

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Corfe Castle 1943

oil on canvas

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 1967 FROM THE HAMBLEDON GALLERY, BLANDFORD FORUM,
DORSET, WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY SOCIETY.

Described by the artist as both ‘her refuge and her prison’, Hodgkins spent most of the war years living at Corfe Castle on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset. In her later years in particular, Hodgkins struggled to find places where she could live and paint, could find sympathetic subjects and have both the company and the solitude she needed. The Isle of Purbeck is in fact a peninsula and Corfe Castle is a towering ruin which dominates the village named after it. Hodgkins first went there in 1934 to stay with a friend and former pupil, the potter Amy Krauss, then found a studio in a disused Wesleyan chapel. ‘Corfe cannot in any way be called stimulating – I could leave it without regret but I am making “do” – And marking time till we get some weather worth calling good weather when I can get about & explore the neighbourhood. I have a Studio...central heated - very convenient.’ [letter Hodgkins to A.J. McNeill Reid, 20 December 1934]

The outline of the castle appears in many of Hodgkins’ oils and gouaches and here is the square tower on the skyline; while the parish church is in the foreground. The misty colours, the golden light on the church and the flowering rose give the work a fairytale mood – like the stage setting for a performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In fact staying in Corfe was often a nightmare as tanks and artillery trundled through the village on their way to the south coast and the vibrations eventually caused her studio roof to collapse. Several times she retreated to ‘The Croft’ at Bradford-on-Tone in Somerset, lent to her by another good friend Geoffrey Gorer, and made his cottage the subject of a number of beautiful works.

Reference: Alexa Johnston, *Frances Hodgkins: femme du monde*,
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

The Weir 1943

oil on plywood

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.
PURCHASED IN 1967 WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN
PUBLIC ART GALLERY SOCIETY. THE WORK WAS PREVIOUSLY
OWNED BY EARDLEY KNOLLYS.

Apart from a short stay at Cerne Abbas in Dorset, Frances Hodgkins spent most of 1943 at Corfe Castle. Her letters tell of the everyday battle to live and paint in these difficult years and it is tempting to see this magnificent painted weir, with its continual dark rush of water, as a grim metaphor for the relentless tides of war. But look again at the plants springing in the grass beside the stream, the light on the horizon behind the leafless trees and the joyous paint scampering across the surface. Once again, she has worked her magic and created a perfect miniature world of beauty.

Reference: Alexa Johnston, *Frances Hodgkins: femme du monde*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Ibiza Harbour c 1933

oil on canvas

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

GIVEN IN 1970 BY THE O'SULLIVAN FAMILY, IN MEMORY OF IRENE STANISLAUS O'SULLIVAN. THE WORK WAS SHOWN AT ST GEORGE'S GALLERY, LONDON. IT WAS BOUGHT BY THE DONORS FROM THE ESTATE OF MRS LEA JARAY-BONDI.

A winter escape to Ibiza, in Spain, was possible in January 1933 after Hodgkins sold a painting of Cornwall to the mother of her friend Geoffrey Gorer. She was determined to make this a productive excursion, since she was preparing for her first solo exhibition at Lefevre Galleries in March 1933. 'The SHOW is the THING – I must set London talking'.

[letter Hodgkins to Karl Hagedorn, 3 January 1933]

She did a lot of work in January: 'I am still reacting pleasantly to Ibiza in the painting way and find heaps to do – all very lovely, I can hardly believe it. Weather much colder – but fine today – houses very cold & we seek bed – or the café in the evenings – to keep warm'.

[Letter Hodgkins to Dorothy Selby, 10 January 1933]

But the strain of painting to a deadline soon began to tell. She postponed the show until October and stayed on at Ibiza for six months, producing watercolours, gouaches and sketches for oil paintings to be made back in London. This masterly work shows Ibiza Harbour at sunset. The view is from the upper part of the town (Dalt Vila), across the water to the distant blue hills and a sky filled with scudding pink clouds. Her bold use of colour and her daring brushwork, take a traditional subject to a new, almost surreal level.

Reference: Alexa Johnston, *Frances Hodgkins: femme du monde*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

The Farmer's Daughter (Portrait of Annie Coggan) 1929-30

oil on canvas, laid onto board

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY. PURCHASED IN 2010 FROM WEBB'S, AUCKLAND WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN CITY COUNCIL, THE I M RICHDALE TRUST AND THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY SOCIETY. THE WORK WAS GIVEN BY THE ARTIST TO ANNIE COGGAN AND PASSED BY DESCENT TO NANCY MOORE (NÉE COGGAN), THEN BY ESTATE SALE AT WEBB'S WHERE IT WAS BOUGHT BY THE GALLERY.

