

Ascent

Frances Hodgkins

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Ascent

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Frances Hodgkins

COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

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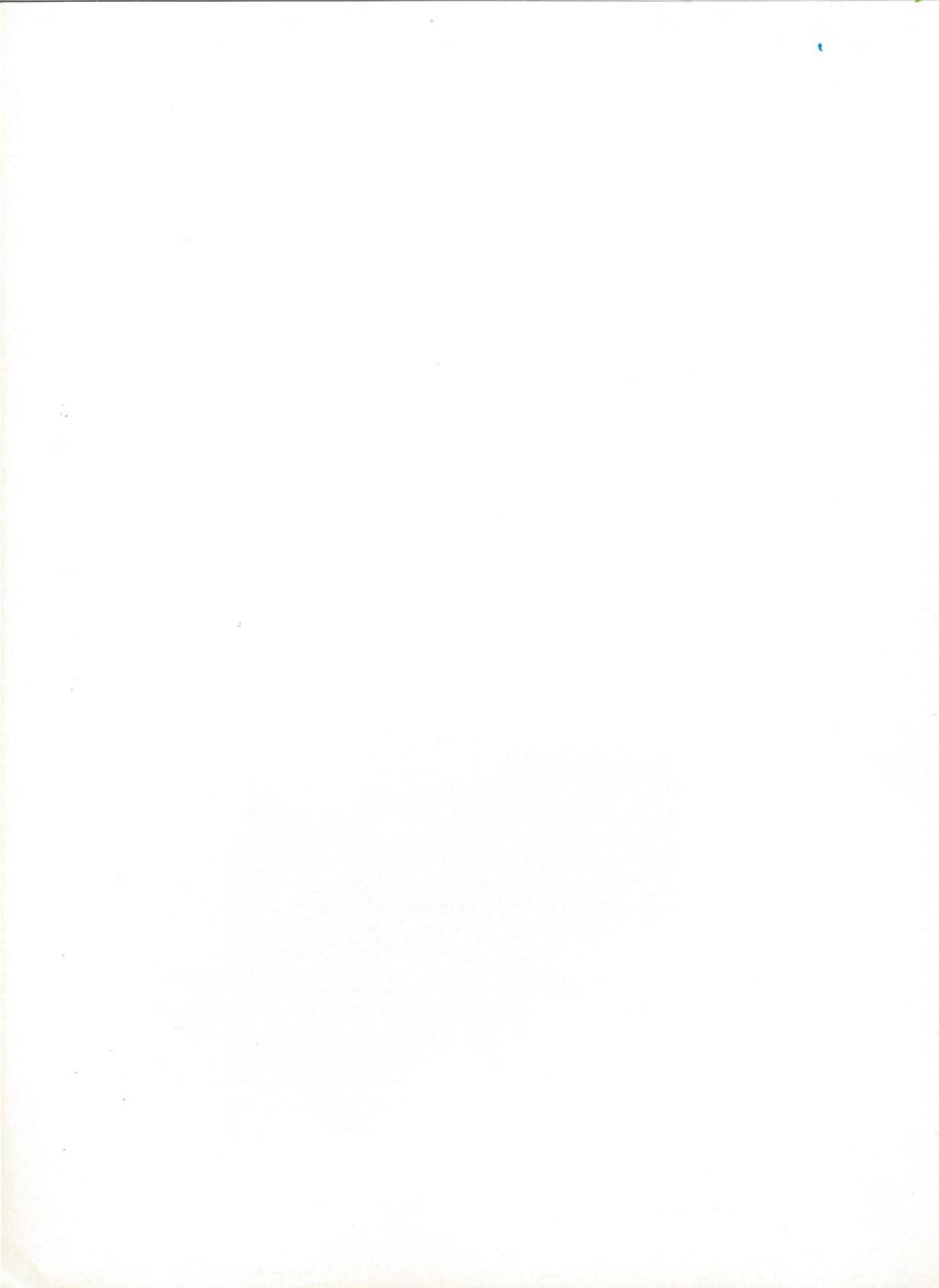
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To mark the centenary of the birth in 1869 of Frances Hodgkins a large touring retrospective exhibition of the work of the artist was assembled under the auspices of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand. As a further commemorative celebration The Caxton Press in association with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council decided to publish this special issue of *Ascent*, a Journal of the Arts in New Zealand, devoted to the life and work of the artist.

The Editors' special thanks are due to the council, to Dr E. H. McCormick without whose continuing research this publication would not have been possible, to Mr G. C. Docking, Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery and to the contributors to this issue.

The publication of the five colour plates of Frances Hodgkins' work was made possible by the sponsorship of the Auckland City Art Gallery, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, the National Art Gallery, Wellington, the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch and the Arts Council.



Frances Hodgkins : 1869-1947



MELVIN DAY

DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ART GALLERY, WELLINGTON

IT is now one hundred years since Frances Hodgkins was born in New Zealand. While we now commemorate the centenary of her birth with a superb retrospective exhibition there can be little doubt in the minds of most people who take an interest in the visual arts that Frances Hodgkins has achieved a reputation which places her in the front rank of New Zealand born painters. I imagine, also, that little doubt exists in the minds of many connoisseurs that she has a rightful place amongst those artists who are regarded as the best British painters of this century.

It is quite reasonable to ask on what grounds one can make these assertions. How is it possible to suggest that one painter is better than others? More, on what grounds does one assess works of art? These are imponderable questions, or rather, they are questions which cannot be answered simply. There is a letter from Vincent van Gogh to his sister in which he writes, 'I should imagine the most distinctive characteristic of the painter is being able to paint. Those who are able to paint, to paint the best, are the beginnings of something that will last

a long time to come.' This comment is, I believe, highly significant, as were many of the Dutchman's observations. The last sentence, especially, is enormously important because I believe, with van Gogh, that the 'distinctive characteristic' of painters and artists in general, is their ability to paint in such a way that what they initiate will 'last a long time to come'.

Art really achieves its significance by the interpretation and evaluation of succeeding generations—by the way it offers inspiration to those artists who follow on. Important art has the quality 'to last a long time to come'. Unfortunately, what we are unable to predict is how future generations will react to our, or any art forms. It is, partly, a matter of chance. What is often overlooked is the enormous courage required, on the artist's part, to gamble his whole life on the hope that his artistic convictions will persist so that future generations will draw inspiration from them. This requires some judgment and intuition but, above all, courage—and Frances Hodgkins possessed courage in abundance, which is obvious from the letter she wrote to Mrs Wertheim.

'But au fond-deep in my work—I am steadfast and steady as a rock. . . . My present work is consistent—I shall sink or swim by it—I think swim—'.

The transcriptions of the recordings made by June Opie reinforce one's feelings that she possessed courage and steadfastness. It is interesting to recall that by the time she began to meet such people as Barbara Hepworth, the Pipers and Ben Nicholson she was quite elderly but indomitable. Remember that in 1929 (the year she joined the Seven and Five) she was sixty years of age and yet was so buoyant as to be accepted by a group of people who were considerably younger. In this connection the question to which it would be well worth knowing the answer was to what extent were her younger colleagues in the Seven and Five Society influenced by her. Perhaps Graham Sutherland supplies us with a lead when he says (in the Opie script) 'She was already speaking the language which gradually spelt freedom in art'.

It seems as if Frances Hodgkins' influence on these young English painters was quite marked and artistically most beneficial. Reference is made in Anthony Green's essay to the growth of the Surrealist movement in England in the mid 30s, and the possibility that this could have had some influence on her work, which seems very likely, and some of the work of this period (e.g. *Houses and Out-houses, Purbeck*) suggests this. If so, then it is obvious in view of the development of British art that she occupies a pivotal position in British painting of the late 30s and early 40s.

When we consider Frances Hodgkins' work we are struck by her technical mastery of her medium—especially watercolour or gouache—and her ability to use it to achieve the desired effect. Mrs Beatrice Seddon (the subject of No. 23) remarked recently on Frances Hodgkins' mastery of watercolour when she was painting with her, and her ability to 'swing it in' (Frances Hodgkins' expression!).

The question that arises here is to what extent is technical achievement a necessity for Frances Hodgkins or any artist. There are many cases where people have possessed a high degree of technical skill yet have disappeared so far as art is concerned. So one might conclude that her success was not bound up wholly with that aspect of art. Criticism has been levelled at her for being eclectic and this is justifiably true. But this is not an artistic crime. Like many other artists, Raphael for example, she was bent on absorbing as much as she could as quickly as pos-

sible. Other criticism has been made on the grounds that her fame rests on several works only. This might be true but Vermeer, for instance, rests secure with few known works to his credit. So, I think, these criticisms can be played down or disregarded altogether.

This is a most illuminating exhibition and it can be regarded as the artist's autobiographical statement in plastic terms. This, obviously, is what visitors to any exhibition of art expect to see. On another level, the exhibition reveals the technical achievements of a very original painter. Standing above all other considerations, however, one sees and senses the tenacity and will, the purposefulness and vitality of a person who succeeded, in the face of very great opposition, in giving form to her vision. As yet, I believe it is too soon for us to see the degree to which Frances Hodgkins was influential as a painter but enough evidence exists for us to accept that her place in British, and indeed European, painting of the 1930s and 40s is assured.

To attempt to be more precise than that, I believe, is presumptuous and a more accurate assessment of her artistic worth must await the more dispassionate judgment of later generations.



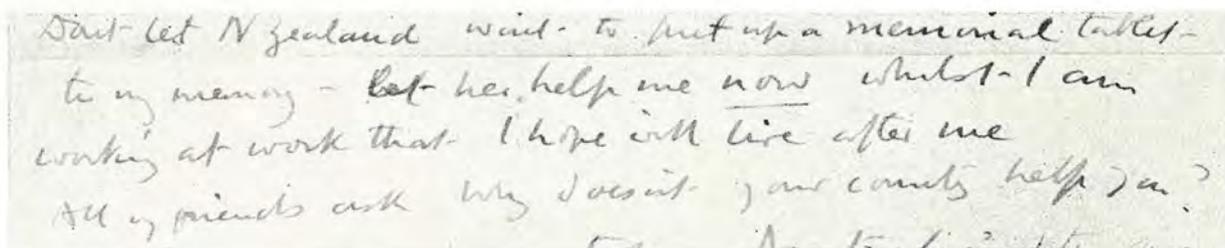
SELF PORTRAIT: STILL LIFE. Oil, 30 x 25 in. 1941. Auckland City Art Gallery.

Frances Hodgkins

A Pictorial Biography

*

E. H. McCORMICK



Don't let N Zealand wait to put up a memorial tablet to my memory - let her help me now whilst I am working at work that I hope will live after me. All my friends ask why doesn't your country help you?

'Don't let N Zealand wait to put up a memorial tablet to my memory—let her help me *now* whilst I am working at work that I hope will live after me.' Frances Hodgkins to her mother, 1921.

FRANCES MARY HODGKINS

Born Dunedin, New Zealand, 28 April 1869

Died Dorchester, England, 13 May 1947

Throughout a long life divided between two hemispheres Frances Hodgkins wrote hundreds of letters to her family. In one of these, sent to her mother during a crisis in 1924, she discussed her situation as an expatriate and her struggle not only as an artist but as a *woman* artist:

'It is one of the tragedies of leaving Home—New Zealand is too far away—it ceases to be *real*. New Zealanders like myself cannot help becoming denationalized—they have no country—it is sad—but true . . . Art is like that—it absorbs your whole life and being. Few women can do it successfully. It requires enormous vitality. That is my conception of genius—vitality.'

In her studio, Corfe Castle, Dorset, July 1945



DUNEDIN 1869-1889

'I was born in Dunedin; we were an English family in a Scottish settlement.'

Frances Hodgkins, 1912

Frances Hodgkins grew up in the southernmost of New Zealand's main centres, the third child of an English-born solicitor and his Australian wife. She attended private schools and, following the example of her father and sister, sketched from childhood onwards. About 1885, after several earlier moves, the family shifted to Ravensbourne, a quiet suburb on the shores of Otago Harbour. Here, with her elder sister Isabel and her four brothers, Frances passed her adolescent years.

Frances in childhood



Dunedin in 1869



The family at her birthplace, Royal Terrace



The family at Waira, Ravensbourne; Frances at left



Mother, Rachel Owen Hodgkins



Father, William Mathew Hodgkins



Frances as a schoolgirl



Frances in her teens



Elder sister, Isabel

DUNEDIN 1889-1901

'I am slowly settling down to an oldmaidship, and I have only one prominent idea and that is that nothing will interfere between me and my work.'

