

JAMES MORRISON WAS ONE OF BRITAIN'S  
FINEST LANDSCAPE PAINTERS

THIS IS THE STORY OF HIS GREATEST CHALLENGE

# EYE OF THE STORM

A FILM BY ANTHONY BAXTER

WORLD PREMIERE



MONTROSE PICTURES PRESENTS AN ANTHONY BAXTER FILM  
"EYE OF THE STORM" WITH JAMES MORRISON  
CASTING BY JAMES MORRISON  
EDITED BY ANTHONY BAXTER  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANTHONY BAXTER  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANTHONY BAXTER AND JAMES MORRISON  
PRODUCED BY ANTHONY BAXTER AND JAMES MORRISON  
WRITTEN BY ANTHONY BAXTER AND JAMES MORRISON  
DIRECTED BY ANTHONY BAXTER

MONTROSE PICTURES



“PEOPLE SEEM A KIND OF IRRELEVANCE, TO WHAT  
THE LANDSCAPE IS DOING AND WHAT THE  
LANDSCAPE IS ABOUT.”

JAMES MORRISON  
ARTIST

Run time: 1 hour, 18 minutes

For all interviews, assets and info please contact:  
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## SYNOPSIS

### *EYE OF THE STORM*



**J**ames Morrison is widely recognised as one of Britain’s finest landscape artists. His work hangs in the homes of JK Rowling and the Royal Family, as well as in museums, and private collections around the world. As the documentary opens, Morrison faces his greatest challenge: his eyesight is fading fast, and he has one more major painting to complete. From his studio just outside Montrose, Morrison can hear the crashing North Sea. On the wall is a drawing of Mickey Mouse he completed when he was 8 years old, at the outset of World War II.

“My sight has quite badly deteriorated,” Morrison admits. “And the very thought of coming in here and not being able to pick up a brush and do something with it really terrifies me. It really appalls me.” Nevertheless he has agreed to let filmmaker Anthony Baxter follow him as he picks up the brushes again at the age of 85 after being sidelined by a series of operations. And while doing so he reflects on an extraordinary artistic life.



*Storm over the Grampians, 2015, oil on board*

***Eye of the Storm*** is a fascinating exploration of what it means to be a landscape painter. It is also the poignant and universal story of a creative mind dealing with his own mortality, and the physical frailties that catch up with all of us.

The film movingly intertwines Morrison's struggle with old age, with his lively views as a much younger painter, captured in remarkable archive filmed more than 50 years ago.



*Catriona Black, Animator*

Pivotal moments in Morrison's career are also brought vividly to life by Scottish animator Catriona Black. Indeed, her own journey to understand Morrison's artistic genius, in order to do justice to it in the film, represents a story within a story in this multi-layered and visually stunning documentary.

As he begins painting again, Morrison is particularly troubled by the fact that – on doctor's orders – he can't paint outside. His lifelong compulsion to paint what he sees, *en plein air*, has taken him around the world – from Africa to Paris to Greenland.

Morrison explains that it all started in Glasgow. Son of a shipyard pipefitter, Morrison entered the famous Glasgow School of Art in 1950, under the tutelage of David Donaldson, a towering figure in the Scottish art world at the time. While other students embraced the overtly political and abstract

art then fashionable, Morrison was attracted to the landscape painters of a different era – such as Claude Lorrain, Jean-François Millet, and Scotland’s own Horatio McCulloch.

Morrison’s first major subjects were the crumbling Glasgow tenements, home to thousands of working class families soon to be relocated to the outskirts of the city. Though painted without people, Morrison’s stark and haunting paintings are memorials to a lost way of life (“*I was painting in areas of Glasgow that no longer exist*”) and would find their place in major museums. And his concern with documenting fleeting, disappearing worlds, would become a recurring feature of his work.



