

Art depicting controversial motorway plan to be purchased for city's collection

An award-winning painting depicting what Edinburgh would have looked like under a 1949 plan for an inner city motorway is to be purchased for the City Art Centre.

Showing a six-lane elevated ring-road tunnelled under Calton Hill and encircling the city centre, the piece is inspired by a vision for the capital's future drawn up by town planners more than 70 years ago.

After being recognised as the 'most outstanding view of the city in any media' at last year's inaugural Scottish Landscape Awards, Robbie Bushe's 2023 artwork is set to be bought for the council-owned City Art Centre's collection for £7,000.

The purchase is set to be confirmed by councillors on Friday, February 23, at a meeting of the Jean F Watson Bequest Committee, which acquires Scottish art for the city's collection with funds donated by the late art enthusiast.

The oil painting is based on the 1949 'Civic Survey and Plan for the City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh' which envisaged the construction of an inner city motorway, which would have seen much of the historic Old Town demolished.

While some changes contained within the re-imagination of Edinburgh went ahead – including the construction of a city bypass – the more radical and contentious elements such as the city centre motorway depicted in Bushe's work, the rebuilding of Princes Street and a freight railway under the

Meadows were eventually scrapped.

Created by Patrick Abercrombie and Derek Plumstead, who were enlisted to help shape post-war Edinburgh, the 'Abercrombie Plan' stated:

"A plan for Edinburgh must needs be a hazardous undertaking: there can be few cities towards which the inhabitants display a fiercer loyalty or deeper affection. Even its blemishes are venerated.

"The planner who dares to propose improvements must go warily."

'Towards St James and Calton Hill (reimagining the Civic Survey and Plan for the City & Royal Burgh of Edinburgh)' is part of a series of panoramic paintings by the Liverpool-born artist responding to the survey.

A report to this week's committee said: "This ambitious historical survey proposed dramatic changes to the topography of central Edinburgh, including a six-lane elevated ring-road encircling the Old and New Towns.

"In his work as an artist, Robbie Bushe explores the potential implications of this survey, had its proposals been approved. The painting under consideration presents an alternative, reimagined vision of the city, with the futuristic ring-road slicing through the historic architecture beneath Calton Hill."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



The painting. Image; Robbie Bushe/Edinburgh Council.