

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

The Water-Melon Seller

watercolour

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Markets, with their laden stalls and lively interactions, were a favourite subject for Hodgkins throughout much of her career. On 6 November 1901, she wrote to her sister Isabel Field from the Hotel du Forum describing a scene in Arles:

Then comes the green grocer with her two pretty daughters always beaming from behind a barricade of pumpkins, melons, pomegranates, figs and green stuff. This is my favourite stall and I have made many studies of it.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Mother and Child 1903

watercolour

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

The rich rose madder tones of the mother's clothes and her cross-legged position suggests that this watercolour was created while Hodgkins was in Morocco. She travelled to Tangier in November 1902, remaining there until March, when she moved on briefly to Tetuan. The subjects were almost certainly indoors, as the mother would have had her head covered if outside. Both mother and child stare intently at the artist, appearing slightly distrustful of this novel experience.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Loading the Cart

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased with assistance from Geri and John
Herbert, Cyril Wright and Linda Light, 2007

Hodgkins left Dunedin armed with excellent skills in traditional watercolour techniques that she learned from her father William Hodgkins, as well as more expressive techniques from classes taken with the Italian artist Girolamo Nerli (1860–1926). Europe provided her with the freedom to explore new and exciting subject matter. The dappled light and casual clothing of these men in the market evoke the heat of a Mediterranean summer. Her technique of brushing off pigment, particularly in the spokes of the wheels, gives the cart in the background a somewhat ghostly appearance.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Checking the Baskets

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased with assistance from Auckland
Decorative & Fine Arts Society, 2007

Whereas some of her early European market scenes try to capture every last detail, in *Loading the Cart* and *Checking the Baskets* the artist has pared back her love of patterning, defining forms with broad pools of colour and focusing on reflections of light. Hodgkins may have used some of these sketches to demonstrate techniques to the ever-growing group, mainly women, who joined her summer classes in Holland and France. Equally, they could have been *aide-mémoires* that she could draw on when the weather prevented her from working outdoors.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

The Piano Lesson c1910

gouache, watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Vertical washes have been used to rapidly map the walls of the large salon in which these women are sitting, the windows thrown wide open to the garden beyond, allowing cooling breezes to enter. Curving lines of colour dance and tumble across the middle ground, and while the two figures at the piano are clearly defined, the woman bending over the table on the left takes longer to identify. This may have been acquired or given as a gift to the owner, as it is the only watercolour in the group that Hodgkins has signed, indicating that she considers the work finished.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Fisherman Sewing a Sail

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Here you can see Hodgkins experimenting with a combination of figuration. The fisherman's garments and tools laid beside him on his bench are detailed, contrasting with the almost abstract mass of white in the foreground. The depth of the space beyond, where shadowy shapes suggest the clutter of the workroom, is mediated by the fisherman's squat body, which serves as a fulcrum for space and light.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

**Still Life with a
Bunch of Flowers**

gouache, watercolour and pencil on cardboard

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Objects on mantelpieces were popular subjects throughout Hodgkins' career. Here a sheaf of pink flowers similar to carnations lie cocooned in their white tissue. The tall glass vase for which they are destined stands beside them, its reflection glistening in the mirror behind. Compositions such as this were a pleasing alternative to scenes that called for deep space, and suggest that the artist is very close to her subject matter.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Woman Sewing with Children

watercolour, charcoal and pencil

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Berthe Morisot's *Le berceau (The Cradle)* may have influenced this intimate scene, but whereas Morisot's mother gazes, head in hand, at her sleeping infant beneath its protective veil, here the smaller child is sitting up, possibly vying with the older child for their mother's attention. She sits, head bowed, concentrating on her sewing. When not teaching groups of students Hodgkins was often short on funds, which could explain the limited colour range in this work.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Beach Huts, Concarneau

c1912

watercolour

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

The Australian critic Alfred George Stephens said of Hodgkins:

In her most impressionistic style, with just enough structure to hold the composition together, she succeeds in depicting the bright spirit of a scene in air and light with a craftsmanship, both swift and suave, that is undeniably fine. She is a painters' painter, too rare for the multitude to appreciate in a British community where art does not sing in the blood ... She has delighted a few Australians who have learned to see with the eyes of the mind.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Woman in a Sunhat

watercolour

The Ilene and Laurence Dakin Bequest

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

This stylishly dressed woman is sitting at the stern of a boat, her hand steadying her hat against the sea breeze. The strong reflections of light behind her signal it is late afternoon. Earlier painters such as Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Édouard Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir painted similar compositions in oils. Yet Hodgkins is never derivative. She noted:

