

At The Scottish Gallery – An Artist's Life, Act I – Alexander Goudie

Flamboyant and confrontational, Scottish figurative painter Alexander Goudie (1933-2004) was part of a generation of influential painters who graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in the 1950s, and whose reputations are ripe for reappraisal.

This new exhibition at The Scottish Gallery charts his beginnings in post-war Paisley in the 1940s, student years at Glasgow School of Art in the 1950s and his early career – a period in which Goudie embarked upon a life-long project to document the evolving landscape and culture of his wife's homeland, Brittany.

Born in Paisley in 1933, the son of a plumber, Alexander Goudie soon revealed an exceptional talent for drawing and painting. He was given special dispensation to enter the Glasgow School of Art at the unusually young age of 16; students from this period have described Goudie as 'a bit of a rock star' and he was awarded the school's Newbery Medal in 1955.



Alexander Goudie at Loctudy, c.1985. France. Photograph by John Thomson, © Goudie Estate.

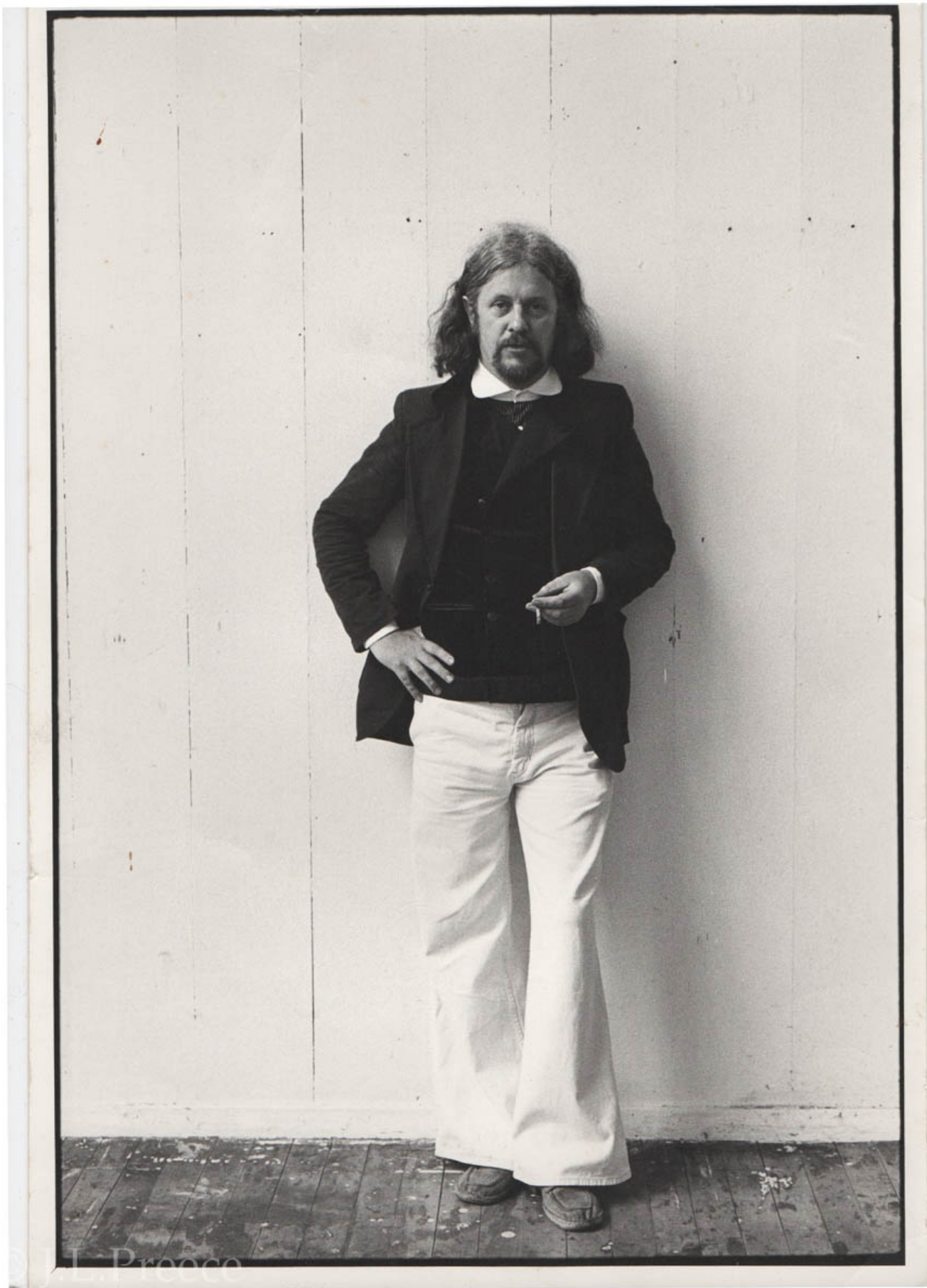
In the late 1950s, Alexander Goudie travelled to France and

