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In his discussion of the efforts of Nigerian painter and sculptor Ben Enwonwu to present himself as a modernist artist, Sylvester Ogbechie ascribes particular importance to a 1948 photograph of the artist in his studio in London.[1] 'Enwonwu the Bohemian' appeared in the *West African Review* and, Ogbechie argues, in its foregrounding of Enwonwu as both easel painter and sculptor, complete with white lab coat, chaotic workspace of an artist-genius, and indigenous tools like the adz, it affronted Eurocentric narratives of modernist art. Ogbechie uses this photograph as evidence of strategic self-presentation and 'subjective intervention' on the part of Enwonwu into art worlds and modernist histories that otherwise failed to accommodate African presence.[2] This photographic portrait of Enwonwu makes clear that at one point he was positioned as a modernist artist. As Ogbechie discusses, it is all the more conspicuous, therefore, that Enwonwu, and his many mid-century contemporaries from the continent, have been continuously excluded from the modernist canons. In the fifteen years since Ogbechie wrote his article, the scholarly literature on African modernist art has grown significantly, to include monographs on specific national contexts as well as major retrospective exhibitions and critical studies of individual artists, notably Ogbechie's own book on Enwonwu himself.[3] The position of the UK within histories of modernist art by African artists has, too, been broached through, for example, investigations into educational programmes that both brought students from the continent to art schools in London, and took British educators to places like Lagos, Kampala, and Harare.[4] Only recently, however, have investigations been undertaken to trace the reception and continued presence of African modernist artworks in British collections, that is to identify works by artists of Enwonwu's and subsequent generations which remain in national and local collections, but whose significance and individual histories have been overlooked.[5] The findings of this research revealed, for example, that the wider aesthetic significance of work by African artists, and their exchange with European colleagues, has often been overshadowed by limited characterisations of political content at the expense of more nuanced art historical discussion.[6] The emphasis of these projects has often, however, focused on London as former colonial metropole or on English collections more broadly, with little discussion of African modernist art in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Indeed, there remains work to be done in excavating what Ogbechie called the 'archival record' embodied by artefacts such as Enwonwu's photograph – the evidence of African engagement of the UK's manifold art worlds,

1. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Portrait of the Artist in the Shadow of Discourse: Narrating Modern African Art in 20th Century Art History', *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 14–27.

2. Ogbechie, 'Portrait of the Artist', p. 15.

3. These would include, in particular: Chika Okeke Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth Century Nigeria* (Duke University Press, 2015); Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008); Salah M. Hassan (ed.), *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (London: Tate Publishing in association with the Museum for African Art, 2013); Atta Kwami, *Kumasi Realism 1951–2007: An African Modernism* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2011); and Elizabeth W. Giorgis, *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019). Notable, too, are journal special issues such as Katharina Greven, Katrin Peters-Klaphake, and Nadine Siegert, 'African Modernisms and Its Methodologies and Terminologies – A Critical Mapping of the Field', *Critical Interventions: A Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, vol. 13, nos. 2–3, 2019, and major exhibition catalogues on western collections of African modernist art such as Perrin Lathrop (ed.), *African Modernism in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), pp. 121–303.

4. Most recently, for example, Kobena Mercer has discussed how London's position within histories of international modernism, particularly relating to African, Asian, and diaspora artists, is not in relation to any particularly radical practice or reputation, but because of 'British traditions of education' which brought students from places like Lahore and Lagos to study at institutions like the Slade. See Kobena Mercer, 'The Longest Journey: Black Diaspora Artists in Britain', *Art History*, vol. 44, no. 3, June 2021, p. 483.

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and of the differing roles that modernist art from the continent came to play in the diverse contexts in which it circulated.

This essay constitutes one such effort to provide insights into a long-overlooked history, one that connects young artists in East and Southern Africa with rural communities on the west coast of Scotland. It involves the founding of a public art collection, the wider context of post-war efforts to democratise access to culture, and the complicated vision of the renowned writer Naomi Mitchison, whose steadfast belief was that art might 'build bridges of understanding' between disparate communities. [7] This is, perhaps, an unexpected history, but it is also one which renews Ogbechie's call to be attentive to the archival traces and 'bodies of evidence' that provide critical insights into the presence of African modernist artists across the UK. It is a history that is indebted to Mitchison's efforts, but also to the 'subjective interventions' of the artists whose work she bought. One of the latter, in particular, the Tanzanian artist Sam J. Ntiro embraced the opportunity that Mitchison's patronage represented but, like his older Nigerian colleague, used a portrait photograph (Fig. 1) to assert an image

Fig. 1. Photographer Unknown, Portrait of Sam Joseph Ntiro, photograph, *c.* 1967. Argyll Collection Records. Live Argyll Archives CA 5/9.

5. Of particular note here is the important work of the 'Black Artists and Modernism' research project (AHRC, 2015–18), led by Prof. Sonia Boyce with Dr. David Dibosa and Dr. susan pui san lok, and a team of Research Fellows including Prof. Paul Goodwin, Dr. Anjalie Dalal-Clayton and Dr. Ella S. Mills. Among other notable outputs this project undertook an audit of work by artists of African or Asian heritage in UK public collections, ultimately identifying over 2000 artworks by 363 artists. See <https://www.arts.ac.uk/ual-decolonising-arts-institute/ual-related-activities/black-artists-and-modernism> [accessed 8 July 2022].

6. See, for example, David Dibosa's discussion of efforts to re-contextualise Gavin Jantjes' *Korabra* series (1986) work at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry. David Dibosa, 'Gavin Jantjes' *Korabra* series (1986): Reworking Museum Interpretation', *Art History*, vol. 44, no. 3, June 2021, pp. 572–93.

7. Naomi Mitchison, *Images of Africa* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1980), p. iii.

of himself into a world that might otherwise have made inaccurate assumptions about him. As is discussed below, modernist artworks by Ntiro, Uganda's Jak Katarikawe, Zambia's Henry Tayali, Tanzania's Louis Mbughuni, and others have spent decades in rural Argyll, yet the history of how they ended up there has been long forgotten. This history is one not only of local but of national and international significance. It offers another critical chapter in the history of public collections beyond the colonial metropole, and of modernist African art in the UK, a history whose 'archival record' has yet to be fully uncovered.

From Dar to Dunoon

In May 1967, a painting (Fig. 2) from Tanzania arrived in Dunoon, the small town on the western shore of the Firth of Clyde in the Scottish highland county

Fig. 2. Sam Joseph Ntiro, *Cutting Wood*, *c.* 1967(?), oil on canvas, 50.7 x 50.8 cm. Argyll Collection. Credit: Elias Jengo. (Photo: Christina Young.)

of Argyll (now Argyll and Bute).[8] *Cutting Wood* had been sent to T. G. Henderson, the Director of Education at Argyll County Council, from Dar es Salaam by the artist Sam J. Ntiro. Ntiro, an artist, educator, and diplomat, had recently been appointed Tanzania's Commissioner of Culture and this work had been purchased by the writer and Argyll resident Naomi Mitchison for the county's public art collection. As well as sending his painting, Ntiro wrote to Mitchison directly, informing her that the work was on its way to Scotland and enclosing a photograph of himself in the act of painting, his white lab coat splattered with paint and his brow furrowed (Fig. 1). This photograph, in contrast to Enwonwu's earlier, wide-angle studio portrait, was a closely cropped shot, in which intense concentration and well-worn overalls codified Ntiro as brooding modernist. The shot of Ntiro in action recalled similar, iconic photographs of American artists like Jackson Pollock, and, unlike in the photograph of Enwonwu two decades earlier in which the artist looked at the camera in a self-conscious presentation of his credentials, Ntiro's obliviousness to the lens asserted that his priority was to his artwork, not his audience. Mitchison was excited by the acquisition of his work for Argyll, on whose County Council she served from 1945 to 1965. As Councillor, she had pushed for the establishment of a fund to purchase art that would circulate amongst Argyll's small towns and remote, rural schools. A progressive endeavour, the project resonated with a range of mid-century ideas from Herbert Read's *Education Through Art* (1943) to various democratising museum initiatives and local authority schemes to acquire art for use in classrooms. The Argyll Collection was notable, however, for its embrace of works of modernist art from beyond Europe, particularly modernist art from Africa, acquired by Mitchison on her extensive travels in the 1960s and 1970s. For the children of Argyll, she bought modern art in the newly independent nations of east and southern Africa. She did so not just because she was excited by these works but, importantly, because she felt the Highlands had more in common with African communities emerging from colonialism than might initially be assumed.

