

Elizabeth Blackadder



Elizabeth Blackadder RSA RA (1931-2021)

Quiet Observations

Landscapes and Interiors 1955 to 1975

Jenna Burlingham Gallery

All works come directly from the Blackadder Houston Bequest  
which is managed by the Royal Scottish Academy



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It's easy to think we know Elizabeth Blackadder's art. Those beloved flowers and cats, particularly from her later years, subjects she was well aware were not fashionable amid a sea of abstraction. "Flowers and cats are clearly a very dangerous area," Blackadder told *The Times* in 1980. "But when you look at painters you really admire, like Bonnard and Gwen John, you see they don't need to be light-weight".

And that is the thing about Blackadder—her subject matter may have been quotidian, but it was never trivial. What mattered to Blackadder was the arrangement of forms within space, not so different to her abstractionist contemporaries. Immensely industrious, she was also modestly straight-talking, refusing to give florid explanations of her work. "I think I'm just trying to find out about things," Blackadder told *The Times*. "If it does communicate something to someone afterwards, it's very good...it's just the thing and yourself, and what comes out".

This catalogue, which contains not a single feline and very few flowers, brings to the fore the lesser known, formative works of a young Blackadder, made between her mid-20s and mid-40s. With landscapes and interiors from 1955 to 1975, it takes us from those early Italian landscapes made upon leaving the Edinburgh College of Art through to the spare subtlety of her still lifes from the early 1970s.

First, the landscapes. We start with dark wintry Tuscan hills, painted *en plein air* in gouache and watercolour during Blackadder's nine-month sojourn in Italy from 1955-56, made possible by winning the Carnegie Travelling Scholarship and Andrew Grant Postgraduate Scholarship. Based in Florence, Blackadder would take a bus out into the countryside to paint. "She would work constantly, out of doors during the day, back in the pensione at night," wrote Duncan Macmillan in his monograph, *The Art of Elizabeth Blackadder*. While we may have romantic ideals of painting trips to Tuscany, the reality of being a young woman, painting outside and alone, through a bitter winter in post-war Italy would have been altogether harsher. Indeed, we can almost feel the chill on her fingertips in the group of inky Tuscan landscapes.



There is a rawness in these early works that might surprise those who only know Blackadder through her restrained later still lifes. When reviewing Blackadder's 1982 solo show at London's Royal Academy of Arts for *The Guardian*, Waldemar Januszczak seemed surprised by the "toughness" of the young Blackadder, mentioning a drawing of the Duomo in Florence which "sees her rubbing out her lines just as powerfully as she draws them." Such raw vigour can be seen in *Piazza del Popolo, Rome* and *The Duomo, Pistoia*, both 1955.

Throughout this catalogue is a progressive lightening, in palette and in touch. Macmillan writes that Blackadder's husband, the painter John Houston, observed that a trip to the Mediterranean in the summer of 1964 "lightened Elizabeth's palette and so too the mood in her work." That is palpable here, in the acid lime greens of *Glen Fyne, Argyll*, 1970, for instance, and the still lifes thereafter.

The latter part of the catalogue charts the maturity of her still lifes from the mid-1960s to 70s. Macmillan writes that the still lifes of the 60s were the first major group of paintings Blackadder produced, with personal objects like the coffee pot and mill appearing time and again. But it is the space between these objects that becomes increasingly important, as does the picture plane itself. The table starts to be tilted towards us, as in *Still Life with Avocado*, 1972, a flattened, skewed perspective that nods to Blackadder's admiration of Morandi and Bonnard.

Blackadder seems to gain confidence in doing more with less, her compositions becoming increasingly refined and pared back to the essentials. She seems to become more instinctive—as Blackadder once said of her still lifes: "I like them to be flexible; I don't plan. If I'm struck by the unusual combination of shape or colour of two objects that happen to be together, I just paint that and then that's where the next thing goes—and so on. It just follows."

