

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

2.00pm, Thursday 2 February 2023

Purchase of two photographs by Sekai Machache

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the photographs *A Hint of Blue I* and *A Hint of Blue II* by Sekai Machache (b.1987).

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

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Report

Purchase of two photographs by Sekai Machache

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the photographs *A Hint of Blue I* and *A Hint of Blue II* by Sekai Machache (b.1987).

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. Diversifying the collection is an important part of the acquisitions policy, ensuring that the collection provides a comprehensive overview of Scottish art for future generations.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following two photographs by Sekai Machache are presented to the Committee for consideration:

A Hint of Blue I and A Hint of Blue II

Direct photographic prints on aluminium dibond, each with a white maple 'Basel Plus' frame.

Each 80 x 119.9cm (image dimensions).

£6,660 for both photographs (including 10% museum discount).





A Hint of Blue I and *A Hint of Blue II*, and installation image

- 4.2 Sekai Machahe was born in Harare, Zimbabwe but raised in Glasgow. She graduated from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in 2012, and recently relocated to Edinburgh from Dundee. She is principally known for her work in photography, but her artistic practice also includes film and performance and centres around the notion of self. Aspects of her photographic practice are formulated through digital studio-based compositions utilising body paint and muted lighting to create images that appear to emerge from darkness. She often uses herself as a model.
- 4.3 Sekai is the recipient of the 2020 RSA Morton Award and is currently an artist in residence with the Talbot Rice Residency Programme 2021-2023. She is the founder and member of the *Yon Afro Collective* and is also a trustee of Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop. Recent exhibitions and residencies include: *'RESET'*, Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh Art Festival 2021, *'The Divine Sky'*, Stills Gallery, Edinburgh Art Festival 2021, *'Expression: Contemporary African Art in Perspective'*, The Hidden Lane Gallery (2019), *'Walking Through the Shadows Eyes Open'*, Subsolo Art Laboratory, Campinas Sao Paolo (2019), *'Wyrd Operations - 3 of Cups'*, Bread Arts Laboratory, Ayrshire (2019), *'Invocation'*, Instituto Moreira Salles, Sao Paolo (2018), *'(Re)imagining Self'* Yon Afro Collective at Govanhill Baths, Glasgow International Festival (2018).
- 4.4 Sekai works internationally with a recent project taking her to Brazil where she produced a cross-cultural curatorial project which was supported by a Creative Scotland and British Council partnership. She is interested in the relationship between spirituality, dreaming and the role of the artist in disseminating imagery that can provide a space for healing against the historical contexts of colonialism and loss. Her work is now being acquired by public collections, with The Fleming Collection in London recently purchasing a suite of her photographs.

- 4.5 Colour is a very important element in Machache's work. In a previous project, *Body of Land*, the theme colours were black, red and white, with each colour representing an aspect of the self/soul. This was derived from a concept that is found in many African cultures who believe the human soul is split into three.
- 4.6 In this recent series, whose overall title is '*The Divine Sky*', the selected colour is blue. Machache writes: "I am very interested in the ancient indigo dyeing processes across West Africa. There are 12 stages in the indigo dyeing process of Mali, and the darkest blues that can be produced are called *The Divine Sky*".
- 4.7 *The Divine Sky* utilises allegory and performance to tell a complicated history through immersive storytelling and photography. This series took form during the Covid-19 lockdown period when restrictions to her movements called for establishing new ways of working. The titles of the project are taken from the 12 stages in the indigo dyeing process. These are as follows: Blue of Nothingness, A Hint of Blue, Milky Blue, Lively Blue, Azure Blue, Blue of the Horizon, Ultramarine, Assertive Blue, The Divine Sky, Light Divine Sky, Deep Divine Sky, Profound Divine Sky.
- 4.8 The two photographs presented to the panel for consideration are entitled *A Hint of Blue I* and *A Hint of Blue II*. They present a ritual of sorts, constructed in a lavish domestic setting and reconstructing the traditional still life. Still Life as a tradition has been used for centuries by artists to practice their skills in rendering objects, to study light, tone, and volume and as a form of conspicuous consumption for the wealthy who were patrons of the arts. As such the photographs complement the many still life paintings within the City's art collection, but also overlay that tradition with a colonial context. The model (the artist) stands in the place of the many black servants who for centuries served their colonial masters. She is shown lighting a candle and pouring some wine, re-enacting the daily duties of a housemaid. In contrast to her simple clothing, the table is laden with expensive chinaware and a bounteous array of food and flowers.
- 4.9 In *A Hint of Blue*, the dominant shade is Cobalt blue, a pigment traditionally associated with 'blue willow' chinaware. Originating in China, it appeared as early as 618 – 906AD during the Tang dynasty, and as trade grew and techniques were shared, the blue willow pattern became a much sought-after design worldwide. In the photographs, the chinaware symbolizes the opulence of the owners' lifestyle.
- 4.10 Sekai Machache is not currently represented in the City Art Collection. She was proposed by our committee member Ade Adesina. The acquisition of her work would help with our aim to diversify the art collection so that it better reflects the multi-cultural nature of contemporary practice in Scotland.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If the acquisition of the photographs 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 The photographs are being offered for sale at a price of £6,660, which includes a museum discount of 10%. 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 Artist website: <https://sekaimachache.com>
- 8.2 Artist Interview: <https://list.co.uk/news/1657/sekai-machache-as-artists-we-have-the-space-to-consciously-create-new-narratives-that-can-catalyse-a-process-of-healing>
- 8.3 Talbot Rice Residency Scheme: <https://www.trg.ed.ac.uk/resident/sekai-machache>

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.