

Completion of purchase of a painting by Sir Henry Raeburn

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

28 June 2005

Purpose of report

- 1 To finalise the purchase of a painting by Sir Henry Raeburn (1756-1823).

Main report

- 2 At the meeting on 1 June 2004, the Committee was presented with a progress report on the purchase of a painting of *Sir James Stirling* by Sir Henry Raeburn. Stirling was Lord Provost of Edinburgh for three periods, 1790-92, 1794-96 and 1798-1800. The painting is a striking 50 x 40 inch portrait dating from about 1795, which shows Stirling seated with the Bridewell Prison designed by Robert Adam in the background. The report noted the efforts that had been made to secure external funding towards the purchase of the work.
- 3 Since the progress report was submitted, a sum of £10,000 has been secured from the National Fund for Acquisitions. This is in addition to the £5,000 set aside by the Friends of the City Art Centre and Museums that had already been agreed. A funding application to the National Art Collections Fund was unsuccessful.
- 4 In February 2005 an application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, seeking a further contribution of £15,000. As part of the application process, the painting was assessed by three independent experts – Dr Duncan Thomson, former Keeper of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Emily Walsh, Director of Bourne Fine Art, and Nick Curnow, of auctioneers Lyon and Turnbull. In each case, they were fully supportive of our application. Moreover, both Emily Walsh and Nick Curnow were of the opinion that the asking price was very reasonable in today's art market.
- 5 On 10 June the HLF formally notified the City Art Centre that we had been unsuccessful in our application. This reasons given were that, while they recognised the heritage merit of the application, they felt that the wider public benefits were less strong than the other projects under consideration at the same meeting.

- 6 The portrait is being sold by 'Historical Portraits' of London. They have been very patient over a considerable period of time as we have tried to find additional funding for the acquisition. The price remains at £40,000.
- 7 The acquisition of this important painting would be a significant addition to the city's fine art collection. Sir Henry Raeburn was the leading portraitist of his generation and a key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. This painting was completed in the 1790s, and is one of a number of similar portraits of leading Edinburgh figures.

Recommendations

- 8 A sum of £15,000 has been raised towards the purchase of this work. It is recommended that, having exhausted the available possible avenues of external funding, that the remaining £25,000 be met from the Jean F Watson Bequest Fund.



Herbert Coutts
Director of Culture and Leisure

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| Appendices | N/A |
| Contact/tel | Ian O'Riordan 0131-529 3955 |
| Wards affected | City Wide |
| Background Papers | The Jean F Watson Bequest files are held by the Museums and Arts Division |