

Please note the images referred to in this paper are not available due to copyright restrictions.

Early Eardley

Introduction

The painter Joan Eardley (1921-63) is best known for two major bodies of work produced between the early 1950s and her death in 1963: paintings of tenement children in Townhead, Glasgow, and seascapes and landscapes depicting the area around the tiny fishing village of Catterline, near Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire. The Tate's entry on Eardley claims that 'her artistic career had three distinct phases': the first dating from 1940 when she enrolled at the Glasgow School of Art to 1949 'when she had a successful exhibition of paintings created while travelling in Italy'; the second spanning 1950 to 1957, when 'Eardley's work focused on the city of Glasgow and in particular the slum area of Townhead; and the third, covering the last years of her life 'when seascapes and landscapes painted in and around Catterline dominated her output.'¹ The Tate's summary is a key example of the way in which Eardley's creative practice has been critically framed following her death in 1963. In contrast, this paper calls into question the frequent and reductive division of Eardley's creative practice into 'distinct phases' and re-examines a number of her early works of the 1940s and 50s, often excluded from accounts of Eardley's career, in order to identify recurrent themes and concerns for the artist across apparently separate bodies of work. In doing so, the paper seeks to highlight Eardley's continued formal and stylistic experimentation throughout her life while rejecting diachronic art historical readings of her development as an artist.

The Townhead and Catterline paintings act as bookends to popular perceptions of Eardley's career: easily identifiable as supposed 'phases', they are easy to categorise according to style and subject matter and work well in terms of tracing the biographical, place-based aspects of the 'Eardley story'. In this respect, different places of production are closely linked with the idea of an unfolding, improving practice, as in the Royal Scottish Academy retrospective in 2008 or the National Galleries

¹ See: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/joan-eardley-1049> (accessed 3 October 2020).

of Scotland exhibition 'A Sense of Place' in 2016-17. Yet the almost exclusive focus on the latter part of Eardley's career (1950-1963) and the way in which the Townhead and Catterline works have so often been treated as contrasting concerns in the development of the artist's practice², has resulted in an understanding of Eardley's career as an unfolding journey towards her pre-eminent 'late style' in the Catterline works. This view of Eardley's career is supported by some of the most insightful critical appraisals of her work. It is an approach which also supports broader assumptions around the idea of progress in art, and the retrospective construction of an artistic career. In this sense, the focus on an artist's mature work could be justified. As the painter and critic Cordelia Oliver noted in her 1988 monograph on the artist, some of Eardley's finest paintings, of cornfields and seascapes, were made in Catterline 'in the last autumn of her life'. For Oliver, these were 'painted with a manifest urgency and immense freedom of brushwork' offering 'an amazingly precise impression of the scene depicted, but with an additional rare insight into the sensations aroused by such an experience'³. Oliver wrote about Eardley's development across her career in greater detail than most, and it is clear that art historians, critics and curators are entitled to be selective, to focus on works they find most interesting. They may be required to summarise an artists' oeuvre or to choose examples of work considered to be the most significant or representative. Likewise, thematic studies or surveys may focus on only one aspect or subject of an artist's work produced over a lifetime. However, the continued historical and critical insistence on reading Eardley's oeuvre as one of progressive artistic maturity, one defined by a change of direction in 1957 towards semi-abstraction and landscape, has led to a view of Eardley's career as one marked by a kind of artistic epiphany at Catterline. In this account, Eardley's 'discovery' of Catterline and landscape in the early '50s allowed the artist to find her Turner-esque apotheosis as an artist, culminating in the elemental, expressive, formally assured paintings of the early 1960s.

² See, for example Christiana Spens, 'Joan Eardley: A Sense of Place', *Studio International* [Online] <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/joan-eardley-a-sense-of-place-review-national-galleries-scotland> (accessed 25 June 2020).

³ Cordelia Oliver, *Joan Eardley RSA*, Edinburgh 1988, p76.

The art historical narrative is well-worn: periodic shifts and changes of direction; the 'rejection' of earlier preoccupations; contrasts and dichotomies; the final 'great works'. The idea of progress in art is almost a trope in art history. It assumes that with age and maturity, an artist produces more resolved or sophisticated 'great works'. This notion persists in spite of countless examples to the contrary (such as the late works of Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso or Frank Stella). As such, while Eardley's work may have indeed reached its full potential in her late works, painted, as Oliver notes above 'with a manifest urgency', what happens to those paintings that do not 'fit the script'- those false starts, deviations, returns and experiments? Does the market demand that the works we encounter are only those deemed most 'characteristic'? Or is exhibitionary practice (in thrall to a public which insists on sequential narratives or thematic taxonomies) responsible for this reductive view? The problem with the popular perception of Joan Eardley, as it is presented via criticism and curating, is that in the attempt to present a coherent, chronological narrative arch, the artist's less easily categorisable works (many produced earlier in her career) are frequently overlooked, both as works in their own right and, more importantly, as possible precursors to the later works for which she is best remembered. Similarly, by citing only those peers and role models which 'match' her most familiar style, contextual understandings of how Eardley's work developed are limited, leaving the artist's late urban figurative subject matter unaccounted for in the narrative of her developing practice. *Children and chalked wall 2* (1963), for example, undermines Tate's claim that the Townhead works belonged to her mid-career work of the 1950s (the so-called 'second phase'). Left unfinished in her Glasgow studio at the time of her death, it was painted in the same year as major landscape works such as *Catterline in Winter* (1963) indicating that these two thematic preoccupations were more concurrent than successive. In fact, Eardley's paintings of city life and children had begun much earlier than is often documented, at the very start of her training as an artist, such as the pen and ink drawing *Two girls and a boy* (c.1940-43). Her stylistic and formal experimentation with realist and kitchen sink themes continued until her death, far beyond the period normally associated with such subject matter. Likewise, unlike the supposed 'turn' from the

city to the country in the late 1950s, landscape and rural scenes had been present from Eardley's student days in the early 1940s and continued throughout her career.

Some of the narrative gaps in the Eardley story, especially as told through exhibitions, may have occurred because of the way the artist's early works have been dispersed. Through gifting and selling, a number of works from the 1940s and '50s have been split between numerous private and public collections, thereby preventing a cohesive overview and making attempts to trace, locate or borrow more complex. The same principle applies to works which do not fall easily into either the Townhead or Catterline oeuvre (in spite of the fact they may have been created contemporaneously). Some of the works from the earlier part of Eardley's life (especially her drawings and works on paper) are undoubtedly more preparatory or unresolved than the later, more famous paintings, and the eclectic mix of styles and influences between the late 1930s and mid-1950s does not lend itself to a neat sense of development. Nevertheless, this paper seeks to retrace and reconsider the development of the artist's work by focussing predominantly on the decade prior to the Townhead works, a period which predates her so-called 'fifteen-year career'⁴.

Beginnings

Joan Eardley's story, with a number of notable exceptions,⁵ has almost invariably been 'tidied up' by critics, curators, art historians and art dealers since her death in 1963. She is often said to be Scottish, for example, in spite of being born and brought up in England 'in the comfortable south in a comfortable house'⁶. Her artistic interests and diverse, prolific output have been reduced to a 'street kids and seascapes' or figurative/landscape dichotomy. Much mention is made of her 'hardships' and economic struggle, in spite of her private schooling, property ownership and access to family wealth.⁷ And until recently, her sexuality, a key aspect of her artistic kinship and circle of peers, has

⁴ 'Joan Eardley: A Sense of Place', National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2017.

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/exhibition/joan-eardley-sense-place> (accessed 11 September 2020).

⁵ Christopher Andreae, *Joan Eardley*, Farnham 2013; Fiona Pearson, *Joan Eardley*, Edinburgh 2007; Oliver, *Ibid.*

⁶ Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Ideas in 20th-Century British Painting*, London 2020, p92.

⁷ See, for example, Cordelia Oliver's entry on Eardley for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40309> (accessed Sept 8 2020) and Christopher Neve's claim that Eardley 'was a working woman like any other' in Townhead (Neve, *Ibid.*).

either been ignored or alluded to in the most ambiguous terms, in stark contrast to queer artists such as Robert Colquhoun, Robert MacBryde, Francis Bacon, David Hockney and many other men, whose artistic biographies are often bound up with their intimate and romantic partnerships.

Born in West Sussex to an English father and a Scottish mother in 1921, Eardley did not move to Scotland until she was 19. Her early childhood was spent at Bailing Hill Farm in Warnham where her parents were dairy farmers. In 1926, Eardley's mother took Joan and her younger sister Pat to live with their maternal grandmother in Blackheath, London. In 1929, after the death of their father, Joan and Pat were privately educated at St Helen's school, paid for by their aunt, and it was here that Eardley's interest in art flourished and her talent was encouraged. In 1938, she attended Blackheath School of Art (now The Conservatoire) for two terms before transferring to Goldsmiths Art School (now Goldsmiths, University of London) where she was enrolled in Autumn 1938 and Spring 1939.⁸⁹ In 1939, the family moved to Scotland, first to stay with relatives in Auchterader in Perthshire, and then to Bearsden, an affluent suburb in the countryside outside Glasgow. The following year, Eardley recommenced her art school training. Among other juvenilia (including a beautiful study of a cat) a watercolour titled *Fair at Blackheath* (1939) was part of her art school portfolio submission. It shows a crowded fairground scene, with a group of small children running, playing and riding donkeys. Though sketch-like, and resembling (in its chubby, slightly caricatured depiction of children's bodies) the illustrations of Mabel Lucie Atwell (1879-1964), the drawing is 'a busy scene full of implied noise, hectic activity and unruly children', offering a foretaste of later preoccupations¹⁰. Another early work, *Rush hour* (c.1938) (Pl 1 *Rush hour*, c.1938. Oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm. Cyril Gerber Fine Art, Glasgow) is another colourful street scene showing people rushing in different directions – a child cycling furiously, scarf flying; a man pulling a child towards a departing

⁸ See <https://sites.gold.ac.uk/goldsmithshistory/the-goldsmiths-terms-of-one-of-scotlands-most-celebrated-20th-century-artists/> (accessed 14 November 2020) for more detail.

