

# Sydney Lough Thompson

New Zealander, 1877-1973

Worcester Boulevard, PO Box 2626, Christchurch, New Zealand  
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## Lyttelton from the Bridle Path

1937, oil on canvas, 98x130 cm

Presented by the Lyttelton Harbour Board 1938

Reproduced courtesy of Thompson / Caldwell families



### About the work

This is a New Zealand landscape influenced by the tendency in the 1930s to sharpen edges. In 1934 Sydney Lough Thompson had returned to live in Christchurch after many successful years painting in France. During that time he had continued to exhibit widely in New Zealand and it was a reflection of his status as an artist in the local community that he was given a major commission in 1935 for a large painting for the Wellington Harbour Board. The following year he was commissioned by the Lyttelton Harbour Board to paint this scene. The intention was to capture both the beauty of the harbour and the activity of this busy port with its prosperous shipping trade.

The painting was commissioned as a tribute to the former chairman of the Lyttelton Harbour Board, W.K. McAlpine. However it turned out to be too large for the boardroom and the following year the Harbour Board presented it to the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Thompson worked up the final painting in his studio from a number of *plein-air* (outdoors) studies made on the Port Hills overlooking Lyttelton Harbour. The composition has the immediate 'snap shot' form favoured by the Impressionists and presents the scene as a segment seen from a site on the Bridle Path on the hills behind the harbour. The hills and the boats cut by the frame suggest the scene extends further to left and right.

The long shadows of the hills, which cast the immediate foreground into shade, suggest a late afternoon scene. Thompson said he preferred to paint in the early morning and then again after 5pm, "when there was more colour. In general the hot dry middle part of the day in New Zealand is unsuitable for painting." ('Sydney Lough Thompson (1877-1973)', *Survey*, No. 14, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, February 1976.)

Using distinct blocks of strong tone, Thompson has placed the emphasis on the changing patterns of light. The broken cloud distributes separate patches of shade and bright sunlight. Light, and its effect on form, are expressed with the colour balances and carefully placed contrasts. Each brushstroke is a response to the colour Thompson has observed in light. He has also deliberately brightened the traditional colour palette and used the complementary relationships of the red against the green or orange adjacent to blue. On the hills across the harbour are the traditional ochre and blues, which had by this time come to be accepted as Canterbury landscape colours.

While Thompson worked on a range of subjects over his career, it was his waterfront and harbour scenes at Concarneau for which he became most well known. In much the same way he has here captured the activities of the bustling port of Lyttelton.

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## About the artist

Born in Oxford, Canterbury, in 1877, Thompson began studying at Canterbury College School of Art in 1895, as well as taking lessons from Petrus van der Velden (1837-1913). In 1900 Thompson travelled to London and Europe where he studied at Académie Julian, Paris, under A-W Bourguereau (1825 -1905). A fellow student was the Irish artist, William Leech (1881 -1968).

By 1902 Thompson was based in Concarneau, on the Breton coast of France. Throughout his career Thompson travelled regularly between New Zealand and Europe, in particular he was drawn to the fishing town of Concarneau.

He returned to New Zealand in 1905. The Artists Sketch Club was formed in 1906 and the membership included Cecil Kelly (1879 -1954), Raymond McIntyre (1879 -1933), Alfred Walsh (1859 -1916) and others who met regularly in Thompson's studio on Cambridge Terrace, in Christchurch. Thompson taught at the Canterbury College School of Art from 1906 to 1911 when he returned to Europe.

In 1934 he again returned to Christchurch where he was already very well known and respected as an artist. Although living in France, several highly successful exhibitions of his work in New Zealand had established a following and attracted considerable patronage. Thompson was officially honoured with an OBE in 1937. He made his final trip to Concarneau from New Zealand in 1969 and died there in 1973.

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 45 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

### *Māori Mother and Child* .

1898, oil on board  
Presented by R.E. McDougall 1932

### *Portrait of Joy Clark*

1917, oil on canvas  
Collection Christchurch Art Gallery Trust

### *Horses on the Quay*

c. 1920, oil on canvas  
Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts 1932

### *Morning Coffee*

1942, oil on board  
Purchased 1967

## Further reading

*Sydney Lough Thompson, At Home and Abroad*, Julie King, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1990.

'Sydney Lough Thompson (1877-1973)', *Survey*, No. 14, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, February 1976.

