

The Wertheim Room

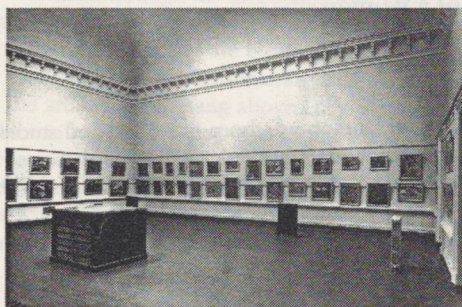
Good luck to the Auckland City Art Gallery for its enterprise and vision in sponsoring a collection comprising numerous masters of tomorrow. May it give the folk of Auckland lasting pleasure is the wish of its Lancashire donor.

So said Lucy Carrington Wertheim in her cablegram to the Auckland City Art Gallery, on the opening of the Wertheim Room in December 1948. This gallery, which had previously served as the Council Chambers, was re-decorated to conform with Lucy Wertheim's specific requirements for the display of her gift of 44 oil paintings, 81 watercolours and 26 prints. She was determined that her paintings, by contemporary English artists, should be framed and hung in keeping with their modern look.

The original impact of this display was considerable. The paintings may now no longer appear radical but, when seen alongside the academic pictures in the Mackelvie collection or the Lindauer and Goldie portraits, they were considered modern in the extreme. To some, this was an occasion for celebration, as the Gallery was thought finally to have caught up with the modern. For other viewers, the work provoked derision and incredulity.

This current selection and display has been designed to evoke the flavour of the original Wertheim Room. Although only a small sampler from the original gift, these works represent Lucy Carrington Wertheim's particular taste in art. Deeply committed to the encouragement of English art, Wertheim preferred paintings which evoked a feeling for objects, people and places. This often led her to search out fresh and at times naive responses to the world. Wertheim loved the free play of colour and a decorative manipulation of form. She shied away from the more difficult or 'intellectual' trends in English art, favouring works that displayed the 'sincerity and imagination' that she sought.

Lucy Carrington Wertheim's enthusiasm for the art she loved resulted in many acts of generosity, not least this major gift to the Auckland City Art Gallery. This collection offers a unique insight into the passions and predilections of a unique supporter of modern art in England. Though not all the artists represented are remembered today, the gift contains some key works that add to the Gallery's collection of modern English Art.



View of the Wertheim Room, Auckland City Art Gallery, December 1948
(photo: Sparrow Industrial Pictures)



Lucy Carrington Wertheim in 1938
(photo: Lafayette)

LUCY CARRINGTON WERTHEIM

Born in 1883, Lucy Carrington Wertheim was the daughter of a cloth merchant from Manchester. Proud of her Lancashire roots, Mrs Wertheim was a forthright North Country woman of comfortable means whose patronage of the visual arts made a considerable impression on the contemporary art scene in England, especially in the 1930s.

The Wertheim Gallery she ran in London between 1930 and 1939 provided a showcase for a wide range of young artists, many of whom belonged to the Twenties Group which she set up in 1930. In addition to her work as a collector and gallery owner, Lucy Wertheim briefly published a magazine: *Phoebus calling*; organised loan exhibitions and lectured on art. She published her reminiscences, *Adventure in art*, in 1947.

Generous to a fault, Lucy Wertheim would often give money, clothes and food, as well as more conventional support to her struggling artists. Frances Hodgkins was a recipient of her largesse in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as were Christopher Wood, Helmut K lle and Alfred Wallis.

Her major gift of oil paintings, watercolours and drawings to the Auckland City Art Gallery (in 1948 and 1950) is further testament to her generosity. This came about as a result of her contact with the writer, critic and artist, A.R.D. Fairburn, with whom she began corresponding in 1947. Her offer to the city of a dozen 'modern' pictures quickly swelled to over 200 works. She intended the collection to provide examples of modern art, to serve as a study aid for art students and to tour around New Zealand.

She died in Brighton in 1971.

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LIST OF WORKS

All works were presented to the Auckland City Art Gallery by Lucy Carrington Wertheim in 1948 or 1950.

1. Frances HODGKINS (1869 - 1947)

New Zealand / England

Bridesmaids 1930

oil on canvas

753 x 612 mm

This double portrait was painted in the summer of 1930. According to Lucy Wertheim, it was considered by Frances Hodgkins to be her 'best' up until that date. This work is one of the highlights of the Wertheim collection.

2. Jose CHRISTOPHERSON (born 1914) England

Ships in harbour circa 1930

oil on canvas

505 x 761 mm

Little information is available about this artist. However, this painting was singled out by *Auckland Star* reviewer A.C. Hipwell as 'most attractive', in his article on the Wertheim Collection in 1948. Hipwell was particularly impressed by the artist's manipulation of colour and his success in capturing the varied forms of a busy waterfront.

