

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10.00am, Friday 17 December 2021

Purchase of a sculptural installation by Virginia Hutchison

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the sculptural installation *Study for a Kiss #5* (2020) by Virginia Hutchison (b.1976).

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director - Place

Contact: Helen Scott, Curator (Fine Art)

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

Report

Purchase of a sculptural installation by Virginia Hutchison

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the sculptural installation *Study for a Kiss #5* (2020) by Virginia Hutchison (b.1976).

3. Background

- 3.1 The City Art Centre's fine art collection traces the development of Scottish art from the 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.
- 3.2 Curators at the City Art Centre believe it is important to collect artistic responses to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The events of the last few years have had a significant impact around the world, and the City's fine art collection should document these unprecedented times. In spring 2020, during the first period of national 'lockdown', Tonic Arts, Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation's arts programme, commissioned a series of micro-residencies entitled 'Life Under Lockdown'. Virginia Hutchison was one of the artists awarded a residency, and this sculptural installation was completed during that time.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following sculptural installation by Virginia Hutchison is presented to the Committee for consideration:

Study for a Kiss #5

Set of six hand-engraved copper plates

2020

70 x 9cm (each individual plate dimensions)

£2,100



Virginia Hutchison, *Study for a Kiss #5*, hand-engraved copper plates, 2020



Installation of *Study for a Kiss #5* with other works from the series *Study for a Kiss*



Installation of *Study for a Kiss #5*



Detail of hand-engraved copper plates

- 4.2 In the spring of 2020, in the middle of the first national lockdown, Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation's award-winning arts programme, Tonic Arts, announced an open competition for a series of 'Life Under Lockdown' micro-residencies.
- 4.3 A call-out sought seven visual artists across seven generations, who could creatively capture the experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from their personal and generational perspectives. Artists were asked to submit applications outlining how they would document their observations, reflections and insights, the ways in which they would create this new work, and how it would reflect this moment in history. Over 100 applications were received.
- 4.4 Having selected seven successful applicants, the residencies programme ran for a ten-week period throughout July, August and September 2020. The resulting artworks were compiled for the exhibition 'Life Under Lockdown', which was staged in the Anne Ferguson Gallery at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh during summer 2021.
- 4.5 Virginia Hutchison was born in Paisley in 1976. During the mid-1990s she studied for a BA Honours in Printmaking at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen. In the early 2000s this was followed by an MA in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London. Hutchison's artistic practice covers a range of disciplines and media, including text, film, performance and sculpture. She has worked as an artist and arts educator in the UK and USA, and currently runs the bronze foundry at Edinburgh College of Art. She divides her time between Glasgow and the Isle of Lewis.
- 4.6 For the 'Life Under Lockdown' micro-residency, Hutchison produced a series of sculptural installations made from hand-engraved copper, entitled *Study for a Kiss*. The artworks were inspired by ideas around the sense of touch, and the fact that opportunities for human contact during lockdown were much reduced, with people unable to physically connect with each other through handshakes, hugs and kisses. Hutchison made several short films that explore the gestures involved in sending a kiss, slowing down the footage and examining each individual bodily movement. From this starting point, she developed a sequence of line drawings, for which she drew around her own hands and replicated their forms in overlapping patterns to articulate the gestural action. These designs were then hand-engraved onto copper plates, creating the finished sculptural pieces.
- 4.7 Hutchison chose to use copper for this project for a number of reasons. As a soft metal, it can be engraved by hand – a very personal creative process which provides a tactile result. The artist was equally drawn to the warm colour tones of the metal, which emphasise the association with human contact and body temperature. Hutchison was also keenly aware of the naturally-occurring antimicrobial properties of copper. Since ancient times, this metal has been known for its health benefits. For many years it was common practice for copper-based alloys to be used in architectural fittings like door handles, push plates and kick boards within public buildings such as hospitals and schools. Using copper in

fittings that were regularly handled and touched had the effect of reducing the spread of bacteria and viruses.

- 4.8 The shape and dimensions of the copper plates in *Study for a Kiss* are intended to resemble traditional architectural push plates. They evoke both the practical usage of copper in public health and wider themes relating to the importance of touch and interaction in human society. The plates have been devised in pairs, and can either be installed on functioning doors or wall-mounted within a gallery context.
- 4.9 As an artist, Hutchison is interested in how the public engage with artworks, and the role of art within community settings. Creating *Study for a Kiss* at home, during a period of lockdown, caused her to reflect further on these issues, alongside ideas raised by the pandemic itself. As she later commented: “*The act of engraving these hand gestures onto soft copper, a naturally anti-viral material, felt political. As an amateur tattooist there was a sense that it sat somewhere between printmaking and tattooing – of the body, by the body and for the body – politics that should be at the heart of public architecture.*”
- 4.10 The full series *Study for a Kiss* consists of seven sets of hand-engraved copper plates, some of which are devised as single pairs, while others are larger sets of multiple pairs. It is proposed that the City Art Centre should acquire *Study for a Kiss #5*, one of the larger sets made up of three pairs. Hutchison has identified this artwork as one that she feels would be well-suited for a public collection. The six-plate composition provides an expansive and impactful expression of her ideas, while maintaining a fundamental sense of intimacy. *Study for a Kiss #5* is being offered directly by the artist for sale to the City Art Centre.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If the acquisition of this sculptural installation is approved, it is intended that an application for grant aid will be submitted to the National Fund for Acquisitions.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 *Study for a Kiss #5* is being offered for sale at a price of £2,100. Funds for this purchase would come from the Jean F. Watson Bequest, and it is intended that an application for grant aid would be submitted to the National Fund for Acquisitions.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Not Applicable.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Tonic Arts produced a video about the 'Life Under Lockdown' project: <https://vimeo.com/537183129> Virginia Hutchison speaks about her work 7 minutes 14 seconds into the recording.
- 8.2 Website for *In the Shadow of the Hand* (Virginia Hutchison's collaborative practice with fellow artist Sarah Forrest): <https://www.intheshadowofthehand.com/>

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.