

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10.00am, Friday, 17 December 2021

Purchase of a painting by Donald Smith (1926-2014)

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of a painting by Donald Smith (1926-2014) entitled *Fisherman with Creels*.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director - Place

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Report

Purchase of a painting by Donald Smith (1926-2014)

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 An oil painting entitled *Fisherman with Creels* is presented to the Committee for consideration. This artwork formed part of a large exhibition of Donald Smith's work which was shown at the City Art Centre from 29 May to 26 September 2021.

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. Donald Smith's work has remained largely unknown until very recently, but his paintings of Island life are significant in the history of post-war Scottish painting.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following painting by Donald Smith (1926-2014) is presented to the Committee for consideration:



Fisherman with Creels, oil on board, 124 x 104cms

- 4.2 In 2011 the City Art Centre included five of Donald Smith's works in the exhibition 'Window to the West', an examination of the relationship between the visual arts and Gaelic language and culture. In the accompanying catalogue, Professor Murdo Macdonald suggested that a full evaluation of Donald Smith's output was overdue, and when he approached the City Art Centre some years later, we were delighted to agree to work in partnership with An Lanntair Gallery in Stornoway to mount a full retrospective of Donald's work. This took place during the summer months of 2021, and the exhibition was extremely well received. *Fisherman with Creels* was part of that display.
- 4.3 Born in rural Lewis in 1926, Donald John Smith was uniquely placed to connect the Gaelic world of the West with the English-speaking mainstream. He left the island to study at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, following which he continued to live and work in Aberdeenshire until his return to the island in 1974.
- 4.4 While working as a painter and teacher, Smith developed a structured, contemporary approach to painting which acknowledged movements in Europe and America but remained resolutely local in its subject. Being one of several post-war Scottish artists responding to swift social and cultural change, he saw himself as an outward looking Gael, with one foot in the culture of mainland Scotland, and one in the Hebrides.

- 4.5 Smith was based in a crofting community on the West Side of Lewis from 1974 to his death in 2014. His educational, crofting and community commitments could not stem the flow of portraits, large oil panels and drawings emerging from his studio. Studies of island people became iconic images. These are intensely lyrical paintings, celebrating the strength of the human spirit.
- 4.6 Outside of the Western Isles, Donald Smith's work is not that well known. He is represented in many different private collections, as well as the RSA collection in Edinburgh and by two paintings in the BBC Heritage Collection in Glasgow.
- 4.7 The potential acquisition of this painting was agreed with the artist's family, who were instrumental in helping stage the exhibition in the summer months. It was chosen not least because it complements works by other artists already in the City's collection, including a recent donation by Morris Grassie (*The Sou'Westers, Arbroath*, c.1953-57) and an early work by John Bellany (*The Obsession*, c.1968). *Fisherman with Creels* would be the first work by Donald Smith to enter the City's collection. The painting is being offered for sale by the artist's estate.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Should the Committee approve the purchase of the painting, 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 ***Fisherman with Creels*** oil on board, 124cms x 104cms. The price is £3,555, which includes a 10% museum discount. 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 can be found in the publication which accompanied the exhibition '*Islander: The Paintings of Donald Smith*' held at the City Art Centre between May and September 2021.
- 8.2 A review of the exhibition by Art Critic Duncan MacMillan:
<https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/art/art-reviews-islander-the-paintings-of-donald-smith-pandemic-a-personal-response-to-covid-19-3261894>

9. Appendices

9.1 None.