Anna Brady

Editor at Large for the Art Market at *The Art Newspaper*



1 **Italian Landscape, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 48 × 62.5 cm (18 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 24 $\frac{3}{8}$  in)



2 **Landscape near Florence, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 49 × 75 cm (19 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  in)



3 **Wooded Landscape, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 51.5 × 69 cm (20¼ × 27½ in)



4 **Landscape with White House, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 47.5 × 65.5 cm (18¾ × 25¾ in)



5 **White House in the Hills**, circa 1955-56 signed; gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper 48 × 66.5 cm (18¾ × 26½ in)



6 **Winter Fields**, circa 1955-56 signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 50.5 × 75 cm (19¾ × 29½ in)

7

**Piazza del Popolo, Rome, circa 1955-56**

signed

oil on board

48 × 92 cm (18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in)

**Exhibitions**

Edinburgh, Fruitmarket Gallery, The Scottish Arts Council, 'Elizabeth Blackadder Retrospective Exhibition',  
11th August - 1st September 1981, with tour, cat. no.5



8

**The Duomo, Pistoia, circa 1955-56**

signed

oil on board

71 × 91 cm (28 × 35½ in)





9 **River through the Hills, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 56 × 76.5 cm (22 × 30½ in)



10 **Hills near Florence, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 56 × 75 cm (22 × 29½ in)



**11 Tuscan Landscape, circa 1955** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 49 × 66.5 cm (19¼ × 26½ in)



**12 Winter Hillside, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache, watercolour and pastel on paper 36.5 × 53.5 cm (14½ × 21 in)



**13 Esterel, France, circa 1966** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper mounted on card 70 × 104.5 cm (27½ × 41½ in)



**14 Town in the Hills, circa 1955-56** signed; gouache and watercolour on paper 47.5 × 66.5 cm (18½ × 26½ in)

15

**Landscape, Western Isles, 1966**

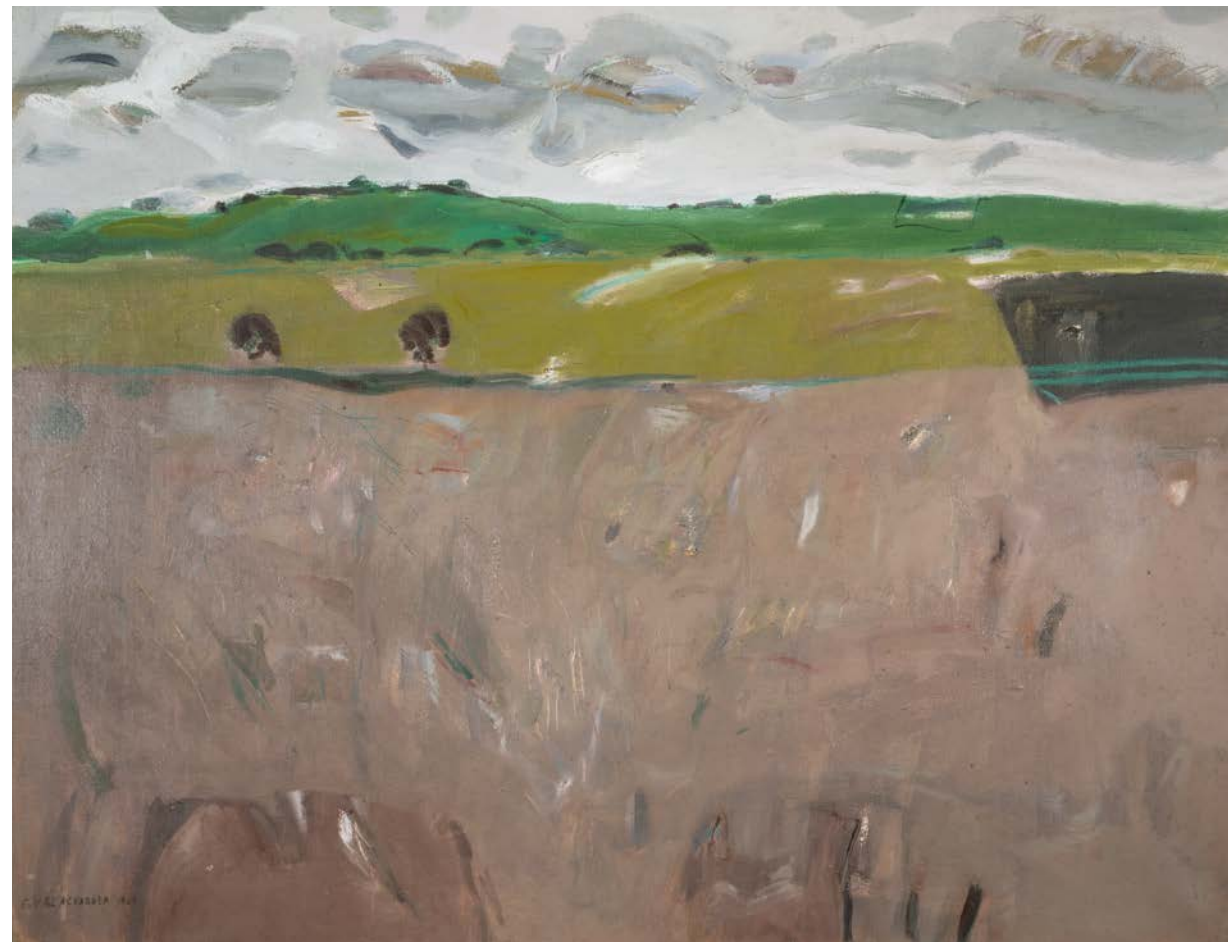
signed and dated  
signed again on the reverse  
oil on canvas  
76 × 102 cm (29 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 40 $\frac{1}{8}$  in)



