

About Frances Hodgkins

OUR custom of exporting (or very often, in effect, deporting) our best brains and talents has in recent years provoked a great deal of discussion, and a negligible amount of action. What is not so often remarked is the way in which we tend to lose all trace of these people who leave us in order to seek more fertile ground. Very often we are not even aware that a loss has been sustained—unless the emigrant becomes distinguished in the field of atomic science, or makes some contact with the Royal Family, or in some other way gets into the headlines.

I suppose most readers of *The Listener* will have seen examples of pottery designed by Keith Murray. How many of them are aware that Keith Murray was born in New Zealand, and educated at the old St. John's College (and later at King's College) in Auckland? He is now, of course, a very distinguished architect, as well as being one of the half-dozen most famous pottery designers in the world.

The fact that Keith Murray has left New Zealand and settled in England doesn't prevent his work from coming

Written for "The Listener"
by A. R. D. FAIRBURN

here. There is, perhaps, no great loss to anybody as a result of his change of address. I find it odd, however, that there should be such a lack of interest in him in the country of his birth.

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WHEN we come to consider Frances Hodgkins the position is rather different. If she had lived in New Zealand, or spent any considerable amount of time here, she might have given us interpretations of our landscape that would have helped greatly in the development of New Zealand painting. Nearly all her work—and certainly all the best of it—has been done in Europe.

But even at that, her painting should have a strong interest for New Zealanders. One would expect to see half-a-dozen of her finest works in each of our big galleries. One would expect to see wealthy New Zealanders buying her paintings and treasuring them. One would indeed—if one did not know one's New Zealand. The sad truth is that most

New Zealanders have never heard of Frances Hodgkins; and that those who have heard her name have seen practically nothing of her work. I regard it as unfortunate, therefore, that the only reference to her that I have seen in print in New Zealand for some years was that made by a *Listener* contributor, T. D. H. Hall, some weeks ago. Mr. Hall's comments conveyed, to me at least, some faint suggestion that Miss Hodgkins has been steadily going to the pack ever since she left New Zealand years ago; and that she is now neck-deep in the "cult of unintelligibility" against which M. Julien Benda inveighed the other day. Those readers who may have seen the recent article by Myfanwy Piper in the English *Listener* dealing with Frances Hodgkins' life and work (to which Mr. Hall referred)—and who noticed that she was given the honour of a front-cover reproduction of one of her paintings—will perhaps have gathered that her reputation stands very high. Mrs. Piper's article (or rather broadcast talk) is, I think, a fine and illuminating piece of criticism. If her metaphors are vivid and striking, this is something to be grateful for. It is hardly possible to convey to listeners and

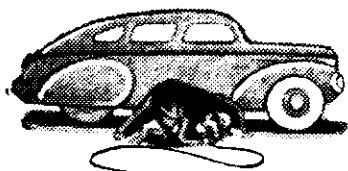


FRANCES HODGKINS
The greatest living woman painter?

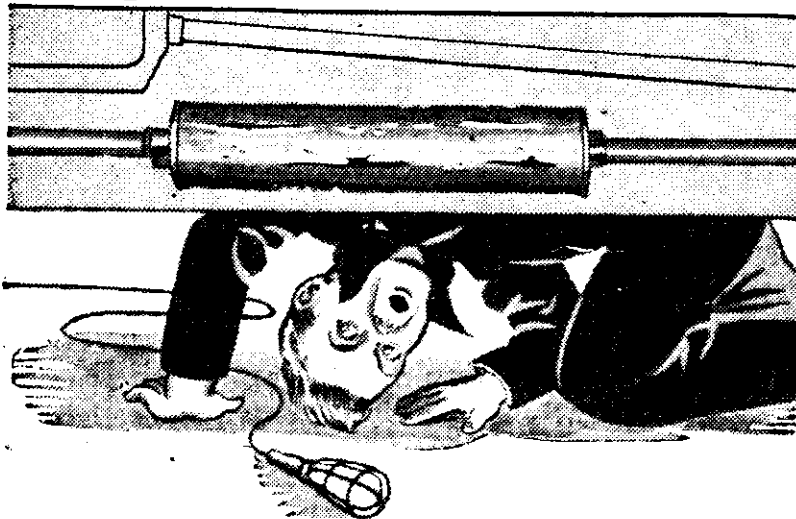
readers one's personal impressions of a painter's work, to give some hint of its emotional power, without abandoning the language of the laboratory and the bureau of statistics.

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[MET Frances Hodgkins in London in 1931. I was at that time very friendly with Lucy Wertheim, who ran the Wertheim Gallery. Lucy had been a



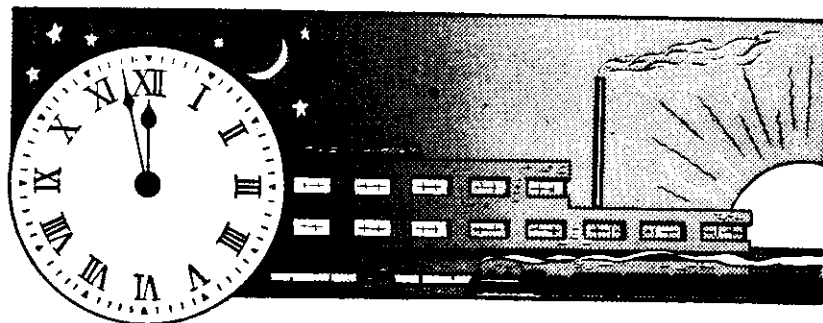
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