

Footnotes

^[1] 'Tabernacle' was conceived by Ruth Impey and first shown in April 2021 as part of a discussion about the work and legacy of Eardley chaired by Kirsty Wark. Eardley has a marker on the trail at Corrie. The Arran Arts Heritage Trail celebrates the life and work of artists who have been inspired by the landscapes of Arran. More information at www.arranartsheritagetrail.com.

^[2] Since her death in 1963 Eardley's work has been included in a number of other exhibitions at The Glasgow School of Art, including the 1995 exhibition 'The Continuing Tradition: 75 Years of Painting at GSA' (curator Sandy Moffat); the 2001 exhibition 'Art Booms with the Guns', which focussed on the war years generation of staff and students and included a number of very early drawings by the artist, such as the 1938 pencil and watercolour work 'Fair at Blackheath', one of her earliest known works (curators Kathy Chambers and Susannah Thompson). Works by Eardley's close-knit circle of friends and peers were also exhibited including paintings by Margot Sandeman, Cordelia Oliver and Bet Low. In 2012, three works were loaned to Glasgow School of Art for inclusion in another historical survey show, 'Studio 58: Women Artists in Glasgow since World War II', (curator Dr Sarah Lowndes), which sought to highlight the work of mid-late twentieth century women alumnae.

^[3] Eardley's only self-portrait is held by National Galleries of Scotland and currently on show in Scottish Portrait Gallery.

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Joan Eardley

Early Eardley: selected works 1940 - 1950

10 November – 16 December 2023

Joan Eardley first enrolled as a student at The Glasgow School of Art in January 1940. Her student years became central to her artistic development, identity and reputation, and she maintained links with the School throughout her life. *Early Eardley: Selected Works 1940-1950* focuses on Eardley's little-known early works, including a number of drawings and ephemera not previously exhibited.

The works for this exhibition are drawn from The Glasgow School of Art Archives & Collections, Lillie Art Gallery, City Art Centre, Gerber Fine Art and Eardley Estate. The exhibition features life drawings made while Eardley was a student in the 1940s, as well as drawings made while undertaking Glasgow School of Art and Royal Scottish Academy Carnegie Travelling Scholarships in Italy and France (1948-49). The exhibition also includes a small group of sketches from Lincolnshire made during a period spent in the county to undertake a mural commission at a school in 1946, as well as a painting from one of her many visits to Arran. A further two drawings, from GSA's Archives & Collections, are of scenes from Glasgow's famous Barras Market.

Whilst Reid Gallery shows Eardley's art works from this early period, Window on Heritage presents documents from GSA Archives & Collections that illuminate early 1940s teaching practice at the art school. The film 'Tabernacle', produced for the launch of the Arran Arts Heritage Trail, is playing in Window on Heritage. In her youth, Eardley spent summers on Arran and the film title 'Tabernacle' is taken from the tiny studio cottage where she stayed and worked^[1]

This show has chosen not to focus on Eardley's most famous works, perhaps too often limited to the 'street kids and seascapes' dichotomy in terms of dominant narratives of the artist's development. In contrast, it aims to introduce audiences to the artist as a young woman, an artist who was still learning, experimenting and developing as a painter. Some of the drawings on display could be regarded as minor works but they nevertheless demonstrate Eardley's emerging talent and the range and breadth of her interests. They reveal a far wider range of themes, places and subjects than those commonly associated with the artist's oeuvre and serve to highlight the role of education and training in her artistic development. In her firm commitment to the practice of drawing, for example, the influence of her much-admired tutor, Hugh Adam Crawford, can be seen. Other influences, such as her friendship with the Polish émigré Josef Hermann, are seen in the artist's growing interest in urban realism.

Early Eardley: Selected works 1940-1950 is not Eardley's first exhibition at The Glasgow School of Art.^[2] In 1948 Eardley, along with Agnes Begg (1920 - 2011) and William Gallacher (1920 - 1978), exhibited work made during a postgraduate summer school at Hospitalfield. This was followed in 1949 by Eardley's first solo exhibition, again in the Mackintosh Museum, on her return from Italy and France in 1949. It featured drawings made while undertaking Royal Scottish Academy Carnegie and Glasgow School of Art Travelling Scholarships between 1948-49. The works made during the scholarship year helped to cement Eardley's reputation as a young graduate to watch. In a review in *The Glasgow Herald*, a critic observed that her work was, "notable among the immediate post-graduate generation [...] for the strength and selective quality in her drawings." The display case holds a copy of the exhibition list of works shown.

Some of these drawings – of working people, landscape and architecture – are shown in the exhibition, along with the scholarship report she was required to submit to the School's Director, artist Douglas Percy Bliss, and other correspondence.