Frances Hodgkins, 1895

I expect she is must be very
truly from all accounts.
Will you send an Rosie
letter to Mum. Bella I think
you have done with it.
Don't see it's so difficult to say
Goodbye. I will write I think
I can but you don't
have a quiet life I think
and Mum is very little to
write about my painting about
me more & more every day
I am slowly settling down
to an old maid ship, and
I have only one prominent
idea and that is that
nothing will interfere between
me and my work.

In 1889 financial losses forced the Hodgkins family to leave Ravensbourne and rent Cranmore Lodge on the hills above the city. A year later Frances began to exhibit, but her career as a serious artist dates from 1893 when she took lessons from the Italian painter G. P. Nerli. In 1895 she attended the Dunedin School of Art and a year later began teaching. After W. M. Hodgkins died in 1898 the family broke up and Frances decided to travel overseas. She set out for Europe in February 1901.



Cranmore Lodge, the Hodgkins' home until 1897



Frances in the drawing room, Cranmore Lodge



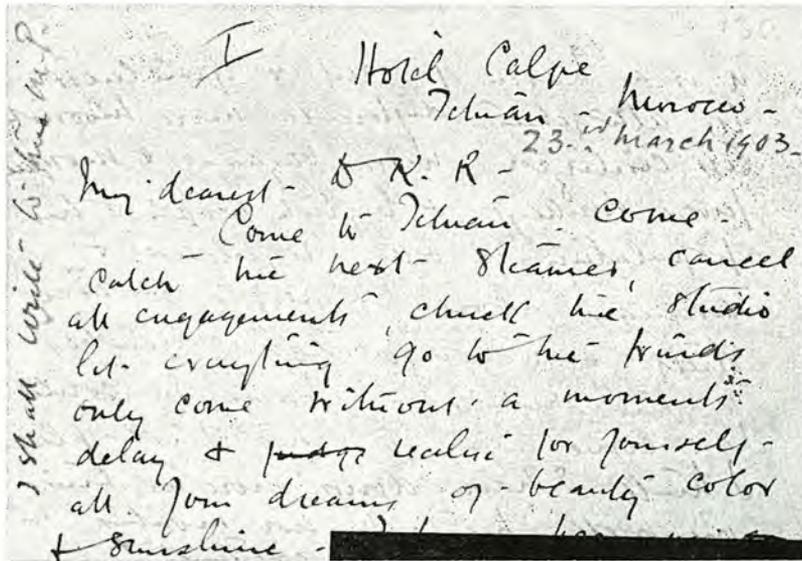
At Cranmore Lodge after Isabel's engagement



Some of the paintings collected by W. M. Hodgkins for the Dunedin Exhibition in 1889



Princes Street, Dunedin, in the 1880s. At left the Bank of New South Wales, her last Dunedin home



EUROPE AND NEW ZEALAND 1901-1906

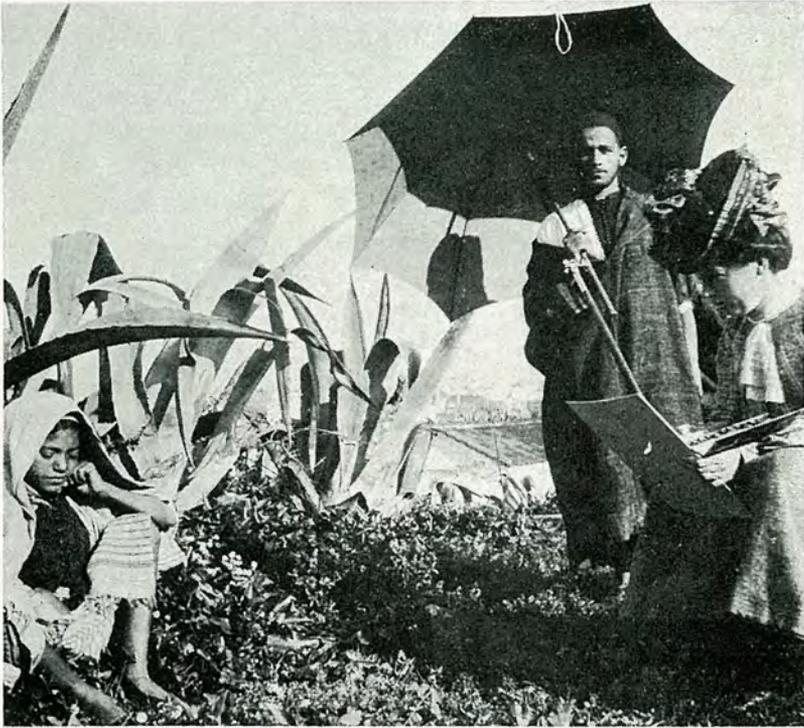
'Come to Tetuan. Come—catch the next steamer, cancel all engagements, chuck the studio let everything go to the winds only come without a moment's delay and value for yourself all the dreams of beauty colour and sunshine . . .'

Frances Hodgkins to Dorothy Kate Richmond, 1903.

Frances intended to be abroad twelve months or so; in fact she stayed away nearly three years. Falling under the spell of the old world, she travelled widely with Miss D. K. Richmond and other friends. She painted industriously and succeeded in having work shown in the Royal Academy and in three London galleries. On her return to New Zealand she took a studio in Bowen Street, Wellington. But, unhappy in her personal life and disillusioned with the colony, she sailed once more for Europe in January 1906.

The Directors of the DORE GALLERY
request the honour of a visit
from *Rosa Dixon* and friends
to a Private View, on Nov. 15th, of Water Colour Drawings,
"IN ITALY AND ELSEWHERE,"
by Miss Evelyn March Phillips,
and some Pictures by the well-known New Zealand Artist
Miss Frances Hodgkins.
35, NEW BOND STREET, W. 11 to 6.
Available until November 29th, 1902.

Rosa Dixon (later Mrs Spencer Bower) travelled to England with Frances



Morocco 1903

With sketching companions, Holland 1903





In her Bowen Street studio

EXHIBITION OF

Oil & Water Colour Paintings

BY

Miss Hodgkins & Miss D. K. Richmond

(LONDON).

... AT ...

McGregor Wright & Co.'s Art Gallery,
129, LAMBTON QUAY, WELLINGTON.

Alex. Peckham, Printer, Wellington.



Corner of Lambton Quay and Bowen Street about 1900

My dearest Mother
 To put Venice into words is impossible
 likewise is it impossible to put it into
 paint. Also it is an impertinence. There is
 a fairy enchantment about it - a sort of
 wizardry that can't be expressed. It is better
 to be silent about it all than to use the
 wrong word or the wrong colour - The Casa

My dearest Mother
 keep my letters only for
 me - so fast to put out

EUROPE, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND 1906-1913

Casa Frolo
 50 Guidecca Venice
 18th April, 06.

My dearest Mother

To put Venice into words is impossible likewise it is impossible to put it into paint. Also it is an impertinence. There is a fairy enchantment about it, a sort of wizardry that can't be expressed. It is better to be silent about it all than to use the wrong word or the wrong colour.

Frances Hodgkins, 1906

The second European visit was again planned for a year but lengthened into seven. After extensive travels and her first one man show in London, Frances established herself in Paris. There she built up a modest reputation as watercolourist and teacher and each summer held informal classes in small French towns. When she embarked for New Zealand in October 1912 it was not to settle but to see her family and show her work. In October 1913, following highly successful exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand, she left to continue her career in Europe.



Cafe du Dome, Montparnasse, near her Paris studio



Montreuil, Summer 1909

SCHOOL
FOR
WATER COLOUR

Conducted by
Miss FRANCES HODGKINS

ATELIER : 21, Avenue du Maine

MORNING & AFTERNOON CLASSES

Costume Models
Models arranged with regard to Colour Motives
Composition, etc.

Classes commence Tuesday, Dec. 26th

For fuller particulars see over-page

Notice for winter classes, Paris 1911



Sydney 1913

ENGLAND AND EUROPE 1913-1927

Concarneau 4th Aug. 14

My Dearest Mother,

This is a record of events in Concarneau since the Declaration of War on Sat. 1st Aug.

Saturday was a day of suspense and agitation. Nobody could work. We hung round the Mairie and Port Office waiting for news. Being Saturday the Port was full of fishermen, all very drunk.

About 5 the town crier announced the fateful news we were all waiting for—Declaration of War by Germany and General Mobilisation of the French Army.

Frances Hodgkins, 1914

The decade after her southern tour was one of repeated disappointment and failure. On the outbreak of war she left France to paint and teach in St Ives, Cornwall, her home until 1920. Efforts to establish herself in London were unsuccessful and at the end of two disastrous continental ventures she retreated to England, first to Burford and then to Manchester. There she found work as a fabric designer but soon returned to painting. In the summer of 1927 she left the city and gave up teaching, determined to make a further bid for recognition in London.

Concarneau 4th Aug. 14

My Dearest Mother

This is a record of events in Concarneau since the declaration of war on Sat. 1st Aug. Saturday was a day of suspense & agitation, nobody could work. We hung round the Mairie & Port Office waiting for news. Being Saturday the Port was full of fishermen, all very drunk. About 5 the town crier announced the fateful news we were all waiting for. Declaration of war by Germany & General Mobilisation of the French Army. Women went & fled to their homes with their papers over their heads. Next came the order that persons wishing to leave Concarneau for Paris or the sea ports must go at once that night, or not at all. General Exams, Hotels emptied of all but the permanent visitors artists etc. Mobilisation was to commence next day & trains would only be available for troops. Simultaneously the telegraph was cut off & no letters came in or went at night. Next morning early as were closed no drink sold. Next morning early as were warned to register ourselves with the Police, had our



In her studio, St Ives 1918



At her exhibition, London 1920



London 1920; Frances at left



Burford, Oxfordshire

Fabric design, Manchester 1925





Flatford Mill, Suffolk 1930

ENGLAND AND EUROPE 1927-1939

'I have travelled far from the Academic tradition which fetters England and recognizes no possibility of further revelation . . . I believe if you saw my present work you would find it very *simple* to understand—it has grown more and more simple and sincere.'

Frances Hodgkins to her eldest brother, 1928

From the late twenties onwards Frances Hodgkins gradually became known among modern English painters. Helped at first by friends and fellow artists, she exhibited in London galleries and in 1929 was elected to the advanced Seven and Five Society. Already she had met the art dealer Arthur R. Howell, an association which led in 1932 to a contract with the Lefevre Galleries. Though she sometimes rented a London studio, she preferred to work in rural England and often spent the winter in such Mediterranean resorts as Ibiza in the Balearics.



In the late 1930s



On holiday in Northumberland, 1939



View in Ibiza, her winter home 1932



INVITATION TO THE 9TH EXHIBITION OF THE

SEVEN & FIVE SOCIETY

AT
ARTHUR TOOTH & SONS, LTD.
155,
New Bond Street,
W. 1

*At the Private View,
on Thursday, March 7th, 1929*

*March 7th to March 28th,
10 till 6. Sats. 10 till 1*

JESSICA DISMORR
E. DRURY
S. FEDOROVITCH
IVON HITCHENS
FRANCES HODGKINS
EVI HONE
SIDNEY HUNT
NORMAN JANES
DAVID JONES
P. H. JOWETT
MAURICE LAMBERT
LEN LYE
R. G. S. MACKECHNIE
CEDRIC MORRIS
ELIZABETH MUNTZ
W. STAITE MURRAY
BEN NICHOLSON
WINIFRED NICHOLSON
L. PEARSON-RIGHETTI
EDWARD WOLFE
CHRISTOPHER WOOD

This invitation admits free throughout the Exhibition.

Sept 1st 39
Corfe Castle
Dorset

L93

My Dearest Willie

I must write you a quick line. All is confusion - we have been very near war for six vital days and now it is war - Germany is bombing Poland - I am filled with hatred of Germany and filled with hatred of Russia - but even now, at this flash point I shall hope for a solution and still dare hope for the miracle to happen.

Don't worry about me

I beg you not to worry - I can't help wishing I were with you all - & you with me - I am well enough, thank goodness, & you may want to go and fetch me some gas mask

ENGLAND 1939-1947

Sept. 1st 39
Corfe Castle
Dorset

My Dearest Willie

I must write you a quick line. All is confusion—we have been very near war for six vital days and now it is war—Germany is bombing Poland—I am filled with hatred of Germany and filled with hatred of Russia—but even now, at this flash point I shall hope for a solution and still dare hope for the miracle to happen.

Don't worry about me.

Frances Hodgkins to her eldest brother, 1939

In the thirties she was known only to a limited public but received both critical and popular acclaim during the war years. In December 1939 she was invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale and her career reached its climax at a retrospective exhibition held in November 1946. Unfortunately her long-deferred triumph was overshadowed by ill health but she continued to paint until the last months of her life. She died at Dorchester, Dorset, near her last home, Corfe Castle.

