PRESS RELEASE

"THE MOST SIGNIFICANT JOAN EARDLEY PAINTING EVER TO APPEAR AT AUCTION" TO BE SOLD NEXT MONTH



Considered to be one of the most important works by Joan Eardley ever to come to auction, Glasgow Back Street with Children Playing,1960, will be sold by Lyon & Turnbull in Edinburgh and live online on Thursday 3 December. Image by Stewart Attwood

An exceptionally important example of one of Joan Eardley's monumental paintings of Glasgow street children is to be sold at auction at Lyon & Turnbull's prestigious Scottish Paintings & Sculpture auction**.**

Glasgow Back Street with Children Playing, 1960 was sold to the current owner's mother for £350 in 1964.

On Thursday 3 December, it will go under the hammer at a starting estimate of **between £100,000 and £150,000,** is regarded by Lyon & Turnbull art specialist. Alice Strang, as 'the most significant work by Joan Eardley ever to appear at auction'.

The painting has only been seen in public once – at a major retrospective of Eardley's work at the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh 2007/2008 – after being acquired by the owner's mother in 1964. Her husband was Eardley's godfather and the two families were close.

Joan Eardley was born in Sussex in 1921 and moved to Glasgow in 1939, when she was eighteen years old. She trained at Glasgow School of Art and Hospitalfield College of Art, Arbroath in the late 1940s.

Considered one of Scotland's most important and revered artists of the twentieth century, her reputation is based on her portrayal of the Townhead district of Glasgow – in particular of its children – and of Catterline, a fishing village on the Scottish north-east coast. Joan Eardley died aged 42 in 1963.

The work was acquired by the current owner's mother from the touring memorial exhibition of Eardley's work which began at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow in 1964. It was loaned by the artist's family to be shown at the exhibition.

This exhibition was held six months after Eardley's death from cancer in August 1963. The exhibition then moved on from Glasgow to the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh.

During her lifetime, Joan Eardley visited the current owner's family home in England on various occasions. The painting's owner recalls of the artist:

"She [Eardley] was powerful looking, not so much feminine as masculine and wore dark corduroy trousers. She was ever-so friendly. There was such a contrast between her being such a great friend and so determined about her work. She had great empathy with children.

"After her death, I stayed with Eardley's mother in Glasgow several times. My bedroom there was full of Joan's little sketches. When I became an architect I designed a house for my parents and the entrance hall was conceived around Glasgow Back Street with Children Playing, so that it was the first thing you saw when you came into the front door. I have known the painting for over sixty years and it has hung above my sofa for a quarter of a century."

Alice Strang, Senior Fine Art Specialist with Lyon & Turnbull, adds:

"Glasgow Back Street with Children Playing is painted on a monumental scale, measuring 99.5cm by 177 cm, and is a triumphant bringing together of the artist's deep connection and intimate knowledge of the Glasgow city centre neighbourhood of Townhead, its vibrant community of young residents and their life upon its streets.

"A wonderful scene plays out before the viewer's eyes, as children of various ages engage in games, squabbles and other activities and intrigues. Some draw with chalk on the walls of the surrounding buildings, having marked out hopscotch on the pavement, others observe their peers or are absorbed in reading, while older siblings watch over younger ones.

"There is so much life, colour and youthful exuberance in the work, realised via Eardley's extraordinarily varied technique. The painting is also an important piece of social history, capturing a Glasgow which has since been lost to demolition.

"From 1952, Eardley had a studio at 204 St James Road in Townhead, which she was to maintain until her untimely death in 1963. She became a familiar sight in Townhead's back streets, taking photographs and making sketches which she worked up into paintings in her studio. She established a happy rapport with the local children, whom she depicted in an unsentimental yet affectionate way.

"I am lucky enough to have known and admired Joan Eardley's Glasgow's Back Street with Children Playing for years and every time I had the opportunity to see it was thrilling.

"Lyon & Turnbull is honoured to now present it, one of the most important works she ever painted, to the market. Quite simply it can be considered a triumphant high point of her depictions of Townhead and its children, in a painting remarkable for its humanity and creativity."

ENDS

Auction Details

Scottish Paintings & Sculpture
03 December 2026 at 2pm

Lyon & Turnbull, 33 Broughton Place, Edinburgh, EH 13RR

Images

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Operating since 1826, Lyon & Turnbull is a premier fine art and antiques auction house, with venues in London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. The company has one of the largest teams of specialists in the UK, offering services nationwide.

Hosting over 50 specialist auctions per year across their locations, there is always something to see at Lyon & Turnbull—from jewellery and watches to fine furniture; traditional British and European art to Modern & Contemporary stars; European decorative arts and design to fine Asian art from China and Japan. www.lyonandturnbull.com