

*Title:* Joan Eardley | Character

*Summary:* In this episode, we ask what we know of Joan Eardley's character.

*Duration:* 43:24

*Contributors:* Lachlan Goudie (painter and broadcaster), Anne Morrison-Hudson (ceramicist), Kirstie Meehan (archivist) and Leila Riszko (curator).

*Transcript*

00:00:11

*Lachlan Goudie*

Joan Eardley is one of Scotland's most popular and influential twentieth century artists. Her powerful and expressive paintings transformed her everyday surroundings, from Glasgow's streets to the rugged Kincardineshire coastline.

I'm painter and broadcaster Lachlan Goudie and in this three-part series to mark the artist's centenary year, I'll be joined by figures from the art world and beyond to try to better understand the character of this ground-breaking artist, a painter whose incredible body of work has endured long beyond her lifetime and continues to inspire new generations of artists.

In this episode I am joined by Joan's niece Anne Morrison-Hudson, curator Leila Riszko and archivist Kirstie Meehan from the Galleries to ask what we know of Joan Eardley's character.

Now Anne, when you got to know Joan Eardley, I am assuming she was an artist in her 30s, would that be correct, and where was she in her career at that time? Were you aware of her being successful as an artist?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Yes, I do remember going to one of the exhibition openings at the Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh, I think it was her first solo exhibition which would have been 1961. That was a very big occasion and even then, I sensed that she was not comfortable with such a big high-profile do with lots of people there, all the art world. I didn't know all of the people obviously, but one sensed it was very important, and I was there with my mother and my grandmother.

*Lachlan Goudie*

So was she quite a reserved person? When you see footage or hear interviews she sounds quite softly spoken.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Yes, she was. She was very quiet and didn't like the busy social events that the art world sometimes likes. She was much quieter and more preferred to be with her friends and the people who she was comfortable with.

But she was not happy in these big high-profile events like an opening. It was something she did because she knew she had to, but it was not something she particularly enjoyed at all.

00:02:20

*Lachlan Goudie*

What is intriguing about Joan is there almost seem to be two Joans. There is this apparently shy, reserved character and yet there is this other side to her, driven, intensely passionate, who expresses herself so furiously on canvas. Were you aware of that contrast in your aunt when you were young?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I don't think so because I just saw the quieter side of her. Although as soon as you became aware of her paintings which I really didn't do very much until after she had died, that's when we started to have far more paintings around the house, then you realised what wonderful, expressive works they are and the passion and the feeling that she put in to all her works.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Did she ever draw you or did you ever visit her studio in Glasgow?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

No, apparently my mother did ask but we were not the kind of children she really wanted to draw. She wanted much more character, and we were just two ordinary little middle-class children, myself and my older brother.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Did she interact with you? You get the impression when you see her sketching the family of kids in Glasgow, the Samsons, that she enjoyed being around those children. Was that true?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Oh yes. There was no problem about that and my brother being a bit older said he particularly felt that Joan talked to him more as an adult, as a person in his own right, rather than as a child. Perhaps I, being slightly younger, didn't quite appreciate that but he certainly did. I think that is quite interesting because if she talked to children in that manner, she was treating them if you like more as equals rather than children.

00:04:12

*Lachlan Goudie*

Could you tell us a little bit about how Joan ended up in Scotland? She was born in England so how was it that she found herself in Scotland?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

My family – it's very confusing – but basically the family is of Scottish origin but moved to London then back up to Glasgow. My grandmother was born in London but her mother, my great-grandmother, remarried and they moved back up, when her first husband had died, moved back up to Glasgow where he came from, but we are a part-Scottish family, so it's always been this up and down. And once my grandmother was here, she went to school in Glasgow and the First World War was on and that's when she met William Eardley who was on quiet duties after being injured during the war. He was still in the army and he was at the barracks in Maryhill and they met there. I gather there was some sort of family connection where they already knew him, but I am struggling trying to get that detail confirmed. But because he was born and raised in England they went back down when they were married and that is why Joan was born in England. But as I say we are part-Scottish, part-London.

