

MacNair, James Herbert 1868 - 1955



James Herbert MacNair [commonly known as Herbert MacNair; also known as J. Herbert McNair; and as Bertie McNair] was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on 23 December 1868. After studying painting in Rouen, France for a year, he was articled as an architect to John Honeyman (1831-1914) and his office, Honeyman & Keppie in Glasgow from 1888 to 1894. He also studied at Glasgow School of Art from 1889 to 1894 and in 1895-96.

In 1894, having completed his articles, McNair set up a studio and workshop at 225 West George Street, Glasgow where he began working as an interior decorator, furniture designer/maker, graphic artist and painter. During this period he produced some of his finest furniture. By this time he became engaged to Francis Macdonald, whom he had met at Glasgow School of Art. She was the sister of Margaret Macdonald, who subsequently married Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a fellow Glasgow School of Art student. The four designer shared a common approach to decorative art and came to be known as The Four. They exhibited together, including at the exhibition of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society in London in 1896.

Disaster befell MacNair in 1897 when a fire destroyed his workshop and he lost much of his stock. By this time McNair seems to have abandoned any thought of pursuing a career as an architect and in 1898 he moved to Liverpool where he was employed as an Instructor in Design at the School of Architecture and Applied Art at University College, Liverpool.

In 1899 he married Francis Macdonald. They set up home in Liverpool, where they worked on decorative art schemes for private clients in the Liverpool area. The interior they designed for their own house at 54 Oxford Street, Liverpool featured in *The Studio* in 1901. They exhibited at the Vienna Secession in 1900 and in Paris, Venice and Dresden. A Writing Room designed by them featured at the Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna in Turin in 1902.

The pair experienced financial difficulties after Herbert MacNair lost his job in 1905 and in 1909 he and Francis returned to Glasgow. Herbert MacNair was unable to re-establish his studio and seems to have abandoned his work as a designer in 1911, although he continued to paint for some years. Over the next thirty years he took various jobs including as a postman and as a car mechanic. It is said that he also took to drink. He eventually died in Innellan, Scotland on 22 April 1955. Following the death of Francis MacNair he had destroyed all their work in his possession.

Worked in

UK

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Exhibition of pastels by J. Herbert McNair. London: R. Gutekunst, 1898

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Links

- Dictionary of Scottish Architects 1660-1980
http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=205696
- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_MacNair
- The Victorian Web <https://victorianweb.org/art/design/macnair/bio.html>
- University of Glasgow - Mackintosh Architecture <https://www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/name/?nid=McNJH>
- Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society <https://www.crmsociety.com/about-mackintosh/the-four/james-herbert-macnair/>
- Gazetteer for Scotland <https://www.scottish-places.info/scotgaz/people/famousfirst1391.html>
- The Charles Rennie Mackintosh Site
<https://www.charlesrenniemac.co.uk/herbert-macnair>
- Review of the Frances Macdonald and James Herbert MacNair Exhibition by Lesley Jackson. 'Country Life' 25 January 2007 <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/out-and-about/theatre-film-music/the-frances-macdonald-and-james-herbert-mcnair-exhibition-42754>
- Benezit Dictionary of Artists - Oxford Art Online [Subscription service]
<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/benezit/B00400701?q=macnair&search>
- Artist Biographies [Subscription service]
<https://www.artbiogs.co.uk/1/artists/macnair-james-herbert>
- National Art Library Catalogue <https://nal-vam.on.worldcat.org/search?sortKey=LIBRARY&databaseList=&queryString=Herbert%20M>
- Artnet <http://www.artnet.com/artists/james-herbert-macnair/>
- Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain & Ireland 1851-1951
https://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/mapping/public/view/person.php?id=ann_1281991109&search=