

Undressed: A study of Louise Henderson's 'Les Deux Amies' (1953)

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Keywords: # Louise Henderson # cubism # nudes # material analysis
infrared imaging # modernist painting

This article takes an in-depth look at Louise Henderson's cubist-inspired painting *Les Deux Amies* (1953), which she painted upon her return to New Zealand after a year studying in Paris with cubist artist Jean Metzinger. Using a combination of formal analysis, infrared imaging and a study of her materials, we go beneath the surface of the painting to find new insights into the creation of this important work, which helped introduce European modernism to the conservative local art scene. In particular, this paper argues that "undressing" the figures in *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich, hidden record of how Henderson worked through key questions about material construction, subject matter and composition at a crucial moment in her artistic career.

INTRODUCTION

Two women sit together in a chair, their bodies intimately entwined. The figure on the left drapes her arm around her companion, holding her hand with a firm grip. The right figure gazes down, and has strong, angular features. These are no gentle Venuses. Their bodies are fragmented into geometric facets, their mask-like faces hardened with acute black outlines. They have been built up like architecture, buttressed by thin layers of blue, grey and beige which form their dresses. Although this is undoubtedly a painting of two women, they are unlike any two women that had ever before been painted in New Zealand.

Louise Henderson painted *Les Deux Amies* (The Two Friends) in 1953, shortly after returning to New Zealand from a year spent studying in Paris with cubist artist Jean Metzinger. This painting was featured



Figure 1. Louise Henderson, *Les Deux Amies*, 1953, oil on canvas. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Purchased 2011, with the assistance of the Molly Morpeth Canaday fund.

as a key work in her 1953 solo exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, one of the earliest shows to decisively introduce a modernist, European style of painting into the local art scene. The striking, cubist-inspired composition caught the attention of critics and artists like Colin McCahon for its emotional acuity and freedom from traditional depictions of space.¹ Through works like *Les Deux Amies*, Henderson posed a challenge to the naturalism of the Regional Realist style that dominated “modernist” painting in New Zealand.

Henderson’s approach to the cubist style is best observed in the way she has rendered the friends’ dresses from angular facets of colour. Although created from delicate slices of colour, the women have a strong and substantial presence, like roughly hewn marble statues. However, by undressing these figures, we find that there is even more to *Les Deux Amies* than first meets the eye. This paper goes beneath the surface of the picture to gain a better understanding of how the artist worked through formal, conceptual and stylistic concerns in the execution of her work. By analysing Henderson’s use of materials, examining the composition using infrared imaging, and comparing the finished painting to an earlier preparatory sketch, we gain new insights into her working methods and understanding of materials. In particular, we argue that a close study of this painting reveals that her extensive background in textile design strongly influenced the development of this work, just as much as her legendary encounter with Metzinger. Undressing the figures in *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich, hidden record of Henderson’s thinking – and her rethinking – within a key moment in her artistic career.

A CUB-ISH ENCOUNTER

Louise Henderson (née Sauze) was born in Paris in 1902. Her father was secretary to Auguste Rodin, and some of her earliest memories involved playing with marble chips in the sculptor’s studio. With such an environment framing her formative years, her calling as an artist might have seemed inevitable. Her parents, however, did not approve of such a career for a young woman. Instead of art school, in 1919 Henderson entered the *Ecole de la Broderie et Dentelle de la Ville de Paris* to study embroidery and lace design—a decision which would have a lasting impact on Henderson’s later career.² During her studies she met her future husband, New Zealander Hubert Henderson, while admiring

a display of medieval gloves at the Musée de Cluny.³ After a long correspondence and marriage-by-proxy at the Embassy, she immigrated to New Zealand in 1925 to join her new husband in Christchurch.