The subject of this portrait is Annie Coggan, who lived on a farm near a cottage called 'The Croft', in Somerset, which the Gorer family made available to Frances Hodgkins from the time they met in the late 1920s. Annie Coggan had been asked to 'keep an eye' on Hodgkins and the 'The Croft' by Geoffrey Gorer when he was absent. Sometimes referred to as the 'Gorer's housekeeper' she was both a caring neighbour and an unpaid, friendly supplier of provisions, which Hodgkins appreciated and mentioned in her letters.

The Farmer's Daughter (Portrait of Annie Coggan) clearly illustrates Hodgkins' unique ability to fuse a dynamic range of colours with a daring sense of composition and brushwork. This stylized, yet warm-hearted portrait also represents a growing level of sophistication in the artist's articulation of modernist painting influences. This includes a hint of English Romantic Surrealism, noticeable in this particular interpretation of the sitter. The deliberate interplay between figure and ground, subject and nature, adds another level of interpretation to the work, both individualising Coggan and universalizing her as a young woman of nature.

Hodgkins produced two versions of *The Farmer's Daughter (Portrait of Annie Coggan)*, which is not unusual for this artist. While sharing some similarities in composition, proportion and overall presentation, the other slightly later version (acquired by Lucy Wertheim, Hodgkins' friend and gallerist), is a cooler, more analytical interpretation. The colours are less vibrant and the sitter, whose face is turned, is less integrated with the landscape background, creating a greater sense of emotional distance from the viewer and representing a more deliberately formalist treatment of the subject.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Still Life with Fruit Dishes c 1937

oil on canvas laid on hardboard

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

THIS WORK WAS SHOWN AT MESSRS REID AND LEFEVRE LTD, LONDON. IT WAS BOUGHT BY A GROUP OF ANONYMOUS DONORS FROM A BRITISH COUNCIL EXHIBITION HELD IN DUNEDIN IN 1949, AND GIVEN TO THE GALLERY THAT SAME YEAR.

Throughout the 1930s Hodgkins continued to paint still life subjects using both oil and watercolour as a medium, a subject which had taken hold after she became a member of the Seven and Five Society in 1929. In 1934 when Ben Nicholson proclaimed that the Society should only focus on non-representational art, this pushed aside the likes of Hodgkins, who throughout her career used the natural world and her experience of it, as a subject, source of inspiration and point of departure for her art.

In *Still Life with Fruit Dishes*, although forms are clearly recognisable in the vase, fruit, flowers, jugs and dishes, their depiction is simplified and amplified to enhance form and movement against a backdrop of fabric which creates an ambiguity of space. The painting seems dynamic and free and is imbued with a feeling for the life energy of the forms depicted, regardless of whether they are organic or not. The work has the quality of 'something newly discovered' and characteristically of her still life subjects, it has a 'vague but tantalising sense of the surreal.'

Reference: Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Random House, 2005.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Country Scene with Pollarded Trees and Wooden Gate c 1933

verso:

Bridge over the River Tone, Somerset. c 1933

watercolour on paper

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 2011 FROM JOANNE AND BOB SOUCH, RICHMOND, NEW ZEALAND, WITH FUNDS FROM THE GALLERY.

This painting was bought from a West End gallery in London soon after WWII and passed by inheritance to a family member, currently living in Whimple, near Exeter. She put the work up for sale at Bearnese, Hampton, Littlewood auctioneers, from whom it was purchased by Joanne and Bob Souch, who offered it for sale to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

In October of 1930, Hodgkins had her first solo show at Arthur Howell's St George's Gallery. She'd signed a contract with Howell making him, for three years, the sole agent for her watercolours, with the option of choosing other works in other media as well, if he wanted them. She promised to send him '...the best work I am capable of...' but then in 1931 St George's closed and the contract was carried over to the Lefevre Galleries, with whom the artist subsequently had an at times fraught but sustained relationship, for a number of years.

Friends such as the young anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, sustained Hodgkins throughout difficult times in her personal life and career in the 1930s. Though a much younger man and a different generation, he was impressed by her and was a strong advocate of her work. Of her large 1937 show at the Lefevre Gallery for instance, he wrote that 'she is a woman and she is a New Zealander. These in turn give her work a sensitivity and freshness of vision that make her the most original and individual painter working in England.'

It was Gorer's cottage 'The Croft', in Bradford on Tone, that offered a refuge for the artist, most notably in 1930 and then again in 1934, when she possibly painted at least two of the pictures in this show, *The Farmer's Daughter: Portrait of Annie Coggan* and *Country Scene with Pollarded Trees and Wooden Gate* and its reverse sketch which may depict the township of Bradford on the river Tone in Somerset.

