



DESIGNING THE NEW

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CHARLES RENNIE  
**MACKINTOSH**

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AND THE GLASGOW STYLE



This immersive exhibition transports us to Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The focus is on Charles Rennie Mackintosh, who worked during this period as an architect, designer, and painter, and was central to the only Art Nouveau movement in Britain, now known as the Glasgow Style. Glasgow Museums and the American Federation of Arts co-organized the tour of this retrospective, which places Mackintosh's life and career within the context of his training at The Glasgow School of Art and his relationships to his patrons and artistic predecessors and contemporaries. On view are 165 objects in a wide range of media, including architectural drawings, books, embroidery, furniture, graphic and interior design, metalwork, stained glass, stencils, and watercolors, plus videos showing the interiors and exteriors of the most important buildings of the Glasgow Style.

Friendships played a significant role in Mackintosh's career. While training as an architect at the firm of Honeyman & Keppie, he encountered James Herbert McNair. They both attended classes at The Glasgow School of Art, where they met Frances and Margaret Macdonald. Together, they became known as The Four. This group developed a distinctive formal vocabulary characterized by elongated lines, organic forms, a restrained palette, and a personal symbolic language. Their defining motifs included birds, roses, and hearts. The Four's shared artistic dialogue led to frequent collaboration. In 1900 Mackintosh and Margaret married, one year after McNair had wed Frances. Spanning sixty years, the exhibition explores the aspirations and achievements of these artists in their youth and the hardships and disappointments they experienced later in life.

Mackintosh was incredibly productive early in his career. By age thirty-one he had designed an art club gallery, an art school, a church, a church hall, houses, a major newspaper building, a public school, and a women's college. Employed by the entrepreneur Catherine Cranston, Mackintosh also became renowned as a tearoom designer. Tearooms were a distinctive type of restaurant in Glasgow: serving nonalcoholic



fig. 1

beverages and light meals, they offered an alternative to pubs and taverns as places to socialize. Mackintosh's imaginative interiors for Miss Cranston were some of his greatest experiments, and many objects made for them are in this exhibition.

In 1900 at the Ingram Street Tearooms, Mackintosh worked in collaboration with his new wife, Margaret, and its predominately white dining room for women epitomizes Mackintosh's method: he designed every detail to create a total work of art (**fig. 1**). They decorated the Ladies' Luncheon Room with wooden furniture, leaded glass, stenciling, and two monumental gesso friezes: Mackintosh made *The Wassail* and Margaret *The May Queen* (**cover**). Displayed high above silver wall paneling, the ethereal figures holding flower garlands



**fig. 2**

presided over a serene interior that was at once opulent and spare. Illumination came from metal pendant lights constructed from simple forms (**fig. 2**). Each crowned with a dome, the lights are pierced with holes and studded with colored glass to achieve dramatic effects. All these elements attest to Mackintosh's ability to create beautiful and inspiring spaces.

In addition to The Four, there were many other artists of the Glasgow Style, including Jessie Marion King, Ann Macbeth, Talwin Morris, William Gibson Morton, Jessie Newbery, Ernest Archibald Taylor, and George Walton. The large number of women active in the movement is notable. Coeducational, The Glasgow School of Art also employed many women designers as teachers. All were enthusiastic supporters of the suffragist cause (full voting rights were not granted to women in Great Britain until 1928).

Informed by decades of research by curator Alison Brown of Glasgow Museums, this exhibition offers a penetrating new interpretation of Mackintosh that proves he was far from an isolated genius. It offers a rare opportunity to see in the United States these extravagantly beautiful works of art from Glasgow public and private collections.

**Cover:** Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. *The May Queen* (detail), 1900. Made for the Ladies' Luncheon Room, Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms, Glasgow. Gesso on burlap (hessian) over a wood frame, scrim, twine, glass beads, thread, and tin leaf, 62 1/2 x 179 7/8 in. overall. Glasgow Museums: Acquired by Glasgow Corporation as part of the Ingram Street Tearooms, 1950. © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection. Courtesy American Federation of Arts.

**Fig. 1:** Ladies' Luncheon Room, Ingram Street Tearooms, photographed after 1901. © The Hunterian, University of Glasgow 2021. **Fig. 2:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh (designer). Pendant light from the Ladies' Luncheon Room, Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms, ca. 1900–1901. Copper, aluminum, and leaded glass, 9 1/2 x 14 5/8 x 14 5/8 in. Glasgow Museums: Acquired by Glasgow Corporation as part of the Ingram Street Tearooms, 1950. © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection. Courtesy American Federation of Arts

# INGRAM GALLERY

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