J.D. FERGUSSON

LA VIE BOHÈME

THE SCOTTISH GALLERY
PROLOGUE

As it is necessary to understand the artist’s intention, in order to estimate his achievement he would explain:

That he is trying for truth, for reality, through light.

That to the realist in painting, light is the mystery, for form and colour which are the painter’s only means of representing life, exist only on account of light.

That the only hope of giving the impression of reality is by truthful lighting.

That the painter having found the beauty of nature, ceases to be interested in the traditional beauty, the beauty of art.

Art being purely a matter of emotion, sincerity in art consists in being faithful to one’s emotions.

To be true to an emotion, is to deal with that impression only which caused the emotion.

As no emotion can be exactly repeated, it is hopeless to attempt to represent reality by piecing together different impressions.

To restrain an emotion is to kill it.

What may appear to be restraint may be the utmost limit of one’s power.

What may appear to be the utmost limit of one’s power may be restraint.

Brightness is not necessarily meretricious, nor dinginess meritorious.

It is absurd to suppose that everyone must be slow to understand; some have insight.

What is on the surface may explain everything to one with real insight.

That the artist is not attempting to compete with the completeness of the camera, nor with the accuracy of the anatomical diagram.

Genius is insight.

J.D.F., 1905

Prologue for Paintings by J.D. Fergusson, Baillie Gallery, London, 1905
J.D. FERGUSSON (1874-1961)
La Vie Bohème

4 – 24 DECEMBER 2013
“He wore good tweeds, honey-coloured, a long pale blue muffler the colour of his eyes which lit up as he grasped both my hands in his. His deep Scottish voice mumbled like a Highland burn in spate. Fergus was both glamorous and benevolent, more like a distinguished actor than a painter.”

Eileen Cassavetti, quoted by The Fergusson Gallery in J.D. Fergusson: Hats and Headgear, Perth, 2013
Looking back on the life and oeuvre of John Duncan Fergusson and in anticipation of the exhibition to open shortly at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art we can see a painter of exceptional talent who was true to his artistic ideals. He was a man with an uncompromising vision of what it meant to be an artist: emotional truth was paramount and the artist's difficult purpose was to reveal this truth in light.

His physical presence, work rate and the honed aesthetic by which he lived and worked made him a man who exemplified the modern artist. Free from the constraints of academic tradition or the conventions of bourgeois life, he was a man for whom his work was his manifesto but ideas and a wide intellectual engagement were the basis for his art.

He had an exhibition with The Scottish Gallery in 1923 which included his 'Highland' works of the previous year, as well as some sculpture. For the simple catalogue, he republished a Prologue from his first London catalogue in 1905, consisting of a series of assertions, which we have reproduced on the inside front cover. His view of the passage's enduring relevance speaks of the man's consistency of belief, even though his work had undergone a considerable transformation. In 1906, his modest landscapes and ambitious figure paintings owed more to Whistler and Sargent than to any branch of Post-Impressionism, with which he was nonetheless familiar. Looking back in 1923, he could recall no dramatic conversion to modernism, no great influence which had made him change direction; rather he saw continuity of purpose from the first. However his monumental portrait of Elizabeth Dryden in The Red Shawl was painted only a year or two before his modernist masterpiece Rhythm; one is a sumptuous portrait, the other an archetype of a woman: at once Eve, a dryad and a real life-model. Like a good modernist, the artist does not make the subject or its meaning explicit; rather he allows the viewer to make their own interpretation. For the artist the development must have been logical and organic; it implied no change of purpose but must be explained in terms of the extraordinary days in which Fergusson was living and the measure of his confidence.

Most aspects of his life and work are represented in our exhibition. We include examples of his sculpture and drawings from an early sketchbook containing mostly café studies, but also a few touching representations of family and friends. A portrait of Margaret and Willy Peploe is also included, painted after Fergusson's second visit to Cassis in 1931. We are delighted to include two of the ‘Highland’ works. These powerful, rhythmic mountain paintings express the artist's sense of a Celtic past, as a son of Caledonia.

GUY PEPLOE
Managing Director
The Scottish Gallery
The first of four children, John Duncan Fergusson was born 9th March 1874 at 7 Crown Street in Leith to John and Christina, who had recently given up farming in highland Perthshire and moved to Edinburgh.