The Listener

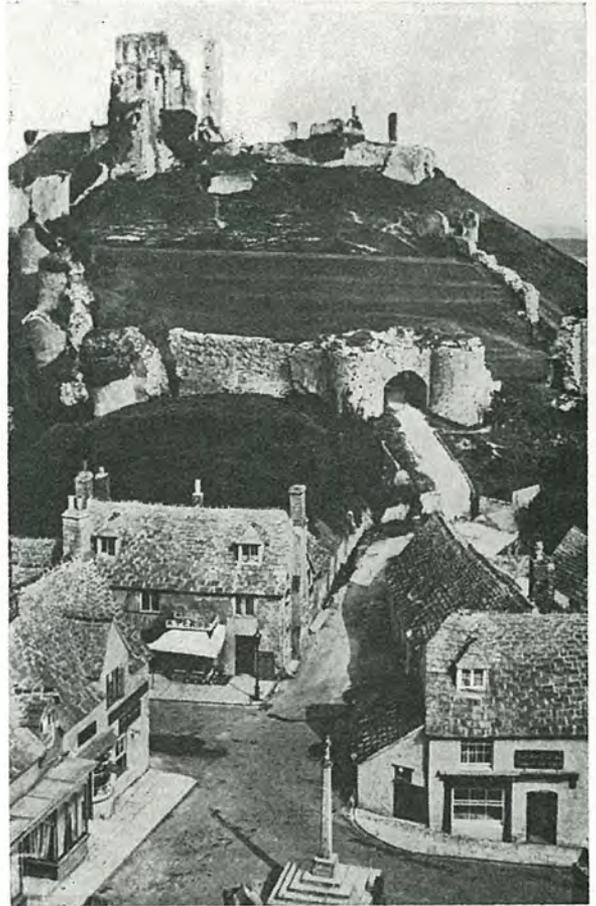
Published every Thursday by The British Broadcasting Corporation



'Flats and Cuckolds' (1920)

London Galleries

The Life and Art of Frances Hodgkins
(see page 782)



Corfe Castle, Dorset

With her friend, Miss Dorothy Selby, about 1940



RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

FRANCES HODGKINS

NOVEMBER 1946

THE LEFEVRE GALLERY
(ALEX REID & LEFEVRE LTD.)
131-134 NEW BOND STREET
LONDON, W.1

ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE WITH A FOREWORD BY
ERIC NEWTON

PRICE - - - - - SIXPENCE



In her studio, Corfe Castle, July 1945



Frances Hodgkins, c. 1912

CHRONOLOGY

1869
28 April Born at Royal Terrace, Dunedin, New Zealand.

1890
November Exhibits for the first time.

1893
June Attends classes given by G. P. Nerli.

1895-6 Attends Dunedin School of Art.

1896
August Begins teaching private classes.

1901
6 February Leaves Dunedin for Europe.

1901-3 Travels in England, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland.

1903
May Exhibits at Royal Academy.
23 December Returns to Wellington.

1904-5 Paints and teaches in Wellington.

1906
18 January Leaves Wellington for Europe.

1906-8 Paints and teaches in Italy, France, Holland.

1907
March First one man show in London.

1909-12 Paints and teaches in France with headquarters in Paris.

1912
25 December Returns to Wellington.

1912-13 One man shows in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Dunedin, Wellington.

1913
17 October Leaves Wellington for Europe.

1914 Travels and paints in Italy and France.

1915-20 Mainly at St Ives, Cornwall.

1921 In France.

1922-3 Established in Burford, Oxfordshire.

1924 In France.

1925-7 In Manchester as painter, designer, teacher.

1927
June Leaves Manchester and gives up teaching.

1927-32 Mainly in London with excursions to France and rural England.

1929
March First shows with Seven and Five Society.

- 1930
February Concludes agreement with St George's Gallery, London.
- 1932-7 Mainly in England with excursions to the Balearic Islands, Wales and Spain.
- 1932
February Concludes agreement with Lefevre Galleries, London.
- 1937-9 At Worth Matravers, Dorset, with brief excursions to France.
- 1939-47 Mainly at Corfe Castle, Dorset, with excursions to Wales and Somerset.
- 1939
December Invited to exhibit at Venice Biennale.
- 1946
November Retrospective Exhibition in London.
- 1947
13 May Dies at Herrison, Dorchester, Dorset.

This brief pictorial biography of Frances Hodgkins has been compiled from material originally gathered for the display accompanying the Frances Hodgkins Centenary Exhibition sponsored by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. The display was designed by Gerard Macdonald and prepared by the staff of the Auckland City Art Gallery. Most of the photographs, letters, etc. were drawn from the Field-Hodgkins Collection in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



Frances Hodgkins, c. 1939

Reflections on the Hodgkins Exhibition



ANTHONY S. G. GREEN

PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

THE recent exhibition of the work of Frances Hodgkins is the crowning achievement of Dr McCormick's years of patient and exacting scholarship. I would like to begin by paying tribute to him. At last we could see examples of her work at every stage of her career all together for the very first time. Apart from Dr McCormick's biography of her and his cataloguing of the pictures in New Zealand, the literature on Frances Hodgkins is rather slight.¹ We have Howell's book on four years of her career, with a catalogue of her paintings in England, which is not altogether accurate, especially in the matter of dates.² What critical writing there is about her is remarkably slight except for the little book by Mrs Piper in the Penguin Modern Painters Series.³ This exhibition is, therefore, the first stage towards an assessment of her stature as an artist. It did not enable us to make lightning judgements which would place her once and for all in the history of European, or for that matter, British art. One reason for this is that it contained only one hundred and one works which left, in some phases, gaps to be filled. The other reason is that no real attempt has yet been

made to discuss her relations with other artists, the influences on her, and her possible influence later in her career on other artists. There is too much that we still do not know about the formation of her style so that we cannot yet fully interpret her work.

We can, however, make an outline sketch of her career, on the main lines of which most people would now agree. In a long first phase from 1893 to about 1918, she developed an exuberant late Impressionist technique. This is closely parallel to a whole series of developments in both Britain and France in this period. Until her works are more closely characterized, it is difficult to be precise about her development in this period. To begin with, in Dunedin, she was clearly affected by the style of Nerli, from which she developed a very free and richly colourful watercolour technique. The influence of his Italian Impressionism is obvious throughout the next few years, and lingers on into the beginning of the twentieth century. This is at least one firm and clear point in her early development. What follows is not nearly so clear. She mentioned, at a later date, the influence on her of



BABETTE. Watercolour, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1905. Mr H. M. W. Atkinson.

Lucien Simon, but one can also guess at the possible influence of other artists, both in Britain and France, in the first years of her acquaintance with art in the Old World. She left New Zealand for the first time in 1901, and visited Paris as well as London on her first trip to Europe. She did not return to Paris until 1908, when she took up residence there on and off until 1912. One can therefore discount, to a great extent, the influence of the developing schools of Paris in the crucial years between 1905 and 1907, the years in which Fauvism and Cubism came into being. She almost certainly did not see the exhibitions of Post-Impressionist painting at the Grafton Galleries in London either, one of which took place in 1910 when she was mostly in Paris, and the other in 1913 when she was on her final visit to Australia and New Zealand. We ought therefore, to look very closely at the kind of painting which she herself

practised and its relations with less avant-garde French and British art in the pre-First World War period.

The clue of Lucien Simon could well be taken up. His work was well known in the first decades of the century (in fact he lived until 1945) and his art was reviewed in the *Studio* in April, 1902, in an article of some length with a large number of illustrations.⁴ One suspects that his broad outlined and vigorously brushed watercolours and his rather realist approach to subject matter, especially in his peasant subjects, may have had a distinct effect on her painting in the next few years. Both *Mother and Child* (No. 9 in the exhibition) of 1906, and *Summer*, which is of about 1912 (No. 18 in the exhibition) seem to have reference to watercolours by Simon, especially *The Woman With Two Sick Children*, illustrated in the *Studio* article.⁵ There are however, other forces at work and one cannot attribute her style at this period exclusively to the influence of Simon. Some of her pictures suggest that Berthe Morisot may have inspired the long flowing rhythms



MOTHER AND CHILD. Watercolour, 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1906. Mr and Mrs Peter Field.



THE CONVALESCENT. Watercolour, $17\frac{7}{8} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ in. 1912. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

of brushwork and the very light tonality in *The Convalescent* (No. 16). It is hard also to account for the two Parisian scenes of 1910 in the exhibition (Nos. 13 and 15). The nearest equivalent is not the work of any contemporary watercolourist that I know of, but rather the watercolours of Jongkind. She may have known his work directly, but it was in the first decade of the century that British journals began to show an interest in Impressionism. It is perhaps not without significance that there was a series of three articles on Impressionism in the *Studio* in 1903, the first of which carried a number of illustrations of Jongkind's work.⁶ On the other side of the Channel, there were enough late Impressionist painters at work with whom she must have had at least some sympathy. She clearly admired Wilson Steer on the one hand, and Frank Brangwyn and Arthur Melville on the other. The nearest to a trace of Brangwyn in the exhibition was a large, dark-toned, heavy silhouetted watercolour of 1906 made in Venice, called *Red Sails* (No. 8 in the exhibition). There is certainly a connexion with the New English Art Club which was the home of late Impressionism in England, in the person of Moffat Lindner, who exhibited regularly with that group of painters.

It could easily be supposed that she did not begin to paint in oils until after her final leave-taking of New Zealand in 1913. In fact, she learnt oil painting in the winter of 1908. There is some confusion about dates here, because the earliest known oil painting, in all probability, is the double portrait, *Loveday and Ann*, in the Tate Gallery (No. 20 in the exhibition).

The dating of this is based on a letter written late in her life by Frances Hodgkins to Sir John Rothenstein, who was then Director of the Gallery. She says of the picture, 'I think 1915, St Ives, is sufficiently accurate,' and she also mentions that it was her first work in oils. Does this mean that there are earlier pictures in oils that she did not care to remember? Perhaps they were studies from life done in the studio which she considered of no importance, or was she, at the end of her life, forgetting when and where things were done? This picture also happens to contain the first suggestions of a clear interest in anything that one could call Post-Impressionist. It is strange that there is no earlier reminiscence of Post-Impressionist styles or techniques since in 1910, when she was teaching at the Academy Colarossi, she specifically recommended her pupils to go and see the works of Picasso, Cézanne, Gauguin and other Post-Impressionists. Clearly she was interested in them herself. There is some mystery about the beginnings of her development towards that problematic experimental style of the 1920s. When exactly her experimentation began is still not clear. The picture of *Belgian Refugees* (No. 22) of about 1916, is puzzling in this respect.



THE WINDOW SEAT. Watercolour, $25 \times 20\frac{1}{4}$ in. 1907. Art Gallery of New South Wales.



AT THE WINDOW. Watercolour, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 25 in. 1912. Art Gallery of South Australia.

The treatment of the heads, especially that of the little boy on the left, clearly owes something to the stylizations current in Post-Impressionist art in Paris, and the whole group is singularly reminiscent of the grouping of Picasso's group of clowns of his Rose period, *Les Saltimbanques* for instance, seen against a vague background, in this case, of sky. The strong modelling in contrasted colours of some of the heads in this picture, and in *Loveday and Ann*, which makes extensive use of green and red and white for modelling, point to a new direction in her art. This is also apparent in the *Portrait of Miss Beatrice Wood* (No. 23) firmly dated 1918, when in spite of the pastel-tone, there is green and pink modelling in the head. In all these pictures, she appears at first sight to use oil paint rather as if it were watercolour. This is perhaps deceptive. Some of her

watercolours of about 1906 onwards seem to take the intensity of watercolours rather further than one would imagine they could safely be taken. This is equally true of the rich-toned *The Window Seat* of 1907, of *At the Window* of about 1912, and even, in places, of *Summer* (No. 18). *Loveday and Ann*, with its vermilion flowers on the table, could hardly have been painted successfully in the lighter tones of watercolour. The most striking of the oil paintings on exhibition in this earlier stage of her career, is *The Edwardians*, with its rich and varied harmonies of colour, remarked on at some length by Mrs Piper in her book on the artist. Here there is no question of a pseudo-watercolour technique. This is fully and richly oil painting. The Camden Town School, probably has as much to do with its style as any Continental force.



SUMMER. Watercolour, 23½ x 19¾ in. 1912. Public Art Gallery, Dunedin.



LOVEDAY AND ANN: TWO WOMEN WITH A BASKET OF FLOWERS. Oil, 26½ x 26½ in. 1915. The Tate Gallery, London.