⁹ Douglas Percy Bliss, the artist and later Director of Glasgow School of Art, taught at Blackheath during the period Eardley was enrolled.

¹⁰ Oliver, *Joan Eardley*, p10.

bus; a woman dashing with her shopping basket. As Fiona Pearson has noted, the work reveals a young artist 'striving to come to grips with movement and tone'.¹¹

Eardley at Glasgow School of Art

In Scotland, Eardley's early career centred around Glasgow School of Art, where she was first enrolled as a student between January 1940 and 1943, studying under the renowned and influential portrait and mural painter Hugh Adam Crawford, who had taught artists including Robert Colquhoun, Robert MacBryde and Robert Henderson Blyth in the 1930s. Crawford became the Head of the Drawing and Painting Department in 1938. Eardley's classmates included Ian Hamilton Finlay, Bet Low, Carlo Rossi, Margot Sandeman and Cordelia Oliver, amongst others (Pl 2 *Joan Eardley and friends at Graduation, 1943*. Courtesy Carlo Rossi). Oliver became a lifelong friend and was instrumental in cementing Eardley's reputation after her death through curating, criticism and the publication of the first full-length monograph¹² on her work in 1988 (following William Buchanan's short 'Modern Scottish Painters' book on Eardley in 1976). But it was Sandeman (who would later collaborate with her classmate Ian Hamilton Finlay) who became Eardley's closest friend. The two lived less than a mile from one another in Bearsden and remained friends for life, often working alongside one another, exchanging letters and travelling together.

The student experience at Glasgow School of Art during the Second World War was distinctive and unusual. The extra-curricular duties students were expected to undertake during the war, such as fire-watching and fundraising for the war effort, contributed to the formation of a very close-knit student body and a strong sense of common purpose. In this period Glasgow experienced an influx of more transient visitors, some of whom became students and guest tutors at Glasgow School of Art, including refugees from Europe and US servicemen, who introduced the students to new and exciting influences and ideas on art and culture, as we discuss later in this article.

¹¹ Pearson, p11.

¹² Following William Buchanan *Joan Eardley: Modern Scottish Painters Number 5*, Edinburgh 1976.

With the exception of those who had medical exemptions or worked in reserved occupations, all of the male staff and students between the ages of 18 and 41 had been conscripted under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act from September 1939. As a result, the vastly reduced number of 'War Years' students received far more intensive training from their tutors than would have been the case in a larger student cohort. In Eardley's case this went even further. According to Cordelia Oliver, Crawford had identified a small group of students he considered to have potential and allowed them to 'short circuit the General Course and spend more time in drawing and painting'.¹³ Eardley and Sandeman were two of the chosen few, drawn from the remaining group of (mainly women) students. Eardley, already living in an exclusively female household, established a close network of women peers who would continue to support her throughout her life and champion her work after her death.

Hugh Adam Crawford encouraged all of his students to take risks, to break with convention and be singular in their commitment to making art. Cordelia Oliver remembered Crawford as 'the least didactic of teachers' combining empathy and abrasiveness, integrity and understanding in his efforts to help students find their own artistic voice. He urged his students to avoid complacency and easy solutions and steered them towards artists of the past that were particular to their individual interests, rather than dictating a prescribed programme of study. As Oliver has recalled, Eardley was 'capable of acting on the slightest suggestion in a way that roused a sense, almost of envy in the teacher who, to the end of his life, maintained that "to teach Joan was a joy"'.¹⁴

Eardley was a student on and off throughout the 1940s. She attended and later taught evening classes at GSA after graduating from her diploma course. She was a postgraduate student at the Patrick Allan Fraser School of Art at Hospitalfield, Arbroath between April and September of 1947 and in 1948 she returned to GSA to complete her post-diploma year, which had been interrupted by

¹³ Cordelia Oliver, *Crawford and Company: Selected Work 1928-1978*, exh cat., Glasgow 1978, p11.

¹⁴ Oliver, *Joan Eardley*, p12.

national service and war work. After her travelling scholarship, she returned to GSA in 1949 for the final time, to exhibit forty-three works produced in Italy and France. *Drawings of Italy* was her first solo show, and already Eardley demonstrated her range of interests, from farmworkers and fishermen to church-goers and beggars, fishing nets and hovels to Florentine rooftops and Venetian bridges.

Self-Portrait, 1943

During her first stint at GSA, after completing the General Course, Eardley was encouraged to continue her studies in order to gain a diploma. In 1943 she won the Sir James Guthrie Prize for a self-portrait, her diploma painting (PI 3 *Self-portrait*, 1943. Oil on plywood 53.4 x 45.7 cm, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh).¹⁵ Painted under Crawford's direction, Eardley's portrait may owe a debt to Crawford's own work. It is possible, though, that along with Crawford's influence, Eardley had the work of Clive Gardiner in mind. Principal of Goldsmiths during Eardley's time as a student, Gardiner was known primarily for his illustration and poster design, but, like Crawford (who had initially taught illustration at GSA), he also painted portraits and murals¹⁶. Both men were regarded by their peers as progressive risk-takers, credited with rejecting the staid conservatism of the academy for self-expression and an openness to developments in modern European painting. In self-portraits by both Crawford and Gardiner from around the same period the composition and approach is remarkably similar.¹⁷ Both artists present themselves as artist-educators: both show themselves sitting at their easel, with framed paintings on the wall behind them; both look sternly, slightly sideways, at their reflection; both are bespectacled, wearing shirt, tie and jacket; each has paint brush in hand. In both paintings the edge of the canvas protrudes into the left side of the picture plane. And both pictures, in common with Eardley's portrait, are decidedly painterly, almost

¹⁵ Oliver won the same prize for her diploma self-portrait in the following year.

¹⁶ Gardiner's mural *Coal* was exhibited at the 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition, the year before Eardley moved to Scotland. Crawford's murals included commissions for a Roman Catholic chapel in Bellahouston, St Columba's Church, John Brown & Company shipyard and the Scottish Brewers premises, all in Glasgow.

¹⁷ See the works here: <https://gsaarchives.net/collections/index.php/nmc-0738> and here: <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/gardiner-clive-18911960>

impressionistic or unfinished, lacking in the smooth, linear finish seen elsewhere in the work of both artists. Even the muted palette is similar – the faded ochre and teal of Cezanne.

It would be easy to assume that the unfinished, heavily scumbled effect of Eardley's portrait reflected Crawford's interest in fifteenth century Italian Renaissance frescoes. While Eardley undoubtedly admired the work of Masaccio and Piero della Francesca, and the surface of the painting takes on the appearance of an ancient, flaking fresco, it would be another four years until Eardley saw such works for herself during her travelling scholarship to Italy. In fact, the unfinished quality of Eardley's painting began as a solution to a practical problem. According to the entry in the catalogue for Eardley's Memorial Exhibition in 1964, students were given a week for the completion of a self-portrait. After three days, Crawford's advice was that Eardley's painting was over-worked and that she should find a way to address this. Rather than beginning again, she scraped it down, added minimal detail and submitted it for her diploma within the week. For Eardley's biographer Christopher Andreae, the portrait was 'remarkably informal' in its lack of finish, but 'full of character – a meeting of uncertainty and confidence'¹⁸, a precursor to charcoal studies of peasants made in Italy and later figurative subjects. Art historian Bill Hare has noted that the self-portrait was, by either accident or design, 'an act of subtle self-effacement'. In this work, he writes, 'Eardley almost turns the conventional ritual and assumed purpose of self-portraiture on its head by seeming to eliminate rather than promote her own distinctive individuality and objective presence.'¹⁹ Crawford subsequently bought the work. An image of it appears behind him in his own self-portrait of c.1943. Both paintings are now part of the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland²⁰

From The Tabernacle to The Watch House

In 1988, writing again of her friend and classmate, Cordelia Oliver observed that 'there is a popular misconception that, as to subject-matter, Joan Eardley's career was arbitrarily and distinctly divided

¹⁸ Andreae, p117.

¹⁹ Bill Hare, 'Joan Eardley', *Scottish Artists in an Age of Radical Change*, Edinburgh 2019, p40.