Upon its founding in 1960, the Argyll Collection intended to primarily focus on Scottish modern artists. As Mitchison reported in 1965, she long 'nagged' her fellow councillors before they agreed to allocate limited funds. Initial purchases focused on 'good pictures' by 'modern Scots'.[9] Five years after its founding, however, she radically expanded the collection's horizons, buying artworks from new, notable galleries like the ChemChemi Creative Center in Nairobi, Kenya and institutions connected to important African art schools, such as the Makerere Artists Guild in Kampala, Uganda. The acquisition of Ntiro in 1967 is revealing of the scale of her ambitions. Born under British colonial rule in the Kilimanjaro region of what is now Tanzania, Ntiro had trained first at Makerere College in Uganda under British art teacher Margaret Trowell, before pursuing further study at the Slade School of Art. His first major solo exhibition had been at the Piccadilly Galleries in London in 1955, a show that received positive national reviews, from *The Scotsman* to *The Guardian*.[10] In the last years of British colonial rule, Ntiro had taught at Makerere, but his ambition had led him to seek opportunities in the USA. In 1960, he opened an important exhibition at the Merton Simpson Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York, from which the Museum of Modern Art acquired his painting *Men Taking Banana Beer to the Bride by Night* (Fig. 3).[11] His US travels affirmed his commitment to the idea of art as cultural diplomacy.[12] When Tanganyika (later Tanzania) became independent in 1961, Ntiro accepted Julius Nyerere's invitation to serve as High Commissioner in London, where he represented his country at numerous events and gave speeches emphasising the role of creative culture in intercultural understanding.[13]

8. The current date for this artwork is given as '*c.* 1967(?)' to reflect that it has not yet been confirmed. The artwork itself has no date on it but was sent to Argyll in 1967. An artwork with the same title, 'Cutting Wood', was reportedly sold in Ntiro's first London exhibition at the Piccadilly Gallery in 1955. Since Argyll's painting by this name was sent by the artist himself from Tanzania, it seems unlikely that it is the same work, but research into the most accurate date for the Argyll Collection's 'Cutting Wood' remains ongoing. Information on the 1955 exhibition from Sam Ntiro File, Box 93, Harmon Foundation, Inc., Records, Library of Congress.

9. Naomi Mitchison, Conversation with Magnus Magnussen. Transcript of video tape recording in Studio B, Glasgow, on Sunday 3 January 1965 (as edited on 7.3.65). Recording Number: VT/4 T/GW2004. Project Number: 147/3/4/7930. Producer: Finlay J. MacDonald. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

10. Mario Pissarra, 'Re/writing Sam J Ntiro: Challenges of Framing in the Excavation of a "Lost" Pioneer', *Third Text Africa*, vol. 4, 2015, p. 30.

11. The exhibition was co-organised by the Harmon Foundation. For more on this and related exhibitions, see Perrin Lathrop, 'African Modernism in America, 1947–1967', *African Arts*, vol. 54, no. 3, Autumn 2021, pp. 68–81.

12. See Kate Cowcher, 'Samuel Ntiro, Skunder Boghossian and Modern African Art in Turbulent Times', in Perrin Lathrop (ed.), *African Modernism in America, 1947–1967* (New York: American Federation for the Arts, 2022), pp. 37–45.

13. In 1963, for example, the *Birmingham Daily Post* reported Ntiro's comments following a school performance at Moreton Hall School in Oswestry of a play called *The Bridge Between*, which purported to emphasise the importance of bridging relations between Europeans and Africans. Ntiro's remarks included a statement about rejecting racial prejudice, and he concluded by stating that he hoped the young performers would 'practice what you have learned here when you go home and into the wide world'. 'Building a Bridge Between Races', *Birmingham Daily Post*, vol. 3, June 1963, p. 3.

Fig. 3. Sam Joseph Ntiro, *Men Taking Banana Beer to Bride by Night*, 1956, oil on canvas, 16 1/8 x 20′ (40.9 Sum: x 50.8 cm). Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Fund. Acc. No.: 122.1960. Credit: Digital Image, the Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala, Florence.

Mitchison knew that Ntiro was an artist of stature, and had already bought two of his paintings for her personal collection.[14] Acquiring his *Cutting Wood* for Argyll was a coup; she enjoyed the fact that, when it hung in the county's rural classrooms, Scottish children would have a painting by an artist whose work also hung in New York City. At the same time, the acquisition chimed with Ntiro's own faith in art's ability to foment dialogue and, as I discuss, his enclosure of his photograph was key to his reciprocation of Mitchison's complicated vision to connect the rural Highlands with the African continent. The Argyll Collection's African artworks are not only some of the most significant British public art acquisitions of the 1960s and 1970s – and revealing of the ways in which Scottish relations with the African continent were, in part, distinct from the rest of the UK – but also evidence of the international reaches of African modernist art in its heyday. The latter, as Chika Okeke-Agulu and others have articulated, surged in the 1960s, with the liberated creativities of independence and the emergence of new national imaginaries.[15] At the same time, jet-age travel, alongside Cold War-era networks and funding bodies, provided Africa's modern artists with unprecedented international markets and opportunities. That works by young graduates from Makerere College, for example, ended up

14. The two paintings once in Mitchison's personal collection are *Gathering in the Village* (n.d.) and *Collecting Wood in the Forest* (n.d.). They were bought in 2001 by Michael Graham-Steward and Michael Stevenson, at the auction of the contents of Carradale House.

15. On the importance of autonomy and independence to the history of modern African art, see Chika Okeke, 'Modern African Art', in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa* 1945–1994 (Munich: Prestel, 2001), pp. 29–36.

in rural Scottish schools in the 1960s is revealing of not just Mitchison's internationalist aspirations but also those of artists like Ntiro. Though relatively small in number – twelve out of 180 works – the Argyll Collection's African holdings provide rich insights into the diverse priorities of professional artists in Kampala, Nairobi, Lusaka, and Dar in the 1960s and 1970s. Though the limitations of Mitchison's vision are apparent in the fact that these works were overlooked soon after they arrived in Scotland, their recent rediscovery provides an opportunity to revisit the aspirations that drove their acquisition, and to consider the role they might play once again in challenging young people to see the world in different, more inclusive ways.[16]

Founding the Argyll Collection

The idea for the Argyll Collection originated in the later 1950s. Mitchison was a well-known writer and committed socialist. With novels like *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931) and *The Bull Calves* (1949), she had established a reputation as a prolific writer of epic historical fiction. Her vocal support of rights to birth control and of the work of Marie Stopes in establishing clinics for women to access the latter gained her recognition as a feminist activist. In the 1930s, she, her husband Dick Mitchison, and their children had moved from London to Carradale House, the titular mansion of Carradale, a small fishing village on the Kintyre peninsula, north of Campbeltown. Both Mitchison and her husband remained active in politics after the move, with Dick winning the election as Labour MP for Kettering in 1945. While he spent considerable time down south, Mitchison established herself at Carradale, driving tractors, riding out with the fishermen, and opening her house for community events. If his political ambitions were at the national level, hers focused on local and regional politics. She was elected as representative for Kintyre East on Argyll County Council in 1945, a seat she held for almost twenty years. In the same period, she became the Argyll representative on the new Highland Panel, a regional government body supporting the needs of Highland communities, from infrastructure and housing to questions of cultural preservation. On the Panel, Mitchison was particularly invested in the preservation of a so-called 'Highland tradition', a range of creative practices and traditions she considered uniquely rooted in this part of the world. This work was also focused on education and social development, advocating for spaces, for example, where communities could gather for social and creative interactions.[17]

Founded in 1960, the Argyll Collection extended these ideas, originating in efforts to create what Mitchison referred to as a 'picture scheme' for rural children, with the council purchasing works to loan to schools.[18] She supplemented the starting fund with donations, and a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. In 1966, she expressed that her aim was to give children who would not otherwise visit a gallery access to art, but also, in a revealingly maternalistic manner, 'to build up a Scottish confidence, a sense of nationhood, something a civilized person could be proud of'.[19] The collection was conceived as an educational resource, but Mitchison also intended it to shape a sense of modern identity, to expand horizons beyond Kintyre. The collection would be nomadic, travelling around schools for exhibitions and workshops. To build the project, she partnered with Jim Tyre, the Glasgow School of Art-trained artist and art teacher. As well as advising on acquisitions, handling artworks, and making exhibition purchases, Tyre drove the collection's van around the large and not always easy to traverse county, taking paintings and prints to classrooms from Campbeltown to Oban.

16. This essay is the culmination of a research partnership founded in 2018 between the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews and Argyll and Bute Council. It originates in my discovery of Ntiro's work in the Argyll Collection, and Argyll and Bute's former Cultural Coordinator, Madeleine Conn, alerting me to the existence of eleven other African artworks in their holdings, many of which had lost their acquisitions and whose histories were unknown. Information on the research project and related 2021 exhibition can be found at <www.dartodunoon.com> [accessed 26 October 2023].