When she first made contact with Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett Haines in about 1920, she was already on the road to new developments as we have seen. The twenties, however, especially between 1920 and 1927, saw a radical change of style taking place. She finally abandoned her Impressionist manner and instead, searched for new ways of organizing the surface structure of her pictures. To this end she clearly began to refer to Post-Impressionist ideas and derivatives of Cubism. There are also traces of the influence of Matisse in this period, especially in No. 29, *Woman Seated in a Rocking Chair*. Unfortunately only nine pictures of these years were shown in the exhibition. It is a very difficult period in which to trace her development, and it is likely to remain so. She did not exhibit very often in this period, and she rarely

dated her pictures. It is now very hard to place them in sequence. There is also less documentary evidence available for this purpose, than usual. To make matters worse, she seems to have painted over many of her earlier canvases, because she had not enough money for materials in this time of difficulty and impoverishment. There are pictures in the exhibition in which one can see traces of heavy overworking, as if there is either a completely different picture underneath, or at least earlier versions of the subject. These might repay X-raying.

Two questions of dating were raised by the exhibition for this period. One concerns the *Portrait of a Woman* (No. 28). This is dated to about 1920 in the catalogue. It bears no visible relation to any of the other pictures exhibited that are dated in the twenties, and it seems to have so



PORTRAIT OF MOFFAT LINDNER. Oil and tempera, 47 x 40½ in. 1916. Public Art Gallery, Dunedin.

much more of her atmospheric technique about it, that a date some three or four years earlier would seem more likely. *Barn in Picardy* (No. 24) also presents a problem. In the catalogue it is dated about 1918; Dr McCormick originally suggested a date of about 1924. This seems to be correct. Her only visit in this period, or at least her only recorded visit to Picardy, was in 1924. There are not enough examples of her work in the twenties to make it possible to see adequate comparisons with other works. The nearest one can get to it in style is in much later pictures like No. 53, *The Garden Gate*, which is of about 1930. Clearly *Barn in Picardy*,

with its strong oranges, blacks, and its pronounced structural elements, has very little in common with the pictures of about 1918.

Her stay in Manchester raises two more questions. The first is her relation to the important figure of Sickert who was teaching in Manchester while she was there, and whose lectures she attended in 1925. His own later style has been for some time the subject of rather hostile criticism, but in it may be found traces of a broad, loose technique, which may have held suggestions for Frances Hodgkins' later style. He cannot have been altogether an unsympathetic figure since he too had had a direct impression-



BARN IN PICARDY. Watercolour, $22\frac{1}{4} \times 18\frac{7}{8}$ in. 1918. Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch.

ist experience at about the same time as Frances Hodgkins herself. The other question about her Manchester period is the question of her designs for calico printing. These have never been investigated, although they were known to Mrs Piper. However much she may have suffered difficulties in this work, the necessity of designing for decorative purposes may have had an effect on her direction in her later years, towards a decorative treatment of surface.

There are fewer problems of this kind in the last fifteen years of her life. By that time, most influences had been absorbed and she was in turn, a force to be reckoned with. One might wonder how far her style, both in her exquisite, delicate, pencil drawings, and in her more familiar paintings, might have affected the style of the rising generations. One thinks of the very different subject matter, but rather similar technical style of David Jones, who was also a protégé of Howell at the St George's Gallery at this time, and one wonders how far her directions towards a painterly kind of near-abstraction might have affected John Piper and Ivon Hitchens, both of whom were painting in a hard-edged, abstract style in the early 1930s, and who changed to a more painterly manner in the next decade. Ivon Hitchens, in his warm colourist reconstruction of landscape



BELGIAN REFUGEES. Oil, 31 x 28 in. 1916. Mr Arthur Lett Haines.

elements, has perhaps the closest affinity to Frances Hodgkins as an artist. At this time of her career, one can also trace her progress in the eyes of the critics, through the reviews of the weeklies and the art periodicals. There is, for instance, a series of reviews by Raymond Mortimer, Clive Bell and some anonymous others in the *New Statesman*, which certainly repay reading, because they provide a very close assessment of what was valued in her work



PORTRAIT OF MISS BEATRICE WOOD. Oil, $28\frac{3}{8} \times 28\frac{3}{8}$ in. 1918. Mrs T. E. V. Seddon.



THE EDWARDIANS. Oil, 40 x 40 in. 1918. Auckland City Art Gallery.

before Eric Newton came to write his enthusiastic reviews in the early 1940s.

Her position, finally, depends on an understanding of British art in the thirties and forties. It seems to me at this stage of our knowledge of both Frances Hodgkins and British painting in that period, that we can say that there was, around 1930, one major current emerging, that of abstraction, in its purest form in the work of Ben Nicholson, but also appar-

ent in the work of a crowd of other painters. In many cases, this gave way to something rather different in the course of a decade. There was, to be sure, the wide-spread influence of Surrealism. This probably reached its peak in 1935, at the time of the great Surrealist Exhibition in London. Some of the later dream images of Paul Nash depend to some extent on this movement, and are the most striking instance of a British artist making use of Surrealist



REFUGEE CHILDREN. Oil and tempera, 24 x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1919. Mrs M. E. Hewit and Miss E. M. Hewit.

ideas, while retaining a romantic naturalism. Surrealism did not affect Frances Hodgkins in any obvious way, but the picture *In Perspective* (No. 82) is very similar in its use of a transparent screen, to a picture of Paul Nash in the Tate Gallery, *Dream Landscape*. Her juxtaposition of still-life objects with landscape may also owe something to the interest in odd juxtapositions in Surrealist art, as it also bears some relation to the treatment of similar subject matter in both Juan Gris and Matisse, earlier in the century.

Frances Hodgkins' art can hardly be said to explore the depths of the unconscious in symbolism or dream imagery. Perhaps the most striking feature of her art is that, having been through a cubist phase in the twenties, she is one of the first to return to nature in much the same sense as other British

artists returned to nature in the thirties. It is not, of course, a return to illusionism, but to natural forms transmuted by the artist's vision and incorporated in an autonomous pictorial creation. This is equally true of such diverse figures as Henry Moore, John Piper and Graham Sutherland.

Her relation to two groups of artists has yet to be looked at closely: Paul Nash's Unit One, and the Seven and Five Society. Group One was a short-lived association without a clear programme, more an exhibiting society than a movement. Frances Hodgkins was a member for less than a year in 1933, resigning in October. Paul Nash may have invited her to join his group, because of some fancied resemblances to his own work. The Seven and Five Society was exclusive, and as near to being avant-garde as any other group in Britain. The strong



WOMAN SEATED IN A ROCKING CHAIR. Watercolour, 17 x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1920. Art Gallery of New South Wales.

abstract element of the ruler and compass sort, was in fact the expression of ideas Frances Hodgkins was already leaving behind in the late 1920s, and her resignation in May, 1934, after five years of membership, coincides with the beginning of her last phase.

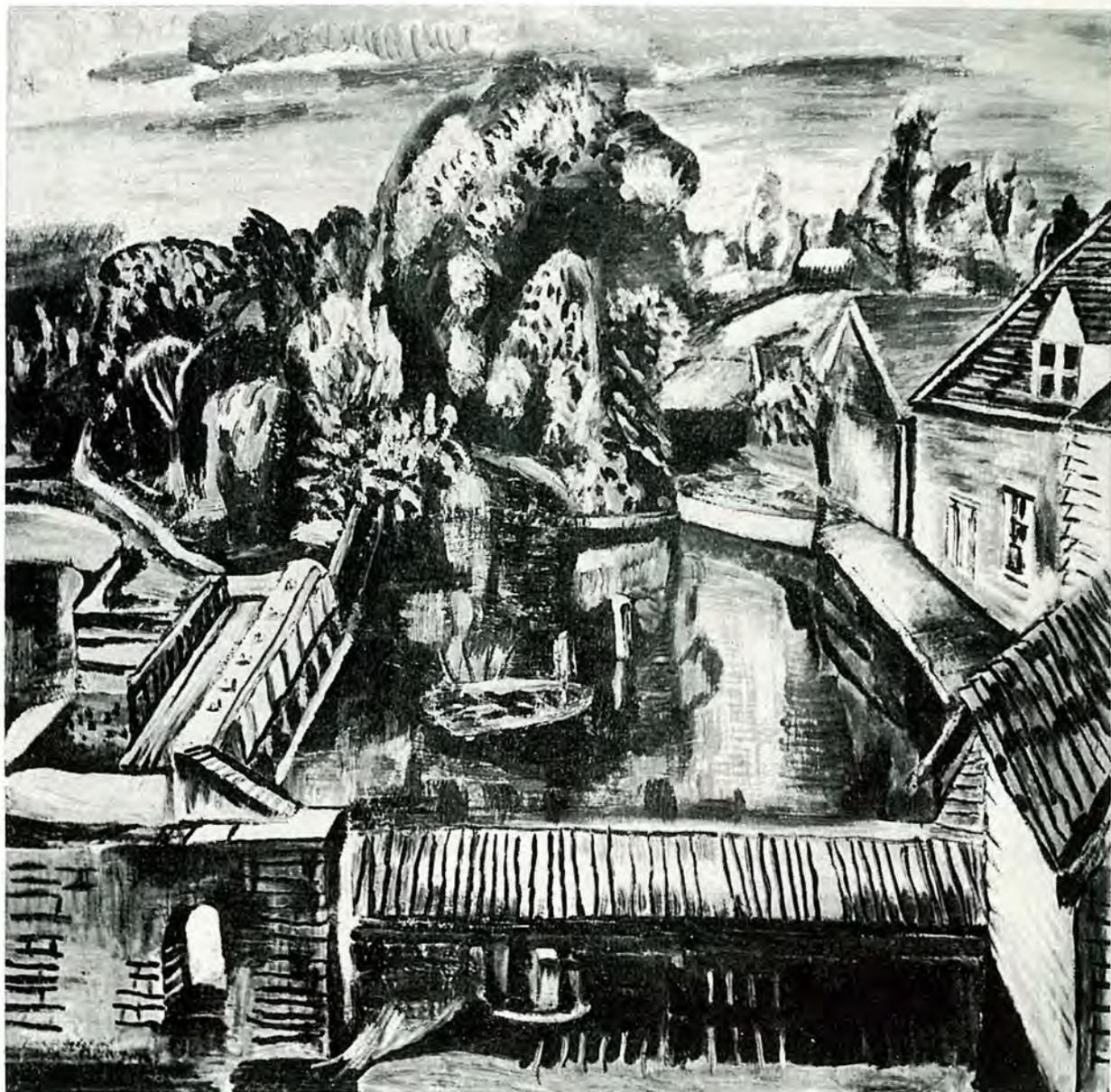
Her progress can be followed much more closely in her last years. The exhibition contained sixty-six of her paintings and drawings of the period 1930 to 1947. She exhibited more frequently, signed and dated her pictures, and was reviewed by most journals. Suggestions of Braque are to be seen here and there in her up-tilted, table-top still-lives. These are akin to Braque's still-lives of the late twenties, some of which she may have seen in London exhibitions. His pictures were to be seen in four exhibitions between 1934 and 1939. She also shows

affinities with Christopher Wood in *Flatford Mill* (No. 49).

The later work shows the results of her efforts in the twenties. The naturalistic content of her work is still present, but the picture surface is more important than an illusion of atmosphere and space. Gradually, she moved away from the heavy surfaces of her oils of 1929, to a looser and thinner technique. She exchanged rigid structure for a loose and painterly approach to surface in which the calligraphy of her brush-work becomes paramount. This first becomes important in the Bridgnorth pictures. Several of these are in thin gouache. She uses traces of colour in fleeting patches, floating in broad areas of neutral tone. Later, she began to use thinner gouache, gave her brush-strokes more substance, and reduced conglomerations of objects or landscape



PLEASURE GARDEN. Watercolour, 20 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1933. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.



FLATFORD MILL. Oil, 28½ x 30 in. 1930. The Tate Gallery, London.

elements to coloured signs, embedded in a nearly-abstract colour harmony.

Her critical fortune was at its highest in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1952, Sir John Rothenstein wrote a very derivative chapter on her work, in which it was clear he knew little of it at first-hand.⁸ He ended with a judgement on her, repeated in the catalogue of the exhibition, in which he asserted that she was not a great master because 'She lacks the scale, the range, the variety and the purposefulness.' The exhibition showed her variety, and her purposeful-

ness is clear from what we know of her life. As to her scale and range, Sir John was clearly thinking in nineteenth century academic terms. Benjamin Haydon was not a great master on account of his scale, any more than Paul Klee is negligible because of his.

Since her death, she has been evaluated most highly by Bryan Robertson in an article on British painting in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ He placed her with Paul Nash and Matthew Smith as pioneers in the emancipation of British art in the



GARDEN GATE. Watercolour, 25¼ x 19½ in. 1930. Mrs Peter Gorer.

