

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

10.30am, Friday 23 February 2024

Purchase of an oil painting by Robbie Bushe

Executive/routine
Wards

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the oil painting *Towards St James and Calton Hill (Reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* (2023) by Robbie Bushe (b.1964).

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

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2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the oil painting *Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* (2023) by Robbie Bushe (b.1964).
- 2.2 This purchase requires an additional spend of £2,000, further to the previously agreed award value of £5,000 allocated to 'The City of Edinburgh Prize'.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the last meeting of the Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest, held on 2 February 2023, the offer of 'The City of Edinburgh Prize' at the inaugural Scottish Landscapes Awards exhibition was [approved](#).
- 3.2 The Scottish Landscape Awards exhibition is the result of an open competition that set out to redefine the boundaries of contemporary landscape art. The exhibition opened at the City Art Centre on 4 November 2023 and runs until 3 March 2024.
- 3.3 'The City of Edinburgh Prize' was established to recognise the most outstanding view of the city in any media. The value of the award was set at £5,000, with funds coming from the Jean F Watson Bequest. The successful artwork would subsequently be acquired for the City's fine art collection.
- 3.4 The winning entry for 'The City of Edinburgh Prize' was the oil painting *Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* (2023) by Robbie Bushe (b.1964). The value of the artwork is in excess of the previously agreed award, but has been substantially reduced to reflect the large scale and quality of the artwork, while providing good value for money with a substantial museum discount.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The following oil painting by Robbie Bushe is presented to the Committee for consideration:

Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)

Oil on canvas, 2023

155 x 170cm unframed dimensions

£7,000 (including museum discount)



4.2 In October 2023 the Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest voted for the winner of 'The City of Edinburgh Prize' at the inaugural Scottish Landscape Awards exhibition. The winning entry was the oil painting *Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* (2023) by Robbie Bushe (b.1964).

4.3 *Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* is one of a series of panoramic paintings in which the artist responds to the 1949 Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh. This ambitious historical survey proposed dramatic changes to the topography of central Edinburgh, including a six-lane elevated ring-road encircling

the Old and New Towns. In his work as an artist, Robbie Bushe explores the potential implications of this survey, had its proposals been approved. The painting under consideration presents an alternative, reimagined vision of the city, with the futuristic ring-road slicing through the historic architecture beneath Calton Hill.

- 4.4 Robbie Bushe was born in Liverpool in 1964 and grew up in Aberdeenshire. He trained at Edinburgh College of Art in the late 1980s, graduating in 1990. Throughout his career he has combined his own creative practice with a series of lecturing posts based around the UK, including Head of Fine Art at the University of Chichester. Bushe returned to Scotland in 2007, and currently lectures in Art and Design at the University of Edinburgh. He exhibits widely, and his work can be found in a number of public collections, including the Royal Scottish Academy and Edinburgh College of Art.
- 4.5 The City Art Centre currently holds one artwork by Robbie Bushe, an early oil painting entitled *Cat amongst the Glutton* (1989). The acquisition of *Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)* (2023) would bring the representation of this acclaimed artist up-to-date within the collection. The painting is also highly relevant in terms of its subject matter, exploring the history and development of Edinburgh's built environment.
- 4.6 The sale value of the painting is £13,000, which is significantly higher than the award value of £5,000 allocated to 'The City of Edinburgh Prize'. Following discussions with curatorial staff at the City Art Centre, the artist has agreed to offer the painting for £7,000. This revised price reflects the large scale and quality of the artwork, while providing good value for money with a substantial museum discount.
- 4.7 For this acquisition to go ahead, the Committee is asked to approve the additional spend of £2,000, further to the previously agreed award of £5,000.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If the additional spend of £2,000 is approved, the revised price of £7,000 will be paid to the artist, and the artwork will be acquired for the City's fine art collection.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The painting is being offered for sale at a price of £7,000, which includes a museum discount of £6,000. Funds for this purchase would come from the Jean F Watson Bequest.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

9.1 Not applicable.

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 The Scottish Landscape Awards website:
<https://www.scottishartstrust.org/landscape>

10.2 Robbie Bushe artist's website: <https://www.robbiebushe.com>

11. Appendices

11.1 None.