2 Rottenrow, The Midgies, 1955, 76 x 127 Dundee Art Galleries and Museums

Morrison’s work then underwent a dramatic shift when he moved to the tiny fishing village of Catterline in Northeast Scotland in 1959. Here, Morrison effectively established what would become a famed artists’ colony – along with another painter, the great Joan Eardley. As he views archive from the time that he hasn’t seen in half a century, Morrison relives his artistic and personal friendship with the woman who some consider the greatest Scottish artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

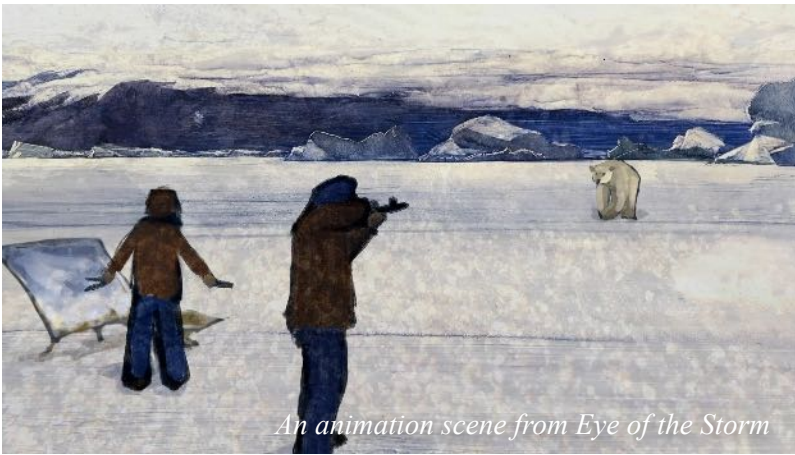
While Eardley became beloved for her portraits of children, Morrison never painted the human figure. Instead he focused on the skies and landscape of Angus and the Mearns that would become a distinctive feature of his work.

“It is my struggle with myself,” a much younger Morrison tells us in an interview from 50 years ago, while painting on the beach at St Cyrus in an old BBC film. “Strangely enough in this landscape I’m trying to face up to the whole question of death. I’m trying to create for myself here an area of solace.”

Morrison’s quest for meaning in the landscape took him, ultimately, to the least populated part of the planet – the high arctic reaches of Canada and Greenland.



*Bergs, Otto Fiord, c.1992, oil on board*



*An animation scene from Eye of the Storm*

“I had no idea what I was getting into,” Morrison says wryly, settling into an extraordinary tale, which includes hair raising flights over glaciers and arctic bison, and a confrontation with a polar bear, all the result of his determination to paint the vanishing arctic wilderness.

As Morrison returns to his studio, there is a sense of time running out.

His memory is now failing as well and he needs to refer to a piece of paper in his pocket to remember the director’s name.

A new solo exhibition of his work in Edinburgh – his 25th – is soon to be mounted at the Scottish Gallery. Despite his worsening sight, Morrison has promised the organisers one last work. As he shuffles through a half dozen different pairs of glasses, he expresses his frustration at not being able to focus his eyes on the canvas properly. He is on the verge of giving up, insisting gruffly that: “I certainly will not send paintings from this studio if they are below an acceptable standard!”

But to the accompaniment of a favourite piece of *Beethoven*, Morrison gives it one last try. As he begins painting on a pristine white board, he miraculously summons up the energy of the brash young painter he once was, his brush flashing across the canvas, leaving behind great waves of lapis lazuli.

As the film – and Morrison’s own artistic journey – draws to a close, there is a final moment of poignant triumph in Edinburgh. The first case of COVID in the UK is still a few weeks away.

“Jim Morrison is a national treasure” intones the Scottish Gallery’s director Guy Peplow, as he opens what will be Morrison’s last solo exhibition. Peplow tells those gathered that he isn’t sure the artist, now very frail, will be able to make the event.



*James Morrison attends his 25th Exhibition at The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh*

But then the artist *does* arrive, in a wheelchair guided by his daughter Judith. As a smiling James Morrison greets his great grandson, and a host of admirers, he learns that one of his final paintings – *Dark Landscape* – has already sold.

James Morrison would die, a few months later, on 31 August 2020, at the age of 88.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



When I came to live in my late mother's home town of Montrose, Angus nearly two decades ago, I was very aware of the beautiful paintings of James Morrison. His work could occasionally be seen in the Montrose Museum or coming under the hammer at the town's auction rooms. It was only later I learned of his wider reputation as one of the greatest landscape artists of his generation. He would hold major exhibitions at the Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh where his dramatic paintings of

stormy skies and the rolling hills of Angus and the Mearns were snapped up by eager buyers.

