



Frances
Hodgkins,
from
Dunedin
to Waikanae

Mahara
Gallery

A Social History of Frances Hodgkins

Much is made – and rightly so – of the circuitous journey Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) accomplished in her seventy-six years. The fact that her beginnings lay in Dunedin and her endings in Waikanae – a mere 848 kilometres apart – belies the discursive route followed by this restless, questing and ambitious woman, who left and returned to her native country three times over. Though a highly individual pilgrimage, Hodgkins's journey was not in all aspects unique or even unusual, and the social history of Frances Hodgkins can help to put her idiosyncratic figure in context; identifying what was typical and what was remarkable about this artist who is of such importance to New Zealanders.

Frances Hodgkins spent the first thirty years of her life in Dunedin. In 1869 it was a go-ahead city recently energised by the Otago gold rush, peopled not only by the Scottish pioneers of the 1840s but by a variety of immigrants such as her own parents – William Matthew from England and Rachel from Australia – who brought to Otago a readiness to make shift in a new setting but an expectation of creating a life based on already formed values. They soon outnumbered the tangata whenua, Ngai Tahu (Kai Tahu), whose local base was Otakau, on the peninsula.¹ From

1866 the Hodgkins's raised a family of five – three boys and two girls – in a series of homes financed by William's rise from clerk to solicitor (a progress undoubtedly aided by his membership of the Masons).² It was a middle-class family life – Rachel at no point undertook paid work, and employed at least one servant – enriched by William's enthusiasm for the visual arts, which manifested itself in illumination, photography and watercolour-painting, and his involvement in civic affairs.³

In the year of Frances's birth, Dunedin saw the founding of the University of Otago; the following year, a public art school; in 1871, the Otago Girls' High School; and when she was six, the city established the Otago Medical School – all of these being the first of their kind in the country, marking out the southernmost city (the country's largest) as a community of social and cultural ambition and commitment, where a young woman could develop ambitions beyond the domestic.

Frances and her sister Isabel were sent to private schools, while their brothers had a public, or government, education. After the Ladies' School sited at the eastern end of George Street,

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they went out to a Port Chalmers facility to board for a year or two. As the two girls entered their teens, in the early 1880s, they attended Jessie Dick's Braemar Lodge, in the centre of town, where they could have learned something of history and mathematics, of several languages, and of music and painting. Isabel's talent for painting emerged at this time. This beginning can be contrasted with that enjoyed by two other Dunedin women who made their mark in adult life: Grace Joel, four years older than Hodgkins, attended Otago Girls' High School, winning several prizes in her senior year, and was taken thereafter by her parents on a trip to Britain; Ethel Benjamin, six years younger than Hodgkins, also attended the OGHS and at the age of seventeen won a scholarship to the University of Otago.⁴ Gentility can be said to have outweighed ambition regarding their daughters' future in the Hodgkins parents' minds.

Hodgkins' first biographer, Eric McCormick, claims that her mother wished Frances to pursue music, in the form of piano-playing, an established accomplishment of middle-class girls at that time.⁵ While he had this from family reminiscence,⁶ evidence of Frances' inclination to follow her sister (and father) rather into visual art dates from as early as 1885. Rachel herself, as the daughter of a District Coroner, would not have been prepared for any occupation other than marriage. But "there are now over 300 professions by which a woman can learn to earn her own living when she is compelled to",

declared an article in the *Clutha Leader* in June 1888. "If she has one special talent, give it special training. In these days, trained labour produces capital. It is equivalent to wealth. And it is no longer 'unfashionable' for a woman to earn her own living and maintain herself in honourable independence."⁷ Isabel was clearly going to be able to support herself as an artist if she wished: in 1884, when only sixteen years old, she was elected a working member of the local artists' society that her father had helped to form, and commenced to exhibit her work. Throughout their childhood and adolescence, their father's commitment to painting must have been one of the most vivid strands in the fabric of family life. Trips away with his painting friends to even more scenic parts of the country, regular meetings of the 'Art Club', as well as the doings of the Otago Art Society (of which he was President from 1880) peppered the family diary. How though would Frances have seen her own life developing as she neared the end of her 'teens'?



William Mathew Hodgkins
A peak in the Clodden Valley, undated
Watercolour, 44 x 37
Private Collection,
courtesy of Te Manawa Museums Trust.

