

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947]

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**Summer** c. 1912

Watercolour and charcoal

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1913 by public subscription.

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**Tunny Boats, Concarneau** c. 1911

Watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bequeathed 1956 by Mr Percy Hodgkins, the artist's brother.

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**Woman and Child** c. 1912

Watercolour and charcoal

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bequeathed 1956 by Mr Percy Hodgkins, the artist's brother.

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**Washerwomen, Brittany** c. 1912

Watercolour and charcoal

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**The Market Place, France** 1903

Watercolour and body colour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

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**Red Sails** 1906

Watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

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**Women in a French Market** undated

Watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1971 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art  
Gallery Society.

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**Market Scene** 1902

Watercolour on card

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bequeathed 2001 by Georgie Millicent Austin.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947]

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**Le Reveil (Mother and Child)** c. 1912

Watercolour on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1955

The mother and child, or maternité theme, was well served by Hodgkins' take on Impressionism. Her ribbonry strokes and the slight, yet judicious, touch of a watery wash not only unite but blur and merge mother and child, to heighten our sense of the bond between them.

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**The window seat** 1907

Watercolour on paper

Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales -

Purchased 1913

Hodgkins' first and second tours of Europe were characterised by highs and lows, as she described to her mother after *The Window Seat* won joint first prize in the Australian women's section of the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908:

*Twice I have been quite without any money to carry on & but for my firm belief that things would ultimately right themselves & that recognition would come eventually . . . I believe I should have gone under . . . It has not only been a fight for my art but a pitch battle for my daily bread . . . I have been tried to my utmost & it had come to a breaking point when I felt . . . I could neither think nor act any more . . . Now I feel I could fight an elephant single handed.*

Hodgkins had been pleased with *The Window Seat*. 'Did I tell you,' she wrote to her mother, 'I painted a portrait of Maud & Una at Wispers [Sussex, England] – in evening dress pale mauve & blue, in the window seat by lamp light & faintest moonlight – a very good thing I say.' Characteristically, in this work, she is enjoying colour and light. Her layering of somewhat indistinct washes and her practice of sponging out colour to reveal the white of the paper underneath creates a night-time flicker and glow.

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**At the Window** c. 1912

Watercolour on paper

South Australian Government Grant 1913. Art Gallery  
of South Australia

This painting is the culmination of Hodgkins' successful years in Paris. It seems to synthesise the more distinct streaky strokes of her earlier works such as *Le Reveil*, *Woman and Child* and *Summer*, the delicate colour washes and sponging of *The Window Seat* and the circular movement of *The Hill Top*.

In *At the Window* Hodgkins seems to celebrate the light, colour and warmth she treasured, as well as the maturing of her impressionistic style. It's almost as if, having painted such a picture, she was free to go on and experiment with other modes of painting that interested her.

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**The Hilltop** c. 1908

Watercolour on paper

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa  
Tongarewa

*The Hill Top* was shown at Hodgkins' last New Zealand exhibition in August 1913, before she returned to Europe for good. Although many reviews expressed some bewilderment at Hodgkins' 'ultra-impressionism', Parliamentary Librarian Charles Wilson, writing in the *Dominion* on 1 September 1913, claimed the show was 'at last an opportunity of seeing what Impressionism at its best and sanest really is'. He considered *The Hill Top* a 'challenging' work in which Hodgkins had 'fairly let herself go' and his recommendation that the National Gallery should purchase it was heeded.

This painting is notable for the way it places women in the landscape, almost throwing them against the elements. Hodgkins' upward foreground brushstrokes seem to propel the women into the vastness of a luminous sky made to race overhead by her overlapping, seemingly haphazard brushstrokes and washes.



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**Old Woman, Caudebec** 1901

Watercolour and gouache on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 2008 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society and the Dunedin City Council.

This painting, a significant recent acquisition of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, was painted in Caudebec-en-Caux in France during Hodgkins' first summer sketching season spent working with Cornwall-based painter Norman Garstin, and his pupils. It continues, but also adds fresh and 'exotic' subject matter to, the kind of painting she was doing before she left New Zealand for Europe. Comparing it to Hodgkins' paintings of women, and mothers and children, gives us an idea of how different, intriguing and potentially baffling her unique impressionistic style would have been to an Australian and New Zealand audience, relatively untouched by the advance of French impressionism, when she visited and exhibited in 1912-13.