*Lachlan Goudie*

But the story of that family move back to Scotland follows a traumatic incident. It was Joan Eardley's father who died by suicide when Joan was only eight, if I understand.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Yes that's correct.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Was this personal trauma do you think something quite formative in Joan's personality or her approach to canvas?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Well, she was not told about the fact that it was a suicide and not an accidental death as I believe they were told. Until she was probably about 18 and I think it did have some sort of bearing that she felt that was a difficult thing. Again, I wasn't told until much later that he died of suicide rather than a riding accident which for some reason we were told. I think that was the story that was put around. At the time you have to understand that suicide in the family was just something that was not talked about. It was thought of as a very difficult thing. But my grandfather had obviously never recovered from his wounds and shell shock, they called it then, during the First World War.

00:06:42

*Lachlan Goudie*

The National Galleries of Scotland holds a substantial archive of Eardley material including numerous letters, many from the artist to her mother and other close contacts. We know that Joan was a prolific letter writer. And I'd like to ask Kirstie, what do you think that we can learn about Eardley from her letters?

*Kirstie Meehan*

Oh, a lot. I think different elements of personality come out depending on who she's writing to, but a thread that runs throughout and is the almost ferocious commitment she had to her work from the very earliest years. I think the earliest letters we hold in the archive are from around 1946 and you can see from the very start how focused she is on the art.

But there is also correspondence often with her mother, a lovely mixture of this day-to-day prosaic chit chat combined with kind of higher ambitions for what she's trying to do in her art so we have some letters dating from around 1948-49 when Eardley was travelling on a scholarship to Italy and France and she's writing these letters to her mother with lovely requests to send a woollen coat to her in France because she's a wee bit chilly or 'could you knit me some socks please and send them through'. There are constant references to sweeties. She seems to be a big fan and misses the sweeties she could get in Scotland. So, you've got all these prosaic details from her day-to-day life, but she mixes in with that in her letters descriptions of what she's sketching and what she's painting so the colour and the light of the places she visits, the influence of the art she's seeing - masterpieces by Giotto and Masaccio, they were all feeding into her at this time. There are these lovely little thumbnail sketches in the letters, too. She'll do a little sketch, a floor plan of the house she's staying in, or a little image of an Italian fisherman or housewife that she's been sketching.

There is a wonderful sketch of her in a heavy tweed skirt looking very out of place in Italy, so you can tell there is a sense of humour there, she's not taking herself too seriously but she's also very focused and she's quite an astute judge of character. I think that comes through in the letters as well. There is one letter where she's talking about James Cowie, who was the principal at the College of Art at Hospitalfield where she studied in 1947 and there is a great quote where she says 'he's a horrible man really, although I am very glad I came here because I know I am learning a lot in the way of painting from him. And he is a very clever man, brilliant in lots of ways I should think'. So, you can see that everything is kind of looping back to her work and you get the sense that she's constantly passing all her experiences for use in her art. She knows herself well, she knows what she needs to paint and that's something that really comes through in the letters.

00:09:19

*Lachlan Goudie*

That's fascinating - a young and driven artist already but also I get the impression that whilst publicly she might have been, as we were saying earlier on, quite reserved and softly spoken, that maybe the letters are opening the door to the true character - strong, driven, even in this kind of conflict with a senior tutor James Cowie who was known to be such a sort of rigorous draftsman and great fan of the Renaissance in art and this must have been a moment of great tension for Joan as she was trying to establish her own style. She was up to the task of keeping true to herself even under those difficult circumstances.