Fergusson’s love of art as a boy had been engendered by his mother, who had encouraged him to draw and took him to the National Gallery of Scotland on the Mound and the Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street. He was given his first box of oil paints in 1883.

A prolific recorder of everyday life, Fergusson always carried a sketchbook with him. The story went that he failed his second-year exams at Edinburgh University because he spent too much time sketching caricatures of his professors. Opposite, the artist captures his father, mother and younger brother Robert in a quiet moment at their Edinburgh home.
1 Fergusson’s Mother, Edinburgh, c.1904
   conté drawing, 12.5 x 12 cms
2 The Artist’s Father and Cat, c.1904
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.7 cms
3 Fergusson’s Father, Edinburgh, c.1904
   conté drawing, 12.5 x 12 cms
4 Robert Fergusson, the Artist’s Brother, c.1904
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.7 cms
Jean McConnachie was the subject of several significant portraits around 1904. From a number of letters discovered after Fergusson's death we now know that the relationship wasn't purely a professional one.

**Jean McConnachie, c.1904**
conté drawing, 12.5 x 10.5 cms

**PROVENANCE**
Madame Autan-Lejeune

**EXHIBITED**
Fergusson held his first solo show with the Baillie Galleries in London in 1905, and of the fifty-six works exhibited, sixteen were paintings of Paris Plage. The success of this exhibition and its excellent critical appraisal, not least from Haldane McFall in The Studio, gave him the impetus to plan a permanent move to France. His father died the next year, and despite a small inheritance, he was obliged to sell his gold watch, a complete set of Beardsley’s The Yellow Book and some furniture. Fergusson was ideally placed to take advantage of the opportunities that a move to Paris would present: he was independent, confident, rebellious and firmly focused on his own artistic agenda. But at the same time he was quite open to change, new ideas and experiences.

The date for our picture is 1904, and it could well have been included in the exhibition the following year (JW Blyth acquired it from The Scottish Gallery in 1949). The Edwardian resort of Paris Plage (or le Touquet) provided a range of subject matter for both Peploe and Fergusson, and the bustle of the streets behind was a favourite. Both painters would wait a year or two before using a palette which would ally them with European Fauvism, but already the freedom of application, with strong colour notes – a sort of Whistlerian Impressionism – makes these exciting small panels unique in British painting.

6 Paris Plage, 1904
oil on panel, 19 x 24 cms
signed on verso

EXHIBITED
Aitken Dott & Son, The Scottish Gallery, 1949 (no. 23);
Paris Plage, 1904
oil on panel, 17 x 24 cms
signed, inscribed with title and dated ‘1904’ (verso)

PROVENANCE
Anthony d’Offay, London, where purchased by R.A. Bevan Esq., 7 December 1966; Private Collection

EXHIBITED
The Influence of Whistler on English Painting, Anthony d’Offay Fine Art, London, 1966, (cat. no 5A)
Anne Estelle Rice (1877-1959) was an Irish-American painter who Fergusson met in 1907 at Paris Plage. The two had an instant connection and for the next six years were involved personally and creatively. Rice was originally from Pennsylvania and was working as a magazine illustrator in Paris. Her outgoing personality entranced Fergusson and they shared a similar love of adventure. Rice would occasionally escort Fergusson to establishments deemed improper for women. Fergusson painted and drew Rice on many occasions, and this drawing captures her stylishness and self-confidence.

Anne Estelle Rice; J.D. Fergusson, Margaret and Willy Peploe, Cassis, 1913
Paris, Jardin du Luxembourg, c.1910

Paris, Le Boulevard Montmartre, c.1910
“Paris is simply a place of freedom. Geographically central, it has always been a centre of light, learning and research. It will be very difficult for anyone to show that it is not still the home of freedom for ideas; a place where people like to hear ideas presented and discussed; where an artist of any sort is just a human being like a doctor or a plumber, and not a freak or a madman.”

J.D. Fergusson in Modern Scottish Painting, McLellan, Glasgow, 1943, p.70
Woman at a Table, c.1910
conté drawing, 14.5 x 9.5 cms

EXHIBITED
Fergusson’s Women, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, 2011
“...Opposite the Bal Bullier was a charming café, the Closerie des Lilas. It had a large terrace and seats under the trees...”

