From the Chair

Spring is finally here and this is my first letter to you since I have taken over the chair from Ben Greenman, who has served the society so well during his one year interim chair-ship. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ben for his great work in moving the society forward and I am grateful that he is staying on the committee. I would also like to thank two of our long-standing committee members, Maria Devaney (membership secretary) and Ellen Graves (minutes secretary), who recently stepped down, for their important contributions to the society over the years. Many of you will already have met our new committee member Rachael Grew as our current membership secretary and I am sure you will cross paths with Claire Robinson before too long as she has kindly agreed to steer our new sub-group for events. Please join me in welcoming both of them - we could not exist as a society without its committee members’ enthusiasm and generous dedication to the cause of art history in Scotland!

Even though it is a daunting task to follow in Matthew Jarron’s footsteps as his vision has so expertly steered the society over many years, I am excited to report on a few of the society’s new initiatives. We have now firmly established a Facebook presence and I invite you to take a look at some of the diverse postings there. We are hoping to increase the visibility of the society through this endeavour and to especially encourage students and younger members of our art historical community to recognise the society as a relevant interest group composed of incredibly diverse and knowledgeable individuals. As previously mentioned, we also formed a new events sub-group and are busily working on an exciting programme for 2014. By the time you read this newsletter, we will already have completed our first event of the year, namely a guided tour of the Hunterian Art Gallery’s Scottish Gold exhibition by its curator Dr Donal Bateson.

We are also discussing potential themes for another conference in 2015 and I am keen to hear from you with any ideas. In this context, I would like to stress that I see the society as a place of exchange for art historians working in Scotland on a wide range of subjects in terms of approach, chronology and geography. So please send an email to me at sabine.wieber@glasgow.ac.uk if you have a possible conference theme in mind and we could discuss it at our next committee meeting.

Allow me to close by observing that art history as an academic discipline and a professional practice has been under increasing pressure in recent years. In the current cultural-political climate, societies such as the SSAH take on an even more important role as advocates for a field of study that is not only dear to our own hearts but that imparts a wider public with an understanding of the importance of the past to current events. So let us keep up the good work!

Sabine Wieber

New Committee Members

Claire Robinson:
Claire is Collections and Exhibitions Curator in the Museum Collections Unit at the University of St Andrews. Her research interests are on 19th and early 20th century material culture and art and design in Britain. She has worked in museums across Scotland and has experience of managing, displaying and caring for diverse collections, from fine art to scientific instruments.
Rachael Grew:
Rachael is an art historian specialising in gender issues in French and British art c. 1850 - 1950. Her research focuses on the work of female Surrealist artists, particularly that of Leonor Fini, and she has just begun a large project investigating Fini’s designs for the theatre. After receiving her PhD in 2010, Rachael taught for two years at Plymouth University, and is currently a visiting lecturer at a number of institutions in Glasgow, including the Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow.

SSAH Research Support Grants
The Scottish Society for Art History promotes scholarship in the history of Scottish art and art located in Scotland. To facilitate this, the SSAH offers research support grants from £50 to £500 to assist with research costs and travel expenses. Applicants must be working at a post-graduate level or above and should either be resident in Scotland or doing research that necessitates travel to Scotland. Application deadlines: 31 May and 30 November.

To apply please send via e-mail:
- a cover letter
- current curriculum vitae
- a brief project description (300-500 words) specifying how the grant will be used and how it relates to a broader research agenda
- a budget
- the name and e-mail address of one reference

Address applications to:
SSAH Research Support Grants, c/o Dr Shannon Hunter Hurtado, sculptthurta@yahoo.co.uk

Project Report by Dr Katerina Loukopoulou
Independent film historian

Near the small village of Shawhead in Dumfries and Galloway, four Henry Moore sculptures are sited alongside works by Jacob Epstein and Auguste Rodin: a constellation of figures and totemic forms across an agricultural landscape. These sculptures were placed there in the 1950s by the landowner William Keswick, so that although the fields continued to be used as pasture, they also acquired an aesthetic identity, as what is sometimes called Glenkiln Sculpture Park. Thanks to an SSAH research grant, I was able to visit the site for part of my post-doctoral research on two BBC documentary films about Henry Moore, which include sequences shot on location there: A Sculptor’s Landscape (1958) and Henry Moore at Home (1974). Both films were directed by John Read, who specialised in the arts documentary genre and always privileged shooting on location. The films can be seen online at www.bbc.co.uk/archive/henrymoore.

