

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

2pm, Thursday, 30 October 2014

Purchase of a painting by Catharine Davison

Item number	6.2
Report number	
Executive	
Wards	All

Executive summary

Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the 2013 oil painting *The Craggs at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* by Catharine Davison.

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Coalition pledges	P31
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Purchase of a painting by Catharine Davison

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the painting *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* by Catharine Davison.

Background

- 2.1 Topographical views of Edinburgh and the surrounding area are a particular strength of the City Art Centre's fine art collection. This part of the collection documents the changing face of the city, and new acquisitions are an important means of ensuring that this visual record provides a comprehensive overview of Edinburgh's topography from 18th century to the present day.

Main report

- 3.1 The following painting by Catharine Davison is presented to the Committee for consideration:

The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)

Oil on Board, 2013

75cm x 120cm

£3,500



- 3.2 Catharine Davison was born in 1970. She is originally from Kilkeel in Northern Ireland, and studied at Manchester Polytechnic and Liverpool John Moores University, before gaining a Masters degree in Illustration with Printmaking at Buckingham and Chilterns University (now Buckinghamshire New University). Davison has been based in Edinburgh since 2007. As well as working as a practicing landscape artist, she is employed as a tutor by Edinburgh College of Art and Loretto School.
- 3.3 Since the mid 1990s Davison has exhibited her work regularly in group shows around the UK. Following her relocation to Edinburgh, she has also become a frequent contributor to exhibitions at the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA). In 2009 she won the Cuthbert Award at the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts, with her painting recognised as the most distinguished by a New Young Artist. In 2013 Davison held a successful solo exhibition at the Open Eye Gallery in Edinburgh, and won the Scottish Arts Club Prize at the 2013 RSA Open exhibition. In the same year, the Society of Scottish Artists awarded her a solo exhibition to be held in the British Embassy in Bratislava, and she was short-listed for the Jolomo Foundation Award for Scottish Landscape Painting.
- 3.4 Davison's work is inspired by her strong connection with the land, something that she says stems from growing up in Kilkeel, a market town and fishing port set against the backdrop of the Mourne Mountains. She has a deep-rooted appreciation of how people live and work with the land, and is interested in the integration of wild and urban areas. Her recent Edinburgh-based work is as much concerned with the city's green spaces as it is with its architecture and built-up environment.
- 3.5 Davison describes herself as a committed outdoor painter. Although she works in a variety of media, including watercolour, drawing and printmaking, she feels that her practice is best represented by her oil paintings created *en plein air*. For the last three years she has devoted much of her time to working outdoors on a series of panoramic paintings in various locations around Edinburgh, particularly Calton Hill, Blackford Hill and Salisbury Crags. Revisiting these places, and drawing or painting from direct observation, has enabled her to create distinctive responses to the cityscape.
- 3.6 *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* was painted almost entirely *en plein air*, aside from an initial layer of under-painting, over the course of about eight visits to Calton Hill. It shows the view to the south, with the looming Salisbury Crags overlooking the sweep of the city. This atmospheric painting has a fragile yet lively quality.

- 3.7 Davison's technique involves building up the image with a series of paint layers, depicting some aspects of Edinburgh in great detail, while evoking other aspects very sparingly. The skeletal, almost ephemeral, appearance of some of the buildings contrasts with the depth and solidity of others, creating the sense of a city in flux, as if it is shifting before the viewer's eyes. Davison's view, captured over a number of early mornings spent on Calton Hill, is one of a living, breathing city.
- 3.8 *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* was first exhibited in September 2013 in Davison's solo exhibition 'This Land Ate My Heart' (Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh). The painting was the largest and most complex artwork to be included in the show; Davison described it as the culmination of that particular body of work. In March 2014 the painting won first prize (£15,000) at the Lynn Painter-Stainers exhibition in the Mall Galleries in London. This competition, which was established in 2005 "to encourage the very best creative representational painting and to promote the skill of draughtsmanship", is one of the biggest of its kind in the UK, and the announcement that Davison had won the award attracted BBC news coverage.
- 3.9 As noted above, topographical views of Edinburgh are a particular strength of the City Art Centre's collection. The enduring popularity of this genre was proven recently with the positive public and critical response to the exhibition 'A Capital View: The Art of Edinburgh'. Key artworks within this topographical group are *The Entry of George IV into Edinburgh from the Calton Hill, 1822* by John Wilson Ewbank and *North Bridge and Salisbury Crags, Edinburgh, from the North West* by Adam Bruce Thomson. (Images of these works are appended.)
- 3.10 This part of the collection records the changing face of Edinburgh across the centuries; an ongoing process of gradual transformation which continues into present day and is visible in *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)*. Davison's painting depicts the city from a familiar vantage point, while documenting its contemporary 21st century appearance.
- 3.11 *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* is being offered for sale to the City Art Centre directly by the artist. Davison has said that she is keen for the painting to remain in Edinburgh, and would prefer to see it acquired by a public collection.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Completed purchase of *The Crags at Dawn (from Calton Hill)* by Catharine Davison.

Financial impact

- 5.1 Funds for the purchase of the painting will come from the Jean F Watson Bequest, and it is intended that an application for grant aid will be submitted to the National Fund for Acquisitions.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Not applicable.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 Not applicable.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Not applicable.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Not applicable.

Background reading/external references

Artist's website: www.catharinedavison.co.uk

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Links

Coalition pledges	P31 Maintain our city's reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure
Council outcomes	CO20 Culture, sport and major events – Edinburgh continues to be a leading cultural city where culture and sport play a central part in the lives and futures of citizens
Single Outcome Agreement	
Appendices	1. Images of key topographical artworks by John Wilson



The Entry of George IV into Edinburgh from the Calton Hill, 1822 by John Wilson Ewbank



North Bridge and Salisbury Crags, Edinburgh, from the North West by Adam Bruce Thomson