J.D. Fergusson quoted in Café Drawings in Edwardian Paris from the Sketchbooks of J.D. Fergusson, Blackie, Glasgow, 1974, p.52
11  Man with Moustache and Cigar, c.1907  
charcoal drawing, 21 x 12.5 cms

12  Man with Bowler Hat and Glasses, c.1907  
charcoal drawing, 21 x 12.5 cms
13 Elegance, c.1907
charcoal drawing, 20.5 x 12.5 cms

14 Young Man, c.1907
charcoal and ink, 21 x 12.5 cms
Fergusson's advice to would-be independent painters was – “always carry a small, cheap sketchbook, a very soft pencil, and make quick, rough sketches of anything around you; never correct a sketch, just make another; don’t try to make a good drawing, you won’t – or by accident, you may! Just keep at it, you are training your eye to see and your hand to respond.”

J.D. Fergusson quoted in Café Drawings in Edwardian Paris from the Sketchbooks of J.D. Fergusson, Blackie, Glasgow, 1974, p.5

The Fedora, c.1907
charcoal drawing, 21 x 12.5 cms
16  Aperitif, c.1907  
conté drawing, 26 x 20.25 cms

17  French Waiter, c.1907  
charcoal drawing, 21 x 12.5 cms
18 The Dance, c.1907
conté drawing, 13 x 21 cms
Guitar Player, c.1907
charcoal drawing, 11.75 x 11 cms
“Well, I was in Paris, without money or rich relations... but was repeatedly encouraged by what someone has called ‘le bon air de Paris, qui semble contenir les effleuves amoreuses et les emanations intellectuelles’. Life was as it should be and I was very happy. The Dôme, so to speak, round the corner; l'Avenue quite near; the concert Ronge not far away – I was very much interested in music; the Luxembourg Gardens to sketch in; Colarossi's class if I wanted to work from the model. In short, everything a young painter could want...”

J.D. Fergusson quoted in Café Drawings in Edwardian Paris from the Sketchbooks of J.D. Fergusson, Blackie, Glasgow, 1974, p.8
The following forty drawings have been taken from a sketchbook dating from 1905-7. Their small scale establishes them as an immediate response to the people he would have seen on the streets and in the cafes of Edinburgh and in particular Paris. Fergusson made several thousand drawings in his lifetime, and each has a particular quality.

He did draw from life models and occasionally drew ‘thinking about painting’ (colour notes are sometimes written on a drawing), but mostly he was outside with his sketchbook. Drawing for Fergusson was like breathing in and out: the natural and essential practice of the artist.
20  Head Studies, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
21  Le Moustache, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
22  Seated Girl, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
23  La Chanteuse, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
24 Distinguished, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

25 Pug, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

26 Les Lunettes, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

27 Floral Hat, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
28  Profile Sketch, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
29  Midinette in Profile, Paris, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
30  The Bowler Hat, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
31  The Boater, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
32  Bourgeoisie, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

33  Smiling Woman, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

34  Frank Harris, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

35  Le Nez Retroussé, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
36 Bowtie, 1905
  conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
37 Homburg, 1905
  conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
38 Rendez-vous, 1905
  conté drawing, 11.5 x 13.2 cms
39 The Quiff, 1905
  conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
40 Luxembourg Gardens, 1905  
conté drawing, 11.5 x 13.2 cms

41 Downward Gaze, 1905  
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

42 The Conversation, 1905  
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

43 View from the Luxembourg Gardens, 1905  
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
44 Bearded Man, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
45 Right Profile, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
46 Midinette, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
47 Left Profile, 1905
   conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
48  Girl Observed, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

49  Paris Lady, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

50  Girl in Profile, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

51  Gentleman in Top Hat, 1905
    conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
52 Les Parisiens, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
53 Pensive Girl, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
54 Character Studies, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
55 At the Opera, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
56 Inward Smile, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

57 Parisian Gentleman, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

58 Self-Portrait, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms

59 Man in Profile, 1905
conté drawing, 13.2 x 11.5 cms
Saintonge is a small historic region of Western France, now incorporated in department Charente-Maritime. Fergusson visited Royan, situated in Saintonge, on a number of occasions between 1909 and 1911, often accompanied by Peploe and Anne Estelle Rice. In 1909, Fergusson was elected a sociétaire of the Salon d’Automne and became further immersed in French contemporary painting. As a result, the landscapes executed in this period display a greater knowledge and understanding of current artistic movements. By this time Fergusson has moved on from the en plein air works executed on his trips to Brittany and Normandy with Peploe.

