

Arts Fellow enjoys freedom from finances

Heather Straka mixes paint on a piece of masking tape wrapped around her wrist. Her two Italian Greyhounds have a quiet fight in the corner of her Union St West studio space, and unfinished works are propped along one wall.

This year's Frances Hodgkins Fellow took up her University of Otago residence at the beginning of February. She was putting the final touches on a series for the Jonathan Smart Gallery in Christchurch when the *Bulletin* met with her at the end of last month.

The 36-year-old Auckland artist has settled into Dunedin and says it is an honour to be working in the studio space that has housed so many talented artists before her.

The Frances Hodgkins Fellowship was established in 1962 and is considered one of New Zealand's premier arts residencies. Past fellows include Ralph Hotere (1969), Graham Sydney (1978) and, last year, Ben Cauchi.

"It's flattering to be in such good company," she says. "Everyone who has come through this residence has been of quite good note and has produced great work while on the residency."

The light in the studio is good, and she says hours can pass without her realising.

"Before I know it, it is 1 am and I am still working."

Straka's background is sculpture, but she has been working full time as a painter for about nine years.

Her grounding in the three dimensional world of sculpture means she is always concerned



Frances Hodgkins Fellow Heather Straka works in the Union St West Studio that comes with the residency.

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about the presentation of her paintings and always searches for an appropriate frame to take her painting from two dimensions to three.

Her latest proposal looks at the relationship between science and religion and will involve some "snooping around the Med school", she says.

She is looking at the notion of a "donor" – both someone who donates their image to art and someone who donates their body to science – and comparing the ethical debates that reside within the two.

It has been refreshing to be in a new place, to

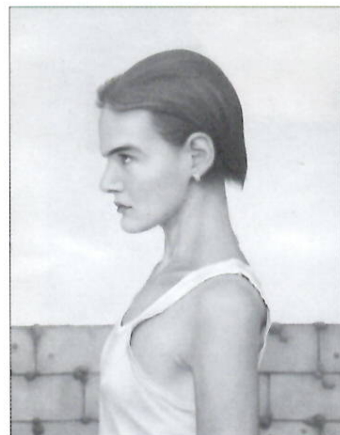
explore new ideas, she says.

"If you are wanting to make a change in your work, or reinvent yourself, there is nothing like moving to another physical environment."

The other benefit of the residency is being able to work as she wants without the financial constraints of having to consider whether it will sell.

"You can just work. You can develop what you like. I don't know if the dealers are bracing themselves or not," she laughs.

"Not really, but it is quite good to have the freedom of research and experimentation, without having to count on shows."



One of the works to be featured in Heather Straka's Christchurch exhibition.

Irish luck brings exhibition bonus

An exhibition celebrating the Irish and Ireland got an unexpected bonus before it opened earlier this month.

Éire á Móradh: Singing the Praises of Ireland was initially planned to showcase the Irish works from the University's de Beer and Brash collections, curator Special Collections Librarian Donald Kerr says.

These include facsimiles of the *Book of Kells* and the *Book of Durrow*, one of John Speed's earliest engraved maps of Ireland (1627) and works by Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, and Frank O'Connor, some of which are signed limited editions.

However, when he was planning the exhibition, Dr Kerr made what proved to be a very fruitful phone call to Mary Galway at the Irish Consulate.

She offered him a ready-made exhibition, telling the story of Irish writer James Joyce, which arrived in time for the opening.

The exhibition is on the de Beer Gallery, Special Collections, on the first floor of the Central Library until the end of July.



Curator of *Éire á Móradh: Singing the Praises of Ireland* Donald Kerr. The exhibition is on at the de Beer Gallery in the Central Library until July 31.