevre Gallery, *Gouaches by Frances Hodgkins painted during 1942-1943*, March - April 1943, No. 4

City of Manchester Art Gallery. *Pictures by Frances Hodgkins*, August – September 1947, No. 39

Arts Council of Great Britain Touring Exhibition, sponsored by Isle of Purbeck Arts Club. Swanage, Bournemouth, Totnes, St Ives. March – May 1948, No. 45

London. Tate Gallery, *Frances Hodgkins Memorial Exhibition*, May – June 1952, No. 100

Auckland City Art Gallery, *Frances Hodgkins Leitmotif*, November 2005

Literature

Arthur R Howell, *Four Vital Years* (Rockliff, London 1951) pp. 102, 122, 127, 128

Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890 – 1950*, (Hocken Library 2000) pp. 82, 91, 93

To Dorothy Selby, c. 16 September 1941; from F. H., Dolaucothy Arms Hotel, Pumpsaint, Llanwrda, Carmarthenshire, Wales

I am here & really resting brain and body We are over 400 ft. up & the air is like wine flavoured with conifer pine – rather too many conifers..... To me it is paradise after Corfe. Fine country which will be better still in week or so – harvest in full swing.¹

[Linda Gill (editor), *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, 1993, p. 528]

Following the declaration of war on 3 September 1939 the now 70-year-old Frances Hodgkins continued to live in the Dorset village of Corfe Castle, but proximity to the English Channel meant local towns were now targets for enemy bombing. At the same time, tanks and military convoys trained nearby and often passed through the village, convincing her to seek the solitude of Geoffrey Gorer's cottage in Somerset. She also spent time in Dolaucothy in Wales, and on 31 October 1942 wrote to Eardley Knollys, owner of a gallery in Knightsbridge, London, enthusing over her recent work:

I have done masses of work in between showers of torrential rain, in and about the woods & river of Dolaucothy and have even seriously made pictures of the funny chimney ornaments, which do so lend themselves to decoration – I love them –²

At Dolaucothy Hodgkins felt inspired and enjoyed a burst of productive energy. By December she was back at Corfe Castle, and a selection of 15 paintings resulting from her Welsh trip were shown at Lefevre Galleries in March-April the following year. Alongside her exhibition, *Gouaches by Frances Hodgkins – A New Series of Gouaches Painted during 1942-3*, the gallery mounted a small collection of modern French painting, *Picasso and his Contemporaries*. The gallery had not previously shown the School of Paris with an English artist, and Hodgkins was the first to be so honoured.³ She hoped to be in London for the private view – 'I look forward to seeing my wall of 15 - & more especially Picasso & his merry men' – but unfortunately was too ill with bronchitis to attend. However, there was much positive response to the exhibition, as from artist John Piper and critic Eric Newton, and the artist herself was able to report that it 'had gone wonderfully'.⁴

Whereas many of Hodgkins' previous solo exhibitions included earlier as well as recent work, the fifteen paintings in her 1943 show were both recent and in the same medium.⁵ The selection therefore had a sense of cohesion, characterised by fluid brushwork, abstracted forms and light-coloured passages over larger and darker areas. *Welsh Emblem* may have qualified as one of the more enigmatic works in this collection, with the composition swirling around a patterned tablecloth and a bowl containing potatoes, beetroot and other garden produce, and autumn leeks which allude to the title. Other elements may be less easy to identify, but Hodgkins' confidence and dynamic approach are plainly obvious.

1. Gill, p. 528

2. Gill, p. 530

3. Gill, p. 532

4. Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Godwit, Random House, Auckland, 2005, pp. 262-3

5. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 158

Country Colour, Purbeck

Gouache on paper, 50 x 65 cm

Signed *Frances Hodgkins* and dated 1944 lower right

Provenance

Collection: Sir Lennox Berkeley (1903 – 1989) London

Estate of Colin Horsley OBE (1920 – 2012) Isle of Man

Exhibited

London. Lefevre Gallery, *Recent paintings by Francis Bacon, Frances Hodgkins and Henry Moore*, April 1945 No. 9

Paris. British Council Fine Arts Department Exhibition, *Quelques Contemporains Anglais* 1945, No. 8

Alsava. British Council Fine Arts Department Exhibition, *Czechoslovakia* 1946, No. 9

Literature

Arthur R Howell, *Four Vital Years* (Rockliff, London 1951) p. 100

Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, *Frances Hodgkins on Display 1890 – 1950* (Hocken Library 2000) pp. 83, 84

To William Hodgkins, 21 June 1944; from F. H., Corfe Castle, Dorset

Friends here are good to me & the country is lovely & this bit of coast line in Dorset the loveliest in the world ... I am in fairly good health – and am feeling the benefit of regular meals - and rest. Most of us are looking rather wan – one needs to be pretty strong headed to survive a 4yrs. war such as this warHave plenty of work to do for the Galleries – I am deluged with invitations commissions etc – They all want Frances H now.¹

In 1933, after returning to London from her time on the Continent, Hodgkins moved to Corfe Castle in Dorset. She was attracted there by ex-pupil, friend and potter Amy Krauss, and would retain this connection with Dorset for the rest of her life.² Corfe Castle is situated on a peninsula known as the Isle of Purbeck, which would feature in the title of a number of paintings executed by Hodgkins in the mid-1940s.

