



# Portrait of June, Lady Hillary

by artist Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo



Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at  
the Welcome Swallow Gallery

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# The portrait of June, Lady Hillary

This is the first official painting of June, Lady Hillary. The *Gilson Family Trust* commissioned this work by artist Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo, to be displayed at the *Welcome Swallow Gallery* before transfer to the Auckland Museum archive. The painting has been gifted permanently to the *Auckland Museum* where it will be displayed later this year in the Hillary Collection. By common curatorial acclaim the **June, Lady Hillary Portrait** is an exquisite watercolour painting.

Dowman-Ngapo whose work has recently been selected by the National Portrait Gallery to be included in the Adam Portraiture national tour, sees this composition as a form of romantic realism. Many artists, particularly during the nineteenth century, are associated with this genre. For example, Edouard Manet's composition *The Rest, portrait of Berthe Morisot* 1870 contains echoes that can be seen in the **June, Lady Hillary Portrait**.

This composition is an important additional to New Zealand's narrative. It reflects June, Lady Hillary's extensive life story; her poise, strength and elegance that are forcefully represented in this portraiture.

# June, Lady Hillary

June, Lady Hillary married Sir Edmund Hillary in 1989, after being the Official Companion (OC) to Sir Ed when he was the High Commissioner to India and Bangladesh for four and a half years between 1985-89. In 1990, for her admirable work re-establishing the High Commission in New Delhi, Lady Hillary received the *Queen's Service Medal* for Public Service.

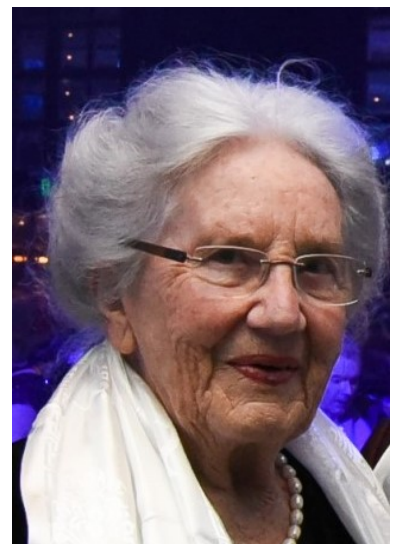
During the 1950s as the wife of her first husband Peter Mulgrew, June was involved with Sir Ed on his many explorations including the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1956-1958. June visited the Antarctic three times and has a deep love for the continent, hoping that it will be protected for generations to come.

Lady Hillary's deep connection with Nepal began in the 1950s with her husband Peter and the Hillary Family. June became involved with the Himalayan Trust (established in 1966 by Sir Ed and Lady Louise Hillary) firstly as Board Member and latterly as Trust Chair until 2011.

From 1975 to 1979 Lady June led parties in trekking expeditions to Nepal and Kashmir. Following the death of Peter Mulgrew in the Erebus disaster, June and Ed became closer resulting in a 'very comfortable companionship'.\*

Throughout her life June, Lady Hillary has both participated and contributed to the New Zealand story.

\*Sir Edmund Hillary, *A view from the Summit*, 1999 (p.257)



# Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo

Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo is a Taranaki born, Waikato based artist specializing in watercolour. She has backgrounds in fashion design, primary teaching and camp directing. In 2017 she became a full-time artist.

Primarily self-taught, Rebecca's work is indicative of contemporary New Zealand culture, reflecting aspects of daily life with a child; drawing inspiration from local people and places visited, family narratives and moments in time.

Her influences include watercolour artists, New Zealand's Nancy Tichborne, U.S. based, Ali Cavanaugh and Mario A. Robinson. Rebecca's style varies from softer controlled romantic realism to disrupted realism using fresh colour and working with watercolour's natural uncertainty.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, to stay connected to people, Rebecca focused solely on portraiture. It was from the resulting work during this period that she was commissioned to do a portrait of June, Lady Hillary.

Rebecca's painting, *Making Magic, Taming Dragons* was a finalist in the 2020 Adam Portraiture Award, and one of 30 chosen to tour New Zealand for a year. She won the People's Choice Award in the Watercolour New Zealand's Gordon Harris Online Competition for the artworks *Toni's Fur Babies* (2018) and *Golden Slumbers* (2019).

Rebecca had her first solo exhibition in 2018 and regularly exhibits in the Waikato area.

## The artist and her subject



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