

Rhona Haszard

New Zealander, 1901 -1931

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The Sea and the Bay

c.1927, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 55.7 cm

Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts 1932



About the work

The Sea and the Bay is a scene on the Breton coast of France. It belongs to a group of paintings made in the summer of 1927 when Rhona Haszard and her husband and fellow artist, Leslie Greener, were on a cycling holiday through the Marne Valley and stopped from time to time to paint. In a letter to her family, Haszard wrote of how the Camarat and Finistère areas had been an "unending source of motifs for us."

Haszard has given the painting a contemporary landscape treatment, using the forms and colour ranges of New Zealand, British and French Post-Impressionism, which she developed into her own distinctive style.

The composition is framed by the angular rock formations in the foreground, which focus the viewer's attention into the depth of the bay and capture a great sense of space. Haszard has used colour rather than tone to define the forms, with

thick pigment used in a type of 'divisionist' style where the planes are created within distinct, flat, geometric shapes. This flattened, planar approach forms a fractured mosaic of patched colour.

The colours are high keyed in tone, which was the preference of the Post-Impressionist painters. The small patches created by the red-toned sails give a feeling of energy to the open water and, with their diminishing size, help to create a sense of depth or recession into the picture space.

Haszard's work was influenced by the Camden Town group of London painters, like Harold Gilman (1876 -1919) and Frederick Gore (1878 -1914), whose work she saw during her time in London. Their work was marked by slightly modified and simplified forms and a flat plane-like treatment of volumes.

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About the artist

Born in Thames in 1901, Haszard moved to Hokitika with her family at an early age. She spent her secondary school years in Invercargill before the death of her mother during the influenza epidemic of 1918. The family then moved to Christchurch where Haszard enrolled at the Canterbury College School of Art. She studied there from 1919 to 1924 and an important teacher for her was Archibald Nicoll (1886 -1953), newly appointed head of the School. Fellow students included Olivia Spencer Bower (1905 -1982), Evelyn Page (1899 -1987) and Rata Lovell-Smith (1894 -1969). In 1923 Haszard married fellow Canterbury artist Ronald McKenzie. They separated in 1925 and by December the same year she had married Leslie Greener.

The couple travelled to Europe, studying briefly at the Académie Julian in Paris. Haszard exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1927 and was also represented at the Society of Woman Artists, London, during the same period. Of their time in Paris, Greener wrote, "Paris was a very wild place for a young artist to go. The air was electric with theories... We used to go to the workmen's cafe every evening - a hotbed of communism, warm and frowsy, with queer types all wearing dirty red mufflers." (University of Canterbury Alumni magazine, Spring 2001)

Haszard's early painting successes were stalled in 1928 by a serious back injury she received in Cyprus. This forced her to seek medical treatment in London in 1929 and 1930. However, while she was there she maintained her commitment to painting and to bohemian art and theatre circles, exhibiting in 1930 with contemporary British artists at the Grafton Galleries.

In 1927 Greener took up an appointment at Victoria College in Alexandria, Egypt. Haszard's works were shown at Claridge's Hotel, Alexandria, in 1928 and at the Galerie Paul in Cairo in 1930. Her final exhibition opened in Alexandria in 1931 just before her tragic death when she fell from a window of the Victoria College Tower.

During Haszard's time in Alexandria she distinguished herself as 'a new woman', a New Zealander who dressed eccentrically, advocated de facto relationships, vegetarianism and unprocessed foods and painted very innovatively.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

La Coupe, Sark

undated, linocut
Purchased 1992

Oxford Terrace

undated, etching
Purchased 1995

Further reading

New Zealand Women Artists, A Survey of 150 Years, Anne Kirker, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1993, pp. 63-68.

Rhona Haszard, An Experimental Expatriate New Zealand Artist, Joanna Drayton, Canterbury University Press, 2002.

