

From the collection



Dame Louise Henderson was born in Paris in 1902 and immigrated in 1925 with her husband to New Zealand, where she studied painting at the Canterbury School of Art.

Louise later moved to Auckland where she attended classes under Archibald Fisher at the Elam School of Fine Arts. During this time she also worked in the Auckland studio of painter John Weeks and subsequently in Paris under the internationally acclaimed cubist painter, Jean Metzinger (1883-1956).

Throughout her extensive career, Louise worked in a variety of materials including most paint mediums as well as sculpture, embroidery, tapestry, weaving, stained glass and mosaic. It is arguably, however, in the medium of paint that she made her biggest impact on the New Zealand art scene.

Louise's early work consistently focused on the landscape of the Canterbury region and she often accompanied friend and artist Rita Angus on her

sketching trips. Louise's work of this period was exhibited alongside fellow leading Christchurch artists including Leo Bensemann, Rata Lovell-Smith and Olivia Spencer Bower. Although Louise is now recognised as being one of the pioneering figures of early cubism in New Zealand, her hard-edged abstractions were often met with disdain and derision by the public throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Louise's understanding and appreciation of contemporary European art made her an important and influential figure in the New Zealand art scene, in both a teaching and exhibiting capacity.

Her time spent as a lecturer in painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts at The University of Auckland during the 1950s saw her teaching some of New Zealand's most renowned abstractionists including Gretchen Albrecht and Geoff Thornley.

Completed in 1952, the present work was bought from the artist by The University of

Arts

Auckland in 1991. Featuring a predominantly earthy palette, the work is characteristic of Henderson's cubist works where she transcribes her subject through a series of angular planes. The time-honoured subject of the reclining female nude is revitalised and reinvented under Henderson's pencil and brush as she fractures and distorts her subject by amalgamating a series of seemingly disparate viewpoints.

In line with the cubist ethos, Henderson unabashedly draws attention to the two-dimensional physicality of the work by doing away with the traditionally celebrated technique of perspective in order to create a three-dimensional illusion and the use of fine mimetic brushwork to consolidate the illusory view. Instead, the viewer is presented with thin rubbings, and smudges of crayon graze the surface of the paper in places, drawing attention to its presence and its texture while any notion of receding space is negated by the background planes being pushed up directly behind the nude form.

The work of Louise Henderson features in all major public collections throughout New Zealand including the Auckland Art Gallery, Christchurch Art Gallery and the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, as well as in an extensive number of important private collections throughout Australasia and Europe.

Jemma Field

*Louise Henderson
Reclining Nude, 1952
Crayon and charcoal on paper, 485 x 1095 mm
The University of Auckland Art Collection*