*Kirstie Meehan*

Certainly. What comes across is her strong sense of self. She knows what she needs and she knows what she's trying to achieve and these influences will come in and she will strip out what she wants and reject what she doesn't and I think something else that comes through is kind of in line with this sense of certainty and direction is a kind of self-doubt that repeats itself throughout the letters. She often writes about how bad she thinks her painting is and she's her very own worst critic. Even when she's getting successful and exhibitions are being held of her work and people are taking notice, she's still doubting herself. There's a line where in the early years in Italy as a student she writes in a letter 'I haven't done any very good paintings. I shall throw most of them the sea before I come back because they're not worth bringing with me' and then there is a later quote from 1963, 15 years later, and she says 'I've been a bit down in the dumps about my bad painting lately. It's so hard to paint how you feel you want to'. So, despite this certainty and this self-assurance about what she wants to achieve, it's coupled with this self-doubt that continues throughout her career.

00:10:58

*Lachlan Goudie*

But I think that's again very revealing because that self-doubt, that uncertainty is I believe a motivating factor behind even the most confident-sounding artists and in Joan we can parallel that doubt with her constant pushing of her work. I think maybe a newcomer coming to her paintings might think that these are just sort of scribbly splatters sometimes on canvas but no, they are a searching, they are a pushing of her technique to find the answer, to find the emotional expression that was very important to her.

Anne, in terms of her emotions, although Joan liked to work in relative isolation, particularly whilst in the village of Catterline, I think these letters reveal that there were certain people with whom Joan maintained very close relationships weren't there?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Oh there were indeed. Her friends were very important. I think people who understood her and, as Kirstie said, she was very driven and very determined to just keep painting but never confident that she was, you know, expressing what she wanted to do and all the rest of it so there was this sort of dilemma of never feeling satisfied with what she was doing.

*Lachlan Goudie*

And how do you think that those personal relationships particularly during the Catterline period both inspired her and maybe troubled her if you like during this period?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I think in some ways being in Catterline was a bit lonely. She wrote nearly every day to her friend Audrey. And I think at the end of the day it almost seemed like she possibly was getting out and writing down what she was feeling and how she felt she was doing. It was possibly a cathartic thing when she wasn't happy with the way things were going. These friendships, and with Margot Sandeman from an early stage at the art school, were very important to her. It was important for her to have people on her own wavelength that she

could express herself to because although I think she wrote to her mother quite a lot, she wrote in a different way to her friends.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Some of these relationships were more than platonic. I think it's important to say that Joan Eardley was gay and that she had several female friends throughout her life and some of those relationships where I think for her unfulfilled emotional relationships. She was in love with some of these people.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Oh yes definitely. It's difficult to know exactly. I think particularly at the end her relationship with Lil Neilson I think that was a very fulfilling one, but Audrey was a friend and what relationship there was between them I'm not quite sure. Never been quite sure on that but it was a very important one. She relied heavily on that relationship with Audrey to just sort of see her through everything.

*Lachlan Goudie*

And was the family aware of the fact that Joan was gay? Was she open about that or was that something that was kept relatively quiet?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Well, it was kept secret. It was never talked about. I was never quite sure because Angus was always around as well, so I just didn't really think anything about it.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Angus Neil you mean, her friend and companion who would have been around since the Glasgow days really and moved to Catterline too.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

That's right, it was from Hospitalfield, she met him there and they were friends all the way through life as well. But of course, Joan must have had some somebody that she could talk to about her sexuality because her aunt who lived in London, my grandmother's sister, she was gay as well. I didn't quite find that out until I was in my late teens...

*Lachlan Goudie*

She sounds like she was a strong character. I read that she had been a suffragist.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Absolutely. Peace movement all through the Second World War, she went to prison for campaigning for peace and stuff like that and so she was quite a character, absolutely. There was an interview in one of the Sunday papers I think in which she said she was gay, and my brother said, 'oh that makes sense' because we suddenly realised exactly who she was, but she was a very strong and forceful character.

Joan went down to London and stayed with her often if she was going to exhibitions and things like that. Now I don't know whether there had ever been any letters, but she must have written to her Aunt Sybil sometimes as well I'm quite sure, but nothing remains.

00:15:41

*Lachlan Goudie*

Well Kirstie perhaps that's an opportunity for you to tell us whether these letters reveal about whether she was open about her sexuality or perhaps references to her aunt, anything like that?