²⁰ See: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/2197/hugh-adam-crawford-1898-1982-artist-self-portrait>

into separate periods; that her interest in the early years was primarily in urban subjects and that only with her discovery of Catterline [...] did she become a painter of landscape.²¹ More recently, Christopher Andreae has noted that 'Eardley was not just a two-sided artist', and acknowledged the 'oversimplified view that people have of her work' which serves to overlook her 'wide and varied' interests and subject matter.²² These misconceptions and oversimplifications have continued, fostering a pat chronological account of Eardley's career while omitting any synchronous thematic concerns and obscuring the nuance and range of Eardley's work over her lifetime. Most accounts – whether writing and exhibitions - divide Eardley's output into either urban and rural subject matter and almost invariably suggest that landscape was something the artist grew towards as she became a mature artist. In his book *Unquiet Landscape*, for example, Christopher Neve claims that for Eardley 'in the end there was only the sea'²³ a claim that almost purposely ignores the ongoing figurative work that the artist was conducting in Glasgow at the time of her death. Neve was writing on landscape, of course, and his interest was clearly on works concerned with land and sea, but the framing of Eardley as exclusively focussed on seascapes at the end of her life is both selective and partial when significant developments in her urban, figurative work were taking place concurrently. To some extent, British culture, however wrongheaded the notion, is underpinned by an understanding of the country and city as distinct and separate spheres. That this perception should influence the way Eardley's work has been framed simply follows the pattern discussed in Raymond Williams' classic study of English literature in 1973's *The Country and the City*. As Williams' noted, the words themselves, 'country' and 'city' 'stand in for the experiences of human communities'. In spite of a real history which is 'astonishingly varied', Williams emphasised that generalisations and loaded associations which contrast the two types of place reach 'back into classical times'.²⁴ These generalisations dogged accounts of Eardley's work: we read of her 'escape' to the country, her

²¹ Oliver, p14.

²² Andreae, p94.

²³ Neve, p95.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London 1973, p2.

longing for a simple life and her fixation with the elemental forces of nature. These accounts are presented in contrast to her fascination with the seamy, downtrodden areas of the city, her garret studio in the slums, her affinity with outsiders etc. All of these claims may be true, but they are not mutually exclusive or incompatible. Eardley herself claimed that her interest in both Catterline and Townhead lay in their shared qualities rather than their diametric oppositions. As she noted, both were small, close-knit, working-class communities where anonymity was impossible and neighbours relied upon one another.

Her work also tells a different, less idealised story of the country and the city, and an examination of her 'early years' as an artist demonstrates this clearly. Her earliest known work was of a rural Scottish scene, though she was then resident in London. Included in the 1964 Memorial Exhibition, a watercolour, *Bridge at Killin*, was undated but listed as being 'a summer holiday task for school'.²⁵ In *The Country and the City* Raymond Williams discussed the range of settlements and places that were neither town nor country, such as suburbs, industrial estates, edgelands, dormitory and market towns - places which complicated understandings of pastoral idyll versus urban den of inequity. Examples of all of these kinds of places can be found in many of Eardley's paintings of the 1940s and early 1950s: a boatbuilder's yard in the suburbs; a marketplace in Lincoln; the harbour at Arbroath; monumental shipyards on the Firth of Clyde; the industrial edges of Port Glasgow; the mudflats of the Thames; unpopulated city canals, bridges and covered markets. The drawings *Shipyard with cranes* and *Swing park, Port Glasgow*, both 1951, exemplify this interest.

During her student years Eardley began to explore Scotland, often spending holidays with Margot Sandeman. These were working holidays, where the women would spend time drawing, painting and exploring. In 1941 they hired a horse and caravan from Pirie's farm (for whom they did a milk delivery round) and travelled through the Campsie hills to Loch Lomond, around 14 miles from Bearsden, taking drawing materials along. From 1942, Eardley was invited to join Sandeman's family

²⁵ The Scottish Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain, *Joan Eardley R.S.A. (1921-1963): A memorial exhibition*, exh.cat., Edinburgh, p5.

on their annual summer holiday to the Isle of Arran. Sandeman's parents - the embroiderer and GSA graduate Muriel Boyd and businessman Archibald Sandeman - were both keen painters and travelled to Skye each year to paint the scenery, establishing a pattern for painting outdoors in the Scottish countryside that the young women would follow. Bearsden, within walking distance to the Campsie hills and the West Highland Way, hardly represented an urban, crowded environment from which the women would 'escape' and as their biographies outline, both artists' interest in the country and in nature was more than just artistic subject matter – they had both spent extended periods of their lives in the countryside, Eardley as the child of dairy farmers. If anything, the city, not the country, was 'other' for Eardley, as her letter to Sandeman from Paris in 1948 notes: 'I'm sure Paris is really terrific – only for me I seem to need a lot of simple country things – and only a very little of rushing rackets towns'.²⁶

For a number of years in the 1940s, Eardley and Sandeman returned to Arran each summer and rented a tiny, two-roomed cottage, 'The Tabernacle', one of two in the grounds of a large villa, Arranmhor, in Corrie on the east coast of the island, owned by a woman named Mrs Kelso. Mrs Kelso's elderly relative, Jeannie, lived yards away from The Tabernacle in Hillcroft and became a regular model for Eardley, featuring in works such as the charcoal and ink on paper *Old woman by the fire* (c.1945-50). The work depicts shows a very elderly woman, hunched in a chair, warming her feet in front of a black range, cup of tea in hand. Titled as *An old woman drinking tea*, it was shown at the RSA in 1950 and was reproduced in *Scottish Art Review* in 1957 and was later included in the 1964 Memorial Exhibition where it became the only work reproduced in the accompanying catalogue. Also titled *Old woman by a fire* (year unknown), a work in watercolour and black ink shows the same scene (Pl 4 *Old woman by a fire*, year unknown. Watercolour and black ink on two pieces of paper-backed canvas, 67.5 x 98.20 cm, National Galleries of Scotland).

²⁶ Joan Hughson, *At home in Bearsden and Corrie: Muriel Boyd Sandeman, Archibald Sandeman, Margot Sandeman*, exh cat., Glasgow 2010, p27.

In her paintings of people, Eardley is known primarily for her images of Glasgow children but Jeannie, and other elderly people, such as subject of the study *Old woman sewing* (c1948-9), *An Old woman praying at St Marks* (1948-9), and *Old Italian woman* (c.1948-9), featured regularly in her early works, often resting. *Jeannie 3* and *Jeannie 4*, both gouache on paper, c. 1954-58 are cases in point.²⁷

Eardley's images of children were also not limited to the classic Townhead works. Like her fellow Glasgow School of Art graduate Archibald McGlashan (1888-1980), Eardley painted pictures of sleeping babies for over a decade. In the 1950s, there are numerous paintings of her friends and contemporaries, including artists Angus Neil and Florence Jamieson. Taken together over the span of her career, particularly up to the mid-1950s, Eardley's portraiture and figurative works seem remarkably diverse for a painter best known for her apparently 'sentimental' images of children in Townhead.²⁸ They also emphasise her command of figure drawing, developed at Glasgow School of Art. Eardley's portraits and figures ranged from babies and young children to the very elderly. She depicted men and women of all ages, at work, at play and at rest, from unknown strangers and beggars to friends, patrons and lovers, and a series of nudes, including the controversial *Sleeping nude* (1954-55), an arresting image of Angus Neil, who had become a regular model for Eardley's portraits and interior paintings and the Vuillard-esque *Reclining nude* (1949), of the artist Florence Jamieson.

A number of other drawings and paintings from the early period survive and again demonstrate that Eardley frequently worked across different subject matter concurrently: interiors (often stoves, sinks, cookers and pots); landscapes; cityscapes; portraits and figures (and occasional combinations of these), are all represented in works produced between the mid-1940s and early 1950s. Of the works made in and of Arran, the pen and ink drawing *Cottages, North High Corrie* is surely a precursor to Eardley's later paintings of fishing cottages in Catterline, such as the astonishing

²⁷ Oliver wrote of Eardley's affinity with elderly people and of her genuine rapport with Jeannie in Corrie. Four small gouache works of Jeannie were shown in a solo show held in 1959 at the 57 Gallery in Edinburgh.

²⁸ Martin Baillie, *Glasgow Herald*, 1975.

Catterline in Winter (1963), where the moonlit row of 'but and ben' dwellings seem to cling to an impossible gradient. Both composition and subject matter are remarkably similar – ramshackle coastal cottages which seem to tip into one another as the incline descends. Another ink drawing, *Corrie* (c.1947), was sold in 1947 at an exhibition held for the Earl Haig Fund, while a painting, *The shore, Corrie, Arran* (c.1943-7) (PI 5 *The shore, Corrie, Arran*, date unknown, Oil on canvas, 32 x 29", Cyril Gerber Fine Art) is composed of broad, gestural blocks of colour and line, moving towards the semi-abstract works more commonly associated with the later part of her career such as *Winter sea from No.1* (1958).

Like many of her later works, and in common with Sandeman, Eardley was not concerned with the most recognisable or dramatic Arran vistas beloved of other artists. Goatfell was a particularly popular subject and overshadowed the village, but Eardley and Sandeman's gaze was fixed on the sea. Two recurrent subjects for both artists were sheep and the shoreline, often together, and both artists' works have been compared to the pastoralism of Samuel Palmer. Eardley was sometimes alone at Corrie, and would write to Sandeman, often complaining of weather conditions which made painting outdoors a challenge. The frequent rain sometimes resulted in the construction of improvised shelters made of a coat, a bike and some rope, which kept the canvas dry unless it was too windy. Perhaps because of the limitations imposed by the weather, a few paintings of domestic interiors exist from this time and Eardley would return to this subject matter regularly between the late 1940s and mid-1950s, such as the ink on paper *Stove with teapot, tiles and shelves* (c.1945-50), and the oil painting *A stove* (c.1954-5), again invoking Vuillard's paintings of hearths and related subject matter, including those owned by Glasgow public collections (Kelvingrove Art Gallery and the Hunterian collection at the University of Glasgow), with which Eardley may have been familiar.

