

Edith Collier

A Cornish Woman of Spanish Descent c. 1920

oil on canvas

Gift of the Artist to the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui

A Cornish Woman of Spanish Descent was painted during Edith Collier's 1920 stay in St Ives. The model for this oil is also used in *The Spanish Woman*. It is possible this painting was produced in Collier's attic studio as the chairs in the background also appear in *An Attic in St. Ives*, which is where she stayed. The painting remained in the artist's possession until 1956, when the Whanganui City Council offered to purchase it. Though she generously gifted the painting to the council, she remarked dismissively of it a year later: "I don't know why they should have wanted that."¹ In spite of this comment, *A Cornish Woman of Spanish Descent* is one of the high points of her painting career.

Collier's treatment of the Cornish woman is a response to the influence of Picasso, whose work she saw at the *Exhibition of French Art 1914-1919* in London less than a year earlier. Although she was only able to see a still life and a landscape by Picasso, there is little doubt these paintings had a significant impact on her work. Essential to *A Cornish Woman of Spanish Descent* is a cubist analysis of form and space. The work's somber black and brown hues, which give the painting a captivating sense of solemnity, are reminiscent of the monotone palette of early analytical cubism. The planes of the model's face take on a primitive mask-like quality, while the placement of objects on the tabletop behind the model defy pictorial logic. Like the tabletops of Cézanne's still life studies, this one tilts precariously towards the viewer, suggesting multiple viewpoints and conflicting angles of recession. All objects including the model are subject to rigorous simplification, revealing the abstract qualities of geometric form below. Even the diagonal bands of cream and green in the distant background are simplified to offer a largely abstract interpretation of space.

Although this work retains a sense of the presence of the sitter, there is an impenetrability about her distant stare that leaves the viewer more engaged with painterly and aesthetic values than with personality.

1 S. B. Maclennan, *Edith Collier's Art in Fine Exhibition*, Wellington, 1956, n. p.

Edith Collier

The Spanish Woman 1920

oil on canvas

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

The model for this painting was also the sitter for *A Cornish Woman of Spanish Descent*.

Edith Collier

The Pouting Girl 1920

watercolour on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

This is one of a number of portrait studies that uses child-models from St Ives. Edith Collier found greater scope for fluidity and experimentation in the medium of watercolour, which she was no doubt encouraged to use by her teacher Frances Hodgkins. *Pouting Girl* marks the beginning of a dramatically more decorative approach to the treatment of figure and ground. Here a young girl and her richly-coloured, swirling backdrop blend decoratively together so that their margins mix ambiguously. Both subject matter and approach are reminiscent of Hodgkins. Cedric Morris, an artist-friend of Hodgkins's, remembered her work:

In 1919 and before she was mostly interested in the portraiture of children in water-colour: I remember the walls of the studio we rented were lined with these compositions in which textural effects were juxtaposed with an emphasis on pattern. They contained that all-over quality [in] which the late Roger Fry was so much interested . . . ¹

1 Tate Archives, Cedric Morris: 8317.6.4.2

Edith Collier

Untitled (Girl with Red Hair) 1920

watercolour on paper

Gift of Miss D Collier to the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui

It is probable that this watercolour was painted in Edith Collier's studio at St Ives, as the red chair depicted behind the model is identical to the one portrayed in paintings of her attic room. In *Red Headed Girl*, Collier distorts perspective with a newfound ease. Pictorial space is compressed, while the primary colours of red, blue, yellow and yellow-ochre predominate, enhancing the work's decorative boldness. Positioned left of centre and dominating almost the entire painting, the red-haired young woman stares insouciantly at the viewer. Instead of capturing the particularity of an individual sitter, or offering psychological insight into the subject, there is in this work a new connection for Collier with the general, with universal woman, and with woman as a symbol of self-containment and independence.

Edith Collier

The Little House Wife of St. Ives 1920

also known as *A Little Housewife*

watercolour on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Edith Collier's economy of approach in this simple yet captivating watercolour makes an interesting comparison with Frances Hodgkins' Douarnenez work. Both artists reduce the human form to its essential and most decorative elements, while still retaining a visual interest in local costuming and the patterns of traditional village life.

Edith Collier

An Attic in Old St. Ives 1920

also known as *An Attic*

watercolour on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

This is the room that Edith Collier stayed in during her time at St Ives. The slanted diagonal beams of the roof, patterned bedspread and red chair all appear in other works produced during this period, so it can be assumed that she also used this room as her studio. Collier produced two almost identical versions of this painting, and another view of the room, which is different in mood and composition.

