

# Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10am, Friday 30 November 2018

## Purchase of a suite of photographs by Robin Gillanders

Item number	5.3
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	<a href="#">46</a>

### Executive Summary

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Committee is asked to approve the purchase of a suite of photographs by Robin Gillanders (b.1952) – a portrait triptych of three Scottish women from 2017, and a set of seven photographs entitled *Ian's Fleet* from 2002.

## Purchase of a suite of photographs by Robin Gillanders

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of a suite of photographs by Robin Gillanders (b.1952) – a portrait triptych of three Scottish women from 2017, and a set of seven photographs entitled *Ian's Fleet* from 2002.

### 2. 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. Acquisitions of new work by established contemporary artists are an important part of ensuring that the collection continues to provide a comprehensive overview of Scottish art for future generations.
- 2.2 Earlier this year the City Art Centre mounted the exhibition *In Focus: Scottish Photography* (7 July 2018 – 12 May 2019), as a means of showcasing the photographic highlights of the fine art collection. In order to consolidate the long-term impact of this exhibition, and create a tangible legacy, it is proposed that new photographic works by contemporary photographers should be considered for acquisition.

### 3 Main report

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- 3.1 The following photographs by Robin Gillanders are presented to the Committee for consideration:



Image from *Ian's Fleet*, set of seven photographs, each 25 x 32cms framed, 2002.



*Karine Polwart*, from *Portrait Triptych*, each image 105.4 x 91.5cms framed, 2017



*Writers, The Abbotsford*, 2010. Proposed donation by the artist to the city in recognition of Edinburgh's status as 'City of Literature'.

- 3.2 Robin Gillanders was born in Edinburgh in 1952 and studied at the University of Edinburgh from 1970-4. After teaching history at the Royal High School in Edinburgh from 1975-82, Gillanders began a career as a freelance advertising and fashion photographer. He began teaching Photography full time at Edinburgh Napier University in 1988, and became Reader in 2004. He left teaching in September 2012. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Edinburgh Napier University in October 2014.
- 3.3 He is widely recognized as one of the foremost photographic artists working in Scotland. He has exhibited frequently in Scotland and internationally in France, Spain, Poland, Norway and USA. He has published several books of his work, most notably *Highland Journey; In the Spirit of Edwin Muir*, in 2009, and *Little Sparta: Portrait of a Garden* from 1998.
- 3.4 In the mid-1990s Gillanders began a collaboration with artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925 – 2006). Over a period of 15 years, Gillanders regularly visited Finlay's acclaimed home in Dunsyre, *Little Sparta*, to document the development of one of Scotland's most significant garden landscapes. The resultant body of work demonstrated Gillanders' empathy with Finlay and his unique contribution to Scottish art. Gillanders is also well known as a portrait photographer, particularly of Scotland's literary, musical and artistic communities. For many years, he worked primarily in black and white, in film formats from 35mm to 10"x8". He still makes silver gelatin prints from all these formats in his own darkroom in the city's New Town.
- 3.5 Robin Gillanders is not represented in the City's collection, a major gap in our holdings of Scottish photography. In a bid to rectify this, we are bringing to the Committee two groups of works, chosen in collaboration with the photographer.

- 3.6 *Ian's Fleet* was a series of photographs made by Gillanders in 2002 in one afternoon at Hamilton Finlay's home. Finlay was unique in Scottish art in that he never made his own artworks, preferring to collaborate with others to realise his ideas. A recurring theme in Finlay's work was the motif of the boat, and it took on different forms and meanings when translated into prints, poems or sculpture. However, on this particular visit, Finlay confided in Gillanders that he made model boats, and invited the photographer to sail them on the pond within his garden.
- 3.7 The resultant photographs depict a different side to Finlay, best known for his deep, intellectual works which draw on a treasury of philosophical writing. They are a playful tribute to one artist from another, and illustrate the deep friendship between the two. The city has a number of works by Finlay in the art collection, including prints and sculptures, so the addition of these photographs would complement and enrich our holdings.
- 3.8 The portraits of the three women artists were made in 2017. Each woman was invited to pose for Gillanders, with the invitation to bring something of significance to them to the studio. Karine Polwart is an award winning singer songwriter living in Midlothian. Her sell out solo performances of '*Wind Resistance*' in 2016 and 2017 marked her out as one of Scotland's unique musical talents. Professor Kathleen Jamie FRSL FRSE is a leading Scottish poet and essayist, and Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Stirling. Her writing is rooted in Scottish landscape and culture, and ranges through travel, women's issues, archaeology and visual art. Hanna Tuulikki is an artist, composer and performer based in Scotland, who specialises in working with the voice and gesture, to re-imagine resonant stories of contemporary relevance. These are thoughtful, timeless images which reflect the sensitivity and creativity of each of the subjects.
- 3.9 In addition, and in recognition of the City's status as a 'City of Literature', Gillanders has kindly offered to donate a group portrait of some of the city's foremost writers from 2010. It is hoped that this work will ultimately go on display at the Writers' Museum in the City's Lawnmarket.
- 3.10 The photographs are being sold directly by the artist. The prices represent a significant museum discount.

## 4 Measures of success

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- 4.1 Completed purchase of a suite of photographs by Robin Gillanders (b.1952) – a portrait triptych of three Scottish women from 2017, and a set of photographs entitled *Ian's Fleet* from 2002.

## 5 Financial impact

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- 5.1 The costs are as follows:

5.1.1 *A portrait triptych depicting Karine Polwart, Kathleen Jamie and Hanna Tuulikki*: £4,000 framed; and

5.1.2 *Ian's Fleet, set of 7 photographs, 2002*: £1,500 framed.

- 5.2 Funds for these purchases 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.

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

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- 6.1 Not applicable.

## **7 Equalities impact**

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- 7.1 Not applicable.

## **8 Sustainability impact**

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- 8.1 Not applicable.

## **9 Consultation and engagement**

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- 9.1 Not applicable.

## **10 Background reading/external references**

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- 10.1 Robin Gillanders website: <https://www.robingillanders.com/>
- 10.2 Stills Gallery exhibition: <http://www.stills.org/exhibition/past/robin-gillanders-a-retrospective>

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## **11 Appendices**

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None.