Her sketchbooks indicate an active social life within and beyond the home, in which men and women mixed comfortably. There are glimpses of her brothers reading or playing the piano, her sister and her mother sewing, people conversing, telling stories, exchanging news. William's work brought him into contact with local Maori and Dunedin's Jews, but most of their friends were Pakeha Anglicans like themselves, middle-class professional families whose leisure activities embraced excursions to the beach and the Peninsula, a bit of tramping, parlour-games, theatricals and musical evenings, dances and weddings. The Hodgkins family could not afford the travel that many in that circle

enjoyed, however: when, in 1888, Isabel went to Melbourne to see the Centennial International exhibition, to visit her mother's relatives, and probably also to gauge her chances in the Victorian art world, the trip was financed by sales of her own works. If this was an attempt to further Isabel's prospects, it is evident that the younger sister's future was also being pondered: William wrote to Isabel, "...If there is anyone in Melbourne from whom you can acquire the art of painting, in watercolour, Photo Portraits - you could on your return teach it to Fanny. There's an absolute want of such a thing here and it would be worth at least a couple of hundred a year to her."⁸



Isabel Hodgkins
Untitled [Alpine Landscape], 1890
Collection Te Manawa Museums Trust

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But, as far as can be told, Frances was engaged at that time in nothing that would equip her for a life of her own. She was not attending the School of Art, like the Dean's daughter Daisy Fitchett,⁹ and neither was she teaching piano or any foreign language, nor offering herself as a governess. She shared the situation of the daughters of family friends such as the Roberts, the Rattrays and the Kenyons, whereby the young women were tacitly awaiting proposals from suitable men while their brothers began careers (not necessarily professions, be it noted) according to their temperaments and talents. It is clear from Hodgkins' correspondence of the 1890s - that is to say, through her twenties - that the marriage prospects of the daughters constituted a primary concern in their families' lives.

And Isabel did become engaged to be married in 1892, her husband-to-be, William Field, a Wellington lawyer with political ambitions - promising a move up the social scale which would, however, cost her her artistic career. For her part, Frances began to exhibit in 1890, suggesting a developing investment in her talent as something that would give focus to her present existence if not secure her economic future. Social invitations competed with painting opportunities, and her awareness grew of other individuals who were devoting themselves to painting of one sort or another: "I went with Miss (Dagmar) Ross to see her studio - what a lot of pottering things she does paint, and yet she makes it pay, and talks quite cheerfully about selling at the Chicago Exh. to which she is sending some things" ...

I spend all my spare time with Miss (Jenny) Wimperis and as yet I despair of ever being able to draw in a fairly decent manner" ... "I went to see Mr (F. Tennyson) Cole's studio today. I admire his work and his method tremendously but I think compared with Nerli his work is lifeless".¹⁰

Nerli - Girolamo Nerli, an Italian painter who arrived in Dunedin from Australia shortly after Isabel had left it for married life in Wellington - provided the Dunedin painters with a great boost. Frances was a keen recruit to his art classes: "I have been so busy that I have scarcely had any time for writing", she told Isabel in June 1893; "I want to make the most of Nerli's lessons and have been painting hard all the week".¹¹ By the end of that year, Nerli had been elected to the Art Society and was seen to contribute to its annual show "a few oil paintings which are quite out of the common of the works of colonial artists".¹² By April 1894 he was running a life class (for men only) and in February 1895 he was incorporated into the School of Art's teaching staff.

Frances Hodgkins was among several daughters of professional families who benefited from this incomer's refreshing vigour, amateurs though they may have been - and indeed, so perfunctory was the art world in New Zealand at that time that very few *men* could claim to be professional artists if that meant a full-time job which could provide a reliable living. How seriously did she take her art, as the social round came to pall in its familiarity and repetition? In April 1894 she became twenty-five, an age

at which many a middle-class woman felt she was 'on the shelf' (after all, the age of consent was fourteen), even after New Zealand women had had their full citizenship recognised in the extension of the suffrage.¹³ Her potential future as an unmarried daughter was brought home to her in the autumn of 1894 when Rachel went to Wellington to help her elder daughter in her first pregnancy: "I never realised how much there is to be done in this house till Mother went. The cooking is the hardest part. Agnes is after all a very primitive cook and savours a little too much of the boarding house ... [but] I always manage to get everything done by the afternoon so I can trot round and see my friends".¹⁴

The most obvious alternative to housekeeping was to set up as a teacher of whatever skill a woman had been able to develop - most likely music of some sort, painting of some sort, or foreign languages - and Frances was thinking of the qualifications necessary to such a move when she enrolled at the Dunedin School of Art and Design (as it was re-named in 1894) for the 1895 academic year.¹⁵ "[I]t will be pretty hard for me, as I hate that kind of work", she observed to Isabel.¹⁶ But she gained good marks, her exhibition appearances continued to expand, and she had a steady trickle of sales. The paradoxical position of an unmarried woman was reinforced that same year, however, when she won a prize with her *Head of an Old Woman* (now in the Olveston collection) at the Wellington Academy's annual exhibition but was forbidden

by her father from viewing the nude studies brought back to Dunedin by Alfred O'Keeffe from his Parisian study. Respectability, it seems, was more important in William's view than his adult daughter's independence of action.