17. John A. Burnett, *The Making of the Modern Scottish Highlands* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), pp. 185–6.

18. Jenni Calder, *The Burning Glass: The Life of Naomi Mitchison* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2019), pp. 258–9. Jill Benton reported that Mitchison described the collection as her proudest achievement as councillor. Jill Benton, *Naomi Mitchison: A Biography* (London: Pandora Press, 1990), p. 144.

19. Naomi Mitchison, in the *Times Education Supplement*, 1969. Cited on 'The Argyll Collection: History', <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/argyllcollection/about> [accessed 26 October 2023].

Early correspondence reveals that the collection initially included prints and reproductions of canonical European masters. 'I suppose we ought to have a Gaugin', wrote Mitchison to Tyre, adding bluntly, '[p]ersonally I think Sisley, Utrillo and Pissarro are old bores'. Budgets soon stretched to contemporary British artists whose work was still affordable, such as the English novelist Raymond Hitchcock. 'I'd like to get something by one of the school of people who do things in wiggly lines', Mitchison wrote to Tyre.[20] Her disarming irreverence evinced her intolerance for pretentiousness, as well as a clear awareness of the opportunity to provoke. She was uninterested in buying works of art to be quaint classroom decorations; this was a chance to challenge young people (and their teachers) to engage the unexpected. Tyre's letters are altogether more temperate, though they echo the same sentiments. He enthused about works that would be both 'exciting and instructive to children', but also expressed awareness that 'not everyone shares our enthusiasm'.[21] The latter was written regarding an exhibition he organised in Campbeltown, to which attendance had been mixed and the local newspaper had not sent a reporter. Neither Tyre nor Mitchison were dispirited by the initial local reception. If anything, it galvanised their commitment to develop the collection in ambitious and potentially provocative ways.

Artworks were purchased from the Royal Scottish Academy and the Scottish Society of Artists, with some made without confidence that the Council would be in support. Demonstrating her financial privilege, Mitchison reported that she 'would gladly take [one unnamed work] for [her]self if the county don't want it'.[22] A similar purchase from the artist (and later acclaimed scientist) Graham Cairns-Smith was undertaken in full awareness that it may not 'go down well with Argyll'.[23] In 1964, *Little Girl with a Piece* (Fig. 4) by Joan Eardley was bought using the council funds. Eardley had died prematurely from breast cancer in 1963, and an exhibition of her work was subsequently held in London. The Eardley acquisition at this juncture points to growing ambitions; Mitchison and Tyre brought to Argyll one of her renowned studies of Glasgow's working-class children, whose lives were very different to those in the towns and villages across the Clyde. The painting expanded the purview of Argyll's children, giving them the chance to consider both the experiences of growing up in Glasgow's dilapidated tenements and Eardley's characteristically non-naturalistic representation of a peer, using a dramatically flattened perspective that emphasised the city's bricks and slabs. The work offered a challenge in both content and form. Over the next twenty years, Mitchison and Tyre amassed a collection of nearly 180 works, ranging from provincial landscapes to other more challenging pieces, including Sir Robin Philipson's visceral work *Figure Crucified* (1969) and Tom MacDonald's haunting *Icarus* (1965). MacDonald, Philipson, and Eardley were amongst many notable mid-century Scottish artists whose work soon came to hang in schools across Argyll. The county collection grew to include Elizabeth Blackadder, Robert MacBryde, Alan Davie, Leon Morrocco, and others.

Public Art and Citizenship

The collection was ambitious and progressive, but it was not unprecedented. After the Second World War, public art initiatives proliferated across Britain, including several that were specifically focused on democratising access to art for children. In 1947, Stewart Mason, Director of Education at Leicestershire County Council, began what became the Leicestershire Education Authority Collection, a public art collection amassed to be exhibited in schools and colleges. Like Mitchison and Tyre, Mason was ambitious, and his acquisitions

20. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, undated, *c.* 1962. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

21. Letter from Jim Tyre to Naomi Mitchison, undated, *c.* 1962–4. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

22. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, 17 October 1962. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

23. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, 16 April 1964. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

Fig. 4. Joan Eardley, *Little Girl with a Piece*, 1959, oil on canvas, 92.2 x 72.1 cm. Argyll Collection. Credit: Estate of Joan Eardley. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023.

included several young artists, such as 'kitchen sink' painter John Bratby, who went on to have notable careers.[24] Concurrently, there was School Prints Ltd, first established by Derek Rawnsley in the 1930s but developed by his wife Brenda after he was killed in action in 1943. The Rawnsleys's scheme involved commissioning prints from renowned artists, such as L. S. Lowry, John Nash, and Barbara Jones, that could be sold inexpensively to primary schools. In 1947, Brenda's ambition led her to commissions from famed Paris-based artists such as Matisse, Leger, and Picasso. These were reportedly too 'avant garde' for some primary school teachers, but even in their abstraction they maintained the colourful, often playful aesthetic that the series was associated with.[25] Another initiative, the *Pictures for Schools* exhibitions, began in the late 1940s, set up by Nan Youngman, an artist and teacher who fervently believed that access to original artworks encouraged not only children's creativity but their critical thinking skills.[26] *Pictures for Schools* was largely focused in England, though Tyre and Mitchison certainly knew of such schemes: they, in fact, purchased one work,

24. See Donald K. Jones, *Stewart Mason: The Art of Education* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988).

25. 'The Guardian view on contemporary art in schools: a joyful idea reborn', *The Guardian*, 14 January 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/14/the-guardian-view-on-contemporary-art-in-schools-a-joyful-idea-reborn> [accessed 26 October 2023].

26. Natalie Bradbury reports that Youngman's inspiration for the scheme came during the war when she was a young teacher and evacuated with her school to Cambridgeshire where the Earl of Sandwich made three rooms of Hinchingbrook House available for lessons. She taught alongside the Earl's art collection, including historic and contemporary work. Natalie Bradbury, '*Pictures for Schools*: Visual Education in the Classroom and the Art Gallery', *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* vol. 57, nos. 1–2, 2021, p. 136.

Leonard Gray's mixed media *Façade* (1970), at one of the rare *Pictures for Scottish Schools* exhibitions in 1970.[27]

In Scotland, Tom Honeyman, Director of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery established an outreach scheme with the Schools Museums Service in the 1940s, part of a broader public educational programming in Glasgow. Honeyman's service included school visits, an after-school programme, and a 'lending library' of objects for schools to borrow from.[28] Mitchison and Tyre knew about Honeyman's scheme through contacts in Glasgow, particularly the artist Louise Gibson Annand, a friend of Mitchison's who worked for the Schools Museums Service in the 1950s.[29] The impetus for the Argyll Collection, therefore, chimed with related contemporaneous concerns both near and far regarding access to art, though from the outset Mitchison and Tyre sought to offer considerably more challenging content than the playful prints of the Rawnsley's scheme. They also inverted Honeyman's vision: rather than take children into museums and galleries, schools themselves were to be sites for exhibition and creative encounter.

One of the leading proponents for rethinking the role of art in and as education from the 1940s onwards was Herbert Read, whose long treatise *Education Through Art* was prepared in the final years of the Second World War. Motivated by what he saw to be education's failure to prevent humanity from criminality and war, Read campaigned for what he called a 'revolutionary policy' that foregrounded aesthetics and freedom of expression as bulwarks against conformity and, by extension, totalitarianism.[30] His intention was to advocate not simply for more art lessons in the curriculum but for a holistic overhaul of education such that 'spirit' and creative learning were given precedence across all subjects, displacing rigid teaching and memorialisation.[31] The urgency of Read's 'revolution' was underpinned by what he saw to be the need to shift away from the production of the conformist 'scholar' to the production of the active 'citizen' – the nurturing of individual 'imaginative powers' as critical to the fomenting of a dynamic and cohesive society.[32]

Mitchison undoubtedly read Read. The two knew each other through left-wing intellectual circles, having published alongside each other in interwar modernist magazines like *New Verse* and *Realist*. Certainly, she shared his idea that art was critical to enriching civic education. Her focus, however, was specifically on the needs of Argyll. The Argyll Collection was envisaged not as a prototype for a more generalised philosophy on art in society but as a specifically rooted project, committed to the idea that Argyll's (and by extension, Highland) identities were neither parochial nor obsolescent. For all of her seeming irreverence, Mitchison was not interested in acquiring challenging modern art simply for the joy of ruffling conservative feathers (though she enjoyed doing so). She believed that the collection was capable of encouraging the county's future generations, through exposure to a rich diversity of creative expression, to be secure in a sense of self and location, not as existing in a disconnected or remote place, but as a modern, internationally integrated community. She was, undoubtedly, driven by an aristocratic maternalism that often manifested itself in overtones of 'knowing best', but she was also entirely committed to enriching the lives of the communities which she considered herself a part of.[33] Her vision was a radical and disruptive one, in sync with Read's rejection of conformity. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was works of art not from Glasgow or Edinburgh but from Nairobi, Kampala, and Dar es Salaam that, in her view, were most capable of affirming Argyll's position in the modernising world.