16

**Borders Landscape, 1967**

signed and dated  
oil on canvas  
71 × 91 cm (28 × 35½ in)





**17 Glen Fyne, Argyll, 1970** signed and dated; gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper mounted on card 30 × 42 cm (11¾ × 16½ in)

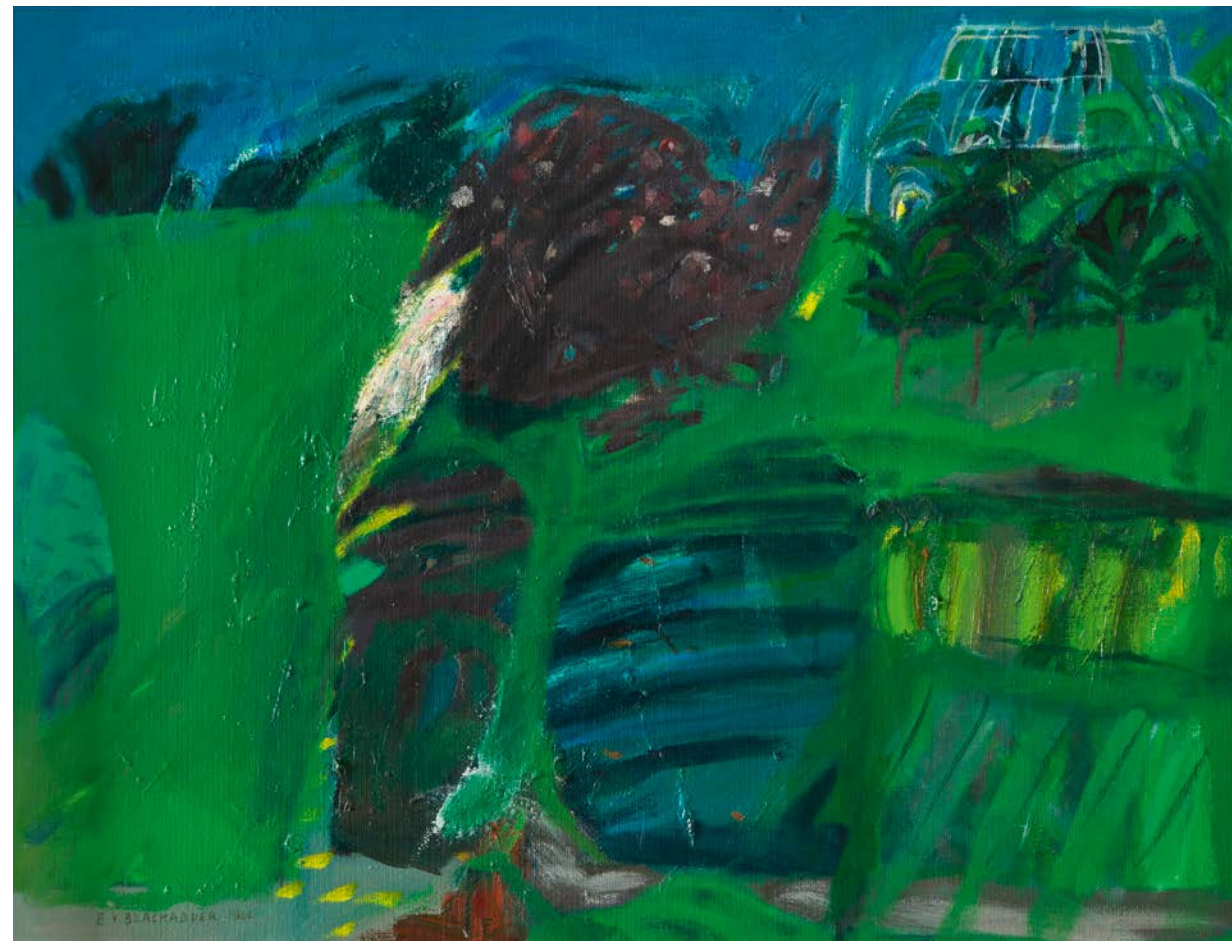


**18 Garden under Snow, 1966** signed and dated; gouache and watercolour on paper mounted on card 70 × 103 cm (27½ × 40½ in)

19

**Botanical Gardens, 1966**

signed and dated  
oil on canvas  
71 × 91 cm (28 × 35½ in)



20

**Still Life with Sea Urchin, 1963**

signed and dated  
titled on the reverse  
oil on canvas  
86 × 112 cm (33<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 44<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)



21

**Red Table with Coffee Pot, 1963**

signed and dated  
oil on canvas  
71 × 91.5 cm (28 × 36 in)



22

**Still Life with Turkish Coffee Mill, 1964**

signed

oil on canvas

61 × 76 cm (24 × 29⅞ in)

**Exhibitions**

Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, 'Elizabeth Blackadder',  
2nd July 2011 - 2nd January 2012, cat. no.29, illustrated

**Literature**

Duncan Macmillan, 'The Art of Elizabeth Blackadder', London,  
Lund Humphries, 2023, p.33, illustrated



23

**White Studio Table, 1966**  
signed and dated  
titled on the reverse  
oil on canvas  
102 × 127 cm (40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 50 in)



24

**Dark Still Life with Tulips, 1965**  
oil on canvas  
102 × 126.5 cm (40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 49 $\frac{3}{4}$  in)



25

**Still Life with Avocado, 1972**

signed and dated

watercolour and pencil on paper mounted on card  
69.5 × 102.5 cm (27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in)



26

**Still Life with Boxes, circa 1970**

signed and titled on the reverse

oil on canvas

105 × 130 cm (41 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 51 $\frac{1}{8}$  in)



27

**Still Life with Shells, 1971**

signed and dated  
signed again and titled on the reverse  
oil on canvas  
122 × 183 cm (48 × 72 in)

**Exhibitions**

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 'Elizabeth Blackadder', 8th April - 2nd December 1989, with tour, cat. no.4, illustrated  
Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, 'Elizabeth Blackadder', 2nd July 2011 - 2nd January 2012, cat. no.39, illustrated



28

**Still Life with Bead Bracelet, 1974**

signed and dated  
oil on canvas

102 × 127 cm (40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 50 in)



29

**Still Life Brown and White, circa 1975**

signed

signed again, inscribed and titled on the reverse

oil on canvas

153 × 153 cm (60 × 60 in)