For a young woman raised in the vibrant artistic milieu of Paris, Christchurch of the 1920s must have felt dull and provincial. But it was there, ironically, that she finally found the freedom and support to fulfil the full breadth of her artistic ambitions. Henderson took up painting and began teaching embroidery at the Canterbury College School of Art, quickly becoming a figure in the most progressive local art circles. She took frequent sketching trips with Rita Angus, and from the mid-1930s exhibited regularly with "The Group," an informal art association formed in reaction to conservative local art societies. The Canterbury landscape became Henderson's earliest testing ground for her interest in formal structure, liberally altering the features of the landscape in pursuit of a strong composition.⁴ As she put it: "I wanted to express the fundamental of what I saw, the form of what I saw, the form of people, the form of things."⁵ Significantly, however, Henderson did not limit herself to painting, but continued to develop a burgeoning modernism through fabric design, embroidery and textiles. She even exhibited her paintings and textile designs together as early as 1934.⁶

From the late 1940s, Henderson started corresponding with Auckland painter John Weeks, whose paintings explored an abstracted formalism that appealed to Henderson's growing concern with form and space.⁷ Weeks had studied in Paris with cubist Andre Lhote in the 1920s, and he encouraged Henderson to return to Europe to study art in a more dynamic environment. Henderson took this advice to heart, and with the support of her family left for Paris in 1952 to expand the horizons of her painting practice.

Upon arriving in France, Henderson encountered the paintings of cubist Jean Metzinger by chance in a retrospective exhibition at the *Galerie Art Vivant*.⁸ Metzinger was considered a major figure of cubism in the first two decades of the 20th century, developing the movement's theoretical foundations with Albert Gleizes in their 1912 text *Du Cubisme*. Metzinger was an early follower of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, and played an important role in winning public recognition for cubism by organising the first major exhibition in the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1911.⁹ By 1952, the senior artist was nearly 70 years old, but still taught at the Académie Frochot in Montmartre. Henderson applied to the studio for lessons, and was accepted on the strength of a quick sketch of a model that she was asked to draw on the spot.¹⁰

Henderson painted *Les Deux Amies* after returning to New



Figure 2. Louise Henderson, sketch for *Les Deux Amies*, 1952, charcoal on newsprint. Private collection.

Zealand in 1953, but the initial sketch for this work was made during her year in Metzinger's atelier. With its rhythmic lines and flattened sense of space, the sketch explores the use of intersecting line and shadow to delineate form. It reflects her interest in Metzinger's cubist sensibility, which followed in the spirit of Cézanne to break with illusionistic painting traditions by introducing multiple viewpoints at once.¹¹ She tests out this sense of simultaneity by creating dynamism in the legs of her figures, as if capturing their movements within a single picture. Henderson's faces are rendered simply, perhaps also inspired by the "primitive" African masks so admired by the cubists.

Interestingly, her use of two nudes in the sketches mirrors one of Metzinger's most important works, *Deux nus* (Two Nudes), which was exhibited in the first cubist exhibition at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1911.¹² Like Henderson's *Les Deux Amies*, Metzinger's two nudes are fragmented into a rhythmic pattern of angular facets. Metzinger treats

the space around the figures much the same way, giving the picture an overall flatness and unity. Like Henderson's painting, Metzinger's two figures are not fully abstract. Henderson retains this essentially conservative approach to cubism in her own work, never completely abandoning the women or the portrayal of their relationship. As Metzinger wrote in his *Du Cubisme* treatise:

"Let the picture imitate nothing; let it nakedly present its motive...Nevertheless, let us admit that this reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished..."¹³

Metzinger's reluctance to wholly embrace abstraction only increased as his career went on, and he returned to a more stylised, classical treatment of the figure from the 1920s. Christina Barton argues that these "gentler" avant-garde values were precisely what attracted Henderson to Metzinger's work, giving her a framework to experiment with the formal properties of line and space while retaining a connection to the figure.¹⁴

Henderson's encounter with Metzinger has a somewhat legendary status in New Zealand art history, because her paintings from this period were among the first to introduce this European, cubist sensibility.¹⁵ However, Metzinger did very little actual teaching, merely encouraging his students to work through problems for themselves:

"He didn't actually teach you. He visited us once a week, looked at what we were doing and said – 'Keep working...You will find your way...And I did.'"¹⁶

Henderson never once saw Metzinger take up a pencil or paintbrush. In fact, she herself did almost no painting in the entire year she was there, instead drawing from the model with charcoal on cheap newsprint.¹⁷ Moreover, by the 1950s there was no longer an active cubist scene in Paris, so it is unlikely Henderson received any significant exposure to actual cubist thinking while she was in Paris, although it is possible she encountered it there as a young woman before immigrating to New Zealand. *Les Deux Amies* is perhaps better understood as the product of a self-led period of study, in which Henderson was given the freedom and encouragement to work through the same problems of constructing pictorial space that the Cubists had tackled four decades earlier. Describing the drawing she had done in Metzinger's studio she later commented:

