

One of John Bellany's 'key works' acquired by the Scottish Maritime Museum for permanent display

28 September 2018

After remaining in private ownership for 55 years, one of the earliest and most significant paintings by internationally acclaimed artist the late John Bellany CBE, will go on permanent public display as part of the Scottish Maritime Museum's new national art collection

Image



The Boat Builders' by John Bellany (1942-2013)

Helen Bellany, the artist's partner and muse, unveiled 'The Boat Builders' at the painting's new home at the Scottish Maritime Museum on the Harbourside in Irvine calling it "one of the key works of his career" and a symbol of their life-long journey together.

The Scottish Maritime Museum acquired, 'The Boat Builders' by John Bellany (1942-2013) with £95,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), £90,000 from the Art Fund and £15,000 from the National Fund for Acquisitions.

Whilst Bellany's works have been exhibited across the world and purchased by collectors including Sean Connery and David Bowie, 'The Boat Builders' has rarely been seen in public remaining, until now, in the ownership of John Bellany and, more lately, the Estate of John Bellany.

The painting was most recently displayed in the National Galleries of Scotland 2012, John Bellany Retrospective.

One of the most influential Scottish painters since the war, Bellany sailed against the tide of realism and abstraction from the start of his career in the 1960s.

Working prolifically to re-establish a native, figurative art, he drew on his life growing up in a family of fishermen and boatbuilders in Port Seton, near Edinburgh, and the sea was a familiar subject of his work.

Bellany painted 'The Boat Builders' in 1962 whilst attending Edinburgh College of Art, where he met Helen, an artist in her own right.

Commanding over 3 metres by 5 metres, the huge oil on board painting captures construction of a seine netter inscribed with the name 'Good Hope' and the word 'BELLANY' at the stern.

Unveiling the painting and recalling stories from her new memoir 'The Restless Wave' as part of Tidelines Book Festival, Helen described the moment when a 'trembling' Bellany first showed her the painting. "He knew...that it was a triumph" and what he would have called "an absolute beezer!"

Only a few weeks into their romance, which was to see them marry twice and bear three children together, they had already made a pact to spend the rest of their lives together. 'The Boat Builders' reflected both the sea voyages of Bellany's ancestors and the start of their own life-long journey 'taking on the world' together.

'The Boat Builders' will go on show as part of the Scottish Maritime Museum's current *Maritime Perspectives : Collecting Art of a Seafaring Nation* exhibition. The exhibition is the first full showing of the Museum's new national art collection which features works by other nationally and internationally renowned artists such as FCB Cadell, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Muirhead Bone and Kate Downie.

After the exhibition closes on Sunday 21 October, 'The Boat Builders' will remain on view until the end of March. It will then undergo conservation work before returning to permanent display.

Unveiling 'The Boat Builders', David Mann, Director of the Scottish Maritime Museum, said: "Since 2015 when we embarked on our ambitious, three year art acquisition project, *SMMart: Enriching the Imagery of Scotland's Maritime Heritage*, it has been our fervent hope to collect a significant work by

internationally acclaimed artist John Bellany as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of our new national art collection.

“We are therefore absolutely thrilled to welcome ‘The Boat Builders’ to a new home on public display at the Scottish Maritime Museum. As well as bringing international significance to the art collection, this wonderful painting enriches the national maritime heritage collection, which includes some of the country’s most beautiful and most historic vessels, and will bring, I am sure, a lot of enjoyment to many, many visitors.

“Also importantly, ‘The Boat Builders’ stands as a very fitting tribute to all shipbuilders, boat builders and maritime industrial workers who made Scotland a great maritime and industrial nation right through to the talented young trainees at our Scottish Boat Building School here at the museum.

“We are very grateful to NHMF for supporting the acquisition of ‘The Boat Builders’ and to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Art Fund and National Fund for Acquisitions for both this highly significant purchase and the creation of our stunning and nationally important collection as a whole.”

Helen Bellany, added: “‘The Boat Builders’ is one of John’s most important works of art. It was completed during his third year at Edinburgh College of Art when he was twenty one years of age. It is astonishing to think that this truly remarkable painting is a student work, ambitious not only in its scale and composition but also a fully realised and accomplished vision of the world he was born into and which remained at the core of his life’s work. It is one of the key works of his career. One that he termed ‘an absolute beezer’. John would have been well pleased, if he had known, that ‘The Good Hope’ had finally tied up in the sheltering harbour of the great Scottish Maritime Museum in Irvine. The perfect home.”

Fiona Greer, Curator of Art at the Scottish Maritime Museum, said: “Bellany and his close friend Alexander (Sandy) Moffat were inspired by social realism and the desire to present a modern Scotland whilst embracing the nation’s heritage. ‘The Boat Builders’ is an exciting and important example.

“The style of Bellany’s work went on to change dramatically over his lifetime as can be seen to some degree comparing ‘The Boat Builders’ with a smaller work also acquired for our collection, ‘The Dawn Pearl in Port Seton Harbour’ (2006). We are excited to be able to display ‘The Boat Builders’ here at the Museum alongside ‘The Dawn Pearl’ and engage with our visitors around Bellany’s

evolving style as well as the large scale changes in the style of, and attitudes towards, Scottish art during the sixties.”

