

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10am, Friday 30 November 2018

Commission of a large-scale drawing by Kate Downie

Item number	5.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	46

Executive Summary

Committee is asked to approve the commission of a new large-scale drawing on the theme of the Queensferry Crossing by the artist Kate Downie (b.1958).

Commission of a large-scale drawing by Kate Downie

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the commission of a new large-scale drawing on the theme of the Queensferry Crossing by the artist Kate Downie (b.1958).

2. Background

- 2.1 The City Art Centre's fine art collection traces the development of Scottish art from 17th century until present day. Acquisitions of new work by contemporary artists are an important means of ensuring that the collection continues to provide a comprehensive overview of Scottish art for future generations.
- 2.2 Topographical views of Edinburgh and the surrounding area are a particular strength of the fine art collection. This part of the collection documents the changing face of the city, and new acquisitions ensure its continued relevance, with the collection providing an ongoing account of Edinburgh's evolving topography since the 18th century.

3. Main report

- 3.1 Kate Downie was born in North Carolina, USA, in 1958. Her British parents moved the family to the North East of Scotland when she was seven years old. She studied Fine Art at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen during the late 1970s, completing her postgraduate training in 1980. Since the mid-1980s she has been based primarily in Edinburgh, although she recently relocated to rural Fife.
- 3.2 A sense of place is key to Downie's work as an artist. At various points in her career she has spent time living and working abroad, most notably in the USA, Netherlands, France and China. Foreign travel has left a significant impression on her artistic practice, not only influencing her subject-matter, but also her methodologies and materials. In addition to working abroad and drawing from those experiences, she continues to depict the urban and rural Scottish landscape, finding inspiration across a range of diverse locations, from busy central Edinburgh to remote Wester Ross.

- 3.3 One of the most enduring themes in Downie's work is the evolving topography and identity of Edinburgh and its surroundings. The artist is particularly interested in capturing lesser-known areas of the City during periods of change, areas which are often overlooked by other artists in favour of the more famous Old Town and New Town. Downie has been engaged in addressing this theme since the 1980s, exploring liminal subjects such as old power stations, railway lines and docks. Her former sites of study include Leith, Haymarket and Portobello. In 2014 she was commissioned as artist-in-residence at the Forth Road Bridge, creating a body of work to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its construction.
- 3.4 Downie is well-known for her consummate draughtsmanship. In 2005 she was shortlisted for the prestigious Jerwood Drawing Prize. Yet over the years she has employed a wide variety of different media and techniques in her work, including oil and acrylic painting, mixed media collage and printmaking.
- 3.5 Between 2004 and 2006 Downie served as President of the Society of Scottish Artists. In 2008 she was elected as a member of the Royal Scottish Academy. She exhibits regularly, and her artworks are held in public and private collections across the UK and internationally, including Aberdeen Art Gallery, Glasgow Museums, Gracefield Arts Centre in Dumfries, the University of Cambridge, the Royal Collection Trust and the Rietveld Kunst Academie in Amsterdam.
- 3.6 In 2005 Downie produced a pair of large-scale drawings entitled *Conversations*. These artworks explore civil engineering in 21st century Scotland, investigating the relationships between man-made structures and their natural environments. *Conversations Part I* presents a view of telecommunications masts situated near South Queensferry, while *Conversations Part II (Granton Gas Tower)* depicts the former gasworks at Granton with the Forth Rail Bridge and Forth Road Bridge in the distance.
- 3.7 For some time, it has been the artist's intention to create a third and final work in the *Conversations* series, which will bring the group up-to-date. The new Queensferry Crossing (which opened in 2017) has been determined as the subject of this third drawing. In discussions with staff at the City Art Centre, Downie has proposed that the Jean F Watson Committee might consider commissioning this third drawing for the fine art collection. Following completion of the proposed commission, she has offered to donate the other two drawings in the series – *Conversations Part I* and *Conversations Part II (Granton Gas Tower)* – to the fine art collection, ensuring that all three works in the series remain together in a publicly accessible collection.

3.8 The details of the two existing drawings are as follows:



Conversations Part I, charcoal and pastel on primed paper, 2005, 128 x 97cm (unframed), 142 x 113cm (framed) [Image above]



Conversations Part II (Granton Gas Tower), charcoal and pastel on primed paper, 2005, 75 x 150cm (unframed), 91 x 165cm (framed) [Image above]



- 3.9 The third drawing to be commissioned would be produced on a similar scale to the two existing drawings, and would make use of comparable materials.
- 3.10 The City Art Centre currently holds seven artworks by Kate Downie in its fine art collection, six of which date from the late 1980s – early 1990s. The most recent work is a small preparatory study for the finished drawing *Hill Farm*, which is dated 2006. As such, the City Art Centre has no examples of major finished work by Downie dated after 1992. The proposed commission, and subsequent donation of work, would be a good opportunity to strengthen the collection with three contemporary compositions by the artist, ensuring that the breadth of her creative development over the years is represented more fully. It would also be a chance to update our topographical holdings of artworks relating to the areas of South Queensferry and Granton, and to complement the historical Queensferry collections managed by the City's Museums Service.
- 3.11 The proposed commission and donation of these artworks is being offered by Kate Downie exclusively to the City Art Centre for consideration by the Jean F. Watson Committee. The artist believes that the City Art Centre's fine art collection would be the most appropriate home for this important series of work.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Completed commission of large-scale drawing by Kate Downie.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The total cost of the commission is £5,000. Full funding for the commission would come from the Jean F Watson Bequest, as the National Fund for Acquisitions does not provide grant aid towards new commissions.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Not applicable.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Not applicable.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 Kate Downie's website: <http://www.katedownie.com/>
- 10.2 The Scottish Gallery website: https://scottish-gallery.co.uk/artist/kate_downie
- 10.3 Royal Scottish Academy website: <https://www.royalscottishacademy.org/members/kate-downie/>

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Helen Scott, Curator (Fine Art)

E-mail: helen.scott@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3575

11. Appendices

None.