

Pioneering Painters: The Glasgow Boys 1880-1900

April-September 2010

Supported by FirstGroup



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1 Introduction

The exhibition *Pioneering Painters: The Glasgow Boys 1880–1900*, supported by FirstGroup, was the most popular and successful visual arts exhibition ever seen at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

It was shown at Kelvingrove from April–September 2010 and then at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from October 2010–January 2011.

The exhibition was memorable for many reasons, among which were:

- It was seen by a total of 243,289 visitors
- It was the first major collaboration between Glasgow and the Royal Academy of Arts in London
- It was enhanced by the innovative inclusion of experts from the private sector
- It generated positive and supportive press coverage both in Scotland and significantly in London
- It produced an accompanying BBC television documentary about the Glasgow Boys which was shown five times in total - once on BBC2 in Scotland and four times on BBC4 in England during the exhibition periods. This documentary, which was made by Dr James Hunter, was seen by an estimated 1.5 million viewers
- It enabled the completion of the temporary exhibition gallery in Kelvingrove
- It enabled the creation of new retail units in Kelvingrove
- It added to the normal Kelvingrove visitor figures
- It enabled Glasgow Life Trading to develop retail products and produce publications
- It was curated and organised entirely in-house as opposed to the Van Gogh exhibition at Kelvingrove in 1948 which was a British Arts Council touring exhibition
- It enhanced the reputation of Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life and Kelvingrove

Most notable perhaps was the fact that all of this was achieved as a consequence of significant financial investment which generated a profit of £152,407.

2 Visitor Figures

Kelvingrove

In 23 weeks, 123,289 visitors saw the Glasgow Boys exhibition in Kelvingrove, making this the most successful visual arts exhibition in the gallery's history. This was enhanced by an extensive education programme and series of talks by Glasgow Life staff and external experts.

The Royal Academy of Arts

In 12 weeks, 120,000 visitors saw the Glasgow Boys in the Royal Academy in London. The lectures and tours programmes were fully booked.

The catalogue for the exhibition sold out before the end of the exhibition and there were queues to enter almost every day.

3 Audience Profile

Staff in Kelvingrove conducted a visitor survey over 4 weeks, interviewing a sample of 735 people. The main findings were:

- 90% came specifically to see the exhibition
- 81% had visited before
- 70% were female
- 33% were over 65
- 27% were aged 55–64
- 17% were aged 45–54
- 16% were aged 25–44
- 3% were aged 16–24
- 4% were under 16

This differs significantly from the typical visitor profile, which is 55% female and 8% aged over 65.

Analysis was also done of the ticket sales figures which gave the following breakdown:

Full price	37%
Concession	57%
Free	6%

In terms of visitor origin, the visitor breakdown is:

Glasgow	28%
Rest of Scotland	47%
Rest of UK	20%
Overseas	5%

4 Public Response

From the visitor survey, 96% of visitors rated the exhibition as “very good” or “good”. In addition, it indicated that the emotional objectives were achieved as was evidenced by hundreds of flattering and supporting comments from the Visitors Books, such as:

“Wonderful. Enjoyed everything about it. Proud to be Glaswegian.”

“What is there left to say? Magnificent.”

“My heart bursts with pride for the Boys and Kelvingrove for letting us enjoy them.”

“One of the most memorable days of my life. What a privilege to be in Glasgow when this exhibition was on. Thank you.”
(visitor from New Zealand)

See sample comments from Visitors Books (page 5).

5 Finance

Total costs of the exhibition, including the costs associated with touring the exhibition to the Royal Academy, comprehensive upgrading of the Royal Bank of Scotland Temporary Exhibition Gallery in Kelvingrove, the creation of new retail spaces, the production of two publications, and associated programmes was £1,043,889.

In addition to the intangible benefits, the income through sponsorship, fundraising, ticketing, shop sales and publications (but excluding the increased income from catering at Kelvingrove) enabled the exhibition to return a profit of £152,407.

6 *Staff*

During the Glasgow Boys exhibition, all of the staff behaved splendidly and were inspired, invigorated and stimulated by the success of their efforts in ensuring that the visitors had an enjoyable experience.