**Exhibitions**

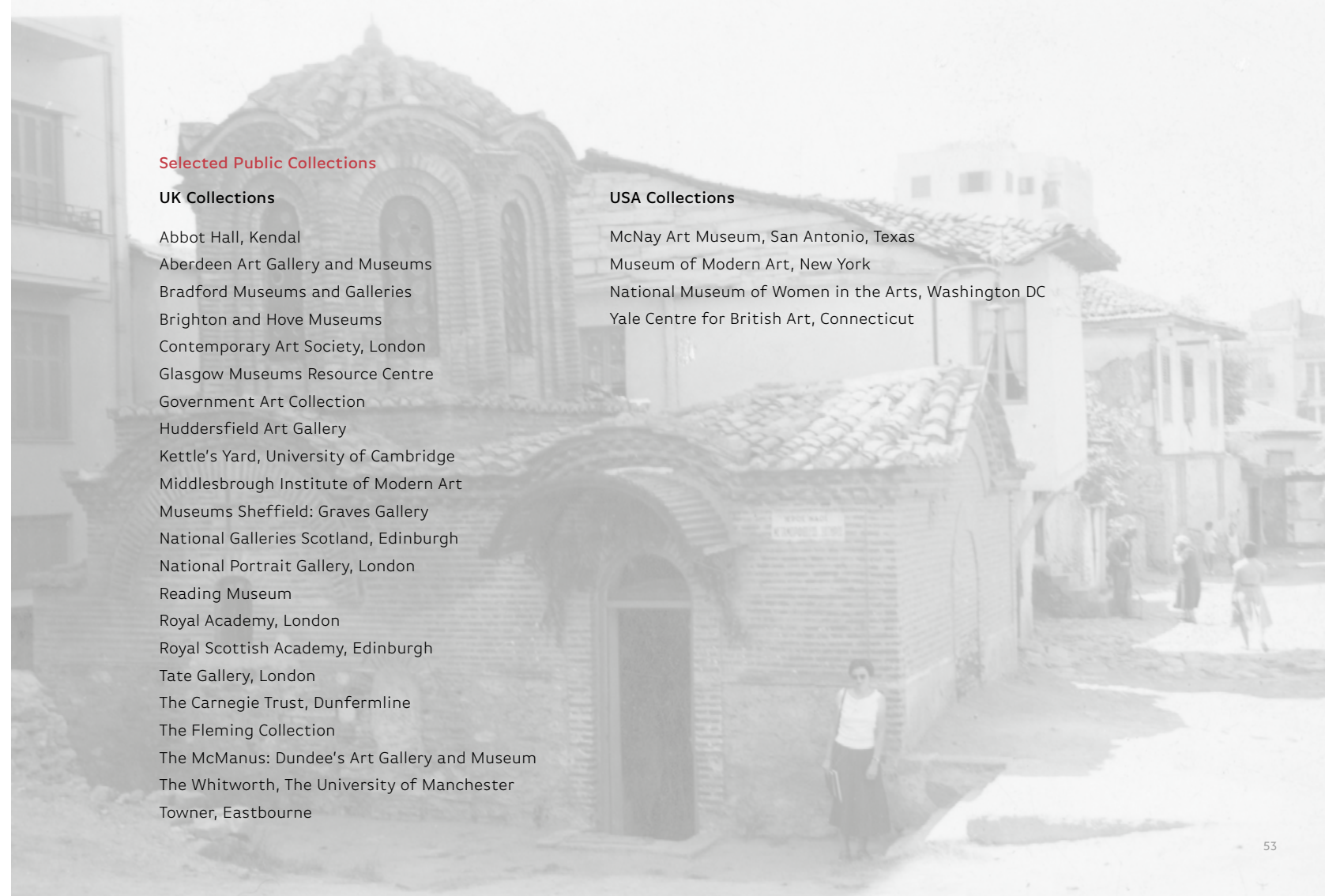
Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 'Elizabeth Blackadder', 8th April - 2nd December 1989, with tour, cat. no.8



## Biography

- 1931** Born in Falkirk, Scotland
- 1949-54** Studied Fine Art with the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh College of Art
- 1954** Awarded Carnegie travelling scholarship by the Royal Scottish Academy  
Awarded Andrew Grant post-graduate scholarship by Edinburgh College of Art
- 1954-55** Postgraduate student at Edinburgh College of Art
- 1955-56** Awarded the Andrew Grant travelling scholarship  
Travelled in Italy from July 1955 till the following spring (most watercolours in this exhibition were executed at this time)
- 1956** Married John Houston  
Appointed part-time teacher at Edinburgh College of Art  
Elected member of the Scottish Society of Arts, Edinburgh  
Selected for '8 Young Contemporaries', Gimpel Fils Gallery, London
- 1959** First solo exhibition at 57 Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1960** First exhibition at Aitken Dott, later The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh (continued to exhibit regularly until 2013)
- 1961** Elected Member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour, Glasgow  
Lithograph commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Included in 'Contemporary Scottish Painting', Toronto, Canada
- 1962** Awarded the Guthrie Award by the Royal Scottish Academy  
Appointed full-time at Edinburgh College of Art (teaching until 1986)
- 1963** Elected Associate of the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh  
Included in '20th Century Scottish Painting', Abbot Hall, Kendal
- 1963-64** Included in '14 Scottish Painters', Scottish Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Commonwealth Institute, London, with tour
