

Joan Eardley 1921-1963



Joan Eardley was best known for the large number of paintings that she did of Glasgow street urchins showing the decay of the city

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- Born in Sussex in 1921, Eardley moved to Glasgow in 1940 to study at Glasgow School of Art. Her paintings of children playing in run-down Glasgow tenements and her drawings and oils of the North-East coast of Scotland are among the most celebrated works in Scottish art.
- Her career was cut tragically short in 1963 when she died at the age of 42.



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- Her Glasgow studio in Cochrane Street, in the Gorbals, became so well known that local children came to pose for sketches and photographs.
- These sketches force the viewer to think hard about the lives of these people.
- Children in ragged and badly fitting clothes who spent their day playing in the dirty streets and back closes of the Gorbals, which at that time was dirty, industrial and smoggy.
- Many artists have painted children, but few have been able to show a real understanding of deprived city children and poverty stricken lives.

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- On her return to Scotland, Eardley rented a studio in the centre of Glasgow.
- She set to work making chalk drawings of the local children, recording and celebrating her immediate surroundings. With some of these works she used blue distemper with which she had painted the studio walls; with others, she rubbed the paper with red chalk to give a warm background tone.
- She used scraps of paper, often extending the work with extra sheets and paperclips. She even did some of her chalk drawings of children on sandpaper.
- Eardley's paintings of children were greatly influenced by Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso. In America Ben Shahn was drawing urban children in a direct manner and with a keen, socially engaged edge.



Two Children 1962

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- Three Children at a Tenement Window 1956
- Eardley was a regular reader of Picture Post which in January 1948 carried a now infamous article, *The Forgotten Gorbals*, featuring photographs of children by Bert Hardy and Bill Brandt. Eardley herself was never without a camera, and some of Eardley's drawings and oils such as *Three Children at a Tenement Window* are closely based on her photographs.
- **Material:** Gouache on paper





Glasgow Tenements with Blue Sky

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- ***Street Kids, 1949-51***
- 1949-51
- This brightly coloured oil composition shows three children seated on the pavement kerb, one rapt in the contents of a comic, another holding an apple and the third gazing out of the picture, his spindly legs ending in t-bar sandals.
- **Material:** Oil on canvas

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- ***Glasgow Kids, A Saturday Matinee Picture Queue***
- Another example of a painting in which Eardley captures the riotous energy of groups of children using rich, vivid colours.
- **Material:** Oil on canvas

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- ***Little Girl with a Squint***
1961
- This painting uses a variety of materials including newspaper.
- Eardley painted a lot from photographs that she took of the scenes that she saw outside her Glasgow Studio.
- She tried to show the rows of derelict, boarded up shops and the dilapidated, peeling masonry in her paintings of the children



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- ***Children at the Window***
- Eardley was trying to capture the community feeling of Glasgow's back streets in her paintings, something she felt was rapidly disappearing.
- **Material:** Oil on canvas

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- ***Brian and Pat Samson***
- The Samson family were painted by Eardley over the course of 7 years or more. They were a large family with children across a wide range of ages. Eardley discussed in an interview how these particular children amused her with their chatter and energy

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- ***Children and Chalked Wall No 3***
- 1963
- A strong sense of close friendship is one of the most striking features of Eardley's paintings of children, and is particularly apparent in *Children and Chalked Wall*. The collage effect which Eardley used in much of her work is also prominent here.
- **Material:** Oil, newspaper and metal foil on canvas

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- Other Work
- Eardley was particularly attracted to the wild seas and storms. During the last 10 years of Eardley's life, she commuted back and forth between Glasgow and Catterline: a phone call from a Catterline resident, warning of an approaching storm, would send Eardley running north again.
- Throughout the 1950s and up until her death, Eardley painted a number of seascapes. She usually painted on hardboard, using artist's paint, boat paint, newspaper, sand and grasses. To paint these seascapes, Eardley would stand on the shoreline in the bay at Catterline.
- In 1955 Eardley bought a house in Catterline, spending much of her remaining time there



Salmon Net Post 1962

This is a much later work – a large partially abstract composition that looks from the salmon net posts out to sea. Some of Eardley's seascapes were huge and it's amazing that Eardley was able to carry these boards up and down the steep cliff path. She did however acquire a motor scooter which helped her transport her materials back and forth.

Material: Oil on board

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■ Joan Eardley - Quiz

- **1** Write some information about the artist, Joan Eardley. e.g Where was she born? Where did she train?...
- 2** Can you describe what Joan Eardley liked to paint? In other words, what was the subject matter of her paintings?

NOW CHOOSE ONE PAINTING AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1** As a heading, write down the title of the painting.
- 2** Describe what the painting is of.
- 3** Say why you like this painting.
- 4** Describe the composition of the painting. This means explain what is in the painting and how these are positioned.
- 5** What kind of colours has the artist used in the painting, and are the colours realistic?
- 6** Why do you think the artist has chosen these colours? Do they explain the mood of the painting and if so, can you describe this mood?
- 7** Joan Eardley used different media in her work. Can you find out what media was used in the painting you have chosen, and how do you know this?
- 8** Joan Eardley's work is full of interesting textures. Describe which parts of your painting show interesting texture and how has the artist made these textures?
- 9** Write a list of words which you think best describe the painting you have chosen.
- 10** Make a small colour drawing of your chosen painting.