*Kirstie Meehan*

I haven't seen any references to her aunt in the letters we hold but she is quite frank in some of the other correspondence about her sexuality, so she writes to her fellow artist and friend Frank Stephen about her personal life and her romantic troubles and how they affect her painting. She says, 'being a lesbian itself isn't a thing to worry me but the trouble is that life hasn't worked out well at all and so I've reached a state of most unholy muddle and my painting isn't going well either. Isn't everything inter-related. I just don't believe in masterpieces coming out of misery, I know I paint best when I'm in a decently settled state.' So, she's obviously aware that her personal life has a great impact on her working life and that does come through in the letters certainly.

00:16:31

*Lachlan Goudie*

And it does in her paintings too. Leila, then, I'd love to ask you how do you think that these different personal relationships and the emotional stresses affected her work or perhaps were expressed in her paintings?

*Leila Riszko*

If we just go back to the letter that Kirstie just mentioned there, the letter that Joan had written to Frank Stephen. It is an undated letter but from specific things that Joan mentions we think it probably dates from 1952 and Eardley is explaining to Frank that things that are going on in her personal life are affecting her and impacting on her work. But interestingly it is around this time that Annette Soper, who initially introduced Joan to Catterline, it is when she bought the Watch House which is where Joan stayed during early trips to the village. These complications in her personal life coincide with the time that Eardley starts to make these frequent escapes from the city, when she actively seeks out the isolation of Catterline where she could work without distraction. So in that sense her art may well have been an outlet, an escape from and a way to process her emotions about the personal matters that were going on in her life.

*Lachlan Goudie*

But you're suggesting that in moving to Catterline, I mean, she kept her studio in Glasgow, and she would go back and forth between these two places, that this was a place where she

could concentrate herself more on her work rather than all these emotional relationships. Is that what you are suggesting?

*Leila Riszko*

I believe so, yes. People have said about her work ethic that she was her work, and her work was her, and I believe that she really plunged herself into what she was doing so that she could find that outlet.

*Lachlan Goudie*

So it's almost like these are two places where she could be different people. Or do you think she was working in a different way when she would go to Catterline and leave Glasgow behind?

*Leila Riszko*

Well certainly she's working a different way in Catterline in the way that she depicts her subjects and especially in that later work which becomes much more expressive and leans more towards abstraction I think there's a lot more channelling of emotion going on there.

00:18:59

*Lachlan Goudie*

But it's difficult to untangle what are the processes of how an artist translates emotion into paint on canvas. If I'm painting outside I'm as much inspired by a strong gust of wind or a wave crashing on the shore or the sounds that occur around me. The immediate experience seems to be more evident to me in pushing my brush around the canvas but I suspect that the mental framework of how I set myself up that morning will probably be the thing that's most affected by the other elements of my life that are going on and that might make me choose a darker or a lighter palette. Maybe these paintings are catalysts for her feelings but also an opportunity to escape from any immediate anxiety from what was going on.

*Leila Riszko*

Exactly. I think it's a bit of both and of course she's reacting to the environment around her so it's an encapsulation of all these things. She always said that the subject led her so that was the first thing for her but then it's the way that she captured what is in front of her that she was trying to represent which is how she channelled her emotions.

00:20:07

*Lachlan Goudie*

During the 1950s Joan also had suffered with depression and physically with recurrent neck pains and headaches. There's one line that is so poignant. She wrote that 'a terrible helpless, hopeless feeling has come upon me. Everything seems to be such a dreadful unending struggle'. Across the whole panorama of the paintings that she creates in Catterline do you feel that she's channelling that sense of loneliness or even the physical discomfort that she suffers later on into her work?



