

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10.00am, Friday, 17 December 2021

Purchase of two paintings by Olivia Irvine

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of two paintings by Olivia Irvine (b.1960) – *Marriage in Ankara* and *Handle with Care*.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director - Place

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Report

Purchase of two paintings by Olivia Irvine

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Two paintings by artist Olivia Irvine (b.1960) are presented to the Committee for consideration. These form part of a group of works which were completed during the period of lockdown in 2020 and are responses to the loss of her father due to COVID-19 during that time.

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 part 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 were keen that we should collect artistic responses to the current global pandemic. These are unprecedented times and we thought it important that the City's art collection reflected that. In spring 2020, during the first lockdown, Tonic Arts, Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation's arts programme, commissioned a series of micro-residencies entitled 'Life Under Lockdown'. Olivia Irvine was one of the artists awarded a residency and these paintings were completed during that time.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following paintings by Olivia Irvine (b.1960) are presented to the Committee for consideration:



Marriage in Ankara, fresco sgraffito, egg tempera and silver leaf on panel, 2020, 37 x 30cms



Handle with Care, fresco and egg tempera on panel, 2020, 32 x 35cms

- 4.2 In the spring of 2020, in the middle of the first 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 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, experiences, 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 The residencies programme ran for a ten-week period throughout July, August and September 2020. The resulting artworks were compiled to form an exhibition which has now been shown in Edinburgh and further afield.
- 4.5 Olivia Irvine was born in Kilwinning in Ayrshire in 1960. She initially studied Medicine at Aberdeen University before switching to a drawing and painting course at Edinburgh College of Art. A postgraduate year followed as well as several scholarships in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1992-93 she completed an MA in European Fine Art at the Winchester School of Art in Barcelona. She currently works in Edinburgh and has a studio at one of the WASPS complexes.
- 4.6 For the project, Olivia made a series of fresco paintings inspired by objects her parents acquired while living in Ankara, Turkey, the decade before she was born. She recalls as a child having to clean and polish them and she always thought they brought a touch of exoticism into her home.
- 4.7 Olivia's father died of coronavirus in April 2020 at the age of ninety. She found that talking to her mother about their life in Ankara, as well as spending time with the objects, drawing them, and making the frescoes helped Olivia through the grieving process. Fresco uses natural powdered pigment on a lime plaster. The paintings have to be done while the plaster is damp and the carbonisation process, whilst it dries, fixes the colours.
- 4.8 Olivia writes: "*Fresco seemed like the right process to use. It takes time to prepare yet is direct and spontaneous in execution. It is possible to work the surface allowing notions of treasured memory, fragmentation, revelation and the passage of time, to arise*".
- 4.9 The two paintings are touching tributes to her father, depicting items he and Olivia's mother collected when they were first married. In choosing them the artist is recognizing that objects can evoke powerful memories in all of us. These paintings are modest in scale and are painted with an eye for delicate detail. Olivia Irvine is already represented in the City's collection by two early works, *Figures in an Interior* from 1985 and *Rain* from 1989. The paintings are being sold directly by the artist.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Should the Committee approve the purchase of these two paintings, an application for grant aid will be submitted to the National Fund for Acquisitions.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The costs are as follows:
- 6.1.1 ***Marriage in Ankara***, fresco sgraffito, egg tempera and silver leaf on panel, 2020. 37 x 30cms. Price: £670.00
 - 6.1.2 ***Handle with Care***, fresco and egg tempera on panel, 2020. 32 x 35cms. Price: £670.00
 - 6.1.3 Funds for these purchases 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 Further details about the artist can be seen on her website: www.irvineart.co.uk
- 8.2 Tonic Arts produced a video about the '*Life Under Lockdown*' project. <https://vimeo.com/537183129> Hear Olivia speaking about her work 10minutes 54 seconds into the recording.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.