- 1965** First solo exhibition at Mercury Gallery, London (continued to exhibit regularly until 1998)
- 1968** Included in 'Three Centuries of Scottish Painting', National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1969** Travelled to the United States with John Houston
- 1970** Solo exhibition of watercolours, Vaccarino Gallery, Florence
- 1971** Elected Associate of Royal Academy, London
- 1972** Elected Academician of the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
- 1975** Included in 'Edinburgh Ten 30', Scottish Arts Council exhibition at the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art, Conwy, with tour
- 1976** Elected Academician of the Royal Academy, London  
Included in the Royal Scottish Academy's 150th anniversary exhibition
- 1977** Solo exhibition at Middlesbrough Art Gallery and Museums, with tour  
Included in 'British Painting, 1952-77', Royal Academy, London
- 1981** Major retrospective exhibition organised by the Scottish Arts Council at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, with tour
- 1982** Awarded OBE  
Included in 'Six Scottish Painters', Graham Gallery, New York
- 1983** Received Pimm's Award, Royal Academy  
Solo exhibition at the Lillian Heidenberg Gallery, New York (and again in 1986)
- 1984** Elected Member of the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts
- 1985** Elected Honorary Member of the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol
- 1986** Elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland
- 1989** Awarded Honorary Doctorate from Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh  
Major retrospective exhibition, organised by the Welsh Arts Council at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, with tour  
Included in 'Scottish Art Since 1900', Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh and Barbican Art Gallery, London

