



William Mathew Hodgkins (1833-1898), *Changing Pastures*, 1888, watercolour, 235 x 495mm.

Liverpudlian by birth, William Mathew Hodgkins followed the goldrush from Victoria to Otago in 1862. His marriage in Dunedin three years later produced six children, including a daughter, Frances, whose fame and artistic success have eclipsed her father's accomplishment. Yet in nineteenth century New Zealand, Hodgkins senior was an artistic colossus, exhibiting widely at art societies throughout the country and publishing his lectures on art in the daily newspapers. As a self-taught watercolourist, his concern about his lack of drawing skills led him to concentrate on atmospheric effects, taking his cue from Joseph Mallord William Turner whose work in the National Gallery in London he described as "a mine of artistic wealth".

By profession a lawyer, Hodgkins neglected his career to concentrate on his artistic hobbies. Helping to found the Otago Art Society in 1875,

and establish the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1884, Hodgkins became an eloquent and persuasive advocate for the visual arts throughout the colony. His 1880 lecture "A history of landscape art and its study in New Zealand" was made influential through wide publication, and its recommendation that aspirant artists make a study of the countryside met an enthusiastic response. Hodgkins writes of his adopted country as a composite of all the scenic wonders of the world. "We have here, as it were, almost at our very door, the special features of every country which is remarkable for its scenery: the English lakes, the Scottish mountain and glen, the snow-covered peaks of Switzerland, the fiords of Norway, the tinted geysers of the Yellowstone..."

*Changing Pastures* shows the wide expanse of the Waimea Plains in Southland in late summer, with the dry tussocky grassland fringed by

Hokonui hills and Eyre mountains in the distance. This peaceful scene is punctuated by the dark figure of the musterer and his dog moving the mob in middle distance. Beyond them, a Turneresque plume of steam marks the passage of a train on the Waimea Plains Railway which, despite the long economic depression of the 1880s, operated three times a week from 1880 providing a link (via Invercargill) between Dunedin and the Lake Wakatipu district.

It is not known how this historically significant painting came to be in The University of Auckland Art Collection, but it was recently retrieved from a pile destined for the rubbish skip during a departmental refurbishment. Staff interested in displaying the work (which is undergoing conservation) should contact [s.hartnett@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:s.hartnett@auckland.ac.nz)

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