

# Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10am, Friday 30 November 2018

## Purchase of a painting by Edwin G. Lucas

Item number	5.7
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	<a href="#">46</a>

### Executive Summary

---

Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the 1940 oil painting *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* by Edwin G. Lucas (1911-1990).

## Purchase of a painting by Edwin G. Lucas

### 1. Recommendations

---

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the painting *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* by Edwin G. Lucas (1911-1990).

### 2. Background

---

- 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. The breadth of the collection is one of its most important attributes. It features work by a wide range of historical and contemporary artists, including both famous names and lesser-known ones. Acquisitions of work by lesser-known historical artists are an important means of ensuring that the collection provides a comprehensive overview of Scottish art, which accurately reflects the diversity of practice that has taken place over the years.

### 3. Main report

---

- 3.1 The following painting by Edwin G. Lucas is presented to the Committee for consideration:

***The Schism – Final Diagnosis***

Oil on canvas, August 1940

117 x 96cm (framed)

£5,000



- 3.2 Edwin G. Lucas was born in Leith in 1911. Although he demonstrated creative talents from a young age, his family discouraged him from pursuing art as a career, persuading him instead to choose a more stable profession. Accordingly, Lucas undertook a law degree and joined the civil service, although he continued to paint in his spare time.
- 3.3 Throughout the 1930s Lucas became increasingly committed to his art. This was partly prompted by encouragement from a group of friends and acquaintances connected with Edinburgh College of Art, including the young modernist artist Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (1912-2004). Growing in self-confidence, Lucas began submitting his artworks to the annual exhibitions of the Society of Scottish Artists and Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour. He attended evening classes in life drawing at Edinburgh College of Art, and taught himself to paint in oils.
- 3.4 In 1939 Lucas moved into his first studio, and started painting in a Surrealist style. This marked a significant turning point in his career. Over the next 18 months he produced a wealth of Surrealist paintings and drawings, combining a range of symbolic imagery with his growing interest in dreams and the subconscious. After the Second World War, he moved away from Surrealism, drawing inspiration from a broader field of avant-garde styles, including Cubism, Futurism and Abstraction, as well as his own imagination. Surrealist themes and approaches did, however, remain an underlying influence in his work for the rest of his career.
- 3.5 Over the years Lucas continued to work as a civil servant, although by the mid-1940s he regarded himself primarily as an artist. His day-job provided a stable source of external income, which allowed him to experiment in his paintings without the need to conform to art market tastes and trends. However, this situation also meant that he was widely regarded as an 'amateur' artist rather than a 'professional', which limited the opportunities available to him in terms of advancing his artistic career.
- 3.6 In April 1950 Lucas staged his first solo exhibition at the New Gallery in Edinburgh. He mounted a second solo show the following year, in August 1951. Unfortunately, these exhibitions attracted little publicity, partly on account of his perceived status as an 'amateur'. His work was considered too radical for the largely conservative Scottish art market, and lacking in institutional support, he failed to gain recognition as a 'serious' artist. In late 1952 he married and started a family. With this change in his domestic circumstances, he found that he had little spare time available for painting. Eventually he decided to give up his studio and focus on family life.
- 3.7 Lucas did not paint seriously again for almost thirty years. He only returned to painting in 1980, after he had retired from the civil service and his sons had both left home. Between 1980 and 1986 he produced a range of vibrant canvases, drawing on the themes and styles of his earlier work, but also forging ahead with new creative ideas. This late resurgence was only curtailed by his failing health.

- 3.8 Lucas died in December 1990. Prior to his death, he gifted the oil painting *Caley Station, Edinburgh* (1942) to the City Art Centre, making it the first public art gallery to own an example of his work. Since then the City Art Centre has acquired two further works from the artist's family: the watercolour *Water of Leith Valley and Pentland Hills from Kingsknowe* (1938) and the oil painting *Pentland Hills from Kingsknowe (Winter)* (1947).
- 3.9 In August 2018 the City Art Centre launched *Edwin G. Lucas: An Individual Eye*, the first ever major exhibition on Lucas to take place in a public art gallery. This ongoing retrospective tells the little-known story of Lucas's life and career. It features over sixty artworks from public and private collections, including loans from the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. The exhibition is accompanied by the book *Edwin G. Lucas: An Individual Eye* by Helen E. Scott, published by Sansom and Company in 2018. A varied programme of public events and activities also complements the show. The exhibition has received positive reviews and is proving popular with visitors. It is due to run until 10 February 2019.
- 3.10 It is proposed that the City Art Centre should build on the momentum of the current exhibition, and consolidate its long-term impact, by acquiring an artwork by Lucas to complement its existing holdings. *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* is a key work from the artist's Surrealist period. Lucas painted it in August 1940, when he was nearing the end of this critical phase in his career. The title relates to his earlier Surrealist work *Diagnosis 1* (1939), which is held in a private collection. In 1951 Lucas exhibited *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* under the alternative title *A Farewell to Surrealism*, further suggesting that the artist viewed this work as one of his last purely Surrealist compositions. The painting is a strong example of Lucas's Surrealist style, which is characterised by the juxtaposition of representational and abstract elements, ambiguous symbolism and vibrant colours.
- 3.11 The City Art Centre does not currently own any examples of work from Lucas's core Surrealist period, and as such this painting would provide an important addition to the collection. Its acquisition would ensure that his most significant body of work is represented, and provide audiences with a better understanding of his creative development. It would also raise wider awareness regarding the unique contribution of this lesser-known artist to Scottish art history.
- 3.12 *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* is currently on display in the exhibition *Edwin G. Lucas: An Individual Eye*. It is being offered for sale to the City Art Centre by the artist's family. Surrealist paintings by Lucas of this calibre are rarely available to buy, and this particular work has never been made available for sale on the open market. It is being offered exclusively to the City Art Centre for consideration by the Jean F. Watson Committee at a price that is significantly discounted from its commercial market value. This reflects the family's desire to have the painting housed within a public collection, where it can be enjoyed and appreciated by future generations.

## 4. Measures of success

---

- 4.1 Completed purchase of *The Schism – Final Diagnosis* by Edwin G. Lucas.

## 5. Financial impact

---

- 5.1 The total cost of the painting is £5,000. Funds for this purchase will come from the Jean F. Watson Bequest, and it is intended that an application for grant aid will be submitted to the Friends of the City Art Centre and Museums.

## 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 *Edwin G. Lucas: An Individual Eye* exhibition webpage: <https://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/edwin-g-lucas-individual-eye>
- 10.2 Review of *Edwin G. Lucas: An Individual Eye* in *The List*: <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/103715-edwin-g-lucas-an-individual-eye/>
- 10.3 Edwin G. Lucas website: <http://edwinklucas.com/index.html>
- 10.4 National Galleries of Scotland website: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/edwin-g-lucas>

### Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Helen Scott, Curator (Fine Art)

E-mail: [helen.scott@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:helen.scott@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 529 3575

## 11. Appendices

---

None.