Frances Hodgkins
Head of an Old Woman, 1895
Watercolour, 215 x 200
Private Collection

O'Keeffe was about to set up as a teacher on the strength of such work but, as a woman, Frances had several other examples on her door-step to consider. All of these were, however, founded on a far greater experience than Frances had achieved. Grace Joel had had five years at the highly esteemed Melbourne Art School as well as private travel overseas when she returned

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to offer her services in painting and drawing in 1894; Mabel Hill, who was in town for a portrait commission in early 1895, was James Nairn's deputy at the Wellington Technical College from 1891-1897; Daisy Fitchett, though three years Hodgkins' junior, had studied in Germany and France before returning to Dunedin to advertise as a teacher of drawing and painting in 1896. Frances' own view of the question of women and work is made starkly clear in a comment she made to Isabel after Mabel Hill had been brought to Dunedin in 1898 by her new husband John McIndoe's job: "Mrs McIndoe has started taking pupils. I wonder what she got married for..."¹⁷ So it is only logical to conclude that Frances, busy preparing herself to teach, was not relying on marriage in her own case. This issue was of huge significance in a woman's idea of her life as, in a family like the Hodgkins's, no marriage also meant no children.

1896 saw a consolidation of the working life Frances was therefore building. She completed the South Kensington diploma and was able to advertise from September as a teacher of 'Painting from the Life and Sketching from Nature' (though the Life was bound to have been clothed!), while a fresh field of subject-matter in her exhibits at that year's annual shows indicates a strategic appeal to gallery-goers – Maori figures, seen from that point as one of her strong suits. She had premises in the town centre to teach in, but Mrs Hodgkins had insisted they live in Roslyn, an awkward distance away, and living at

home embroiled Frances in the daily doings and welfare of the rest of the family ("Frank has such a depressing influence on us all..."¹⁸). A constant anxiety from late 1897 was the decline of her father's health.

William's death in February 1898 revealed a parlous financial situation, suspected by the family but shocking in its actuality. Frances's role in maintaining the family thenceforth was central, in her mother's view: "...Fanny is out with her sketching class today she has 12 pupils now so I think we ought to get along very comfortable [sic]", she wrote to assure Isabel as the dust settled on her husband's sad demise.¹⁹ But Rachel also confided to Isabel the classic tension between the widowed mother and her unmarried daughter: "...Fanny is so hard to work with – she was bad enough you know when we had Mary but she is ever so much worse now – it is a dreadful misfortune for the poor girl having such an unhappy discontented disposition. I wish I could raise the money to send her to England – I would gladly give up anything to do so."²⁰ This proposal, which would improve her skills and enhance her standing as an artist as well as offer emotional release, resolved itself within months into a plan for Frances to go to Paris for further study.²¹ Isabel's husband offered to fund it, but Frances spent the next two years earning her own way to this great opportunity, which eventuated in February 1901.

This was by no means an outlandish thing to be doing: Dora Meeson, whom the Hodgkins's

had known when her family was living in Dunedin in 1892, had gone to Europe in 1893, and the Christchurch artist Margaret Stoddart had gone across in 1898.²² From Dunedin, Grace Joel and Annie Blacke – together Frances' biggest competition – went to London in February and March 1899, respectively. Shortly thereafter, Hodgkins reported to Isabel, "I have had a long letter from Dora Meeson in Paris giving me much valuable information as to ways and means etc. Ways and means will be very costly next year in Paris on account of the Exhibition so she advises me to stay in London till after the rush is over...".²³ While this is an early indication of the 'sisterhood of the brush' that was not only a conspicuous trend of the time but, as Hodgkins herself would sometimes acknowledge, a lifeline for colonial women struggling to enlarge their world, it gave her plans a timely boost. There were other tips that would have benefited her, passed on by Annie Blacke in an interview published just too late for Hodgkins: she left Dunedin on 6 February and arrived in London two months later, while in *The Press* of 22 June 1901, Blacke spelled out a few invaluable home truths:

"Everyone who comes here and has to make a living is sure to have a hard time. The long waiting breaks down many and nearly broke me down. I have suffered in health through it; but I have been exceptionally fortunate in having so many useful letters of introduction to influential people...".²⁴

Hodgkins could have used her sister and brother-in-law's connections, but there is no evidence that she did so – though she later acknowledged they made all the difference to Blacke's overseas experience. Blacke had other salutary words to say about what it took to make a trip Home work for the colonial female artist: "It is no use coming for less than two years, not counting time spent in travel...[and] you cannot live really comfortably in London on anything under £120 a year...I think London a place in which you run down frightfully. The climate is most depressing, and the winter very trying". No wonder the colonial woman artist was driven to consider other Anglophone outposts, however alien, in her determination to make a career.²⁵

It is relevant to note, therefore, that Hodgkins sailed off quite alone into the oft-imagined but essentially unknown Old World, having her mother's blessing to stay away a year, with a mere £100 in her wallet.²⁶

Frances was the first to acknowledge that like-minded company was also invaluable in the circumstances she now found herself in. Although her age – she was thirty-two in April 1901 – cancelled convention's demand for a chaperone, the single woman abroad was vulnerable to violence, theft and exploitation as well as to loneliness and homesickness. In this regard, few women in Hodgkins' position would have had a command of foreign languages fit for the hurly-burly of independent travel. The person she had arranged to join up with, Dorothy Kate Richmond,

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the daughter of her father's great painting chum James Crowe Richmond, was better equipped, and proved a diamond companion, and in her choice of programme for the two of them introduced into Hodgkins' life one of the most important people she was ever to know. This was the Irish painter Norman Garstin, whose advice, support and friendship nourished her not only in this first foray into Europe but over many years. Twenty-two years older than her, he remained a good friend until his death in 1926.

