

Frances Hodgkins:
Forgotten Still Life

AUCKLAND
ART GALLERY
TOI OTAMAKI

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Cover image

Frances Hodgkins
Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths (detail) c1925
oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956

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Figure 1.1: Frances Hodgkins in 1920, sepia print, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Linda Gill, 2015, photo: Langfrier Ltd.

Preface

Rhana Devenport, Director

Frances Hodgkins: Forgotten Still Life focuses on the working practice of influential expatriate New Zealand artist, Frances Hodgkins (1869–1947), and explores the high degree of experimentation she brought to the subject of still-life painting.

This project extends and deepens Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki's strong commitment to the work of Frances Hodgkins. A major initiative to produce a comprehensive online catalogue raisonné of her work is currently underway and is being generously supported by the Stout Trust and the Decorative & Fine Arts Society branches throughout New Zealand.

The Gallery's commitment to Hodgkins is also reflected in the work of the Conservation Research Centre. Extensive research into the techniques of Hodgkins has been undertaken by Gallery conservators, beginning in 2002 with funding by the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board and followed by further support from Creative New Zealand. This research resulted in several publications, as well as informing the exhibition *Frances Hodgkins: Leitmotif* in 2005, which was co-curated with Mary Kisler.

The conservation of the painting *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, c1925 carried out by 2015 Marylyn Mayo Intern, Genevieve Silvester, provides a pivotal technical and treatment focus for the current exhibition which is expanded in the catalogue essay and computer interactive. Conservation research has benefited immeasurably from the Marylyn Mayo Foundation. There have been three conservation placements since the internship was inaugurated: research into Ralph Hotere's *Black Paintings*, 1960s–70s by Lydia Gutierrez in 2008; research and conservation by Angela Ruegger in 2010 of the panel painting, *St Anne* c1470 by the Girard Master; and in 2014, Brooke Randall's research on time-based media art collections at Auckland Art Gallery.

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous generosity of the Fletcher Trust, Executive Chairman, Angus Fletcher, and Art Curator, Peter Shaw, for facilitating their significant collection of works by Frances Hodgkins to be included in the exhibition. Our sincere and heartfelt thanks to Dr John Mayo of the Marylyn Mayo Foundation for his exceptional support through this valuable internship programme.

Finally, we also thank the Gallery team responsible for the exhibition and publication: Principal Conservator Sarah Hillary, Senior Curator Mary Kisler, Assistant Curator Julia Waite, Editor Clare McIntosh, Research Library Manager Catherine Hammond, Archivist Caroline McBride and Marylyn Mayo Intern Genevieve Silvester.



Still Life in Paint

Sarah Hillary

From the 1920s, Frances Hodgkins began to integrate still-life elements with architecture and landscape in her painting. The success of this development in her work – which became a characteristic of her mature style – culminated in her first major solo exhibition in London at St George's Gallery in 1930. Still life provided an opportunity to experiment with the representation of form, space and colour, across a variety of media. Objects in the foreground were located directly in the landscape rather than within a domestic space, and were depicted in thick oil paint with lively, calligraphic brushwork. Over the next decade, Hodgkins' oil and gouache (opaque watercolour) paintings were progressively abstracted to become self-contained objects with only a symbolic representation of depth.

Central to the exhibition, *Frances Hodgkins: Forgotten Still Life, is Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, c1925, an unfamiliar painting by Frances Hodgkins from the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki collection (fig 2.1). The painting was in a deteriorated condition when it was acquired from her long-time friend Hannah Ritchie, and although it was displayed a few years after acquisition in 1959, it could not be shown again until a suitable treatment for its condition could be developed. This conservation project was recently undertaken by the 2014–15 Marylyn Mayo Intern Genevieve Silvester, alongside work by the Auckland Art Gallery on a larger Hodgkins project and web-based catalogue raisonné, which will be launched in 2017–18. The successful treatment of the painting has meant that it is possible to return *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* to the Gallery walls once more.

The 14 works in the exhibition (see p 25) are representative of the media that the artist most commonly used – pencil, watercolour, gouache and oil. Frances Hodgkins described herself primarily as a watercolourist¹ and this was indeed her specialty until about 1916, when she began to paint in tempera² as well as oil. Eight years earlier she had attended lessons in oil painting from the Parisian studio of Pierre Marcel-Beronneau. She found the medium difficult to master, preferring the fluidity of watercolour, at which she was highly skilled and consequently her watercolour works in this medium received positive public recognition.

However, painting in watercolour was considered an amateur occupation compared to oils, so it is not surprising that she changed mediums eventually to enhance her professional status as an artist. As Hodgkins became accustomed to oil paint, she began to work with the properties of the medium and build up layers of thick impasto in strong colours. The change in handling is apparent when comparing

Figure 2.1: *Still life: Anemones and Hyacinths* c1925, oil on canvas, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1956.

Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths with *The Birdcage* and *Still Life*, both painted around 1929. While the brushwork is always gestural, the paint in the later works is more intensely textured. *The Birdcage* (p 25) has a regular pattern of impasto as well as luscious wet-on-wet tube colour, and a thick buttery layer was applied over and around the flatly painted objects in *Still Life* (fig 2.2). In these three works, we see the transition from an interior to exterior scene, which is further resolved and simplified in *Red Jug*, 1931. Additional layers were often applied in the process of resolving the image; however, in *Red Jug*, the brushwork is much freer and more confident. There is less build-up and the surface is animated by *sgrafitto* (scraping back).

Drawings and watercolour sketches were done in front of the subject and reworked later in oil. For example, both *Jug* (fig 2.3) and *Vase with Handles – Notes for Colour* (p 26) are working drawings and colour notes exist for *The Bird Cage*. The Auckland Art Gallery has a number of drawings from the same notebook, and Hodgkins drew so forcibly with the pencil that the outline of other sketches has been impressed into the page. Finished drawings such as *Sea Landscape with Flowers*, 1931 (p 26) have a greater overall intensity and complexity – the various grades of pencil have been inscribed, smudged, and even erased to produce the image.