In both Henry Moore scholarship and sculpture studies at large, one of the most frequently repeated quotations is Moore’s 1951 statement that ‘Sculpture is an art of the open air’. This was an unusual observation at the time, because in 1951, the aesthetic practice of siting and viewing modern sculpture in ‘the open air’ had yet to be established. In most cases, sculpture outdoors was decorative or monumental, rather than an aesthetic focal point. Statuary in landscape gardens, memorial stones in cemeteries and political monuments in urban spaces were the sculptural forms commonly situated outdoors. Exhibitions of modern sculpture in the open air had just started to be organised in London’s parks in the late 1940s and it took almost 30 years for the first permanent, dedicated sculpture park in the UK to open in 1977: the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The siting of modern sculpture at Glenkiln does not fall into any of the above categories. Keswick intended the siting as neither an open-air art exhibition nor a sculpture park, but as an intervention in a landscape used as farmland; in this way, he anticipated the practices of Land Art.

As a film historian, I am interested in the ways Moore’s work was mediated through film, and more specifically in the role that the representation of Moore’s sculpture at this site played in the process of popularising new ways of seeing sculpture against natural settings. In interviews, Moore often emphasised that ‘out of all the outdoor placings of his sculpture’ it was the one at Keswick’s estate that ‘satisfied him most’. When this aesthetic satisfaction is articulated through the audio-visual language of cinema, then the mediation becomes a heightened multisensory experience. It is the source of this experience, and the dialogue between the screen landscapes and the location, that I sought to study, by comparing a physical visit to the area with the cinematic encounters provided by the two aforementioned documentaries. In A Sculptor’s Landscape, black and white cinematography is utilised to place emphasis on outline and form, so that the correspondences between sculpture and landscape at Glenkiln are revealed: the two emerge as equivalent formations of curvilinear shapes.

The aural experience of viewing the specific Moore sculpture at the specific location is further
enhanced through the film’s soundtrack, which seeks to establish a dialogue between the sculpture’s landscape and nature’s sounds. The amplification of the ambient sounds of birds singing and wind blowing emphasise thus what a visitor to the site might not be fully conscious of: the aesthetic symbiosis of the sculpted form and the contingent sounds of nature. The montage of distant and close up views of Upright Motive No.1: Glenkiln Cross (1955-56) recreates the quite laborious experience of climbing up the hill to stand next to this totemic sculpture.

The sense in which the sculptures belong in this space is brought even more to the fore in Henry Moore at Home, which ends far from Moore’s literal home, with a sequence dedicated to the Glenkiln siting. The voice-over narration evokes the unexpected suitability of the countryside near Shawhead as a home for Moore’s work: ‘For the present, the most appropriate tribute to Moore’s vision is in a Scottish glen.’ For his second visit to this location, Read brought colour film stock to capture views of the sculpture that convey the ‘naturalisation’ of the artefacts after almost twenty years at this site. An upward tilt from Glenkiln Cross’ earthy base creates the illusion that the sculpture has grown out of the rocky surface on which it stands.

During my visit to this location on a rainy afternoon in August 2012, I was able to compare my filmic experience, which had preceded my visit, with a lived one. In doing so, I was also able to appreciate the immense effort of Read and his cameramen, who carried a heavy 35mm camera up a rough and rocky terrain, and meticulously captured on film the undulations of light and wind on these sculptures, standing fully exposed to the elements of nature and the Scottish weather. But above all, I found that it was the peripatetic experience and the possibilities of different vistas that both films explore convincingly, especially in the case of the approach to Glenkiln Cross: both films emulate the actual climbing up the hill, during which the visitor is constantly negotiating the rocky surface that leads to a gradual encounter with the sculpture. At the summit, Glenkiln Cross is revealed as a beacon, and the visitor is invited to explore the surrounding views in relation to the artwork.

Nowadays, the Glenkiln site is a staple recommendation in tourist guidebooks of the area. But this was not the case back in the late 1950s. With both films now available to watch online, we are reminded once again how original this marriage of sculpture and landscape must have seemed to viewers of the two Read documentaries and to visitors of the time. That this Scottish glen offered the apposite ground for Moore’s sculpture to be sited in such an original and aesthetically pleasing way fits in the long history of Scotland’s landscape inspiring artists and opening up new avenues of artistic explorations and new types of mediation.