The works produced on the trips to Saintonge and Royan display a bolder use of colour and a stronger emphasis on structure, sharing ideals of French contemporary painters. The vivid palette and dynamic brushwork of The Watercart, Saintonge reflects Fergusson’s interest in the work of the Fauves. A fine example of this shift in technique and style, The Watercart, Saintonge is very similar to Roofs At Saintonge in the collection of The Fergusson Gallery, Perth.

60  The Watercart, Saintonge, 1910
oil on panel, 28 x 35.5 cms
signed and dated ‘1910’ (verso)

PROVENANCE
Margaret Morris; George Smith; Private Collection, London

EXHIBITED
Probably Paintings, John Duncan Fergusson, Annan Gallery, Glasgow, 1957, (cat. no 10); Hunterian Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow (lent by George Smith during the 1980s)
St Palais is a beach resort to the north-west of Royan, where Fergusson stayed in the summer and autumn of 1910 with the Peploe family, and where Willy Peploe was born in August. It was at Royan that Peploe found his full expression as a Fauvist. Fergusson had already shifted towards his modernist fulfilment in his Paris studio over the previous year or so. In landscape, he moved away from impressionism towards a simplification of the motif, similar to work by Matisse and Derain made in Collioure in 1905. In 2000, when the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris mounted their major survey of the Fauves, the only British inclusions were the Royan paintings of Fergusson and Peploe.

Please note that this work is not in our exhibition but is loaned to the Fergusson Exhibition by the National Galleries of Scotland.

61 St Palais, 1910
oil on panel, 27.3 x 35.6 cms

PROVENANCE
With T & R Annan & Sons, Glasgow; Collection of Dr John Shanks, Kilmarnock; The Fine Art Society, London, 1986; Private collection, Switzerland

EXHIBITED
Memorial Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture: J.D. Fergusson, 1874-1961, Arts Council of Great Britain, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 1961, (cat. no. 43)
62  Meg Dancing a Toccata, 1914
conté drawing, 22 x 18 cms

EXHIBITED
Fergusson’s Women, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, 2011
Meg, c.1918
conté drawing, 25.5 x 20 cms
Fergusson was introduced to Margaret Morris by a mutual acquaintance in Paris in 1913. Seventeen years his junior, Morris was to become Fergusson’s lifelong partner. She called him ‘Fergus’ after the ancient Irish king and he affectionately called her ‘Meg’. Margaret was not only an important model for Fergusson, but as a pioneer in modern dance and choreography, her dynamic physicality and personality fascinated him and inspired much of his subsequent work.

Fergusson and Morris’s relationship grew into a burgeoning creative partnership. They held a firm belief in each other’s artistic vision and in their respective art forms, centred on the quest for a new form of expression and language founded on colour, line and rhythm.

After Rhythm, Fergusson’s renowned work of 1910, many of his paintings reduce the female form to a stylised representation. Here, Margaret’s head is shrouded in a headscarf, focussing our attention on her facial features. Her oval-shaped face and almond eyes are boldly sculptural but a sense of gentle femininity is maintained as she is rendered in delicate pencil line and a pink watercolour wash which emphasises the soft roundness of her face.
“When I came back from London at the beginning of the First World War in 1914, I met one of Margaret Morris's best pupils, Kathleen Dillon, a very good-looking, charming and intelligent girl... one day she arrived with a remarkable hat... It was just like a rose, going from the centre convolution and continuing the ‘Rhythm’ idea developed in Paris and still with me. Looking at Kathleen I soon saw that the hat was not merely a hat, but a continuation of the girl's character, her mouth, her nostril, the curl of her hair – the whole character – like Burns's love is like a red, red rose... At last this was my statement of a thing thoroughly Celtic.”