"Looking back on my pen drawing now, I see that it was certainly belonging to the family [of cubism] but why I could not say as I had used only my observation not any knowledge of the mind work of that school of thought."¹⁸

In this way, *Les Deux Amies* can only be considered cub-ish; although it shares a similar set of concerns around form and structure, Henderson's work cannot really be placed within any formal cubist school of thought.

FROM SKETCH TO PAINTING

After returning to New Zealand in 1953, Henderson began translating her sketch of the two women into its final, painted form. Although she roughly followed the basic elements of composition laid out in her preparatory sketch, the application of colour to the painting transforms the work into something quite different. Henderson shaped her figures by applying rhythmic facets of paint to create the illusion of volume through sophisticated handling of her medium. The muted colours and thin application of paint have a distinct softness to them, but Henderson layered them upon one another to create the effect of hard, angular bodies. The flat planes of colour slide over each other, employing subtle variations of tone to emphasize the fullness of the figures.



Figure 3. Detail of Louise Henderson's *Les Deux Amies*

These effects are enhanced by Henderson's unusually deep awareness and skilful handling of her materials. She has taken control of every element of the final product, making a number of judicious choices in the construction of her work in order to achieve the overall

effect. For instance, her choice of canvas for *Les Deux Amies* is a carefully chosen blend of linen and jute with a non-standard weave, similar to the open weave found in tapestry canvases. This produces a coarser surface, on to which Henderson laid down thin, fluid washes of paint usually associated more with a watercolour technique than oil painting. In some areas, the thin wash of pale paint sits in the valleys of the weave over the darker tones below, allowing Henderson to create subtle tonal shifts which create a sense of volume. On the right figure, for example, this effect serves to make the woman's lips recede and her chin more prominent, helping give shape to the lower part of her face (see Figure 3).

Henderson's sophisticated approach to material extends to every aspect of the final painting, demonstrating a deliberate set of choices around the final presentation of the work. The whole canvas is tensioned over a homemade strainer of heavy timber, and framed using a commercial frame moulding that was hand painted in an off-white colour.¹⁹ Henderson demonstrates this high level of concern with material in correspondence with her mentor, John Weeks. In a 1948 letter to Weeks, for instance, she seeks his advice on procuring quality native wood to paint on, asks how to fashion a good easel, and laments the difficulty of finding good paint and brushes in New Zealand.²⁰ Henderson's creative process was not limited to the act of putting paintbrush to canvas, but involved every aspect of preparing her canvas and support toward the final product.

Henderson's discerning involvement with material reflects her extensive background in textiles, including her advanced knowledge of the qualities of different fibres and their effects on the weave. This was established in Henderson's earliest studies in embroidery and design in Paris, and continued through her teaching career in New Zealand. Here, she sought to raise the teaching standards of art and design in her adopted country by emphasizing a thorough knowledge of materials, design principles and their histories to her students.²¹ She urged the Canterbury School of Art toward a more professional approach to design, shifting emphasis from domestic embroidery on petticoats and tablecloths to an intensive study of gold-stitch techniques and histories of medieval embroidery like the Bayeux tapestry.²² Finding New Zealand resources for students inadequate, Henderson even published an authoritative *History of Embroidery* through the Department of Education, which outlines the importance of understanding the relationship between the foundation material, thread and tools in conceiving the overall design.²³ She also outlines a guide to local plants

and lichen that can be used to produce natural dyes for fabric.²⁴ These tools, for Henderson, were not merely the means to an end, but played an integral part in the development of a work of art.

