

Seize THE
DAY

A TRIBUTE TO JEAN HORSLEY



The Auckland Art Gallery is proud to present this exhibition which pays tribute to Jean Horsley. The works shown here span 63 years and are the distillation of a lifetime of achievement in the visual arts by this vigorous and innovative painter. I want to thank Jean Horsley for her active support for this Gallery, its staff and its programmes. Jean is a Life Member of the Friends of the Gallery and we are delighted that the Friends have sponsored the production of this catalogue. Our thanks to them and to Brian Spring of Communication Graphics who are co-sponsors. We are grateful also to Kathlene Fogarty of FHE Gallery who has given considerable assistance to the exhibition curator, Alexa Johnston. There is no doubt that Jean Horsley's enthusiasm and generosity has infected all those who own and enjoy her work, as the exhibition has come together with a spirit of goodwill from all those involved. Our thanks to all the lenders, and particularly to Jean Horsley for all that she continues to contribute to the arts in New Zealand.

Chris Saines
Director



Jean Horsley. For those in the arts community who know Jean, the name summons up a raft of positive attributes – enthusiastic, energetic, talented, honest, generous, passionate, inspiring, self-critical but determined, optimistic, curious, fascinated by change, tireless in her search for what is new.

And for her family, who know her as Bylo, more positives – a loving and involved sister, aunt and great-aunt; a rememberer of a multitude of birthdays; a sender of the latest consumer treats – Beatles stockings from 1960s London, pocket calculators from 1980s New York; an independent woman who supported herself through the profession of physiotherapy; a writer of irreverent and racy letters on politics, people, cities, art, life; and in recent years the cherished centre of a large and still-growing extended family. An exemplary if unusual matriarch.

Jean Horsley contributes much to many lives. This exhibition, however, celebrates her considerable artistic achievements and her position as an important

Jean Horsley

c1940

Photograph by
Clifton Firth

Jean Horsley

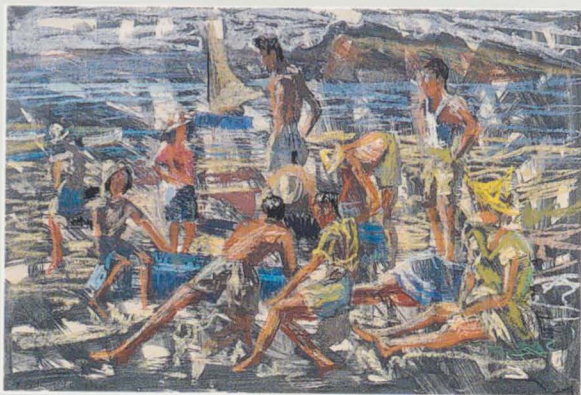
1996

Photograph by
Anna Bidwill



Stanmore

c1947 cat no 3



Beach scene

1953 cat no 4

New Zealand painter. An expressionist, working consistently with abstraction, Jean sets paint dancing on canvas, makes light and airy compositions using colours rich and heavily glowing, or pale, evocative and meditative. Her abstract forms allude to movement and transformation. Several of her works have become icons of New Zealand modernist achievement.

A constant experimenter, in the last two years she has been working solely in pastel, a relatively new medium for her, and is exploring the use of words in some works. One recent drawing provided the title of this exhibition: *Seize the Day* – a phrase which encapsulates Jean Horsley's approach to the difficult business of being a painter. Other phrases which many have heard from Jean send the same bold and determined message: Go for it! No fear! This response to unfamiliar and possibly threatening developments in art is epitomised in her 'Damascus road' experience confronting modernist art in 1950s New Zealand.

In 1957, after 22 years of exhibiting what she terms 'Sunday painter landscapes' at the regular Auckland Society of Arts exhibitions, Jean Horsley enrolled in painting night classes taught by Colin McCahon upstairs at the Auckland Art Gallery. During the lessons McCahon did not talk about or show his own work, but in response to a request from his students on the last evening he brought in one large painting – *On Building Bridges* 1952, a work subsequently purchased by the Auckland Art Gallery. Jean recalls her own amazement – the work was strong, revolutionary and upsetting. Yet this experience, combined with seeing two exhibitions at Auckland Art Gallery, *Frances Hodgkins and her Circle* (1954) and *British Abstract Painting* (1958) sealed her determination to leave New Zealand for America and Britain, to see more of this new kind of painting for herself, and to remake her own art practice in response. Rather than retreat into the familiar, in her middle years she embraced a new and difficult challenge.