Dr Katerina Loukopoulou previously held The Henry Moore Foundation Post-doctoral Fellowship at the History of Art Department of UCL (2010-12). The major outcome of this Fellowship is her forthcoming book Henry Moore on Screen: The Making of a Media Icon, to be published by Ashgate.
With the assistance of the SSAH Research Grant I was able to travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh in 2013 to carry on research for my forthcoming book Art, Law and Order: The Legal Life of Artists in Eighteenth-century Britain (Manchester University Press).

This research also helped me prepare for a talk at the Facing Allan Ramsay in his European Intellectual Context conference held at The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (6 December 2013). The conference was part of a series of events on the occasion of the exhibition Allan Ramsay: Portraits of the Enlightenment (13 September 2013 until 5 January 2014) which commemorated the 300th anniversary of the artist’s birth.

Ramsay was a prolific legal writer, and although his opinions on legal and political matters attracted the attention of prominent 18th century thinkers, they constitute a neglected topic of his biography. I had the chance to examine Ramsay’s annotated copies of his unpublished essays and pamphlets held at the National Library of Scotland as well as a number of letters and documents relating to the painter. I came across relevant material for my study that seeks a better understanding of the painter’s legal opinions and their impact on his artistic interests. I was particularly excited to visit the Scottish National Gallery’s exhibition Citizens of the World: David Hume & Allan Ramsay as well as the elegant display of Ramsay’s drawings, which included the painter’s black chalk Self-portrait (c. 1755) and several of his early red chalk studies. I am grateful for the opportunity given by the Scottish Society for Art history to visit Edinburgh to pursue my research. I would like to thank the evaluating committee for their support.

I was honoured to receive a grant from the SSAH that funded a research trip to the British Library in London in order to access The National Life Stories: Artists’ Lives sound archive, which holds recorded oral history interviews of a number of prominent Scottish artists. These interviews contained valuable information about Hospitalfield House, Arbroath, which is the focus of my PhD thesis. Through the bequest of Arbroath artist and philanthropist Patrick Allan-Fraser, Hospitalfield has served as a place of artistic learning and teaching for the past 100 years and, from 1937, functioned as a postgraduate and later, summer school for the four Scottish art colleges at Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It was this summer school that artists Ian McKenzie Smith, Richard Hunter and Ann Patrick recalled during their interviews. They described the unique artistic community at Hospitalfield, the work and impact of guest artists, James McIntosh Patrick and the significance of the experience within their careers. Hunter and Ann Patrick also shared their later connections with Hospitalfield in the 1970s when Peter Blake was a guest artist. Although Blake did not specifically mention Hospitalfield in his interview, he explained about his participation in the Brotherhood of Ruralists, which provided a context for his work at Hospitalfield. Callum Innes, who also attended the summer school, reflected on the qualities of a Scottish art education and the differences between the Scottish art colleges.

With little scholarship devoted to the 20th century at Hospitalfield, collecting oral history is a vital part of my research. Listening to the interviews at the British Library provided examples of effective interview technique and questions, which I will employ as I continue my research and conduct my own oral history interviews.

Feature articles

The Scottish watercolours of John ‘Warwick’ Smith
By Robin Campbell, Independent Art Historian

Until ten years ago, there was little published indication or mention that John ‘Warwick’ Smith had visited Scotland. However, there are two prints by Samuel Alken after Smith of Scottish subjects in the British Museum, each dated 1787: The Hermitage on the Braan at Dunkeld and View by the Tilt at Athole House. Also, the Witt Library has three images of Scottish works by Smith: Taymouth (exh. Agnew’s, 1966), Falls of the Foshart/Doshart [= Dochart] (exh. Fine Art Society, Leger and Agnew’s, 1969 – 1975) and Distant View of Stirling (private collection, 1992), which is now in the Stirling Smith Gallery. In addition, there are two Scottish watercolour on graphite works dated 1788 in the Yale Center for British Art: B1975.4.1615 The Tay and its Tributary and B1975.4.1616 The Falls of the Doshart. Furthermore, Simon Fenwick mentions in his 2004 DNB biography that ‘In 1786 [Smith] was paid
£247 16s. by the 4th duke of Atholl for 56 watercolours of Perthshire for Blair Atholl Castle.’ Fenwick’s source was a Smith invoice described by Basil Megaw in The ‘Warwick’ Smith Watercolours of 1795 (J. Manx Museum, 1958, pp15-18). However, as described by Megaw, the invoice doesn’t specifically identify the 56 artworks as being Scottish, and the date of 1786 is derived only from association with other papers.