3. Suzanne COOPER (active 1930s) England

Royal Albion 1936

oil on canvas

518 x 606 mm

This painting was singled out for praise by reviewers when the Wertheim Room was opened in December 1948. A.C. Hipwell wrote in the *Auckland Star*:

Royal Albion is a delightfully gay and spirited interpretation of an old time English inn. With its quaint architecture, its courtyard and stalls, the horses and riders, it breathes the very spirit of England.

Such a remark suggests both enthusiasm for the work and a nostalgia for the charms of what many then still considered 'home'.

4. Christopher WOOD (1901 - 1930) England

The Sloop Inn, St Ives 1926

oil on canvas

754 x 623 mm

Lucy Wertheim was a close friend of Christopher Wood and one of the first collectors of his work. The opening

show at the Wertheim Gallery in 1930 was to be a solo exhibition of his work. However, the show had to be postponed because of Wood's tragic death under a train in Salisbury station. Wertheim, who had already purchased a number of his paintings, subsequently exhibited his work in February 1931. As her finances fluctuated during the 1930s, she would occasionally be forced to sell works from her collection of Wood's paintings. Her reluctance to part with his work makes *The Sloop Inn* a doubly precious part of her gift to the Gallery. Unfortunately, the painting was ridiculed by a sceptical New Zealand audience when it was first shown here in 1948.

5. Alfred WALLIS (1855 - 1942) England

The steamer 1930

ship's oil paint on cardboard

440 x 562 mm

Lucy Wertheim considered this painting one of her personal favourites. She met Alfred Wallis in 1930 and subsequently showed 20 of his paintings at The Wertheim Gallery in 1931. She describes meeting the Cornish fisherman, who only began painting in his 70s, in her autobiography, *Adventure in Art*:

I found the old man in his little bovel (for it seemed to me no better) painting away with what appeared to be boat paint on odd bits of canvas, old photographs and scraps of cardboard. He had a special predilection for the ends and sides of Quaker Oats boxes!

6. Rachel RECKITT (active 1935 - 1940) England

The farm circa 1935

oil on canvas

520 x 615 mm

This lyrical painting is a good example of the kind of work to which Lucy Wertheim was typically attracted. With its muted tones and simple forms, the painting sensitively captures a very 'English' rural scene.

7. R.O. DUNLOP (1894 - 1973) England

Head of a woman

oil on canvas

510 x 408 mm

Ronald Ossory Dunlop was born in Dublin and studied painting in Manchester and Paris. While his choice of subject matter is traditional, Dunlop's preference for thick impasto is reminiscent of the work of more recent expressionist painters like Leon Kossoff and Lucian Freud.

8. Maxwell BATES (1906 - 1980) Canada/England
Cafe interior 1934
oil on canvas
766 x 507 mm

Maxwell Bates is considered one of Canada's pioneer expressionists. He lived in England between 1931 and 1946, where he studied art and architecture. During the 1930s, Bates was a member of Lucy Wertheim's Twenties Group. He had a solo exhibition at the Wertheim Gallery in 1934. Although he is recognised as one of the first abstract artists in Canada, his work in England was largely figurative. *Cafe interior* demonstrates Bates's lively observational skills and his strong sense of colour.

9. R. Vivian PITCHFORTH (1895 - 1982) England
Portrait of Lucy Carrington Wertheim 1927
oil on canvas
760 x 640 mm

Vivian Pitchforth studied art in Leeds and London (at the Royal College of Art). In the 1930s he was a member of the London Group and taught at the Royal College of Art. He became Official War Artist in 1940. Pitchforth is one of the more established artists to be patronised by Lucy Wertheim. This portrait may have been included in the Wertheim collection in response to pleas from Auckland City Councillors for a portrait of their benefactor.

10. Rory MULLEN (born 1900) England
Woman thinking circa 1930
oil on canvas
615 x 510 mm

11. Cedric MORRIS (1889 - 1982) England
Djerba no 2 1926
oil on canvas
495 x 600 mm

Born in Wales, Cedric Morris studied in Paris under the artists Lhote and Léger. Morris came to the attention of Lucy Wertheim through his friendship with Frances Hodgkins and Christopher Wood. His paintings share their feeling for landscape, but are characterised by his use of thick paint and obvious brushmarks. This painting, a gift from the artist, used to hang above Lucy Wertheim's fireplace in her London flat. This room, with its paintings, sculpture, decorative ware and comfortable furnishings, was frequently referred to by many of the artists who spent time there.