Are they the result of a person suffering from loneliness and physical discomfort or as I perhaps suggested earlier on are they the escape valve, the losing of herself?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I think it's more the escape valve, the losing. She just lost herself, I think. When she was painting that was where she was happiest, most at peace with herself. The more dramatic the seas I think she felt there was so much more to put down and it was a struggle to do it, but I think she felt that that was something that gave her the strength to put it down and if she felt she'd captured it then I think that was a great achievement. Although she was never confident that she was doing as well as she wanted to do, and I mean we just know she did, but that is the kind of feeling she always had. It was a passion. It was in her and she had to paint to get it out and I think she captured a much more emotional feel to the paintings of Catterline, such as the rich summer cornfields. You could feel the warmth in the sunshine or the amazing seas that she captured.

*Lachlan Goudie*

I think that's true and looking at an Eardley painting particularly from that Catterline period there is this sense of release and I think it's why they're so popular because as a viewer they almost become a portal for you. You can release your own self into these paintings and the way that the pigment is moved across the canvas and the gestures are so powerful and expressive, not of anything specific, but they can become a place where you can put yourself and your own emotions onto what Joan Eardley has created and that's why I personally think what she's doing is so resonant.

Kirstie, during these latter stages particularly from 1960 onwards Joan is producing a huge number of canvases - *Catterline in Winter*, *The Wave*, *A Field by the Sea*... some of her most popular images are created during this period. Do the letters suggest that she knew she was on a roll here or perhaps that she was aware of pressure building or time running out in any sense?

*Kirstie Meehan*

You don't get that impression from the letters that we have in the archive. But like any archive we only have little glimpses of parts of her life. There are massive gaps. We have perhaps more material relating to her early life when she's just starting out rather than correspondence by her relating to her later success. But you can see it in other forms. We have plenty of news cuttings which document her successes of the time kept by her mother or by friends of hers and there you can really see this ascent through the art world and see how frequently she is exhibiting and the acclaim she is getting in newspapers from critics and fellow artists alike.

00:23:30

*Lachlan Goudie*

Anne, were the family aware during 1955 onwards and when she's going to Catterline lots more that the conditions that she was working in and living in were pretty tough? Initially she had no running water and electricity?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

She was so taken with the place that she was happy to live in very primitive conditions. She wasn't brought up to live in primitive conditions at all. You know, nice little Victorian villa in Bearsden and I don't really know what the house was like in in London but, you know, suburbia. So, she wasn't brought up to be living in these conditions but she was happy to do so and yet it must have also taken a toll on her physically. As you say there was no running water and sanitation was a little house out the back. Until she bought the cottage number 18 which had all the mod cons in about 1959 she was quite happy to do that, and I think some of the letters, maybe more the ones to Audrey that are not in the National Galleries say that after a long day out painting having to come back up and light the fire to boil the kettle to get some hot water. But the first thing she says is to clean her brushes before she starts making her dinner because that was the most important thing to her because you need to keep painting.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Do you think that for the sake of her paintings she ended up really neglecting herself, physically?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I suppose in some ways. She didn't go and see the doctors as soon as she should have when she found out she had breast cancer. She'd been ill before that, but I think because there were always physical problems, she just kind of said 'right well I'll just get on with it' and did. I know my mother said at one time after she died, 'Her life was a struggle. She doesn't have to do that anymore'. She certainly struggled with a lot of physical things.

00:25:44

*Lachlan Goudie*

Leila, in the 1950s and 60s the Scottish art world and Glasgow, in particular, was a pretty macho place. It was dominated by male artists, tutors, teachers like, well, we've mentioned James Cowie but also David Donaldson and Jefferson Barnes. Many of them advocated a very painterly and traditional approach to the canvas. How do you think Joan reacted to this?

*Leila Riszko*

Well I think this is another reason why she removed herself to Catterline or she worked in Townhead and surrounded herself with the children that she painted there. I think she removed herself from that tough Glasgow art world. I think she found she was almost quite embarrassed by what critical acclaim brought to her. As Anne said, it wasn't part of her character, so she's always trying to step back from that.

*Lachlan Goudie*

You think she was embarrassed because she was shy, or she was embarrassed because people were making comments, or she was aware perhaps of things on the grapevine?