As the exhibition neared its end, there were long queues every day outside the building and the staff looked after the elderly and frail in a sensitive and caring manner which was much remarked on, particularly by visitors from outwith Scotland.

The staff contribution was a major factor in the wonderful success of the Glasgow Boys and they deserved the warmest thanks for their efforts.

The Boys would have been proud of them.

7 *Conclusion*

Whilst requiring significant investment of time and financial resources, the exhibition and associated benefits were delivered whilst returning a significant financial surplus.

The exhibition was hugely popular – far exceeding early estimates for visitor numbers.

Working with the Royal Academy significantly enhanced the national profile of the City of Glasgow, the collections and Glasgow Life, and sets a benchmark for collaboration with other partners in the future.

The exhibition demonstrates the potential popularity of high quality visual arts exhibitions to appeal to a wide range of local, national and international visitors. It also demonstrates the attraction of such exhibitions to an older audience which can and is inclined to buy related merchandise, including publications.

The innovative inclusion of external experts from the private sector in the planning and delivery of the exhibition may serve as a model for the future.

Glasgow Boys – Selected comments from Visitors Books

'Thank you to all the contributors for this wonderful exhibition and to the volcanic ash for delaying my flight.'
(a visitor from Toronto, Canada)

'Wonderful. Enjoyed everything about it. Proud to be Glaswegian.'

'Well worth two bus trips!
(a visitor from Hawick in the Borders)

'Well worth a fiver!'

'An exhibition which I will return to again and again – just brilliant!'

'Absolutely fabulous! Beautifully presented – a real feast of colour, creativity and imagination. Well done Glasgow!'

'Such a joy, so much talent and recollection of days when life was so much more simple and peaceful. Thank you.'

'An absolute feast for the eyes. Just wonderful. Thank you.'

'We have just spent time in heaven.'

'I can't stop smiling with happiness.'

'Humbled and moved. Awe-inspiring. Would gladly have paid £500 to see this wonderful collection. Superb – thank you!'

'Fabulous – I was almost in tears with admiration.'

'Brilliant! The MET could have done not as well! (a visitor from New York)

'The framing I thought was absolutely stunning!'

'Not a better exhibition in the UK this year. Excellent.'

'I am only eleven and I love the Glasgow Boys work.'

'Amazing. The most beautiful exhibition I have ever seen. I have to return. Thanks to all who put this together.'

'What is there left to say? Magnificent.'

'Absolutely fantastic. Miss this exhibition at your peril. Spiritually uplifting.'

'My heart bursts with pride for the Boys and Kelvingrove A[rt] G[allery] for letting us enjoy them.'

'A superb exhibition – makes your heart swell with pride.'

'An exceptionally enjoyable exhibition of works we were totally unaware of. Great works and brilliant curatorial effort. Thanks.' (visitor from Canberra, Australia)

'The best £5 I have ever spent. Just wonderful.'

'Loved the rural studies of kale-yards and such, rhubarb has never looked so inspiring ...'

'We have visited Kelvingrove many, many times in our lives, but this is amongst the best exhibitions I have ever seen, equal to Musee D'Orsay, Paris. Glasgow has come of age!'

'Two words sum up the exhibition – world class. Thank you.'

'Wonderful. Came all the way from Exeter to see this exhibition and it lived up to all expectations – superb!'

'This exhibit takes my breath away!
(visitor from Minnesota, USA)

'This is a truly superb collection.
I leave in AWE.'

'3rd visit. Still inspiring.'

'A most wonderfully presented collection from all over the place – public and private. I have spent most of the day here and would love to stay longer. Great work.'
(visitor from Perth, Western Australia)

'Breathtaking – a gasp around every corner!'

'After this feast for the eyes, I shall go and sit by a river in the dappled shade of beech trees and practice my blottesque ...'

'One of the most memorable days of my life. What a privilege to be in Glasgow when this exhibition was on. Thank you.'
(visitor from New Zealand)

'It's like summer in a bowl.'

'The most beautiful collection I have ever seen! Thanks for the special effort to do this exhibition!
(visitor from Cape Town, South Africa)

'The early rural scenes so wonderfully captured evoke a world so sadly lost – full of animals, flowers, the hand-made and not a car in sight.'

