

Joan Eardly

The life and works of Joan Eardly was the topic of our meeting in June. In her short life, Eardly achieved the great accolade of being the youngest woman ever to be admitted as academician to the Royal Scottish Academy and is touted as one of the most distinguished Scottish landscape painters. One of our members remembers studying Eardly's work for her Higher Art in the 60s.

Although born in England, Eardly studied at the Glasgow School of Art in the 1940s and spent all of her life in Scotland. The traditional teaching methods of the GSA served her well and her early drawings and paintings, particularly of people, are accurate and arresting. Whilst at GSA she was part of the New Art Club set up by JD Ferguson which exposed her to the expressionist and modernist art which was emerging in Europe at the time.

After a study trip through a war torn Europe, funded by two scholarships, she returned to Glasgow and began to paint in her own city which she recognised as a city in decline. Setting herself up in a tenement studio in Townhead, she began to paint the city streets and the children who played in them. She found the sense of community in Townhead strong but under threat as areas were being cleared and families rehoused elsewhere. She wanted to capture the gritty scenes before they disappeared forever. Her paintings of the Glasgow children are famous for controlled palettes, tight compositions, sludgy colours and flashes of bright colours. She often used graffiti and collaged sweetie wrappers and other paper ephemera in her work. Her portraits were gritty and not sentimental but exuded a depth of feeling, an honesty and sense of humanity.

As well as receiving some recognition for her Glasgow works, Eardly was also painting concurrently in Catterline, Starting with landscapes of the farmland around the fishing village, she soon gravitated to painting seascapes; her works becoming ever bigger and ever more abstract.

Sadly, just as she was about to take her work to an exhibition in America, and whilst in London for a successful solo exhibition, she was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer and died in August 1963 age 42.

Next is our trip to Aberdeen Art Gallery on July 11th where we will see some Joan Eardly paintings.