

Poppies

ANNE HAMBLETT

Oil on board, c.1937

John and Ethel McCahon bequest, 1973. Hocken Pictorial Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago 73/58

“Still-life painting was Hamblett’s strength, and she used flowers and vases as vehicles for the display of her skills in Post-Impressionist brushwork and modern composition. Handling primary colours and geometric forms with a sure touch, she juxtaposed the luscious reds of Oriental poppies with the luminescent blue of a ceramic vase tilted up on a yellow cloth-covered table. She daringly included glimpses of two other paintings in the background in the manner of Paul Cézanne.”

Uare Taoka o Hākena, Hocken Heritage Collections, University of Otago¹

“The few surviving works are remarkably mature. Her paintings *Poppies* and *Auriculas* in the Hocken are two such and so is her *Flower Study* in 1939 which is still privately owned. These still lifes are painted expressively and use their motifs as symbols. Hamblett has left few clues about her painterly concerns but hardly needed to... (they are) evocations of an interior life. They succeed in conveying a sense not only of a domestic setting, but of a way of living in it², a frame of mind.”³

Peter Entwistle

1. Uare Taoka o Hākena, Hocken Heritage Collections, University of Otago website, accessed 13 August, 2020.

2. We also read this as an analogy for their shared studio. A setting and arrangement for both work and social connection. The Studio as an extension of living space.

3. Peter Entwistle, *The Birth of Modernism in New Zealand Painting*, 1999, unpublished manuscript, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, p277.

Prop inspired by vase in *Poppies* (Anne Hamblett)

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Painted vase, 2021

Spring Blossom

ANNE HAMBLETT

Oil on board, 1939

Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 2020

“An outstanding student at the Dunedin School of Art from 1934–1937, Anne Hamblett (1915–1993) became an accomplished painter of landscapes, portraits and still life compositions who exhibited her work at the Otago Art Society and with the Wellington Sketch Club to considerable acclaim. At this time, many of the male art students were enlisted to serve abroad in the Second World War. In order to provide continued support to each other to paint and exhibit, Doris Lusk, Mollie Lawn and Anne Hamblett established an all-women’s art gallery and studio above the UFS Dispensary in Princes Street¹ Dunedin in 1939. The space was always filled with fresh flowers in vases² and pots, and these were a favourite subject for Anne.”³

Linda Tyler

“the time when she was a practicing artist in Dunedin, sharing a studio with friends, earning money drawing specimens at the Medical School and attending art school where she met my father, Colin McCahon.”⁴

Victoria Carr

1. We have established the Lawn/Lusk/Hamblett studio was probably on Moray Place. Peter Entwistle thought it might be above where Moray Gallery is now. The studio above the UFS Dispensary on Princes Street housed a larger group, which included Lawn, Lusk and Hamblett, and also Colin McCahon, Max Walker and Morris Kershaw. This studio preceded the all-women’s space.

2. I see the same vase here that is featured in Doris Lusk’s *Flower Study*.

3. Linda Tyler, exhibition information included on Michael Lett’s gallery website, accessed 3 October, 2020.

4. Victoria Carr’s (Anne Hamblett’s daughter) essay in the publication accompanying *A Table of One’s Own: the creative life of Anne McCahon*, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, p17.

Replica of vase in *Mixed Flowers* (Doris Lusk) and *Spring Blossom* (Anne Hamblett)

EMMA TURNER

Earthenware, 2021

Studio Interior

ANNE HAMBLETT

c.1939–1940, [exact materials and whereabouts unknown]

Studio Window

ANNE HAMBLETT

c.1939–1940, [exact materials and whereabouts unknown]

Another two works Hamblett exhibited in the 1940 Otago Arts Society exhibition were not able to be located for curator Linda Tyler’s exhibition on Anne Hamblett at Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery in 2016. Tyler infers that these interior scenes, titled *Studio Interior* and *Studio Window*, “seem to be celebrations of having an independent space to paint in.”¹ The studio featuring as subject matter shows how significant it was to the women.

(Julia Holderness)

“Studio Window” had this wonderful collection of vases sitting in front of a small window framed with blue curtains. Outside the window was the suggestion of tall city buildings.

Florence Weir

1. From Linda Tyler’s essay in the publication accompanying *A Table of One’s Own: the creative life of Anne McCahon*, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, p36.

