

From the collection



Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) *Courtyard in Ibiza 1932-33* watercolour, 395 x 540mm

A childhood in Dunedin gave painter Frances Hodgkins a life-long aversion to cold weather. The south of France was her usual destination as soon as dreary English winters began to bite, but in the middle of the Depression she ventured instead to Balears, the third largest of the Balearic Islands off the coast of the Spanish town of Valencia in the West Mediterranean. Better known now for the dance parties and rave culture that made it iconic in the late 1990s, the Balearic capital of Ibiza was fascinating to Hodgkins for its Roman, Phoenician and Carthaginian remains, and its famous whitewashed architecture.

On arrival in late 1932, Hodgkins set herself up in the Hotel Balear, situated high up in the old town (Dalt Vila), and commanding a view over the Mediterranean. She was joined by the Auckland painter May Smith and the Wellington artist Maud Burge. Together they enjoyed exploring the narrow, winding and steep cobbled streets and the views glimpsed through breaks in the high ramparts of the vast terraces at each level. She relished the high contrast of Mediterranean light, writing to a friend: "I would rather be here in the sunshine than alone in the Studio – it was getting me down badly." Notices reviewing her works in recent London exhibitions had been good, drawing attention to her skills as a colourist and her originality, with the critic for

The Times remarking that her system of painting had become "a sort of free translation of natural forms". Already 63 years old when she went to Ibiza, Hodgkins felt the pressure to use the dramatic environment to produce brave new works: "The SHOW is the THING – I must set London talking – they expect it of me...but down here I forget all about it & think only of the jolly things around me & the awful urge to get at them."

A lively parrot belonging to Hodgkins' landlady had been a successful feature of works done in Cornwall in 1931, and the caged bird at the centre of the composition here is a tightly detailed anchor in an otherwise fluid composition. Hodgkins' scene is painted from a high viewpoint and includes a mysterious draped and hooded female figure seated on the wall looking down into the scene.

With their high-keyed colour and expert use of watercolour, the paintings Hodgkins produced in Ibiza were just what the artist needed to cement her reputation for adventurous effects. This work went immediately after exhibition into the collection of Eardley Knollys (1902-1991), an English artist of the Bloomsbury School who was a friend of Hodgkins and was also an art critic, art dealer and collector. It was purchased from Knollys (along with *Courtyard in Wartime*, one of Hodgkins' late oils of her home in Corfe Castle in Dorset) by Dr Eric McCormick on behalf of The University of Auckland.

Linda Tyler