Edith Collier

Roofs and Chimney Pots 1920

watercolour and charcoal on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

It is probable that this is a view across the rooftops of St Ives from Edith Collier's attic studio. This is one of three works that uses the repeating patterns of chimneys and roofs to create compositions that articulate colour and abstract shapes in a decorative, yet still recognizably representational manner. Certainly, one of the most striking aspects of *Roofs and Chimney Pots* is the unusual viewpoint, which fills the composition with the simplified shapes of the roofs and chimneys and gives almost no sense of a horizon line.

Edith Collier

Buildings, Beach and Boats, St. Ives 1920

watercolour on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

This watercolour of the buildings, beach, and boats at St Ives is one of a series of works that deal with the harbour life of this ancient Cornish fishing village. Edith Collier approaches her subject matter with the eye of a modernist, painting scenes of the town and beach front that are progressively more abstract and experimental. The medium of watercolour gave her an effective channel for her painterly development and experimentation.

Collier found a host of potential subject matter at St Ives. Her visit overlapped a period of transition and change for the community. The fishing industry that had been central to the town's economy was already in decline and "by the early decades of the twentieth century, many buildings used for pilchard processing had been converted to stores, the seine boats tied up and the nets piled in lofts, many rotting there to this day. It was the end of a grand era in the history of the fishing community in Cornwall,"¹ and many of Edith Collier's paintings capture this way of life at its closing.

1 Dave Smart, *The Cornish Fishing Industry: A Brief History*. Penryn, 1992, p. 25.

Edith Collier

Hayricks in Cornwall 1920-1921

also known as *Hay Ricks, Edale*

watercolour and charcoal on paper

Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Edith Collier produced watercolour and charcoal images of the countryside around St Ives. These works are modern in their decorative flatness and, in many cases, in their elegant simplicity of form and composition. *Hayricks in Cornwall* is an impressive example of the skills and ideas Collier learnt while working with Frances Hodgkins. This watercolour and charcoal work shows the full benefits of her fluid handling of the medium, and her now sophisticated use of vivid colour and tightly integrated composition. The image is strong and immediate. The scene is dominated by a central hayrick, which touches the upper margins of the painting, and is framed by the foreground, which is cropped to increase the work's sense of immediacy. The visual impact of the painting is further enhanced by the fact that all areas of the scene are painted with the same intensity. Although clearly a rural scene, the strengths of this painting owe more to Collier's vision and interpretation of the landscape, than they do to her representation of it. Collier is likely to have been aware of Monet's famous haystack series and possibly Bloomsbury painter Vanessa Bell's *Landscape with Haystack, Asheham* (1912). *Hayricks in Cornwall* is among the last and most modern works she produced in Britain.

Edith Collier

Boats 1920

watercolour on paper
Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Close parallels can be made between Edith Collier's studies of Cornish fishing boats and Frances Hodgkins drawings of similar subject matter. What is immediately apparent in both groups of works is the closeness of focus and large scale of the central motifs. The paintings and drawings assume unusual viewpoints, are brief in detail, and appear self-consciously aware of the flat picture surface.

Edith Collier

Study of Boats in Cornwall 1920
also known by the title *Study of Boats*
Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Edith Collier

An Alley to the Harbour, St Ives 1920
also known as *Alley to Harbour*
watercolour on paper
Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Edith Collier produced two similar versions of this view through an alley to the harbour at St Ives. Both *An Alley to the Harbour, St Ives* and its companion work, *Harbour, St. Ives*, offer the viewer a ruthlessly compressed picture space, with compositional elements that are rigorously simplified and distributed across the picture plane with uniform intensity. These are distinctly modern works.

Edith Collier

On the Quay, St Ives 1920
also known by the titles *On the Quay at Old St Ives*, *On the Quay at St Ives* and *On the Quay*
watercolour on paper
Edith Marion Collier Loan Collection, Sarjeant Gallery

Watercolours like the loosely brushed *On the Quay, St. Ives* are daringly experimental in their flattening of picture space and almost abstract form.

Frances Hodgkins

Belgian Mother and Child c. 1920

watercolour on paper

Gift of Misses D and T Collier to the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui

Edith Collier purchased this painting from Frances Hodgkins, paying for it probably in 1921. In February of that year, she received a note from Hodgkins: “Very many thanks for the postal order for £5 – safely come. It was good of you to send it so quickly – I do hope you are not running yourself short. You had better wait till you get out to N.Z before sending balance (£9.15).” This correspondence almost certainly relates to the sale of the painting. Collier collected work by both Hodgkins and her Australian teacher and colleague Margaret Preston. While her teachers’ work ceremoniously hung on the walls of her family home, her own often languished unframed in her studio.

