

# Committee on the Jean F. Watson Bequest

10am, Friday, 15 December 2017

## Purchase of a drawing by William Wilson

Item number	5.3
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	

### Executive summary

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Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the 1926 pencil drawing *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* by William Wilson (1905-1972).

## Purchase of a drawing by William Wilson

### Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the drawing *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* by William Wilson.

### Background

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- 2.1 The City Art Centre's fine art collection traces the development of Scottish art from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until present day. Artworks relating to the architectural heritage of Edinburgh are a particular strength of the collection. New acquisitions in this field are an important means of ensuring that the changing face of the city is documented for future generations.

### Main report

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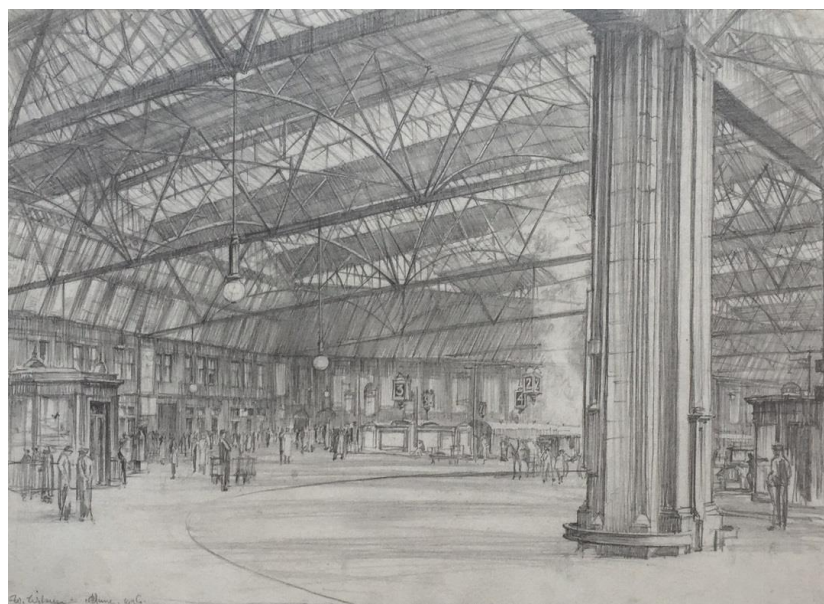
- 3.1 The following drawing by William Wilson is presented to the Committee for consideration:

***Princes Street Station, Edinburgh***

Pencil on paper, 1926

25.3 x 32.9cm (unframed)

£550



- 3.2 William Wilson (1905-1972) was born and educated in Edinburgh. His artistic career began as an apprentice in the studio of the stained-glass company James Ballantine and Son, which he joined in 1920. During his apprenticeship, he attended evening classes at Edinburgh College of Art, where his talents in drawing and printmaking were noticed by his tutor Adam Bruce Thomson.
- 3.3 Wilson travelled regularly during the late 1920s and early 1930s, depicting landscapes in France, Germany and Italy, as well as more local scenes such as Dunfermline and St Monans. In 1932 he was awarded the RSA Carnegie Travelling Scholarship, and received leave from James Ballantine to study full-time at Edinburgh College of Art. There he continued to win further distinctions for his printmaking, including an Andrew Grant Fellowship, which allowed him to study engraving at the Royal College of Art in London. Following completion of his training, he continued to work on a freelance basis for James Ballantine and Son. He finally established his own stained-glass studio in Edinburgh in 1937.
- 3.4 Wilson went on to become one of the leading stained-glass artists of his generation, receiving numerous commissions in the wake of the Second World War. Among his most notable projects were windows for Canterbury Cathedral, Brechin Cathedral and St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. Throughout his career, he worked across a variety of different media, including printmaking, stained glass design and watercolour painting. His exceptional draughtsmanship underpinned his work in each of these areas. Wilson was elected as a member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour in 1946, and became a member of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1948. In 1961 he was awarded an OBE for his services to art in Scotland.
- 3.5 *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* is a very early drawing by Wilson, produced in June 1926 before he had begun his full-time studies at Edinburgh College of Art. During the 1920s and 30s Wilson executed a number of finely detailed drawings of Edinburgh scenes. This one depicts the interior of the old Princes Street Railway Station, at the west end of Princes Street. The drawing records the original ornate fixtures and fittings of the station, including the expansive glass roof. The scene is populated with figures and a horse-drawn cart, while steam can be seen rising from the engines in the distance. Princes Street Railway Station was constructed in the 1890s and operated by the Caledonian Railway Company. Most of the building was demolished in the late 1960s, allowing The Caledonian Hotel, which had been built over the station entrance, to expand.
- 3.6 *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* was acquired by the Fine Art Society earlier this year from a private collection. The previous owner had inherited the drawing from their father, who was a friend of the artist and a fellow student at Edinburgh College of Art. Wilson often exchanged artworks with his friend, and it is thought that this drawing came to him as the result of one of these exchanges. It is signed and dated by the artist.

- 3.7 The City Art Centre currently holds 21 artworks by William Wilson, including four cartoon designs for stained glass commissions, four watercolours and eleven prints. However, it only holds two drawings by him, namely *The Usher Hall, Edinburgh* and *Edinburgh from Princes Street Gardens looking North-East towards the Mound*. Both of these works date from 1934.
- 3.8 *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* would provide an excellent companion piece to the existing pair of drawings. This acquisition would ensure that the early part of Wilson's career is better represented in the collection, and strengthen the City Art Centre's overall holdings of work by this significant Edinburgh artist. Furthermore, the acquisition would provide audiences with a rare interior view of Princes Street Railway Station, an important part of the city's architectural heritage that is now lost.
- 3.9 *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* is being offered for sale to the City Art Centre by the Fine Art Society in Edinburgh. It is currently on reserve for consideration by the Committee on the Jean F. Watson Bequest.

## **Measures of success**

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- 4.1 Completed purchase of *Princes Street Station, Edinburgh* by William Wilson.

## **Financial impact**

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- 5.1 The total cost of the drawing is £550. Funds for this purchase can be made available from the Jean F. Watson Bequest.

## **Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact**

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- 6.1 Not applicable.

## **Equalities impact**

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- 7.1 Not applicable.

## **Sustainability impact**

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- 8.1 Not applicable.

## Consultation and engagement

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9.1 Not applicable.

## Background reading / external references

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- Fiona Pearson, *William Wilson 1905-1972 (Scottish Masters Series)*, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1994
- *William Wilson: Master Printmaker*, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, 7 – 31 October 2015, exhibition catalogue [https://scottish-gallery.co.uk/artist/william\\_wilson](https://scottish-gallery.co.uk/artist/william_wilson)
- *William Wilson (1905-1972)*, The Fine Art Society in Edinburgh, <http://www.fasedinburgh.com/artists/513/>
- *William Wilson (1905-1972)*, National Galleries of Scotland, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/william-wilson>
- David McLean, 'Lost Edinburgh: Princes Street Station', *The Scotsman*, 20 December 2012 <https://www.scotsman.com/news/lost-edinburgh-princes-street-station-1-2702217>

## Paul Lawrence

### Executive Director of Place

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## Appendices

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