Eggs and Ferns, c1931 (fig 2.4) was sketched out in pencil before the watercolour was applied in thin washes onto the tinted paper. Hodgkins used a smaller brush to apply intensely coloured highlights, and this must have been applied rapidly as there is limited working time with watercolour before the paper is damaged and the colours muddled. The use of black mixed with transparent colours is a marked contrast to the whiteness of *Pumpkins and Pimenti*, c1935–6 painted with gouache (fig 2.5). Hodgkins only began using gouache in her watercolour paintings in the early 1930s, but eventually it became her preferred medium. The still-life elements in *Pumpkins and Pimenti* are located in an ambiguous mountainous landscape framed by windows or glass panels. Greater layering of paint was possible with gouache, as was complex colour mixtures such as the musty pinks, browns and yellow in another work, *Ornaments* from 1942 (p 25). Strangely, it was gouache and another incompatible water-based medium – casein – derived from cow's milk, which was found to be causing the flaking on the surface of the oil painting *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*.

Frances Hodgkins: Forgotten Still Life provides an opportunity to enhance understanding of the artist's working practices and how technical examinations can inform conservation treatments.



Figure 2.2: Detail of impasto from *Still Life* 1929, oil on canvas, The Fletcher Trust, Auckland.

1. Letter to A J McNeill Reid, 11 January 1935, Corfe Castle Dorset, Linda Gill (ed), *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1993, p 464.
2. Mary Kisler, Sarah Hillary and Ute Strehle, *Frances Hodgkins: Leitmotif*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, 2005, p 20.

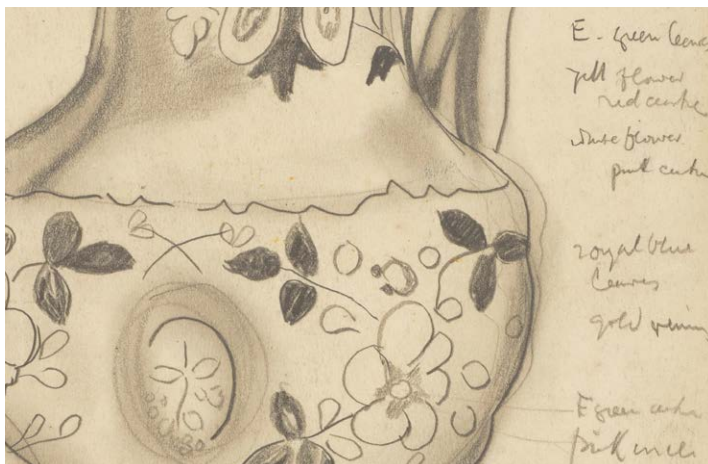


Figure 2.3: Detail of drawing and colour notes from *Jug* 1931, pencil drawing, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2005.

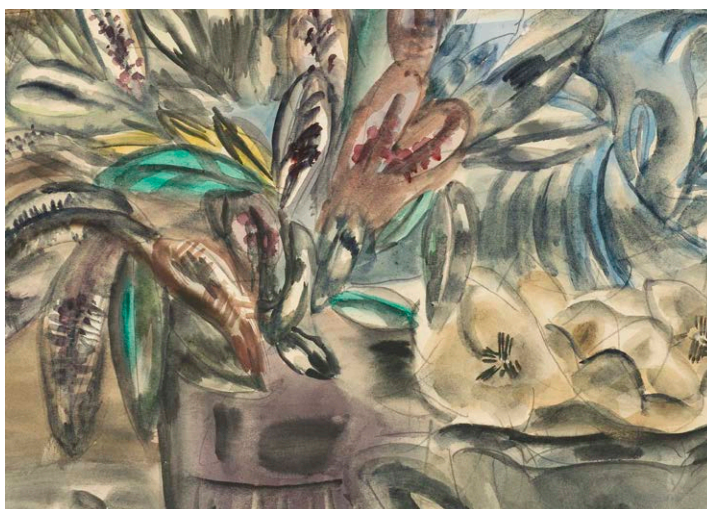


Figure 2.4: Detail of drawing and washes from *Eggs and Ferns* c1931, watercolour on paper, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased with funds from the Winstone Bequest, 1954.



Figure 2.5: Detail from *Pumpkins and Pimenti* 1935–6, gouache on paper, The Fletcher Trust, Auckland.

The Conservation of Frances Hodgkins' *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*

Genevieve Silvester

Frances Hodgkins' practice entered an evolutionary phase during the 1920s. Her primary subject matter moved away from figures and street and harbour scenes towards arrangements of still life and landscape, a combination which would feature prominently in later works. Her use of colour and pattern developed together with greater abstraction and simplification. The use of oil as a medium also became more prevalent in Hodgkins' painting. *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, c1925 (see p 6) is a wonderful example of this developmental phase in her career.

Auckland Art Gallery acquired *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* in 1956 from Hannah Ritchie, Hodgkins' long-time friend and supporter.¹ Ritchie dated the work as 1925, which was the year Hodgkins was living in Manchester with Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders for a period and working for the Calico Printers Association Ltd.² This engagement provided a dramatic change in her circumstances giving Hodgkins a generous and dependable income, although leaving her much less time to paint.³

The Condition of the Painting

Although the painting was generally in good condition when it entered Auckland Art Gallery's collection, the upper layer of brown paint which covered much of the background around the flowers was severely flaking and some losses of paint were evident (fig 3.1). The brown paint had a matt quality, dissimilar to the surrounding paint. The craquelure (a pattern of cracks in a network formed on the surface of materials) of this layer was also unusual. The paint had not formed a smooth continuous film on drying. This suggested that there was an inherent problem of adhesion between the brown paint and the paint layers beneath and this problem had occurred during the drying process. To the left of the painting where the brown paint covered purple, the paint had reticulated or beaded into round small islands before drying (fig 3.2). A similar effect is seen when water is dropped onto an oily or waxy surface. The paint over the yellow appeared to have shrunk upon drying, tearing into angular square forms and this is where the majority of the flaking had occurred (fig 3.3).