In *Les Deux Amies*, Henderson's intimate knowledge of textiles helped her to achieve the painterly effects which she applies in a cubist (or cub-ish) style. The rhythmic pattern of colour in the friends' dresses even seem to resemble the arrangement of fabric pieces in a quilt. That is not to say that Henderson approached these forms of art as interchangeable, however—it was about developing a deep understanding of the individual properties of medium. In fact, she regarded paintings as a pursuit fundamentally different to embroidery or textile design:

"Sometimes one comes across landscapes executed in needlework...The only place for such things is the fire! However well they are worked, they are meaningless...and as decoration they only imitate painting, and in themselves are a false representation and a parody of art."²⁵

Rather, Henderson advocated for a deep understanding of the individual properties of any given medium in order to utilise them to their full potential. Within *Les Deux Amies*, her expert handling of material helped her to achieve its modernist effect, employing colour and texture to convey a sense of volume rather than relying on the traditional perspectival laws.

RETHINKING FORM: A LOOK UNDER THE DRESSES

In *Les Deux Amies*' translation from sketch to painting, the most important shift is in the application of colour to produce form. For Henderson, form and structure was often a stronger focus than her specific subject matter. However, it cannot be overlooked that in the painting the two nude figures have become clothed. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that Henderson did originally paint the figures nude, but went back and painted clothing over the naked bodies.²⁶ This theory has never been proven for *Les Deux Amies*, but we do know that it happened at least once before to a painting of a nude—Henderson later added clothing to the only painting she made in Paris in 1952

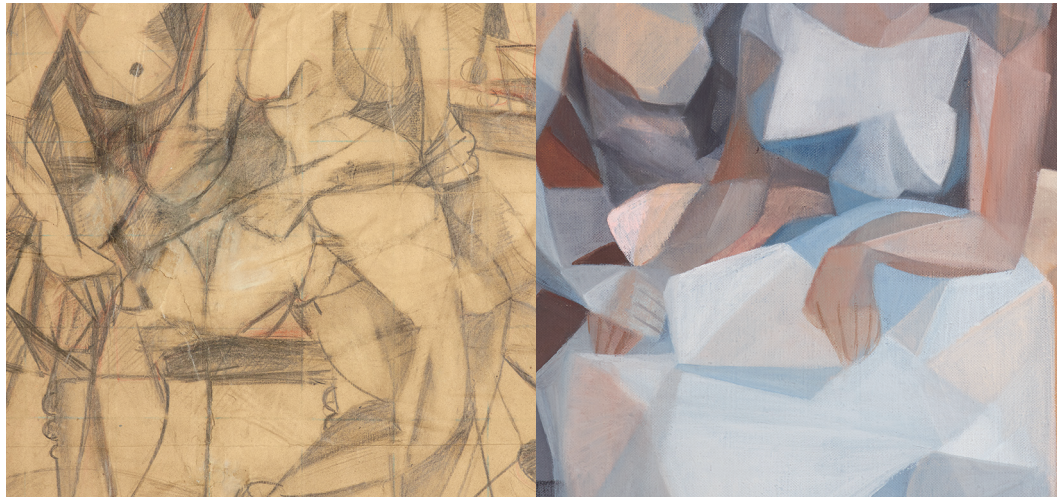


Figure 4. Comparison detail of sketch and painting

(*Woman in Blue*), after being admonished by *New Zealand Herald* reporter Anthony Alpers for its indecency.²⁷

Because the sketch confirms that the figures in *Les Deux Amies* were originally conceived as nude, infrared (IR) imaging of the painting was undertaken in February 2016 to investigate whether Henderson repainted this work as well. IR imaging revealed a series of drawn or painted lines that exist under the top layer of the painting, which aligns with those of the drawing. Easily seen in IR are the legs in the foreground, the midriff and breasts, and lines delineating her left arm. Traces of these lines are visible in normal light in some places, such as across the left breast of the figure on the left. The IR imaging also shows the lines tracing the legs, and—very faintly—the inner thigh and pelvic area, suggesting that the dress was indeed painted over the drawn form after re-thinking the initial composition.

This examination also revealed that Henderson cut the original picture down from a larger canvas, radically altering the dimensions of the canvas between two distinct applications of paint layers. The earlier paint layer extends around the tacking edges to the back of the work, whereas the uppermost layer sits within the confines of the current format. This indicates that the first configuration of the painting was larger, with the figures positioned higher on the canvas and with more space. There are also a number of subtle shifts in the texture of the paint surface around the figures in *Les Deux Amies*, which suggests that the forms beneath were later covered. Painted in two distinct layers,

this confirms that Henderson radically reconsidered her composition as she painted. Combined with the IR imaging, it indicates that she likely did paint clothing over the original nude bodies.