Although Hodgkins had moved to the relative isolation of Corfe Castle, she could not avoid the effects of the war. Her 1940/41 oil painting *Houses and Outhouses, Purbeck* included 'tank traps', and other symbolic references such as farm implements in states of disuse or dereliction. This highly abstracted composition also incorporated various ambiguous shapes, and was considered a major contribution to the British neo-romanticism of the day.³ Some three years later, in 1944, she took as her subject the courtyard next to her cottage in the village of Corfe Castle and produced a trio of paintings, two of which are in New Zealand collections: *The Courtyard in Wartime* (The University of Auckland Art Collection) and *Purbeck Courtyard, Early Afternoon* (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). The former is the most dramatic of these works; quite aside from the manipulation of the formal elements, an unsettlingly theatrical atmosphere suggests the night raids by enemy aircraft.

In late June 1944 Hodgkins wrote to her friend Dorothy Selby about the 'devilry' of war and its impact on her at Corfe Castle:

The village is stiff with troops mostly Canadians & the motor traffic is terrific.... The planes overhead bringing back wounded from Normandy have scared all art out of me – I simply cannot paint. This lovely weather makes it easier. The sun has been pouring down on us & we are literally cooked.⁴

Country Colour, Purbeck was painted at about the same time as the courtyard works, and may be interpreted as an entirely different response to the war. A more conventional composition executed with a naïve charm, it presents a lone cow standing before a straw-covered clump of mangelwurzels (cultivated root vegetables), while the background is dominated by a large white double-gabled structure surrounded by the artist's now familiar calligraphic trees. In contrast to the frightening intensity of *The Courtyard in Wartime*, *Country Colour, Purbeck* is positively bucolic, an essay in simplicity and productivity beneath a blue Dorset sky. In terms of style and subject matter it is similar to the earlier (1938-1940) *Cheviot Farm* (Manchester Art Gallery), in which a left-facing cow stands amongst farmyard buildings and machinery. Hodgkins' interest in agricultural themes was also apparent in the 1943 gouache *The Root Crop* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki), which has been described as a 'twilight fantasy',⁵ and bears more relation to the intensity of the courtyard series than the apparent innocence and pastoralism of *Country Colour, Purbeck*.

Hodgkins exhibited the present work, and others, at The Lefevre Gallery in April 1945 and received a positive review in *The Spectator*. Although *Country Colour, Purbeck* was not singled out, artist Michael Ayrton wrote that these paintings demonstrated that the artist had 'reached a very complete and final maturity'.⁶

1. Gill, p. 550

2. Gill, p. 462

3. Iain Buchanan, Elizabeth Eastmond and Michael Dunn, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 168

4. Gill, p. 551

5. E. A. Sheppard, 'Five Paintings by Frances Hodgkins', *Art New Zealand* 16, 1980, pp. 38-39

6. *The Spectator*, 12 April 1945



Two Wooden Figures in Sabrina's Garden, 1932

Pencil, 43 x 28 cm
Unsigned

Provenance

John Piper (Frances Hodgkins' executor)
Professor Peter Millard, Saskatoon, Canada

In the summer of 1932, Frances Hodgkins and fellow artist Hannah Ritchie set out on a sketching holiday to Norfolk. After finding the landscape flat and uninspiring, the pair instead decided to seek inspiration in the West Country on the banks of the river Severn in Bridgenorth, Shropshire.

Hodgkins wrote at the time to her friend Dorothy Selby:

This place is a complete wash out – Won't do in any way – from our point of view – Hannah admits she has made a mistake ... depressing waste of mud flats on all sides - & flat flat landscape – a lifeless outlook. We have jogged round for 2 days & have decided against staying – she halfheartedly & I very empathetically – and are leaving Tuesday morning for Bridgenorth my old love ... I am tingling with impatience to get settled - & at work.¹

Two Wooden Figures in Sabrina's Garden is a pencil study completed by Hodgkins whilst in Bridgenorth. The sketch went on to inspire and inform the artist's major oil Sabrina's Garden painted circa 1934 – currently held in the collection of the Bristol City Art Gallery. The two female figures however make their first appearance in the watercolour Pleasure Garden, 1932, which features many of the elements – sunflowers, canvas awnings, a table and chairs – present in Sabrina's Garden. 'Sabrina' was the Roman name for river Severn, whose sunny banks inspired this series of work.

Two Wooden Figures is an excellent example of the artist's refining of ideas. As exemplified by Pleasure Garden, and later by Sabrina's Garden, the works completed over the course of the summer of 1932 saw Hodgkins move away from her earlier Impressionistic style to embrace a freer more abstract approach with a focus on colour harmonies and essential yet expressive lines.