*Leila Riszko*

Going back to the archive and a letter that she wrote to her mother quite early on and something that she wrote when she was travelling in Italy, so I think probably about 1949. She said that there had been a write-up in *The Scotsman* and that people thought that she was younger than she was and therefore better than she was.

*Lachlan Goudie*

You suggested Joan might have been embarrassed by the growing fame that she had and whether that sense of self-consciousness was because she was just naturally being shy or whether she was aware of that Glasgow art world, backbiting comments and things that she might have overheard because I don't think she was hugely supported by her fraternity of artists in Glasgow.

*Leila Riszko*

I think you're right. She only had one solo exhibition in Glasgow in her lifetime and that was her Glasgow School of Art show after her travels. She did have one smaller show at the Cosmo Cinema which is now the Glasgow Film Theatre but she thought it was too insignificant to include in her CV, so she only had the one show in Glasgow. Even though she was showing in London, she was showing in Edinburgh. It was recognised that she was very successful, but that same acclaim didn't come in Glasgow proportionately.

00:28:16

*Lachlan Goudie*

My father who was a painter, he was teaching at the Glasgow School of Art in the 1960s and he studied there in the 1950s. I do remember that sense of almost pride that he and that generation of male artists had in Glasgow still being 'no mean city' and that extended into attitudes in the art world. I am aware that Joan's work was referred to first and foremost as that of a female artist and someone who was gay by the way and it's extraordinary that those sorts of prejudices were very present in thinking within the upper echelons of the Glasgow art world and I wonder to what extent you might think she was kind of alienated or maybe even ostracised from her fellow painters in Glasgow?

*Leila Riszko*

I think maybe she might have been for exactly the reasons that you've outlined.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Anne, did you get the sense, or laterally have you thought that that might have been the case?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Yes. I went to the art school and did ceramics in the seventies and that was the art world that was around. It was very male-oriented, and it just wasn't Joan's scene. They didn't seem to recognise her, and she just wasn't interested or didn't want to know about that kind of thing. As far as I know she hardly ever exhibited if at all within the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (RGI) whereas she always had work accepted in the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) open exhibitions and the Society of Scottish Artists (SSA) and the other ones. I think that Glasgow was a bit cliquey, and I think it worried her. But in some ways, she just thought 'well they can get on with it and I'll go on with my life'.

*Lachlan Goudie*

But it's also curious that many of the critics of the time refer to her work in terms of strength and masculinity. Leila, do you think that's because by the standards of her time her work was not seen as being conventionally female by which I mean sort of decorative, gentle, still life, things like that?

*Leila Riszko*

I find this a really difficult question because I have what you might term a very contemporary view of gender. I don't think about it in this binary way how we can kind of ascribe strength and masculinity to a male figure and gentleness and femininity to a female figure. It is such an alien concept to me.

00:30:48

*Lachlan Goudie*

But it was very much the thinking of the time. I mean there was the art world and the way that you created was gendered and for someone to go and stand on a beach anchoring her easel to the shore and painting these seascapes? I mean what was this? It must have been shocking to many of these male artists.

*Leila Riszko*

Kirstie you have mentioned that you have found some interesting snippets in the archive about this haven't you?

*Kirstie Meehan*

We have news cuttings in the archive because there was a lot of press surrounding her and it's really interesting to see how she's framed in them by the art critics. There are constant references to her appearance and to her physicality of being quite kind of heavy set and not feminine in appearance. And there are two which really jumped out at me. One for 1958 which is taken from the *Bulletin*, and it has this full-length portrait of Eardley. She is wearing trousers, a donkey jacket and a scarf and the author of the article writes: 'she does not care much even for fashions which stir most women, but this does not dim her feminine charm' and I just thought if anyone could care less about feminine charm it's probably Joan Eardley.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Good grief.