12. Mosse CASTEL (active 1928 - 1931) France/
England
Village on the hill circa 1930
oil on canvas
346 x 266 mm

This is one of the few works by a non-British artist in the Wertheim collection. When the work was first displayed in 1951, the Auckland Star reviewer, Tom Bolster, was particularly attracted to the landscape with its 'fairy-like ascent to a dimly viewed continental chateau'. He may have been drawn to the particular European feel of the work.

13. Phelan GIBB (1870 - 1948) England
Abstract 1922
oil on cardboard
618 x 524 mm

Phelan Gibb studied art in Glasgow and Paris where he met Matisse, Braque and Gertrude Stein. Lucy Wertheim met Gibb in 1931 and, from that date, regularly exhibited and purchased his work, supporting him with money, food and clothes when his paintings did not sell. Gibb was an artist of uneven quality who lived in obscurity in Exmoor, despite his promising beginnings in Paris. This composition is a good example of his abstract work, with its cubist massing of forms in shallow space.

14. Kenneth HALL (1913 - 1947) England
Abstract circa 1935
oil on canvas
610 x 510 mm

Kenneth Hall submitted a portfolio of paintings to Lucy Wertheim in 1934. He was immediately given a solo exhibition at the Wertheim Gallery. Trained in agriculture, Hall turned to painting when his health failed. He was a close friend of Basil Rakoczi and they worked together in Ireland during the Second World War. Both Hall and Rakoczi were interested in psychoanalysis, using this as the basis for their imagery. With its strange interweaving of lines, which simultaneously describe a number of figures within a profile head, this 'abstract' may be a product of their psychological experiments.

15. Anne Marie TEN CATE (active 1930s) England
Madonna circa 1930s
oil on canvas
320 x 226 mm

16. Humphrey SPENDER (born 1910) England

Design for a tapestry 1947

crayon and watercolour

292 x 377 mm

Humphrey Spender is best known as a documentary photographer. However, he was also a painter, architect and designer. His career as a photographer reached a high point when he was appointed official War Office photographer during World War II. He also designed carpets, plastics, wallpapers and textiles. He was appointed tutor in textiles at the Royal College of Art in 1956, a position he held until 1976.

17. Olive LILLY (active 1930s) England

Romantic painting circa 1930

oil on canvas

520 x 650 mm

This painting is unique in the Wertheim collection for its fantastic subject matter. Unlike the landscapes, still lifes and portraits that dominate the collection, this painting depicts various mythological or allegorical female figures, in a forest setting.

18. Mary LARKIN (active 1930s) England

Melting snow in Cranch End 1930s

watercolour

452 x 303 mm

19. Basil RAKOCZI (1908 - 1979) England

The lake, Aran circa 1940

watercolour and ink

253 x 355 mm

Of Hungarian and Irish stock, Basil Rakoczi studied art in Brighton and Paris, taking private lessons from Ossip Zadkine. At the outbreak of war in 1939, Rakoczi and his friend, Kenneth Hall, moved to Ireland where they settled in Dublin. Lucy Wertheim met Rakoczi through Kenneth Hall and they became close friends. Wertheim regularly showed their work and, as with so many of her artists, supported them in their self-imposed exile in Ireland. This watercolour was painted soon after Rakoczi arrived in Ireland, in response to one of his many visits to the Aran Islands.

20. David GOMMON (1913 - 1987) England

Winter landscape circa 1932

watercolour and gouache

382 x 559 mm

David Gommon lived and worked for more than 40 years in Hardingstone, Northamptonshire. The local landscape around his home was a favourite subject. Like his better-known contemporaries, Christopher Wood or Winifred Nicholson, Gommon preferred simplified forms and lyrical colour to suggest his responses to the natural world. Lucy Wertheim was one of the few to respond to his work, offering him a solo show at The Wertheim Gallery in 1932. After a long break in the mid-1930s, Gommon resumed painting in 1945, working productively until his death in 1987.

21. Eileen HOLDING (active 1930s) England

Brighton Front 1932

watercolour and pastel

422 x 535 mm

This watercolour owes a strong debt to the then fashionable paintings of French artist, Raoul Dufy.

22. Kathleen WALNE (born 1915) England

Girl 1937

gouache

568 x 380 mm

Kathleen Walne met Lucy Wertheim when she was only 17. Wertheim was immediately attracted to her vibrant watercolours and gave her a solo exhibition at the Wertheim Gallery in 1935. Walne was fortunate in being offered lodging and studio space at the gallery, helping out whenever necessary in return. Lucy Wertheim had first option on any paintings Walne produced, but paid her 10 shillings for any she chose. This was considered a sizeable sum in the early 1930s. Lucy Wertheim spent her last days with Kathleen Walne, who cared for her early benefactor at her home in Brighton until Wertheim's death in 1971.

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