



William Gillies (1898-1973), Still Life, Doyley

c.1948, McLean Museum and Art Gallery, Greenock. © Royal Scottish Academy / Bridgeman Images.

The title of "Still Life, Doyley" of about 1948 by William Gillies (1898-1973), brings attention to the ornamental fabric mat in the left foreground of a bravura example of still life painting. Gillies was born in Haddington, East Lothian. His studies at Edinburgh College of Art were interrupted by service in World War One, but he returned to complete his course between 1919 and 1923. Thereafter, he trained at the Académie Montparnasse in Paris, under the Cubist artist André Lhote (1885-1962). Gillies taught at Edinburgh College of Art for thirty-six years, from 1925 until his retirement, becoming its Principal in 1960. He was elected a member of the Royal Scottish Academy, Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour and the Royal Academy of Arts; he was knighted in 1970.

Gillies is celebrated for his landscapes and still lifes and enjoyed working both in a studio and en plein air. In Still Life, Doyley his love of the physical and visual properties of oil paint is clear. At times verging on the abstract and focusing on mark-making rather than description, this freely worked image is painted from several viewpoints at the same time. Different areas compete for attention, from the jug on the left to the solitary bowl sitting on red fabric to the right. Great play is made of shadow, particularly through the doyley and in the almost sinister forms cast in the background. At times, form is flattened, as in the scallop shell, at others it is revelled in, as seen in the nearby fruit dish. The energy contained in the image mirrors the painting's size, as the canvas measures 83 by 103 centimetres. With ordinary objects Gillies created a powerful, energetic work, which was promptly acquired by the Trustees of the Stuart Anderson Caird Bequest and given to the museum in 1948.

More info on this painting can be found here: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/still-life-doyley-183281>