In 2005 I played a small part in bringing Smith’s Distant View of Stirling to the Stirling Smith Gallery after a failed Sotheby’s sale. Since it was undated, Henry Wemyss suggested that I visit Blair Castle to look for dates on the ‘large number’ of Smith watercolours that he had seen there. I saw them in 2008. They were all in frames and hanging in private rooms, apart from an image of Stirling Castle in the Atholl Arms. None of the 50-odd works were signed or dated. However, all had titles on the mounts. The frames were also mostly numbered. The views were all in Perthshire, with concentration around Dunkeld and Blair. The Castle Archivist, Jane Anderson, produced a partial inventory of the watercolours taken by the 7th Duke, giving a number and title for each. The artworks were clearly commissioned by the 4th Duke, but the archives yielded only two invoices from Smith. One invoice, dated 1796, listed ‘2 large views of Stirling’ and ‘28 smaller views near Dunkeld’ as well as 25 Isle of Man works. The Manx ones (26, rather than the 25 mentioned in Smith’s invoice) were bought from Atholl in the early 1950s by F.C. Harris and donated to the Manx Museum (see Megaw ibid.). The second invoice, dated 1801, was for ‘A large drawing of the Pass of Killiecrankie’, ‘A large drawing, the Fall of the Tummel’, and ‘A small one of the Fall of Tummel’, leaving around twenty watercolour paintings unaccounted for by Castle archives.

When the Yale Center put its collection online I examined its two Scottish Smith works. Titles are dubious when applied by the trade, as here, but I identified No. 1615 (named by Yale as The Tay and its Tributary) as the junction of the Rivers Lyon and Tay with the help of Google Earth and Stobie’s 1783 Perthshire Map, which produced matches for the sandbanks in the Tay and the depicted buildings respectively. The mountain in the background is Schiehallion. Drawing No. 1616 was very puzzling. It was not like any view of the Falls of the Dochart, but I couldn’t locate it. However, together with the Alken prints, these suggested strongly that Smith had visited Perthshire in 1787 or earlier.

John ‘Warwick’ Smith, The Tay and its Tributary
B.1975.4.1615, Yale Center for British Art
Photograph courtesy of Yale Center for British Art

Smith’s Viewpoint showing junction of Lyon and Tay
© 2014 Google; Image © 2014 DigitalGlobe;
Image © 2014 Getmapping plc; Image Landsat

My list of titles made in 2008 contained The Junction of Lyon and Tay, as well as two titles possibly matching the Alken prints. So I visited Blair Castle again at the end of last year. I took very poor photographs of the Smith watercolours, 53 in total, and have appended a list of titles below. The Castle’s image of The Junction of Lyon and Tay was a perfect match for Yale No. 1615, and I found similarly perfect matches for the two Alken prints, and for the Falls of the Dochart work in the Witt Library. Yale no. 1616 was identical to a watercolour at the Castle entitled Pass of Killiecrankie except for foreground figures. Smith’s viewpoint for this is inaccessible due to unrestrained tree-growth around the Pass. Yale has accepted these new titles.

These discoveries confirm that the Yale watercolours are Scottish by fixing their locations, and they help to date some paintings at the Castle to 1787 or earlier. While there are a handful of earlier Highland
artworks - by Paul Sandby, James Norie and Charles Steuart - Smith was the first of the golden generation of watercolour artists to draw and paint Highland landscapes, and he created them in quantity, and with admirably faithful mountain backgrounds. His Highland landscapes antedate those of John White Abbott’s tour of 1791 and Turner’s tour of 1801, and they clearly deserve the same kind of detailed study recently given to his Lake District works commissioned by John Christian Curwen (see C. Powell & S. Hebron, A Cumbrian Artist Rediscovered: John Smith (1749 - 1831), Wordsworth Trust, 2011).