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of NHMF, said: “John Bellany is one of the most prolific and acclaimed Scottish artists of his generation. And with this exquisite painting, considered amongst his very best work, he has created a vibrant tribute to Scotland’s illustrious ship and boat building heritage. We, at the National Heritage Memorial Fund felt it important that it should be on permanent display at the Scottish Maritime Museum for everyone to enjoy.”

Stephen Deuchar, Director of Art Fund, said: “We are delighted to support the acquisition of this important painting by John Bellany, which promises to be a highlight of the museum's thriving collection of Scotland's maritime heritage. It will give visitors from Scotland and beyond the opportunity to see and enjoy one of the country’s most celebrated artists, as well as firmly establishing the international significance of the museum as a leading collector of works by Scottish artists.”

Dr Hazel Williamson, National Fund for Acquisitions Manager, said: “It is wonderful to see works collected with the support of the National Fund for Acquisitions, particularly John Bellany’s Boat Builders, going on display for people to see in *Maritime Perspectives : Collecting Art of a Seafaring Nation*.”

The Scottish Maritime Museum’s new art collection was created to enrich and enhance the nationally recognised collection of maritime heritage at the Scottish Maritime Museum. The art collection has been made possible by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Collecting Cultures programme, with further support from Art Fund and the National Fund for Acquisitions.

The collection features over 80 artworks capturing Scotland’s coastline in all its grit and glory. Exploiting a wide range of mediums from oil painting, watercolour, sketching and photography through to sculpture and mixed media, works feature scenes of shipbuilding, fishing, island communities, travel ‘doon the watter’ through to life on North Sea oil platforms and war and loss at sea.

As part of a new Art Fund RA250 programme celebrating works by Royal Academician artists, the exhibition also features a display of recently acquired works by William Lionel Wyllie RA including ‘The Grand Fleet in the Firth of Forth’ after the Armistice.

Maritime Perspectives : Collecting Art of a Seafaring Nation runs at the Scottish Maritime Museum on the Harbourside in Irvine, Ayrshire, until 21 October. Entry

to the exhibition is included within the standard Museum admission.

For more information on the Scottish Maritime Museum and Maritime Perspectives: Collecting Art of a Seafaring Nation exhibition and events, visit www.scottishmaritimemuseum.org

Notes to editors

Scottish Maritime Museum, Irvine and Dumbarton

- Established in 1983, the Scottish Maritime Museum is recognised as the principal resource for material relating to Scottish Maritime history, in particular shipbuilding and marine engineering.
- The Scottish Maritime Museum is based on the Harbourside in Irvine, North Ayrshire, and Dumbarton and buildings and sites occupied are part of the collection themselves: The Scottish Maritime Museum in Irvine is housed within the Linthouse, the A listed former Engine Shop of Alexander Stephen and Sons which was built in 1872 and salvaged and relocated from their derelict Linthouse shipyard in Govan during 1991. The Scottish Maritime Museum in Dumbarton is located on the site of the former innovative William Denny Shipyard and features the world's first commercial ship model experiment tank, the Denny Ship Model Experiment Tank.

SMMart: Enriching the Imagery of Scotland's Maritime Heritage

- The SMMart programme is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through Collecting Cultures
- The SMMart enables the Scottish Maritime Museum to discover, acquire and present artworks, which help bring the Museum's amazing maritime collection to life. Equally, it is enabling the Museum to create a visual art collection, which is significant in its own right and can attract visitors from across Scotland.
- The Museum is collecting art over ten years in age across a wide range of mediums including oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, sketches, photography, posters, sculpture, textiles, historical travel posters and mixed media and installation work. The focus is on original work and, in the case of historical travel posters, rare designs with limited print runs. Subjects include Scottish shipbuilding and engineering scenes, coastal scenes and works connected to the River Clyde, maritime workers and people involved with the sea, early shipping and depictions of Scottish built vessels before photography was standard.

- The Museum is also keen to attract potential donors gifting or loaning artworks appropriate to a national collection.
- The Museum is working closely with other UK museums, which collect maritime art.

About the National Heritage Memorial Fund

- The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our national heritage, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK. It will receive £5 million of Government grant in aid in 2018/19 www.nhmf.org.uk
- Follow us on Instagram: @NationalHeritageMemorialFund
#MemorialFinerThanStone

Heritage Lottery Fund Collecting Cultures Programme

- The Heritage Lottery Fund Collecting Cultures Programme enables museums, libraries and archives to strengthen and enliven their core collections through strategic purchase.
- Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #HLFsupported.

Art Fund

- Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 139,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by Tate St Ives in 2018) and a range of digital platforms.
- Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org

National Fund for Acquisitions

- The National Fund for Acquisitions, administered with Scottish Government funding by National Museums Scotland, contributes towards the acquisition of objects for the collections of museums, galleries, libraries and archives throughout Scotland. During financial year 2017/18, the NFA made 48 payments totalling £129,085 to 29 organisations, supporting acquisitions with a total purchase value of nearly £367,740.
- Find out more about the work of the National Fund for Acquisitions on our webpage:

[National Fund for Acquisitions](#)