

# First Minister's Christmas Card by Alasdair Gray

✘ The First Minister's official Christmas card for 2011 will feature a painting by renowned Scottish artist and author Alasdair Gray, it was announced today.

Bella Caledonia features an image painted by Alasdair Gray as part of the spectacular ceiling mural in Oran Mor in Glasgow, and that venue was chosen by the First Minister as the apt location for his launch reception this afternoon.

The painting will be auctioned in the new year with proceeds given to four Scottish charities: Children's Hospice Association Scotland (CHAS); Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF); Glenachulish Preservation Trust; and the Small Tribes Trust – a charity chosen by Alasdair Gray.

Last year's card – Let's Twist Again by Jack Vettriano – raised £86,000 for the Bethany Christian Trust, Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres, Quarriers and Teenage Cancer Trust.

That took the total raised by the First Minister's Christmas cards to more than £127,000 since 2007, with charities including CLIC Sargent, Joining Against Cancer In Kids Foundation, Mary's Meals and the RNLI all benefiting from the auction sales.

First Minister Alex Salmond said:

“Alasdair Gray is one of Scotland's most iconic and prolific artists and authors, and I am delighted that he accepted the challenge of painting this year's charity Christmas card – which with his involvement is going to raise significant amounts of money for this year's four charities.

“Bella Caledonia personifies Scotland as a strong woman with a

passion for social justice, and Alasdair Gray has said she represents the qualities that Scotland should aspire to – a view I am happy to endorse at Christmas-time and year-round.

“As in previous years, the original artwork unveiled today will be auctioned off and the funds raised will be handed to four deserving charities in Scotland.

“Since 2007, my Christmas cards have raised more than £127,000 for a variety of causes in Scotland. And this year, the Children’s Hospice Association Scotland, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, the Glenachulish Preservation Trust; and a charity chosen by Alasdair Gray – the Small Tribes Trust – will all share in the auction proceeds.

“I am sure ‘Bella’ herself would be extremely happy to hear that her image is to benefit four such deserving charities.”  
Alasdair Gray said:

“In Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s ‘Sunset Song’, the heroine is referred to at one point as Chris Caledonia. I called my character Bella Caledonia for the same reasons as Gibbon – because she is a representative of all Scotland.

“Bella Caledonia first appeared as an illustration in my novel ‘Poor Things’. She was wearing a Gainsborough-style hat, with a view of central Scotland behind her. The post is based on the Mona Lisa, with crossed hands, looking sideways.

“The original is lost long ago, but I have painted different versions of Bella. I changed the hat to a Glengarry and put a tartan plaid over her shoulder. The character is a strong woman with an enquiring mind and a sense of social justice, the qualities we would like Scotland to have also.

“That sense of social justice and compassion is reflected in the work of the charities who will benefit from the painting. At Christmas, that is very appropriate.”

Maria Gill, CHAS Chief Executive, said:

“All of us at Children’s Hospice Association Scotland feel very proud to have been chosen to benefit from the First Minister’s Christmas card. We have been touched by the interest shown towards our work by the First Minister since his visit to Rachel House Children’s Hospice in March of this year.

“CHAS provides much needed care and support at Scotland’s two children’s hospices, Rachel House in Kinross and Robin House in Balloch, as well as helping families in their own homes with our CHAS at Home service. Christmas is a particularly poignant time for children and young people with life-shortening conditions, and their families. We are incredibly grateful to the First Minister for supporting them in this way.”

Lorraine Currie, SCIAF’s Head of International Programmes, said:

“We are delighted that the First Minister has chosen to show his support for SCIAF’s work in this way. Too many people are still going to bed hungry each night because of crippling poverty and social injustice around the world.

“The proceeds from the First Minister’s Christmas card will provide vital additional funds to help SCIAF address these problems and we will make sure that every penny raised is spent where it is needed most.”

Dr Jennifer Frances, Chair of Trustees of the Glenachulish Preservation Trust, said:

“We have been completely taken by surprise to be chosen as a beneficiary of the First Minister’s Christmas Card 2011, and are very appreciative.

“We are a small, recently formed charity run completely by

volunteers, which aims to preserve in working order the last turntable ferry in Scotland. Once a common sight throughout the Highlands 'wee ferries' such as our MV Glenachulish were road links before the widespread building of bridges to improve the road network in the 1970s.

"The Glenachulish sails the historic route between the Isle of Skye and Glenelg, the shortest crossing to the island, and offers the people of Scotland an opportunity to experience an important aspect of our culture and heritage first hand. Money donated will begin the extensive restoration programme for the vessel."