After the social round of expatriate London, Hodgkins was pleased to participate with Richmond in Garstin's summer class in the small town of Caudebec in northern France, not far from the historic city of Rouen. Garstin had moreorless invented the summer art school, in which an established artist needing to boost his/her income recruited as many as a score of amateurs or novice artists to spend a month (typically) as students in a picturesque location either in Britain or on the Continent. The spot would be chosen for its scenery, its quaintness, its weather, its affordability - amounting to a working holiday which could benefit the artist organiser in a number of ways, and in later years Hodgkins was to copy his model. That this was an enterprise deemed to be within the capacities of contemporary women and contemporary notions of propriety is indicated by an article in the Daily Mail a year later -

"A few enterprising ladies with a love for travel have lately organised sketching parties of girl art students, conducting them to all parts of England and the Continent. They smooth over all the difficulties of travel, and the idea has proved so successful that the pioneers are likely to have many imitators...In such centres of concentrated beauty as Sark and the other Channel Islands, Brittany, Italy, and Switzerland, these parties may frequently be met".²⁷



Frances Hodgkins with a group of artists in Holland, 1903. Seated in front are from left, Rosamond Marshall, Norman Garstin, Frances Hodgkins, Maud Mickalls. By an unknown photographer in 1903. The Eric Hall McCormick Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



Frances Hodgkins
Fallen Timber at Corfe Castle, 1942
Gouache on paper, 858 x 655
Collection of Waikato Museum Te Whare
Taonga o Waikato

- and by the number of advertisements for summer schools taught by women appearing in later years in the pages of *The Studio*, *Colour* and other art periodicals. As Frances reported to her mother, "Miss Richmond and I are never tired of congratulating ourselves on coming abroad with such delightful people as the Garstins... Mr and Mrs Garstin have been such good friends to me apart from the great help I have got from him artistically".²⁸

At this point, however, Hodgkins was still learning, and trying to eke out her funds rather than earn an income, so her comings and goings were a way of combining sight-seeing, productive work and making useful acquaintances.

Richmond's organising skills (and greater wealth) took the two friends to the sights of Italy, the artist colonies of Cornwall (Garstin's home), London and Brittany.²⁹

Hodgkins learned that the artistic worlds of both Britain and France were byzantine in their complexity. Both cities offered opportunities that were ostensibly open to all, that were predicated on membership, and that were for women only. Both had a calendar based on the annual exhibitions, just as was the case in New Zealand. Unlike in her home country though, here the commercial sector augmented that roster of dates with a constant offering of contemporary art shows tempting to the unknown artist such as Hodgkins trying to attract attention.³⁰ Though by early 1902 she had found that an unknown colonial woman watercolourist was not going to get a Bond Street show simply by asking³¹ (this is where Blacke's 'letters of introduction to influential people' made the difference), Garstin had identified this as an important goal. Luckily, John Baillie, a New Zealander with a gallery in less fashionable Bayswater, favoured his compatriots, and did not mind that so many of them were women, so Hodgkins could boast an appearance in a dealer gallery in October 1902 - funnily, as she remarked in telling her family of it, surrounded by her Dunedin peers Grace Joel, Annie Blacke and Dora Meeson, as well as Margaret Stoddart.

The next step to a solo show was a two-hander, which she achieved through a connection made

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on her second Garstin summer school: Miss March Phillips had got herself a slot at the Doré Gallery the following month which she invited Hodgkins to help her fill. This was how an artist was supposed to work their way up to visibility, but Hodgkins found that it was a slow haul: the show seemed to have no effect on her situation at all, to her chagrin. The fora dedicated to women - The Society of Women Artists and the Women's International Art Club - did not, it seems, particularly attract her. Used to New Zealand's greater equality of the sexes, she may not yet have realised their value in Britain and France.

It is often suggested that, when Hodgkins returned to her home country at the end of 1903, she saw insufficient potential there to fulfil her professional aims and so departed once more for Europe two years later (January 1906) to advance her career further. But, whatever her initial intentions on repatriating, once she became engaged to be married, the decision was no longer solely her own. Her fiancé was Thomas Wilby, whom she had met on the voyage home, and he wrote at the beginning of 1905 to his prospective mother-in-law that the couple's shared intention was to return to Europe to live after their marriage.³² When the engagement was broken off (for reasons unknown) the question for Hodgkins then became whether to stay or to still return to Europe: marriage, as Ros Pesman has observed in considering Australian women overseas, "was a sanctioned means of remaining abroad".³³ The factors Hodgkins needed to consider were as much social as professional -

how embarrassing was public knowledge of her failed engagement? would she resume living with her mother? if she wanted to be independent of the family, would the art community of Auckland or Christchurch provide her with a living? staying in Wellington, wouldn't she be in awkwardly direct competition for opportunities with Richmond?