I am grateful for assistance and encouragement from Hannah Hawksworth, Cecilia Powell and Lisa Thornell in pursuing this research. I would also like to thank Blair Castle Trust for allowing me access.

The Blair Castle Watercolours (mount titles in italics, listed as encountered in a tour of the rooms)

1. Blair Castle (from West)
2. View from Creag Urrard (of Castle, looking South)
3. Blair Castle (from NW)
4. West Ferry (Dunkeld)
5. Middle Fall Bruar
6. Dunkeld (from South, large)
7. Upper Fall Rumbling Brig (on Braan)
8. Upper Fall Bruar
9. Hermitage (on Braan)
10. Lum Rumbling Brig
11. Forrest Lodge (on Tilt)
12. Hermitage (from below bridge)
13. West Ferry (showing Craig-y-Barns)
14. Bridge Glen Tilt
15. View Down Tay (from Dunkeld)
16. Bridge in Den (Banvie)
17. Fall on the Bran
18. Loch of Lows
19. Torr Wood (Birnam)
20. Natural Arch, Bruar
21. View up Tay (North, from Creag Vinean)
22. Tilt Side Walk
23. Fall on Tilt
24. Tay Side
25. Polney Gates (Dunkeld)
26. King’s Ford (Dunkeld)
27. (title obscured, Hermitage Fall)
28. View Up Tilt
29. Hermitage (from East)
30. Fisherman’s House, Dunkeld
31. Falls of the Tummel
32. Finlarig, Loch Tay (Killin)
33. Pass of Killiecrankie
34. Junction of the Mark and Tilt
35. Faskally
36. View at Dunkeld (of grounds)
37. Ochtertyre
38. Falls of the Fender
39. View from King’s Seat, Dunkeld (of Craig-y-Barns)
40. View at Dunkeld (of Craig-y-Barns)
41. Junction of Lyon and Tay
42. Glen Lochie (Lochay)
43. Lynn of Campsie on the Tay
44. Glen Dochart
45. Falls of the Dochart
46. East End of Loch Tummel
47. View across Bran and Tay, Dunkeld
48. Strowan Mill (Comrie?)
49. Fall of Tummel (large)
50. Falls of Touldunie
51. Craige Barns
52. Grotto Craigy Barns
53. Stirling Castle (large, Atholl Arms)

The watercolours are all approximately 12 x 17 inches, except for those described as large. The first 29 and last six are in heavy gilt frames with verre églomisé mounts and gilt title, whilst the rest have black wood frames.

A Lost Victorian Treasure
By Keith Otto, Abertay University

There has always been a human fascination with lost items that are subsequently found or rediscovered. Many of us will have tuned into the Antiques Roadshow and marvelled at the some of the items that come to light like Fabergé boxes or rare jewellery pieces by Pugin which were only previously known of as drawings. Similarly with attribution: the buzz in the Art market when the ex Winton House Caravaggio was deemed to be the missing work by the great master is just one example of how the uncovering of an original can lead to huge interest.

In the case of Warriston Cemetery the idea of uncovering lost Art was less a case of detective work and more of extreme gardening – the ‘lost’ was due to thick ground ivy that had run rampant and unchecked for many years. Most of the headstones of this beautiful Victorian Cemetery were simply shapeless, difficult to discern, and impossible to read.
The growth of Edinburgh’s new town in the 17th and 18th century had put huge pressure on existing cemetery space and it was decided that there was a need for a series of new ‘garden’ cemeteries to be built around the centre to cope with demand. These included Newington, Dalry, Rosebank and further along the Water of Leith, at the foot of the new town, Warriston. The graveyard was opened in 1843 to a design from David Cousin with citizens being invited to buy plots. Plots in the lower part of the cemetery appear to have been sold fairly quickly to a wide cross section of reasonably well to do citizens. The most famous individual to have been buried was Sir James Young Simpson, who discovered chloroform and who had lived in Anne Street in nearby Stockbridge.

An early complication was the routing of a railway branch line - the ‘Edinburgh, Leith and Newhaven railway’ - which bisected the new cemetery and resulted in ornate tunnel entrances being constructed. A neo-tudor line of catacombs was constructed and this was doubled in size in 1862. A tour of the southern part of the cemetery reveals many stones that were constructed in the mid to late Victorian period, some with extremely elaborate borders or detailing.