Frances Hodgkins

Port with Boats, Douarnenez 1921

watercolour, gouache, graphite on paper pasted on to board

The Field Collection, Mahara Gallery, Waikanae

This group of five paintings was produced during a stay at Douarnenez in Brittany in the summer of 1921. Frances Hodgkins was aching to get to France after her long exile in England during World War One. In October 1920, she wrote to her mother: “I shall wander for a year in the South [of France] & gather material for a show in London in 1921 . . . I am taking several pupils to help grease the wheels – & I have banked enough to keep me for a year with care & economy.”¹ But no London show materialized and the post-war freedom to travel and paint became a poverty trap. Instead of staying in the south of France she was forced to return to the familiar sketching grounds of the west. “I have been on the tramp for nearly a month exploring Brittany for a spot for my summer class . . . We are now settled at this place – not many miles from Concarneau where I lived for so long . . .”²

In spite of her desperate circumstances, Hodgkins consolidated the advances she had made at St Ives to produce some outstanding work. The low viewpoint she adopts at Douarnenez fills the picture surface with her subject. Forms are bold, simple and decorative, while detail plays across the picture plane like the pattern of a fabric. The town and its people are the inspiration for these works, but the paintings are also lyrical explorations of line, tone, colour and the materiality of surface.

1 Letter from FMH to ROH, 26 October 1920, [Letter 415, E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery].

2 Letter from FMH to ROH, 19 May 1921, [Letter: 423, E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery]

Frances Hodgkins

The Rag Market, Douarnenez, Finistere Brittany 1921

also known as *Market Scene with Carts* and *Market Scene*

watercolour and charcoal on paper

The Field Collection, Mahara Gallery, Waikanae

It is in the paintings Frances Hodgkins executed at Douarnenez that the closest parallels can be found to Edith Collier's St Ives work. Both artists choose similar subject matter, constructing not dissimilar compositions, where bold, simplified forms and schematic detail enhance the decorative qualities of the scene. Hodgkins' decision to use the more modern medium of gouache further emphasizes surface and the shallowness of pictorial space.

Frances Hodgkins

Old Port, Douarnenez 1921

watercolour and charcoal on paper pasted on to board

The Field Collection, Mahara Gallery, Waikanae

Frances Hodgkins

Peasant Woman at Market 1921

watercolour, charcoal, gouache on paper pasted on to board

The Field Collection, Mahara Gallery, Waikanae

Frances Hodgkins

Women at Market 1921

also known as *Market Scene six women*

watercolour, gouache on paper pasted on to board

The Field Collection, Mahara Gallery, Waikanae

Frances Hodgkins

Fishing Boats c. 1911

watercolour on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1913 by public subscription.

This was purchased by public subscription from the artist's Dunedin exhibition in 1913. Frances Hodgkins was in Concarneau, France, from the summer of 1910 until about

October 1911, and it is almost certainly there that this was painted. Concarneau was a popular artist colony rich in motifs. Amongst the wharves and magnificent brown-sailed tunny-fishing boats, Hodgkins found many subjects to paint. Here three boats are pictured, passively moored on a millpond harbour, against a backdrop of simplified Breton architecture. Composition is cleverly orchestrated. The masts of the boats thrust vertically cutting through the canvas, while the distant shoreline creates a counter-balancing horizontal tension. Hodgkins' breadth of experience as a watercolourist is especially evident in her superb handling of reflected light on water.

Frances Hodgkins

Threshing in the Cotswolds c. 1919

watercolour and charcoal on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1955 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Threshing in the Cotswolds was purchased by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1956, for £56. It is one of a number of images Frances Hodgkins produced on the harvest theme. The scale is relatively large, and the scene itself more decoratively painted than her earlier work. Details are represented by patterns that flow rhythmically through the work. The texture of the haystack becomes a cluster of calligraphic brush marks, the light through the thresher, elemental dots and boldly thickened brushstrokes. The forms of haystacks, machinery and workers are simplified while the chickens foraging for food become a series of delightfully observed triangles. This painting, like its companion piece *Threshing Scene*, is more lyrical, fluid and free of representation than earlier work on the subject. It makes an interesting comparison with Edith Collier's slightly later *Hayricks in Cornwall* (1920-21).

Frances Hodgkins

Breton Woman and Child 1923

gouache on cardboard

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1970 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

This was purchased in 1970 from the Fine Arts Society in London with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society for £160. It is one of Frances Hodgkin's earliest experiments with the medium of gouache. It differs from watercolour in its opacity, which allows for sections of the work to be over-painted to add calligraphic detail, or to brighten or darken. Gouache, with its poster paint like qualities, was used by modernist painters like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Paul Klee to emphasize the flatness of picture plane. Hodgkins uses gouache in *Breton Woman and Child* to enhance both the bold simplicity and flatness of forms. Her colour range here of purples, mauves, pinks

and browns is one that she will continue to use with increasing sophistication.