Flower Study / Mixed Flowers

DORIS LUSK

Oil on board, 1940

Given by Charlton Edgar, Dunedin, in memory of his wife Mona Edgar in 1963
Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, 20,007

*Tulips, bluebells, lilac and greenery. Mixed Flowers*¹. Doris Lusk's (1916–1990) painting of a white ceramic vase with tulips, bluebells, lilac and greenery has two titles – so let's use both. It is known as *Flower Study* in the Hocken Pictorial Collections, yet she exhibited this painting in her first solo exhibition in the all-woman studio as *Mixed Flowers*. It also seems to have two different dates. The description on the Hocken Hākena page says that she exhibited this painting in the Moray Place studio as *Mixed Flowers* where it was for sale for 5 guineas. The Otago University website has the picture painted in 1935 when the artist was still a student at the Dunedin School of Art. Art historian Peter Entwistle thinks *Mixed Flowers* 'may' have been in her solo exhibition in the studio (1940), "a note on the back says it was painted in 1935 but she may have improved it"². "The tipped up table top"³ has a paisley fabric in various blues and oranges, and those shapes compete a little with the petal shapes above. The Hocken's text about the painting includes "snaking tulips" and "a study in decorative pattern making"⁴. The texture on the vase⁵ announces the material as ceramic; there is a curved handle and a goldy-red band at the bottom. *Was it Doris, Anne or Mollie who put these flowers in the vase? Which garden were they picked from? Or did they come from a nearby florist in the Octagon? We can probably say it was September, a spring arrangement.* So were the tulip stems that flimsy? In the painting they don't look quite strong enough to hold up their bright heads (in yellow, red and white), but that's because the dark brown and green lines of the stems have been carefully arranged on the painting surface and these snaky lines are striking and lively.

(Julia Holderness)

1. So we wonder, how did the "Flower Study" title come about; was this an institutional title, decided later on by someone else? Perhaps later Doris thought "Flower Study" was a better title?

2. Peter Entwistle, *The Birth of Modernism in New Zealand Painting*, 1999, unpublished manuscript, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, p287.

3. Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago website, accessed 13 August, 2020.

4. Ibid.

5. We think it is the same vase in Anne Hamblett's *Spring Blossom*.

Pink Roses

DORIS LUSK

Oil on board, c.1935
Collection of Jancis Meharry

Flattened green dining room chair in the background. Or could it actually be a striped wallpaper? This painting can be seen in the photo of Doris in the studio - hanging to the right at the back. Her first solo exhibition. The teacup reminds me of Poole. Pink and grey, but the fine black rim isn't Poole. Jancis, Doris's daughter, has the painting in her bedroom in Christchurch now. Three pink roses in a small, brown pottery vase.

(Julia Holderness)

It's the sort of arrangement I put on the dresser in my guest bedroom when a friend comes to stay. Speaking of which, Joan is coming to stay with me next month. She wants to spend a few weeks in the studio. I must clear the wardrobe. Her ensembles always inspire me. Such a colourist!

Florence Weir

Table with Flowers

DORIS LUSK

Oil on board, 1942

Collection of Jancis Meharry

“Oh, that table was her mother’s. Maybe she borrowed it, took it up to the studio for a bit. That’s very Doris, just grab things to paint, an Agee jar....you know - making do. She didn’t own much. They didn’t have any money back then.”

Jancis Meharry

Side table

Wood [undated]

Collection of Jancis Meharry

This side table was owned by Doris and is depicted in *Table with Flowers* (1942).

Replica of teacup with saucer depicted in *Pink Roses* (Doris Lusk)

EMMA TURNER

Stoneware, 2021

Untitled (Still life)

MOLLIE LAWN

Watercolour, 1940

Collection of Kershaw family

“It was a wonderful period. We’d have meetings and chats around the fireplace and solve all the world’s problems. It might sound like we were just socialising but it was actually a fairly frugal existence where a lot of art was produced.”¹

Mollie Lawn

“Fun then consisted of drinking a little, listening to records and talking.”² Jazz records and Jazz apples (past their best) turning a little orange-yellow, pale yellow teapot thrown by a friend. They drank a lot of tea back then. Brown flask with curved handle. Mollie Lawn was born in 1919 and attended Dunedin School of Art for two years from 1937 where she met Anne Hamblett and Doris Lusk. It appears that the studio days were a very happy time for Mollie. As a student she was also invited to join the Otago Art Society and exhibited in their annual exhibitions. She later married the photographer Morris Kershaw.