Based on stylistic grounds, it is likely that *Pollared Trees*, was painted around 1933. A work in watercolour, its subject is straightforward enough and the treatment of it suggests an illustrative quality, like a cartouche, where the artist is exercising her hand, playing with colour and form, brushwork and pattern. The motif of a black wooden gate appears in earlier watercolours painted while the artist was staying at 'The Nook' Bodinnick-by-Fowey in Cornwall in 1931, during which time the artist painted the countryside relentlessly and also completed her well known work *Wings Over Water*, in the collection of Tate London.

While at first glance this work seems simple, it has an underlying complexity in the way the motifs are handled and it is weirdly organic. Around the time it was painted, critics commented on a number of elements that are found in this picture and others in this show, such as the artist's 'gift for colour-design and wilful elimination of both linear and aerial perspective.' In 1935 in *The Times* review of her 1935 show at the Leicester Gallery, the critic considered her '...one of the most original artists of the day in England...' and described her work as '...a kind of surrealism, where objects are intuitively perceived rather than logically ordained.' It was also these qualities that the writer Eric Newton was contemplating when he wrote in mixed admiration of her 'personal vision' with 'surrealistic elements' as being evidence of her 'strangely personal and strangely limited genius.'

All quotes from Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Random House, 2005.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Still Life c 1931

pencil and watercolour on paper

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 2011 FROM SOTHEBY'S, LONDON, WITH FUNDS FROM THE FRANCES HODGKINS GALLERY'S SPECIAL FUNDS.

THE PAINTING WAS BOUGHT BY WILFRID A. EVILL FROM THE REDFERN GALLERY, LONDON IN NOVEMBER 1944, AND BEQUEATHED BY EVILL TO HONOR FROST IN 1963. IT WAS PURCHASED BY THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY FROM SOTHEBY'S 'THE EVILL/FROST COLLECTION' SALE, PART II, LONDON, 16 JUNE 2011.

In 1929 Frances Hodgkins became a member of the Seven and Five Society – a group of predominantly young Modernist painters who sought to achieve sincerity in their work through freshness of tone and colour. Limiting their subjects primarily to landscapes, still-lives and portraits, and then later to increasing abstraction, Hodgkins at 60 years of age, was the eldest of the group, but not the least experimental. Membership of this group, brought her into working contact with progressive artists, such as of Winifred and Ben Nicholson, David Jones and Ivon Hitchens. Increasingly members of the Seven and Five Society experimented with setting their still life studies outdoors in the landscape. Not only did Frances Hodgkins begin to add the still life into her repertoire of subjects from around 1929, but she, too, increasingly began to incorporate a landscape background, painting them in both watercolours and oils.

This work is an example of one of Hodgkins' decorative still life paintings set in a landscape, and stylistically dates from around 1931. Both she and David Jones were painting with a similar lightness of touch at this time. Hodgkins' painting combines delicate drawing with blushes of pink watercolour and depicts a cornucopia of fruit, flower and leaf forms. On closer inspection, it has the usual individualistic quirks, such as exaggerated gloxinia leaves - with its tiny flower - which flop in the foreground of the arrangement like the skull and tongues of an alien life form.

The frame around this picture originally came from the *Country Scene with Pollarded Trees and Wooden Gate*. The moulding is the same as that around *Ibiza Harbour*, which is also that work's original frame. Made by Bourlet, frame makers of London, the dealers Lefevre, who sold Hodgkin's works from the early 1930s onwards, often used this particular moulding with its plaster-like distressed paint finish, to frame her pictures.

Reference: Joanne Drayton, *Frances Hodgkins: A Private Viewing*, Random House, 2005.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

**North End of George
Street, Dunedin.** 1898

watercolour

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.
GIVEN IN 1963 BY MISS CORA GOW IN MEMORY OF HER
CHILDHOOD DAYS IN DUNEDIN.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Dunedin Harbour. 1893

watercolour on paper on board

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.
PURCHASED IN 2010 FROM DUNBAR SLOANE, WELLINGTON,
WITH FUNDS FROM THE JAMES DORMER AND ANNE
MARGARET WOULFE BEQUEST. PREVIOUSLY OWNED BY DR
NEVILLE HOGG.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

The Onion Seller, Tangier 1903

watercolour on board

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 2011 FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ART CENTRE,
AUCKLAND WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART
GALLERY.

Backing board from *The Onion Seller*

This is the original backing board from *The Onion Seller*. The labels, postings and handwritten notes all add to the provenance information and history of the picture. The backing board will be retained for the archive, but in the meantime, to protect the painting, it has been removed from the reverse of the work because it is acidic board.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Outside the Ramparts. c1933

pencil

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 1988 FROM DUNBAR SLOANE, WELLINGTON,

WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY

SOCIETY.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

North End of George Street, Dunedin. 1898

watercolour

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

GIVEN IN 1963 BY MISS CORA GOW IN MEMORY OF HER CHILDHOOD
DAYS IN DUNEDIN.