27. Bradbury reported that only one *Pictures for Scottish Schools* exhibition took place, in 1967, <https://picturesforschools.wordpress.com/2014/09/> [accessed 26 October 2023], yet the Argyll Collection records have a receipt for Gray's work from 1970. Either way, the *Pictures for Scottish Schools* scheme was clearly far more limited that the England-based *Pictures for Schools* scheme.

28. Anne Marie Millar, 'T.J. Honeyman: Policies Towards the Popularization of Art and the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove' (MLitt Thesis, University of St Andrews, 1992), pp. 54–5.

29. In an undated letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre in the Argyll Collection records (Live Argyll archives CA 5/9), Mitchison states that 'Louise Annad [sic] is going to make a drawing'. This is not elaborated on and no work by Annand remains in the collection, but it is evidence of their connection and of Annand's awareness of her work in Argyll.

30. Herbert Read, 'Education through Art: A Revolutionary Policy', *Art Education*, vol. 8, no. 7, 1955, pp. 3–17.

31. Michael J. Parsons, 'Herbert Read on Education', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1969, p. 35.

32. Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943), p. 221.

33. This was discussed by Jenni Calder in 'Remembering Naomi Mitchison', *Dar to Dunoon Conversations Podcast*, 27 May 2021 <http://dartodunoon.com/podcast-summary/> [accessed 26 October 2023].

From Mochudi to Culloden, and Back

The establishment of the Argyll Collection was concurrent with another major development in Mitchison's life. In 1960, she met a young man from Bechuanaland (today, Botswana) called Linchwe who was studying in the UK and who came to Carradale House on a British Council tour.[34] Linchwe was in line for the chieftanship of the Bakgatla, a Tswana-speaking people whose land encompassed both part of Bechuanaland and northern South Africa, then an Apartheid state. As a cross-border people, the Bakgatla faced significant political challenges, especially after Botswana's independence from Britain in 1966 when the country found itself largely surrounded by hostile white-minority governments in South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and the area today known as Namibia. Linchwe was a conscientious student, mindful of the expectations placed upon him. He went on to participate in the South African liberation struggle, welcoming Apartheid refugees to Mochudi, the Bakgatla's administrative centre, north of Gabarone, the capital city.[35] Linchwe and Mitchison became close friends, and upon his installation as *Kgosi* Linchwe II in 1963 he invited her to Mochudi.

Mitchison was deeply interested in African politics, having travelled in Nigeria and covered Ghana's independence for the *Guardian* in 1957. Her account of travels for the latter conveyed her excitement about the end of colonialism and the exuberant celebrations that went with it, as well as an awareness of the cultural destruction that the former had wrought. She later recalled with approval, for example, that Lady Olave Baden Powell had taken 'a few objects' back to the museum in Kumasi in 1957.[36] These were some of the many objects that her husband, Robert Baden Powell, had looted during his leadership of the British forces in the Anglo-Asante wars of the 1890s. As Jacqueline Ryder has aptly noted, however, Mitchison's African writings, though well intentioned, could all too easily veer into colonialist guilt or denial.[37] The account of Lady Baden-Powell, for example, was quickly followed by a paragraph about how, by 1957, the British were, in fact, no longer 'seriously considered … as oppressors' in Ghana, a statement that, though intended as a compliment to the strength of emergent Ghanaian nationalism, also served as a way out of confronting the complexities of colonial legacies.[38]

Mitchison's journey to Mochudi in 1963 was the start of a long connection with Botswana, and with east and southern Africa. When Linchwe was installed as Chief, he asked Mitchison to become *Mmarona* or 'Mother' to the Bakgatla, a ceremonial, advisory position, later commemorated in a portrait of her as 'Ma Bakgatla' by the Australian artist Clifton Pugh (Fig. 5). Mitchison took this honour very seriously, describing Mochudi as her home and identifying, in certainly problematic ways, as a Motswana.[39] She took the title 'Mother' literally and her writings, again, revealed maternalistic attitudes, not just to Linchwe, but to the Bakgatla people in general. Despite her overt anti-colonial politics, her romanticisation of her role often reproduced a colonialist dynamic, with clear echoes of the 'knowing best' attitude she equally displayed in Argyll. At the same time, Linchwe valued her opinion sincerely, both during his leadership in Mochudi and later when he served as Botswana's ambassador to the USA. Their affectionate letters reveal extensive discussions of African politics, of racism in America, and of shared visions for developments in Mochudi.[40] Mitchison threw herself into Mochudi society, attending the *kgotla* council whenever visiting, campaigning for resources and women's education.[41] As she had done during her time on the Highland Panel, Mitchison was enthusiastic about projects that bolstered and preserved historic traditions and cultural heritage. A project of particular interest was the establishment of a museum, which Linchwe was a strong advocate for. The Phuthadikobo Museum in Mochudi, she later wrote, was a community

34. Benton, *Naomi Mitchison*, pp. 147–8.

35. See Louisa Cantwell, 'Chiefly Power in a Frontline State: Kgosi Linchwe II, the Bakgatla and Botswana in the South African Liberation Struggle, 1948–1994', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 255–72.

36. Naomi Mitchison, *Mucking Around: Five Continents over Fifty Years* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), p. 118.

37. See Jacqueline Ryder, 'Speaking as Tribal (M)other: The African writing of Naomi Mitchison', in Carla Sassi and Theo van Heijnsbergen (eds), *Within and Without Empire: Scotland Across the (Post)colonial Borderline* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 203–4.

38. Mitchison, *Mucking Around*, p. 119.

39. Ryder, 'Speaking as Tribal (M)other', pp. 211–12.

40. For example, Mitchison's papers in the National Library of Scotland included long letters exchanged between the two in 1969, when Linchwe was based in the USA. Most are detailed reports on what has been happening in Mochudi or the events Linchwe is representing Botswana at. ACC. 10,753/2 Letters, 1967–70 Chief Linchwe II and his wife to Naomi Mitchison, Naomi Mitchison Papers, National Library of Scotland.

41. Mitchison's papers at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York include a folder of minutes of council meetings in Mochudi. These reference her involvement in a Youth Development Association, a Community Center, and proposals for a 'Lady Mitchison Scholarship Fund'. MIT File 3: Mochudi and Kgatlang, Naomi Mitchison Papers, Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

Fig. 5. Clifton Pugh, *Naomi (Lady) Mitchison, 1897–1999*, 1974, oil on canvas, 101.60 × 76.20 cm. National Galleries Scotland. Purchased 1999. Credit: Dailan Pugh.

42. Naomi Mitchison, 'A Museum in Africa', *Museum Journal*, vol. 77, no. 1, 1977, pp. 9–10.

43. Naomi Mitchison. 'Open Letter to an African Chief', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1964, pp. 65–72.

triumph, emblematic of the enthusiasm to reclaim and restore indigenous arts and traditions in the wake of colonial and missionary cultural destructions.[42]

Mitchison quickly saw parallels between the Highlands and Mochudi, and by extension Africa's many newly independent states. From the 1960s onwards, she published numerous texts about the African continent: collections of stories for children, fictional accounts of life in settlements like Mochudi (with only thinly veiled representations of people she knew), and histories that were explicitly intended to affront colonialist reductions. Yet, she rarely offered reflection on her own position as a privileged white British woman, something she felt was eclipsed by her close affiliations with the Bakgatla. A recurrent topic in Mitchison's writing was her defence of the concept of the 'tribe', itself a word affiliated with both colonial ethnography and racist conceptions of so-called 'primitive' social organisation, as well as potentially divisive affiliations. Mitchison knew this: '[t]ribe is a dirty word nowadays', she wrote in 1964.[43] She knew that, in

the wake of colonialism, new national identities took precedence over longer-standing ethnic or, in her words, 'tribal' ones, the latter seen as a possible threat to the nascent authority of the former, and a source of civil conflict.[44] Yet, in large part motivated by her affiliations with the Bakgatla, she defended the 'tribe' as a critical unit of social cohesion and identity. In one revealing article, she wrote an 'Open Letter' to her 'tribal son', *Kgosi* Linchwe II, extolling the cohesion and cooperation of the Bakgatla people and openly pondering how Bakgatla governance might evolve towards a form of democracy. With no sense of irony, she praised the Bakgatla's resilience in the face of colonial incursions, yet took the opportunity to advise, as someone with 'quite a lot of experience of British democracy', on how 'our tribe' might shift to different, elected systems. Though lacking in self-awareness, Mitchison's letter was also revealing of why Mochudi enthralled Mitchison: 'my own feeling about our tribe', she wrote, 'comes from my being partly Highland and knowing in myself the warm feeling that we in the Highland area have towards our own and our related clans'.[45] In Mitchison's imaginings, Mochudi and Argyll were both places of historic social identities, affiliations, and traditions that had been undermined by external, oppressive forces, as well as the necessities of modernising nationalism.