*Kirstie Meehan*

It's the sort of attitude that I find hard to deal with today. But there is another one too. There is a famous nude portrait of Angus Neil, *The Sleeping Nude*, which was painted around 1954. In 1955 it was exhibited at the Glasgow Institute and the *Sunday Express* runs with the headline 'this sleeping man has (ooh) no clothes' and it describes her as a 'girl artist' even though by this point she's 37 years old. So, there is this constant undermining of her ability and her achievements. You get the feeling that they are just puzzled by her, they don't quite know how to fit her into any of the usual boxes that they would usually fit female artists into. It is fascinating but it is depressing at the same time.

00:32:25

*Lachlan Goudie*

Would it be fair to say that in Catterline she perhaps didn't feel scrutinised in that way, that she was maybe accepted for who she was?

*Kirstie Meehan*

Perhaps Anne could comment on this more than I can, but you certainly get the impression that she was accepted by the community and though what she was doing was perhaps quite alien to them, coming in and working as an artist, they saw her as an exception and accepted her as such. Perhaps, Anne, you would like to comment, too.

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I do think she felt accepted her because of her work ethic. She was out there in all weathers painting, working long days and I think because of that she was accepted into the community. They had no expectation of her or anything like that, so I think it left her much freer whereas in Glasgow as part of the art world she didn't fit in.

Her work back then couldn't be categorised as one thing or another or fit into any of the 'female artists'. I hate that phrase, but you know it's used all the time. She didn't fit into the mainstream. Everything she did I see as totally new. They were her own ideas and I think that in a way is why the art world didn't really respond to her terribly well. Because they didn't know what to say about her work.

00:33:51

*Lachlan Goudie*

Leila, as her career progressed, and we know that Joan died at a terribly young age, only 42. Do you think that actually her reputation was beginning to overcome this sense of antipathy in Scotland. Was Joan Eardley in the early 1960s being recognised in Scotland as a great almost abstract painter?

*Leila Riszko*

She was made an academician at the Royal Academy and that was in 1963 and she was selling very well. Her work was in high demand, she had a big show in London at the Roland, Browse & Delbanco Gallery and that was pretty much a sell-out. She was hugely successful.

*Lachlan Goudie*

And do you get the impression that that success and becoming an academician at the RSA, was that important for her? Did she need that justification from outside sources or was her work enough?

*Leila Riszko*

Again, I found something in the archive about this. She had written the letter about the award and saying how nervous she was about having to make a speech, but she was delighted to have accepted that. The recognition was important to her, and it mattered but equally that she would have to overcome her own kind of shyness to physically be there and accept it and make a speech about it.

00:35:14

*Lachlan Goudie*

Anne, there's a sense that Eardley's work demonstrates a character, a natural, instinctive approach to the canvas and this can lead to the misapprehension that there wasn't much of an intellectual to Joan, that she was just pouring herself onto canvas without thinking but that would be wrong, would it not?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

Absolutely. She was very interested in literature; music was very important to her, and she did go to concerts when she was in Glasgow and plays at the Citizens Theatre. She had a huge collection of books on all artists and although I don't think there's a particularly huge record of it but a lot of books and a lot of novels and a really serious interest in literature. Painting was not the only thing, there were a lot of other things going on that she was interested in as well.

00:36:09

*Lachlan Goudie*

I think I would like to end by asking each of you, we've had this wonderful exploration of Joan Eardley's character, but what do you feel, what's your experience of engaging with Eardley's work and Leila perhaps you could give us an impression of how you feel when you're standing in front of a painting by Joan Eardley.

*Leila Riszko*

My background is actually in performance and so I've done a lot of research and writing about performance art and so when I am looking at an Eardley painting, especially those big

seascapes where she's working more towards abstraction, I'm seeing something very performative in those. The physicality of it. I'm imagining her standing on the shore moving her full body. She's really using all of her energy to express herself in these paintings, so I think for me I'm transported to something quite visceral and embodied and performative when I look at her works.

We have some fascinating archive audio of Joan speaking and I would like to share an extract of that with you here just now.

