

# Committee on the Jean F. Watson Bequest

10am, Friday, 15 November 2017

## Purchase of a drawing by Charles Poulsen

Item number	5.4
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	

### Executive summary

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Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the 2017 drawing *7 February 2017* by Charles Poulsen (b.1952).

## Purchase of a drawing by Charles Poulsen

### Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the drawing *7 February 2017* by Charles Poulsen.

### Background

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- 2.1 The City Art Centre's fine art collection traces the development of Scottish art from 17<sup>th</sup> century until present day. Acquisitions of new work by contemporary artists are an important part of ensuring that the collection continues to provide a comprehensive overview of Scottish art for future generations.

### Main report

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- 3.1 The following drawing by Charles Poulsen is presented to the Committee for consideration:

***7 February 2017***

Pencil, wax, gouache on paper, 2017

153 x 153cm

Inscribed: bottom left: *7 February 2017*. Bottom right: *Charles Poulsen*

£1250.00



- 3.2 Charles Poulsen was born in Kent in 1952. He graduated from Loughborough College of Art in 1983, and from Trent Polytechnic Nottingham with an MA Fine Art in 1986. His works has been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Great Britain, and he his work is represented in public and private collections within the United Kingdom, Italy and the USA.
- 3.3 In 1993, he and his wife, the celebrated textile artist and quilt maker Pauline Burbidge, came to live in the Scottish Borders at Allanton, near Berwick-on-Tweed. Together, they developed Allanbank Mill Steading into a residential, studio and exhibition complex, which opens its doors annually at the beginning of August to an art-loving public. Since 1999 invited artists have featured in the Open Studio event, including sculptors, ceramicists and photographers.
- 3.4 In 2015 Charles and Pauline approached the City Art Centre with an exhibition proposal *Songs for Winter*. Their aim for the project was not only to showcase a range of their work in the gallery, but also to give the visiting public a glimpse into their unique home and their working practice. The exhibition opened at the City Art Centre on 4 November 2017, and continues to 4 March 2018. The drawing before the Committee is included in the exhibition.
- 3.5 Charles started his career as a sculptor. Once in Scotland, he extended his sculptural practice to include 'grown' sculpture for which he received many commissions, both public and private, across the Border country. Currently he is

developing a series of tree-based projects at Spottiswoode, and his grown sculpture can also be found in Puglia, Italy, as well as in their extensive garden at Allanbank.

- 3.6 Poulsen began drawing to the present scale in 2010, working in his studio through the winter months to early Spring when activity in the garden and on his grown sculptures was at an ebb. Early drawings included references to sculptural forms, but these have since evolved into a series of essays in pure abstraction.
- 3.7 *7 February 2017*, like all of Charles' other more recent drawings, is made on a large square sheet of paper, measuring 5 feet by 5 feet. These dimensions are, of themselves, unusual for drawings. The artist writes: "*The drawings start with the square sheet of paper and a drawn frame within. The square is chosen for its stability, calmness and because there is not the same association with landscape or the portrait of a rectangle*". If the deliberate choice of a square is to suggest stability, it acts as the perfect counterfoil to the energy that Poulsen then employs within the work itself. His drawings pulsate with energy and surge with movement. He builds them up with pencil, wax, and gouache, layer by layer. The drawing under consideration uses the underlying grid, marked out in wax, upon which to release a fury of gestural movements to create a dense, almost impenetrable screen. And yet, despite all of this, the drawing is controlled, contained within his drawn frame.
- 3.8 Poulsen's work taps into a form of abstraction which is echoed in the history of Scottish art of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Artists such as Callum Innes, Kenneth Dingwall, John McLean and David Connearn have all employed abstraction in this lyrical, constrained, thoughtful fashion. Furthermore, each of these artists is represented in the City's art collection, so the acquisition of Poulsen's drawing would be a fitting complement to works already owned by the City.
- 3.9 *7 February 2017* is being offered for sale directly by the artist.

## Measures of success

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- 4.1 Completed purchase of *7 February 2017* by Charles Poulsen.

## Financial impact

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- 5.1 The total cost of the drawing is £1,250.00. Funds for this purchase can be made available 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, administered on behalf of the Scottish Government by the National Museums of Scotland.

## **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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- *Charles Poulsen: Drawing*, exhibition catalogue, Hughson Gallery, 2016
- *Open Studio, Allanbank Mill Steading*, Poulsen and Burbidge, 2014
- *Songs for Winter*, exhibition catalogue, City Art Centre, 2017

## **Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

Contact: David Patterson (Curatorial and Conservation Manager)

E-mail: david.patterson@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3955

## **Appendices**

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None.