Kawau Island
1955 cat no 9



Mark O
1959 cat no 13

In her telling of this story, Jean is typically modest about the stage she had already reached with her own painting. Although not yet abandoning the subject in her works she was moving steadily towards abstraction. She was included in a 1957 Auckland Art Gallery exhibition *Three Women Painters*, with M. Rainier and Freda Simmonds and received favourable comment. The *New Zealand Herald* critic wrote: 'Jean Horsley's strength is... in colour, fresh, sanguine, briskly put on, and unobtrusively supported by a carefully worked out geometrical framework. She is clearly one of our major painters.' (NZH 17/7/1957)

Two years later in 1959 she set off for London via New York. She had already travelled widely, spending a year at the Chelsea School of Art, London in 1934 and working as a physiotherapist in Japan and South Africa between 1947 and 1950. But this new venture posed far greater challenges. Each day of painting brought intense struggles to achieve the results she longed for. During eight years

in London, she had a solo exhibition, was included with other expatriates in several group shows of Commonwealth painters, and sent work home to New Zealand for exhibition at the Ikon and New Vision galleries.

Then in 1968 Jean Horsley decided to move to New York. She could support herself through physiotherapy and be close to the heart of the contemporary art world. In a 1976 letter home she wrote "New Yorkers have a gay humour, necessary perhaps to live in this absurd, grotesque but lively city". Jean Horsley's 15 years there were spent working during the week and avidly visiting galleries at weekends and evenings. She remembers vividly the impact of exhibitons by artists like Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Clyfford Still and Philip Guston. "I was delighted to be there as a receptor, not, unfortunately as a participator; because when you are working and paying the rent, you don't have much vitality left for painting. Although it was a joy, I simply didn't have the will or the energy to



Dancing figures

1962 cat no 16

Photograph by Stephanie Leeves



Floating fragments

1992 cat no 37

paint in America.” (Interview with Christina Barton, 1985, Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery)

On her return to New Zealand in 1983 at the age of seventy, she began to paint again in earnest, becoming a lively and respected participant in the Auckland art scene. She had several solo exhibitions and in 1996 she was awarded the OBE for services to art.

Looking back now on her years as an artist Jean Horsley quotes from a 1957 poem by James K. Baxter poem ‘At Hokianga’

*...those who learned before us
The secret of survival, to be patient,
Suffer, and shut no doors,
Change all things to their habit, bridge
The bogs with branch laid to branch...*

Every small advance must be built upon patiently. The process is slow and the effort unceasing. She said in 1964 “If one picture in five years comes off, I count myself lucky”. In 1985, answering a question on her own

abilities “I’m very good at painting air it seems to me. Now that’s a strange thing...” and “I suppose I’m quite good with colour..., you’ve got to know why an ultramarine should go beside a cerulean blue. It’s very fascinating.” (Barton interview) She recently described her process of working “I put down these blocks of colour, and some pencil lines or whatever. And I think ‘By the end of the day it will be better.’ And I put it up on the wall and after a while I might realise it’s beginning to speak to me. Some of them can start speaking, and have some value. But I haven’t even started.” (Conversation with Kathlene Fogarty, 1995)

Yet she obviously has started, and achieved convincing success as the works in this exhibition demonstrate. Seize the day. Make the most of what you are given, challenge yourself, keep looking for stimulus and new ideas. Now entering her 86th year Jean Horsley still looks forward, still draws, still is her own sternest critic, still celebrates art and embraces life.

