

Purchase of a set of six paintings by William Highet

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

16 March 2009

Purpose of report

- 1 To consider the purchase of a set of six paintings by William Highet

Main report

2. The following paintings by William Highet are presented to the Committee for consideration:

The Royal Mile, Edinburgh

Acrylic on board

Set of six paintings, total measurement 4 feet x 30 feet

Total price: £25,000

3. In November 2000, retired architect William Highet embarked on the ambitious project of painting one side of Edinburgh's Royal Mile. The chosen section, from St Mary's Street to the Castle Esplanade, is also the extent of the "Royal Burgh of Edinburgh" founded by King David in 1130 AD. His first sketches were produced by pacing out the distance. Not satisfied, he enlisted the help of his wife Anne to accurately measure each building frontage. Levels on manhole covers established the street gradients, and the heights of the buildings were measured using an 'inclinometer' – a sort of simplified sextant.
4. *"It started as a challenge ... a challenge to record part of our nation's history pictorially, focusing on a small section of the capital city of Edinburgh, where the age and variety of buildings illustrates a mixture of activities – religion, government, commerce and family life – all contained within one 'living' street."* The complete painting was finished in May 2003. Together they provide a remarkable 'snapshot' of this historic street in exacting detail, and encourage the viewer to appreciate the architectural features we so often pass by without a second glance.

5. William Highet was born and educated in Glasgow, graduating from the Glasgow School of Architecture (now the Mackintosh School of Architecture) in 1958. He has worked in private practice in various parts of the UK, including Glasgow, London, Belfast and Inverness. Whilst with James Munce Partnership, later Consarc, he worked on projects in Egypt and Libya.
6. In 1973 William Highet set up his own architectural practice in Inverness where he worked on industrial and domestic commissions for the next twenty years. Since his retirement, he has had more time to devote to painting. His subjects vary from the countryside surrounding his home in the Scottish Borders, to scenes from holidays in France and Italy.
7. The paintings have been on long term loan to the City Art Centre for the past few years, and during that time they have been on display in the City Art Centre and at the Museum of Edinburgh. However, the artist has now indicated he would like to offer the paintings to the City Art Centre for purchase, as an invaluable record for posterity.

Financial Implications

8. The funds for the purchase of the paintings will come from the Jean F Watson Bequest. Grant aid will be sought from the National Fund for Acquisitions administered by the National Museums of Scotland.

Environmental impact

9. N/A

Recommendations

10. Approve the purchase of a set of paintings by William Highet.


JIM INCH
Director, Corporate Services

Appendices	None
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Wards affected	City Wide
Background Papers	The Jean F Watson Bequest files are held at the City Art Centre