Investigation of Materials

The first step in the investigation of the deterioration was a 'solubility parameter' test. Different solvents were tested to establish which had an effect on the paint surface. Testing showed the majority of the painting was unaffected by water; however, the brown paint rapidly dissolved on contact. Water solubility can occur in modern oil paints,

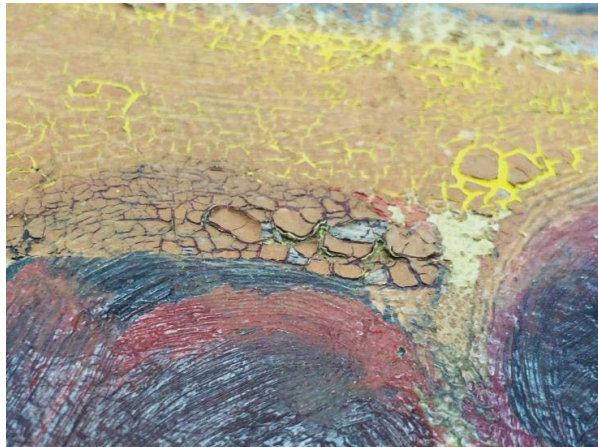


Figure 3.1: Detail of the lifting and flaking paint in the background of *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* c1925 before treatment 2015.



Figure 3.2: Detail of brown paint in the background reticulating into small rounded islands above a layer of purple. There is a significant amount of surface dirt and hair.



Figure 3.3: Detail of brown paint in the background cracking and shrinking into angular square forms.

but as the brown paint also demonstrated a different surface quality and very poor adhesion testing suggested that the brown paint was possibly bound in a water-based media.

Very small samples of paint were taken from the brown background, embedded in resin and polished to expose the layers of paint in cross section. The brown paint was shown to comprise two layers, the first a pinker tone, and the second a red brown (fig 3.4). The pink and brown layers had probably been applied after the paint layers beneath were relatively dry as there was no mixing of paint. It was also clear that much of the rest of the work had been painted 'wet in wet', or when the different layers were not yet dry (fig 3.5). These tests raised the possibility that some time had elapsed between the execution of the work and the application of the brown paint. This might indicate that the artist may not have always intended the background to be brown. Cross sections also showed a very thin layer of material between the brown paint and the layers beneath. This appeared transparent in ordinary light and fluorescent under ultraviolet light (fig 3.6).

The bright yellow and purple paint beneath the brown may have formed a different pictorial composition to what is seen now (see the comparison in fig 3.7). In this state, the yellow region forms a square to the right of the image, and looks remarkably like the windows placed behind still-life compositions seen in other works by the artist. To the left is a long rectangle of purple paint, which has different tonal highlights, suggestive of drapery, which may represent a curtain.

The first layer of pinkish brown paint which now covers the areas of yellow and purple is highly opaque and appears to have been used to cover the bright tone beneath, rather than utilising them in the composition. The layer above is also opaque but more thinly applied in most areas.

An attempt was made to separate the layers of brown paint. Samples were taken to the University of Auckland's School of Chemical Sciences and analysed with Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy (FTIR). It was possible to classify the upper red brown layer as gouache through the identification of gum arabic and calcium carbonate. The pinkish layer was found to possibly contain shellac (a varnish) and possibly proteins. Samples were also sent to Auckland Science Analytical Services where they were analysed using Liquid Chromatography with Tandem Mass Spectroscopy (LCMS/MS). Analysis positively identified the presence of bovine proteins derived from milk. The finding suggests that the paint layer probably contains casein, a paint binder made from cow's milk. The presence of shellac in the lower layer may be the florescent layer seen in cross section beneath the pinky brown paint (fig 3.6).

The Conservation Treatment

The most critical part of the treatment was to stabilise the flaking paint to prevent any further loss. This required selecting an appropriate adhesive that would have no effect on the paint surface after application. The adhesive would need a comparable gloss to the original paint surface and be transparent, and remain so after aging. Any added material needs

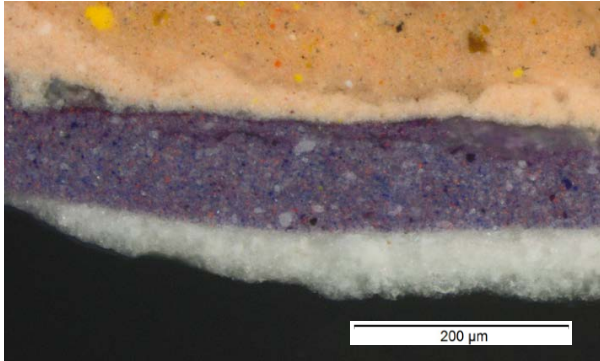


Figure 3.4: A cross section clearly showing the two separate layers of brown paint, the lower being lighter and pinker and the upper more orange containing large yellow and red pigments.

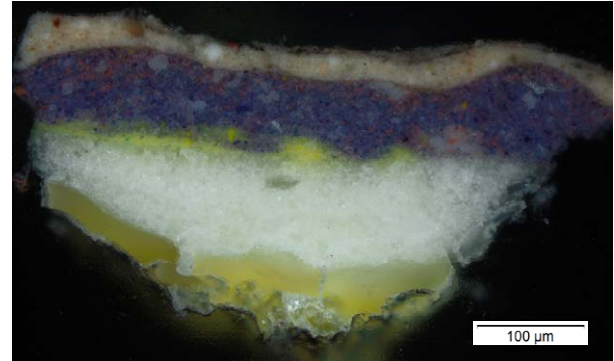


Figure 3.5: Cross section of paint taken from *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* showing the layers of paint. The white layer is the preparatory layer with a transparent layer of glue beneath. The purple layer has been painted over the yellow while the yellow was still wet. The top two layers are the brown paint.