Through the addition of clothing in *Les Deux Amies*, dynamic line gives way to a more static and solid form. Between sketch and painting, the position of the heads have also shifted so the women no longer gaze at each other. In fact, the women's bodies are melded into one, interlocked together through the overlapping facets in their dresses and hair. This downplays the intimacy between the two women, adding to the sense that Henderson is more interested in their form than their character or relationship. As Henderson once described in a letter to Weeks:

"I am working at figures...and considering them as pattern within pattern. I find pleasant harmonies of form and colour and satisfactory design but my models who are friends seem to think this crazy – through this I lose likeness and vivacity but gain colour and forms..."²⁸

The modified figures, in this way, reveal Henderson's conscious decision against naturalism, inspired by her interest in cubist forms.

Henderson may have chosen to dress her figures in order to address an unresolved problem about how to depict the upper legs and pelvic area in a satisfying composition. In her sketch, a series of overlapping lines and areas of shading leave the groin area ambiguous. This helps add a sense of movement to the figures' legs, but Henderson seems to have had difficulty in translating these intersecting lines into blocks of colour. A thicker band of paint is applied across the skirt, in the area of the sketch where the seat is positioned between their legs, suggesting she repainted this area several times. This thicker application seems slightly clumsy compared to the surrounding areas of paint, actually emphasising the high level of control and refinement in Henderson's usual painting technique. The arm of the right figure has also been re-positioned to cover this unresolved area, leaving her hand and wrist at an exaggerated, awkward angle. This strange position works well within the overall balance of the composition, but seems as if it was posed to strategically cover a problematic area.

However, it is also just as plausible that Henderson's choice to paint clothing over *Les Deux Amies* was guided by the same concerns about indecency that prompted her to repaint *Woman in Blue*. Adding to this theory, Henderson intended these women to be lovers, not

merely platonic friends.²⁹ This is alluded to with the French title *Les Deux Amies*, in which “the two friends” can be understood as a double entendre—a meaning that probably went over the heads of most New Zealand audiences of the early 1950s. There was little public visibility for lesbian imagery in this period in New Zealand; one only has to think of the negative connotations attached to the supposedly romantic attachment of Christchurch murderesses Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker in 1954, to see why Henderson may have been hesitant to make this content too overt. Henderson was already pushing the boundaries of the conservative art scene with her radical cubist style of painting – although it is unlikely that the bold and fearless Henderson would have felt threatened by risqué subject matter, the conservatism of the larger social context cannot be ignored either.

THE RECEPTION OF *LES DEUX AMIES*

In 1953, Henderson presented *Les Deux Amies* in her exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, alongside 40 of her other paintings, pastels and drawings. This solo show – a rare honour for a mid-career female artist in New Zealand at the time – was well-received by critics. She was praised for how her European travels strengthened and enriched her artistic practice. E. H. McCormick, for instance, wrote that the show gave Henderson “a leading place amongst artists practising in New Zealand,” admiring her technical skill, use of colour, and command of the cubist idiom “controlled by a subtle, mature intelligence”.³⁰ McCahon, too, commended Henderson’s work, writing that the two women in *Les Deux Amies* become real to the viewer “through the building up of apparently unrelated planes to become the very being of the two friends.”³¹ From the very first time it was exhibited, *Les Deux Amies* was recognised as a significant achievement in the development of modernist painting in New Zealand.

Henderson’s unconventional painting style became an important part of the accelerated changes taking place in the conservative Auckland art scene of the early 1950s. As Francis Pound describes, up until this time the “modern” in New Zealand terms typically referred to the stylised, sharp-edged naturalism of the prevailing Regional Realist style. All manner of abstraction or experimental approaches to space were reprehensibly “foreign,” not seen as something that could be usefully employed in the art of New

Zealand.³² It was only in the early 1950s that modern painters began, in any real measure, to consciously confront the abstract, expressionist and cubist experiments that characterised European painting in the first half of the 20th century. In many ways, Henderson’s work represented the bridge between local and international modernisms – a painting practice that pushed the boundaries of experimental painting, but with a radicalism gentle enough to be stomachable by the conservative local art scene. Although it is complimentary, McCahon’s 1954 review of Henderson’s exhibition takes on a defensive tone, making a plea for viewers to look at *Les Deux Amies* and be prepared to accept new realities in her work: “These paintings may surprise you, perhaps even shock you, but given a chance to reveal themselves they do have a lot to tell you.”³³ McCahon shows that he was aware Henderson’s work would indeed rub up against local conservative sensibilities.