Alexa M. Johnston, Principal Curator

CATALOGUE

1. **Backyard** 1933
oil on cardboard
235 x 322 mm
private collection
2. **Mousehole Harbour** c1934
oil on canvas
408 x 510 mm
private collection
3. **Stanmore** c1947
oil on hardboard
405 x 460 mm
private collection
4. **Beach scene** 1953
pastel and ink
380 x 560 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
purchased 1954
5. **Dappled shadow** 1953
crayon, gouache and watercolour
378 x 560 mm
private collection
6. **Kawau Jetty** c1954
oil on board
470 x 608 mm
private collection
7. **Sunlight, Kawau** c1954
oil on board
455 x 560 mm
private collection
8. **Kawau** 1955
oil on canvas on board
400 x 565 mm
private collection
9. **Kawau Island** 1955
oil on board
570 x 905 mm
private collection
10. **Abstraction** c1955
oil on canvas
610 x 510 mm
private collection
11. **Forms in movement** c1955
pencil and oil
455 x 625 mm
Entrwistle collection, Auckland
12. **Untitled** c1958
oil on canvas on board
1000 x 750 mm
private collection
13. **Mark O** 1959
oil on board
1080 x 775 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
purchased 1962
14. **Painting** 1960
oil on canvas
505 x 1320 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
purchased 1989
15. **Aquamarine** c1960
oil on canvas
910 x 1105mm
Turkington collection
16. **Dancing figures** 1962
oil on canvas
772 x 998 mm
Chartwell Collection,
Waikato Museum of Art and History
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton
17. **One in three** 1962
oil on canvas
630 x 910mm
collection of Beatrice Grossman
18. **Umber** 1963
oil on canvas
610 x 840 mm
private collection
19. **Emerging figure** 1963
oil on canvas
608 x 827 mm
private collection
20. **Time remembered** 1964
oil on hessian
1270 x 1016 mm
private collection
21. **Thames** c1965
watercolour
550 x 750 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
gift of the artist 1995
22. **New York, New York** 1968
pastel on paper
750x540mm
Turkington collection
23. **City** c1980
gouache
760 x 540 mm
Turkington collection
24. **Spring rain** 1983
watercolour
482 x 603 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
purchased 1993
25. **a.m. New York** 1983
pencil and watercolour
560 x 758 mm
private collection
26. **Portrait of Andrew and Julia** 1983
watercolour and gouache
725 x 540 mm
private collection
27. **Movement** 1984
pastel and charcoal
730 x 540 mm
private collection
28. **Bush** 1985
watercolour and charcoal
612 x 430 mm
private collection
29. **The Family** 1986
crayon, gouache and watercolour
557 x 758 mm
collection of Campbell and Bridget Horsley
30. **Comet** 1986
gouache, watercolour, ink, pencil and charcoal
642 x 449 mm
private collection
31. **Exegesis** 1988
oil on board
1200 x 800mm
courtesy of John Leech Gallery
32. **Starburst** 1988
watercolour
750 x 560 mm
collection of Tom and Anna Mandeno
33. **Migration** 1989
watercolour, chalk, and charcoal
898 x 640mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
purchased 1993
34. **Crystal window** 1990
oil on board
1020 x 760 mm
private collection
35. **The Song of the Bellbird** 1990
oil on board
1200 x 800 mm
courtesy of FHE Gallery, Auckland
36. **Waitakere** 1990
oil on calico on board
790 x 1197 mm
courtesy of FHE Gallery, Auckland
37. **Floating fragments** 1992
oil on canvas on board
510 x 815 mm
courtesy of FHE Gallery, Auckland
38. **Into the forest** 1996
pastel and pencil
595 x 418 mm
private collection
39. **Seize the day** 1996
pastel and charcoal
418 x 593 mm
private collection

JEAN HORSLEY

- 1913 Born in Auckland, 15 February
1925 - 1930 Diocesan High School
1933 Elam School of Art
1934 Chelsea School of Art, London
1940 - 1942 Dunedin, training as Physical Therapist
1942 - 1946 Rotorua - physiotherapy
1947 Japan - physiotherapy
1948 - 1950 South Africa - physiotherapy
1959 To New York
1960 To London
1968 To New York
1983 To Auckland
1996 Awarded OBE for Services to Art

MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

- 1935 - 1958 Regular exhibitor, Auckland Society of Arts
July 1957 *Three Women Painters*, Auckland City Art Gallery,
with M. Rainier and Freda Simmonds
July 1959 *Three Auckland Painters*, Auckland City Art Gallery,
with Alwyn Lasenby and Janet Moore
July 1960 Ikon Gallery, Auckland, solo exhibition
1961 *Paintings from the Pacific*, toured to Britain
August 1964 *Young Commonwealth Painters*, Whitechapel Gallery, London
June 1966 *Louise Henderson, Jean Horsley*, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
July 1966 Drian Gallery, London, solo exhibition
1967 *25 New Zealand Artists*, Qantas Gallery, London
1975 *New Zealand's Women Painters*, Auckland City Art Gallery
March 1985 *Jean Horsley*, John Leech Gallery, Auckland
February 1993 *Works on paper by Jean Horsley*, Beatrice Grossman, Auckland
February 1993 *Jean Horsley*, John Leech Gallery, Auckland
Sept 1993 *Jean Horsley, a Survey of Work 1934 - 1993*,
Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton

FURTHER READING

- Anthony Green 'Jean Horsley: A Documentary Account', *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, Vol 5, 1977, pp27-35
Christina Barton 'An Interview with Jean Horsley, 30 January 1985' tape and transcript, Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery
Anne Kirker *New Zealand Women Painters*, Reed Methuen, 1986
Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold *Women and the Arts in New Zealand: Forty Works 1890-1990*, Penguin 1986
John Daly-Peoples *Elam 1890-1990* Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 1990
Linda Tyler and Ken Orchard *Cross Currents - Contemporary New Zealand and Australian Art from the Chartwell Collection*, Waikato Museum of Art and History, 1991
Riemke Ensing 'Who's Afraid of Red Yellow Blue? The Career of Jean Horsley' *Art New Zealand* 63, pp 76-79



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GRAPHICS

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

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