

William Mathew Hodgkins

[1833 - 1898 New Zealand]

Lake Waihola 1894

wash

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1976 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Petrus van der Velden

[1837 - 1913 Dutch / New Zealand]

Three Figures at a Table Circa 1901

pencil on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1971 by Mrs F W Griffiths.

Girolamo Nerli

[1860 - 1947 Italian / New Zealand]

Portrait Of A Man

watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bequeathed 1970 by Mrs A B B Northcroft.

D.K. Richmond

[1861 - 1935 New Zealand]

Yachts 1921

watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1955 by Miss Brenda Bell.

William Mathew Hodgkins

[1833 - 1898 New Zealand]

The Southern Alps of New Zealand - an Evening Glow 1885

watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1908 by Mr Wolf Harris.

Born in Liverpool William Mathew Hodgkins (1833-1898) emigrated to Dunedin in 1860. A solicitor by trade Hodgkins quickly became an influential figure in this burgeoning community, but it was his passion for painting that would leave an indelible mark on this place. Although he had very little formal art training, Hodgkins developed a keen eye for painting by visiting art collections back in London, which he carried with him to the 'Edinburgh of the South'. A staunch advocate for the importance of art in the education system as an essential building block in a new society in a new country such as New Zealand, Hodgkins became a central force in the establishment of the Otago Art Society. He became its first President in 1875 and remained in that position until his death in 1898.

While at the helm of the Otago Art Society Hodgkins, presented an influential paper in 1880 titled 'A History of Landscape Art and its Study in New Zealand'. Delivered to members of the Otago Institute, the paper appears to be the first artistic manifesto presented in this country. In it he outlined the problems associated with developing a sound artistic voice in a new colony, which he noted were due in part, to factors such as a lack of 'constantly seeing those masterpieces in paintings which serve alike to charm the eye and educate the mind'.

He pointed out however, that this was a condition that could be tempered by gaining access to high quality reproductions or 'fugitive glimpses obtained on the rare occasion of a journey to Europe'. He was also quick to argue that, '...we have in the country in which we live, a land absolutely teeming with artistic subjects of the most varied kind. We have here, as it were, almost at our very doors, the special features of every country which is remarkable for its scenery, the English lake, the Scottish mountain and glen, the snow-seamed peaks of Switzerland, the fiords of Norway, the tinted geysers of the Yellowstone'.

William Mathew Hodgkins

[1833 - 1898 New Zealand]

The Dome Pass, Lake Wakatipu

Circa 1885

watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bequeathed 1945 by Mrs E C Reynolds.

W. M. Hodgkins was a strong advocate for painters spending sustained periods in the landscape developing their skills and understanding of the typography and nuances of particular locations. Having said this, he also argued that an artist's role was not simply to transcribe what lay at their disposal but to bring a sense of unity and poetry to every situation. *The Dome Pass, Lake Wakatipu* reflects this concern as Hodgkins presents both an idea of the grandiose in this scene, but also adds a level of mystery in the form of the ghost-rider figure who moves through the middle ground.

The quality of William Mathew Hodgkins' work was the subject of some speculation when Frances Hodgkins returned to New Zealand for her last visit in 1913, when she noted: 'I was glad to feel, on returning to New Zealand that his work had a breadth and value which, coming with educated eyes, I was scarcely prepared to find'.

Girolamo Nerli

[1860 - 1947 Italian / New Zealand]

Portrait of a Farmer

oil on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1967 by Miss G Y & Miss M H Johnstone.

While the influence of the three magnanimous artistic forces of James McLachlan Nairn (Scottish), Petrus van der Velden (Dutch) and Girolamo Pieri Nerli (Italian) was spread across a number of New Zealand cultural centres, they were all known to a young Frances Hodgkins either personally or through their work. These painters brought to New Zealand, in particular Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, at the close of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, a deep understanding of art history, exemplary artistic skills, and a professional approach to image making. Added to this they also introduced a set of bohemian attitudes and cultural concerns that directly challenged the prevailing notions being espoused in a number of the recently established Art Societies that were taking root in New Zealand's main centres.

Girolamo Nerli

[1860 - 1947 Italian / New Zealand]

Portrait of a girl 1890

oil on canvas on board

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1972 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Girolamo Nerli was a particularly significant figure in Frances Hodgkins' early art education, giving her private tutorials in his studio and providing extra lessons on weekends. It is not perhaps surprising therefore, that Frances's painting flourished under Nerli's guidance; her watercolours became less staid and the subject matter more diverse than the material she had been exposed to in her family circle.

Portrait of a Girl is an iconic painting that represents Nerli at the peak of his artistic powers. The sitter is said to be Olive Wilke, who appears in a small series of this painter's works. This portrait is the most memorable however, because it captures a seemingly highly charged emotional moment. Nerli brings an intensity to this small painting that some of his more grandiose works lack: in this fleeting glimpse he reveals that transitional moment between childhood and adulthood.

Petrus van der Velden

[1837 - 1913 Dutch / New Zealand]

Old Jack 1893

oil on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1893 with funds from the Otago Art Society.

