

*Frances Hodgkins  
in Kāpiti*

THE FIELD COLLECTION

FRANCES HODGKINS

# *Some notes on the twenty-four pictures by Frances Hodgkins in the Field Collection*

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There are a few lines in a letter to Arthur Howell of 17 March 1930 which convey a great deal about Frances Hodgkins' attitude to her own work:

*I can't judge my own work – I am too close to it – All of it is done at a venture – one's re-actions vary – They all seem very real & convincing to me at the time – and I send them off in good faith hot from the heart – The cool critical detachment sets in later – to the point of distraction which might end in my not sending any of them!*<sup>1</sup>

Change and variety, incessant questioning and exploration are the hallmarks of Hodgkins' work. She did not settle early into a recognisable style like her contemporaries Margaret Stoddart, Dorothy Kate Richmond, or Sydney Lough Thompson, but continued to respond to the challenges of modernism in her own way and at her own pace.

These qualities are evident in the twenty-four works in the Field Collection, spanning three decades from the 1890s to the 1920s, years in which Hodgkins was laying the foundations of the later work for which she is chiefly celebrated.

*Frances Hodgkins's slow rise to recognition and artistic success was not a simple progression from obscurity to fame; intermittent periods of success were followed by setbacks.*<sup>2</sup> Among her earlier works there are pictures that stand out, markers of a new level of accomplishment. The Field Collection has its share of such markers.

The earliest work is a genre painting of 1891 from which little of her future achievements could be deduced, apart from an interest in human beings rather than landscape. The last works are an interesting series of five watercolour/gouaches from the early 1920s when she was making flat patterns of the picturesque subjects

of Breton markets and fishing harbours. These point forward to later work. *The Rag Market*, for example, with its heaps of patterned bundles in a band across the foreground, hints at a 1944 gouache, *Country Colour, Purbeck*.

Watercolours from England, France, Morocco, and Holland chart Hodgkins' earlier progress as a recorder of picturesque scenes in the early 1900s. Her winter in Morocco, 1902-3, was particularly exciting and productive: a watercolour of an Arab girl was hung 'on the line' at the Royal Academy in 1903, her first notable success in England. *The Dye Yards* is a fluid watercolour showing the influence of her contemporary, the Scottish artist Arthur Melville, whom she admired. (See *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, p. 90.)

There are five images of Maori women in the collection, culminating in the fine 1913 portrait from Rotorua, possibly the last of them. The European artist's response to Maori is one theme of New Zealand art history and Frances Hodgkins' contribution – her many pictures of Maori women and children – is of considerable interest. There is also an exquisite early portrait of Isabel Hodgkins, and a more anecdotal but carefully finished study of a woman reading a tea cup. Portraiture interested Hodgkins till the end of her painting life. Of women with children, another favourite subject, the Field Collection has two lovely examples, *Summer Joys*, 1916 and *Sisters*, 1906.

Hodgkins, the illustrator, caricaturist, and satirist, is represented by *She Loves Me Not, But Will Always Regard Me As Her Ber-ruther!*, c1891. The element of caricature in some of her later portraits, such as *Loveday and Anne*, 1916, or *David Brynley*, 1945, awaits analysis. The future maker of superb black and white drawings is presaged in *Bearded Old Man*, 1896.

A web of biographical and artistic information about Frances Hodgkins is represented in these works that remain together and collectively represent her links to the Field family and Kāpiti.

