

**THE GLASGOW  
SCHOOL OF ART**



Art Fund\_



*Untitled*, 1961, Oil on Canvas, Bet Low. Image courtesy The Glasgow School of Art © Bet Low Trust

## **Largest collection of Bet Low's works seen this century to go on display in Glasgow then Orkney.**

This timely centenary exhibition bringing together over 60 works by Scottish painter Bet Low (1924-2007) has been supported by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund.

The centenary of the birth of the Scottish artist **Bet Low** RSA RSW RGI D.Lit.(1924-2007) is to be marked in both Glasgow and Orkney through a collaboration between the Reid Gallery, The Glasgow School of Art and the Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Orkney. The exhibition, **Bet Low - An Island on Your Doorstep**, will be the most comprehensive display of Low's works since The Third Eye Centre's 1985 exhibition curated by Cordelia Oliver, and includes unseen drawings and rare glimpses of Low's material practice and process. The exhibition, which opens on the 11th January will reflect on her working life, from early studies of Glasgow to the late Orkney landscapes - both places that played a crucial role in the artist's life and work, forming the backdrop to important stages in her long career.

The exhibition is composed of loans from 10 public and 13 private collections, bringing together early Glasgow works, alongside Low's abstract works and her more widely known landscape paintings.

The loans are supported by the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund. Created by the Garfield Weston Foundation and Art Fund, the Weston Loan Programme is the first ever UK-wide funding scheme to enable smaller and local authority museums to borrow works of art and artefacts from national collections.

Loans are from public and private collections, including The Bet Low Trust, Centre for Contemporary Art Glasgow (CCA) Archive, Culture Perth & Kinross Museum & Galleries, The Glasgow School of Art, Lillie Art Gallery, National Galleries of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council, Orkney Islands Council, the Pier Arts Centre Collection, Royal Scottish Academy Diploma Collection and University of Glasgow Library Archives and Special Collections.



***Portrait of a Man Smoking, 1945, Oil on Canvas, Bet Low. Image courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland © Bet Low Trust***

This particular work was completed the same year as Low left Glasgow School of Art, after completing her Diploma in Drawing & Painting. Low was twenty-one years old. The man is called Billy Higgins.



***Green Place*, 1962, Oil on Board, Bet Low, image courtesy of Royal Scottish Academy  
© Bet Low Trust**

This oil is representative of a period of Low's career when she was drawn to abstraction, creating works that were inspired by the movement of water, reflections and stones underneath. *Green Place* is on loan from the Royal Scottish Academy Diploma Collection (deposited, 2005).



***Warsaw / Peace Protest*, 1954, Linocut, Bet Low, The Bet Low Trust. Image courtesy  
Lyon & Turnbull © Bet Low Trust**

Low's earlier work captured mostly Glasgow city scenes and people. Whilst this lino cut is of a peace protest, other black and white scenes she produced that will be exhibited include a wide variety of subjects including the Co-operative float of a May Day Procession, and scenes from a children's hospital ward. Low had been taught how to make linocuts in art classes at Greenock Academy.



***In the Hoy Hills (Orkney), 1977, Oil on Canvas, Bet Low. Image courtesy of the Pier Arts Centre, Stromness Photo: Alistair Peebles © Bet Low Trust***

Bet Low's painting *In the Hoy Hills* (1977), gives weight to this landmass, through a colour palette that renders the nearest shoulder of the hill the darkest. The light and rain flickers on the receding flanks of hills. Low and her husband Tom Macdonald bought a small cottage on the island of Hoy, Orkney in 1967, ten years earlier than this painting and spent many summers there.

The last thirty years has seen a varied resurgence of interest in Bet Low's career, works and legacy: from the establishment in 1994 of The Bet Low Trust which awards scholarships to Scottish Artists, to new research on contemporary Scottish women artists and their importance. All have helped to reposition Low's oeuvre within the broader context of Scottish and British art.

Douglas Erskine's writing in Art Scotland emphasises her unique ability to capture the essence of the landscape, likening her to a "poet in paint". Contemporary artist Karla Black included seven of Low's paintings in her 2009 exhibition at Inverleith House in Edinburgh, allowing new readings by re-contextualising the paintings with her own sculptural works. The Lowlands Artist Collective's show at Glasgow's Oxford House in 2021 mounted seven artists based in Glasgow, Fife and Finland and incorporated work on paper by Bet Low. Each has introduced a new generation of artists and viewers to Low's legacy.

This exhibition will also contain reference to Low's wider contribution to Scottish arts, in Glasgow, including co-organising an open-air exhibition on the railings at Glasgow Botanic (1956) to her role as one of the co-founders of the New Charing Cross Gallery (1963-68).



**Jenny Brownrigg Exhibitions Director at The Glasgow School of Art commented:**

*“We are pleased to have the opportunity to work with the Pier Arts Centre on this project to showcase the work of Scottish artist Bet Low. Glasgow and Orkney were both influential in Low’s creative endeavours, and so it is very fitting for the two organisations to collaborate and bring together work from throughout her long artistic career.”*

**Andrew Parkinson, Curator at the Pier Arts Centre said:**

*“The project has received funding from the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund, allowing us to gather together paintings from both private and public collections from across Scotland, and show the work collectively for the first time in Glasgow and in Orkney. The funding also supports opportunities for audience development and promotion, assisting us to highlight and widen the reach of Bet Low and encourage new and existing audiences to explore this important artist’s work.”*

**Agnes Samuel, Bet Low Trust and friend of Bet Low said:**

*“Bet Low’s work has always had an enthusiastic and devoted band of admirers, as well as being in many public and private collections. I remember the first thrill of discovering her Orkney paintings, and it’s wonderful that this centenary exhibition will extend the pleasure to new audiences.”*

**Sophia Weston, Deputy Chair of the Garfield Weston Foundation, said:**

*“Our programme was created to empower regional and smaller arts organisations to stage ambitious exhibitions through significant loans so we are incredibly pleased to support this collaboration between The Pier Arts Centre and The Glasgow School of Art, which will shine a light on this important Scottish painter in the year of her centenary.”*

The exhibition will take place in Reid Gallery at The Glasgow School of Art, and runs from 11th January until 8th February 2025, and at the Pier Arts Centre 1st March till 7th June 2025.