... it is so easy to paint like your master & to think other people's thoughts, the difficulty is to be yourself, assimilate all that is helpful but keep your own individuality, as your most precious possession – it is one's only chance.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

**Women Sitting among
the Rocks** c1912

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Alfred Stephens wrote of similar works in
Hodgkins's 1912–13 Melbourne exhibition:

The process of Miss Hodgkins's artistic education is seen in the work of different dates and styles; the latest is the best. Her interpretation of colour – not hard and brilliant but rich, soft, flowing – is her best gift. Her feeling for the medium – with a touch fluid and caressing, as if the colour had run of itself just where she wants it – is her best acquirement.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Still Life with a Bottle c1908

oil on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

This still life in oils is of major importance, for we know that Hodgkins initially found the medium difficult to control, compared with the fluidity of watercolour. She took classes in oil painting with Pierre Marcel-Beronneau in Paris in 1908, which focused on the nude model. However, this study shows she also experimented with the compositions and structures found in the still lifes of Paul Cézanne.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Beach Scene c1912

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

We are able to date the works painted in Concarneau because of their similarity to scenes exhibited by Hodgkins in Sydney and Melbourne in 1912, on her way out to New Zealand. They are the most abstracted of the group, with the artist leaving large sweeps of the paper clear, either by sponging away pigment, or leaving the paper unmarked. She often used charcoal at this time, complaining in 1911 that her ‘pretty little studio floor’ in Paris was ‘dirty with muddied feet & charcoal ends’.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Sleeping Child

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

This baby has the red nose and flushed cheeks of an infant who has finally cried itself to sleep. Subjects such as this were popular with Hodgkins' clients. She noted in a letter to her brother Will years later, 'What I want is a small & tidy income so that I need not have to fight for daily bread. Truly living is a fine art these days. Yesterday I sold a 12 guinea baby. Item: Paint more babies!'

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Fishing Boats c1910

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

In 1910, Hodgkins was still struggling between teaching classes and finding time to do her own work. She wrote to her mother from Concarneau, describing the late autumn scene:

I go for walks by the sad sea walls – when it is too dark to paint – They are never sad for me I love them so & the gulls & the big sky overhead. Its grey moments are too big to allow for sadness really...

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Woman with a Mirror

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased with assistance from Georgina Ralston, 2007

Like *Sailor Mending a Sail*, in *Woman with a Mirror* the way in which the white of the paper suggests the volume of fabric, its form defined by only a few rapid dashes of paint, is a tour de force. While many of Hodgkins' sketches demonstrate her skill in different watercolour techniques, in this intimate scene we are also encouraged to consider how the woman feels about her reflection in her mirror.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Interior of a Cathedral

watercolour, pencil and gouache

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

Architecture rarely served as a subject in itself for Hodgkins, but this rapid sketch may have resulted from being forced indoors through poor weather. The cathedral in Arles where Hodgkins also painted has shorter Romanesque arches than seen here. However, Meaux Cathedral, west of Paris, has similar clear horizontal bands on its stone pillars, and Gothic apertures above the side arches. Apart from Claude Monet, who specialised in capturing the shimmering effects of weather on their façades, the Impressionists struggled with cathedrals because stone tends to absorb rather than reflect light.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Summer Garden

watercolour and charcoal

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

In *Summer Garden* Hodgkins demonstrates her bravura use of colour, saturating the wet paper with pigment before sponging off broad areas such as the tabletop. It is only after several moments that we fully make out the two women seated in the shade, beside a large-wheeled perambulator. Like many of her subjects, they seem at ease in the artist's company, going about their daily tasks unselfconsciously.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Boats by the Harbour Wall

c1910

watercolour

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

purchased 2007

There is a strong calligraphic element to the rapid swirls and arabesques of the brushstrokes in this watercolour, suggesting the artist's determination to capture the flapping red sails and constant movement of the water. The red-sailed tunny boats in the narrow harbour of Concarneau were also a favourite subject of another New Zealand expatriate, Sydney Lough Thompson, although he never moved beyond painting in an Impressionist style.

FRANCES HODGKINS

[1869–1947 New Zealand, England]

Laying the Table 1909

watercolour

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

gift of Maurice and Beverley Allen, 2007

In 1909, Hodgkins described a portrait she was painting of her friend Rosamond Marshall preparing a salad in her hotel with a *bonne* (maid) in the background. In another version, Rosamond is alone at the table, wearing a striking large hat, a stuffed bird skimming across its front. The handling of the objects across the front of the table is similar, with a fine brush used for delicate outlines which are then filled in with broad washes. Here, only the maid stands in the background, somewhat closed off by the vase of flowers and bottles in front of her.