

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

2.00pm, Thursday 2 February 2023

Purchase of three artworks by Leena Nammari

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of three artworks by Leena Nammari (b. 1970). The artworks are: *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Arches* (2013), *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Tower* (2013) and *Before long ago became long ago* (2020).

Paul Lawrence

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Report

Purchase of three artworks by Leena Nammari

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of three artworks by Leena Nammari (b. 1970) – *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Arches* (2013), *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Tower* (2013) and *Before long ago became long ago* (2020).

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 recent work by contemporary artists, reflecting the diverse range of identities and backgrounds that make up contemporary visual arts practice, are an important means of ensuring that the collection continues to provide a comprehensive overview of Scottish art for future generations.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following three artworks by Leena Nammari are presented to the Committee for consideration:

Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Arches

photo-etching and screenprint on paper, 2013

edition of 2

80 x 60cm (unframed dimensions)

£600 (including 25% museum discount)

Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Tower

photo-etching and screenprint on paper, 2013

edition of 2

80 x 60cm (unframed dimensions)

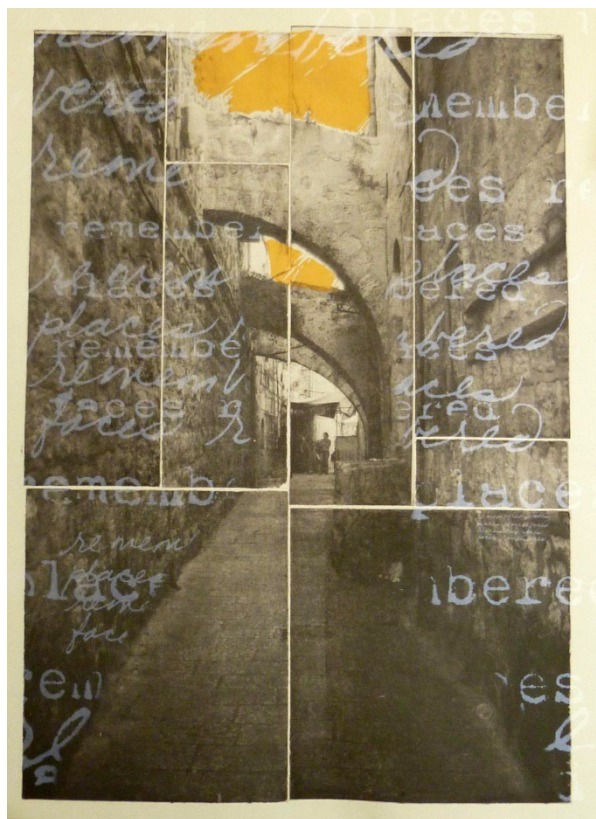
£600 (including 25% museum discount)

Before long ago became long ago

photo-etching with hand-embroidery on calico cotton (diptych), 2020

63 x 63cm each (unframed dimensions)

£1,200 (including 20% museum discount)



Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Arches, photo-etching and screenprint, 2013



Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Tower, photo-etching and screenprint, 2013



Before long ago became long ago, photo-etching and hand-embroidery on calico cotton, 2020

- 4.2 Leena Nammari is an Edinburgh-based Palestinian artist who was born in 1970. Nammari received her education in Ramallah in the West Bank, before relocating to Scotland in the late 1980s. During the early 1990s she trained as a nurse in Edinburgh, but later changed direction to study fine art. She completed a BA (Hons) degree in Fine Art Printmaking at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee in 2000.
- 4.3 Nammari has a long-running association with Edinburgh Printmakers, one of the UK's foremost printmaking facilities for visual artists. In 2005 she began working there as a Studio Assistant, before becoming a Studio Technician in 2007, and

taking on the role of Studio Coordinator in 2013. Since 2017 she has continued to work with Edinburgh Printmakers as a freelance Master Printmaker. Over the years she has also worked with a range of other organisations, teaching printmaking and photography to groups and individuals. This includes leading workshops for the National Galleries of Scotland and Stills photography centre in Edinburgh.

