

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10.00am, Friday, 17 December 2021

Purchase of an artwork by David McCulloch (b. 1968)

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of *Walk of Faith* by David McCulloch (b.1968).

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director - Place

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Report

Purchase of an artwork by David McCulloch (b. 1968)

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 A vinyl artwork entitled *Walk of Faith* by artist David McCulloch is presented to the Committee for consideration. This artwork formed part of a group of works which were completed during the period of lockdown in 2020 and is a direct response to the anxiety and unease which we all experienced at 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'. David McCulloch was one of the artists awarded a residency and this artwork was completed during that time.

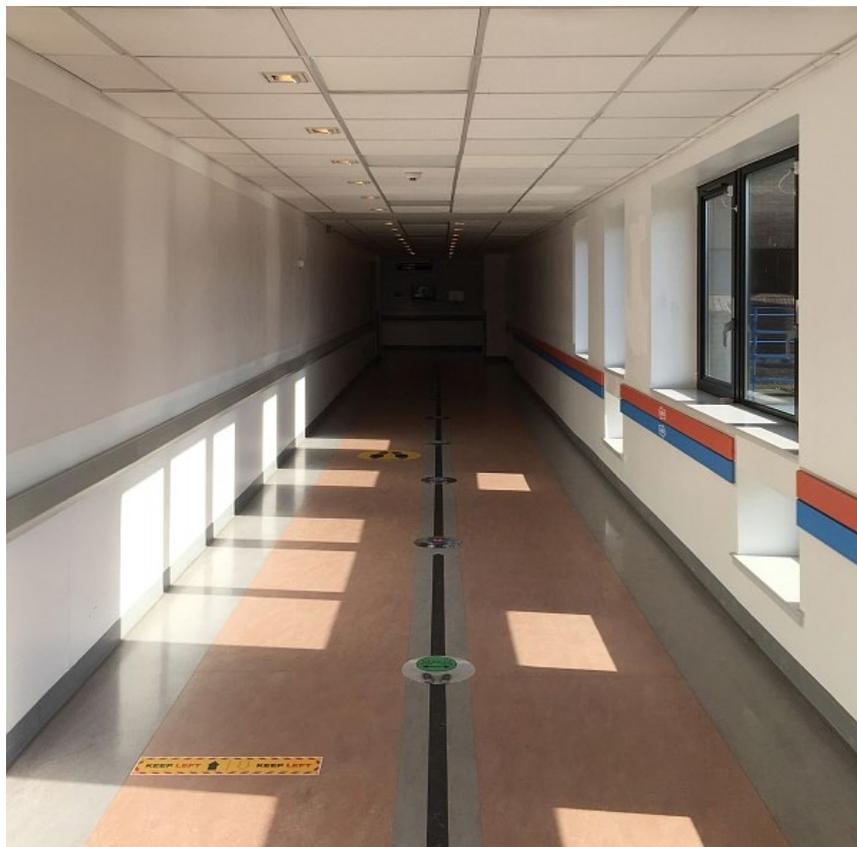
4. Main report

- 4.1 The following artwork by David McCulloch is presented to the Committee for consideration:





Three examples from the full set of 36 floor vinyls



The floor vinyls on display within the Western General Hospital during the *Life Under Lockdown* exhibition, summer 2021.

- 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 David McCulloch is a Dundee based multi-media artist and curator, and co-founder of Morphé Arts, a national network supporting arts graduates and emergent artists. His multi-disciplinary art practice includes print and sculpture and encompasses the programming of two alternative gallery spaces, Nomads Projects and Sharing Not Hoarding, both in Dundee.
- 4.6 The 'Life Under Lockdown' residency provided an opportunity for him to reflect, research and respond to life under lockdown by making artworks based on his personal experiences of reading and hearing how language was used between authorities, institutions and the general public at the outbreak of and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.7 'Unprecedented', 'self-isolation', 'social distancing', 'stay home', 'stay safe', 'lockdown', 'key worker', 'PPE' and 'new normal' are just some of the phrases that have become part of the cultural daily vocabulary since the outbreak of COVID-19. David was fascinated by how, as a society, we were affected emotionally and physically by the words permeating our collective rhetoric, and so he developed responses to how words and phrases have impacted the way we were expected to live in lockdown.
- 4.8 In a few years' time, when we look back on what we are currently living through, undoubtedly one of our abiding memories will be the proliferation of signage reminding us to socially distance, wash our hands, etc. *Walk of Faith* consists of 36 floor vinyls. They each show the artist standing on a sign which encourages him to keep his distance. David writes about this work as follows:
- 4.8.1 *"One of the artworks - Walk of Faith - is a series of floor vinyl signs. Physically my signs mimic the common '2m social distance' visual signage that we now see in every building we enter. Each of my signs was a photograph taken from above showing my feet next to the shop floor signs that I encountered. Collectively, they form a narrative revealing my cautious entry back into society after lockdown. Each vinyl includes the date of when the photograph was taken. This indicates both the nature of my activity and my personal timeline of adjustment after an intense period of lockdown. The title Walk of Faith indicates both a physical and emotional encounter.*

Physically, it felt like every step taken when entering a shop or building could potentially be my last. Emotionally my trust was tested based on how much I believed the instruction on the sign would keep me safe”.

- 4.9 The artwork is designed to be totally flexible. Should the Committee approve the purchase of the work, the artist will provide a full set of floor vinyls plus the original digital artwork files which will enable us to reproduce them in future. Inherent in any display of *Walk of Faith* is the fact that the vinyls will deteriorate over time as people walk over them. We have agreed with the artist that he will give us the finished digital artwork files so that we can display them many more times in different situations and contexts.
- 4.10 David McCulloch studied at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art between 1986 and 1990. He returned to the same college to complete an MFA (with distinction) in Art, Society and Publics between 2015-17. He has exhibited his work throughout the UK in solo and group exhibitions. He is not currently represented in the City’s art collection.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Should the Committee approve the purchase of *Walk of Faith*, 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 *Walk of Faith*, 36 floor vinyls plus final digital artwork, each vinyl 30cms in diameter. The price of the work is £4,000.00. 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 Further details about the artist and examples of his work can be found here: www.else-where.org
- 8.2 Tonic Arts produced a video about the ‘*Life Under Lockdown*’ project. <https://vimeo.com/537183129> Hear David speaking about his work 8 minutes 59 seconds into the recording.

9. Appendices

9.1 None.