1930s. Although he remarked that she was, in 1962, 'almost totally neglected and forgotten', he went on to say, 'After many years devoted to the principles of the School of Paris, particularly Matisse, this extraordinary woman, in her old age in the nineteen-forties, produced a body of work based on landscape which could probably only be properly appreciated today.' He then singles out the qualities of colour and calligraphy on which I have already commented.

He links them, perhaps unfortunately, with abstract expressionism, but at least he had the merits of pointing to the most valuable qualities in her late work, and of seeing their true modernity.

One might end with a comparison with the development of an acknowledged great master, Matisse, who, at the end of his career, arrived at a kind of near-abstractness based on colour, which had been his life-long pre-occupation. Frances Hodgkins



IN PERSPECTIVE. Watercolour, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1936. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

arrived at something very similar, richer in some ways for its exploitation of a singular control and understanding of the effects of the isolated brush-mark. She too was capable of inventing original and sometimes brilliant colour harmonies. Unlike those of Matisse, hers did not tend to pure primary colour, but to varied, muted, broken, complex tones. This is no less valuable, but merely different.

It was mildly startling to leave the end of the exhibition and go back to the beginning. Having seen the brilliant colouristic improvisations of her late years, it was astonishing to see, within the naturalistic forms and the atmospheric impressionism of her early years, that each surface was richly variegated in colour and co-ordinated by a rhythmic and very spontaneous handling, which was of the same character as that of the late work, although of course, for different purposes. It was as if, at last, one could see the unity of her work, the single-mindedness of an artist working out her 'little sensation', changing her style with an increasing understanding of the possibilities of expression

that could be gained thereby, so that at the end, the 'little sensation' was given its free rein and full expression.

NOTES

- ¹ E. H. McCormick. *The Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand*. Auckland, 1954.
- ² E. H. McCormick. *The Expatriate*. Wellington, 1954.
- ³ Arthur R. Howell. *Frances Hodgkins: Four Vital Years*. London, 1951.
- ⁴ Myfanwy Evans. *Frances Hodgkins*. London, 1948.
- ⁵ G. Mourey. *The Art of Lucien Simon. The Studio*, Vol. 25, no. 109. April, 1902, pp. 157-170.
- ⁶ Ibid. p. 164.
- ⁷ W. Dewhurst. *Impressionist Painting: Its Genesis and Development. The Studio*, Vol. 28, no. 121, April 1903, pp. 159-168. The reproductions consisted of four Jongkinds (one in colour), three Boudins, two Berthe Morisots and two Cézannes.
- ⁸ B. Robertson. *1893/1963 British Painting. The Studio*, Vol. 165, no. 840, April, 1963, p. 139.
- ⁹ Sir John Rothenstein. *Modern English Painters: Sickert to Smith*. London, 1952, pp. 119-120.



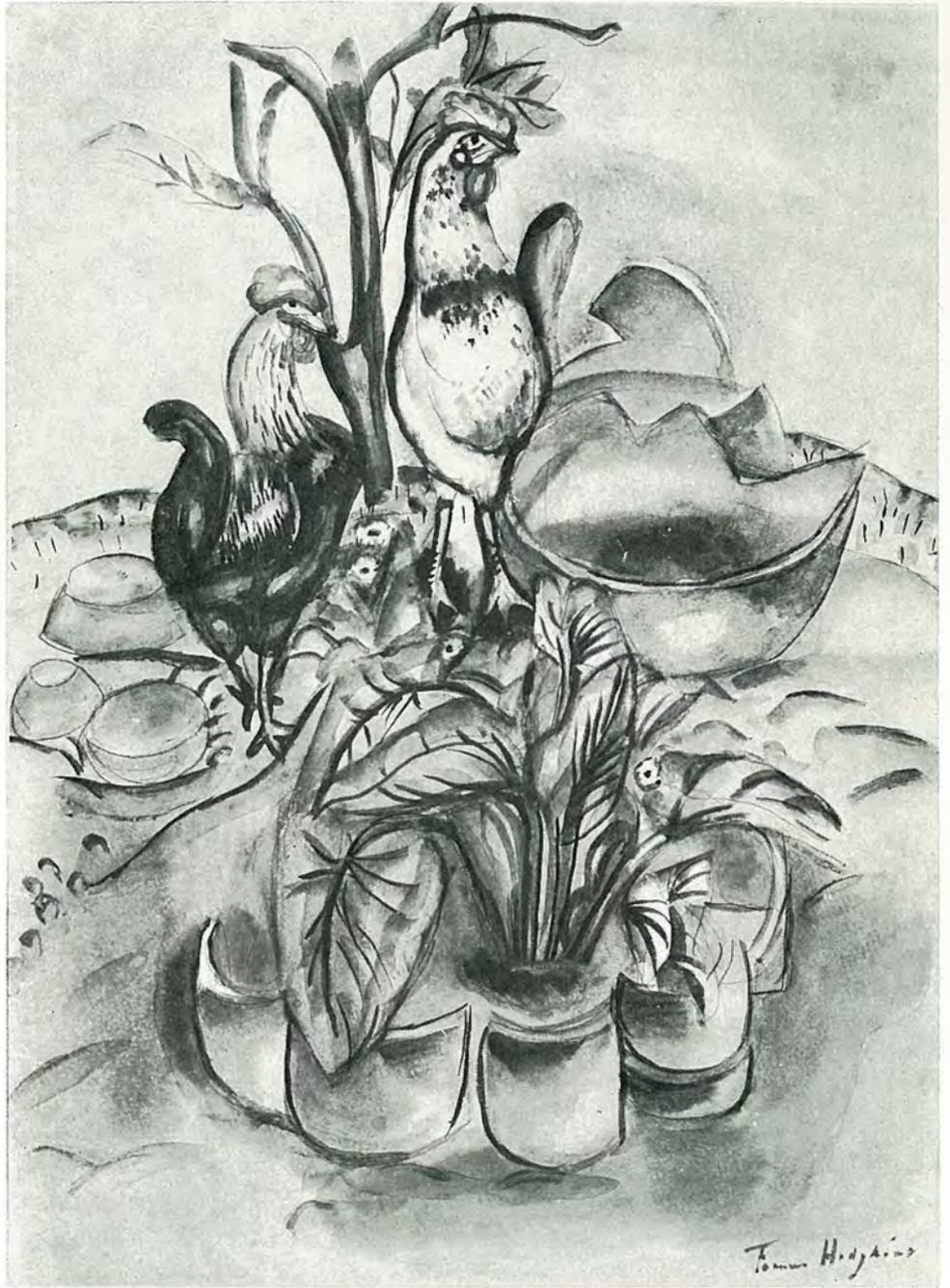
MAORI WOMAN'S HEAD. Watercolour, $13\frac{7}{8}$ x $10\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1913. Mr and Mrs Peter Field.



DOUBLE PORTRAIT. Oil, 24 x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. 1922. Mr C. O. Brasch.



MOTHER AND CHILD. Watercolour, 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1927. Mr Peter Millard.



PLANTS AND COCKERELS. Watercolour, 18¼ x 14 in. 1928. Mrs Alan Ward.



THE RED COCKEREL. Oil, 27 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 36 in. 1924. Public Art Gallery, Dunedin.

The Quest for Frances Hodgkins



JUNE OPIE

THEY remembered her vividly, they talk of her as if she had recently been with them—twenty-one people who knew Frances Hodgkins during the forty years she spent in England and Europe. They knew her, worked with her, loved her.

One of them is Douglas Glass her compatriot, born in New Zealand, a photographer of international fame now living in Kent. A dynamic man with a beard and a great mane of jet-black, steel-grey hair, rooted in rebellion, a man of intellectual vitality and passion.

'Frances,' he said leaning forward, emphasising her name, 'is one of the persons in the world I'd say I love, in the deepest . . . deepest sense possible. In some funny way, perhaps, I could say I loved her more than my wife in a—another category—in another department of love. But she had that capacity to . . . *give* a terrible lot, without appearing to give. She said, "Douglas—just don't be afraid," because I was afraid, you see. I used to lie like stink about everything. It was the only way I could tackle life, really. And it was people like Frances—she was earlier than my wife—who somehow, by their own

conduct the very way *they* lived, showed me that . . . there's nothing to be afraid of. There's, really, nothing to be afraid of. And shortly—you know, after a time, you feel *safe* in that area with this person. And affection grows out of that. She *never* moralized at all. And having been brought up in a moralizing atmosphere this is very precious to me.' Douglas Glass was momentarily still and then in one characteristic animal-like gesture his whole body straightened, his eyes looked directly into mine, 'She was a *very very* witty woman. I remember once . . . I'd been to France and amongst other people, I'd met Léger. I was young and enthusing about him—he was the fashion at the time—I'd been impressed with my encounter with Léger. "Léger, Douglas! However could you like that man's paintings," she said, "he's nothing but an inspired plumber!"' A great snort of laughter ended his fun and he leaned forward impetuously. 'I wish you could have known her,' he said, 'to hear her, I mean. She was an absolute original, her painting was original, anything she had to say was original, and even in her dress she was original.'

They all spoke of her originality and her wit. They all spoke of her poverty. She was a revolutionary and one of the most important indicators of what she contributed and continues to contribute to painting is to be found in the 7 and 5 Society and what it stood for in 1929 when she was elected to it. Its membership then reads like a roll of honour today: Dame Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland and John Piper were members. Frances Hodgkins was invited to join this group when she was sixty and they were in their twenties. She alone, of her generation, was painting the way the young people were painting. They understood her work and the importance of the Society was in bringing all these people together, strengthening them in their struggle against a largely alien climate. I asked Henry Moore about the Society. He replied: 'The 7 and 5 Society was formed long before I became a member of it and it was, in the beginning, rather an academic body. Its name came from the idea of having seven painters and five sculptors, although I doubt whether there would have been five interesting sculptors in those days because sculpture was very little practised and appreciated then. A lot of the artists, later, probably became members of the Royal Academy but, at some stage, people like Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson and David Jones became members and their idea was to try and make it into a more contemporary exhibiting society. In those days so-called experimental artists found it very difficult to have exhibitions on their own.'

And of Frances Hodgkins, Henry Moore said: 'I remember, very well, meeting her in her own studio. I liked her very much. She was several years older than I, but I found she had a twinkle in her eye and a sense of humour. She had both a critical appreciation of, and attitude towards other artists and painters; and she knew very clearly what her own direction was. I liked her work very much; there was, for those times, a freshness, a very individual sense of colour. One could recognize a Frances Hodgkins from a long distance purely by colour alone. There was a distinct Frances Hodgkins colour sense, colour scheme, I think that her gouache and water-colour I preferred to her oil painting.'

Among her particular young friends, and also members of the 7 and 5 were John and Myfanwy Piper. Frances Hodgkins often visited their farmhouse at Fawley Bottom, I went to the same farmhouse, travelling along the road out of Henley-on-Thames which Frances Hodgkins often took when

she went to stay with them. The approach to the house is along a narrow road with a high wooded bank on one side and a slight descent on the other which was also heavily wooded but between the trunks of the trees I could see newly cut barley and corn fields curving and sloping, coming together in folds to form the countryside then going out again. Fawley Bottom Farmhouse looks well in this country because it is part of it; long rectangular rooms, a kitchen with a flag stone floor, long wooden refectory-like table, a stove which backed onto a huge coal bunker separating the kitchen from another large rectangular room in which John Piper does much of his painting, using only an oil stove for heating.

When Frances Hodgkins first began visiting them there, John and Myfanwy Piper were very young and had not long been married. They came to love her, as the following conversation shows:

JOHN PIPER: 'I must say she always seemed to me—and to us in general—the most normal person in the sense of not being in any way exceptional or outside this closed circle. She was a highly intelligent woman whom I thought was an extremely good painter and that is how I regarded her and is the reason why I loved her. She was part of us—with no parish, country, climate or anything else attached to her. She was just herself and she was such a sensitive person that she was very good at adopting the colour of the climate she was in—like a fish on the bottom of the sea.'

MYFANWY PIPER: 'But she did have a very strong idea of what, and how, she could develop, and she kept along those lines. She didn't get stuck in one aspect of her own work.'

JOHN PIPER: 'After a time the good artist sees the possibilities of developing a line that he has been taking for some time, and she was like any other good artist in doing that. She didn't want to repeat herself.'

