



University of
St Andrews

Significant African art works rediscovered in rural schools

An overlooked collection of modern African art in schools in Argyll and Bute has been rediscovered by academics at the University of St Andrews. The collection, which belongs to Argyll and Bute Council will go on public display with new attributions and contextual information.

The paintings, prints and drawings, purchased from Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa, were acquired for the Argyll Collection, a public art initiative founded by writer Naomi Mitchison and Art Advisor Jim Tyre in the 1960s for the young people of Argyll and Bute.

In the years since they were purchased, the historical significance of these works had been overlooked. Many of them were misattributed and their stories untold.

New research reveals that they are by some of the continent's most notable modernist artists; together they provide a range of insights into the interests and concerns that pervaded the era of independence.

Dr Kate Cowcher, of the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews who worked with Madeleine Conn, Cultural Coordinator for Argyll and Bute, on the study, said: "The Argyll Collection recently gained recognition as an important public collection of Scottish art, but its African additions needed further research.

"It has been remarkable to uncover their histories. To have the opportunity to bring these artworks together and share their stories with those living in the area, as well as further afield is a privilege."

'Dar to Dunoon: Modern African Art from the Argyll Collection' will exhibit twelve works of modern art from East and Southern Africa at Dunoon Burgh Hall and opens on 21 May 2021.

The collection has been the subject of a partnership with the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews, led by Dr Kate Cowcher. As a result of the research project, ten out of twelve works can now be confidently attributed to major modernist artists, including Tanzania's Samuel Ntiro, Uganda's Jak Katarikawe, Zambia's Henry Tayali and South Africa's Lucky Sibya.

'Dar to Dunoon' will exhibit the works of these artists, along with their biographies and related contextual material.

Mitchison acquired these works primarily for use in schools, where she hoped that children in Scotland's rural communities could study and enjoy them.

Yvonne McNeilly, Argyll and Bute Council's Policy Lead for Education, said: "We are very lucky to have such a wide and varied art collection in our schools, and our partnership with St Andrews has enabled us to rediscover the rich histories of the Modern African Art collection. This has been central

to new creative education projects that pupils have been working on with artists to explore the collection.”

The art that Mitchison purchased, from both professionally trained and self-taught artists, was diverse and complex. Several pieces came from the prestigious Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts at what is now Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

The title of the exhibition derives from an archival find: a letter sent from Dar es Salaam to Dunoon in 1967 by the artist and diplomat, Samuel Ntiro, who soon became Tanzania’s Commissioner of Culture. Mitchison had purchased Ntiro’s ‘Chopping Wood’ in Dar in 1967, and the artist personally packaged and sent it to Scotland, along with a letter and a photograph of himself.

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Notes to editors

DAR TO DUNOON: MODERN AFRICAN ART FROM THE ARGYLL COLLECTION

Dunoon Burgh Hall
21 May – 13 June 2021
www.dartodunoon.com

Dr Kate Cowcher is available for interview, please contact the press office in the first instance.

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