But for a star artist he was very seldom 'centre stage', despite the fact his work hung in the homes of celebrities such as JK Rowling and the Royal Family. And so, when James wrote to me after seeing my film *You've Been Trumped*, and suggested meeting for a coffee, I was delighted to accept. Sitting in his Montrose studio, James explained how he had been struck by the fight of the local residents standing up for *their* landscape against billionaire Donald Trump. At that time, he was struggling with painting, due to his fast-deteriorating eyesight and had taken a break from his brushes. He felt bereft without it.

I asked whether I could follow him on camera should he consider painting again and he agreed. BBC Scotland commissioned the film. So, in the spring of 2018 I began to document James as he returned to work. On discovering more about his fascinating life, from his early tenement paintings in *The Rottenrow* in the Townhead area of Glasgow to his dramatic trips to paint in the High Arctic to capture the melting ice cap, I felt cinematically, there was potential to add another dimension to the film. With the assistance of Screen Scotland, we commissioned some animation to bring these episodes to life. These scenes were hand drawn and meticulously crafted by the award-winning Scottish animator Catriona Black - perhaps best known for her haunting work on the Iolaire disaster on the Isle of Lewis. Having completed the majority of filming at what turned out to be James' last exhibition in January 2020, I had an editor's dream palette to work with, and was able complete the film over the lockdowns that followed.

After moving into a home here in Montrose, James died at the age of 88 in August. While it is a personal sadness he did not get to see the completed film, I hope *Eye of the Storm* will help his stunning works find new admirers around the world.

Anthony Baxter, January 2021

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Anthony Baxter is a former BBC journalist and award-winning director that Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* describes as “a filmmaker who refused to be brushed off”. His “monumental” (*The Guardian*) documentary ***FLINT*** (2020) is an unsparing examination of one of the worst man-made disasters in American history. Other films include ***You've Been Trumped Too*** (2016) and ***A Dangerous Game*** (2014), a searing indictment of the profound ecological and social impact of luxury golf resorts around the world. Baxter's iconic ***You've Been Trumped*** (2011), in which a small Scottish community battles against the brash New York developer Donald Trump who would later become the

American President, has received a dozen international awards.

[www.twitter.com/antbaxter](https://www.twitter.com/antbaxter)

## PRODUCTION COMPANY MONTROSE PICTURES

Montrose Pictures is an award-winning film and television production company based in Montrose, Angus, making content for the BBC, international broadcasters, Amazon, Netflix, Apple & others. Feature documentaries include *Eye of the Storm* (2021), *FLINT* (2020), *You've Been Trumped Too* (2016), *A Dangerous Game* (2014) and *You've Been Trumped* (2011).

[www.montrosepictures.co.uk](http://www.montrosepictures.co.uk)

[www.eyeofthestormfilm.com](http://www.eyeofthestormfilm.com)

#EyeOfTheStorm

## NOTE TO EDITORS

*Eye of the Storm* is a Montrose Pictures production, in association with **BBC Scotland** and **Screen Scotland**. The film has been selected for major film festivals in the United States, Canada and Europe, following its World Premiere at the Glasgow Film Festival.

*Eye of the Storm* will be theatrically released in the UK by Cosmic Cat. The film has been acquired for worldwide distribution, by Journeyman Pictures.

**A ‘television hour’ version of the film, commissioned by BBC Scotland, will be broadcast on the BBC Scotland Channel in spring 2021. The theatrical version of the film (Run time: 1 hour, 18 minutes), will be broadcast by the BBC Scotland Channel at a later date.**

## UK THEATRICAL RELEASE

Cosmic Cat is a theatrical film distributor based in Glasgow, Scotland that specialises in dramas and documentaries that have compelling social impact potential. Notable titles in recent years are *FLINT* (2020), *Nae Pasaran!* (2018) and *Eminent Monsters: A Manual For Modern Torture* (2020). While Covid-19 means the majority of UK cinemas are currently closed, *Eye of the Storm* will be booked ‘virtually’ at arthouse cinemas around the UK.