A somewhat unfriendly notice in Wellington's *The FreeLance* announced in early 1906 that Hodgkins had made her decision:

"Miss F.M. Hodgkins, the talented artist, who has been associated in Wellington with Miss Richmond, left for London last week, en route for sunny Spain, whose big glaring splashes of red and yellow appeal to her artistic temperament more than the solemn greens of fair New Zealand - but, is it art?"³⁴

The most pressing question, however, will not have been an aesthetic one but a practical one: how to live overseas for an undetermined length of time with no fixed goals? Any financial arrangements that may have been made at this point between Frances and her relatives are unknown, but it is evident that she went back to Europe with the possibility that Dorothy Richmond might join forces with her once more, and with the certainty that various women friends in England would offer her hospitality and moral support. Without a husband financing her, and with no personal wealth, Hodgkins needed this band of sympathetic women and their families who, over the coming years, provided her with a network of

'safe havens', as one might say, from a society that still preferred the middle-class woman to stay in the home. Thus Grace Nickalls met the boat; Gertrude Crompton whisked her away to her family home in Sussex; both Nickalls sisters, Crompton and Rosamond Marshall intended to accompany her to Italy; other women they knew would present themselves for Hodgkins to teach.

These were upper-middle-class-people (the Nickalls home, Hodgkins reported, was like Bishops court, the splendid Maori Hill residence of their Dunedin acquaintances the Roberts family, "only five times larger"³⁵) who could afford to support Hodgkins as a form of arts patronage. Though Hodgkins characterised the Cromptons as distressed gentry, as she said, "It is amusing to contrast Gertrude's poverty with mine."³⁶ They spread their friend's name to further potential patrons whose support helped this second trip to work:

"A nice thing happened the day before yesterday. Some friends of the Cromptons came to call, just at the time when I was showing my sketches...and the same evening sent a message round to Mrs Crompton to know if I sold my pictures and if so would I quote a price for the large Dutch picture of a bridge and barges...The next morning the chauffeur arrived with the cheque..."³⁷

Between gifting her supplies, buying her works, having her as a house-guest, signing on as her students and commending her to their

social circle, these people enabled the expatriate working life that Hodgkins aimed for on this return to Europe. If the practical friendship of the Garstins, the Lindners and other artists met on her first trip is added in, there is no cause to feel that Hodgkins had a hard life at this stage.

Why she chose to remain dependent on this network, however, is moot: she could surely have followed Norman Garstin's example and chosen an affordable, congenial location for her home from which she could have made periodic forays to feed her income, teaching summer schools, exhibiting in London and Paris, and soliciting exposure from the commercial sectors of both capitals. Such a settling down could have included a long-term relationship, unlikely by this time to have been marriage but quite possibly a commitment to another woman – amongst her European acquaintance, the Australian Bessie Davidson was an example of this move.³⁸ The most likely reason this did not happen is that the length of Hodgkins' stay in Europe was still undecided; as the years went by this issue was to keep her in a limbo that made her life overall much harder than it need have been in both emotional and financial terms. Hence her need inter-war for the help of the upper-class artist couple Arthur Lett Haines and Cedric Morris, of the Manchester teachers Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders, of the Adelaide businessman Peter Waite, and of the middle-aged spinsters Dorothy Selby and Elsie Barling; and during the second

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war of art-world friends Eardley Knolleys, Geoffrey Gorer and his mother, and her potter friend Amy Krauss.

One of the things that Hodgkins had to keep doing that remained hard for a woman to do on her own was pursue professional opportunities. In both London and Paris, the competition for opportunity was unceasing and the field so variegated: it included exhibiting institutions, exhibiting societies, open-access exhibitions, commercial galleries, competitions, the art press, journalism and private patronage.³⁹ The successful artist was always looking for the next exposure, the next sale, the next critical attention. But Hodgkins was prepared to teach, which was not the case for all artists: thinking of her British contemporaries, it is notable that although Lucy Kemp-Welch ran a very successful art school, the successful painters Ethel Walker and Beatrice How never taught, nor other slightly younger leading women artists of the time Vanessa Bell and Laura Knight.⁴⁰ In Paris, when Hodgkins was given a class to head at Colarossi's studio in 1909, she cut a very unusual figure, all the more so when she set up her own watercolour classes around the corner in December 1911. Though teaching brought in money and increased sales, it required a lot of attention, both in the organisation and the execution, and Hodgkins was glad to give it up when she eventually gained a dealer's contract ensuring her an ongoing income.

Perversely, perhaps, her greatest success with regard to the business end of a painting life was

her solo show of about seventy-four works that she held in Melbourne in November 1912, where it was hailed as "an exhibition that no lover of art can afford to miss".⁴¹ It was reprised in Sydney (now seventy-six works) in April 1913 - where it was observed that "the pictures come to Australia like a ray of sunshine" - before continuing to Adelaide (June).⁴² Press attention was enormous, and sales considerable. Thereafter, the works remaining were exhibited successfully in Dunedin (July) and Wellington (August). This venture garnered Hodgkins a substantial amount of money, which she intended would re-establish her in Paris; the esteem which it also brought her remained locked up in Australasia, however.