J.D. Fergusson quoted by Margaret Morris in The Art of J.D. Fergusson: A Biased Biography, Blackie, Glasgow, 1974, p.103
Ruby was Ruby Baxter, a student at Glasgow School of Art who modelled for Fergusson with her sister Elsie (Quick). He mentioned both girls in a letter to Margaret Morris, written on 7 August 1916: ‘Looking up the road, two very decent types turned the corner. Very good looking legs. I wondered where they had sprung from. Very good looking dresses etc. Presently, they waved and turned out to be Ruby and Elsie. Ruby looking very well.’
Fergusson moved to London at the outbreak of the First World War, from then on dividing his time between there and Edinburgh. The paintings that Fergusson had seen whilst in France were still clearly at the forefront of his mind during the next few years. In Ruby (cat. no. 66) and Dark Woman (both painted in 1916), one sees Fergusson exploring particular devices: the use of dark red and black to outline subject matter and an emphasis on flat, strong pattern; these correlate closely with the work of his French contemporaries. The strong features and form in both portraits put less emphasis on psychological content and place more emphasis on aesthetic quality and design.

In Dark Woman Fergusson employs a background suggestive of foliage or patterned drapery. The device, reminiscent of that employed by some of the Glasgow Boys (such as E.A. Hornel) was used to great effect in many of Fergusson's impressive paintings of the period – including Rhythm of 1910 (University of Stirling). The use of flowers and foliage in his portraits of women suggests Fergusson wished the viewer to make a direct correlation between the fecundity of the flowers and the fertility of the sitter.

“Fortunately Fergusson differs from the common young artist of today and is not an unharnessed emotionalist. He is a poet with an acute sense for the discipline of form. He has an instinct for the rhythm which makes sense out of a picture just as it informs the shape and meaning of a dance. His pictures and his sculptures seem to move with a musical rhythm.”

Robins Millar in Glasgow Evening Citizen, May 5th 1948

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67  Dark Woman, 1916  
oil on panel, 35.5 x 28 cms  
signed and dated ‘1916’ (verso), further signed and titled (on attached label verso)  

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection  

EXHIBITED  
The Scottish Colourists, Beadleston Gallery, New York, 1998
“He led me to share his enthusiasm for Indian and Cambodian art, taking me repeatedly to the Trocadero Museum with its wonderful collection of ancient Eastern sculpture.”

Margaret Morris, quoted by The Fergusson Gallery in J.D. Fergusson: Hats and Headgear, Perth, 2013

68 Philosophie, cast after 1919
brass, 13.5 cms

EXHIBITED
(version exhibited at the following) J.D. Fergusson, Painting and Sculpture, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh and Alexander Reid, Glasgow, 1923 (cat. no. 24); Lefèvre, London, 1928 (cat. no. 2); Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by J.D. Fergusson, C.W. Kraushaar Galleries, New York, 1928, (cat. no. 2); Les Peintres Ecossais: S.J. Peploe, J.D. Fergusson, Leslie Hunter, F.C.B. Cadell, Telfer, Bear, R.O. Dunlop, Galerie George Petit, Paris, 1931 (cat. no. 27); Lefèvre, London, 1939 (cat. no. 30); J.D. Fergusson, First Retrospective Exhibition, McLellan Galleries, Glasgow, 1948 (cat. no. 6); Memorial Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture: J.D. Fergusson, 1874-1961, Arts Council of Great Britain, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 1961, (cat. no. 140)
Fergusson made only a handful of works in three dimensions, but with his talent, he could have made sculpture a more significant part of his practice. Perhaps the expense of casting and editioning work was too much for an artist who never enjoyed consistent commercial success. From his drawings, we see that he had no difficulty thinking in the round and his deep understanding of oil paint as a plastic medium makes the translation to clay a natural one. He also produced a few carvings. One whose current whereabouts is unknown depicts the life-size faces of himself, Margaret Morris and their friend and patron George Davison, hewn from one piece of stone. His masterpiece, Eastre, originally cast in brass in 1924, depicts a pagan goddess. The medium is specifically chosen so that when polished and lit, the effect is an extraordinary emanation of light.

69  Head of Meg, 2013
Bronze, 13.5 cms

PROVENANCE
Cast in an edition of eight by permission of The Fergusson Gallery, Perth
In 1922, Fergusson and his friend, the novelist and journalist Captain John Ressich, toured the Highlands by car. The two week trip started in Glasgow in May and was to inspire numerous sketches and watercolour studies. The newly gathered material fuelled a six month painting spree on his return to London, and fifteen Highland canvases resulted. This series of paintings proved important to Fergusson as it sparked a series of exhibitions, most importantly his first exhibition at The Scottish Gallery in 1923, and with Alexander Reid in Glasgow the same year. This painting was then exhibited in the Whitney Studio in New York in 1926, where Fergusson received critical acclaim. He was to exhibit in New York again in 1928 at the Kraushaar Galleries. The Pass of Killiecrankie is an impressive wooded gorge, well known for the Jacobite battle which took place nearby. J.M.W. Turner sketched there on his trip to Scotland in 1801. Fergusson chose to paint the scene looking north east, towards the summit of Ben Vrackie. This important work is among his most accomplished Scottish landscapes.