The theme of accessibility is a central message in our publicity for the release of the film, particularly due to the limited availability of physical screenings because of Covid restrictions. Therefore, as part of the theatrical release strategy, we are making the film available online through cinemas, art galleries and third party partners who can help make the film as accessible as possible.

As an artist, Morrison never allowed blindness to become a barrier to creating his last works and we strongly believe that those with sight loss should be able to enjoy James’ work just as much as he enjoyed creating it. In this spirit, we are working on creative and more innovative ways to produce audio description for the film. We would like to thank our partners for the UK release of the film the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh. Sincere thanks also to Screen Scotland, whose support has made this special film release possible.



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## **CREDITS - EYE OF THE STORM**

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Anthony Baxter

WRITTEN & PRODUCED BY  
Richard Phinney

EDITOR  
Anthony Baxter

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
David Harron

BUSINESS AFFAIRS  
Jane Gilmartin

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SCREEN  
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Catriona Black

CINEMATOGRAPHY  
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ADDITIONAL CAMERA  
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Catriona Black

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY  
Graham Black

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Montrose Pictures Studios

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PICTURE & SOUND POST PRODUCTION

Blazing Griffin Post Production  
Glasgow

COLOURIST & ONLINE EDITOR  
Colin Brown

AUDIO POST PRODUCTION  
John Cobban

QC OPERATOR  
Laura Wedlake

POST PRODUCTION MANAGER  
Katy Engels

## MUSIC

### We're All Leaving

Composer : Karine Polwart & Dave Gunning  
Publisher : Bay Songs Limited  
Performed by Karine Polwart  
Album : Traces (Hegri Music)

### Rivers Run

Composer : Karine Polwart  
Publisher : Bay Songs Limited  
Performed by Karine Polwart  
Album : This Earthly Spell (Hegri Music)

### Ophelia

Composer : Karine Polwart & Steven Polwart  
Publisher : Copyright Control  
Performed by Karine Polwart  
Album : Laws Of Motion (Hudson Records)

### Labouring And Resting

Composer : Karine Polwart & Pippa Murphy  
Publisher : Copyright Control  
Performed by Karine Polwart  
Album : A Pocket Of Wind Resistance (Hudson Records)

ORIGINAL MUSIC  
WRITTEN & RECORDED BY  
Dominic Glynn

ACCOUNTING SERVICES  
Norman Thomas

## ARCHIVE

'SCOPE - JOAN EARDLEY'  
DIRECTED & PRODUCED BY  
W. Gordon Smith  
©BBC Scotland 1973

'SCOPE - SEVEN DUNDEE PAINTERS'  
©BBC Scotland 1973

'THREE SCOTTISH PAINTERS'  
DIRECTED BY  
Laurence Henson  
©National Library of Scotland 1963

'MUNGO'S MEDALS'  
DIRECTED BY  
John Elder  
©Glasgow City Council 1961

'SEAWARDS THE GREAT SHIPS'  
DIRECTED BY  
Hilary Harris  
©National Library of Scotland 1960

ADDITIONAL FOOTAGE  
Pond 5  
Motion Places

WITH THANKS

Magasin Sennelier, Paris  
The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum  
Anna Robertson  
Susan Kercher  
Shona Gonella  
Fiona Guest  
Frances Marnie  
Julia Davies

Photographs and personal film footage of  
James Morrison  
Courtesy of John Morrison

Arctic Fox photographs from  
The Arctic Fox:  
Bush Pilot of the North Country  
By Don Braun with John C Warren

REPRODUCTIONS OF JAMES MORRISON'S PAINTINGS  
The Scottish Gallery  
Edinburgh

PAINTINGS RESEARCHER  
Lisa Muxworthy

DIRECTOR  
Guy Peplow

MANAGING DIRECTOR  
Christina Jansen

Reproduction of “Kelvinhaugh Street”  
By James Morrision  
Courtesy of The Argyll Collection,  
Argyll and Bute Council  
Photograph by Alan Dimmick

OTHER IMAGES

National Galleries of Scotland  
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum  
Flemming Collection  
Bridgeman Images

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Paul Reid

WEBSITE  
[eyeofthestormfilm.com](http://eyeofthestormfilm.com)