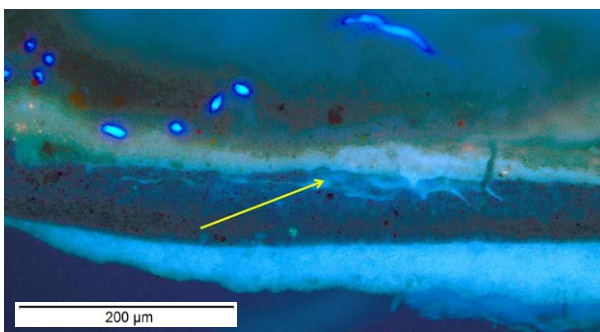


Figure 3.6: Showing the cross section in figure 3.5 under ultraviolet light. Under this light the transparent layer beneath the lower pink brown becomes visible as a whitish material.

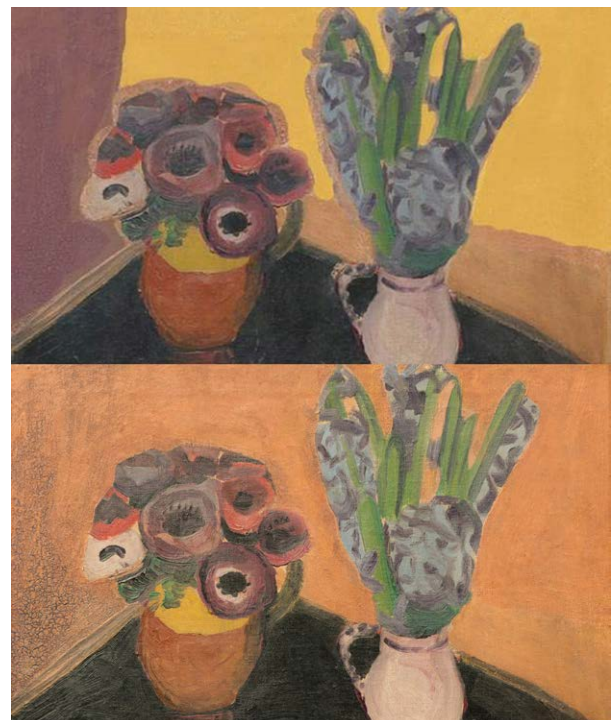


Figure 3.7: An impression of the composition covered by the brown paint in the background.

to be reversible so it can be removed safely by another conservator at a later time. Furthermore, an adhesive must have a low shrinkage and good viscosity (not too thick) so it would flow easily into the cracks of the painting and spread into the cavities but also have some body so as not to simply flow through the paint structure. Many of the typical adhesives used for consolidation on oil paintings are water soluble. The water solubility of the paint in *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* called for a more unusual choice. Klucel G is a non-ionic cellulose ether which is most commonly used as a consolidate adhesive for leather in book conservation where its solubility in alcohol is exploited.

The adhesive was applied to the cracks of the flaking paint with a very fine sable brush. Capillary action helps to draw the adhesive down into the cavities beneath the flakes (fig 3.8). A heated spatula was then used to warm the flakes increasing their flexibility before gently pressing the flake back down on the picture surface (fig 3.9).

As the surface of the painting was quite dirty, it was important to remove the dirt before applying the adhesive to prevent any dirt from being drawn in and adhered into the paint structure. However, due to the very fragile nature of the surface this task had to be done under the microscope immediately before each flake of loose paint was consolidated. The traditional tool for cleaning painted surfaces is a swab stick with a cotton fibre tip. This method was not suitable in this case, however, as the fibres, which are usually so effective at trapping dirt, caught on the edges of the raised paint flakes. Instead, a very small piece of micro-sponge was attached to a swab stick and wet with white spirit, a solvent which did not affect the paint surface. This was gently touched on the surface to draw the dirt into the sponge. The consolidation could commence when cleaning was complete.

Once the paint was secure, the varnish was removed, and with it, the excess adhesive. This process revealed the brighter tones of the paint which had been masked by the aged varnish which had become increasingly yellowed over time. It also increased the three-dimensional quality of the bouquets and vases.

Retouching the painting required a significant amount of judgement. The background of the image still had extensive cracking caused by the shrinkage of paint, rather than losses. This is a type of deterioration which cannot be restored back to the original; instead, a decision must be made as to whether those cracks should be retouched. Retouching them would reintegrate the painting, probably bringing the painting closer to the artist's original intention. The result would be the audience looking at the work of the conservator which would cover the original hand of the artist. In this instance it was felt that a combined approach would be optimal. Some cracks that were found to be very disturbing to the composition, mainly around the flowers, were retouched minimising their impact. The cracks were left untouched where the cracking was not affecting the legibility of the composition nor drawing the eye. This is a subjective approach and required a great amount of consideration and consultation with colleagues. All the retouching was executed in a medium that would be easily reversed. Finally, the painting was varnished again with a very thin layer of modern resin with good aging characteristics.

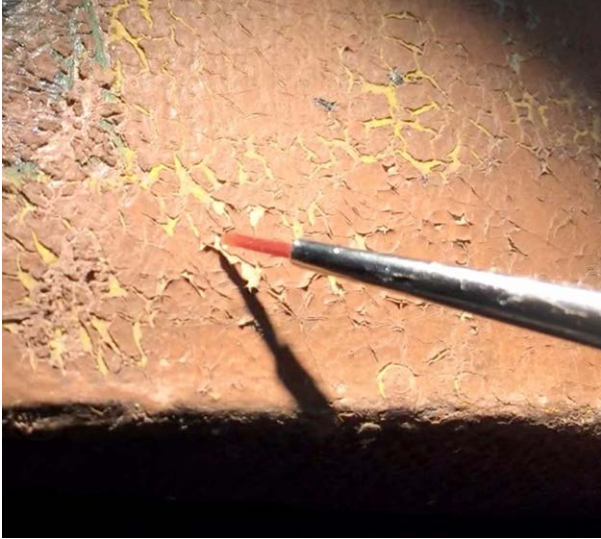


Figure 3.8: Applying a drop of adhesive to the flaking paint using a small brush.