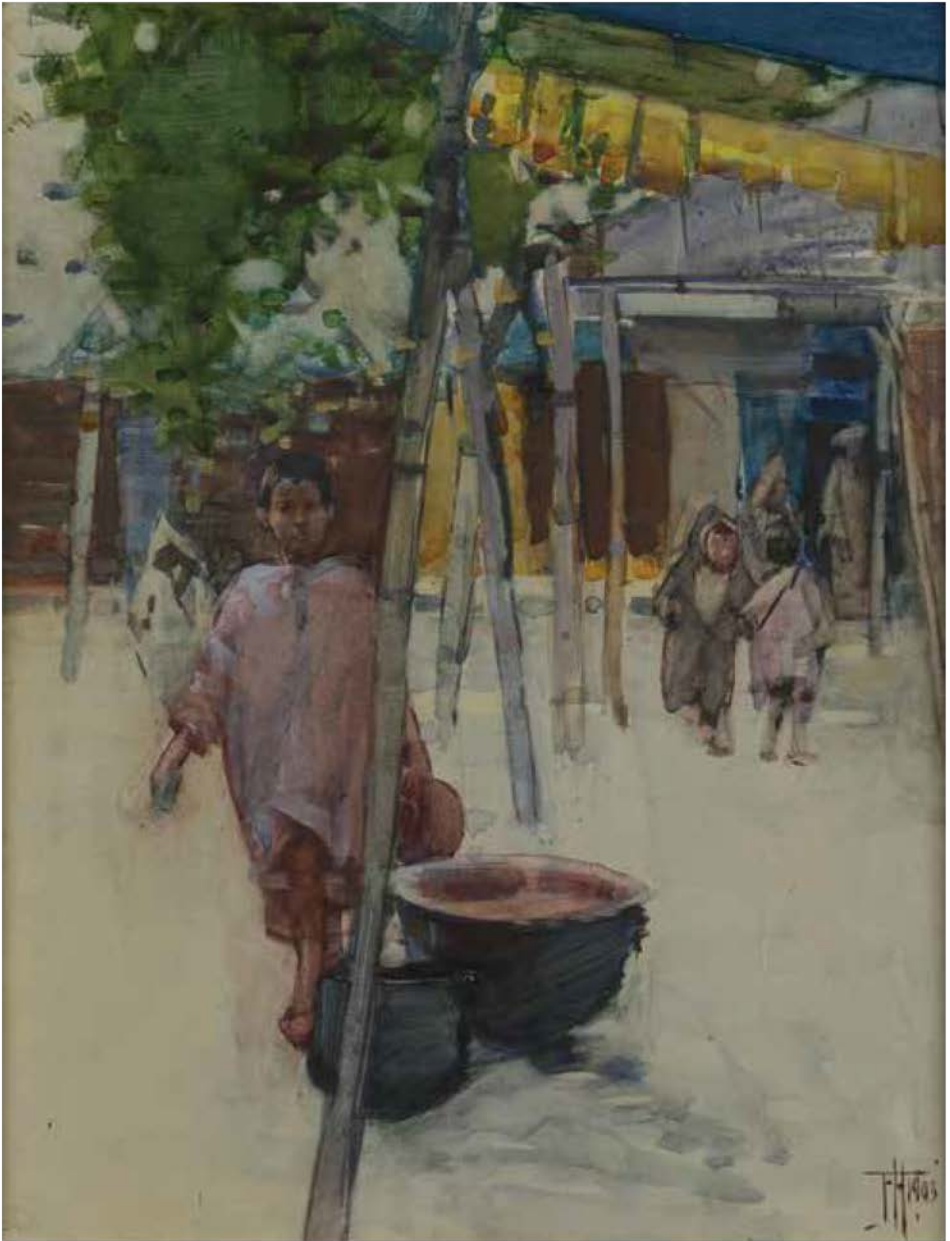
1. Frances Hodgkins, letter to Arthur Howell, 17 March 1930, cited in Linda Gill (ed.), *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, 1993, p. 425.
2. Roger Collins and Iain Buchanan, 'Frances Hodgkins on Display: Galleries, Dealers & Exhibitions, 1890-1950', *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, special series no. 5, 2000, p. 7.



FRANCES HODGKINS 1869–1947

*The Rag Market, Douarnenez, Finistère, Brittany (Market Scene with Carts), (Market Scene) 1921*

Watercolour and charcoal



FRANCES HODGKINS 1869–1947  
*The Dye Yards (The Dyer's Courtyard)* 1903  
Watercolour



FRANCES HODGKINS 1869-1947

*Summer Joys* 1916

Oil



FRANCES HODGKINS 1869–1947  
*Sisters (Mother and Child)* 1906  
Watercolour



FRANCES HODGKINS 1869-1947  
*She Loves Me Not, But Will Always Regard Me As  
Her Ber-ruther!* c1891  
Pencil and watercolour





FRANCES HODGKINS 1869–1947  
*Bearded Old Man (Portrait of Old Man)* 1896  
Pen and ink