

## Purchase of a painting by Cecile Walton

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### Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

9 March 2010

#### Purpose of report

- 1 To consider the purchase of a painting by Cecile Walton (1891-1956).

#### Main report

2. The following painting by Cecile Walton is presented to the Committee for consideration:

**Gerard de Nerval**

1913

Oil on canvas

59.7 x 63.5cms

Signed bottom right: Cecile Walton

Price: £8,500

3. Cecile Walton was born in Glasgow. Her father, E A Walton, was a landscape and portrait painter who moved to London in the 1890s. Cecile grew up in an artistic environment, for Walton was close friends with many of the Glasgow School of artists. Nevertheless, she was drawn more to the work of the Pre-Raphaelites because they painted a fairytale, romantic world.
4. The Walton family moved to Edinburgh when Cecile was still a young girl. She studied for a time at Edinburgh College of Art and at 17 was sent to Paris to study. On her return she became an integral member of the short lived Edinburgh Group of painters that included Dorothy Johnstone and Eric Robertson. Despite her parent's objections to Robertson as a suitor because of his reputation as a philanderer, the two were married in 1914.
5. The painting under consideration was painted in 1913 and was exhibited at the second Edinburgh Group exhibition of that year. The

subject matter is taken from the life story of the French romantic poet, Gerard de Nerval. Although the precise episode is difficult to pinpoint, it seems likely that Cecile had in mind the poet's infatuation with Sophie Dawes, the Baronne de Feucheres, as the subject matter for her painting.

6. Painted when Walton was in her early 20s, it depicts two figures in a garden setting. Behind them is a low wall, and beyond that a river and the imposing walls of a large manor house. In the foreground, the smitten lover rests his head on the lap of his beloved. They are both fashionably dressed in black and white, colours which make them stand out from the muted greens, blues and browns of the rest of the painting. The picture reveals the influence of a number of artists, but perhaps it is Jessie M King, who was a close acquaintance, who most readily comes to mind.
7. Cecile's mature paintings are very rare. Many of them, it seems, were destroyed after her death as her Kirkcudbright studio was cleared. Sadly, her marriage to Robertson foundered in 1923, and with their divorce, Walton lost the desire to continue painting. She did paint a number of murals, and book illustrations, but by the time she settled in Kirkcudbright in the 1940s, the vigour of those early paintings had been lost.
8. The painting is being offered for sale by John Kemplay, a former dealer and an authority on the Edinburgh Group. He is the author of the book *The Two Companions*, which tells the turbulent story of Walton and Robertson. The City already owns one work by Cecile Walton, a watercolour entitled *Kabyle*.

### **Financial Implications**

9. The total cost of the painting is £8,500. The funds for the purchase of the painting will come from the Jean F Watson Bequest. Grant aid will be sought from the National Fund for Acquisitions.

### **Environmental impact**

10. There are no adverse environmental implications arising from this report.

### **Recommendations**

15. It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the painting of Gerard de Nerval by Cecile Walton.

  
**Jim Inch**  
Director of Corporate Services

25/02/10

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<b>Appendices</b>	None
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<b>Wards affected</b>	All
<b>Single Outcome Agreement</b>	Supports National Outcome 1 “We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe”
<b>Background Papers</b>	The Jean F Watson Bequest files are held at the City Art Centre