(Julia Holderness)

1. *Artist Profile: Mollie Kershaw*, Dunedin Star Weekender, July 24, 1994.

2. Peter Entwistle’s quote that records Anne Hamblett’s sister Majorie talking about parties and happy days in the Pharmacy studio. Majorie also “mentioned staying up late there and going out to watch the dawn at Balmacewen.” Entwistle interviewed her for *The Birth of Modernism in New Zealand Painting, 1999*, unpublished manuscript, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.

Portrait of Mollie Lawn

MAX WALKER

Oil on canvas on board, [undated]
Collection of Kershaw family

Mollie's son Neville thought it was a self-portrait from the photo he had of the work. He said he was certain because it looked so like her. A self-portrait in the studio then: there are artworks behind her, and a vessel containing paintbrushes.

When I met with Jancis and Rachel, Doris's daughters, they showed me a folder of Doris's, a collection of Dunedin sketches. There is a small sketch in pastels titled *Mollie* and it shows the same haircut and green fitted short-sleeved knit top that she is wearing in this self-portrait. Short bob hair, wavy. Parted down the middle and pinned at the sides. She is sitting on a blue wooden chair and has a paper or book in her lap.

I read some letters that Mollie wrote to Anne (Anne McCahon lived in Auckland with husband, Colin and their four children) in the 1980s – they stayed in touch regularly. Mollie said that she was still painting but couldn't afford the framing. She wrote to Anne mostly about her family, with news of her children and grandchildren.

Later, looking at the artwork in Dunedin, Neville realised that the portrait was actually painted by Max Walker, another graduate from Dunedin School of Art. Walker set up the first group studio along with Anne Hamblett's husband, and several others.

(Julia Holderness)

New Bouquet (after Anne and Doris)

KIRSTIN CARLIN

Oil on aluminium panel, 2021

Courtesy of Melanie Roger Gallery

“When I make a painting I work from found images; photos of paintings I have spotted in op-shops, other people’s photos uploaded to Instagram and most frequently from historical paintings found through a google search or from a museum database. Rather than set up a still life I decided to create a “new bouquet” by taking the flowers from different paintings in the exhibition. I created a digital collage in photoshop which I then printed out and hung in my studio. I made a number of paintings based on this image figuring out colours and composition. I was drawn to Doris’s tulips and pink roses and Anne’s poppies. There is a hint of Doris’s lavender and the leaves from Anne’s blossoms (would these flowers actually bloom at the same time?). Continuing the conversation with other works in the exhibition, I have included a pear and flatto peaches in reference to Erica’s small sculptures and the fruit in Mollie’s watercolour, with the lines on the vase taken from Richard’s op-shop vase.”

Kirstin Carlin

Florence Weir, Fabric design W-5

c.1937

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

Still Life (from the studio garden)

RICHARD ORJIS

Ink on canvas, 2021

“I painted the studio walls black, and then Erica’s chair, (a homage to Donald Judd), while I was at it. It had been raining, and the garden was looking particularly lush. I spent time looking downwards and fossicking for flowers that were coming harder to come by as summer progressed. I cut a handful of plant life that included white cosmos, a couple of geraniums – Roxanne and tiny monster – as well as clover, salvia, dried opium poppy heads, bronze fennel, honesty, the native Euphorbia glauca and a hebe. I talked with Julia about the vase I found in a Whanganui op-shop. The one with a brown metallic glaze and horizontal ridges formed by an anonymous potter’s fingertips. I told her I like it because of the logic of plants emerging from the colour of soil.”

Richard Orjis

Florence Weir, Autumn Study c.1938

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

Still Life Colour Study (after “Mixed Flowers” by Doris Lusk)

TATYANNA MEHARRY

Ceramic beads, 2021

Tatyanna Meharry’s *Still Life Colour Study* explores the tones and hues found in *Mixed Flowers* by her grandmother Doris Lusk. The beads are made with gathered materials from the Canterbury landscape to create a focus on locality that connects Doris’s early shared studio in Dunedin with her later one in Christchurch. Tatyanna told me she has strong memories of this Christchurch studio, especially the ceramic fragments that littered every surface. She also remembers many ice-cream rewarded trips around Banks Peninsula with her siblings on Sunday afternoons, so that Doris could paint on the run.

