
The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

Designed in 1825 by William Burn, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art was originally known as the John Watson School. It was intended to function as an institution for fatherless children. However it was opened as the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in August 1960 at Inverleith House, before moving to its current location on Belford Road, Edinburgh in 1984. [1] The Gallery is housed in a large neo-classical building and has been adapted in many ways in order to fit its new purpose, allowing for larger, brighter rooms to display both temporary and permanent collections. Burn was open to a number of styles throughout his designs and is responsible for the design and contribution to many Churches, Castles and important public buildings. He also influenced a number of architects who trained under him throughout his career, and was considered a master of many styles.[2] In order to truly analyse the building, it is important to take a number of factors into account such as the location of the building and its contribution to the building itself. Also the building's style, and how consistent it appears with neo-classicism. And finally the life and career of its designer William Burn.

Firstly, one must address the style of the building itself. The exterior of the building has some very obvious neo-classical features incorporating the typical classical influences from ancient Greece. One of the more prominent of these features being the main entrance, with its bold Greek Doric style pillars. This gives the building its bold and imposing image on approach. The building also emphasises its planer, bolder qualities as opposed to masses of sculptural volumes, shown in its minimal yet prominent frieze surrounding the exterior.(Figure 1) The huge scale of the building alone screams Greek revival, creating a strong neo-classical image. In the process of adapting the building from school to library there was little change to the exterior of the building, as it was already a fitting candidate for the purpose. A great number of large windows allowed for light to flow into the interior, meaning there would be no issues with any form of display inside. The interior also reflected its neo-classical features. The original interior design of the building did hold some stereotypical neo-classical features, yet the original purpose of the building created a contrast within. The rooms were of course large with high ceilings with a great deal of light projected by the large windows with a huge sense of spacious freedom. Yet they lacked the typical elegant friezes and draped ribbon usually associated with neo-classical interior design. Instead the interior had a sense of discipline, with cold, hard features to reflect the building's purpose. Of course during its transformation since 1984, [3] the interior of Burn's building has undergone much adaptation and revision to suit its new occupancy. It is now a picture of modern design with varnished hardwood floors, minimalist furniture and calm white walls. The minimalist design is typical with modern art galleries and truly allows for focus on the art itself. Its most recent refurbishment performed by Alison Architecture has shown focus on the main foyer space. The room was stripped of all furniture

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and electric wires before being painted white. This was in order to introduce a new form of design within the room. Introducing furniture of wound steel and shine, pure finish.[4] This shows the real transformation the building has had. The interior design of Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art is no longer intended to reflect the style of the building, but the styles of the art within.

The plan for Burn's design also reflects many of the typical characteristics of the style. The length of the building is emphasised by the long, straight corridors that run parallel to each other throughout the building. The plan also emphasises the true scale of the rooms. It explains why the building has functioned so well in both its past and present purposes. Its huge rooms and beaming light allows for a mass of modern art to be displayed correctly, yet the building is art in itself.

Another key aspect to be considered when analysing the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art is its location, both old and new. Previously the gallery was situated at Inverleith House in Edinburgh. Initially this was seen as an excellent location. There was much open space to surround the gallery, allowing for a sense of freedom within its grounds. Yet the building was still fairly central in terms of the city itself, located not too far from Edinburgh Castle. However the decision was made in 1984 that it was time for the location to change. This is also its current location on Belford Road, Edinburgh. (Figure 2) This was a prime location for the purpose of the building. Creating easier access for members of the public to visit the building, some were concerned that the downsize in surrounding land would impact the effect of the building. But it would appear this was not to pose an issue. Still surrounded by a great deal of open grass and trees there was ample open space. There was even room for a pond centre, shaped into three sleek sections that from both above and ground level reflect the modern art within (Figure 3). Having the right location of course is key to the function of the gallery's purpose. There had to be space for such a grand building to flourish, yet still be accessible. This also made sense in terms of its previous purpose as the John Watson Institution, as it was intended as full time residence for a vast majority of the boys who attended. The large open land created more than enough space for the boys to occupy in their spare time and for sports.

A final factor that is important to take into account is the career of the designer William Burn and his influences. Burn was responsible for a number of diverse designs in his career such as George Watson's College, The Edinburgh Academy and Inverness Castle. He has a diverse list of designs and styles to his name. He dipped in and out of styles in his work, for example, he spent time designing Gothic churches in his earlier career, and even houses in the neo-Jacobean style.[5] Yet had a clear enthusiasm for the neo-classical, Greek Revival at the same time. He is credited as a master of a number of styles. Burn was also responsible for the designing and remodelling of over six hundred country houses in his career [6]. But from all his architectural achievements, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art is arguably one of his

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more famous and impacting designs. Not only did the building stand as refuge for some of Edinburgh's youth in need, but as a revolutionary place of a new appreciation for art, the building art in itself worth admiring.

Burn also influenced a number of Architects who he trained. Those such as David Bryce who would go on to design influential buildings such as Edinburgh's Surgical hospital in 1853. The architectural influences Burn made throughout his life helped shape Edinburgh into the city it is today. He trained eight young and prosperous architects, all of whom went on to design buildings in and around Edinburgh, both important and insignificant. Consciously or not, all have added their own splice of character from Burn to the city of Edinburgh through their work.

To conclude, Burn has captured the ever present neo-classical style within the building of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. Its key features both external and interior have created a bold yet elegant image for the gallery to be housed in, and is a very fitting design. The location is also ideal for its purpose, allowing for easy, central public access without ruining the beauty and functionality of the building. Burn's career itself has a long list of achievements, but it is truly arguable that this is one of his greatest and influential. His work has inspired and enabled many to continue to add character to the city of Edinburgh, and he is right to be considered a master in architecture.

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