And many a developing art career was stymied by what happened next in Europe: the war, that broke out shortly after Hodgkins's return to the northern hemisphere and lasted a long and dreadful four years, draining the funds she had amassed in 1912-13. Of course no-one knew how long it would last, and what aspects of art practice would continue or survive. There was a general expectation that women with no family obligations would do some kind of war work, but though she mentions knitting and offering to help the Red Cross at the outset, it looks as if Hodgkins' time was largely her own. She managed to keep her usual activities going (teaching each summer, and portraiture becoming her new speciality), and she believed at the end of 1918 that, with the support of her pre-existing network, she could resume her career.⁴³

It turned out, however, that it was rather that she had to rebuild her career, at the age of fifty. (And to aggravate the uncertainty and privation of the war's aftermath, it is reasonable to wonder if at this time Hodgkins also had the challenge and disorientation of the menopause to deal with – a significant occurrence in a woman's life that is even so hardly ever attended to in biography.) Hodgkins seems to have had no appetite (at any stage) for initiating joint ventures, though she was ready to take a chance on a promising enterprise once it had been set on foot, and was now uncertain where to base herself for greatest advantage. Critical attention during 1919 brought an unsolicited solo show in London (a new gallery in Hampstead, not Bond Street) in February 1920 that gave her a temporary sense of recovery, but she was still reliant on the generosity of others: "I may spend a week or two with the Nickalls at Boxley Abbey, and then to Miss Winthrop. I crave a rest and a degree of comfort. But no-one has any servants and visiting friends isn't the easy thing it was..."⁴⁴

And "she was very depressed and seedy when I was in England, poor thing. In confidence, the trouble is her age, you see. It is a hard time for a woman all alone struggling along on insufficient means", her niece Lydia reported to the family a year or so later. "...She is most wonderful in the way she keeps her head above water but I was really shocked to see the way she lived when I was with her in St Ives".⁴⁵ Hodgkins would have been in good company, sad to say: about one

quarter of the body of artists in England was female, amounting to some four and a half thousand women, and they all struggled against the conventional preference for middle-class women to find fulfilment in home and family, and the topical sentiment that competitive fields should be left, post-war, for men to find financial security and self-esteem in.

The 'sisterhood' saved her: moves by two of her loyal students, Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders, put Hodgkins in sight of what she felt would be a stable professional situation, though it meant relocating to the northern city of Manchester in 1925. This replaced a plan to settle in Australia (Melbourne), which would, of course, have brought her within reach of her family – a salutary thought when Rachel Hodgkins died in April 1926. The family, to judge from surviving correspondence, always saw Frances as hard to please, never satisfied, and one wonders if she reflected on this when, once again, she changed direction in mid-1927, back to a life centred on London with periodic trips to France funded by teaching.

Still, it was in London (rather than Paris) that she eventually achieved a working situation with which she felt satisfaction. The London art scene of the late 1920s and 1930s was eclectic and offered a wide variety of contexts for an artist without a rigid allegiance to a particular theory, style or aim. As one visiting New Zealander put it on viewing her work in 1930 at the dealer gallery to which she was by then contracted, "Miss

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Hodgkins is an original thinker and belongs to no identifiable school⁴⁶, so just had to keep her nerve until things clicked into place at last.⁴⁷

As well as this contract with the St George's Gallery, Hodgkins gained recognition from a friendly circle of progressive artists including expatriate Len Lye, and Winifred Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. These two much younger women struggled to match marriage and motherhood with their own creative ambition and the prejudices of English society, so it is tantalising to have no clear picture of Hodgkins' thoughts about them.⁴⁸ She seems to have been interested in Nicholson's painting but Hepworth's medium was, of course, sculpture, which seems to have lain outside Hodgkins' field of vision. In fact, Hodgkins has left scant evidence of what she thought of other female artists of her time. When she arrived in England in 1901 she was already an admirer of Elizabeth (Armstrong) Forbes and soon became one of Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale. Perhaps she wrote home, especially to Isabel, of Australian Thea Proctor and fellow New Zealander Eleanor Hughes; and, as time went on, of those whom she found herself alongside in exhibition from time to time such as Elisabeth Nourse, Beatrice Bland, Olga Boznanska, Ethel Walker, Alice Fanner, and Ethel Wright; and of those whose names appeared most frequently in the British art press including Laura Knight, Vanessa Bell, Dorothea Sharp, Isabel Codrington and Flora Lion.⁴⁹ If so, these letters have not survived, and we can only speculate on how her keen-eyed

observation of her peers may have influenced her own ambitions. What did she think when critical opinions put her explicitly in the company of Annie Swynnerton and Mary Cassatt, twenty years her seniors, and Marie-Mela Mutermilch and Marie Laurençin, twenty years her juniors?