Many of Eardley's earliest publicly exhibited works in the 1940s were of Arran and in the early part of their respective careers, Eardley and Sandeman's works, in spite of their stylistic differences, were often produced and exhibited alongside one another. In a review of a 1940s Society of Scottish Artists exhibition, a *Scotsman* art critic noted that 'Miss Joan Eardley and Miss Margot Sandeman

more than maintain the exciting promise of their first appearances [...] Both are quite fearless and convinced exponents of highly individual outlooks.’²⁹ Sandeman would continue to paint scenes from Arran throughout her career, into the 1980s and beyond. Her 1960 painting *Two figures in a landscape* shows the two women together, almost certainly in Arran. As the Arran works demonstrate, the notion that Eardley ‘discovered’ rural or pastoral subject matter at Catterline in the 1950s is a misconception; a number of works from Arran highlight the artist’s sustained interest in landscape from the very start of her career. For an artist whose work is so often divided into figuration or landscape, it is notable that a range of her works, including those from the early part of her career, depict landscapes and rural scenes which feature people, while the cityscapes and street scenes are often unpopulated, as in *Tenement, Winter* (c.1949), *Glasgow tenements* (c.1955), *Gable end of a tenement and telegraph poles* (c.1955) and *Glasgow corner shop* (c.1955-60). When figures do appear, they themselves seem strangely pastoral, such as the reclining figure in *Glasgow backland, near the canal* c.1944.

War Work

Whilst Eardley’s influences have been attributed to tutors Hugh Adam Crawford at Glasgow School of Art and James Cowie at Hospitalfield House, Arbroath (considered later in this article), this section considers a third early influence on Eardley. Josef Herman (1911-2000) a Polish Jew and war refugee, came to the UK in 1939 and lived in Glasgow between 1940-43. In stark contrast to the predominantly conservative and formal teaching in the drawing and painting department at GSA, Herman’s international outlook and work of a social realist nature chimed with the politics and realities of a poverty-stricken Glasgow. He, along with another Polish refugee, the painter and printmaker Jankel Adler (1895-1949), were to meet and have a great impact on the wider Glasgow art scene including Tom Macdonald (1914-1985), Marie de Banzie (1918-1990) and William Crosbie

²⁹ Anon. ‘Good Show!’, *The Scotsman*, 15 October 1949.

(1915-1999) as well as another of Eardley's peers, Bet Low (1924-2007),³⁰ who wrote: 'New ideas were not welcomed as people of the stature of Jankel Adler, Josef Herman, J.D. Fergusson, Bill Crosbie, Andrew Taylor Elder and others who had studied abroad found out. In a certain well-known establishment, Adler and Herman were contemptuously called 'these queer foreign painter chaps'.³¹

It is possible that the certain 'well-known establishment' could have been the Royal Scottish Academy. There was already a palpable Edinburgh / Glasgow divide in artistic circles, with J.D. Fergusson noting in his 1943 manifesto *Modern Scottish Painting* that any artist from Glasgow would fail trying to get into the RSA, '... where they were hated, and as often as possible rejected, coming from Glasgow, an industrial town not considered a seat of learning'.³² In response to this lack of access to the Academy and perceived lack of galleries in Glasgow, other independent groups and enterprises were set up, such as The New Scottish Group, with author Naomi Mitchison writing in her forward for their first exhibition in 1943 '... that nobody is kept out either by expense or by snobbery'.³³ In 1942, whilst the RSA held its One-Hundred and Sixteenth annual exhibition of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, predominantly of members' work, Herman and Estonian-born Benno Schotz (1891-1984) co-curated *Jewish Art* at the Jewish Institute in Glasgow, which included the work of Käthe Kollwitz, Amedeo Modigliani, Marc Chagall and Chaim Soutine.³⁴ This was also the year that Herman discovered his family had perished in the Warsaw Ghetto. Many of the drawings that Herman made in Glasgow over this period were of memories of his family such as *My grandmother telling a story on Friday evening* (1940-43) and *I dream about my sister* (1940-43) or of Warsaw street characters such as *Old man* (1940-43) and *Musicians* (1940-43).

³⁰ Low met Herman through the networks of the Glasgow Unity Theatre, which had formed at the start of the Second World War, bringing several progressive theatre groups together.

³¹ Bet Low, *Scottish Review* See: <https://www.scottishreview.net/BetLowannalsa.html> (accessed: 7 Mar 2021)

³² (Eds.) Alexander Moffat and Alan Riach, *Modern Scottish Painting*, Edinburgh, 2015, p92.

³³ Naomi Mitchison, 'The New Scottish Group First Exhibition', *The New Scottish Group*, Glasgow 1947, p13.

³⁴ Mia Spiro, *Exhibiting Jewish Culture in Post-War Britain: Glasgow's 1951 Festival of Jewish Arts*, University of Glasgow, 2019, p7. See: <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/180719/1/180719.pdf> (accessed: 7 Mar 2021)

For an art student like Eardley, the contrasting formal styles of the academy alongside immediate, expressionistic examples of international art, must have presented a heightened experience to learn and draw inspiration from. Cyril Gerber, the Glasgow gallerist and collector, noted that for the art scene in Glasgow, Herman and Adler, ‘...stayed long enough to open windows for the less experienced. Without them it would have taken longer to achieve a ‘Modern’ view’.³⁵

Eardley began to visit Herman’s Glasgow studio in 1940, in her first year of being a student at Glasgow School of Art. Eardley was 19 while Herman was ten years older. Herman described the moment in *Related Twilights: Notes from an Artist’s Diary*, that followed his chance meeting in a cafe with the sculptor and filmmaker Helen Biggar (1905-1953) who had found him a studio and arranged for an artist’s easel to be brought to him: ‘One afternoon I was in the studio, which was empty but for a mattress and blankets, when I heard a noise of banging on the stairs. Opening the door I saw two girls dragging an awkward, heavy Victorian easel. One of the girls was very big with a dark complexion [it was].... Joan Eardley. Joan, though unbelievably shy – she could not utter a word without going red in the face – came frequently to the studio after this first meeting.’³⁶ The easel was returned to Glasgow School of Art fifty years later, by Herman’s widow Nini Herman, with the gift of a life drawing by him, as a thank you for the extended loan.³⁷

Herman had attended art school in Brussels for the two years preceding his time in Glasgow. While studying there he met and became influenced by Belgian Expressionist artist Constant Permeke (1886-1952), who had painted peasant labour, a key subject of Herman’s oeuvre. This concern can also be traced throughout Eardley’s early work, whether the bean pickers or farmers of Lincolnshire or Italy, or the fishermen of Arbroath or Forte dei Marmi. Herman also drew fishermen from Skye and the Western Isles from a visit during his stay in Glasgow.³⁸ Christopher Andreae observes that Herman and Eardley arrived in Glasgow at almost the same time, with both being

³⁵ Cyril Gerber, *Jankel Adler and Josef Herman: Paintings, Drawings, Watercolours*, exh cat., Glasgow 1990.

³⁶ Josef Herman, *Related twilights: notes from an artist’s diary*, (ed.) Tony Curtis, Seren, Wales 2002, p62.

³⁷ The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections, NMC/0634 and NMC/633.

³⁸ Robert Heller, *Josef Herman*, London 1998, p10.

'observer[s] of working class life, with the emphasis on 'working'.³⁹ A clear comparison of subject can be made between the two drawings, *Young man playing accordion*, (c.1940s), a black chalk on paper study by Eardley (PI 6 *Young man playing an accordion*, c. 1949-50. Black chalk on paper, 70 x 42 cm, Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums) and Herman's ink and wash work, *The old Jewish accordion player* (undated) (PI 7 *The old Jewish accordion player*, undated. Ink and wash, 20 x 25cm. DACS copyright, courtesy Martin Tinney Gallery). Where Eardley captures the dexterity of the youth, focusing in detail on his hands, using strong black charcoal marks to create negative space between the fingers, Herman's work captures the dejectedness of the musician, hunched over the accordion, with his empty cap at his feet.

There is also a resonance between Herman and Eardley in their favouring unusually close cropping in their compositions. For Herman, the claustrophobic framing of portraits, interiors and exteriors on the page, hold the weight of memories of scenes and people no longer there. In the catalogue from his 1985 retrospective at The Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, *Memory of Memories, The Glasgow Drawings 1940-43*, he wrote, 'What use is there in the discussion of a vertical, a horizontal or a curve, when without the human imprint no line makes any sense: it is all a matter of feeling.'⁴⁰ In his work *Beggars*, the outstretched hand of the old woman is proffered to the space beyond the edge of the page, while her head tilts to the right, leading to the male whose figure and downward vertical line of his long overcoat run tightly parallel to the right hand margin. The figures appear trapped on the page, neither person wishing to hold the gaze. In one of Eardley's paintings from her Italian Travelling Scholarship, *Beggars in Venice* (1948-49), the prone beggar with bandaged head in the foreground is held up by a balustrade (PI 8 *Beggars in Venice*, 1948-49. Oil on canvas 92.7 x 99.7cm. Private collection). He forms the 'L' in his recline that creates the framing of the composition, his outstretched legs and feet barring the way right over to the bottom right of the painting.

³⁹ (Ed.) Sarah MacDougall, *The Living Part of Glasgow*, from *Reconfiguring the 50s: Joan Eardley, Sheila Fell, Eva Frankfurter, Josef Herman and LS Lowry*, London 2014, p62.

⁴⁰ Josef Herman, *Memory of Memories the Glasgow drawings 1940-43*, exh cat. Glasgow 1985, p7.