- 4.4 Throughout her career as an artist and educator, Nammari has shown particular interest in social engagement with marginalised groups, working on projects with organisations such as Women's Aid, Cyrenians and Saheliya, as well as with various schools and higher education institutions. In 2018 she completed an MFA degree in Art and Humanities at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee. She has recently embarked on a PhD at the same institution, exploring concepts of 'post-locational' home and belonging as an enduring force in Palestinian art and culture.
- 4.5 As an artist, Nammari's practice concentrates on printmaking in all its forms, from etching and screenprinting to lithography and cyanotypes. However, she also creates work in other media including textiles, ceramics, bronze, photography and film. She regularly collaborates with other visual artists, and has undertaken several multidisciplinary projects with writers and poets, such as Robert Crawford.
- 4.6 Nammari's art is deeply rooted in her Palestinian identity and heritage. Having grown up in the West Bank, she has direct experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the repercussions of military occupation. Against this wider geo-political backdrop, her imagery addresses personal reflections, exploring ideas around themes of memory, loss, family history and storytelling. The artist states that much of her work contains a note of sadness and abandonment, a sense of something being amiss. This lingering atmosphere encourages the viewer to pause, reflect and feel.
- 4.7 *Remembered Places, Places Remembered* is a series of photo-etchings from 2013 depicting scenes from the Old City of Jerusalem. Each composition is constructed from at least eight separate etching plates, which have been pieced together and assembled almost like a jigsaw. Nammari explains that this approach is intended to evoke the 'fragmentation of memory', underlining 'the idea that a whole is made up of many pieces'. Some of the works in the series are further developed and embellished with layers of screenprinting. Two works from this series, *Arches* and *Tower*, are to be considered for acquisition.
- 4.8 *Arches* portrays a sequence of stone buttresses spanning a narrow alley in Jerusalem. The artist explains that these structures are common in the Old City, criss-crossing the streets above the heads of pedestrians. Plants often grow out of the historic stonework. This type of scene is familiar to locals, but tends to be little seen, or noticed, by visitors despite its regular occurrence. As Nammari says, 'you just have to look up'. In this image several figures are shown standing at the far end of the alley. Although their basic outlines are apparent, their identities are unclear. The street otherwise appears to be deserted. Fragments of the words 'Remembered' and 'Places' have been screenprinted onto either side of the

composition, in both handwritten and typed fonts. The words seem to emerge and disappear among the walls, suggesting the passage of time and memory.

- 4.9 *Tower* depicts another architectural scene from Jerusalem's Old City. This image highlights the way the City has grown over the ages, as different populations have inhabited and gradually developed the location: constructing buildings, demolishing them, and replacing them with new structures. The bell tower of the 19th century Anglican church appears in the top left corner of the composition, overlooking the esplanade of the older Coptic Orthodox church. The artist's jigsaw-like use of multiple etching plates to create the overall image further accentuates the sense of architectural evolution.
- 4.10 The third artwork by Nammari to be considered for acquisition is a unique textile work in the form of a diptych that combines photo-etching with hand-embroidery. *Before long ago became long ago* (2020) consists of two images of a derelict olive store, which have been photo-etched onto plain calico cotton and then hand-embroidered with dark red, green and white stitching.
- 4.11 Nammari selected an old olive store as the subject of this work because the olive tree is considered an iconic symbol of Palestine, representing the attributes of resilience and resistance. This particular store is located on a hillside in the Ramallah region where, having been abandoned many years ago, it is gradually crumbling back into the landscape. The embroidery in this artwork is also symbolic. In Palestinian culture women living in rural locations traditionally embroidered particular motifs onto their dresses to demonstrate which village or area they came from. In this case, the embroidery follows a stylised cypress tree pattern that derives from the Ramallah region.
- 4.12 The artist deliberately chose to create this work on calico, a coarse form of cotton, to reference the traditional dressmaking skills of Palestinian women. However, it proved a technically difficult material to use in the photo-etching process, with the cloth often wrinkling as it was manipulated through the printing press. As such, she has produced very few similar works.
- 4.13 Nammari is a highly respected printmaker who has been recognised with several awards and artists residencies over the years. In 2020 she was elected to the Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture. She has exhibited extensively in venues around Scotland, as well as contributing to group exhibitions in Slovakia, Spain, Palestine and Australia.
- 4.14 In the last few years, the City Art Centre has been working to develop its holdings of contemporary printmaking. Recent acquisitions have included works by Ade Adesina, Nicola Murray, Robert Powell and Anupa Gardner. Leena Nammari is not yet represented in the collection. It is felt that the purchase of these artworks would be an excellent opportunity to further strengthen and diversify the City Art Centre's holdings. As demonstrations of outstanding technical skill and creative subtlety, they capture the evolution of Nammari's distinctive style. All three artworks are being offered directly by the artist for sale to the City Art Centre.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If acquisition of the artworks 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 artworks *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Arches* and *Remembered Places, Places Remembered: Tower* are being offered for sale at a price of £600 each, which includes a museum discount of 25%. The artwork *Before long ago became long ago* is being offered for sale at a price of £1,200, which includes a museum discount of 20%. 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's website: <https://leenanammari.co.uk>.
- 8.2 Artist's profile on Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture website: <https://www.royalscottishacademy.org/artists/867-leena-nammari-rsa-%28elect%29/overview/>.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.