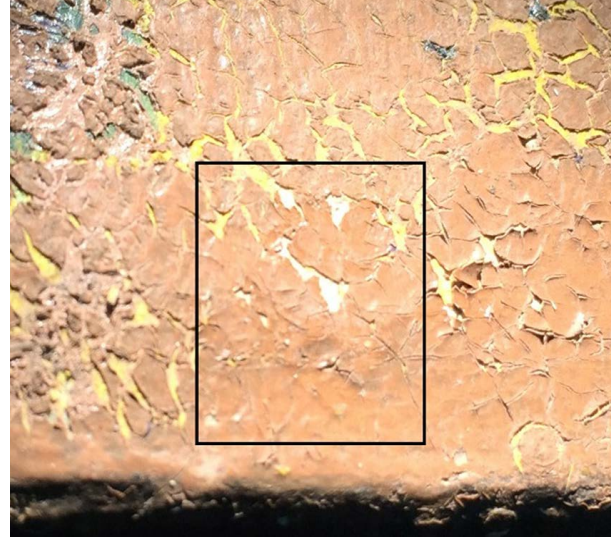


Figure 3.9: Square indicates the area after the flakes have been flattened into plane.

Conclusion

Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths is a fascinating work from a very interesting period in the career of one of the New Zealand's most innovative modern artists. The unusual use of a water-soluble media caused some inherent issues with the stability of the painting, but also gives good insight into the working practices of the artist as she defined and, it would appear, changed her composition. It is tempting to suggest that during the period in 1925 when Hodgkins was working primarily as a designer, she may have had access to these materials. Many of the designs that Hodgkins produced during this period for Calico Printers Association Ltd are documented as gouache, but it is certainly possible that she may have also used casein – a common paint in the graphic industry. The conservation of *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* has made it possible for this painting to be displayed to the public for the first time in 56 years, and the work can now play its part in future discussions of Hodgkins' exploratory working methods.

1. Auckland Art Gallery Curatorial Files.
2. Linda Gill, 'Hodgkins, Frances Mary', 'Dictionary of New Zealand Biography', *Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, updated 22 Oct 2013, accessed 13 July 2015.
3. Letter to Rachel Hodgkins, 30 May 1925 in Linda Gill, *Letters of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1993.

An Enduring Friendship: Frances Hodgkins and Hannah Ritchie

Mary Kisler

While travelling through England researching a future book on Frances Hodgkins,¹ Dr Eric McCormick met various people who had known Hodgkins either as friends, students, dealers or patrons. The information he gleaned from them continues to be of immense value to researchers. He also helped source works by Frances Hodgkins to enrich Auckland Art Gallery's collections.

The Frances Hodgkins' painting *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, c1925 (see p 6) was acquired by Auckland Art Gallery in 1956 from Hannah Ritchie, who was a younger friend, supporter and student of Hodgkins. She also gifted the Gallery five of her own drawings which had been annotated by Hodgkins at her own request. At the time of *Still Life*'s acquisition, Eric McCormick noted:

I think it should be put on record that Miss Ritchie told me that she had retrieved the work from a waste-paper basket where Frances Hodgkins had thrown it. The artist obviously considered it a failure and did not sign it. In my opinion the painting should never be exhibited, but might conceivably be of some interest to students.

It was done some time during the Manchester period in the nineteen-twenties. My interview with Miss Ritchie took place in April 1955.²

In spite of McCormick's advice, the painting was exhibited in 1959, but it is only now that it has been so expertly restored that it can deservedly be called an exhibition painting. We cannot be certain if Hodgkins threw it away because the final layer of paint had already started delaminating from those beneath it (as recent tests suggest the reaction would have been fairly immediate). But why did Hannah Ritchie retrieve it from the bin, and why might she have later offered it to Auckland City Art Gallery (as it was then known) nine years after Hodgkins' death?

First it is necessary to understand the long-standing relationship between the two women. They had become acquainted in 1909 when Hannah Ritchie came to study under Hodgkins at the popular artists' colony of Concarneau, Brittany. Hodgkins had recently become the first female watercolour teacher in Paris at Académie Colarossi, albeit part time, so teaching private groups was a necessity if she was to survive. Ritchie, then an art student, was a newcomer, while other pupils had attended several of Hodgkins' summer classes in France and Holland earlier in the decade.

Hannah Ritchie was to remain close to Hodgkins throughout her life. The year after they first met, Ritchie became an art teacher at Manchester High School for Girls, where she met another artist, Jane Saunders, and the two became partners. During World War I, after being forced to flee France, Hodgkins finally settled at Porthmoer Studios in St Ives (fig 4.1).



Figure 4.1: View of Porthmeor Studios, St Ives, Cornwall, England 2015, photo: the author.

Hodgkins wrote to Ritchie and Saunders on 11 July 1917, informing them of her new location and adding invitingly: 'There is fine bathing as a set off to painting & a variety of every sort of subject', and offering them a small cottage studio for 10 shillings a week. She added, 'I wish it were not such a long & expensive journey – but if you have been in Manchester all the winter I am sure a spoonful of sea air will be all to the good...' The invitation was too tempting to resist, and the pair spent their summer holiday in St Ives.

On her return to Manchester, Ritchie sent Hodgkins a selection of watercolour sketches (seemingly since destroyed) that she had painted in Ludlow in South Shropshire, close to the Welsh border, and asked her to critique them. Having studied her sketches, Hodgkins reworked them, indicating how she had altered certain elements to create a more balanced composition. For example, on the drawing described as 'Bridge with distant landscape seen through one of the arches' (fig 4.2) she instructs:

Note arrangement of cloud – fill in space voids to balance your solids

Use charcoal to construct & paint fresher with dainty touches – Trees over bridge too solid. Also narrow this arch. Keep bridge one scheme of yellow & black & let yr. structural drawing be part of it not rigid lines on surface leave out weeds & trivialities 2nd Arch minor to 1st.



Figure 4.2: Hannah Ritchie and Frances Hodgkins, *Bridge with Distant Landscape Seen through One of the Arches* c1917, pencil, charcoal and watercolour on paper, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Miss Hannah Ritchie, 1955.