- 1990** Awarded an Honorary Doctorate, University of Edinburgh  
Solo exhibition at Abbot Hall, Kendal
- 1992** Elected Honorary Member of the Royal Watercolour Society, London
- 1994** Elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh  
Elected Honorary Member of the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers, London
- 1997** Awarded Honorary Doctorate, from University of Aberdeen
- 1998** Awarded Honorary Doctorate, from University of Strathclyde  
Included in 'Art from Scotland', Forbs Galleries, New York
- 1999** Solo exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
- 2000** Major retrospective exhibition at Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh
- 2001** Appointed Her Majesty the Queen's Painter and Limner in Scotland (held until 2021)  
Awarded Honorary Doctorate, from University of Glasgow  
Included in 'Mirror Mirror – Self Portraits by Women', National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2002** Awarded Honorary Doctorate, from University of Stirling
- 2003** Appointed DBE
- 2004** Awarded Honorary Fellowship, from Edinburgh College of Art
- 2011** Major retrospective for eightieth birthday at the National Galleries of Scotland with tour
- 2019** Retrospective exhibition, The Arc, Winchester and Willis Museum, Basingstoke
- 2021** Died in Edinburgh on 23 August



### Selected Public Collections

#### UK Collections

Abbot Hall, Kendal  
 Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums  
 Bradford Museums and Galleries  
 Brighton and Hove Museums  
 Contemporary Art Society, London  
 Glasgow Museums Resource Centre  
 Government Art Collection  
 Huddersfield Art Gallery  
 Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge  
 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art  
 Museums Sheffield: Graves Gallery  
 National Galleries Scotland, Edinburgh  
 National Portrait Gallery, London  
 Reading Museum  
 Royal Academy, London  
 Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh  
 Tate Gallery, London  
 The Carnegie Trust, Dunfermline  
 The Fleming Collection  
 The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery and Museum  
 The Whitworth, The University of Manchester  
 Towner, Eastbourne

#### USA Collections

McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas  
 Museum of Modern Art, New York  
 National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC  
 Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut

# Jenna Burlingham Gallery

Hampshire

PAINTINGS PRINTS SCULPTURE CERAMICS

Jenna Burlingham Gallery was established in Kingsclere on the Hampshire/Berkshire border fifteen years ago. It has since become a destination for buyers and sellers of Modern British and Contemporary paintings, prints, sculpture and ceramics.

In 2021 we moved to Rope Yard, a former rope merchant's home and workshops, where we exhibit our extensive inventory in furnished interiors. This inventory ranges from entry level to museum quality works and our team is always on hand to give straightforward guidance to private and corporate collectors, galleries and institutions, art advisors and interior decorators.

All our works can be seen on the website or in the gallery, with on site viewings by arrangement throughout the UK with our weekly van service.

We also regularly exhibit at the London art fairs including the Decorative Fair in Battersea, the London Art Fair in Islington and the British Art Fair in Chelsea.



Works © the Royal Scottish Academy

Endpapers: The artist's studio, photographed by Andy Philipson

p. 2: The artist in her studio, photographed by John Houston, 1968

p. 53: The artist in Salonica, 1954

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Design by Graham Rees Design

Published by Jenna Burlingham Gallery 2026

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