The early works give a particular insight into the artist's approach to drawing and sketching. Materials used include pen, ink, chalks, watercolour and blue biro. The latter was often used for quicker sketches which appear to work out composition, light and shade. There are two drawings of the same study 'Church Interior, Basilica di San Marco, Venice' (1948-49), of three figures at worship. The early, presumably quicker sketch begins to plot the nuanced differences between the angles of the heads of the three figures. The front worshipper, with his head raised, appears more in communion with above, while the man in the middle seat stares at his hands and the figure at the back stares ahead. This is further developed in the second work, a chalk and pastel study on brown paper. Eardley develops the church interior surrounding the figures, choosing to link them to their surroundings by three bold columns that echo their number.

Many of the sketches are working drawings. As part of the schema of 'An Italian Hilltown' (1948-49), Eardley writes colour notes on this black chalk sketch as an aide memoire. A far spire is 'pink', shutters are 'dark green' against a 'brown' building. Drawings are often immediate and look to be on any scrap material that was to hand: 'Bridge in Venice' (1948-49), for example, is drawn on lined paper suggestive of a letter pad.

There is strong evidence of Eardley's interest in the rural as well as the city in these early works which is perhaps unsurprising given that she was born at Bayling Hill Farm, in Warnham, Sussex. Whether at rest or on the move, in works such as 'Mule with Cart' (1948-49), Eardley shows an interest in and ability to capture aspects of rural labour and its mechanics. 'Italian Farmhouse' (1948-49) is beautifully constructed, with a plough in the foreground which leads the eye through trees to the white farmhouse, its front door ajar, a detail set at the golden ratio point in the composition.

Of her Glasgow works in the collection there are two studies of the Barras stalls entitled 'Covered Market', both dated c. 1945-49. The first is black ink on paper showing distinctive bold lines and mark-making that are recognisably Eardley's dynamic style, capturing a line of stalls with few customers at the start or end of a market day. Her ability to convey age through posture is also evident in this work. There is a real weight denoted in the coat of the stooped figure in the foreground as they clutch the edges of the coat to make it meet. This composition is then further worked up into colour in the second chalk and pastel study of 'Covered

Market' with a predominant yellow in this study being taken through the awnings of the stalls and replacing the cobbles of the passage, set against contrasting colder blue tones of the stall's interiors. It is worthwhile noting that in the ink study there is perhaps an early indication of Eardley's fascination with signage, as seen in later works such as 'Sweet Shop, Rotten Row' (c.1960-61), described by Edwin Morgan in his 1962 poem 'To Joan Eardley', as "Pale yellow letters / humbly struggling across / The once brilliant red / of a broken shop-face / CONFECTIO". In 'Covered Market', the sign on the end of one of the market carts reads 'Bush's Nurseryman. Roots. Cut Flowers'.

The life drawings by Eardley in the School's collection represent the rigour of drawing instruction at the art school. Figures twist, with Eardley following with a second observational detail of a foreshortened arm on the same page to better understand form ('Life Drawing', 1940-45). This academic understanding of the figure as an exercise, of how skin and clothes cover skeletal structure, underpins her ability to capture the figure quickly and authentically in her own chosen subject works. Her early life drawings are shown in proximity to 'Figure Drawing of Young Woman' (1940s), an intimate and sensual study of a nude woman in a red waistcoat. This is one of few works which perhaps hint at the artist's identity as a lesbian.

The Glasgow School of Art is integral to Joan Eardley's story. Her close-knit network of friends and supporters, a group who would sustain her both personally and professionally throughout her life, were largely formed during her student years in the 1940s. A younger classmate, Cordelia Oliver (1923 - 2009), would go on to become one of her staunchest champions, writing the first book-length critical biography of the artist in 1988 and mounting several major posthumous exhibitions of her work. Her close friend and early collaborator, Margot Sandeman, was also a fellow classmate and lifelong advocate of her work. Eardley would visit Arran many times with Sandeman. Eardley's early career was intrinsically linked with her primary place of education, from her diploma between 1940-43 and her post-diploma year in 1948, to attendance at evening classes in between. In Window on Heritage, the book Eardley won for her Guthrie prize-winning self-portrait in 1943^[3] is on show. A small photograph of Eardley with her then partner Dorothy Steel (1927 - 2002) is also on display here. Steel would introduce Eardley to the shipyards of Port Glasgow as a shared subject of work.

It is eighty years since Eardley first graduated from Glasgow School of Art. This exhibition is her second solo show at the School, the first, since 1949. The exhibition introduces her work to another generation of students. Eardley's early works are distributed across several collections in Scotland, including University of Aberdeen and National Galleries of Scotland. For a longer discussion of Eardley's early works see the article: 'Early Eardley: a reconsideration of Joan Eardley (1921-1963)', *The British Art Journal*, XXII (3), pp. 64-79. ISSN 1467-2006.

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