My involvement with Warriston came in February 2010 when my father, a D-Day veteran, passed away at the age of 93. One of his last wishes was to be buried in the family plot, impossible at that stage to locate, even with the help of a map from the city cemeteries department at Monktonhall. The stone was eventually discovered, cleaned and repaired, and we regularly visited and maintained the plot, conscious of the surrounding ivy jungle.

A chance meeting early last summer between a local genealogist Caroline Gerard, and an American, Bob Reinhardt, led to the formation of a ‘Friends of Warriston’ group, with the aim of helping to bring the cemetery back to life. An initial meeting was held for all interested in helping and regular work parties were set up to start clearing the ivy. The cemetery was a designated nature area as well as Grade A listed by Historic Scotland, so care had to be taken with nesting birds in particular - each large clump of ivy was checked for nests before being given the all clear for removal. Clearing the ivy can be hard work even if armed with sharp secateurs, shearers and strong gloves and care
does need to be taken not to lift carved inscriptions with the ivy roots embedded into the stone, particularly if the latter is soft. Work continued throughout the summer, autumn and even winter. As word has got around the group has grown in size, aided also by newspaper articles in the Edinburgh Evening News and a TV report for BBC Reporting Scotland.

Several notable Scottish artists are linked to Warriston including Horatio McCulloch (1806 -1867), whose monument was designed by the Edinburgh-based sculptor John Rhind, who in turn was buried in Warriston in 1892. Other artists include Robert Gibb (creator of The Thin Red Line) and Sir George Harvey.

So if you do happen to be in Edinburgh’s New Town in good weather and have some free time, come down and have a look. You will be well rewarded.

(Photography by Caroline Gerard and Keith Otto)

Etched with Melancholy: The Prints of William Strang
By Hannah Brocklehurst, Curator, Department of Prints & Drawings, Scottish National Gallery

During his lifetime the work of Dumbarton-born artist William Strang (1859 - 1921) featured in a number of group and solo exhibitions and gained international recognition at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889 and, in 1897, at the Dresden International Exhibition and the First Viennese Secessionist Exhibition. Strang was highly skilled as a painter, printmaker and portraitist, and was a founding member of both the Royal Society of Painter Etchers and the National Portrait Society. In 1918 he was made President of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Engravers and shortly before his death in 1921 was elected Royal Academician Engraver. Strang was arguably one of the most exciting British artists of the
period, yet posthumously there have been only two major exhibitions of his work - a memorial show held at the Fine Art Society in the year of his death and, in 1980-81, William Strang RA, 1859 - 1921, Painter-Etcher, organised by Sheffield City Art Galleries and also shown at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, and the National Portrait Gallery, London. This summer, Strang’s work is the focus of two separate displays at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and at the Scottish National Gallery. Though modest, these exhibitions will give audiences the opportunity to enjoy a group of highly accomplished, highly acclaimed artworks that have rarely been seen in public in over 30 years.

The most significant body of Strang’s work is held by Glasgow Museums. Totalling around 2,000 works, the collection contains 1,700 prints - some bequeathed by Strang himself and the larger part presented by his son David Strang - plus around 270 drawings and eight oil paintings, including two of his best known, Café Bar (1915) and Nymph and Shepherds (begun 1879 and worked on up until his death). The National Galleries of Scotland holds around 800 works on paper by Strang, also mainly given by the artist’s son, as well as two self-portraits in oil which are in the collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Despite his parents’ hopes that he would work for the family firm, the Clydeside shipbuilders Messrs Wm Denny and Bros, Strang enrolled at the newly-opened Slade School of Art half-way through the academic year 1876, aged seventeen. Although he made periodic return visits to Scotland and travelled (he visited New York twice), from that date London became his permanent home. That term, the French Realist Alphonse Legros (1837 - 1911) was appointed Professor at the Slade. A painter, sculptor and, most importantly for Strang, a prolific etcher, Legros introduced a continental style of teaching that focused on the importance of drawing from life and on fine draughtsmanship in pencil and chalk. He also introduced classes in etching and in the more technical aspects of printing. In Legros, Strang had found his perfect match, and his teaching was to have a profound and lasting influence on the young artist who, on completing his studies, continued to work under Legros as assistant in his etching class. By the age of 30, Strang had produced around 180 original etchings and was experimenting with many printmaking techniques - including drypoint, mezzotint, lithography, aquatint, woodcut and engraving. Even from the mid-1890s, whilst developing his interest in painting and occupied with more lucrative portrait commissions, Strang continued to make prints.