John Berger writes of Herman's ability to 'see the movements of the human body in terms of mass and force of gravity'.⁴¹ Herman's pen and ink drawing *Glasgow workman* (c. 1940-43) quickly captures the solidity of a man with a mallet or spade thrown over his shoulder. His hand clasping the handle is drawn cartoonishly larger than his face. Eardley focused on the same working subject, with her early painting *The mixer men* (1944), completed a year after art school (PI 9 *The mixer men*, 1944. Oil on canvas 88 x 77 cm. Private collection). It highlights the industrial nature of a changing Glasgow- so reviled by the Academicians. An unusual, closely cropped work, the painting revolved a central figure with his broad back to the viewer, holding a wheel barrow and looking at the work of another man who, shovel raised, feeds the mixer. The shapes that make up the painting revolve around sharp angles – the 'v' of the walk way that creates a boundary to hold the figures within the canvas. This is echoed in the 'v' of the back of the braces of a blue overall, then the top corner of the wheelbarrow and the inverted 'v' of the shed in the distance. While there is not a use of black lines to delineate figure and shapes (as can be seen in later figurative paintings) Eardley employs darker areas of colour to push back areas and help with perspective, such as the ground lying within the walkway and the background, which flows into the second worker's black cap. Eardley's broad brush work creates the direction of planes within the composition – a quieter orange brown of jersey over the expanse of the first worker's back, or the scumbled, 'mucky' surface of the central ground. Her use of lighter colour as a highlight to accentuate contours is present – the light blue line on the shoulders to denote the edge of an overall, then interplays with the darker blue line of the double edge of the girder in the background. There is a suggestion in this painting that Eardley had begun to work from a coloured ground, aiding in the ability to keep a painting tonally connected when subsequently bringing in other shapes and areas.

In his diary Herman described the atmosphere of the war in Glasgow, with the 'criss-cross beams of searchlights' in the evening sky, and 'The sporadic wail of a tramcar made everybody stop, look

⁴¹ John Berger, 'Artists who struggle', *Permanent Red*, London 1979, p.90.

around, look up at the sky. No one knew what a sound might bring'.⁴² The wars had touched Eardley's family twice. Her father had been gassed in World War 1, an event leading to his death by suicide when Eardley was a child. The subsequent move to Glasgow had been taken partially to leave London, a clear target for any bombings in World War 2. As a Glasgow School of Art student Eardley undertook firewatching duties on the top floor of the Mackintosh Building, which allowed women to stay in the building overnight. Following her diploma at Glasgow School of Art, there were two assumed routes open to women: to take a teaching diploma at Jordanhill Teacher Training College, or work in a reserved occupation for the war effort. After only lasting one term at Jordanhill, Eardley was offered war work employment as a joiner's labourer in a small boat-building yard near her home in Glasgow, 'painting camouflage on ships'.⁴³

Lincolnshire and London

Eardley is rightly renowned for her Scottish subject matter, but a series of drawings made in the 1940s are of the English countryside and its people. In 1946, after completing her war work, she was commissioned to paint a mural on the history of costume in Lincoln. She lodged with Miss Joan Davis, the headmistress of Sincil Bank Secondary Modern Girls School, whose collection of art books included Van Gogh, Matisse, Degas and Picasso. Based on the work she produced during her time there, it is clear that Eardley explored the surrounding countryside as well as the city. Some of the Lincolnshire works are held in the Glasgow School of Art archives, including two works on paper (in coloured chalk, ink and pastel) which depict farm wagons, both titled *Farm wagon, Lincolnshire*, 1948. Another pastel work, from 1947, *Ploughing in Lincolnshire* (now part of the Lillie Art Gallery collection), prefigures the sweeping, expansive fields and skies of Catterline. Pen and ink works from Lincolnshire, such as *A Shipwright's Workshop* (c.1946-7) and *Room at Swineshead, Lincolnshire* and *Bean pickers, Lincoln* (c. 1947) highlight Eardley's commitment to drawing, and complicate any arbitrary division of her work into city or country, showing interiors which could have been either (PI

⁴² Josef Herman, *Related Twilights: notes from an artist's diary*, (ed.) Tony Curtis, Seren, Wales 2002, p61.

⁴³ Helen Beale, *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, (eds.) Elizabeth Ewan, Rose Pipes, Jane Rendall, Sian Reynolds, Edinburgh 2018, p129.

10 *Room at Swineshead*, c.1947. Pen and ink, 20 x 25 ½ “. Cyril Gerber Fine Art, Glasgow). Likewise, in *Bean pickers, Lincoln* (1947-49), there is no division between figuration and landscape - the labourer's figures are integrated into the fields, at times barely distinguishable from the landscape that surrounds them (the same is true of later images of fishing nets). The subject matter, if not the style, is close to Millet.

A Shipwright's workshop, which was exhibited in 1948 for the Society of Scottish Artists, is a highly detailed linear work that manages to retain the spontaneous quality of a quickly rendered sketch. No part of the paper is left untouched, from the wood curls that litter the floor to the oil lamps suspended from the roof beams. Whether or not Eardley had seen the Van Gogh exhibition held at Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (now Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum) in 1948, there is no doubt of the artist's influence on Eardley. Even her childhood drawing, *Fair at Blackheath* (1938), owes something to Van Gogh's sketches of figures in the late 1890s, and he was cited regularly in Eardley's letters to Sandeman. Van Gogh's influence is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in *Room at Swineshead, Lincolnshire* in its depiction of a working class domestic interior, off-kilter perspective, thickly rendered line and the almost stylised, decorative patterns and contours used so often in Post-Impressionist painting. The abrupt 'cut-off' edges of the composition and strangely flattened perspective suggest a strange congruence of Japanese prints and Scottish genre painting (perhaps via the influence of Van Gogh, Vuillard and others). For Cordelia Oliver, the influence of Van Gogh on Eardley was 'so evident in the drawings which she brought back from France and Italy' and 'coincided with the onset of her creative maturity [...] a lifelong struggle to convey in line and coloured pigments the unusual power of her response to visual and sensual experience'.⁴⁴

Three of Eardley's Lincolnshire works, including *A Lincolnshire Cart* and *Bean Pickers, Lincoln*, were chosen for a touring exhibition organised by the Scottish Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1948. *Bean pickers, Lincoln* (c. 1947) also featured in Eardley's first solo exhibition (after her post-Italy scholarship exhibition at GSA) at the Gaumont Cinema in Aberdeen in 1950, along

⁴⁴ Oliver, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*.

with a range of other subjects and places, such as an ink and pastel drawing, *Shrophire barn*. Another work from the period, in the archives of Glasgow School of Art and catalogued as *Drawing of elderly, seated woman* c. 1948-1950 'probably from Lincolnshire' is a sketch in black chalk, showing a seated, middle-aged woman, arms crossed, hair swept up. Like the works made in Italy, the drawing highlights that Eardley worked across landscape and figuration simultaneously from the beginning.⁴⁵

In 1948 Eardley was elected a professional member of the Society for Scottish Artists. She exhibited two works, both interiors. One of these was another Lincolnshire subject, *Mrs Red Wallpaper* (1948) a large oil painting completed in Eardley's Glasgow studio from a drawing made earlier in Lincolnshire (PI 11 *Mrs Red Wallpaper*, 1948. Oil on canvas, 90 x 91 cm. Private collection). Like *Room at Swineshead* and several pictures of Jeannie Kelso, discussed earlier, it shows an elderly woman sitting in a cluttered, domestic interior. Eardley had already painted a range of so-called 'kitchen sink' subjects and returned to both urban bedsit and rural cottage interior subjects throughout the 1950s, perhaps surprisingly for a renowned landscape painter who relished painting *en plein air*. Along with her later paintings of Angus Neil in lodgings and bedsits (such as *The table*, c.1953-54 and *Reading at supper*, c.1953-56) *Mrs Red Wallpaper* highlights once again that Eardley worked simultaneously on different types of painting – landscape, interiors, informal portraits, street scenes, children, babies, nudes, workers, old people. Only in posthumous exhibitions have her works been categorised according to theme and place so strictly - in many cases, such categorisations proved arbitrary or overlapping, and could not be divided into neat chronological divisions. Many of her Eardley's paintings, for instance, could be classified variously as genre, the nude, still life, interiors or portraits. These curatorial narratives serve to present a sense of artistic 'journey' but they also omit the possibility of concurrent concerns. In their insistence on teleological notions of art historical stylistic development, they risk overlooking an artist's return to earlier subject matter and flatten formal and thematic idiosyncrasies.

⁴⁵ Some of these works can be seen at: <https://gsaarchives.net/collections/index.php/nmc-0079>

Mrs Red Wallpaper is a seemingly 'uncharacteristic' painting that is, in fact, very characteristic of Eardley's early work and influences. Fiona Pearson's 2007 book cites a contemporary review: 'in the first room an important place rightly goes to Miss Eardley's painting of a strange but wholly convincing interior'.⁴⁶ Another reviewer (to Eardley's annoyance) observed that her 'noteworthy' *Mrs Red Wallpaper* hinted at the influence of Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde (fellow GSA graduates who had also studied under Hugh Adam Crawford) and the Camden Town Group painter Harold Gillman, whose works, such as *Mrs Mounter at the breakfast table* (1916-17)⁴⁷ which similarly featured an old woman drinking tea in a richly coloured and patterned interior. Unlike Mrs Mounter, *Mrs Red Wallpaper* does not look directly at the viewer – indeed, in many of Eardley's early figurative works, including her nudes, the sitter faces to the side, if not away from the audience, absorbing rather than returning our gaze. The vivid, saturated palette is again Post-Impressionist, but here Eardley leans towards Fauvism – the face in particular echoes Derain, the densely patterned, ornamental interior, Matisse. These were among the varied influences that had begun to filter into British and Scottish modernist painting in the inter- and post-war period, such as Sandeman's later Matisse-inspired bathers. The reviewer who nodded to the 'Two Roberts' as a possible source was astute and direct comparisons could be made between the figures – particularly the use of colour and handling of paint in the faces of the sitters - in Robert Colquhoun's 1946 painting *The Dubliners*, shown in Lefevre Gallery in October 1947 and *Mrs Red Wallpaper's* stylised, heavy and sculptural profile.