MYFANWY PIPER: 'And pushing it so far that she was left almost without objects but with colour—but still was very aware that all the objects were there, and all her influences were there. She used to go up the road from here, where there was a farmyard, and the farmer was a rather eccentric old man who believed that we should all be going back to barter by the end of the war, so he collected the most cumbrous and ridiculous objects that he could lay hands on in his yard—old steam engines and old doors, old beds, old lavatory basins and all sorts of things. His yard was an incredible junky mess, and



A COUNTRY WINDOW. Oil, 24 x 29 in. 1929. Mr John Aldridge.

Frances adored it. She used to sit and gape at it and make drawings of it and paint it. One of her late large paintings was based on it, wasn't it?

JOHN PIPER: 'Yes, it was. It suited her because she was able to select among these objects the shapes that she liked, and the colours. It was full of virtue and beauty in her eyes—and she would see that it was frightfully funny that she liked this great assemblage of nonsense in this yard, at the same time as really liking it very much and seeing the point of it, which is greatly to her credit and merit. She had a tremendous sense of fun, she was a great wit. I can remember an occasion when there was a lithograph by a rather good artist whom she admired, called Eric Ravilious, who lost his life in the war when he was acting as a war artist. He had done a painting, or rather a lithograph, of a pier

running out into the sea at Newhaven. It was a summery kind of picture, all in blues and greys and whites, quite gay, but at the same time it was very arid in an odd way—and, almost conventionally pretty. I remember Frances Hodgkins looking at it when she first saw it, putting her head on one side and saying, "So glad he didn't put a seagull in!"'

MYFANWY PIPER: 'Her wit was a kind of weapon. She used this capacity for sharp comment and for fun as a way of keeping away from people. It's rather difficult to describe because she didn't want intimacy—she was afraid that intimacy would stop her from concentrating on her work.'

JOHN PIPER: 'In this she was very like Paul Cézanne, and I think she was aware of Cézanne's horror of getting intimate with people. She was lonely.'



THE BROKEN BOWL. Watercolour, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1929. Mr Dunstan Curtis.

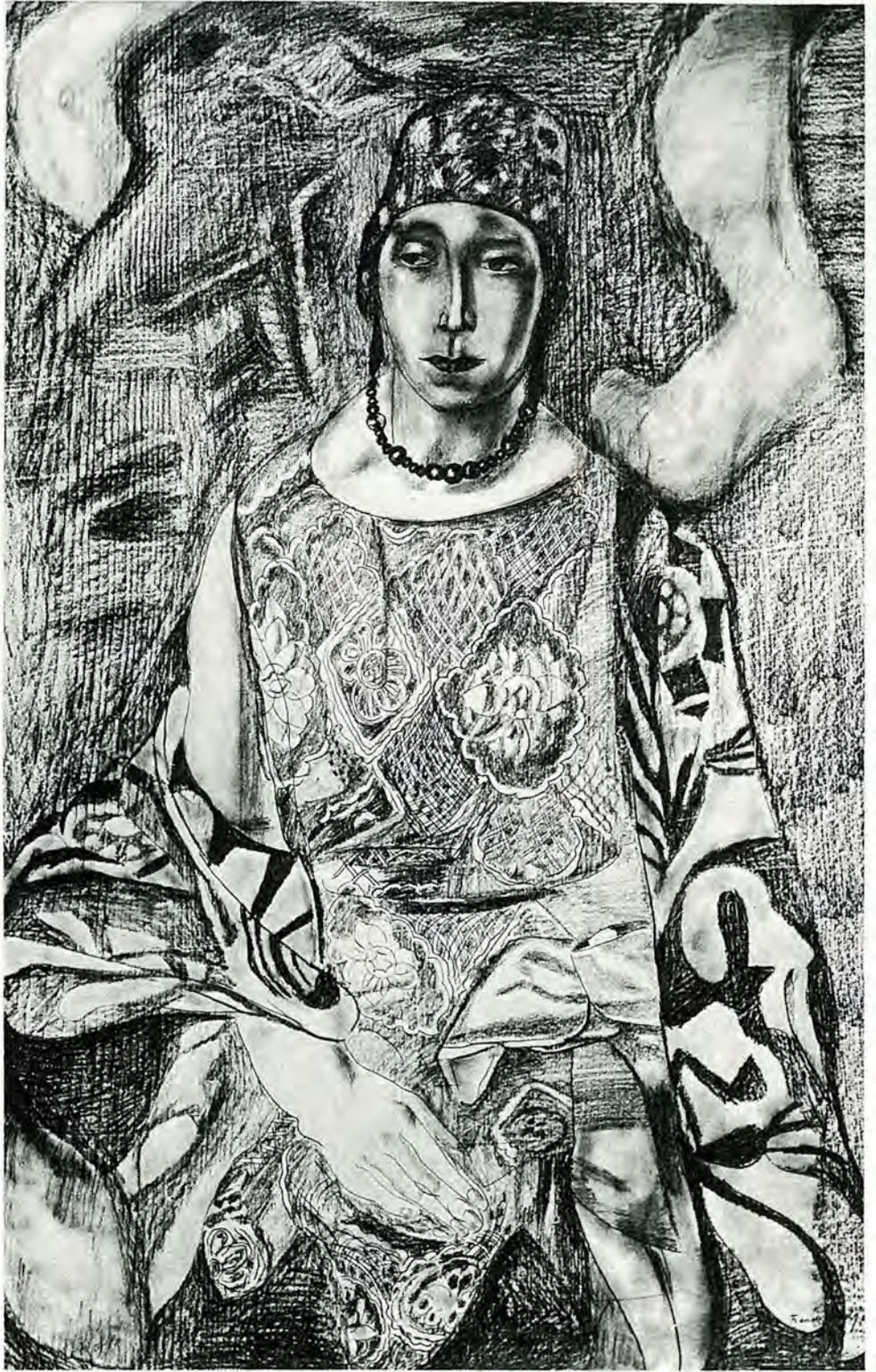
Even after the discussion with the Pipers was finished and we were talking of other things, Frances Hodgkins' personality remained with us. As I was leaving the farmhouse, passing through the long stone kitchen, Myfanwy Piper pointed to a large marmalade cat bunched against the warm stove: 'Frances loved those,' she said.

And Jane Saunders, from her cottage in Wiltshire, said the same: 'She loved cats, she would have loved our cat, that one there,' indicating a gigantic unheeding tabby spread determinedly in the best position in front of a wood fire, 'and she loved flowers. Small things moved her, she was very sympathetic to all life, all creatures. But of course,' with a shrug which accepted the inevitable, 'she was a creative genius,' and, after a pause, this beautifully-spoken, brown-eyed subject of *Double Portrait*, now in her eightieth year, went on, her mind racing ahead, her eyes sparkling. 'Something happens to everything

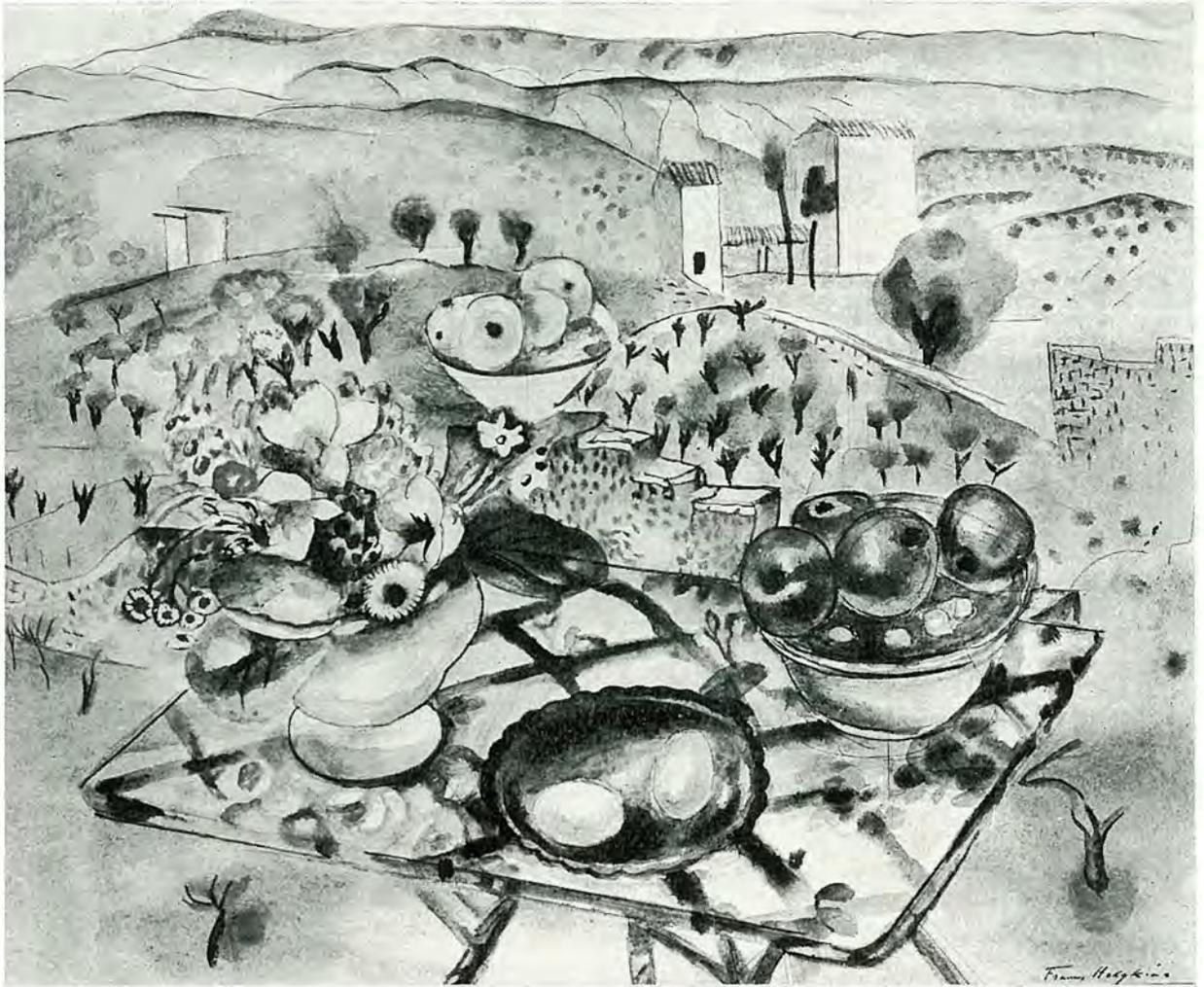
you're making into a picture, whatever you see, whether it's a cat, or a fire, a flame or a pot. You must do something to it before you can create a picture. It goes into your mind and it comes out again transformed. Frances could transmute everything into an interesting object. Too interesting sometimes! It was like the people who could make gold by touching it, wasn't it? Like the Midas touch. Everything she touched could become a beautiful picture.'

The genius of Frances Hodgkins lies in her sensitivity to colour. The late Sir Herbert Read said of her, 'Frances Hodgkins developed one of the richest styles in English painting—she had an innocent eye.' She looked at everything with this innocent eye. It brought a quality to her painting, and her conversation, which was uniquely hers.

Ben Nicholson described a visit from her. 'I think Frances Hodgkins' work speaks for her and that



SEATED WOMAN. Chalk, 37 x 23½ in. 1929. The Tate Gallery, London.



STILL LIFE. Watercolour, 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 22 in. 1929. Wakefield City Art Gallery.

nothing further is really necessary. I saw her in London both at her studio, and at Barbara Hepworth's and my studio, where she arrived one particularly cold frosty morning and, coming in, removed from her bosom several daily papers which she'd used to keep herself warm. Propped up on the mantelpiece, at the end of the studio, was a small painting I'd made to illustrate a children's book—the rump and tail of a horse projected from one side of a hillock in the landscape and the head came out on the other side. At the sight of this she made straight for it and laughed *like* a horse! In fact she was a 'card'. People have interpreted the story of the newspapers as a sign of poverty, but I had no feeling that this was so, if one is a 'card' surely this is all part of it.

'Her dealer, Duncan Macdonald, Director of the

Lefevre Gallery, was also my dealer and I knew from him that he had a contract with her—and, as he was a most enlightened and responsible man, I am sure that this contract would have provided her with enough to live on, and work, under the kind of conditions she needed.

'Her vision is very much her own and her humour delightful. I remember when I first met Barbara Hepworth she had just seen an exhibition of her (F.H.'s) work and much admired it. I also certainly admired it and suggested she should be invited to become a member of 'Unit One', but she was unwilling to accept, and, perhaps, to become a member of any group was not in the nature of a 'card'. She is certainly a fine painter.'