In 1904, he became a founder member of the Society of Twelve - a group of artists (which included fellow Scots David Young Cameron and Muirhead Bone), who were committed to bringing about a revival of interest in traditional printmaking and drawing. His sons Ian (1886 - 1952) and David (1887 - 1967) were also printmakers. David, with whom he occasionally collaborated, printed many of his father’s plates. Strang produced one of the most significant bodies of original etched work by any Scottish artist of the period and it is his prolific output in this medium that is the focus of this summer’s displays in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Both backward and forward looking in his artistic and stylistic choices, Strang’s range of subjects was as vast as his output and equally experimental. His

William Strang, Self-portrait, No. 6 (Strang No. 116)
Courtesy of Scottish National Gallery
etchings include portraits of important artistic and literary figures such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy, the printmaker Sir Francis Seymour Haden and a number of portraits of Legros. Inspired by Rembrandt, he made over 30 self portraits. In Self Portrait, No. 6 (1885), Strang presents himself wearing tam o’shanter, holding an etching needle to a copper plate - expressing both his nationality and his trade. He created illustrations for periodicals including Aubrey Beardsley’s The Yellow Book, as well as series of narrative illustrations, such as The Pilgrim’s Progress (1895), Ancient Mariner (1896) and Don Quixote (1902), and for his own Scots dialect ballads. Strang’s macabre and often bewildering genre pictures range from the real to the fantastic, the allegorical and the historical. He also explored the biblical themes of traditional art, and these he treated with deep reverence. Although Strang made a small number of etchings of architectural and landscape subjects, these never held the same importance as those in which there was human interest, and he retained throughout his life a primary concern for the ordinary working person.

In Paris, Legros was closely associated with the artists of the Realist movement, who sought to convey in their art a truthful vision of everyday contemporary existence. At the Slade, he encouraged a similar honesty in the work of his pupils. Strang’s own closely observed and bluntly direct depictions of the lives of the urban poor are clearly influenced by Legros, and by his life-long respect for the traditions of the old masters Rembrandt, Dürer, Van Dyck, and Goya. As a lowland Scot, Strang’s rural realism related strongly to his own vernacular Scottish roots.

Strang’s realist subjects also reflect his ardent Socialism. The artist was an enthusiastic member of the Arts and Crafts Movement and in 1907 became Master of the Art Workers Guild, a craft co-operative committed to bringing about economic and social improvement through traditional workmanship, hand-crafted goods and apprenticeships. He was also an advocate for the revival of the hand printed book and became closely involved with The Essex House Press.

William Strang: Modern Life at Kelvingrove this summer, focuses on the artist’s portrayals of city life. Harrowing images such as Poverty (1885) and The Soup Kitchen (1889) are displayed alongside the scenes of conspicuous consumption in Selfridges Toy-Window, London (1911). The Aeroplane (1913) reveals Strang’s interest in advances in transport and technology, although, typically, his interest is in the people, and it is the mesmerised onlookers rather than the plane itself that are the subject. Beyond the age of conscription himself, but with four sons on the Front, Strang’s work during the First World War frequently featured aspects of everyday life on the Home Front and the psychological effects upon those separated from loved ones at war.

William Strang, Despair (Strang No. 157)
Courtesy of Scottish National Gallery

Despair (1889), which will be on show as part of the exhibition in Edinburgh, shows a woman sitting, her back hunched, in a dark interior, with a small child at her side and a baby at her breast. The woman stares grimly ahead, tired and physically entrapped by near-constant nursing. Strang’s depiction of a mother at the bottom end of the social scale, offers a direct and forthright depiction of the effects of poverty and social injustice - sharp contrast to the Victorian sentimentality of some of his contemporaries. The composition is brutally stark, even for Strang. The sombre nature of the subject is enhanced by a dramatic chiaroscuro and uncluttered composition, which again show the influence of Legros and of the study of old master prints.