The painting sits somewhere between genre and portrait, where characterisation is achieved not through the figure itself, but a kind of object theatre. Amongst the many decorative and practical items on display are a coffee grinder, decorative pitcher and jug, wicker chair, longcase clock, record player, mounted taxidermy fish, patterned carpet and, on the wall, what appears to be a Japanese print in a bamboo frame. Taken together, they form a portrait of the sitter as she soaks her feet in a

⁴⁶ Pearson, p16.

⁴⁷ Oliver, p21.

patterned basin, staring blankly at an open fireplace and laundry rack. The possessions are not typical of Eardley's interiors, which are usually distinctly, bluntly working class. Here, in common with *Room at Swineshead*, the sitter's circumstances may be modest but her tastes and interests are cultured and artistic. In contrast to her later paintings of Townhead, or her earlier images of Jeannie Kelso in front of her range, *Mrs Red Wallpaper* stands as a more discerning, ambiguous and bohemian depiction of a 'woman of slender means'. It also reveals a young artist, confident in her work, attempting to find a distinctive register amidst competing influences and the vicissitudes of fashion. *Mrs Red Wallpaper* emphasises Eardley's continued and tireless interest in people and her continued attempt to find formally inventive approaches to realist subject matter. If anything, *Mrs Red Wallpaper* can be seen less as a concerted path towards figuration *per se* than as an ambitious example of Eardley's interest in the depiction of the figure at rest within confined interior space, a concern which continued into the mid-1950s, often using the same rich palette and cluttered, almost claustrophobic composition. While not 'classic' Eardley paintings, many are wholly representative of qualities associated with British Modernism – the tension between realist subject matter and abstract form in, for instance, the remarkable *Venetian beggar, woman no.2* of 1948-9, her experimentation with colour and perception, the 'experiential' and immersive modes of painting in her landscape work (which stem from her time in Arran) and the Expressionist, isolated figures of her portraits and interiors in works such as *A Glasgow lodging*, 1953 and *The table*, 1953-4.

After Lincolnshire, Eardley left for London with the intention of staying there. She lived in both Notting Hill and Blackheath for a year or so between 1946-7 before returning to Scotland. In London, as well as bustling street scenes, she was drawn to the River Thames, to the mudflats, wrecks, gravel and boats. She continued to document both urban and rural life, and was unconcerned with dividing her works according along country or city subject matter, as evidenced by her contribution to a 1947 exhibition, which featured both an Arran landscape and a drawing of Shepherd's Bush Market.

Hospitalfield, Arbroath

While in London, realising she did not want to become a permanent resident, Eardley applied to the Patrick-Allan Fraser School of Art at Hospitalfield, Arbroath, which had been established in 1890 as a residential art school before becoming a postgraduate art school. When Eardley attended, between April and September 1947, it was run by the artist James Cowie, known for his precise, linear, almost classical facture and the almost unnerving quality of stillness in his paintings. Eardley's concerns that Cowie's approach and her own might be in conflict were well-founded, and the relationship between the two was strained. In a letter to Sandeman, Eardley recalled being asked by Cowie if she had changed her way of painting since art school. Replying that she had been 'trying to tighten it up a bit', Eardley claimed that Cowie had said, 'I'm very glad to hear it – this loose self-expression business is no good at all.'⁴⁸ In his daily visits to her studio Cowie's manner was abrupt and opinionated and Eardley resented his tone, but she was keen to learn from him. Cowie's paintings were distinctive for their cool palette and the exactitude of her brushwork while Eardley's works tended to be warmer, and much more expressive and gestural in their execution. The contrast was of an almost classical / romantic divide, and Cowie was determined that Eardley's technique should be more disciplined (he asked her to re-do an oil painting in pastel, for example). In spite of their differences and clashes, they shared a single-mindedness and fierce commitment to the development of their work and a grudging respect was forged between the two.

In terms of subject matter, Cowie has sometimes been credited for Eardley's subsequent interest in painting children, perhaps because of the number of Cowie's own paintings to feature school children, playgrounds and classrooms from his time as a teacher in Bellshill. In relation to Cowie, apart from the fact that children were already present in some of Eardley's very earliest works in the late 1930s (such as *Rush hour* or *Fair at Blackheath*), the artists' respective treatment of the subject was completely dissimilar. By the time Eardley attended Hospitalfield, Cowie's work had long since moved away from these themes towards enigmatic still lives and figures in the landscape imbued with almost Symbolist or Surreal qualities. According to the National Galleries of Scotland, Cowie

⁴⁸ Pearson, p16.

helped to shape Eardley's 'preference for everyday subjects'⁴⁹, but again, realist subject matter had been a staple element of her work throughout the 1940s, long before her training at Hospitalfield. Rather than being formally or stylistically influential, then, Cowie's key influence on Eardley's work, much like Hugh Adam Crawford, was to challenge her. What the two artists shared was a desire to experiment with a range of subjects concurrently, sometimes within the space of a single painting. Just as Eardley's career would become synonymous with her Townhead paintings, Cowie was most famous for his portraits and paintings of children, yet both artists painted prolifically, and farmhouses, nudes, architecture, still lifes, interiors and seascapes were among their diverse and wide-ranging subjects. In his final annual report to the Board of Governors before he resigned as Hospitalfield's Warden in January 1948, Cowie wrote: 'students trained in the same School of Art show too much sameness in the work they produce. This year, three of the students were trained in the Glasgow School of Art but do not exhibit this characteristic in the work they have done. Nothing could be more marked than the wide different points of painting of Miss Eardley, Miss [Agnes] Begg and Mr [William] Gallacher. Combined with the seriousness with which they have all worked this has made for an interest in teaching more than usual. In its different way, the work of each is interesting, promising and capable of perhaps great development'.⁵⁰

During her time at Hospitalfield, as well as meeting fellow artist Angus Neil, who would become a close friend and regular model, Eardley was drawn to the coast, as she had been in Arran. Unlike her later seascapes, many of her images of Abroath centre on the harbour and the bustle of the fishing industry, as seen in the work on paper *Crew in a fishing boat in a harbour, Arbroath* (1947) and the oil painting *Fishing boats, Abroath harbour* (1947). Her preoccupation with images of fishing nets hung up to dry may stem from this time and she returned to the subject over and over again over the next fifteen years, from *Man tending drying Nets* (1948-49), an ink on paper drawing made in

⁴⁹ See: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/201/landscape-comrie-perthshire> (accessed 14 Nov 2020).

⁵⁰ Cowie, J. (1947) 'Warden's Report on Work for Session 1st April till 20th September 1947', Minute of Annual Ordinary Meeting of the Governors, 17 October 1947, Minute Book Patrick-Allan Fraser Trust Vol 2, pp 34-35.

Italy or the pastel *Fishing nets, hung up* (c. 1954) to oil paintings on canvas and board of salmon nets at Catterline, including one of her final paintings, *Fishing nets* (1963). It is perhaps in these works, rather than the seascapes, that Eardley comes closest to abstraction. It is only on closer attention to the title, for instance, that one of Eardley's most arresting and distinctive works, the chalk on paper *Three men mending a net, Forte dei Marmi* (1948-49), appears to be representational. Before the tiny figures emerge from their nets, the drawing resembles a spiky, linear automatic drawing or a study for an open-work iron sculpture more a realist image of working fishermen PI 12 *Three men mending a net, Forte dei Marmi*, 1948. Black chalk on paper, 48.5 x 62 cm. Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums). In the report completed for her Travelling Scholarship, discussed in the next section, Eardley noted of Forte Dei Marmi 'here there were no works of art to study. I made friends with the peasants and worked everyday, making drawings of them and the countryside.'⁵¹

In autumn 1947 Eardley registered for her post-diploma year at Glasgow School of Art, which occupied the time between Hospitalfield and her travelling scholarship, and marked the end of almost a decade of formal art education. A letter in Glasgow School of Art archives and collections shows that following a visit to Hospitalfield by Glasgow School of Art Director Douglas Percy Bliss (1900-1984), Eardley, along with her peer William Gallacher (1920-1978), another Hospitalfield resident and GSA alumnus, was invited to, 'exhibit the work in its entirety just as was done at Hospitalfield'.⁵² This places an exhibition of this work likely in 1948 in Mackintosh Museum, a year before her solo exhibition there of work from the travelling scholarship. She began to exhibit more widely, showing drawings and paintings with the West of Scotland Artists' group at Skelmorlie and in Airdrie with the Society for Scottish Artists, where works included landscapes made at Hospitalfield as well as landscapes of Arran, Lincolnshire, St Abbs Head and Greenwich. Her return to Scotland in 1949 marked the end of a decade of formal art education, the beginning of her immersion in Townhead, and the alleged start of her 'fifteen-year career'. With a huge body of work already

⁵¹ Joan Eardley, *Report on cities and places visited in Italy*, GSA Archives and Collections GSAA/DIR/12/1/5/8.

