

Frances Hodgkins (1869 - 1947)

Frances Hodgkins is regarded as New Zealand's most important historical expatriate artist. She is a cultural icon both here and internationally. Open any European auction catalogue and she is adopted as British, so great was her contribution to the development of modernism in Britain during the 1930s and 40s.

Dunbar Sloane Ltd is delighted to offer these iconic works from the same source collection to the market for first time in over 25 years. The original owner of both works was former pupil, patron and friend, Jane Saunders. Jane and her partner Hannah Ritchie attended Hodgkins' summer school in 1912 at Saint-Valery-sur-Somme which began a lifelong friendship. They were an important source of financial assistance, especially during her time in Manchester. Hodgkins depicted the pair multiple times, most iconically in *Double Portrait* (1922-5) held in the Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago.

Christmas Decorations was produced at a key moment in Hodgkins career. It is an exemplar of a new direction, a synthesis of genre developed in the mid 1930s. In 1935 Hodgkins was living in London after a period in Ibiza, Spain. It is therefore not surprising that she turned away from painting pure landscapes to concentrate on the genre of still life and portraiture. Moving beyond the formal strategies of her earlier still life arrangements, she employed a new decorative approach to colour and form. Objects are simplified to silhouettes with bright splashes of colour, floating freely in space disregarding allegiance to objects. The overall effect is an emphasis on the decorative, bordering on abstraction.

Christmas Decorations has much in common with her two acclaimed oil self-portraits of this period - *Self Portrait: Still Life* and *Still Life: Self Portrait* c 1935. Both merge the perimeters of still life and portraiture, clustering similar objects and motifs in an interconnected organic piled up around a central motif. *Christmas Decorations* exhibits composition echos to both works, particularly *Still Life: Self Portrait* where the circular red bauble is echoed in the oil's central red beret. There is also a strong link to *Decorative Motif* c1935 in collection of Te Papa Tongarewa which depicts the same dove ornament in the foreground.

Abandoned Cottage, Cerne Abbas No 2 is a starkly different work in both subject matter and technique. However, both works are unified by Hodgkins ongoing quest to present the everyday in challenging new ways. Due to the war and her age, Hodgkins was unable to continue her restorative trips to Europe and made Corfe Castle her base from 1940. In September 1943, she was forced to briefly relocate to Cerne Abbas, Dorset with her friend Dorothy Selby as her studio in Corfe Castle had been damaged by heavy tank traffic. Her time in Cerne Abbas was spent sketching and accumulating assorted motifs and landforms, which she worked into fully developed paintings on her return to Corfe.

The war years saw Hodgkins embrace the British Neo-Romantic movement. She began depicting imagery such as farm machinery, dilapidated structures within her environment, typical metaphors for the tortured psyche of the English landscape. *Abandoned Cottage, Cerne Abbas No 2* illustrates these Neo-Romantic sensibilities however her treatment is more concerned with the painterly possibilities inspired by the structure than the associative interpretation of it. Form is free following, structure fades, with colour, shape & line subtly controlling the picture plain. The use of gouache, her preferred medium towards the end of her career, aids this fluidity of form. It is important to note that Hodgkins produced relatively few works in 1943, with only 13 finished paintings recorded. However, her powers were undiminished in this last decade of her life. To quote esteemed Hodgkins scholar, the late Tony Mackle, 'she retained the ability to surprise and delight - the eye is constantly active finding something new and intriguing to contemplate.'

Helena Walker