But we also see the facility Hodgkins already had in watercolour before she arrived in Europe. We also see that Hodgkins identified with the Newlyn School or artist's colony, of which Garstin was a key member, interested in capturing a quaint, more traditional way of life. She had already been painting genre works as well as studies of 'old age' before leaving New Zealand. Then, with the picturesque people of France, such as this woman of Normandy in her distinctive regional dress, and the company and encouragement of more like-minded artists, Hodgkins was in her element and on her way.

*Old Woman, Caudebec* was purchased with funds provided by both the Dunedin City Council's Acquisition Fund and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

# *The Marketplace/ Daily Life*

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The marketplaces of quaint European towns were magnets to touring artists but painting them was not always easy; they could be busy, stallholders could be uncooperative and, as Hodgkins said of Venice in 1906, 'the street children [could] give one a very bad time and literally persecute a timid person'. While working in Norman Garstin's sketching class at Caudebec-en-Caux in France in 1901, Hodgkins wrote to her mother: 'it is useless trying to paint a market scene, we have all tried and then sadly turned our backs on its fascinations'.

The market in Arles was a different story. With her companion Dorothy Kate Richmond, Hodgkins painted there nearly every day.

*I must tell you, this market is a huge white washed building lighted from above round which the different tradeswomen have their stalls, imagine the color with the sun overhead — the butcher's stall made to look as red as possible with crimson colored tables & awnings to help out the illusion of a plentiful supply of meat — this stall is flanked by the poulterer on the left who is always in a cloud of feathers . . . then comes the green grocer with her two pretty daughters always beaming behind a barricade of pumpkins, melons, pomegranates, figs and green stuff. This is my favourite stall and I have made many studies of it.*

(Letter to her sister, 6 November 1901)

# The Street

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For Hodgkins the street was a place where she could happen on painter-friendly scenes, colourful and of interesting design. She liked carts, once asking a policeman to shoo off some children in her middle distance so she could get the right view of the cart, and the composition she wanted. The cart in *Village Street* would have caught her eye with its stack of colourful wares overhung by vivid red leaves catching the light.

In *Dordrecht*, Hodgkins' creates a watercolour she might herself have called 'immense and impressive'. Not only is the painting unusually large, but Hodgkins' clever composition and mastery of watercolour make it seem even bigger. She creates a real sense of depth by placing the children and their three jugs in a puddled foreground, while the canal in the middle ground creates distance between them and the groups of people, buildings and wintry sky in the distance. She is also able to fully control the wet-on-wet technique of putting wet paint onto damp paper to create the feeling of a rainy day. She uses this technique mainly in the foreground, middle ground and sky, making the grand architecture appear even more monumental.

# Boats and Water

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Hodgkins enjoyed boats with sails. Even when cruising up the Thames when arriving in London for the first time, in torrential rain and yellow fog, she was taken by ‘the bright brown sails of the barges making ripping pictures against the peasoup background’.

Venice, despite the allure of its canals and gondolas and all its other charms, overwhelmed Hodgkins in 1906. She soon escaped it for Chioggia, where it is likely she painted *Red Sails*. As she told her mother, ‘the red & yellow sails of course are the feature of Chioggia, otherwise it would be quite uninteresting . . .’ In *Red Sails* Hodgkins makes dramatic use of the sail form and the viewpoint, which places the viewer below, and looking up at, the subject. She also makes almost decorative use of contrasting colours, as she would the following year in *The Window Seat*.

Hodgkins also spent quite a lot of time in the Breton fishing village of Concarneau, even passing up a teaching position in Paris to stay on there in 1910. In a photograph she sent to her mother she has her easel set up as close to the boats as she can possibly get – perhaps on top, and at the very edge of, one of the sea walls. The boats seem collected in front of her, their sails in various striking poses, as they are in *Tunny Boats*, probably painted near the end of her stay there.

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Watercolour on paper

South Australian Government Grant 1913. Art Gallery  
of South Australia

This painting is the culmination of Hodgkins' successful years in Paris. It seems to synthesise the techniques she explored over this time. In it, for example, we see the more distinct streaky strokes of her earlier works such as *Summer*, the delicate colour washes and sponging of *The Window Seat*, and a sense of circular movement, such as that introduced in *Woman and Child*.

In *At the Window* Hodgkins seems to celebrate the light, colour and warmth she treasured, as well as the maturing of her impressionistic style. It's almost as if, having painted such a picture, she was free to go on and experiment with other modes of painting that interested her.