(Julia Holderness)

“There were two black lacquered containers on her bedroom chiffonier filled with coloured beads. I recall how humble Doris was in both her manner and attire. Her only vanity seemed to be these strands of non-precious beads, collected as her own bookmarks of place and time, worn with a particular shade of red lipstick.”

Tatyanna Meharry

Colour wheel (after Florence Akins)

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Digital print on linen, 2018

Florence Weir, Fabric design 9-59 c.1937

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

Portrait of Florence Weir in her Studio

JULIA HOLDEN

Acrylic on board, 2021

It might go something like this: *“Florence Kowhai Cunningham Weir (1899–1979) was born in Christchurch, but spent most of her life in the UK where she built a successful career as an artist designer. Florence Weir is the only known New Zealander to have studied at the Bauhaus in Germany, when she was on a post-graduate visit in 1926. In the UK, she was known for her ceramic ranges¹, small print editions and hand-painted furniture. Weir was also a textile designer for a brief period, working at the Calico Printers’ Association, Manchester. Some of Weir’s designs from that time became popular furnishing fabrics; however, it is believed that the eight gouache designs recovered in New Zealand in the 1980s were never commercially produced. Weir travelled back to her country of birth several times in the 1930s, where she exhibited in Christchurch with The Group, and in Dunedin at the Otago Society of Arts.”*

Keywords: Portrait, Artist-Designer, Studio, Collaboration, Watercolours, Textiles², Paintbrushes, Colour wheel³, Gouache designs, 1930s, green skirt, beaded necklace.

(Julia Holderness)

1. See exhibition *Florence & Friends*, Flotsam & Jetsam, 2015, curated by Julia Holderness and Richard Orjis.

2. The depicted woven textile held by Weir was made by art student Ann Macarthur in the 1960s under tuition of Florence Akins, Canterbury College School of Art.

3. The colour wheel is a translation of a teaching resource used by Florence Akins in her textiles course at Canterbury College School of Art. UC-MBL-1808, UC Art Collection, Macmillan Brown Library, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Florence Weir, Fabric design from Doris Lusk's "Flower Study/Mixed Flowers" c.1937

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

Doris's "Flower Study" / "Mixed Flowers" has a paisley fabric in various blues & oranges. I have borrowed this design for a new fabric, using leaf shapes in blues & rust. I recall that Hamblett also painted a "Flower Study" in 1939. It was sold at the Otago Arts Society Annual Exhibition in 1940, but she wished she had kept it & given it to family. I seem to remember a vibrant crimson colour against olive greens & a confetti-like tablecloth-covered circular side table, sitting behind an ochre-coloured vase.

Florence Weir

Florence Weir, Mixed Spring Flowers c.1936

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

We were told that Florence often cut flowers from her garden, snipping petals and leaves into various shapes and slivers, then letting them fall onto coloured paper backgrounds. She used gouache for most of her designs on paper. I wish I could see how they looked as fabrics, and also know what the fabrics were used for. It's almost as if these designs are little outfits, worn arrangements from a cottage garden.

(Julia Holderness)

Florence Weir, Mixed Flowers (Summer) c.1937

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Felted wool textile, 2021

Jancis and Rachel told me that Doris once casually mentioned that she designed fabric. I wanted more detail.

(Julia Holderness)

“Oh, she just said casually ‘I once did that, I designed fabric.’ But goodness knows whatever happened to them. I don’t even know how old she was. It was just a casual comment. We must have been looking at a book or something. We could have been talking about dresses. Maybe I was saying something about her dress. She had a really beautiful one, and I remember the fabric. It had silver leaves with a tiny bit of gold in it. And then she just said that, in passing. Just casually. She sounded quite pleased with herself, but there’s nothing to back it up. It just stuck with me that she said that. She said that her designs went to Japan. I’m not sure if it was the fabric or the designs that went to Japan. Probably the designs. How would you find out about that? I love fabric, that’s probably why it stuck with me. There is nothing to verify it at all. Nothing to cement it or fix it to any other conversation. Maybe I said “I love that dress...” It just floated around... that she designed fabric. Like you might say... walking around a garden with a friend: “I had that flower once, but I haven’t got it anymore.” Like naming a plant in a garden. A casual, conversational tit bit, I guess. Goodness knows.”