The angular brushstrokes and emphasis on geometry reflect the influence of Cézanne, whom Fergusson would have seen whilst in Paris.

PROVENANCE
Alice Moore of Chatham, New Jersey; Terence McGee of Chatham, New Jersey (by 1942); Anonymous sale; Sotheby’s, 24 April 2006, lot 147, where purchased by the present owner

EXHIBITED
J.D. Fergusson, Painting and Sculpture, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, 1923 (cat. no. 14); John Duncan Fergusson Exhibition, The Whitney Studio (now the Whitney Museum), New York, 1926, (cat. no. 8)
Nude and Cliff is one of a series of nudes based on Ferguson's time in Cap d'Antibes where Margaret Morris had set up a dance school in the summer of 1923. Ferguson played an active role at the school at the Château des Enfants and his works of this time express the vivacity and beauty of Margaret Morris and her pupils. The youthful exuberance of the dancers caused quite a stir around Antibes and they were photographed dancing at Eden Rock. These images were reproduced in Vogue and Tatler magazines, and helped put Cap d'Antibes on the map as a glamorous tourist destination. Ferguson was particularly interested in the writings of Henri Bergson at this time. Bergson's principle of the feminine life-force was influential in artistic circles in the early part of the 20th century and Ferguson's nudes of this period take on monumental forms, reflecting Bergsonian concepts of earthy paradise. By incorporating the angles of the female form into the landscape surrounding the nude, Ferguson creates a symbiosis between the landscape and sitter and establishes Morris as a modern day Gaia.

This work was exhibited at Ferguson's second exhibition in New York at the Kraushaar Galleries in 1928. Out of the eighteen paintings and six sculptures which were exhibited, it was his nudes which attracted the most praise from the American critics. Ferguson felt a certain kinship to New York and its modern aesthetic. He drew parallels with the architecture of the city and the modern woman, which were the focus of his painting at that time.

“The air was just like Edinburgh and I saw one building on the way down that struck me dumb, so beautiful it was. Just a plain office building that didn’t pretend to be anything else, but what a lift it gave me! That is why I saw the architecture of New York as the best expression of the modern age that I’ve seen yet. These new skyscrapers are art – if they will only keep to the recent trend and won’t start breaking the sweeping lines with a lot of silly decorations. They are as simple, as sweeping as the modern woman, who is efficiently artistic in everything she does.”

J.D. Ferguson quoted by Dorothy Dayton, The New York Sun, 1928, read in Kirsten Simester, Living Paint, Mainstream, 2001

Nude and Cliff, c.1928
oil on canvas, 56 x 61 cms
signed (verso) and titled (on a label attached to the stretcher)

PROVENANCE
Alexander Reid & Lefèvre, London; Margaret Morris; Private Collection

EXHIBITED
Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by J.D. Ferguson, C.W. Kraushaar Galleries, New York, 1928, (cat. no. 15); Lefèvre Galleries, London, 1936 (cat. no. 11)

LITERATURE
‘Artists of Note - J.D. Ferguson’ by A. Watt, The Artist, May 1937, ill. p.87
Cassis from the East, 1931
oil on canvas, 66 x 53 cms
signed and dated on verso

PROVENANCE
Lefèvre Gallery label; label for artist's address in Glasgow; Private Collection, Scotland

EXHIBITED
In August 1913 Fergusson was in Cassis with his partner Anne Estelle Rice, accompanying S.J. Peploe, his wife Margaret and their son Willy. It was both artists’ first visit to the South of France and their choice of the small fishing village near Marseilles may have been inspired by the many French painters who had worked there before, including Paul Signac. It was Fergusson who recalled persuading Peploe to accompany him after seeing a poster with the name ‘Cassis’ on it near his Paris Studio. Fergusson wrote in 1945 in his Memories of Peploe that at first he thought it would be too hot for ‘Bill,’ but “he decided to take the risk. We arrived to find it quite cool and Bill didn’t suffer at all. We had his (third) birthday there and after a lot of consideration chose a bottle of Château Lafite instead of champagne. Lafite now always means to me that happy lunch on the verandah overlooking Cassis bay, sparkling in the sunshine.” As in Royan three years before both painters worked chiefly on panel, although Fergusson used several canvases and both made many sketches, particularly of the harbour and its traffic of schooners.