On the other hand, later critics have dismissed Henderson’s work as not being radical enough, sometimes describing it in pejorative terms like tender-minded, feminine, and lightweight—a stark contrast to the robust intellectual reading usually afforded McCahon’s work of the time. For example, in his review of the 1991 exhibition *Louise Henderson: the Cubist Years, 1946-1958* (Auckland Art Gallery), Michael Dunn criticized the “decorative shallowness” of Henderson’s painting, which “gives all it has quickly and has nothing left for later.”³⁴ However, his critique overlooks the originality that Henderson applied to the cubist approach, framed by her encounter with Metzinger. Moreover, delving beneath the surface of *Les Deux Amies* reveals a rich record of how she worked through the formal elements of this work, and her sophisticated engagement with the materials of her craft. There is an unmistakable depth to this painting, both in terms of her thinking and in her command of the materials.

Today, *Les Deux Amies* is recognised as an important painting which represents the significant contribution Henderson made to modern New Zealand art. The work is an intensive study of form and structure in painting, which used the female body as a vehicle for expressing volume in space.

Henderson was the first woman in mid-century New Zealand art to really attack the human figure with her brush, breaking up the female body into rhythmic facets with a deft handling of her materials. The women of *Les Deux Amies* are not slick, or graceful, or beautiful, tender or romantic. They are blocky and confrontational—they do not exist to please the eye but to challenge the brain. In some ways, the strength embodied by her figures mirrors the strong position taken by Henderson

in the local art scene, as a serious and determined modern painter.

The enigmatic relationship between the two women in *Les Deux Amies* leaves the painting open to interpretation, which is partly why the work has remained so compelling to audiences today. Hidden under their dresses is a record of Henderson's thinking which shows how she worked out the elements of her composition. This was underpinned by a sophisticated command of her craft, enhanced by Henderson's knowledge of materials and her extensive background in textile design. A close examination of the painting reveals how she drew on this background in service of her art, using her technical knowledge to achieve the cubist-inspired effects in her painting. Although it is a striking and interesting painting in itself, undressing *Les Deux Amies* reveals the depth and intelligence of Henderson's work within a key period of her career.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 As Colin McCahon described in his 1954 review of the exhibition: "In Louise Henderson's 'Les Deux Amies,' the two women become real to us through the building up of apparently unrelated planes to become the very being of the two friends, quite real people with real personality...[T]he depicting of space and objects in space is no longer tied to the brief Renaissance heresy of lines running back from the picture frame, but is freed from these ties to reach out in all directions from the painted surface of the painting." See: Colin McCahon, "Louise Henderson," *Home & Building* (1 February 1954): 40.
- 2 Elizabeth Grierson, "The Art of Louise Henderson 1925-1990," MA Thesis, University of Auckland (1990): 14, 28.
- 3 Simone McKegg, "My grandmother, Louise Henderson," talk at the Christchurch Art Gallery, 23 March 2016.
- 4 McKegg at Christchurch Art Gallery, 23 March 2016.
- 5 Louise Henderson, as quoted in Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 13.
- 6 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 21, 98.
- 7 John Weeks, "John Weeks: Career and Credo," *Art New Zealand* 22 (Summer 1981-82): 36.
- 8 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 35.
- 9 Picasso and Braque, it should be noted, were not part of this exhibition. Rather, the cubists most publicly associated with the style in these salon exhibitions were Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Henri Le Fauconnier, Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger – sometimes known as the Salon Cubists.
- 10 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 36.
- 11 See: Edward F. Fry, *Cubism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966): 36-41.
- 12 Jean Metzinger's *Deux Nus* (1910-11) is now in the collection of the Gothenburg Museum of Art in Sweden.