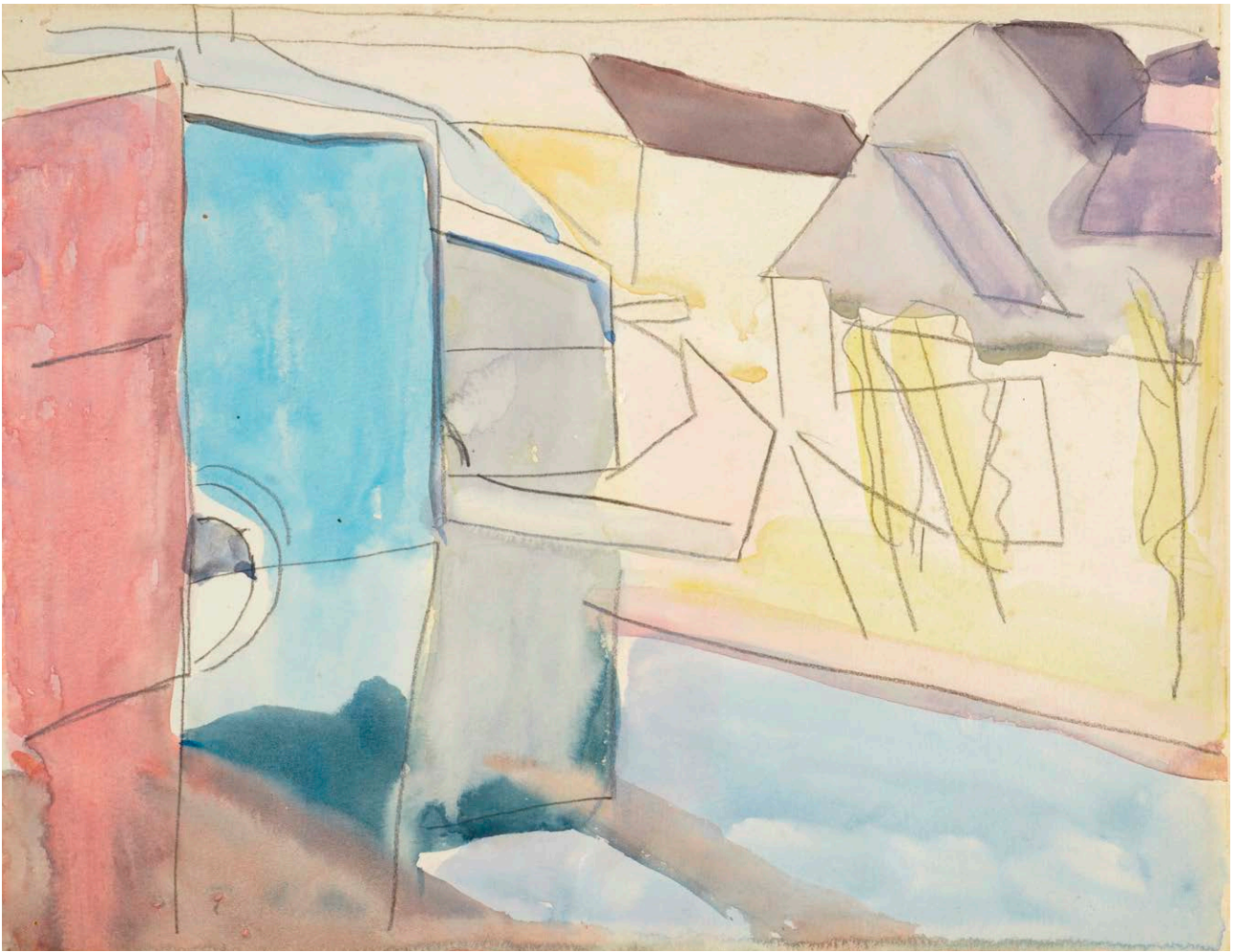


Figure 4.3: Hannah Ritchie, *Landscape with Buildings and River* c1927, pencil and watercolour, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Miss Hannah Ritchie, 1955.

In her covering letter Hodgkins wrote 'Don't let any thing I say depress you. You have a fine bold talent.' These were the drawings that Ritchie gifted to Auckland Art Gallery, believing them to give an invaluable insight into Hodgkins' teaching methods. Although Ritchie stated at the time that they were all done in 1917, two are highly likely to belong to the late 1920s as they are more abstract in design (fig 4.3).

Ritchie and Saunders provided Hodgkins with emotional, moral and sometimes financial support during the 1920s when the older artist struggled to survive. With their encouragement, Hodgkins visited Manchester several times before moving to the city in 1925, hoping to find enough paying students to cover her living costs. Her fortunes changed when she acquired a position as a fabric designer at the Calico Printers Association for the grand sum of £500 a year. This was thanks to Ritchie. She had attended an evening class taught by Walter Sickert and brought home a friend and one of the directors of the Association, Forrest Hewit, who offered Hodgkins a position after viewing her work. Her contract was for a trial period of six months, and the directors immediately sent Hodgkins off to Paris to the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs to study the latest fashions in design.

While in Manchester, Hodgkins saw her friends often, sketching them several times (fig 4.4) before commencing a larger oil painting, *Double Portrait* c1925, showing Ritchie on the left and Saunders on the right (fig 4.5). Hodgkins found it difficult to relinquish the painting, writing in a letter to Ritchie on 14 March 1925 from London, 'I have your portrait group with me – it wears well! It needs so little to both faces to make it a fine thing – I'll bring it with me to finish it.'

Manchester and its constant soot-laden rain proved too difficult for Hodgkins in the end, as there was little time to paint and her position at the Calico Printers Association had come to an end. The depression she felt had been exacerbated by the death of her mother in April 1926. She wrote to her sister Isabel in Wellington: 'There is an extraordinary bond between a Mother & child – even when you have lived so long apart.' The mother and child watercolours (fig 4.6) that she produced during this period of mourning were extremely well received, the *Guardian* newspaper praising her for 'her uncommon power and sensitiveness'.