⁵² Letter from GSA Director to Joan Eardley, Glasgow School of Art Archives & Collections, 20 October, 1947. GSAA/DIR/12/1/3/1

completed, and an ongoing practice which demonstrates a wide range of approaches to genre painting, portraiture, the nudes and landscape, many of Eardley's works of the early 1950s, like those of the 1940s, have also been overlooked - too diverse in style and subject matter to merit the status of 'signature' works. The drawings and paintings produced in Italy and France could be seen as a bridge between the decades.

Travelling Scholarship – Italy

Correspondence held by Glasgow School of Art includes Eardley's handwritten *Report on cities and places visited in Italy*, sent to the Director Douglas Percy Bliss (Director 1946-1964). The report provides glimpses of the artist's travels to Florence, Assisi, Siena, Padua, Arezzo, Forte dei Marmi and Venice.⁵³ While Eardley was to spend Christmas in Paris in 1948 and there are sketches of Parisian street musicians in Aberdeen Art Gallery archives, her desire was to return quickly to Italy. Therefore, this section focuses solely on her experience and work from there.

Eardley noted that she was consistently drawn to church cloisters, 'where one is still able to forget the present century and lose all sense of time.'⁵⁴ She was also drawn to Early Renaissance frescos. In the report, she discusses San Marco, Florence, to which she often returned, 'particularly in the cloisters and its monks cells where Fra Angelica painted for his brother friars', adding that the frescos that 'interested me greatly were the Masaccio's in the church of the Carmine [Santa Maria del Carmine] these more than anything else in Florence I think'. These would have included *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (c.1425), painted when Masaccio was twenty-four and viewed by Eardley when she was twenty-seven. Writing of sculpture, her report reads '... the humanity of Donatello seemed to mean even more than Michaelangelo's lumps of granite'. As she moved from Florence to Assisi, Eardley noted that was drawn to its village life, and stayed for three weeks: 'the

⁵³ This was a Glasgow School of Art Travelling Scholarship. Eardley had also won a bursary from the RSA Carnegie Award. Both combined gave her enough money to fund the trip.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

white oxen and paniered donkeys and the barefooted peasants, still looking very much as they must have appeared in the time of Giotto. I made drawings of these things.’⁵⁵

The report records Eardley’s sense of timelessness in both the churches and village life. It should be remembered that this is from her own historical standpoint of travelling three years after the end of the Second World War and great upheaval across Europe. Fiona Pearson, from her paper for the *Scotland and Italy* Scottish Society of Art History conference in 1989, noted that post-war Italy was undergoing a shift from agricultural to industrial, yet ‘The sketches, letters and cards [gifted to National Gallery of Modern Art] show that Eardley sought to capture the old order, in town and country’.⁵⁶

Eardley’s travels resumed, but following a visit to Arezzo to view frescos by Piero della Francesca, the pull of the rural was there again: ‘I felt once more the need to go to the country and paint myself’. She notes that the landscape of cypress trees and scattered farmhouses in the Tuscan countryside seemed familiar, thanks to the paintings of ‘so many Florentine paintings’ that she had ‘forgotten [...] must also exist. That a painter is always primarily influenced by Nature. And [this] makes me see nature afterwards through his eyes.’⁵⁷

In her Venice visit, Eardley noted in her report that, ‘the beauty and richness of colour, which is everywhere, seemed of most importance to me’.⁵⁸ This statement is supported by her subsequent oil paintings, the most finished set of works from the scholarship, such as *Beggars in Venice* (1948-49) where the azure blue of a twilight sky is drawn down through the columns and the coats and legs of a gathered group of three beggars. Or the distinctive yellow, orange and blue palette of *Venetian Beggar woman 2* (1948-49), where the stripes of the skirt form an expansive altar for the baby that the woman cradles (Pl 13 *Venetian beggar woman no.2*, 1948-49. Oil on canvas 83 x 75cm. Cyril Gerber Fine Art, Glasgow). Eardley’s observations of richness of colour have clearly been carried

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Fiona Pearson, ‘Joan Eardley in Italy 1948-49’, Scottish Society of Art History, *Scotland and Italy*, 4th Annual Conference 28 Jan 1989. Talbot Rice Art Centre, University of Edinburgh.

⁵⁷ Eardley, *Report on cities and places visited in Italy*, GSA Archives and Collections GSAA/DIR/12/1/5/8.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

through in these works. The religious overtones of the composition of the latter work, with the gold hue of the crumbling wall as backdrop and the woman's outstretched hand, in this case for money, create a loop between the imagery of church frescoes and the real poverty of the situation; the same dichotomy as the expulsion from Eden.

Works from Eardley's six month scholarship range from quick sketches captured in ballpoint or charcoal to longer duration studies in charcoal, pastel and watercolour, and finished works in oil on canvas. This body of work is significant as it gives insight into her processes. Two drawings, *Mule cart viewed from the back* (c.1948, Aberdeen Art Gallery) (Pl 14 *Mule cart viewed from the back*, c. 1948. Pen and black chalk on blue paper, 21.6 x 28 cm. Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums) and *Mule with cart* (c.1948-49) (Pl 15 *Mule with cart*, c. 1948-1949. Black chalk on paper, 21.6 x 27.5 cm. The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections) are likely, from comparison, to be the same mule and cart, with a man in a cap sitting in the first part of the cart, and the load, perhaps hay, at the back. In both studies, the man is turned, in profile, away from direction of travel. Through establishing this small sequence, we are given an insight into Eardley's drawing practice, which can also be seen in her series of church interior studies of Saint Marks, Venice, whose architecture and patterns were noted in Eardley's report as a place which had 'impressed me more than anything I had yet seen'.⁵⁹ The quicker line drawing, *Mule cart Viewed from the back* (c.1948) perhaps completed in only a matter of a minutes, establishes subject, key shapes and perspective. Here, for example, we see the ears of the mule, the sloping diagonal of the three-sided cart, the position of the man, lighter marks to denote the load, and the substantial axle of the wheels holding the drawn structure up. The bottom ellipsis of the wheel nearest the viewer remains incomplete. The locking down of these points – tip of ears, axle, hay, far side of cart - creates a strong triangular composition on the otherwise blank page, holding the man within. The second sketch, linear again, but including tone in selected areas, contains more detail so it was probably drawn over a slightly longer period. The second work, by positioning the cart from more of a side view, establishes a stronger

⁵⁹ Ibid.

composition in terms of key diagonals. Whilst the key plane remains the sloping cart, the differing perspective allows more sight of the mule. The diagonal of its back leg echoes the angle of the switch the man now idly holds. A dark tone under the belly of the mule and in the spaces between the spindles of the cart wheel suggests more weight at play. Both quick works of the same subject show the immediacy of observation, and also, in from simplicity of line, Eardley's ability to simply capture movement, in this case a cart in motion. The reason for the quickness of sketch has been commented on by Christopher Andreae, who cites from a letter written by Eardley to her mother: 'I haven't really been able to take a long time over drawing them because I just have to catch a moment when they are resting from their work'.⁶⁰ The discovery of these dual drawings of the same subject allows for an insight into Eardley's use of the sketch as a working drawing and one which the artist by going back with a second drawing can make better adjustments to composition or key detail.

During her time in Venice, Eardley made a series of studies of the interior of the Basilica of San Marco. Again, the time spent on the production of these drawings is significant. *Old woman in church* (c.1948, Aberdeen Art Gallery) closely resembles *Woman in pew reading, San Marco, Venice* (1948-49, Aberdeen Art Gallery). The latter is a far quicker sketch, capturing the woman with one foot placed on the low bar of the pew in front as she reads, with head covered and wearing a heavy coat, denoted by heavy directional lines. *Old woman in church*, the more detailed of the two, has the woman in the same pose but captures her age more effectively through broadening the bulk of the coat, the slight curvature of the spine an almost and imperceptible lowering of the head onto the shoulders. The ornate shapes of the pew in front are given more detail. The first sketch shows a figure that has captured Eardley's interest – perhaps the simple position of the raised foot or her engrossed reading of the bible. The second drawing, given that the sitter has perhaps continued to read and remain in the same position reading, has allowed Eardley to enhance some of the elements attempted in the first, and to simply render the woman more realistically. An exterior study, Church

⁶⁰ Christopher Andreae, *Joan Eardley*, Lund Humphries, Farnham 2013, p85.

of *San Giovanni Grisostomo, Venice, with well and market stall* (Date unknown, GMA 3075, National Galleries of Scotland) is a different kind of working drawing, with written notes on the different sketch sections, such as 'pinky white here' and 'some pattern here' on the church exterior, indicative of notes for any later colour studies.⁶¹ These kind of colour notes on a black line drawing can also be seen on the later pen and blank ink study *Fishing nets, hung up* (c.1954).