It is very difficult, today, to understand just how poor Frances Hodgkins was or how she survived the



STILL LIFE WITH EGGS, MUSHROOMS AND TOMATOES ON A TABLE. Oil, 25½ x 21 in. 1929. Public Library and Museum, Hove.

appalling conditions under which she lived. She knew hunger over long periods, was almost permanently cold and had to accept gifts of blankets and clothes from friends. At the age of sixty-three she was found in her basement studio with the water and light turned off: she had pawned everything and was lying in bed covered in newspapers. Arthur Lett Haines rescued her, motored her down to his mother's house in the country, fitted her up and set her to work. I asked him if she would have felt this as an indignity and he said, vehemently: 'Oh, yes!

But on the other hand she was in such desperate straits she could hardly complain. But she didn't like people knowing.'

Today Lett Haines and Cedric Morris share a house near Ipswich. They are a remarkable couple, Sir Cedric six feet tall, Lett Haines above that; their use of and pleasure in the English language is a privilege to encounter. They are eighty, stand splendidly erect, both slim, both still painting—Sir Cedric had an exhibition last year—and still teaching painting. They were friends of Frances

Hodgkins for over thirty years, loved and admired her, helped her but made no demands. They are still angry at the treatment she received from art dealers. Sir Cedric rammed a long indignant finger into his freshly-filled pipe, 'She was treated *disgracefully* all round,' he declared.

In 1932 she was offered a contract with Reid and Lefevre, giving her £200 a year for forty-eight paintings and they had the right of choice. Douglas Glass told me that she destroyed a vast amount of work during this period, tearing it up or painting large black crosses over it. He found her, on more than one occasion, in tears. 'I'm cheating, Douglas!' she cried, 'I'm not being true to myself, I'm cheating in order to try and pay back the debt I owe,' and more work would be destroyed. She was a person of unassailable integrity and, in 1939, withdrew from the contract.

Dame Barbara Hepworth commented on the difficulties of this revolutionary period of art in the 1930s. 'I always remember, with considerable excitement, my first acquaintance with the painting of Frances Hodgkins. It must have been about 1929 or 1930 at St. George's Gallery in London. The work had great strength and purity and was so individual that it was like discovering some new world.

'I think I only met her twice because I was so tied up with the care of home and children, but she came once to my studio and I was delighted by her wit and gaiety and her quick appreciative feeling for sculpture. I was in close touch with her painting throughout the thirties because of the 7 and 5 exhibitions and the fact that we were under the wing of the same gallery, the Lefevre Gallery. The late Duncan Macdonald had so many of us under his wing. His great gift was in sustaining the artists of that time and completely believing in what they were doing and, to all of us who know him, our debt is immense for in those times, which were so very difficult financially, his constant care and faith meant so very much. We were maintained, during the thirties, by the encouragement of a handful of people who seemed to have complete faith in what we were doing although we were not able to sell much. For people like Frances Hodgkins, Ben Nicholson, myself and many others it was perhaps one of the happiest of times although it was so very difficult to make a living.

'Frances Hodgkins seemed to me to have the most tremendous courage and dedication; but I often thought how very difficult it was to be so very much alone. We all loved her and the other artists in our group admired her work and truly appreciated it;

and I think it was the fact that the contemporary artists of that period understood each other's work that produced a very real revolution in sculpture, painting and architecture by the very unity of our spirit and our friendship.'

Although she did not wish to become intimately involved with other people Frances Hodgkins was generous and warm-hearted in her relationship with them, as Winifred Nicholson recalled. 'My grandfather was a Pre-Raphaelite and since then I've been interested in abstract painting and I've had very many friendships which I value very much, friendships with interesting people that I've met, interesting painters, and of these Frances Hodgkins was certainly a very interesting friend. And she liked my work which gave me a great deal of encouragement; I was very grateful to her and always remembered her. When you're starting it's very nice to have an older and established painter help you and encourage you and I was very grateful for the help she gave me.

'I remember that when I had gone down, with my three children, to a little house in Cornwall—called Penpillock—and she was staying, I discovered presently and with great pleasure because I knew nobody there, in Fowey, a Cornish village near the sea. And I took my father to see her when I discovered she was there and she gave us tea in a little funny dark Cornish room, looking over a ferry and a shining sea—and I was very pleased because my father liked her so much. They had a gay conversation. My father was six foot four and rather stiff, and stern and English—he generally didn't like painters very much, he thought them funny, but he admired her and they had a very interesting intellectual conversation. I don't know what about, I only remember that we had sardines, Cornish cream and jam for tea; all mixed up! This he thought very funny but afterwards, on the way home, he said what an interesting person she was and how she had a Shakespearian sense of humour.

'We used to talk together and she told me that after one was sixty one could get clear of emotional relationships and the difficulties of making them work and then one could really settle down to painting. She felt she was free after sixty, detached from other human beings. I don't think it's true . . . but she was very clear that she did . . . and she reached a standard, during the last bit of her life, that was very different from anything she did in her earlier work and came out on top as one of the leading women painters of her generation. Of course there haven't been very many really good women



MOTHER AND CHILD. Pencil, 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 14 in. 1930. Salford Museum and Art Gallery.



PRIMULAS. Pencil, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. 1930. The British Council, London.

painters and I think that she is more and more being recognized as one of her generation who was so valuable as a painter.'

While interviewing Frances Hodgkins' surviving friends and fellow artists I was interested to find three eminent men, a critic, a writer and a painter, independently commenting on her contribution, as a

woman, to the arts. The first, the late Eric Newton: 'That she is a woman is important. Femininity does mean something in art. It means, in her case, a quite hair-raising reliance on instinct, and a rather disturbing refusal to be logical or prudent. It is a method that could lead to the worst kind of aesthetic disaster—without her genius for colour orchestration



TWO CHILDREN. Oil, 28 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1930. Auckland City Art Gallery.



STILL LIFE. Pencil, 15¼ x 18¼ in. 1931. City of Manchester Art Galleries.

. . . Then Geoffrey Gorer, whom I met this year, writing in the *Listener*, June 1947: 'Frances Hodgkins is a serious woman painter as Emily Brontë or Jane Austen . . . are serious women writers. Like these women she has a contribution to make to the experience of the world which no man could provide.' Finally, John Piper in *Horizon*: 'Painting is difficult enough anyway but a woman painter, if she is going to be a woman painter, has an enormous task added; she has to create a woman's standard. Few women painters manage to make a standard for themselves at all; on the whole sixty is decidedly young to do so. Frances Hodgkins' standard was formed on long experience, and in the end she covered ground that belongs to no other artist.'

In the last eight years of her life she became celebrated. She settled at Corfe Castle in Dorset. One of the members of the 7 and 5 to see her at Corfe

was Graham Sutherland, who spoke of her unique influence towards greater freedom in the visual arts. 'It was when I was teaching at the Chelsea School of Art, about the year 1929 or 1930, that a whisper went around that there was an artist of originality working in England. Frances Hodgkins became, at that time, quite a myth and I can remember even such small things as people saying that she mounted her gouaches in the "French" way, and that she drew landscapes in front of which were placed still-lives. This seemed, at the time, a daring procedure and when, eventually, I saw her work what had been said was entirely borne out.

'Then from time to time when I was in Wales, or wherever, I came across an elderly lady sitting in front of a huge piece of brownish paper painting the most picturesque subjects in the most un-picturesque way, with a slightly child-like vision and a com-



IBIZA HARBOUR. Oil, 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. 1933. Mrs Lea Jaray-Bondi.

pletely free palette. I never, then, was brave enough to go up to her and speak to her but, eventually, I did find myself within two doors of her studio at Corfe Castle in Dorset and, somehow, my wife and I were able to meet her.

'I remember my wife did a caricature of me walking down the street arm in arm with the old lady, she being so small that she made me appear tall. I saw the last work that she was engaged on.

'I think that she had, without question, a moral effect on artists of that day, far more than any other woman artist; she was virtually the only one who was artistically emancipated and was already speaking the language which gradually spelt freedom in art; away from the Academies and the academic tradition generally.

'One was not conscious at all that she was, in her painting, a New Zealander. She just seemed to know exactly what she wanted to do and there appears to be no question in her mind that she was doing anything particularly pioneering.'

Frances Hodgkins has left a legend, an inspiration not only to creative artists but to all human beings. Sir Cedric Morris said, in his lilting Welsh voice: 'She was a very gallant person as I knew her. I think of what she did, of how she faced up to the appalling difficulties of that time without any money, and of her being a woman. Her courage was phenomenal. It was something the same as Modigliani did, but it killed Modigliani. It didn't kill her.'

October 20, 1969



THE WHITE HOUSE. Oil, 26 x 25 in. 1931. Art Gallery of New South Wales.



WINGS OVER WATER. Oil, 28 x 36 in. 1932. The Tate Gallery, London.



KATHARINE AND ANTHONY WEST. Oil, 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1937. National Art Gallery, Wellington.

Frances Hodgkins and a New Tradition



SHAY DOCKING

THE elapse of two decades since Frances Hodgkins' death brings us to a time when we can begin to assess objectively her contribution to painting. That this can be and must be done in terms of several factors, makes her presence as a twentieth century artist more and more interesting. In many ways her appearance as a major artist, while it can be thought of as an expected event, is a fascinating and often misunderstood phenomenon amongst the evolutionary happenings of this era.

Primarily her contribution stands on the quality of her painting, its originality and strength of vision, the power and validity of its statement. The level of these achievements must be looked at in terms of art history—in the context of her time and place, which in turn of course is measured in the broader context of history itself.

Secondly, her presence is interesting because she was a woman, and as such, a professional and creative painter. It is still no cliché to single out this circumstance as a recent event of sociological evolution, and part of a new tradition. She was in fact the first woman painter in the English speaking

world to achieve a level of greatness (including such considerable figures as Mary Cassatt). And to my mind, with the exception of Marie Laurencin (whose work surely equals Frances Hodgkins' in its qualities of delicate and visionary colour; and light of tender and extraordinary subtlety), she emerges as perhaps the most important woman painter in history—up to the very recent past.

She broke through to a degree of creativity which placed her without reservation on a level of acceptance as an impressively germinal figure, of the creative movement which developed in the 1930s and 40s in Britain. It flowered in her own work, produced till within a year of her death, and took many other directions in the work of younger members of this very famous group which included Nicholson, Moore, Hepworth, Sutherland—all of whom regard her painting with immense respect and admiration, and remember Frances herself with affection. They unreservedly accepted and revered her painting as a spearhead for their own searching—although she was then an elderly lady in her sixties. More research needs to be done as to just



A CORNISH GARDEN. Gouache, 21¼ x 17¼ in. 1933. Sheffield Art Gallery.

how much she did influence other artists at this time—I suspect that she may prove to be greater than we think, in that hers were some of the creative ideas from which grew considerable later developments.

These facts about her are astonishing. Added to them is the triumph manifested in her years of struggle—to gradually, painfully develop and bring to fruition from her first tentative glimmerings, this very late manifestation of a vision which was concerned with light, colour calligraphy, and the magic

of well-loved domestic objects, occurrences and environments.

This late maturing is surely unique. Such a sustaining of vision and drive towards gradual unfolding is psychologically rare (most artists have more than hinted at their possibilities by their thirties and if they haven't made any expression of them by their forties, have opted for substitutes or dropped out). But Frances Hodgkins evidenced a simple, dedicated and stubborn faith in her potential, endured very real distress, poverty and



PUMPKINS AND PIMENTI. Gouache, 20 x 28 in. 1935. Sir Kenneth Clark.

illness, and public disinterest in her advanced work, for nearly all her years in England—in her determination to win through to the limits of her possibilities. Rare courage indeed. It would have been so much easier to decide for acceptance of her earlier successfully received style, back in New Zealand. But at that stage, art in England was beginning to break away from the academic stagnation inherited from the 19th century, and held a challenge. Frances Hodgkins was part of the initial spring which bubbled through and away from the mud of ponderous respectability. The academic attitude, as a residue of colonial culture, then still held sway in New Zealand. Today in the late 60s and early 70s, the position is reversed. The 'new academy', to quote the New York critic, writer and doyen of contemporary American art, Clement Greenberg, exists in the *avant garde*. The new academy is established in London and New York. Each trend and change in the *zeitgeist* spreads like a wave (or an infection) throughout the world.

