

Louise Henderson

New Zealander, 1902-1994

Addington Workshops

1930, oil on board, 95.7x117.6 cm

Dame Louise Henderson Collection, presented by the McKegg Family 1999

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About the work

Addington Workshops shows the influence on Louise Henderson of European Modernism of the 1920s and 1930s. The Addington railway workshops were first established on the Addington site in Christchurch in May 1880, having previously been in Carlyle Street. Steam trains, passenger cars and goods wagons were produced there. The workshop depicted in the painting is likely to be the car and wagon shop built in 1927.

The Modernists looked for styles to reflect the new industrial age and had a fundamental commitment to a new sense of classical order and unity. They combined some of the new ideas of Post-Impressionism and Constructivism with a strong emphasis on geometric design.

Addington Workshops has an illustrative/poster-like quality to it. With its clear overall lighting and fairly muted colouring it reflects some of the ideals of the Modernist style. Henderson has concentrated on the geometric qualities of the workshop, which she has depicted with the use of many straight lines painted with the aid of a ruler. The workshop has been cleaned and tidied and the design elements emphasised, as can be seen in the prominence given to the clear geometric structures of the roof supports, the lathe and work under construction.

She has painted the work in a tight realist manner, paying attention to the details of the workshop and the variety of tasks that the men are involved in. However, there is a deliberate unity in the treatment of man and machine, with neither becoming dominant. This makes the painting more a celebration of new industry than a straightforward, realistic factory scene. The work is most likely to have been completed in Henderson's studio from studies and sketches made on site.

This is an early work by Henderson, painted after she had been living in Christchurch for a number of years and during her period teaching embroidery and design at the Canterbury College School of Art. Henderson is better known for her later abstract cubist phase than the realist design approach she has taken here.

The British artist Christopher Perkins (1891-1968) was an artist and teacher who came to New Zealand in 1929. He was also interested in recording men at work and industrial scenes or workplaces.

By the 1970s the workshops at Addington covered over 41 acres and employed over 900 staff. However by 1990 those numbers had been drastically reduced to fewer than 50 staff and the workshops were closed in December of that year.

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About the artist

Born in Paris in 1902, Louise Etienne Sidonie Sauze was the daughter of Daniel Sauze who, for a time, was secretary to the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). Her maternal grandfather abandoned a successful career as an academic painter to become under-secretary to the Ministry of Culture. In 1920/1921 Louise attended the School of Industrial Arts in Paris and there studied embroidery, lace design and drawing. From 1921 to 1927 she was employed as a designer of embroidery and interior design for the weekly journal, *Madame*, and continued to submit designs to the journal after marrying Hubert Henderson and leaving Paris for Christchurch in 1925.

By 1926 Henderson was employed as an instructor in embroidery and design at the Canterbury School of Art. She also enrolled in courses on methods of teaching and art study and received an Honorary Diploma of Fine Arts in 1931. Henderson exhibited with the New Zealand Society of Artists in Christchurch in 1933 and with The Group in 1935, the same year she began exhibiting with the Canterbury Society of Arts and went on sketching trips with Rita Angus (1908-1970).

Henderson moved to Wellington in 1941 and from 1942 to 1945 taught needlework and established a new course in embroidery at the New Zealand Correspondence School. Between 1944 and 1950 she was an assistant teacher in art and craft at the Wellington Teachers' College. She also attended classes at Victoria University.

In 1950 Henderson moved to Auckland where she attended classes at the Elam School of Fine Arts with Archibald Fisher. She also began working in John Weeks' studio and took up painting full-time, building a studio at the family home in Epsom.

Henderson travelled to Europe in 1952 and studied in Paris under the cubist artist Jean Metzinger (1883-1956). She was back in New Zealand between 1953 and 1955, then in 1956 travelled to the Middle East with her husband. The couple went through Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Israel. They returned to New Zealand in 1959 and Henderson took up a full-time teaching position at Elam School of Art in Auckland. In 1961 she taught painting, drawing and design at the Darlinghurst School of Art in Sydney. In 1965/1966 she travelled to Brussels, Paris and London with a joint exhibition of her work and that of Milan Mrkusich (b. 1925). Throughout the 1970s Henderson tutored frequently in painting and design in Auckland and throughout New Zealand. She was made a Dame in 1993 and died in 1994.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 27 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

Portrait of Betty Curnow

1954, oil on canvas
Purchased 1972

Abstract (Orange/blue circle)

1992, oil on canvas
Dame Louise Henderson Collection, presented by the McKegg Family 1999

Bush Series No. 5

undated, oil on canvas
Dame Louise Henderson Collection, presented by the McKegg Family 1999

Governors Bay

undated, oil on canvas board
Dame Louise Henderson Collection, presented by the McKegg Family 1999

Plain Girl (nude)

undated, crayon on paper on board
Dame Louise Henderson Collection, presented by the McKegg Family 1999

Further reading

Louise Henderson The Cubist Years 1946-1958, C. Barton, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1991.

'Louise Henderson', E. Grierson, *Art New Zealand*, No. 46, Autumn 1988, pp. 77-81.