Eardley returned from her trip with hundreds of drawings. Those that had not been sold were catalogued after her death leaving two hundred and thirty-three large drawings and one hundred and eighty smaller works, down to tiny sketches. Most of these were gifted to collections in Scotland by Eardley's sister in the mid-1980s. Recipients included Glasgow School of Art, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Gracefield Arts Centre in Dumfries and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. Forty-three works from the Travelling Scholarship were exhibited in a solo exhibition in the Glasgow School of Art's Mackintosh Museum in 1949. A newspaper clipping features a photograph of Eardley installing her work in the Mackintosh Museum, surrounded by four framed works: *Farmhouse with pumpkins* (1948-49, also catalogued as *A country hovel with figure and plough*); *Man sitting on bank, wearing clogs* (1948-49, now part of Aberdeen Art Gallery's collection); *Mending nets* (1948-49, also catalogued as *Man tending drying nets*, Lillie Art Gallery, Milngavie) and *Mediterranean fisherman* (1948-49). The photograph's caption reads: 'NOTABLE WORK – Miss Joan Eardley, travelling scholar of Glasgow School of Art, arranging an exhibition of her Italian drawings at the school.'⁶²

Conclusion

Joan Eardley's works of the 1940s demonstrate her fierce commitment to the development of her work. This singular dedication to her art, and to ongoing experimentation, continued throughout her

⁶¹ *Church of San Giovanni Grisostomo, Venice, with well and market stall*, available at: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/18/church-san-giovanni-grisostomo-venice-well-and-market-stall> (accessed 7 Mar 2021).

⁶² Bulletin, Evening Citizen, 1 Oct 1949, clipping, Estate of Joan Eardley.

life. These early works show a broad interest in theme and subject matter, the use of different media, techniques and scale and a far wider geographical reach than is commonly associated with the artist. While attentive and receptive to training and criticism and having experienced both academic as well as expressionistic approaches to painting, Eardley's relationship with her tutors and mentors was based on being challenged rather than being 'influenced'. Her best work was produced when she attempted to forge her own distinctive vision and approach. Eardley's talent was noted from her earliest student days and her circle of peers and supporters, many of them met during this period, were of crucial importance to her both personally and professionally. It is important to remember that it was on the basis of work produced in the 1940s, just after finishing her diploma, that Eardley began to build her critical reputation. Her first group and solo exhibitions were held in the 1940s and the works she exhibited helped her to establish an audience – including critics and collectors - for her work. In the early 1950s, Eardley began to explore the area around Catterline, which would become a key focus, but she also continued to travel to other areas of Scotland (Comrie, Selkirk, Port Glasgow) and to France, in 1951 with fellow artist Dorothy Steel. Many of her figurative works (nudes and portraits of friends) and interior scenes (bedsits, hearths, still lifes) also date from the early 1950s, as distinct from her 'classic' Townhead works.

In this paper we set out to contest, or at least problematize, popular perceptions of Joan Eardley's work as a series of images of Glaswegian 'slum' children in Townhead, followed by her late, great seascapes at Catterline. For Alexander Moffat and Alan Riach, both admirers of Eardley's landscapes, 'the contrasts are forceful: it is almost as if we are looking at two different artists'.⁶³ For Guy Peplow, she had two 'distinctive areas of subject matter – Glasgow and Catterline'⁶⁴. For Christopher Andreae, 'remote and rural places were the complete contrast she needed to Glasgow's

⁶³ Alan Riach & Alexander Moffat, 'Joan Eardley and the art of contrast', *The National*, 3 Feb 2017, available at: <https://www.thenational.scot/news/15066985.alan-riach-and-alexander-moffat-joan-eardley-and-the-art-of-contrast/> (accessed 14 Nov 2020).

⁶⁴ Guy Peplow cited in Janet McKenzie, 'Joan Eardley', *Studio International* [online] 8 Jan 2008 at: <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/joan-eardley> (accessed 27 Nov 2020) available

grubby, impoverished community of Townhead'⁶⁵ while, again, for some critics and historians, *only* the Catterline works are mentioned, and she is framed exclusively as a painter of the sea⁶⁶. This reading of Eardley's oeuvre - as one composed of stark contrasts - has resulted in a reductive and often inaccurate understanding of her development as an artist. The Catterline paintings are frequently described as 'later works'⁶⁷ to the extent that many audiences are unaware of the ongoing and synchronous experimentation and development of her figurative works, such as her burgeoning interest in collage (metal foil, newspaper and sweet wrappers along with oil on canvas), her use of stencilled lettering, and an emergent Pop aesthetic in the late Townhead works such as *Children and chalked wall, no.2* (c.1962)⁶⁸, developments that were actively discouraged by her London gallerist Roland, Browse and Delbanco.

The insistent division of Eardley's work into city or country, figure or landscape, by almost every commentator on her work (however incisive and specialist their knowledge) overlooks the range and breadth of Eardley's vision across her career. In some ways, it is hard not to regard these easy categorisations, or at least their origin, as gendered, that in her mature, 'late style' she had left behind the apparently more 'trivial' realist subjects of children and tenements, working people or architecture. For the painter and critic Edward Gage, writing in 1977, Eardley is described in exceptional terms, as though the author can't quite believe what she has accomplished. Gage writes of Eardley that she had qualities 'no other woman painter has matched' but notes that in her 'tragic-comic' images of 'urchins' she paints 'with so much warmth and compassion' that it 'must represent a personal interpretation of a theme that is seldom absent from the work of women artists.' For Gage, 'these touchingly human commentaries' brought her early recognition⁶⁹ but 'occupied only half of her inspiration while the other was engaged with landscape and 'the elemental forces of

⁶⁵ Andrae, p60.

⁶⁶ Craig Richardson, *Scottish art since 1960*, Farnham 2011; Neve, *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ See, for example: Alexander Moffat & Alan Riach, *Arts of resistance: poets, portraits and landscapes of modern Scotland*, Edinburgh 2008. p153.

⁶⁸ This has been noted by art historians such as in Murdo Macdonald, *Scottish Art*, London 2000, p192-3.

⁶⁹ This is not strictly correct as Eardley was exhibiting as a solo artist and her work was being collected prior to the Townhead works.

nature'.⁷⁰ 'Elemental' is a word often used about Eardley's landscapes, while softer words such as 'endearing' and 'affectionate' are used in reference to her images of small children experiencing grinding poverty. Certainly, any attempt to see these works as politically motivated is rare. In their 2008 book *Arts of Resistance*, Alan Riach and Alexander Moffat choose to focus on landscapes and assert that the so-called 'later work' at Catterline is both 'elemental' and 'much more existential and bleak than her urchins, her street-kids'. The seascapes, they claim, 'reveal more of her uncompromising toughness and originality'⁷¹

The origin of the notion that Eardley's work can be divided into three distinct phases stems from her first biographer, William Buchanan, who, even as he wrote of her 'three distinct phases of development', warned of the tendency to oversimplify⁷². In spite of attempts by figures such as Cordelia Oliver to question the 'phases' narrative, it has been repeated so frequently that it now resembles fact. The result of this persistent account is both a lack of awareness on the part of many Scottish artists of Eardley's works beyond or before Townhead and Catterline, and a positioning of Eardley as either sentimental realist (for her detractors) or visionary landscape painter (for commentators seeking to position her work as representative of an inherent 'Scottishness'). For many younger artists, Eardley is seen a populist crowd-pleaser, producing a kind of Glaswegian visual kailyard. For an artist so committed to development, learning, experimentation, stylistic shifts and diverse subject matter, it is disappointing that she is so rarely acknowledged in Scottish art schools or universities as an exemplar of modernist painting in Scotland. The Townhead works are often regarded as kitsch and sentimental, in spite of Eardley's long-held commitment to realism and the *actual* subject matter of many of her figurative works: beggars; cold, malnourished children; peasants engaged in backbreaking labour. For all the attempts to categorise Eardley and her works, her real legacy is that she is uncategorisable. She belongs to no school, her relationship to ideas of an inherent Scottishness in art are ambiguous, she has been overlooked in recent major surveys of

⁷⁰ Edward Gage, *The eye in the wind: contemporary Scottish painting since 1945*, London 1977, p.38.

⁷¹ Moffat and Riach, *Ibid*, p153.

⁷² Buchanan, p3.

work by queer artists in the Twentieth century⁷³, and her work is considered either too experimental (expressionist mark-making) or fails to go ‘far enough’ (the refusal to formally engage in pure abstraction or fully commit to social realism).

Carolyn Trant’s observations are astute in this regard. As she noted in her 2019 book *Voyaging out: British women artists from suffrage to the Sixties*, it was Eardley’s commitment to the development of her practice and her integrity in the face of the market and other influences which has resulted in her mixed reputation as ‘great’ but never great *enough*: ‘Eardley could be placed alongside Prunella Clough, arguably occupying the same space between abstraction and social realism, between mid-decade Kitchen Sink School and *tachisme* in Europe. Eardley tended to be ignored by John Berger – for not being realist enough – and by the Tate, where Alan Bowness judged her ‘unsuccessful’ because she didn’t ‘go all the way’ like Peter Lanyon, with whom her emotional response to landscape was compared. Eardley felt that maintaining some sense of realism rather than abstraction was more ‘visceral’, a view shared by Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud.’⁷⁴

In spite of a small but significant body of scholarship and research (notably by Oliver, Pearson and Andreae) Eardley’s career trajectory has often become over-simplified in the sixty years since her death. We have attempted to show here that a taxonomic approach to Eardley’s oeuvre has obscured a more nuanced understanding of the artist’s interests, influences and development. Through looking at her works as a whole, by closely observing the development of her practice across a short lifetime, and by questioning the dominant narratives and assumptions which surround her work, we hope to encourage audiences to (re)consider the larger range of works produced by this diverse and distinctive Twentieth century painter.

⁷³ Such as Tate’s 2017 survey exhibition *Queer British Art 1861-1967* <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/queer-british-art-1861-1967>

⁷⁴ Carolyn Trant, ‘This is tomorrow: signs of change’, *Voyaging out: British women artists from suffrage to the Sixties*, London 2019, p278.