Franco's Spain for the first time, where he was awe-struck by the great art collections of Paris, Madrid and Toledo. These initial encounters with the lifestyle and art of the continent would prove transformative. He absorbed the influence of artists like Picasso, Manet, Velázquez and El Greco and when he returned home to the drab cultural landscape of post-war Scotland, Alexander Goudie was inspired to create paintings that promised escapism, sensuality and beauty.

Confidence and exuberance became the hallmarks of Goudie's art as the works in this exhibition demonstrate. They reveal his enjoyment of life, his appreciation of beautiful women, his relish of strong character and his pleasure in social interaction. His ability to convey these things through paint is what made him such a fine artist.

Glasgow, in the post war era, saw the emergence of extraordinary talents like Joan Eardley, Alasdair Gray and John Byrne. It is a period whose significance in the story of Scottish art has often been overlooked, in favour of more glamorous and notorious graduates of Glasgow School of Art from the 1980s and 90s. But, these were decades of enormous change and creative energy as Scottish art in the 20th Century came of age, and Glasgow was at the very forefront.





Cancan c. 1975, oil on canvas, 196 x 96 cm, © Goudie Estate and Alexander Goudie at Glasgow School of Art, c.1970, both ©

Goudie Estate.

Goudie became a prominent and charismatic figure in the art scene, sought after for his portraits with sitters including Lord Chancellors, business tycoons, celebrities (including Billy Connolly) and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and exquisite still life paintings.

Through the work he produced in his studio, in a Victorian palazzo in Glasgow, he established an enviable reputation. But what was perhaps less appreciated during his early career, was the extent to which he alternated painting portraits of businessmen, celebrities and royalty with portraying rural farmers and trawlermen in Brittany, where he travelled for two months every summer from 1961.

This exhibition reveals an unseen archive of sketches and paintings which Goudie produced in his adoptive homeland, and which would form the basis of one of the biggest projects of his later career, the décor of the 25,000 tonne Brittany Ferries flagship, 'Bretagne'.

As conceptual art came to the fore in the second half of the 20th century, Goudie was unrepentant in following his principles of painterliness, craftsmanship and technique. His son Lachlan Goudie, an award-winning broadcaster, author and painter himself, comments, To his last breath he was an unreconstructed romantic, an egomaniac, an artist immersed in the tradition of painting.

His was a life dedicated to colour and painterly flamboyance, an eye and a hand that documented his most valued experiences with unrivalled skill. I will always be his apprentice.



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Potato Picker, c.1960, pastel and chalk on paper, 49 x 64 cm and Basket of Mussels, c.1989, acrylic on board, 40 x 36 cm, both © Goudie Estate.jpg

Guy Peploe, Director at The Scottish Gallery, comments, "No project was too grand: a commission for all the artwork and designs for the interiors of a giant ship from Brittany Ferries; Strauss's Salome or Burns' Tam o'Shanter. The artist thought big but honed his aesthetic to the last flourish, for a highlight on a ceramic jug or vital pentimento in a life

drawing; attention to detail was obsessive and his art was an extension of his personality.

“From the declaration explicit in his early portraits that says: ‘I have arrived,’ to the touching depiction of the children, to his love letter in paint to his Breton wife Maiñée, to accomplished easel paintings and designs and sketches fizzing with creative energy, the personality of the painter is not hard to find and forms a vital, recently overlooked contribution to post-war Scottish art.”

[The Scottish Gallery, 16 Dundas Street, Edinburgh, EH3 6HZ](#)

An Artist's Life: Act I

Exhibition Dates Thursday 1st July – Saturday 24th July 2021

Top image – Party Piece c. 1975, oil and charcoal on canvas, 124 x 208 cm (2), © Goudie Estate.