'As a devotee of the 'School' for many years it was delightful to see so many pictures from private collectors not normally accessible to the public. A stunning exhibition. We may never see the like again! Well done Kelvingrove.'

'50,000th visitor through the door! Great exhibition and a day to remember. Thank you.'
(Annie Miller, Marie Holt, Mary McArthur)

'Entrancing exhibition! Continues to open the eyes of art. We take our hats off to the artists and whoever made this possible.'

'One of the most beautiful and exciting exhibitions I have seen in a long time.'

'Marvellous but the village scenes show a world we have lost.'
(Sir James Cayzer)

'Simply awe-inspiring. Left one utterly speechless.'

'Fabulous. Inspiring. Who needs to go to the Louvre??'

'With so many different artists' work, this exhibition could potentially be quite confusing, but it has been beautifully designed and explained.'

'This exhibition has changed my view on art for life. It touched my heart with divine water paintings.'

'Fantastic to see all these works together. I wish it could be permanently displayed here to visit time and time again. Inspirational – thanks!'

'Indescribably wonderful! Quite the most remarkable exhibition I've seen in the last 30+ years, eat your heart out Edinburgh.'

'Difficult to find the words for such a wonderful exhibition. Congrats and thanks.'

'Food for the soul. Beautiful.'

'A visual feast. Well researched and curated. So much work in preparation. Touch screens and booklets excellent. Congratulations.'

'An absolute gem! Thank you! Here from Brighton, Sussex for a few days. Glad I didn't miss it. Obviously, lots of thought, organisation and hard work went into this. Thanks again.'

'An inspiration! Thank you: thoroughly enjoyed even at my age it was fascinating and a pleasure to see. (I'm 15).'

'A delight and expertly curated!'

'Many old favourites displayed better than ever before – wonderful lighting and contrast. Great insights and lovely connections made.'

'Could we not keep these wonderful paintings in Glasgow? Please.'

'Second visit and still finding new elements in the paintings – I feel a third visit coming on. Wonderful.'

'This exhibition is stunning. It deserves to tour the world.'

'Once again Glasgow Museums have displayed why they are amongst the best in the world. Sweet!'

'It's the day of happiness - we see so many beautiful pictures for the first time in life. It is the great surprise. Thank you for such a piece of wonderful Scots art.'

(visitor from Moscow)

'This is an exemplar exhibition that Glasgow can be very proud of.'

'Well worth the visit from London. Will recommend this exhibition!'

'We liked the Aviary. It was inspiring to experience such artistic talents. It truly makes the mind boggle! This has definitely [sic] spurred us to become future art enthusiasts. We enjoyed the selection of Glasgow Boys portraits, landscapes, figure compositions and as budding art students we hope to reach this level of accomplishment in later life. Thumbs up!'

(Chloe and Poppy age 15)

'Must have taken ages to put together – but SO worth it. Thanks.'

'I can't keep away. I have been a few times. Each time I learn something new. Amazing. Thanks to all who put this together.'

'Wonderful! Please show every year, month, week!'

'Well worth traveling 12,000 miles to see. Read an article in 'Scots' Magazine and planned the visit around the exhibition dates. Fantastic!'

(visitor from Australia)

'One of the most extensive and uplifting art exhibitions I have ever seen. I came away with an appreciation of the artists and their era, that will remain in my mind. There is almost too much to see!'

'Great to see such a collection of 'home grown' talent together in one place. Refreshing, at a time when other institutions prefer to 'import' well known artists ...'

'What is outstanding about this exhibition is the way the paintings are grouped in context. The close relationship of the various artists is echoed in the placing of the paintings.'

'A breathtaking exhibition and thanks to all those who were involved in sourcing the works, negotiating and bringing the whole show together.'

'The most dynamic concentration of excellence I've ever seen! Third visit. It gets better and better each time. A benchmark in exhibitions. Well done to all involved.'

'Overwhelmingly beautiful.'

'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.'



The Boys are back in town

Visit the new Glasgow Boys gallery
at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Open from 21 October

More information:
www.glasgowmuseums.com
0141 276 9599