

Purchase of an artwork by Karla Black

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

12 October 2011

Purpose of report

- 1 To consider the purchase of works by Karla Black (born in 1972).

Main report

- 2 The following works by Karla Black are presented to the Committee for consideration:

Nature Equals Meaning Minus Choice

2011

Sawdust

95 x 155 x 168 cm

Division Is

2011

Sugar paper, chalk, lipstick, concealer stick, spray tan, thread

30 x 40 cm

The price for the two works together is £13,000.

(The Contemporary Art Society has already offered assistance of £5,000 towards the purchase of these works)

3. The City Art Centre is a longstanding member of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS). The CAS was founded in 1910, initially to provide support for the Tate Gallery in acquiring new work of that time. Over the years, the remit of the CAS has expanded to include supporting all the major British public art galleries and it has very been active in helping them acquire contemporary art. Under the previous distribution scheme, different buyers were appointed each year to acquire cutting edge new work. Through this mechanism, the City Art Centre has benefited, acquiring works by Felim Egan, Bruce McLean, David Connearn and others. The City Art Centre has enjoyed a close relationship with the CAS for some time, co-hosting their final distribution exhibition in 2005. The CAS also managed the initial stage of the National Collecting Scheme for Scotland, membership of which has enabled the City

Art Centre to further develop its collection of contemporary art, acquiring works by Christine Borland, Nathan Coley and Rosalind Nashashibi among others.

- 4 The CAS has now changed its method of providing support to its 64 member galleries and runs a partnership scheme to work with a group of 16 different galleries each year over a four year cycle. This enables the member galleries to take a more proactive role in selecting works for acquisition, with the benefit of expert advice from the CAS. With the scheme now in its third year, the City Art Centre is now seeking to acquire a work at the same time as a group of other galleries, including the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, York Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. This in itself is providing a new and interesting curatorial support group.
5. With the advice of the CAS, the City Art Centre has identified Karla Black as a key artist whose work should be acquired for the collection. Karla Black has emerged as one of the most important Scottish artists of her generation, representing Scotland at the Venice Biennale in 2011. The Venice exhibition was curated by the Fruitmarket Gallery for *Scotland + Venice*, a partnership between Creative Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland and British Council, Scotland.
- 6 Karla Black was born in 1972 in Alexandria, West Dunbartonshire and studied at Glasgow School of Art. Her work has been shown extensively in the UK and abroad. In 2009 she had one person shows at Inverleith House, Edinburgh; Modern Art, Oxford; Kunstverein, Hamburg; and at Migros Museum, Zürich. In 2010 she had one person shows in Ingolstadt, Nürnberg and Berlin. So far this year, her work has been included in the *British Art Show 7* shown in Nottingham, London, Glasgow and Plymouth and in *Watercolour* at Tate Britain.
- 7 Karla Black uses both traditional and non-traditional art materials to create sculptures with a strong material presence. She has described her artistic practice in the following terms: “Essentially, then, I make different configurations with or from mess or formless matter (that which is in a ‘pre-object’ type state), and from waste or used materials (that which is left ‘post-object’), as well as from straightforward art store materials.” She has described her finished works as having “a looseness and messiness that is allowed to exist within an overall attempt at simplicity, purity, cleanness or smoothness.”
- 8 Feminism and psychoanalysis have been cited by the artist as major influences in shaping her work. She has been particularly influenced by the thinking of Melanie Klein and her pre-linguistic, child-centred practice. Fiona Bradley, Director of the Fruitmarket, has described Black’s position in the following terms: “The floor, for Black, is not only the first important site of human learning but, for her, an on-going one. Before human beings have language, they see colours and shapes and forms and have a direct relationship to the material world. Their first connection to the world is the mother’s body, followed very quickly by the ground or the floor. This is where

most of the learning that we do in our lives is done. Black continues to prioritise material experience over language as a primary way to learn about and understand the world.”

- 9 Karla Black’s work clearly exists in the art historical context of ready-mades and found objects, in a tradition extending from Picasso to Carl Andre. Her work is fragile and ephemeral, and her sculptures have been described as being “caught between thoughtless gestures and seriously obsessive attempts at beauty”.
- 10 The two works under consideration complement each other. *Nature Equals Meaning Minus Choice* made of sawdust sitting on the floor is both solid and quite fragile. It has a strong physical mass and presence but the viewer is always aware of its ephemeral nature. *Division Is* hangs from the ceiling, a paper piece that explores notions of gender and colour, created using traditional female beauty products. The works were selected from the Venice exhibition after careful consideration, with the advice of Lucy Byatt, Head of National Programmes at CAS.
- 11 The works are being sold by Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, for an asking price of £13,000. The Contemporary Art Society has already offered assistance of £5,000 towards the purchase of this work, leaving £8,000 to be met from the Jean F Watson Bequest and raised from other possible sources, including the National Fund for Acquisitions.

Financial Implications

- 12 The funds for the purchase of the works will come from the Jean F Watson Bequest. Grant aid has already been offered by the Contemporary Art Society.

Equalities Impact

- 13 The contents of this report are not relevant to the public sector equality duty of the Equality Act 2010.

Environmental impact

- 14 There is no direct environmental impact arising from this report.

Recommendations

- 15 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the works *Nature Equals Meaning Minus Choice* and *Division Is* by Karla Black.

Alastair Maclean
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Appendices	None
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Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	Supports National Outcome 1: “We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe”
Background Papers	