

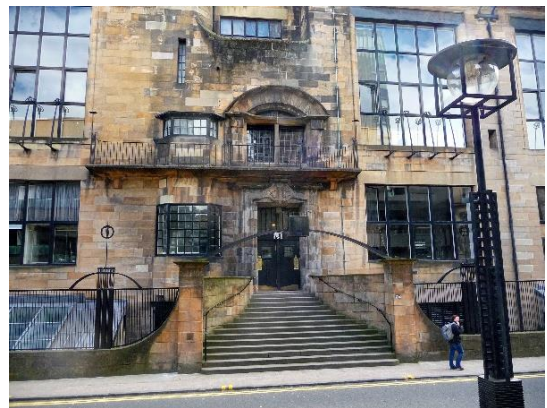
## My Story: Glasgow School of Art

My ambition throughout my childhood was to be an artist. However, during my school years my hopes were dashed when I was not supported by teachers on the grounds that “there were no jobs for women from this kind of study”. So instead I took a technical drawing job, got married, had a young family, ran a small shop, attended classes for hobby artists. But I never gave up hope of being a professional artist; of art being my work and my life.

By the time I secured a place at the Glasgow School of Art I was divorced and fortunate to have one of the last government student grants. My children were at school in Fairlie and my extended family and wonderful parents were nearby. I was thirty-three and could begin my studies.

It was a dream come true. To be able to paint and draw every day beside like-minded people, to have use of the excellent library and attend comprehensive lectures on art. I loved every minute of my four years at the Glasgow School of Art.

I felt proud and privileged to work within the main building of the Art School, the architectural jewel of the innovative architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It was a privilege. Walking up the stairs and viewing the feet of others through a half moon cut out space of those who'd rounded a corner before me.. Small pleasures here and there; delicate stained glass set into the heavy doors; the original antique deep sinks where we cleaned our brushes; the light in the high windowed studios.



Because of the significance of this historically important building, there were also the international visitors wandering around.

After a basic first year we were allocated a tutor. All of the tutors were working professional artists with a private studio within the school. Mine was James Robertson



*Detail from my painting Derek completed while I was a student at the Glasgow School of Art.*

and my student colleagues were mostly female. I liked 'Jimmy' as he was called, affable although sometimes making a sarcastic remark here or there. Pure white laid on a painting would be greeted with a raised eyebrow: "Is it toothpaste?"! he would ask. Another of our studio's tutors was Alexander (Sandy) Moffat who gave little advice on 'how to paint'

but if he saw an artist striving in a

direction he was full of support and it was he alone who supported and encouraged my later study with Georg Baselitz in Berlin and has remained a critical supporter of my work and a friend to this day.

The majority of students had come straight from school but a small group of older students were in their mid-twenties or thirties. The friends I made tended to be from the Scottish islands; feet on the ground young women who seemed more mature. But for me there were no extra-curricular activities, nights out in Glasgow because of my personal circumstances but I was fine with that.

Travelling the eighty-mile round trip each day was hard. It was an hour-long train journey after the children went off to school and it meant leaving earlier than the other students to get back to Fairlie for my children. My fitness regime was the seven minutes it took me to run from the Art School to Glasgow's Central Train Station! There were also happy surprises; soaked from rain I'd round the corner to my home, spot my parents car and just knew my Mum had brought us a delicious meal.

Attending the Glasgow School of Art was one of the best times of my life. However following a spell in hospital I felt I had missed so much and requested that I repeat a semester. But I was told no, I was doing well and it wasn't necessary.

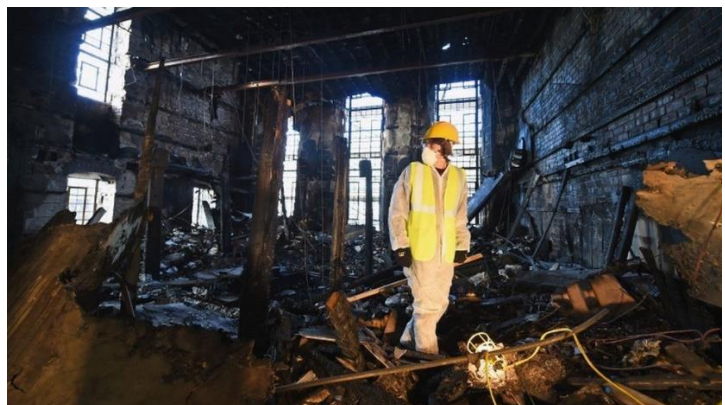
By the time of my degree show I was awarded a good Honours Degree but I was still experimenting with my art which underpinned the fact that I felt a strong need for post graduate study. But where and under who's influence?

This was one of the occasions where a handicap or 'knockback' became a positive driving force that paved the way of my artistic career. On an art school trip to Amsterdam we had visited the Stedelijk Museum and there I found the resounding answer. I saw a major exhibition of the German artist Georg Baselitz and I knew I had to study with him – which comprises another part of My Story.

My association with the Glasgow School of Art continued with regular spells of tutoring when I was in Scotland during the nineties and I was proud to be invited into the major group exhibition in 1995: *The Continuing Tradition, 75 Years of Painting at the Glasgow School of Art*.

### **Postscript**

I commented above about how inspiring it was to study in the Glasgow School of Art building designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928). It was therefore a tragedy in 2014 when the splendid and iconic library, one of the finest examples of art nouveau in the world, was completely destroyed in a fire. Everyone who had been proud to have studied and worked in the Glasgow School of Art must have felt, like me, devastated and deeply sad at the loss.



Restoration work had begun when another fire in 2018 caused further damage to the whole building. It is reassuring, however, that the School plans for a 'faithful reinstatement' of the 1909 architectural masterpiece. The School has said this option would 'protect the nation's heritage' while creating a fit-for-purpose 'landmark sustainable building'.

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