James Caw, Director of the Scottish National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery from 1907 to 1930, described Strang as ‘grim’, ‘rugged’ and ‘Calvinistic’. David Strang (in Print Collector’s Quarterly in 1937)
described his father as ‘Outspoken, combative and with strong convictions’. It was in Strang’s nature to disguise nothing. In powerful subject etchings, such as Despair and The Eating House (1903), Strang’s interest was in achieving psychological intensity and strong composition; he was not concerned with the picturesque or figuratively beautiful.

William Strang, The Eating House (Strang No. 566)  
Courtesy of Scottish National Gallery

Strang’s works have been frequently referred to as dour and even as macabre to the point of being ugly but, true to his ethics, his personality and his teaching, Strang saw beauty in disciplined draughtsmanship, in technical skill, imagination and in sincerity and authenticity. At the time of his sudden death from heart failure aged 62, Strang was still experimenting and modifying his techniques, and still full of ideas. The constant, over-riding feature of Strang’s art is his emphasis on fine draughtsmanship and craftsmanship.

William Strang: Modern Life is on show at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (April - October 2014) and an exhibition of Strang’s graphic works will open at the Scottish National Gallery on October 18 and will run until 15 February 2015.

New Exhibition

Fred A. Farrell - Glasgow’s War Artist (From Home Front to Frontline in WW1)  
Glasgow Museums
29 May 2014 – 23 November 2014
By Dr. Joanna Meacock, Curator (British Art), Glasgow Museums

As part of the nation’s WW1 centenary commemorations, an exciting and thought-provoking exhibition opens at the People’s Palace in Glasgow at the end of May, focusing on the war drawings of Glasgow artist Frederick Arthur Farrell (1882 - 1935).

Archival research has brought to light details of the extraordinary commission Farrell received from the Corporation of Glasgow to produce 50 drawings of the front line and munitions factories in Glasgow. Farrell was unique in being the only British war artist to be commissioned by a city rather than by the government, Imperial War Museum or armed forces. Glasgow was one of the first cities to recognise the importance of creating images as a historical record for posterity, rather than just for propaganda purposes.

Farrell came from a distinguished Glasgow family, his father being the curator of the Trades House on Glassford Street. He initially studied civil engineering. As an artist he was self-taught, although his debt to Muirhead Bone is often commented on. By WW1 he was gaining recognition as an etcher and watercolourist specialising in portraits and topographical subjects. British Army records show that during the war he enlisted as a sapper, or military engineer, with the Royal Engineers Railway Troops Depot but was discharged due to ill health. In November 1917, Farrell returned to the Front as a war artist, attached for three weeks to the 15th, 16th and 17th Highland Light Infantry in Flanders. In late 1918 he was in France, attached for two months to the staff of the 51st Highland Division. Both were strategic placements, the Highland Light Infantry having been raised by the Corporation of Glasgow, while the 51st Division contained many Glaswegians posted to the old Territorial battalions of the Black Watch, Seaforth Highlanders, Gordon Highlanders and Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders. Authorised by the Minister of Munitions and Admiralty, and supported by Glasgow’s Lord Provost, Farrell also drew the heroic home effort of women in Glasgow’s munitions factories, shipyards and engineering works.

As a former soldier, Farrell’s sketches of the Front powerfully offer a landscape filtered and mediated through personal experience and emotion. Battle scenes and operational meetings are reconstructed, informed by first hand accounts. Many include portraits of named soldiers. There are poignant images of graves, devastated landscapes and destroyed churches. However, there are also scenes of reconstruction and renewed activity amid the desolation. Farrell is at his most dynamic in his drawings of the munitions factories, which are full of noise, light and movement. In these he conveys an artist’s delight in the patterning of architecture, machinery and shells.
In 1920 Farrell’s war drawings were exhibited in the Banqueting Hall of the City Chambers and a limited edition publication, *The 51st Division: War Sketches by Fred Farrell*, was brought out with an introduction by the well-known journalist and writer Dr Neil Munro. Likewise, Glasgow Museums’ exhibition is to be accompanied by a catalogue of Farrell’s war drawings with essays providing historical context and highlighting the importance of this unique collection.

Fred A. Farrell, *Forging shell-noses*
Pencil, chalk and watercolour on paper
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