A misty blue view of the very edge of town, with a solitary figure riding along the bank of the Water of Leith – here are the hallmarks of a rural idyll. But since proximity to the river was essential for a number of Dunedin industries, including the steam laundry, a paper mill and several tanneries, this is not a country church with a steeple – it is a factory with a tall chimney.

William Mathew Hodgkins (the artist's father) had died in February and Frances and her mother Rachel, beginning a new phase of their lives, moved down from Roslyn to a smaller house in Castle Street. It is quite a short walk from there to the north end of George Street and this sunny day with just a thin layer of scudding cloud no doubt encouraged Frances to go outdoors with her paper and paints. Lessons from the artist Nerli have clearly helped to loosen her brushwork and she is now applying colour in broad washes. She finishes the foreground of her painting with confident staccato dashes of colour to suggest the reedy grasses on the water's edge.

This was one of two works she showed at the 1898 Otago Jubilee Industrial Exhibition and it sold for £2-2-0, no doubt a welcome addition to Hodgkins' travel fund, as she was about to make her first excursion to Europe in 1901.

Reference: Alexa Johnston, *Frances Hodgkins: femme du monde*,
Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

The Onion Seller, Tangier 1903

watercolour on board

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

PURCHASED IN 2011 FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ART CENTRE, AUCKLAND WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

The painting was previously owned by the artist's close friend Dorothy Kate Richmond. It was inherited by Mrs Esmond Atkinson of Wellington, from Richmond, then purchased in 1975 by a private collector from Christchurch at R G Bell & Co Auctioneers, Kaiapoi, who put it up for sale at The International Art Centre in Auckland.

In November 1902, Frances Hodgkins was in Europe and the winter cold had begun to bite. She decided to escape London and embark on a painting trip to the sunshine, colour and exotic otherness of Morocco. The country was in a state of political upheaval, so she reassured her family that she was not going alone. She would travel with Mrs Ashington, whom she knew from her time in Caudebec in 1901 and it was also possible that she would bump into the Theomins from Dunedin who were planning a tour through Spain and North Africa.

In fact, they met the Theomins on the boat from Gibraltar across to Tangier and had tea with them a few days later, after Frances had discovered that the city was not as colourful as she had hoped – 'all browns & whites & muddy creams'.

[letter Hodgkins to Dorothy Kate Richmond, 7 March 1903]

Nonetheless when David Theomin generously gave her a £15 commission to paint a Tangier picture she produced this watercolour in which tumbled oranges and red-skinned onions radiate a fiery glow and the glittering, blinding sunlight bleaches and disintegrates the forms of people and buildings. In July 1903 nine North African works by Frances Hodgkins were included in a group exhibition at the Fine Arts Society in London's Bond Street, but the Theomins' painting was already on its way home to Dunedin. She described the painting in a letter to her friend Dorothy Richmond:

'I wish I could have sent you my large picture of the market – it is the apple or rather the onion of my eye – much the same sort of subject a jumble of onions, melons & oranges. It is going tomorrow to Mr. Theomin – I am going to eschew vegetables after this with a comfortable feeling that I have done my duty by them.'

[letter Hodgkins to Dorothy Kate Richmond 7 March 1903]

The Gallery bought *The Onion Seller* in 2011 both as a complement to the Theomins' work at Olveston, and because it did not have one of these Moroccan works in its own collection. It's significant that this picture was formerly owned by the artist's good friend the New Zealand painter Dorothy Kate Richmond, and it is possibly the very same work that Frances Hodgkins alludes to having sent Dorothy, in the letter above.

Reference: Alexa Johnston, *Frances Hodgkins: femme du monde*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Outside the Ramparts. c1933

pencil

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.
PURCHASED IN 1988 FROM DUNBAR SLOANE, WELLINGTON,
WITH FUNDS FROM THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY
SOCIETY.

Trees often feature in Hodgkins' pictures, both as a feature subject and as a background motif. The leafless limbs and trunks of tree forms in particular seemed to fascinate her. At times she treats them as minimal abstracted forms in stark and distant isolation, while at others they are organic and fecund, ruined and animated, which is in keeping with both a Neo Romantic and Surrealist interpretation.

FRANCES HODGKINS [1869-1947 New Zealand]

Dunedin Harbour. 1893

watercolour on paper on board

COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.
PURCHASED IN 2010 FROM DUNBAR SLOANE,
WELLINGTON, WITH FUNDS FROM THE JAMES DORMER
AND ANNE MARGARET WOULFE BEQUEST. PREVIOUSLY
OWNED BY DR NEVILLE HOGG.

Purchased in 2010 by auction in New Zealand, this picture was bought as a complement to the other early painting of Dunedin, *North End of George Street*, in the collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. These pictures show the artist in the early stage of her career and offer a great contrast to the style of her middle to late period works, for which she is most highly regarded in the art world.