00:37:15

*Joan Eardley*

When I am painting in the North-East I hardly ever move out of the village. I hardly ever move from one spot. The more I know the place or the more I know the particular spot the more I find to paint in that particular spot. I do feel the more you know something, the more you can get out of it. The more it gives to you. I don't think I am painting what I feel about scenery but certainly not scenery and certainly not scenery with a name just because that is the North-East. It is just vast with vast seas, vast areas of cliff, you just have to paint it.

*Lachlan Goudie*

That's wonderful. Part I think also of the fascination with Joan Eardley is that she is almost an actor. She moves from one stage to the other from the Glasgow studio and the Glasgow streets out into the open and it's very hard to disengage my appreciation of her paintings from the archival photographs we have of her at work with the Samson kids or on the beach and it's intriguing how much that has informed at least my enjoyment of her work.

Kirstie, how about you, what are your feelings, what does it generate in you now that you've gone through these letters, and you perhaps have a slightly more intimate knowledge of Joan Eardley's writing and thinking. Has that changed how you feel when you when you look at her work?

00:39:00

*Kirstie Meehan*

There are two responses I have, I think. The first is a response to her artistic techniques, so that kind of spontaneous and assured way in which she applied paint to canvas. The way in which she'd smudge pastel with a finger to convey the curve of a cheek, so the process is right up there in front of you and there's a wonderful tactility which gives us a real sense of her quickness, her concentrated working process and the way in which she pursued an idea on the canvas or on the sketchbook. So, you feel like she's there. And obviously that is reinforced in my mind through the letters and the photographs that I am familiar with, so I feel like I know her in that sense.

But at the same time the subject matter really evokes a sensory response. There's such a sense of location, of place in these paintings of Catterline and you feel as if you are there, you are being buffeted by the wind whipping off the North Sea or, in the case of the

sketches that survive from her time in Italy, there's such a strong sense of heavy sun, of oppressive heat and clear bright light. So, on one hand I am amazed at her technique and her skill, but there is also that response to the subject matter at the same time.

00:40:00

*Lachlan Goudie*

Kirstie that's so true. I think this sense of immediacy is very compelling. There is nothing frozen in a painting by Joan Eardley. It's as alive today as it was in 1958 it will be as alive in 2033 as it was then. We can each be there with her, and I think that's part, in terms of her character, of her generosity, you know. She's a generous person when it comes to painting and sharing her experience and I don't think that's true of all artwork that I look at so that's a lovely thing to point out.

Anne, this is the legacy of your aunt, this is a part of your family. I know personally how difficult it can be to separate my emotional relationship with the artist from the work but what kind of feelings do you now have when you go through the archive or find yourself standing in the National Galleries in front of one of your aunt's paintings?

*Anne Morrison-Hudson*

I think it's just amazing that the more you look into them the more you can see that she was capturing those little moments. I think some of the sketches and the quicker drawings catch just so simply the little fleeting moments of light and sunshine. Even some of the children of the Glasgow ones, the pastels just catching that cheeky little look of that grubby face. There's an immediacy that she caught and her reaction to the simplest of little things; the wee smile, the little finger to the mouth, that kind of thing on some of the children. These little, tiny details, they are so important. When you look around the Catterline paintings, you know exactly where she was standing when she did it because there are these little, tiny details. If you don't know you might not see it, but once you get there and you see a funny little rock, well that wasn't just a little scribble in the background, that was catching that little rock down by the shore or that bit of grass, that bit of the house. The detail behind it is always there and yet it's this amazing emotional response to the feeling of being there and catching it and I just think the more you look into them the more you see even the ones I do every day. It's amazing when you take the time to go and have another look.

*Lachlan Goudie*

Thank you everyone. It has been so wonderful to meet Joan Eardley through this conversation and definitely, like any artist worth their salt, Joan was a complex, complicated person, but what I'm left with when I look at the paintings, particularly from Catterline, is that in spite of her struggle and the traumatic element to her life, I think she found happiness in Catterline and that's expressed through the vigour, the colour and the absolute wonder of the way that she saw and painted Scotland and its people. So, thank you very much. I'm Lachlan Goudie and this is a three-part series brought to you by The National Galleries of Scotland.



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