Jancis Meharry

Impromptu cushion-sofa

JULIA HOLDERNESS

Various found and printed fabrics (digital prints on linen), 2021

“There was another exhibition in August when Doris Lusk had her first solo show in the all-woman studio in Moray Place. There is a surviving photograph of the exhibition with the artist, rather severely dressed in her role now as part-time teacher at a private girls’ school, and committed avant-garde painter and intellectual. She sits on an impromptu cushion-sofa, her hands crossed, her expression serious, while a self-portrait¹ on an adjacent wall shows her in a similar pose, but dressed in more stylish tweeds.

Someone has taken pains to record the artist and the occasion. The photograph is a little over-composed for a modern taste but it is characteristic of such things then. The show was well received. *Art in New Zealand* commented the exhibition ‘provoked much interest’; that ‘There is much breadth of treatment in Miss Lusk’s work and a strong sense of design...’ It said ‘That Miss Lusk has produced such strong and attractive work this early in her career augurs well for future exhibitions.’²”

Peter Entwistle³

1. This painting is in fact a portrait of Anna McLeod (see the black and white photograph of Doris standing in front of the painting).

2. *Art in New Zealand*, p20.

3. Peter Entwistle, *The Birth of Modernism in New Zealand Painting*, 1999, unpublished manuscript, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, p50.

Studio bench for Julia Holderness

HARLEY PEDDIE

Plywood and salvaged rimu, 2020

Weaving with ribbon (depicted in Florence Weir studio portrait)

ANN MACARTHUR 1960s

Metal paintbox containing pallet (owner unknown)

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 2011 by Joan and Nylda Gooseman.

Doris Lusk sketch book

Watercolour and pencil on paper

Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation

Watercolour designs

JULIA HOLDERNESS 2020

Florence Weir ceramic vase (red, white)

Fabricated by **RICHARD ORJIS** and

JULIA HOLDERNESS 2015

Various ceramics

JULIA HOLDERNESS 2012-2015

Felted wool textile (blue)

JULIA HOLDERNESS 2020

Still Life fruit

“Mollie brought in some lovely looking pears today. I’ve been mainly painting flowers, but I may try one with fruit. I will do some drawings first. Mollie often combines fruit with ceramic vessels. We must remember to eat the pears before they turn...”

It might be nice to note that during their student days over the Summer months, Doris (and maybe the others too) had fruit-picking jobs around Central Otago.

(Julia Holderness)

The Pear

ERICA VAN ZON

Clay, acrylic, gouache, 2014

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Old Lemon with Peel

ERICA VAN ZON

Clay, acrylic, gouache, 2014

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Flatto

ERICA VAN ZON

Clay, acrylic, gouache, 2014

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Archives & Resources

Catalogue (works list) for solo exhibition by DORIS LUSK, 1940. Hocken Collections.

Sketch of Mollie Lawn seated, DORIS LUSK, pencil on paper. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Watercolour, KIRSTIN CARLIN, 2021.

Christmas card, DORIS LUSK, watercolour on paper. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Photographs of Doris Lusk in the studio, EDWARD ARTHUR PHILLIPS. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Photographs of the studio, EDWARD ARTHUR PHILLIPS. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Photographs of Doris with her portrait of Anna McLeod, EDWARD ARTHUR PHILLIPS. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Reproduction of Leo Bensemann's *Untitled (imaginary portrait on cloth)* in Caroline Otto's *Leo Bensemann: Portraits, masks & Fantasy Figures*, 2005, page 31.

Study for Florence Weir studio portrait, JULIA HOLDEN, 2021.

Sketches and design ephemera, FLORENCE WEIR.

Woodblock print of a vase of flowers and a dog, DORIS LUSK, ink on paper, Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Photograph of "Doris Lusk with a self portrait in the studio at Moray Place above Marjery Mills dress shop, Dunedin." Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Photograph of "The Old Barn, Max Walker, Mollie Lawn, Doris Lusk, Don Reid and Anne Hamblett." Photographer unknown, 1937. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Doris Lusk sketch books (floral images), watercolour and pencil on paper, dates various.

Folder of Drawings and Prints. Courtesy of the Doris Lusk Foundation.

Still Life Colour Study (after "Mixed Flowers" by Doris Lusk), TATYANNA MEHARRY, ceramic beads, 2021.

Photograph of Anne Hamblett in the publication *A Table of One's Own: the creative life of Anne McCahon*, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, 2016.