After Hodgkins left Manchester for good in 1927, Ritchie and Saunders continued to join her classes both in Britain and abroad. They were life-long friends; Hodgkins encouraged and advised, sent sums of money to help them in return, and wrote words of comfort when the women were bombed out during World War II. Hodgkins summed up the artist's life in a letter to Saunders in the early 1940s:

. . . Whereas painting reduces one to tears and misery – peaks of ecstasy [sic] and depths of disillusion, depending on how deep you go in search of truth and how long you can stay alone. To obtain all this you have to be pretty self contained and strong minded and very selfish. Is it worth the sacrifice – 'you say you fear you are unbalanced temperamentally' – from the Manchester High School point of view you may be – but I prefer to call it – vision . . . imagination and rejoice in it.

It might be tempting to think that Hannah Ritchie wished to recoup her past generosity when she decided to sell Hodgkins' painting in 1956. But it is more likely that she wanted others to understand the important teacher-pupil role that she and Jane Saunders had experienced at first hand. She had learned from Hodgkins that artists must experiment if they are to succeed, and that those experiments do not always pay off at first. The fact that she rescued Hodgkins' still-life painting from the waste basket suggests that she valued her work too much to let it be cast into darkness. Today, with the sophisticated conservation techniques now at hand, *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* stands as a fitting reminder of a long, sustaining friendship.

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1. E H McCormick, *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, Auckland and Oxford, 1981.
 2. Registration records, Auckland Art Gallery.



Figure 4.4: Frances Hodgkins, *Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders* c1923, watercolour and gouache on paper, University of Auckland Collection.



Figure 4.5: Frances Hodgkins, *Double Portrait* c1925, oil on canvas, Hocken Library, Dunedin.



Figure 4.6: Frances Hodgkins, *Adoration* c1926, pencil, watercolour, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1974.

Frances Hodgkins and Toi o Tāmaki

Catherine Hammond

The Auckland City Council's decision, on Mr Eric Westbrook's initiative, to form a collection of Frances Hodgkins's painting deserves nothing but praise, for if she received little recognition in this country during her lifetime, this collection will be a permanent token of the esteem in which her art is now held in New Zealand.

Peter Tomory, 1959¹

In the 1940s and in the decade following her death, Frances Hodgkins (1869–1947) was one of England's best known painters.² She was selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1940, the book *Frances Hodgkins* was published as part of *The Penguin Modern Painters* series in 1948 (fig 5.1), and in 1952 her memorial exhibition, organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain, was held at the Tate Gallery in London.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in 1952 Auckland Art Gallery's newly arrived first director, Englishman Eric Westbrook, quickly embarked on establishing Hodgkins' work as one of the cornerstones of the Gallery's modern collection. In his former role at the British Council, Westbrook organised international tours of British art which would likely have included works by Frances Hodgkins.³ He must also have become aware of the differing attitude to her work in New Zealand; it had only been a few years earlier that *Pleasure Garden* – a key example of Hodgkins' unconventional still-life painting – was initially rejected for Christchurch city's collection on the grounds that it was too modernist.⁴

Westbrook's decision to form a representative collection of Frances Hodgkins' paintings for Auckland was formalised in 1954 in the Gallery's collection policy.⁵ Although the collection already included examples of Hodgkins' practice,⁶ this was the beginning of Auckland Art Gallery's long-term commitment to proactively collect her work. Immediately, artworks were sought and purchased from Hodgkins' friends and colleagues in Britain including nine paintings from the estate of Dorothy Selby and five works from Hannah Ritchie, among them *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, c1925 (p 6).

Major exhibitions of Hodgkins' work soon followed. For the Auckland Festival in 1954 the Gallery, assisted by art historian Eric McCormick, organised the exhibition *Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle* in which the entire Auckland collection of Hodgkins' paintings was shown (fig 5.2). McCormick's seminal *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* was published by the Gallery that same year. In 1959, with the Gallery now under the directorship of Peter Tomory, a more ambitious touring exhibition of Hodgkins' work was mounted, *The Paintings and Drawings by Frances Hodgkins* (fig 5.3). Colin McCahon

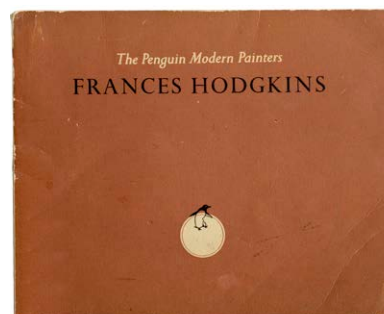
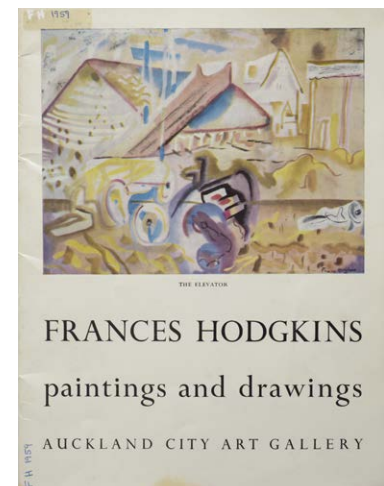


Figure 5.1: Cover of *Frances Hodgkins* by Myfanwy Evans, *The Penguin Modern Painters*, Penguin Books, London, 1948, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



Figure 5.2: Review of Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle, 'A Show NZ Should See', *The New Zealand Observer*, 28 June 1954, Auckland Art Gallery scrapbook Sep 1953–Jul 1958, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.


Figure 5.3: Cover of *The Paintings and Drawings by Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland City Art Gallery (1959), E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.



(then keeper at Auckland Art Gallery) noted pointedly in his introductory text: 'The present catalogue has been published to accompany our pictures on their New Zealand tour. It does not mark the completion of our collection of the works of Frances Hodgkins.'⁷ It was in this exhibition that *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths* was shown for the first and only time until now.