**Reid Gallery Opening Hours:**

Mon – Sat: 10am to 4.30pm

Sun: Closed

Free admission

[GSA Exhibitions website](#)

**The Pier Arts Centre Opening Hours:**

Tue – Sat: 10.30am to 5pm

Sun – Mon: Closed

Free admission

[Pier Arts Centre website](#)

High resolution images available on request, please select from the exhibition images [HERE](#).

ENDS

For all media enquiries please contact:

Alan Miller | Press Officer | The Glasgow School of Art

e: [al.miller@gsa.ac.uk](mailto:al.miller@gsa.ac.uk)

t: 07970931537

### **Notes to editors:**

**Bet Low RSA RSW RGI D.Lit.** was born in Gourrock in 1924.

She attended Glasgow School of Art (1942-45), during the period of the Second World War, gaining a diploma in Drawing and Painting. In 1945, Low undertook a three-month diploma course at Patrick Allan-Fraser School of Art, Hospitalfield, Arbroath. Low attended teacher training at Glasgow's Jordanhill Training College in 1945. However, she did not wish to teach and after three months, left the course and become involved in Glasgow Unity Theatre. She helped paint set scenery, did occasional set design and assisted with publicity.

In 1946 she joined the Clyde Group of Writers and Artists, going on to be part of their 'Art and Peace Festival and Exhibition' in McLellan Galleries, Glasgow. In 1956, with her husband Tom Macdonald and others, she co-organised a series of open-air exhibitions on the railings of Glasgow's Botanic Gardens. She joined the Glasgow Group Society in the mid-1960s, taking part in many of its exhibitions. In 1963 she co-founded and was one of the directors of the New Charing Cross Gallery in Glasgow (1963-1968). Low was elected a Professional Member of the Society of Scottish Artists in 1964 and was an invited Professional Member of the Scottish Society of Women Artists.

Whilst Glasgow was to remain home, in 1967 Low and Macdonald bought a small cottage in Lyness, Hoy (Orkney). This sustained relationship with place had a great impact on her practice. Low had several solo shows through Cyril Gerber Fine Art, including 'The Forties, Glasgow People and Places: Drawings and Paintings, Tom Macdonald & Bet Low' (1984). In 1985 she had a significant retrospective, selected by Cordelia Oliver, at the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, which toured Scotland to Dumfries, Perth and the Pier Arts Centre, Orkney. Her work was acquired for both public and private collections in her lifetime. Low was elected a Royal Scottish Academician in 1988, and in 1999 was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from Glasgow University. Bet Low died at the age of 82 in Glasgow.

### **The Glasgow School of Art (GSA)**

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) is internationally recognised as one of Europe's leading independent university-level institutions for education and research in the visual creative disciplines. Our studio-based, specialist, practice-led teaching, learning and research draw talented individuals with a shared passion for visual culture and creative production from all over the world.

Originally founded in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design, the School's history can be traced back to 1753 and the establishment of the Foulis Academy delivering a European-style art education. Today, the GSA is an international community of over 3500 students and staff and 22,000 alumni across architecture, design, fine art and innovation and technology in our campuses in Glasgow and Altyre (in the Scottish Highlands).

## **The Pier Arts Centre**

Pier Arts Centre receives Regular Funding from Creative Scotland. This supports the organisation to play an important role within the visual arts in Orkney, hosting a programme of local, national and international exhibitions and events, providing more people with the opportunity to engage with art of the highest quality. The Pier Arts Centre's entire collection is a Recognised Collection of National Significance to Scotland.

## **Bet Low Trust**

Bet Low herself encouraged many artists and writers over the years. Her biggest gift was to set up the Bet Low Trust to assist artists in drawing and painting. Since 2012, her trust has given 67 grants and a total of over £100,000.

## **Garfield Weston Foundation**

Established in 1958, the Garfield Weston Foundation is a family-founded grant-maker that gives money to support a wide variety of charities across the UK. The Foundation's funding comes from an endowment of shares in the Weston family business – a successful model that still exists today. The Weston family has a consistent aim. The more successful the family businesses, the more money the Foundation can donate.

Each year the Foundation gives away its income and donations have continued to grow. Since it was established, it has donated over £1.5 billion, of which over half has been given away in the past ten years. In the most recent financial year the Foundation gave away over £100 million to nearly 1,800 charities across the UK.

## **About Art Fund**

Art Fund is the UK's independent charity for art, helping museums and people to share in great art and culture for 120 years. Art Fund raises millions of pounds every year to help the UK's museums, galleries and historic houses. The charity funds art, enabling the UK's museums to buy and share exciting works, connect with their communities, and inspire the next generation. It builds audiences with its National Art Pass opening doors to great culture; and it amplifies the museum sector through the world's largest museum prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year, and creative events that bring the UK's museums together. Art Fund is people-powered by 135,000 members who buy a National Art Pass, and the donors, trusts and foundations who support the charity.

The National Art Pass provides free or discounted entry to over 400 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and Art Quarterly magazine.

[www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org)