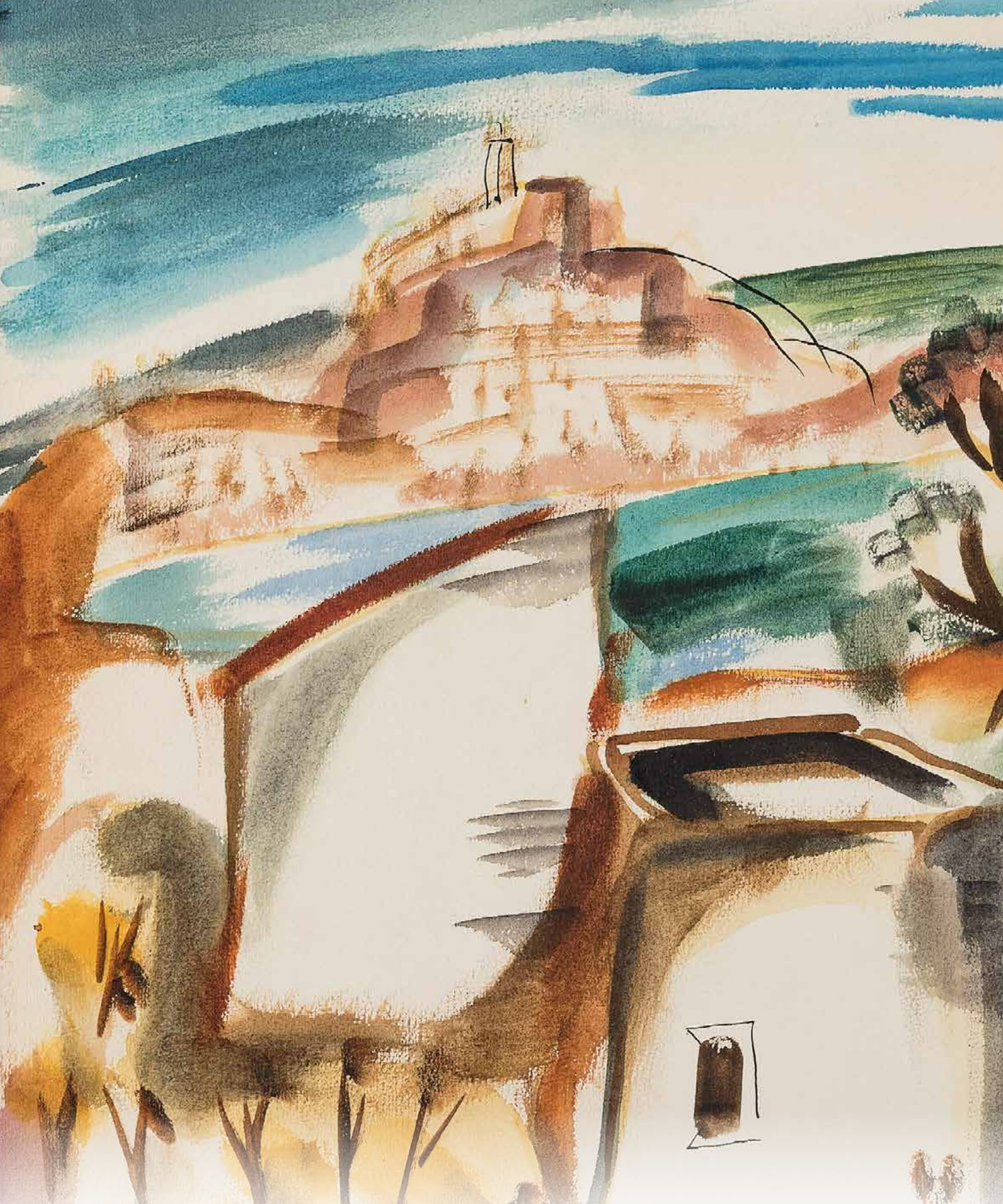
Whilst her work was critically acclaimed in England and Europe, Hodgkins' shift towards an unconventional and abstract style caused an enormous amount of controversy back in New Zealand. In 1948 members of the Canterbury Society of Arts sought to purchase some paintings by the artist but upon receiving a selection from the British Council decided against buying any of them. Among them was the serene Pleasure Garden though the tranquillity of the painting seemed lost on a New Zealand audience who reacted with indifference or hostility. Pleasure Garden suddenly became one of the most famous paintings in the country as petitions were signed, letters written and debates had. Three years later in 1951 the new Christchurch council accepted the painting and it is now held in the collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery.

Unaware of the controversy that would follow, Hodgkins stated in a letter to Peter Watson of 'Horizon' on 14 November 1941 that:

The original painting of Sabrina's Garden with its two wooden figures is, incidentally, my favourite of that vintage 1930-40.²

1. Gill, p. 454
2. Gill, p. 519.





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