Her line of argument anticipates more recent understandings of Highland and Lowland relations, and those between Scotland and England more generally, in clearly colonial terms. Here, as Mitchison emphasised in 1964, the 1746 Battle of Culloden in which the British army defeated the Jacobites is critical, presaging the demise of the clan as a 'body of people' and the ushering in of a system of destruction and domination, a process hastened by the Clearances in the nineteenth century.[46] Argyll, as Mitchison knew, was a place in which the latter left visible scars. The ruined remains of the village of Arichonan on the Kintyre peninsula pointed to a notorious eviction in 1848, where the revoking of tenant farm leases by the landowner, Neill Malcolm, 13th of Poltalloch, precipitated a protracted and violent resistance that ultimately led to the decimation of the settlement, and the dispersal of its population.[47] In a clear illustration of the entwining of the Clearances with other Scottish colonial endeavours, Neill Malcolm was not only an owner of land in Argyll but heir to a fortune derived from sugar plantations in the Caribbean, where the labour of enslaved men and women dramatically increased his family's wealth. The abolition of slavery in the 1830s enabled to the Malcolm family to claim £40,000 (£4.8 million in current currency) in government compensation.[48] Wrangling with Scotland's position as land both of the coloniser and of the dispossessed is an enduringly difficult task.[49] There is a risk, especially when emphasising domestic histories of dispossession, of overlooking or forgetting Scotland's own extensive involvement in colonialism, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean, something that the artist Alberta Whittle calls 'the luxury of amnesia'.[50] Though Mitchison in her 'Open Letter' did, for example, reference the 'jealousy' of Christians who undermined east African religious practices, she did not confront the fact that missionaries from Scotland were critical to such efforts.[51] Ultimately, Mitchison wished to suggest that African communities like Mochudi might learn from the histories of former clan-based societies in the Highlands, particularly with regard to the importance of enfranchisement.[52] Mitchison was, however, not only interested in encouraging Bakgatla cognisance of Scottish history as a cautionary tale. Her journeys to and from Mochudi from the early 1960s onwards involved flights through Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, and Tanzania, and on these she became equally convinced of the need for communities in Argyll to learn about this rapidly changing part of the world. Here, she wrote, were artists who were

44. Mitchison, 'Open Letter', p. 65.

45. Mitchison, 'Open Letter', p. 65.

46. Mitchison, 'Open Letter', p. 66.

47. Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances (Debates and Documents in Scottish History)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 61.

48. Entries for Neill Malcolm, 12th of Poltalloch and Neill Malcolm, 13th of Poltalloch are available via the online database for the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, UCL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/23187> and <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146637310> [accessed 21 July 2023]. See also 'The Scot Who Owned More than 2000 Slaves in Jamaica', *The Scotsman*, 29 November 2018 <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/the-scot-who-owned-more-than-2000-slaves-in-jamaica-199409> [accessed 21 July 2023].

49. For an overview of the long historiographic debates on this, see John M. MacKenzie and T. M. Devine, 'Introduction', in John M. MacKenzie and T. M. Devine (eds), *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1–29.

50. Chris Sharratt, 'Alberta Whittle's Decolonizing Impulse', *Frieze*, 28 February 2018 https://www.frieze.com/article/alberta-whittles-decolonizing-impulse [accessed 26 October 2023]. See also: Alberta Whittle, 'The Luxury of Amnesia', *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2017, pp. 3–6.

51. Mitchison, 'Open letter', p. 70.

52. Mitchison, 'Open letter', pp. 66–7.

committed to 'their own landscape and colours and movement of people in a rather definite and exciting way'.[53]

African Modernism for the Highlands

Mitchison's investment in Mochudi was obsessive: 'I had become completely, alarmingly, joyfully committed', she confessed to her diary.[54] In 1965, she lost her seat on the Argyll County Council, and biographer Jill Benton claimed that this followed accusations of '[squandering] County Council money in Africa'.[55] Mitchison pressured loved ones into donating to her adoptive home. Press articles, for example, document friends and family members leaving sums in their will to the Bakgatla.[56] She lobbied hard locally, too, for Mochudi, a place that suffered from severe drought in the mid-1960s. Her split commitments irked her Kintyre constituents. They did not, it seems, share her sense that Argyll had any affinity with Botswana. After almost two decades of service, she was voted out. The rejection hurt her. Her personal musings reveal the extent to which she explicitly, and problematically, romanticised the Highlands and the African continent in parallel. Though once, she wrote, she had committed to the 'dream of Alba', she now turned to the 'dream of Africa'. The 'reality' of Scotland, she wrote, had killed the former; would the 'reality' of Mochudi kill the latter?[57]

The first African acquisitions were almost contemporaneous with Mitchison losing her seat on the Council in 1965. Indeed, she continued to develop the collection even after her council tenure, well into the 1970s. The African artworks were not the first non-European works that interested her. As early as 1962, she had suggested that the collection acquire a painting by the Indian modernist Avinash Chandra.[58] The purchase did not go ahead, but her interest in Chandra's work underscored that from the earliest days, her vision for Argyll was capaciously international. With the African artworks, however, it is clear that she sought not just one or two token pieces, but a diverse selection: she bought paintings and prints, and attempted to acquire small sculptures via Frank McEwen at the National Gallery of Rhodesia, though the latter purchase was never completed.[59] Several were bought at the Makerere Artist Guild in Kampala and the ChemiChemi Creative Center in Nairobi in 1965 and 1966; these included a painting by Berlington Kaunda which was later reported lost in transit.[60] She continued buying African modern art works for the next ten years, adding at least twelve to the collection overall, including a selection of prints from the first graduating class of printmaking students at Makerere College and two works by the earliest Tinga Tinga painters in Tanzania.[61] The timing of the first African acquisitions suggests that the animosity she faced in fact spurred her to use the collection to insist upon connections she was sure existed, and upon the benefits she felt would come to children of Argyll through their exposure to such work.

One of the earliest purchases was a brooding nightscape *The Fishermen* (Fig. 6) by Louis Azaria Mbughuni, painted in deep, expressive colour, experiments in which were actively encouraged amongst art students at Makerere College in the 1960s.[62] *The Fishermen* featured two people seated in a dug-out pirogue, traditional canoes typically seen on Lake Tanganyika. The scene itself, saturated and abstracted, had an unsettling quality, with the central figure turning to confront the viewer. Emphasising the ominous, dream-like quality of the painting, Mbughuni depicted another pair flipped, but not fully mirrored, in the top left. For generations, sardine-like fish called *dagaa* had been caught by men in wooden canoes on Lake Tanganyika.[63] Fishing occurred at night, using a lamp to attract the shoals who were dragged in by nets. At first glance, Mbughuni's work could

53. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, sent from Nairobi, 26 March n.d. (1966 or 1967). Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

54. Untitled manuscript, detailing events following Linchwe's installation. MIT File 4 Diaries, Naomi Mitchison Papers, Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

55. Benton, *Naomi Mitchison*, p. 153.

56. For example, see '£1000 Bequest to Tribe', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 June 1967. A short account of a Mrs Christine Cecil Hope leaving a large sum in her will to the 'Kablata tribe' [sic] in Botswana, 'to be dispensed by Lady Naomi Mitchison'.

57. Untitled manuscript, detailing events following Linchwe's installation. MIT File 4 Diaries, Naomi Mitchison Papers, Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

58. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, sent from Carradale House, 6 December 1962. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

59. Letter from Frank McEwen to Jim Tyre, 8 November 1972. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

60. Kaunda's work is listed in a letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, 29 March 1966. Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

61. The Argyll Collection has prints by Mugalula Mukiibi and Catherine Nankya Katonoko Gombe, and two still unidentified classmates. They were students of Michael Adams, who set up the printmaking department in 1961. Tinga Tinga paintings are today largely mass produced, but they originated in the work of the Tinga Tinga Co-operative Society, established after the untimely death of the artist Edward Saidi TingaTinga in 1972. Mitchison bought works from two close associates of Tinga Tinga: Mandu Mmatambwe Adeusi (his friend) and Simon Mpata (his half brother).

62. From 1959, Makerere College was led by Cecil Todd, a Scottish artist who emphasised artistic individuality, rigorous training in colour theory and composition, and a break from the more overtly 'African(ist)' aesthetics of his predecessor, Margaret Trowell. See Sunanda K. Sanyal, '"Being Modern" Identity Debates and Makerere's Art School in the 1960s', in Monica Blackmun Visona and Gitti Salami (eds), *A Companion to Modern African Art* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp. 255–75.

