

RSA Obituary transcribed from the 2015 CATALOGUE FOR THE 189TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

James Alan Davie CBE RA HRSA (1920-2014) was born in Grangemouth, the son of a school teacher and a keen amateur artist. His father was a painter and etcher who encouraged him to draw. The young Alan Davie developed a strong interest in painting and music and was a keen lover of jazz. After seeing the jazz saxophonist Coleman Hawkins playing in an Edinburgh record shop he switched from playing piano to the saxophone.

From 1938 to 1940 Davie attended the Edinburgh College of Art, where he studied under Professor John Maxwell. Davie was an outstanding pupil and won the Andrew Grant Scholarship.

In 1941, Davie left Edinburgh College of Art and served in the Royal Artillery for the last three years of the war. After the war he earned his money mostly playing saxophone in jazz bands and teaching jewellery design. He remained particularly proud of having played sax with Johnny Dankworth and Ronnie Scott.

Davie returned to Edinburgh in 1946 and the following year, married the artist and potter Janet "Bili" Gaul. They moved to London in 1949 just months before the birth of their only child, Jane, and later lived in Hertfordshire and Cornwall.

It was whilst on his Andrew Grant Travelling Scholarship to Italy in 1948, Alan visited Venice and got to know Peggy Guggenheim whose enthusiasm proved a powerful influence on his painting. Peggy bought his music of the Autumn Landscape, which enhanced his growing reputation, especially in America.

The following year, Davie visited the south of France and Spain, and in 1950 the first of his many solo exhibitions took place at the Gimpel Fils Gallery, London.

He travelled to the United States for the first time in 1956, where he presented a solo exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery, New York, and was introduced to Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning. That same year he won the Gregory Fellowship in Painting at the University of Leeds, which was followed by a cycle of conferences and a period of teaching. Important retrospectives of his work were presented at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 1958, and at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1962. He took part in the São Paulo Bienal in 1963, receiving the prize for Best Foreign Painter. His work brought him an international reputation and his admirers included David Hockney, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Davie's works are now held in more than 50 public collections.

In 1971 he made his first visit to the island of St Lucia, where he began to spend part of the year. The Caribbean colours and clear skies were to further influence his painting. As well as being a prolific painter and printmaker, Davie continued to make jewellery and play music throughout his career, often arranging and performing concerts to accompany the openings of his exhibitions.

In 1979 he travelled to Australia and exhibited in Sydney. From the 1990s, Davie was the subject of many retrospectives. The most notable of these retrospective exhibitions being held in 2000 at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; in 2001 at the Cobra Museum for Modern Art in the Netherlands; and in 2003-2004 at Tate St. Ives.

Davie refused to be stereotyped. He described himself as a painter, poet, jazz musician and jewellery designer.

Alan Davie was appointed CBE in 1972 and was made an Honorary Royal Scottish Academician in 1977 and elected a Royal Academician in 2012. *

Refers to The Royal Academy of Arts in London