Petrus van der Velden was a member of the Otago Art Society from 1893 until 1897 despite the fact that he had settled in Christchurch during this period. He showed his paintings with the Society on only two occasions while a member. The first was *Old Jack* that appeared in the 1893 exhibition, and subsequently entered the Otago Art Society's Collection under the direction of William Mathew Hodgkins, of whom A. H. O'Keeffe noted: 'He could not be taken in by the "tripe" that some produced. His own work rang true, and he was ever keen, if he saw merit, to help a sale. He was the means of our purchase of Van der Velden's pictures, "The Otira Gorge" and "Old Jack".'

(A. H. O'Keeffe 'Art in Retrospect, Earlier Dunedin Days – Paint and Personality' in Art in New Zealand March 1940 Vol. XII, No. 3, p. 160.)

Old Jack was a painting familiar to the young and impressionable Frances Hodgkins. The sitter for this work appears in her painting *An Old Salt*. In a letter dated 7 May 1974, from Mr G. B. Abel to the Director of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, it is suggested that the sitter for *Old Jack* is his great grandfather Mr Robert Fulton who packed and transported Van der Velden's pictures in Christchurch. Mr Abel noted: 'On a number of occasions Van der Velden said he would paint Mr Fulton, and one day gave him a south-wester to wear and sat him at a table. At no time would he allow Great Grandfather to see the picture until it was completed. When Mr Fulton saw himself sitting with a pipe and a pint pot he was most upset, because he was a strict teetotaller and non-smoker and he had never been a seaman'.

Daisy Elmore

[1878 - 1958 New Zealand]

Head of an Old Woman Circa 1900

oil on canvas board

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1950 by Dr Frank Fitchett.

Born Margaret Fitchett, 'Daisy' grew up in Dunedin where she attended Otago Girls' High School and later the Dunedin School of Art. In the early and middle 1890s she was in Europe pursuing further study in Dresden under the portrait painter Frank Pops and at the Académie Julien in Paris under Bougereau and Ferrier and Louis Deschamps.

By the close of the nineteenth century, Daisy had returned to Dunedin where she quickly entered the small circle of painters who had garnered a strong social and critical association. As Eric McCormick notes in *The Expatriate*, Frances Hodgkins struck up a distinct and valuable relationship with this artist during her sojourn home. 'A competitor of her [Frances Hodgkins'] own sex, also returned from abroad, now appeared in Miss Daisy Fitchett, whose drawings in chalk and pastel, exhibited at an 'At Home', were 'pronounced very good' reported Mrs Hodgkins, adding with slight asperity towards her hostesses, 'The Wimperis family gushed tremendously over them-.' Nor was Frances exempt from the small feminine animosities of that little provincial circle. 'Daisy Fitchett has started a studio,' she informed her sister Isabel, 'but so far has no pupils. She is frightfully lackadaisical and about as unpractical as they make them'. As always, however, she was prepared to pay her ungrudging tribute to merit when she recognised it. Some time later she wrote with unadorned and unqualified enthusiasm, 'Daisy Fitchett's work is splendid...'

(E. H. McCormick, *The Expatriate*, pp 33-34. McCormick makes reference here to letters from Frances Hodgkins to Rachel Hodgkins on; 20 July 1907, 20 August 1907 and 22 November 1907.)

Isabel Field

[1867 - 1950 New Zealand]

By Tranquil Waters 1899

watercolour

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1973 by Dr Charles Richard S Roberts.

The older of the two Hodgkins sisters, Isabel was initially considered the most likely to pick-up their father's talent for watercolour painting. However, her commitment to this activity waned with marriage and her eventual move to Wellington. Her interest in art was sustained through the lively correspondence she shared with her sister over the coming decades. *By Tranquil Waters* in all its effortlessness goes some way to show what a loss her withdrawal from the Dunedin painting scene would have caused.

John Halliday Scott

[1851 - 1914 New Zealand]

Moeraki Boulders or On Moeraki Beach

1889

watercolour on board

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 1936 by the artist's family and Miss M B Scott.

Dr John Halliday Scott, was formerly Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, and the first Dean of the Medical School at the University of Otago. He was not only a Hodgkins' family friend, but also an amateur painter of considerable merit, an important mentor to Frances Hodgkins and an artist-colleague of William Mathew's.

When Frances Hodgkins made, what was to be her final visit to New Zealand in 1912-1913, she held a solo-exhibition at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, when the Gallery occupied the building which now houses the Otago Settlers Museum. Works sold slowly, but Hodgkins' spirits were raised when Dr Scott arrived and 'snapped all around in the well-known manner', arranged for the Gallery to buy three pictures and 'went home well pleased with himself.'

Dr Scott played an important role in Hodgkins' life, particularly after her father's death when she came to rely more heavily on his friendship and role as a critic of her work. She heard of his death in 1914 while painting in Siena and wrote... 'The World will not seem quite the same place without him. He really has been a big influence in our lives & I owe him much...'

Writing in 1942 to her brother Willie about her career she commented... 'the tide had begun to turn after my return to New Zealand in 1913 but when Dr. Scott had died I received no further interest or help from my native land-'

(Letter from Frances Hodgkins to Rachel Hodgkins 5 April 1914 and Frances Hodgkins to William Hodgkins 22 October 1942.)

Photographer unidentified

**Frances and her father, William Mathew
Hodgkins, Waira, Ravensbourne 1888.**

Courtesy of E. H. McCormick Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.