63. See Jori Lewis, 'The Disappearing Sardines', *Salon*, 24 March 2006 <https://www.salon.com/2006/03/24/dagaa/> [accessed 26 October 2023].

Fig. 6. Louis Azaria Mbughuni, *The Fishermen*, *c.* 1965–6, oil on hardboard, 50.7 x 58 cm. The Argyll Collection. Credit: Louis Azaria Mbughuni.

be taken as an exploration of such traditions. He himself went on to become an important theatre professional, penning a UNESCO report about socialist Tanzania that emphasised the diversity of expression in Tanzanian painting, and its interests in documenting urban and rural life.[64] Though Mitchison enthused about the quality of the work she encountered in east Africa, she rarely provided commentary on why any particular work was purchased. In Mbughuni's case, Mitchison possibly envisaged *The Fishermen* as an ideal, if rather obvious, point of connection between two fishing communities, but in her letter to Tyre she only cursorily referred to it as 'a kind of boat with its reflection or counter dream'.[65] Mbughuni has recently, however, disclosed that the work was a depiction of Jesus's disciples, a theme directly connected to his own family's involvement with missionary service.[66] This detail was not recorded by Mitchison. It would have been challenging to her given her scepticism about missionary Christianity. She was, it seems, mainly attracted to this work for its ambiguity. In its refusal to offer a clear narrative, it affronted the images of the African continent that Scottish audiences were far more familiar with.

64. Louis Azaria Mbughuni, *The Cultural Policy of the United Republic of Tanzania* (Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1974), p. 58.

65. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, from Mochudi. Dated 26 March (1965?). Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

66. Personal communication with Louis Azaria Mbughuni, 26 January 2021.

These were images produced and constructed under colonialism, images that conspired to project the continent as a barren, inhospitable landscape, a place of limited technological development and of so-called 'primitive' social organisation. In Scotland, in particular, these were images that had grown out of the mythologies surrounding the journeys of Scottish missionaries and explorers, from Mungo Park to David Livingstone.[67] In 1971, the Clydesdale Bank issued a £10 note commemorating Livingstone, who famously travelled across southern Africa and advocated for the end of the Indian Ocean slave trade and for the introduction of 'Christianity, commerce and civilisation' (though Africa, of course, already had all three). Alongside Livingstone's face, the note featured two anonymous African men and an African woman, one of whom was visibly shackled.[68] These were the kinds of images that continued to perpetuate notions of the continent as a sparsely populated place of brutality, connected only to Scotland through the perceived munificence of men like Livingstone, who, in dying in what is today Zambia in 1873, literally gave his life for his vision. These are the images that Mitchison's purchases challenged. Though her acquisition of these works was clearly motivated by own romantic and, at times, troublingly reductive projections, she nonetheless brought to Argyll works of art that had the potential to radically alter perspectives.

Shortly after the Clydesdale Bank issued the Livingstone banknote, Mitchison bought a painting of a bustling café scene in Lusaka by the Zambian modern artist Henry Tayali (Fig. 7).[69] In its urbanity, its riot of colour, and its densely crowded scene, this painting stood in stark opposition to the colonialist stereotypes that lingered in the popular imagination. Like Mbughuni and Ntiro, Tayali had been trained in painting at Makerere College, but had returned home to Zambia in the early 1970s, when Idi Amin seized power in Uganda. He was an ambitious and talented artist, whose early work had depicted working-class Zambians. The painting that Mitchison bought exemplifies the shift he made in the 1970s away from earlier crisp social realism towards dense, semi-abstracted scenes that emphasised the dynamics of busy, urban spaces. Tayali did not individuate most of the people in the scene, though different patches of colour suggested an array of shirts and gesticulating bodies. In a diagonal from the upper left to the lower right, however, he included three studies of men in profile, men who did not appear to be interacting with any others, but who sat either in quiet contemplation or, in the case of the lower right, overtly downcast. This latter figure, in particular, prevented Tayali's painting from being a simple, jubilant social scene; his mood was at odds with the work's otherwise warm, exuberant tones. He evidenced to Tayali's continued concern for the hardships of working populations. Like Mbughuni's work, therefore, Tayali's painting retained a critical ambiguity even as it offered a visually colourful scene. In rendering working-class men in a modern, urban place of leisure, it offered audiences in Argyll a complex counterpoint to the primitivising images they carried in their wallets.

Another acquisition from the late 1960s offered a more provocative representation of African men and women: a wax crayon work, from what became 'The Lovers Series' by the Ugandan artist Jak Katarikawe (Fig. 8). Katarikawe was a self-taught artist, whose talent for drawing had been encouraged by Makerere College professor David Cook, for whom he had worked as a taxi driver. A young artist in the 1960s, Katarikawe soon acquired a reputation for depicting dream-like visions and the social mores of Uganda's Kiga people, as well as for erotic subject matter. For Argyll, Mitchison purchased, from what was likely one of Katarikawe's first exhibitions in Kampala, a bold, wax-crayon work of a couple embracing. The bodies were so closely entwined that they merged, their individual faces reduced to a single eye, half a nose, and half a mouth, which combined

67. See, for example, Tim Barringer, 'Fabricating Africa: Livingstone and the Visual Image, 1850–1874', in John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996), pp. 169–200.

68. Afe Adogame and Andrew Lawrence, 'Introduction: Africa-Scotland. Exploring Historical and Contemporary Relations in Global Contexts', in Afe Adogame and Andrew Lawrence (eds), *Africa in Scotland, Scotland in Africa: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Hybridities* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 6.

69. The title of this artwork remains unknown. When research began in 2018, the artist was recorded in the Argyll database as 'Henry Tayaz', with no title recorded. Project research assistant Elikem Logan deciphered the signature as 'Henry Tayali', and the attribution was confirmed in communication with Zenzele Chulu at the Visual Arts Council Documentation Department (Lusaka, Zambia) and the artist's son, Rhodrick Tayali. Tayali always titled his works, and research continues to determine the title of this one.

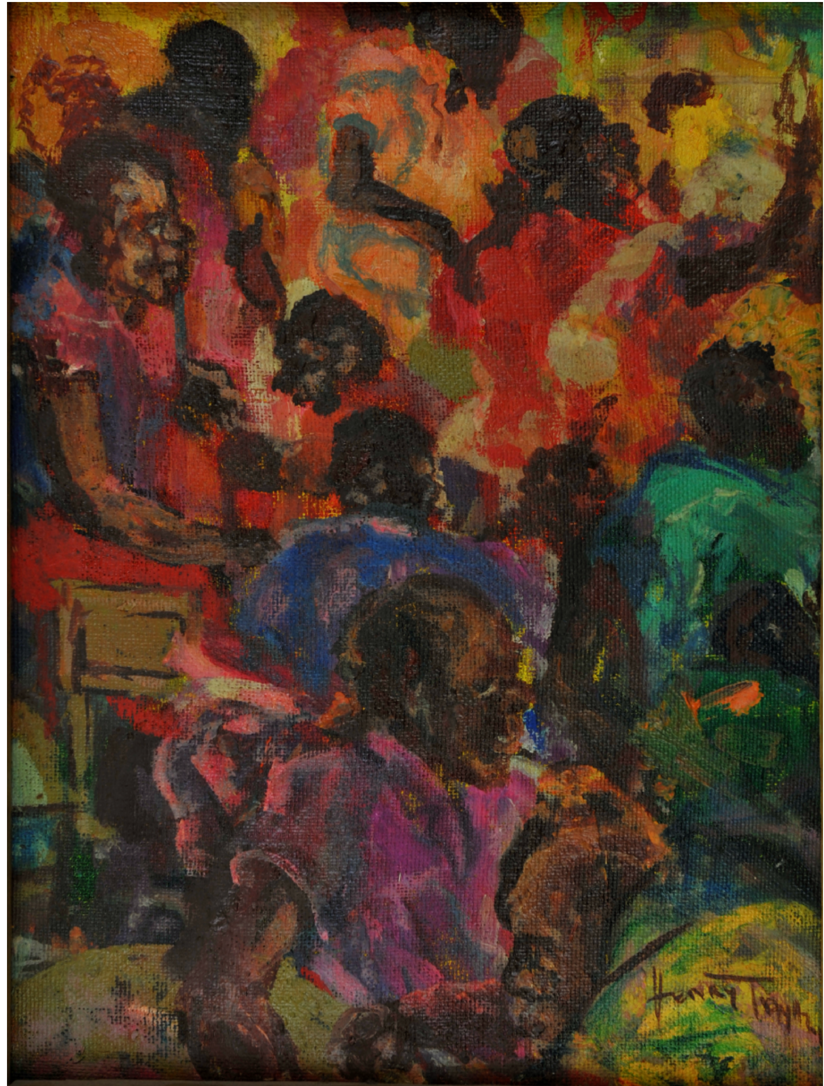

Fig. 7. Henry Tayali, *Title Unknown*, *c*. 1971, oil on board, 33 x 45 cm. The Argyll Collection. Credit: Rhodrick Tayali.