One of the things she may have grown to think is that the lumping of women together as a special category of artist was not to her advantage. It is notable that, when interviewed by the Australian press in 1912-13, Hodgkins cited only male artists as inspiring her: Arthur Melville, the Maris brothers, Anton Mauve and Edouard Manet.⁵⁰ While not discounting the possibility of journalistic licence, let us assume she did make these references: given the superior credibility of male names in the cultural discourse, she did herself more good by associating herself with a handful of men than she would have done by implying kinship with "that terrible low creature, a female painter".⁵¹ The company one kept had a big influence on public image and, on her return to Europe in 1913, she made no further appearances in women-only arenas until, in the post-war situation, desperation won out over strategy, and she returned to both the Society of Women Artists and the Women's International Art Club for a few years.

Regardless of an individual's stance, the sex of a female artist was a matter that many commentators found it impossible to set aside, and her gratitude to critic Frank Rutter for endorsing her 1920 show must have stuttered

when he rolled out the hackneyed term 'virility' to describe the strength of her work, implying as it did a stereotype based on the belief in sexual difference.⁵² This insistence was a solecism even the sturdy supporter of Hodgkins' late years, Geoffrey Gorer, risked in his attempt to praise her solo show at Reid and Lefèvre's in 1938:

"There are, I think, two reasons for her individuality, her aesthetic loneliness, one might almost say her uniqueness. She is a woman and she is a New Zealander... Frances Hodgkins is a serious woman painter, as Emily Bronte or Jane Austen or Edith Sitwell are serious women writers...".⁵³

A telling moment occurred when, at the end of the war, Hodgkins' friend Myfanwy Evans was preparing a monograph on her, to appear in a series of fourteen to be published by Penguin. Evans was the only female author commissioned, as Hodgkins was the only female subject in view; and the artist's train of thought when she inquired, "I should like to know if my Book is included in the main group Sutherland - Piper - or something slightly different *with other women?*" is transparent.⁵⁴ If female artists were in general opinion the B team, who would want to belong to it? Especially when, a couple of months earlier, she had been presented in a Bond Street gallery in the company of Francis Bacon, Henry Moore, Matthew Smith and Graham Sutherland - alongside the men of the day, albeit as what might nowadays be recognised with some scepticism as the token woman.⁵⁵

Artistic success was, throughout Hodgkins' career, hostage to so many circumstances and conditions, not always even apparent to those who did not belong to the class that made the rules. Though she was eventually given some state funding,⁵⁶ Hodgkins survived through her gift for friendship - or, her realisation at some stage that without good friends a single woman without money at large in the world (even the Anglophone world, to which Pakeha like the Hodgkins felt they belonged) was like a tiny boat on an unpredictable sea. In McCormick's words, she was attempting "to inhabit two irreconcilable worlds at the same time",⁵⁷ so her survival is in itself an achievement and the success that she eventually saw a vindication.

The maelstrom of the second world war proved yet again, however, what a hard road Hodgkins had persisted in following as she battled with privations and illness in the little coastal community of Corfe Castle, within reach of London but therefore also within the zone of military activities. A single woman of seventy with no family nearby, dependent on the continuation of her work for her everyday income, she must have wondered at times if she would survive this horror. Having survived it, like many New Zealanders through the twentieth century she died far from home. But she would surely have appreciated the ultimate embrace of her whanau and her country that brought her ashes to lie in Waikanae cemetery.⁵⁸

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- 19 Rachel Hodgkins to Isabel Field late February 1898 (MS-Papers-0113-01/44, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 20 Rachel Hodgkins to Isabel Field c.April/May 1898 (MS-Papers-0113-01/45, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 21 Rachel Hodgkins to Isabel Field July(?) 1898 (MS-Papers-0113-01/46, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 22 For Meeson, see Victoria Hammond and Juliet Peers, *Completing the Picture*, Artmoves, 1992, p. 50-53; for Stoddart, see Julie King, *Flowers into Landscape: Margaret Stoddart 1865-1934*, Hazard Press, 1997.
- 23 FH to Isabel Field dated by McCormick 17 April 1899 (Ms-Papers-5292-115, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 24 "A New Zealand Artist in London", *The Press*, 22 June 1901, p. 5. Blacke was accompanied on her travels by her mother; when Hodgkins crossed paths with her in London in 1908, she had married but continued to paint until at least 1914.
- 25 For instance, May Lingard left Wellington in 1902 for the US, while Stoddart was considering taking a post in South Africa in 1903.
- 26 There was talk of Isabel accompanying her sister (Rachel Hodgkins to Isabel Field undated October(?) 1900, MS-Papers-0113-01/47 Alexander Turnbull Library), but it seems unsurprising that this did not eventuate, given that by this time she had children aged six, five, three and one, and that her husband had just entered on a political career, becoming MP for Otaki at the beginning of that year. Hodgkins spent her £100 in nine months - confirming Blacke's estimate almost exactly. In 1902, Hodgkins reports Stoddart managing on £1 a week (i.e. £52 a year).
- 27 "Women who have found new Professions", *Daily Mail*, 23 August 1902, no pagination.
- 28 FH to Rachel Hodgkins 14 July 1901, 26 August 1901.
- 29 "Miss Richmond has kindly offered to be my banker till fresh supplies arrive and I shall not in the least mind letting her help me if I should need it. She has ample for herself and it would not inconvenience her...". FH to Rachel Hodgkins 8 July 1902.
- 30 See Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich eds, *The rise of the modern art market in London, 1850-1939*, Manchester University Press, 2011.
- 31 See FH to Isabel Field 7 March 1902.
- 32 MS-Papers-0085-51, Alexander Turnbull Library; Wilby, an Englishman, had been living in the USA up till then. His letter names London and Paris as possible places of domicile for the married couple.