'Today . . . the avant-garde is left alone with

itself, and in full possession of the "scene". This hardly means that the kind of impulse and ambition that once went into avowedly academic art has now become extinct. Far from it. That kind of impulse and that kind of ambition now find their way into avant-garde, or rather nominally avant-garde, art. All the sloganizing and programming of advanced art in the 60s, and the very proliferation of it, are as though designed to conceal this. In effect, the avant-garde is being infiltrated by the enemy, and has begun to deny itself. When everything is advanced nothing is; when everybody is a revolutionary the revolution is over.'¹

There is indeed, more possibility in New Zealand at present, for real creativity and challenge to creative thinking. For here, the paraphernalia of the new academy, with its institutes and power and pressure to conform (just as the Victorian academy possessed), have not yet resulted in the cults of 'internationalism' which are stultifying the outlook of many creative artists throughout the world. Perhaps instead of the 'old fuddy duddies' of some



KIMMERIDGE FORESHORE. Oil, 30 x 40 in. 1938. Staff Common Room, Victoria University of Wellington.

years ago, there are now on the international level, many *young* 'fuddy duddies', who follow slavishly the edicts of the tastemakers—those popular culture heroes, whose work and names, publicized by the public relations machine to rapid international renown, equate and echo those of Lord Leighton, Frith and a dozen others of seventy years ago.

This is the predicament into which a creative artist of personal vision can be thrown—and, it seems, whether living or dead.

It would bring a chuckle to Frances Hodgkins and stir her tremendous sense of fun, that thirty years after her death, she is still getting into hot water for what amounts to not conforming to the demands of present day academic '*avant-garde*' thinking. For her Retrospective Exhibition of 1969 drew misunderstanding of this kind within New Zealand. But as Greenberg points out lucidly—'*avant garde*' is a misnomer—the true *avant garde*

being the independently creative artists whose vision stands apart from the *zeitgeist's* cults, and who usually are misunderstood by most people involved with art in their day and even decades after their day. William Blake and Gerard Manley Hopkins come to mind as such superbly great and visionary artists, who were so completely alone as creators in their environment of '*avant garde*', academic 19th century England, that the one was forced to retreat to his private and family circle, in order to continue creating. The other did not attempt to publish a line of his poetry knowing that it could never then be comprehended—as indeed proved to be the case. Nearly thirty years after his death this magnificent poetry was at last published (in 1918) and even now communicates to few at its true level so far in advance was his thinking; as was his method of expressing it.

Even if as the last decade has shown, the *zeitgeist*



CIRCULAR BARN. Gouache, $22\frac{1}{2}$ x $17\frac{1}{2}$ in. 1939. Mr Eardley Knollys.

creates a powerful cult each manifestation lasts no more than three or so years, to give way to the new 'spirit of the times'—a sort of phoney and ephemeral Holy Ghost which powerfully sweeps over and creates infatuation for tastes which are predominantly fashionable. That the fashion has its validity and relevance is certain. The phenomenon is that the original impulse behind each

trend quickly becomes conformist, spreading immediately to the most obscure corners of the world through medium of the 'glossies'; the lavish and expensive publicity magazines. It's a big organization and a big deal. The sensibilities of its followers are orientated exclusively towards the aesthetic dictated. Academic pompousness is often added to youthful arrogance. Sadly, nothing can



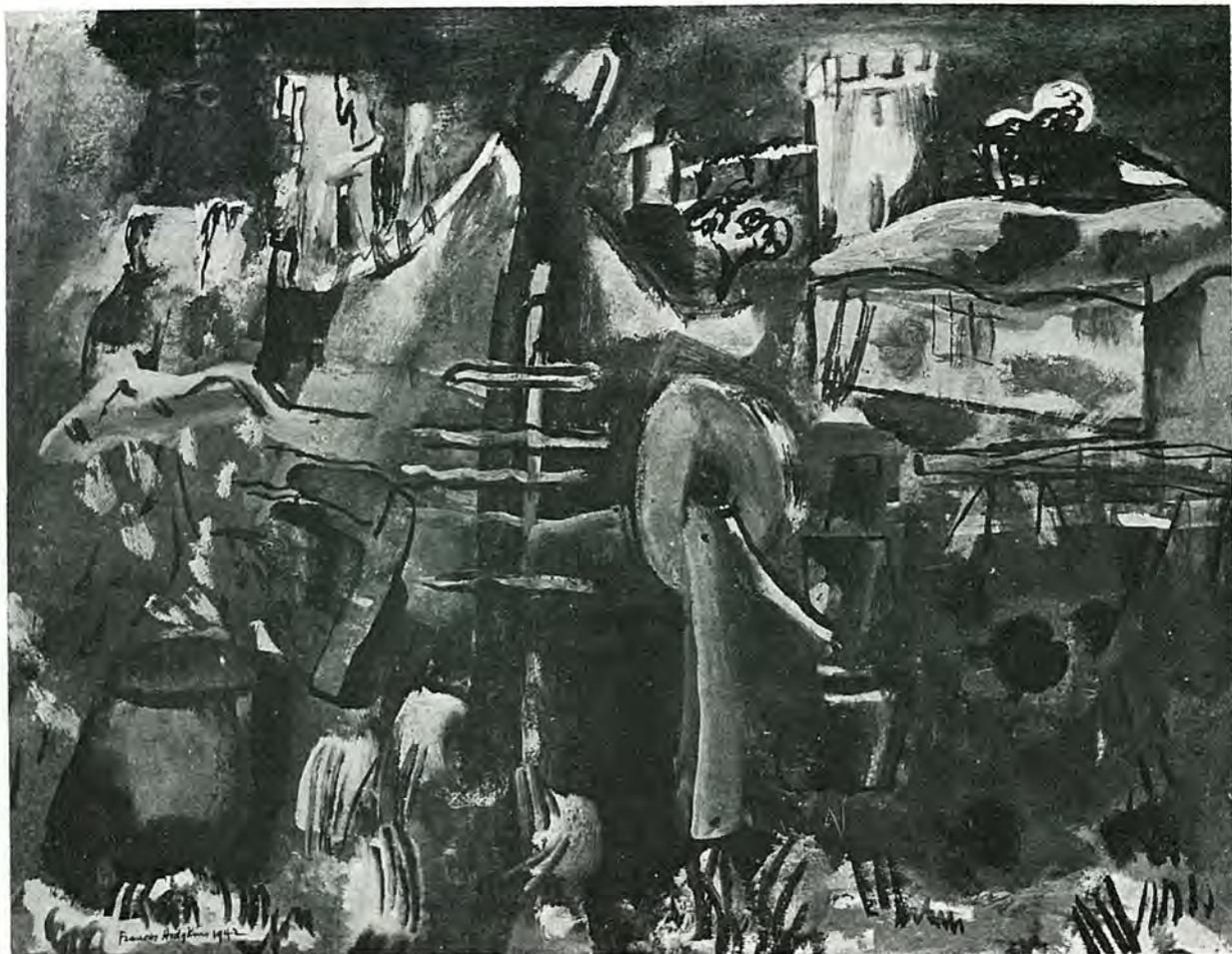
MUSHROOMS. Gouache, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. 1941. Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford.

be contemplated tolerantly as worthwhile outside the mores and dictates of the academy. One can't feel that any of this has much to do with real creativity. 'The quality of art depends on inspired, felt relations or proportions as on nothing else. There is no getting around this . . . No amount of phenomenal, describable newness avails when the internal relations of the work have not been felt, inspired, discovered.'²

Frances Hodgkins, the painter who worked her way through the fog of an earlier academic conformism, through rigid if timid colonial attitudes, gradually released and realized her intuition and her insight, eventually giving the world the rare gift of an art which had emerged from the other end of a long search—unfolding in a precious and joyous revelation. She began her commitment in a family atmosphere of philosophical thought and aesthetic discussion. Such a climate of ideas, new to the young colony, was introduced as we know by her

father, the sensitive watercolourist William Hodgkins.

Perhaps in the family circle, sister Isobel manifested more brilliant talent. Frances' talent was not in any way extraordinary. But her *vision* grew to an awareness of fused light in landscape and interior. And her determination was immense. The seed of her late work is there in those early domestic genre studies and pictures of farmyard environments—her warm and ecstatic delight in life's simple accoutrements. She gradually released them from their sentimental and literary significance. Finally—she distilled from a deeper level of identification with the subject and from the aesthetic demands of painting, simple and fluid statements. Her contact with European art of the modern movements, especially Cubism, and her avidly sought exposure to the works of European history, had shaped and refined her vision. These later works place her in the marvellous company which includes Chardin,



CHURCH AND CASTLE, CORFE. Gouache, 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. 1942. Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.

Braque and Morandi. Like them she took everyday objects and invested them with splendid life. At their finest these works are charged with spiritual joy.

Frances Hodgkins' father must have provided her with an image of life-long staying power, necessary in her approach to what she did. His empathy and response to nature (he was the first person to write and lecture creatively about the New Zealand landscape to a local audience); his breadth of intellect (which created the first tangible drive to enjoy the visual arts in New Zealand), must have given an authoritatively positive symbol of direction to her unconscious mind.

If we accept Jung's persuasive theory of *anima* and *animus*³ as being the female and male principles in the subconscious minds of men and women respectively; as the all important counter image which fulfills and balances our personalities, and is

always by natural law, based on the image of the parent of the opposite sex—fortune favoured Frances. For her *animus* image—derived from the strong and positive personality of her father, must have been the hidden subconscious direction which sustained her drive. It developed her vision and secured her faith and confidence that the goal she set herself was her right and proper destiny. So that eventually, dedication and sheer hard work transcended a talent which her early output evidences as no more considerable than that of her New Zealand contemporaries. Perhaps this is another example of the old truth that brilliant gifts and virtuosity of performance are not necessarily qualities of a great artist—indeed, countless 'prodigies' and young artists of extraordinary promise have stumbled and fallen *because* of their talents,—where again and again, creators we recognize as great have possessed only the *necessary* amount of



THE FARMPOND. Gouache, 19 x 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 1943. Mr Peter Millard.

talent, (i.e., technical and intellectual ability). But they have possessed in quantity the potential for tremendous intuitive and spiritual growth. And the practical good sense to realize the relevant qualities of such things. Often, such realization has been discovered as the result of a soul-searching and agonising experience.

As well as her family environment, there was Frances Hodgkins' colonial background. Did these beginnings give her the precocity to imagine, to believe, that a woman could succeed? In pioneering days women had by the sheer need of circumstance, been given the opportunity to function alongside men. And most occupations which they were physically capable of carrying out, they did quite naturally, without thought that it was anything but what was expected of them, as people playing their part. So that Frances would never have expected to do otherwise than that which seemed ordained for her. Just as the sheer needs of the years during

and after the two world wars accelerated the acceptance of women working in vocations, the pioneering years of the colonies caused a huge leap forward in this area of social evolution. It is no accident that New Zealand was the first country to grant women franchise.

We have by now (in the 1970s) reached the point in history where we totally accept that women have the capacity to use their intelligence, their experience, their gifts, to contribute through their chosen vocations to society. To communicate their vision and identification with life *as* women, as well as persons. A woman must express herself as a woman. She must write as a woman; she must paint as a woman. Thus her contribution is more authentic and valuable.

If perhaps no woman has yet, in the visual arts, reached the heights of the very greatest painters and sculptors (although I suspect that Barbara Hepworth's achievement will be increasingly highly



PURBECK COURTYARD. Oil, 28 x 24 in. 1944. Southampton Art Gallery.



CHRISTMAS TREE. Oil, 50 x 40 in. 1945. Dr Leonard Hamilton.

regarded), this does not mean anything but that it is yet to happen—as happen it will. For sociological evolution, like the thaw of a frozen river in spring-time, has now brought us to the melting, breaking up and tumultuous churning of the ice floes. For centuries, society rigidly dictated the behaviour and station of females. This was originally necessary. Societies' structures grow basically from good and right needs—women are childbearers, guardians of race and domestic life—this must always be female

priority, for otherwise society would perish. But this defining of woman's station did become an excuse for a neurotic and often insidious sexual apartheid to become imposed. For nothing affects human society at its roots as much as the position of women.

When, in perhaps fifty years, two or three generations having in turn, matured and evolved, the melted floes of the most devastatingly disruptive, if the most subtly *quiet* revolution in history, have

ceased their agitation and the river finds its own depth and level, I believe we can expect life to regain a direction (and a new one) deeper and wider for the fact that both men and women function naturally as fulfilled and creative humans, contributing in their unique and complementary ways to society.

And of course, there will be great artists who will be women, whose minds, like Frances Hodgkins', will become 'unimpeded and incandescent.'¹ But this could not happen if it were not for the tradition begun by a few women a century ago, and propelled forward by significant artists such as Frances Hodgkins. She shows forth in her courage,

and humour, and love, and faith—and in her exquisite paintings.

NOTES

- ¹ Clement Greenberg. *Avant-garde attitudes*. The John Power Lecture in Contemporary Art, 1968. Published by the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney. Page 9.
- ² *Ibid.* Page 10.
- ³ Frieda Fordham. *An introduction to Jung's Psychology* Pelican Books. Chapter 3. Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious. Page 52.
- ⁴ Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*. Penguin Modern Classics. Page 58.

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