to create a new face, a picture of intimate unity. Elsbeth Court has noted that this motif of an embracing couple was recurrent in Katarikawe's work, a visual representation, she believes, of the Swahili love song 'Malaika', a particularly popular version of which was released by Harry Belafonte and Miriam Makeba in 1965.[70] This was not a salacious image but one of deep affection, and as a writer long interested in the complexities of human love and sexuality, it clearly appealed to Mitchison. On a formal level, Katarikawe's work made an interesting, unexpected comparison to Joan Eardley's, with its similarly flattened perspective and graphic distillation of the human body in the foreground. Additionally, where Eardley's work humanised Glasgow's urban children in the figure of the little girl with her snack ('piece'), Katarikawe offered an unashamedly intimate image of an African man and woman in love. The acquisition of both Eardley and Katarikawe in the mid-1960s was revealing of both Mitchison's consistency in acquiring works that altered perspectives, and of her judicious eye for not-yet-widely-appreciated talent.

70. Court discusses this in 'Art and Culture in East Africa in the 1960s', *Dar to Dunoon Conversations Podcast*, 3 June 2021 <http://dartodunoon.com/podcast-summary/> [accessed 26 October 2023].

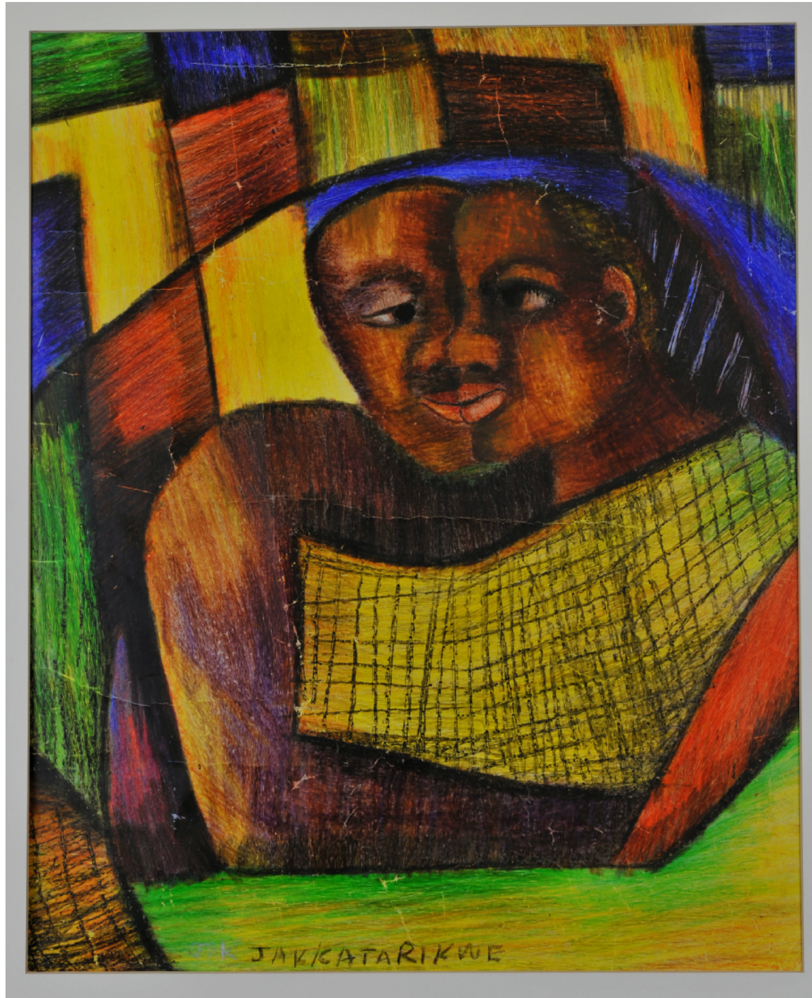

Fig. 8. Jak Katarikawe, from *The Lovers' Series*, Kampala period, 1960s–1980s, *c.* 1967, wax crayon on paper, 82 x 51 cm. The Argyll Collection. Credit: Mbabazi Ruth and the Katarikawe Family.

In the 1960s, African modernist art had a mixed reception outside of the African continent. Though African diaspora audiences, particularly in the USA, were deeply enthusiastic about the arts that accompanied the era of independence, elsewhere white European and American scholars suggested that 'contemporary' African painting and sculpture was derivative or, worse, a kind of 'voluntary cultural colonialism'.[71] Given her own romanticising of Mochudi and its cultural traditions, it is notable that Mitchison did not add to the Argyll Collection any of the local traditional arts and crafts. The museum in Gabarone, for example, had large displays of coil basketry that might have served well as representatives of Motswanan historic arts. Mitchison's African acquisitions made clear her draw to explicitly modernist work, predominantly but not exclusively by professionally trained artists; she sought for Argyll contemporary representations that were distinct from historic craft or utilitarian design traditions. She wanted works of art that evidenced a self-conscious, confident reflection on current, complex realities. In contrast to white British contemporaries like William Fagg, she saw nothing inauthentic about this work. If anything, she fetishised what she saw as its rootedness in its time and place of production.

71. In an oft-quoted passage from their 1964 book *African Sculpture*, William Fagg and Margaret Plass described 'contemporary African art' as 'an extension of European art by a kind of voluntary cultural colonialism'. Cited in Mbughuni, *Cultural Policy*, p. 56.

At face value, Sam Ntiro's *Cutting Wood*, undoubtedly the highest profile African acquisition made by Mitchison, appears the least challenging of preconceptions. A depiction of seven men working in the forest, the painting on canvas was characteristic of Ntiro's oeuvre which, since the 1950s, had focused on scenes of life from the Chagga villages in Tanzania in which he had grown up. A stylised group portrait, set amidst a dense forest landscape, the composition was divided into three zones: a serpentine, leafy canopy obscuring a blue sky; a central vignette of physical toil; and a base of hewn wood, reduced to stark geometry by the axes swinging above. Interpretations of Ntiro's work continue to divide scholars. In his lifetime it was equally appreciated for its 'naïve' representation of Tanzanian communities and critiqued for a perceived lack of skill.[72] More recently, scholars Angelo Kakande, Dominicus Zimanimoto Makukula, and Mario Pissarra have all speculated on Ntiro's interest in socialist politics, especially given his support for Julius Nyerere, whose socialist *Ujamaa* ideology guided Tanzanian public policy in the 1960s.[73] Kakande, in particular, has argued that Ntiro's work increasingly foregrounded collective labour in sympathy with the ideas that rooted African socialism, though fellow Tanzanian artist Elias Jengo has argued that this line of thought is overstated.[74] Mitchison's writings make clear her awareness of the draw of African socialism, and of Ntiro's specific commitments to Nyerere's government. She too, however, echoed characterisations of his work as picturesque when she described it as 'Rousseau-ish'.[75] Recently, Gabriella Nugent has shown how Ntiro was explicitly drawn to Rousseau's work during a visit to Paris in 1954.[76] Nugent speculates that it may well have informed his depictions of Tanzanian flora. Yet within the context of the mid-1960s, Mitchison's intended complement – 'Rousseau-ish' – also risked affirming reductive characterisations of belatedness or derivativeness that were rife regarding African modernist art.

An affront to such characterisations was, however, provided by Ntiro himself in the form of his photograph. Where the photograph had been taken was unclear, but it was not the first photographic portrait of Ntiro. In 1960, during the visit that had resulted in MoMA buying one of his paintings, the Harmon Foundation had facilitated a series of portrait photographs, posing in front of an easel with one of his paintings, sometimes smiling in a suit and other times more sober, in the crisp white lab coat.[77] The photograph he sent to Argyll differed from these; Ntiro turned his body and his work away from the camera, showing only himself in the act of painting. This photograph, sent along with his painting, made clear that he wished for audiences in Argyll – whom he knew Mitchison had bought his painting for – to recognise him as a professional artist, affronting any suggestion that he was a naïve, peripheral, or derivative painter. Ntiro believed in cultural diplomacy and recognised the value of visual representation. As he had stated explicitly in a speech in London in 1963, pride in oneself and in one's cultural traditions was essential to the building of any 'great nation'.[78] In a later article, he went further, advocating not just for pride but for outward projection and to 'increase the … cultural contact' long denied by colonialism.[79] The Argyll Collection purchase, therefore, was another opportunity for him to share his work with the international audiences that he knew were largely ignorant of Africa's cultural riches and complexities. He also knew, however, that a full appreciation of such work's significance hinged on a recognition of its creator as a respected professional. He sent his photograph to Mitchison in the hope that such connections would be made.