In the decades that followed the 1959 touring exhibition, however, Hodgkins' reputation once again had to withstand critical blows. Ironically, it now seemed that, by comparison, Hodgkins' was not quite 'modern' enough in an era when Clement Greenberg's notions of abstraction as the marker of modern painting were in the ascendant. The catalogue essay for Hodgkins' centennial exhibition in 1969, organised by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, deflates Hodgkins' achievements and that of British modernism in one fell swoop:

Frances Hodgkins's output of major works is small; this exhibition could have been halved without any loss in quality. She can never be classed as a great or even a major artist; an assessment which with remarkably few exceptions, can be made of most of her English contemporaries.⁸

X cat. no. 2513	img. no. 71:12:354	FRANCES HODGKINS (1889-1947)	
		TITLE STILL LIFE - ANEMONES AND HYACINTHS	
		DATE 1925	
		SIZE (h x w) 609 x 508 mm	height x width actual size
		MEDIUM oil	
		SUPPORT canvas	
		SIGNATURE	location
INSCRIPTIONS		Auckland City Art Gallery acc. no. 1956/20/5	
OWNER		Purchased 1956 from Miss Hannah Ritchie	

(NB picture may be reversed)

Figure 5.4: Index card for *Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths*, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Dr Rodney Wilson, 2012

Hodgkins' scholarship was reinvigorated in the 1980s and 1990s, in no small part due to feminist readings of her work, along with the renewed interest generated by Eric McCormick's well-received biography *A Portrait of Frances Hodgkins* (1981) and Linda Gill's edited *Letters of Frances Hodgkins* (1993) both published by Auckland University Press. In that same period Auckland Art Gallery's director, Rodney Wilson, arrived with an already vast knowledge of Hodgkins' practice, having started work on a catalogue raisonné of her work while at the University of Canterbury. While never published, the nearly 800 cards (fig 5.4) remained at the Gallery after Wilson left and were eventually gifted to the E H McCormick Research Library.

The research undertaken by Eric McCormick and further developed by Rodney Wilson has formed the basis of Auckland Art Gallery's current Hodgkins Project, led by Senior Curator Mary Kisler, to create an online catalogue raisonné of Hodgkins' work. It also builds on the research Kisler began into the importance of location to Hodgkins' practice for Auckland Art Gallery's 2005 exhibition, *Frances Hodgkins: Leitmotif*. The Frances Hodgkins website planned for launch in late 2017 will be a continuation of the Gallery's long-standing dedication to researching and understanding one of our finest modernist painters.

1. Colin McCahon, *Frances Hodgkins: Paintings and Drawings*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1959, np.
2. Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art and National Identity, 1930–1970*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2009, p 238.
3. British Council archives held at Tate Archive, TG 9172.
4. Painted in 1933 and a combination of still life and landscape, *Pleasure Garden* was originally offered as a gift in 1948 to Christchurch Council for the city's collection. It was eventually accepted in 1951.
5. Hodgkins is one of only two artists to be individually named in the Auckland Art Gallery's collection policy; the other is New Zealand painter Colin McCahon (1919–1987).
6. Auckland's collection included notable examples of Hodgkins' work such as *Bridesmaids*, 1930 gifted by English gallerist and collector Lucy Carrington Wertheim in 1948.
7. Frances Hodgkins' works in the collection of Auckland Art Gallery numbers 91 at the time of publishing.
8. Ian Roberts and David Armitage, 'The Art of Frances Hodgkins', in *Frances Hodgkins 1869–1947: A Centenary Exhibition*, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, Wellington, 1969, np.

List of Works



Still Life: Anemones and Hyacinths c1925
oil on canvas
609 × 508 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956



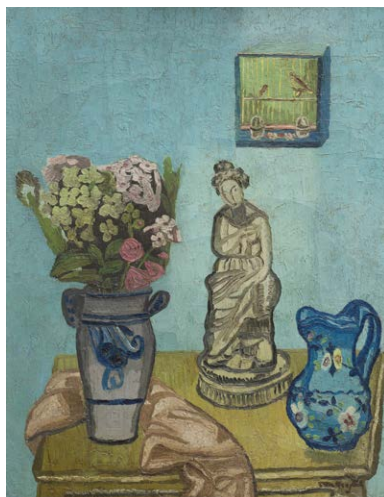
Still Life 1929
oil on canvas
730 × 600 mm
on loan from The Fletcher Trust, Auckland



Ornaments 1942
gouache
565 × 384 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1956



Red Jug 1931
oil on canvas
685 × 570 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1982



The Birdcage c1929
oil on canvas
763 × 596 m
on loan from The Fletcher Trust, Auckland



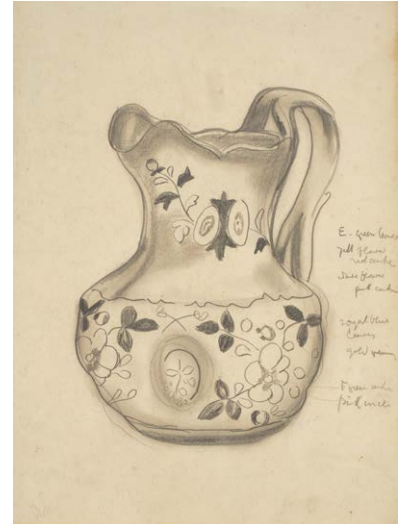
Pumpkins and Pimenti 1935–6
gouache
510 × 710 mm
on loan from The Fletcher Trust, Auckland



Eggs and Ferns c1931
watercolour
530 × 458 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased with funds from the Winstone Bequest, 1954



Foliage and China 1932
pencil
533 × 406 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1955



Jug
pencil
311 × 230 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 2005



Phoenician Pottery and Gourds c1933
watercolour
390 × 542 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased with funds from the Winstone Bequest, 1954



Sea Landscape with Flowers 1931
pencil
470 × 360 mm
on loan from The Fletcher Trust, Auckland



Vase with Handles – Notes for Colour
pencil
311 × 230 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1971



Girls with Jug c1930
watercolour
545 × 415 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1961



Dish of Fruit – Notes for Colour [Cityscape (verso)]
c1935
pencil
230 × 310 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 1971