Endnotes

- 33 Ros Pesman, *Duty Free: Australian women abroad*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 30.
- 34 "All Sorts of People", *The FreeLance*, 27 January 1906, p.1.
- 35 FH quoted in McCormick 1981, p. 49.
- 36 FH to Rachel Hodgkins 15 September 1908.
- 37 FH to Rachel Hodgkins 2 September 1908.
- 38 For Davidson, see Penelope Little, *A Studio in Montparnasse*, Craftsman House, 2003. Rose MacPherson (later Margaret Preston) may also have been known to Hodgkins at this point. It can be construed that both Gertrude Crompton and Gwen Knight were at some stage in love with Hodgkins. Female couples (whether lesbian or simply companionate) became even more common in both Britain and France after the war in the wake of its extinction of so many men of marriageable age. Later examples among the artists Hodgkins knew included Annie Falkner and Leslie Hervey and Marcella Smith and Dorothea Sharp.
- 39 See Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists between the Wars*, Manchester University Press, 2010 for a thorough account and evaluation of this matter.
- 40 See Deepwell, op cit, p. 59-64.
- 41 "A Notable Exhibition", *The Argus*, 22 November 1912, p. 6.
- 42 "New Art Movement", *The Sun*, 15 April 1913, p. 6.
- 43 Her Australian patron Peter Waite, for instance, sent her £100 to rent a London studio.
- 44 FH to Rachel Hodgkins 24 February 1920.
- 45 Lydia Pharazyn to Field family (MS-Papers-0113-01/41, Alexander Turnbull Library) and Lydia Pharazyn to William Field 21 November 1921 (MS-Papers-0113-02/21, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 46 Harry H. Tombs reported in "Art in London", *The Dominion*, 30 December 1930, p. 9.
- 47 See Arthur R. Howell, *Frances Hodgkins: Four Vital Years*, 1951.
- 48 They felt positively towards her: see June Opie, *Interviews re. Frances Hodgkins*, 1969 (transcript: MS-Papers-5295-195, Alexander Turnbull Library); the original tapes can be heard as *Frances Hodgkins, the European years (1969)*, ref. 3950, Nga Taonga Sound and Vision.
- 49 Some of these artists are mentioned in Sara Gray, *The Dictionary of British Women Artists*, The Lutterworth Press, 2009, Deepwell, op cit, and Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, Manchester University Press, 1995.

- 50 A.G. Stephens, "Art. Frances Hodgkins", *The Bookfellow*, 1 May 1913, p. IX. Of course, Hodgkins is promoting her exhibition in this situation and understands the function of the interview is to make it sound worth visiting. A truer list of exemplars would surely have included Lucien Simon, Berthe Morisot, Henri Matisse and Laura Knight.
- 51 The phrase, used ironically, is Vanessa Bell's: quoted by Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p. 37.
- 52 See "Hampstead Art Gallery", *The Athenaeum*, 27 February 1920, unpaginated.
- 53 "The Art of Frances Hodgkins", *Art in New Zealand*, March 1938 (vol. 10, no. 3), p. 160.
- 54 FH to Myfanwy Evans 12 June 1945; italics in the original. The publication was Myfanwy Piper, *Frances Hodgkins*, Penguin Books, 1948. For an extended inquiry into these questions during Hodgkins' working life, see Deepwell, op. cit.
- 55 "Recent Paintings by Francis Bacon, Frances Hodgkins, Henry Moore, Matthew Smith, Graham Sutherland", The Lefèvre Gallery, Bond Street. It is telling of the persistence of the separation of women as a category apart that the Tate Gallery bundled Hodgkins with Gwen John (1876-1939) and Ethel Walker (1965-1951) when it got around to memorialising her ("Ethel Walker, Frances Hodgkins, Gwen John. A memorial exhibition", Tate Gallery, 1952). It can be supposed that none of these vigorously self-determining painters saw this package as either necessary or appropriate.
- 56 In April 1942 she was awarded a Civil List pension of £150 a year: forty years after Annie Blacke had recommended £120 as a minimum budget, it can be noted. One other recorded instance of external financial support occurred in 1924, with a £50 grant from the charitable Artists' General Benevolent Institution.
- 57 McCormick 1954, p. 201.
- 58 Thanks to Eric McCormick and the artist's nephew Peter Field.