

# SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART



UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL SATURDAY 9 JUNE 2012

PHOTOCALL: FRIDAY 8 JUNE 2012, SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART TWO, 73 BELFORD ROAD, EH4 3DS, 10.30AM

## Press release

### Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art receives gift of work by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham on centenary of artist's birth

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (8 June 1912 – 26 January 2004) was one of the most admired painters of the St Ives School of British Modern art.

Tomorrow, Friday 8 June, to celebrate 100 years since the day of her birth, the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust, the charitable body set up by the artist in 1987, has, through the Art Fund, given one of her most iconic paintings, valued at £150,000, to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. This is the first of Barns-Graham's significant glacier paintings to come into a Scottish public collection.



Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Glacier Chasm*, 1951  
Oil on canvas  
76.2 x 91.5 cm / 30 x 36 ins

Barns-Graham arrived in the famous artist colony of St Ives in Cornwall in 1940, where she became friends with such major figures in twentieth-century art as Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and the Russian sculptor Naum Gabo, who had a particularly strong influence on her. As the 1940s progressed Barns-Graham, together with many other St Ives artists, became increasingly interested in abstraction rather than figuration. In 1949 she travelled to Switzerland, to the Grindelwald Glacier near Berne, an encounter which went on to form the basis of a number of her most important paintings including this work from 1951, *Glacier Chasm*.

This series marked a major turning point in Barns-Graham's stylistic development, the experience of the glacier offering her a unique opportunity to explore the nature of interior and exterior forms. As she said of the aesthetic impact of Grindelwald, "*The massive strength and size of the glaciers, the fantastic shapes, the contrast of solidity and transparency, the many reflected colours in the strong light... This likeness to glass and transparency, combined with solid rough ridges made me wish to combine in a work all angles at once, from above, through, and all round, as a bird flies, a total experience.*"

With this one exception, the major paintings inspired by the Grindelwald Glacier are already in British public collections, including Tate, the British Council, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Sheffield Galleries & Museum Trust, and Southampton City Art Gallery. *Glacier Chasm* was the only example of this series retained by the artist, and now becomes the only glacier painting in a public collection in Scotland.

As well as her connection to St Ives, Barns-Graham also had a strong association in her life to Scotland. She was born in St Andrews in Fife, and studied at Edinburgh College of Art from 1931-37. She returned to St Andrews in 1960 when she inherited a house from her aunt, thereafter dividing her time between Cornwall and Fife. Her home, Balmungo House, is now a centre for the study of Barns-Graham within the context of Modern British Art. The Trust offers scholarships and bursaries to young artists and scholars of art in their higher education, in accordance with Barns-Graham's aims in establishing the Trust. The Trust also offers, through the Royal Scottish Academy and the University of St Andrews, residencies at Balmungo House for artists and writers.

*Glacier Chasm* is the first in a small group of works by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham that the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust plans to give, through the Art Fund, to a number of public museums across the UK. Using its expert knowledge of UK museum collections and strong relationships with museums and galleries, the Art Fund will support the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust in donating a wide range of works by the artist for the British public to enjoy.

Simon Groom, Director of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Galleries of Scotland, said: "We are honoured to be presented with this exceptional painting by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, one of Scotland's most distinguished artists. We are immensely grateful to the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust and the Art Fund for their generous gift in celebration of the artist's centenary. *Glacier Chasm* is a remarkable example of Barns-Graham's highly significant 'glacier series' and it is a major contribution to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art's holdings by the artist."

Geoffrey Bertram, Chair of the Barns-Graham Trust said: "The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust is delighted to give *Glacier Chasm* to the National Galleries of Scotland. The glacier series, for which she is most often remembered, received high critical acclaim when they were first exhibited in 1950. This painting marks a key moment in the development of her art and career and is the 'jewel in the crown' of the Trust's collection. As no other glacier painting is held in a Scottish collection, a situation the Trust wishes to rectify, this seems a most fitting way to celebrate her centenary year with this significant gift to Scotland."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, added: "The Art Fund is here to help museums and galleries to develop their collections so we're thrilled to celebrate this important twentieth-century Scottish artist by placing *Glacier Chasm* with the National Galleries of Scotland – a keynote work and the first of its kind by the artist to enter a Scottish public collection."

*Glacier Chasm* is on view to the public in the Great Hall of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Two today.

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#### **Notes to editors**

**The Art Fund** is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums to buy, show and share art for all to enjoy. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24m to help 227 museums and galleries acquire over £195m of art for their public collections. The Art Fund is funded by over 90,000 members who own a National Art Pass, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off many major exhibitions.

Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at [www.artfund.org.uk](http://www.artfund.org.uk). The press office can be reached on 020 7225 4888 or [media@artfund.org](mailto:media@artfund.org)

**Barns-Graham Charitable Trust** was set up by the artist in 1987 to secure her life's work and archive for future generations. It was also her express wish for the Trust to provide financial support to art and art history students through bursaries and grants as she herself benefitted in her own studies.

The Trust aims to:

- Advance the knowledge of her life and work through exhibitions, research and publications
- Support and inspire art and art history students
- Foster, protect and promote the reputation of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham
- Create an archive of key art works and art papers.

**Wilhelmina Barns-Graham CBE, RSA, RWA (1912-2004).** A graduate of Edinburgh College of Art (1931-1937), she was a member of the St Ives Group along with Roger Hilton, Terry Frost and Peter Lanyon, exhibiting with the Crypt Group and a founding member of the Penwith Society.

Barns-Graham carried on painting right until her death in 2004. She exhibited continually throughout her life. Two significant exhibitions at Tate St Ives in 1999-2000 and 2005 have led to her work being re-appraised and have re-confirmed her as a leading contributor to British modernist painting.

Her late work found new critical success with the *Scorpio Series* first exhibited in 1994. These paintings, and the considerable collection of over 60 screenprints she made in collaboration with Graal press (started in 1998 at the age of 86), are works of considerable colour and energy, revealing an artist at the height of her artistic powers.

A major monograph 'W.Barns-Graham: a studio life' by Lynne Green was published by Lund Humphries in 2001 (2<sup>nd</sup> expanded edition 2012). A catalogue raisonnée of the prints by Ann Gunn was also published by Lund Humphries (2007).

She held four Honorary Doctorates from: University of St Andrews 1992; University of Plymouth 2000; University of Exeter 2001; Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh 2003.

**Balmungo House** is now open for visits at the present time, by appointment. [www.barns-grahamtrust.org.uk](http://www.barns-grahamtrust.org.uk)