One of the last African acquisitions that Mitchison made for Argyll was in 1976. It was the apotheosis of her endeavours. A print (Fig. 9) by the South African artist Lucky Sibiya was acquired not in South Africa but from a joint

72. Pissarra, 'Re/writing Sam J Ntiro', pp. 30–32.

73. Angelo Kakande, 'Contemporary Art in Uganda: A Nexus of Art and Politics' (PhD diss., University of the Witswatersrand, 2008), pp. 137–49. Socialist politics are also discussed in Dominicus Zimanimoto Makukula, *The Development of Visual Arts in Tanzania from 1961 to 2015: A Focus on the National Cultural Policy and Institutions' Influences* (Freie Universität Berlin, 2018), pp. 82–3.

74. Elias Jengo, 'The Making of Contemporary Art in Tanzania', *African Arts*, vol. 50, no. 3, Autumn, 2021, pp. 50–2.

75. Letter from Naomi Mitchison to Jim Tyre, sent from Mochudi. Dated '27th' (March? 1967?). Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9. Here she also states that Ntiro is 'about to be made Commissioner of Culture' and cannot take council money for his work, so she has paid him directly herself.

76. Gabriella Nugent, 'Categories and Contemporaries: African Artists at the Slade School of Fine Arts, c. 1945–1965', *Burlington Contemporary*, November 2022 <https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/journal/journal/categories-and-contemporaries-african-artists-at-the-slade-school-of-fine-art-c-194565> [accessed 26 October 2023].

77. The contrasting photographs of Ntiro are in the Harmon Foundation Archives, National Archives, College Park, MD. I am grateful to Perrin Lathrop for alerting me to them. The photograph of Ntiro in the suit is reproduced in Pissarra, 'Re/Writing Sam J Ntiro', p. 26.

78. Samuel J. Ntiro, 'East African Art', speech given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1963. Samuel Ntiro Folder, Harmon Foundation Archives, National Archives, College Park, MD.

79. Samuel J. Ntiro 'Our Art and Culture', published article, publication unknown, but an East African outlet because of evident Swahili text. Samuel Ntiro Folder, Harmon Foundation Archives, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Fig. 9. Lucky Sibiya, *Sangomas* from the *uMabatha* Series, 1975, woodcut, 41 x 56 cm. The Argyll Collection. Credit: Simphiwe Sibiya.

exhibition of Sibiya and Lucas Sithole, held at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Gaborone.[80] Three years earlier, Mitchison had published a biography of the Afrikaner lawyer and Communist Party member Bram Fischer, who had defended Nelson Mandela at the Rivonia Trial. The book was banned in South Africa, a country whose Apartheid regime Mitchison made no secret of opposing. The woodcut print was called *Sangomas* and came from Sibiya's *uMabatha* series, made to illustrate the 1970 play of the same name, by South African playwright Welcome Musomi. *uMabatha* was Musomi's first foray into epic historical theatre, having previously written works that depicted township life. It took the narrative structure of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and retold the epic battles and internal conflicts that beset the Zulu nation in the nineteenth century. It was first performed at the University of Natal, and Msomi was invited to bring what became known as the 'Zulu Macbeth' to London in 1972 as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's World Theatre Season. *Sangomas* were Zulu healers, presented in *uMabatha* as the equivalent of Macbeth's fateful witches. Sibiya represented the *Sangomas* as complex intersecting bodies and forms, sweeping from side to side as if in the midst of a ceremony. Sibiya's father was himself a Zulu *sangoma* and the tools of his healing work, from fly whisk to calabash to bone-like forms, were inferred in the print. The print was powerful and tightly composed, revealing Sibiya's well-regarded skills as a printmaker, skills first honed under Cecil Skotnes at the Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg.

When *uMabatha* was first performed, white South African critics made direct connections between Macbeth's Scotland and Mabatha's Zululand on the grounds that they were both, as one wrote, 'primitive, warring, bloody thirsty'.[81] Mitchison would have had no time for such crude, dehumanising stereotypes. From her perspective Msomi's work was a startling realisation of her vision for potential creative exchange between Scotland and the African continent. In *Macbeth*, Msomi found historical narratives and fictional structures that offered frameworks for processing the complexities of Zulu epic history, itself otherwise entirely eclipsed by racist, Apartheid narratives of African inferiority. By purchasing Sibiya's print for Argyll, Mitchison was, in part, able to complete her wished-for process of exchange between the two, giving Scottish young people exposure not only to the creative innovations of Black artists in South Africa but also to the role that art could play in retelling histories otherwise only ever written by victors and oppressors. Beyond its obvious abilities to connect Scotland and Africa on the level of content, Sibiya's work was a soaring embodiment of the pride and resilience that Mitchison wished to inspire cognisance of in Argyll's school children.

Beyond the Dream of Alba

Mitchison's African acquisitions were the most ambitions works bought for the Argyll Collection, itself a remarkable, progressive venture. In their confident, diverse creative expressions, they had much to offer young people in a rural Highland region that still wrestled with its own complex histories of dispossession. Their initial fate in Scotland, however, was a disappointing one. Though Tyre reported exhibiting paintings by Mbughuni and the Kenyan artist Hezbon Owiti at Lochgilphead High School in 1966, and the works were repeatedly shown over the coming decades, the specific information about them – the very details that underscored their significance – gradually began to disappear. Shuffled into the papers of personal archives, too, went Ntiro's photograph, and its potential to alter perspectives of what a modernist artist from Africa looked like

80. Individual woodcuts by Sibiya were listed for sale at 50 Botswana pula each. 'Exhibition of Sculptures and Graphics by Lucas Sithole and Lucky Sibiya. 28th October – 9th November, 1976'. Flyer in the Argyll Collection records, Live Argyll archives CA 5/9.

81. Quoted in Natasha Distiller, '"The Zulu Macbeth": The Value of an "African Macbeth"', *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 57, Macbeth and Its Afterlives, (2004), pp. 159–68.

went unfulfilled. This loss of information was, in part, the result of the practical realities that confronted Mitchison and Tyre's utopian visions: how could museum-quality records by maintained for works of art that were not held in a museum? Without the infrastructure of registries or museum storage, practically maintaining the collection proved challenging. The African acquisitions, by virtue of the distance they had travelled and the fact that they came, largely, from young, then-unknown artists, were particularly susceptible to information neglect. Despite the possibilities of surprising formal comparisons, such as between Eardley and Katarikawe, the presumed 'otherness' of these works also seemed to hasten their overlooking. By 2018, works by Tayali, Katarikawe, and Mbughuni had lost their artist attributions, and others had acquired ill-fitting and inaccurate titles. The Argyll Collection's African artworks increasingly seemed like small, anomalous additions in an otherwise recognisably Scottish collection. This was particularly unfortunate, of course, because for Mitchison it was these very works that had the greatest potential to open minds and forge new connections, making them amongst the collection's most important pieces.

In retracing the journeys of these artworks from the African cities in which they were made to the Scottish towns and villages in which they now reside, we can redress historic inattention and re-centre these paintings and prints not only as important works of African modernist art but as the productive learning resources they were intended to be. The significance of these works exceeds Mitchison's original vision for them. All are capable of prompting conversations about the resilience and innovation of African modern artists, but they can also, in various ways, help foreground timely discussions about the legacies and long shadows of colonialism, missionary activity, and racial prejudice. Indeed, alongside the vital work of contemporary artists like Alberta Whittle, whose media, print, and performance works have all consistently brought forth complex histories, particularly Caribbean-Scottish histories, these modernist paintings and prints open onto regional and political histories that inevitably confront that 'luxury of amnesia' that Mitchison herself was partial to. Mitchison unquestionably recognised that Katarikawe's, Tayali's, and Ntiro's works were historically significant, but she was never quite explicit enough about why when she sent them to Argyll. Ntiro's photograph is a reminder that, beyond Mitchison's own visions, the makers of these works had clear aspirations for how they wished to be seen. It is our duty, just as Ogbechie did with Enwonwu's 1948 photograph, to be attentive to the 'subjective interventions' that accompanied them, interventions that have been too long buried in the archival record. Though they are today still in schools in Tayvallich, Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Dunoon, and elsewhere in Argyll and Bute, these artworks are now digitally available to classrooms anywhere.[82] As the audiences for them grow, so too do the opportunities to more fully appreciate their historic significance and the aspirations of their makers.

82. The collection is all viewable online. Additionally in November 2021, ArtUK launched specific learning resources for Ntiro, Tayali, and Mbughuni, formatted to meet primary school curricula needs in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. <https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources> [accessed 26 October 2023].

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