- 13 Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, *Du Cubisme* (1912), translated by T. Fisher Unwin, as reproduced in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968): 212
- 14 Christina Barton, *Louise Henderson: The Cubist Years, 1946–1958* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1991): 22-23.
- 15 It is important to note, however, that Louise Henderson was not the only New Zealand artist to experiment with the cubist idiom around this period, although her 1953 exhibition significantly raised the local profile of these modes of painting. In particular, Auckland painter John Weeks was an important mentor to Henderson, and had drawn on cubist influences in his own work since studying with Andre Lhote in Paris the late 1920s. Although Weeks did paint a small number of figurative works (such as the *Bathers* series), his treatment of the human figure retained a much higher degree of naturalism than Henderson achieved in paintings like *Les Deux Amies*. In addition to Weeks, other local artists experimenting with these approaches around this period included Charles Tole, Melvin Day, Wilfred Stanley Wallis, and Colin McCahon (whose cubist experiments were strongly influenced by Australian cubist Mary Cockburn-Mercer).
- 16 Louise Henderson, as quoted in Elizabeth Grierson, "Louise Henderson," *Art New Zealand*, no. 46 (1988): 78. In an unpublished 1984 interview with Anne Kirker (Te Papa archives), Henderson also stated: "He was a little short man with the darkest blue eyes you've ever seen, and cold. [...] He came at 12 and left about 20 past 12 casting an eye on all the rubbish students."
- 17 According to Henderson, Metzinger instructed the studio assistants to give her a single canvas, which she would only have to pay for if she made a mess of it. On this she painted a nude that would later become known as *The Blue Bird* or *Woman in Blue*. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 38–39.
- 18 Louise Henderson, in a letter to Mr T. Garrity, 23 June 1981 (Hocken Library, Dunedin).
- 19 It is likely that the artist painted the frame herself, but this cannot be confirmed. The frame is documented in a photograph of the artist with the painting in 1953. In 2015, painting conservators at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (who purchased the painting in 2011) restored the frame to this original colour, as it had been spray-painted gold at some point while privately owned.
- 20 As Henderson writes in a letter to John Weeks from September 1948 (Auckland Art Gallery archives): "I find wood hard to get – wood to paint on – I have a very nice piece of kauri – but only one – Would 3 ply finished in Matai, Rimu or Kauri do?"
- 21 Henderson's teaching career began as an instructor in embroidery and design at the Canterbury College School of Art in 1926, shortly after arriving in New Zealand. In 1938, Henderson applied for a research grant from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research related to upgrading craft teaching (especially embroidery) in the country, although the approved grant was never taken up. She began teaching "Art and Craft Expression" part-time at Rangiora High School in Christchurch from 1938–39, before being appointed as Assistant Teacher for the New Zealand Correspondence School (1942–1945) where she taught needlework and embroidery. From 1944 to 1950, she worked under Roland Hipkins at the Wellington Teachers' Training College teaching a range of arts and crafts to trainee teachers, including embroidery, bookbinding, painting, drawing and leatherwork. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 96–99.
- 22 Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 28.
- 23 Louise Henderson, *History of Embroidery* (Wellington: Department of Education, 1955): 4–5.
- 24 Louise Henderson, *The Story of Knitting* (Wellington: Primary School Bulletin, undated), as reproduced in Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 128.
- 25 Louise Henderson, "Embroidery a Living Art," *Art in New Zealand* 14, no. 1 (September 1941): 38.
- 26 Verbal anecdote told by a private collector of Henderson's work to the author, September 2015.
- 27 Grierson, "Louise Henderson," (1988): 78; Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 50.
- 28 Henderson, in a letter to John Weeks dated 12 September 1948 (Auckland Art Gallery archives).
- 29 As Henderson stated in interview with Grierson on 4 December 1988. See: Grierson, "Art of Louise Henderson" (1990): 43.
- 30 E.H. McCormick, "The Louise Henderson Exhibition: A Note in Retrospect," *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly*, no. 29 (March 1954): 54–55.
- 31 McCahon, "Louise Henderson," (1 February 1954): 41.
- 32 Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930–1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009): 225.
- 33 McCahon, "Louise Henderson," (1 February 1954): 41.
- 34 Michael Dunn, "Louise Henderson at the Auckland City Art Gallery," *Bulletin of New Zealand Art*, no. 13 (1992): 45.