It may have been a difficult time for Fergusson and Rice who were to separate shortly; Fergusson had already met Margaret Morris in the spring when she had brought a troupe of her dancers to Paris to perform at the Marigny Theatre. Fergusson, whose Paris studio had been demolished, decided to stay in the south. By Christmas, he was renting a little house at Cap d’Antibes where he persuaded Morris to join him and where they spent the summer of the next year before the outbreak of War forced their return to London.

The group stayed in the Hotel Panorama, which forms the backdrop to the portrait, with its distinctive round pediment on the façade and screened verandah below. Peploe painted the same view when he returned with Willy, Denis and Margaret in 1924.

At this time, Fergusson was seeking more structure in his compositions the simplification of motif recalls the later Cézanne. The paint was applied in short, directional brush marks and the palette restrained. In recollection, he has captured the calm strength of his subject with her young child, confident in motherhood.

Margaret and Willy Peploe at Hotel Panorama, Cassis, 1931
oil on canvas, 61 x 56.5 cms
signed verso

PROVENANCE
Gifted to S.J. Peploe, thence by descent; Fragmentary label verso
“Mrs. Peploe and Bill at Cassis, Hotel du Panorama”; labels also for artist’s addresses in Paris and Glasgow; label stating picture belongs to Willy Peploe, April 1944.

EXHIBITED
Spring Collection, The Scottish Gallery, April 2012
Fergusson with his sculpture, The Patient Woman, c.1930
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CHRONOLOGY
J.D. FERGUSSON RBA (1874-1961)

1874 Born in Leith, Edinburgh, 9 March.
1874-95 Decides to pursue art full-time. After a short spell as a student at the Trustees Academy, leaves to become self-taught.
1896-1901 Visits France, Spain and Morocco.
1898 Exhibits watercolours of French subjects at the Royal Scottish Academy and the Society of British artists.
1900-05 Annual painting holidays to coastal resorts of north-west France with S.J. Peploe (1871-1935).
1902 Moves to first studio in Picardy Place, Edinburgh.
1903 Elected member of the Royal Society of British Artists.
1905 First solo exhibition at the Baillie Galleries, London.
1906 Spends summer with S.J. Peploe touring the Normandy coast.
1908 Makes his first recorded sculpture.
1909 Elected Sociétaire of the Salon d'Automne.
1910 Paints with Peploe and Rice in Royan.
1911 Launch of Rhythm magazine by John Middleton Murry and Michael Sadler in London, with Fergusson as Arts Editor. Paints with Peploe in Royan.
1913 Meets the dancer Margaret Morris (1888-1923) in Paris who later becomes his wife. Four works included in the Post-Impressionist and Futurist Exhibition, Doré Galleries, London. Visits Cassis with Peploe and Rice. Settles in Cap d'Antibes.
1914 Forced to leave Cap d'Antibes on outbreak of First World War and returns to London to be with Margaret Morris.
1914-18 The war years spent between his family and Peploe in Edinburgh and Margaret Morris in London.
1918 Commissioned by the Ministry of Information to make a series of paintings of life in naval dockyards, Portsmouth.
1922 Tours the Scottish Highlands with journalist and paints Highland Landscape series.
1923 First Scottish solo shows at The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh and Société des Beaux Arts, Glasgow.
1926-28 Held two one man exhibitions in New York.
1929 Left London to settle for second time in Paris.
1939 Settles permanently in Glasgow following the outbreak of the Second World War.
1940 Founds the New Art Club with Margaret Morris.
1942 The New Scottish Group formed, comprising members of the New Art Club.
1943 Modern Scottish Painting is published by MacLellan.
1948 First major retrospective exhibition at the MacLellan Galleries, Glasgow.
1950 Awarded honorary LLD by Glasgow University.
1950-60 Annual trips to the South of France to teach and paint at Margaret Morris's Summer Schools.
1954 J.D. Fergusson Retrospective Exhibition (touring) Arts Council of Great Britain Scottish Committee.
1961 Dies 30th January in Glasgow.