



Latin types

Clockwise from left: Agnes Goodsir *The letter* 1926, oil on canvas, 81 x 65.3 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, bequest of the artist 1947
Agnes Goodsir *Girl with cigarette* c1925, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 81 cm, Bendigo Art Gallery, bequest of Mrs Amy E Bayne 1945
Agnes Goodsir *The Chinese skirt* 1933, oil on canvas, 72.7 x 73 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of the artist 1938
Agnes Goodsir *In a Paris studio* c1922, oil on canvas, 61 x 49.9 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, gift of Mrs Rachel Dunn 1947

At the age of 36, artist Agnes Goodsir was poised to leave Australia and join the thrum of Europe. From 1900 she hopped between London and Paris and, while in London, she met American-born divorcee Rachel Dunn. They became a devoted pair and moved to Paris together, setting up their lives in the bohemian Left Bank from 1921.

While a talented painter of still life, Goodsir became most renowned for her portraits. She regularly painted Dunn, nicknamed ‘Cherry’, and throughout her oeuvre, Dunn’s fashionably cropped haircut, shawls and bright blue eyes often reappear. She is frequently pictured at leisure, or gently alert, her gaze resting candidly on the viewer. Appearing often in domestic settings, Dunn’s familiarity with the artist is palpable. As Dr Angela Hesson writes of Goodsir’s works, ‘Unlike many artists of her generation who offered subtle suggestions and ciphers, Agnes Goodsir put her queerness in plain sight.’

Dunn is symbolic of the liberated and self-sufficient modern woman of the time – confident, intellectual, stylish and a consenting muse. She also embodies what was then called the ‘Latin type’, meaning someone from the liberated Latin Quarter of Paris. Focusing upon Dunn as muse, and on other sitters, allowed Goodsir to position women at the centre of the art world, while also suggesting their interiority and depth of experience. She also managed to do this in a way that was acclaimed by the conservative Australian art world of the day, which was oblivious to any hint of subversion.

In *Girl with a cigarette* 1925, Dunn is perhaps at her most chic. Sitting inside a Parisian cafe, she holds a cigarette which, for women, was then associated with freedom and social defiance. In *The letter* 1926, she seems to be caught in a moment of discovery. The contrasting motifs of the letter in her hand and her shrouded, dark garments pack a narrative-laden picture. The painting *In a Paris studio* c1922 offers a deeper insight into their home. Using the mirror as an aesthetic and symbolic device, we perceive Dunn’s exposed back and her reflected image, surrounded by gentle tones of pink and green, with foliage winking from the window in the background – or is it really the foreground?

Agnes Goodsir died in Paris in 1939 and left the majority of her estate to Dunn, who ensured that her artworks were sent to Goodsir’s family and to Australian institutions. Through this action, she was responsible for safeguarding the artist’s legacy. Rachel Dunn died in 1950 and was buried alongside Goodsir, just outside Paris.

Emma McLean, *Look* deputy editor



Artworks by Agnes Goodsir can be seen in *Dangerously Modern: Australian Women Artists in Europe 1890–1940*, Naala Nura building, lower level 2, until 15 February, charges apply