

James Guthrie

Scottish, 1859-1930

Marion Lorna Guthrie

1895, oil on canvas, 82x62 cm
Marion Lorna Guthrie Bequest 1972



About the work

James Guthrie was part of the Glasgow School of painters, a group influenced by French naturalism, which emerged in Scotland in the 1880s. His niece, Marion Lorna Guthrie, was 10 years old when he painted this $\frac{3}{4}$ length portrait. Her father, the artist's elder brother, had immigrated with his family to New Zealand in 1874. However, in 1893 the family had returned to Scotland and Lorna's father, Dr John Guthrie, was working at Glasgow Hospital at the time *Marion Lorna Guthrie* was painted. The family returned to New Zealand in 1908.

The portrait shows the influence of the poses and colours used by James Whistler (1834 -1903), whose works Guthrie would have seen while he was working in a nearby studio in London. Like Whistler, Guthrie has used a very limited colour palette.

The standing pose has Lorna's body facing off to the right and just her head turned to face the artist/ viewer, as though her attention had just been captured. It is a lively portrait with an attentive expression in her eyes. The immediacy and vitality of the paintwork captures the sense

of childlike vivacity, with the rapid execution catching the essentials of her face and expression.

The white collar creates a flash of interest near her face and the black ribbon in her hair helps to isolate it from the warm brown background. It also counterbalances the black necktie. Only the broadest details are given to the black dress or to the hands holding the hat, but by contrast the alert expression on the child's face is captured with a succession of carefully smoothed and modulated layers of paint.

The Glasgow School followed their own styles of Impressionism, often employing the looser, more immediate brushwork and broken surfaces, without the French emphasis on the effects of light on broken surfaces or their high-keyed palette. Other artists connected to the Glasgow School included W.Y. Macgregor, John Lavery, E.A. Hornel and George Henry.

Marion Lorna Guthrie came to New Zealand when the family returned in 1908. For many years it was hanging at Lorna's grandparent's home, which is now the Aigantighe Art Gallery in Timaru.

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About the artist

Sir James Guthrie was born in Greenock, Scotland, in 1859, the son of Rev John Guthrie. He began a career in law but gave it up in 1877. Two years later he began studying art under J. Pettie. Guthrie visited Paris in 1882 and there he was influenced by the French *plein-air* painters. When he returned to Scotland he became a leading member of the Glasgow School of artists.

Guthrie kept a house in London between 1879 and 1901, as well as living in Scotland. In 1892 he was elected to membership of the Royal Scottish Academy and in 1902 was elected President. The following year Guthrie was knighted for his contribution to art. He died at Rhu, Dumbartonshire, in 1930.

Although Guthrie began his career painting landscapes, he started painting portraits in 1885 and it was with portraiture that he was to have the most success, particularly with his portraits of children.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are no other works by the artist in the Collection.

Further reading

'The New President of the Royal Scottish Academy', G. Aikman, *Art Journal*, 1903, pp. 26-27.

'A Phase of Scottish Art', J.L. Caw, *Art Journal*, 1894, pp. 75-80.

Sir James Guthrie, P.R.S.A., LL.D., J.L. Caw, MacMillan and Co. Limited, London, 1932.

Scottish Painting 1837-1939, W. Hardie, Studio Vista, London, 1976.

'Sir James Guthrie, P.R.S.A.', F. Rinder, *Art Journal*, 1911, pp. 139-144.

'Sir James Guthrie, P.R.S.A.', A.S. Walker, *Art Journal*, 1911, pp. 18-26.

