



# Dovecot Gallery

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## Press Release

# The Weaver's Apprentice

## Dovecot's Apprentices: 1912 to the Present Day

*The Weaver's Apprentice* exhibition at Dovecot; from the founding weavers who lost their lives in World War 1 100 years ago, to the current apprentice who builds on the legacy of six generations of weaver's apprentices before him.

- *The Weaver's Apprentice* exhibition 10 March to 1 July 2017
- Story of the Dovecot apprenticeship from 1912 to the present day
- Historic textile works and details from the archive at Mount Stuart
- 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary founding weavers' Glassbrook and Berry's deaths in World War 1
- Apprentice works on show from Richard Gordon to Ben Hymers
- Dovecot vision for keeping alive the traditional tapestry skills highlighted in the exhibition

### Exhibition Overview:

*The Weaver's Apprentice* opens at Dovecot Gallery 10 March to 1 July 2017. This exhibition tells the story of the importance of apprenticeships at Dovecot, featuring details from the organisation archive, as well as historic and current works. A key part of the exhibition will tell the story of the founding weavers and apprentices at Dovecot. The loss of the two founding master weavers, John 'Jack' Glassbrook and Gordon Berry, during World War 1 in 1917 might have seen the end of Dovecot before it had fully begun, but the young apprentices Ronald Cruickshank, Richard Gordon and David Lindsay Anderson returned to continue weaving at the studio. A new group of apprentices was recruited after 1919 and the cycle of activity at the studio continued.

The exhibition includes the loan of *The Chace* from Hampshire Cultural Trust - a tapestry produced by Morris & Company and woven by Dovecot's founding weavers after their own apprenticeships with William Morris. Another key work in the exhibition is the earliest surviving apprentice piece from the studio – on loan from the National Museums Scotland (A.1981.164) - offers a fascinating glimpse into the founding of Dovecot. It was woven by one of Dovecot's first apprentices, Richard Gordon, under the instruction of the founding weavers, Glassbrook and Berry. Gordon was one of the apprentices who returned from the Great War to continue the *The Lord of the Hunt* tapestry that was halted in 1916 when the last remaining weavers went off to fight. The tapestry was finally finished in 1924, and has hung at Mount Stuart ever since, and some of its own story will also be uncovered in the exhibition.

The founding Master Weavers Glassbrook and Berry did not return from the war, both losing their lives in 1917. A month before his death Glassbrook wrote home:

*"I'm very anxious to get back to see how the tapestry is getting on. It has been covered up for twelve months now and I'm wondering if Mr Thomson has ever given it a look. But Cheer-i-oh I don't suppose it will be so very long before we are back again".*

This exhibition commemorates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deaths of Glassbrook and Berry and celebrates the legacy of their young apprentices' work. The connection and sharing of skills and knowledge from master to apprentice continues at Dovecot to this day and the methods for teaching remain remarkably similar - beginning with simple triangular and curved forms. From this apprentice piece through the works of many apprentices in between, the exhibition brings this story to the present day, and featuring sample works by Dovecot's current apprentice, Ben Hymers.

Hymers' apprentice piece, titled *Hipsters Love Triangles* was completed in 2015, under the instruction of Master Weaver and Studio Manager Naomi Robertson. Another key part of Dovecot's current apprenticeships is for the new weaver to produce a completed and self-designed tapestry. Hymers' tapestry titled *Penelope* tells the story of the wife of Odysseus, whose faithfulness to her husband on his long journey was maintained by her weaving, secretly unravelling, and then reweaving a burial shroud for Odysseus' father Laertes. Because of this faithfulness the name Penelope is considered synonymous with fidelity, but it also became a term used in tapestry. In addition to *Hipsters Love Triangles* and *Penelope*, other sample works from Hymers' apprenticeship feature in this exhibition along with his reactions to the six generations of apprentices who have gone before him.

### **Dovecot Apprenticeship:**

Dovecot's three-year Apprenticeship is open to applicants over the age of 16 offering a unique opportunity to learn from Dovecot's Master Weavers. As a world leader in tapestry weaving, Dovecot Tapestry Studio is dedicated to the continued development of this highly skilled art form, ensuring that the skill of tapestry weaving continues to thrive as a dynamic and evolving process. Nurturing innovation in new tapestry weavers who will carry the medium forward for future generations.

The Apprenticeship Programme sustains the lineage of Dovecot tapestry weaving as an essential feature of Scotland's creative community. Through hands-on learning experiences, the unique and exceptional skills are passed from Dovecot Master Weaver to Apprentice, building expertise for the future. Following the successful completion of the three-year apprenticeship, the aim for the apprentice is to remain part of Dovecot's weaving team and to continue a career progression in the Studio to Junior Weaver, Weaver and then, following 10 years weaving experience, Master Weaver. A Dovecot Apprenticeship lasts three years and covers technique, design practices and artistic collaboration.

Dovecot aims to maximise the Apprentice's creative and intellectual potential by developing individual strengths and a design philosophy, gaining an understanding of the professional context and practice of tapestry and rug making. Apprentices work in a studio setting alongside fellow weavers and they are encouraged to build a personal creative identity and aesthetic vocabulary informed by historical, cultural and technical knowledge and by the practical experience of making textiles and collaborating with leading contemporary artists.

The Dovecot Foundation was established as a charity in 2010 by Alastair and Elizabeth Salvesen in order to secure the long term future of tapestry weaving in Scotland and to build on the legacy and archive of 100 years of Dovecot Tapestry Studio's history. Apprenticeship and learning are fundamental to the future success of the Studio.

Since 1912, Dovecot has placed craftsmanship at the core of its existence, inspired by the founding Master Weavers who came from the workshops of William Morris. Respect for skills and learning has been a constant throughout, allowing Dovecot to develop a remarkable reputation for working with renowned artists and designers on prestigious projects for public and private commissions. Central to the Dovecot vision is that of supporting and developing this legacy. A classic apprenticeship at Dovecot Tapestry Studio ensures that the skill of tapestry weaving and the ethos embodied in the Arts and Crafts movement has been handed on to each new tapestry weaver at Dovecot, enabling them to become a Master Weaver.

#### Notes to editor:

- The present Dovecot apprentice Ben Hymers joined the Studio in 2015. Originally from Leeds, Hymers has an MA (Hons) History of Art from The University of Edinburgh, starred in the BAFTA nominated *The 1940s House* and is a part-time Close-up Magician and amateur footballer.
- In future years, the Dovecot Apprenticeship programme will open to new applicants but at present the position is filled.
- Dovecot is a 100-year-old tapestry studio founded by the Marquess of Bute in Scotland - Master Weavers employed from the tapestry studio of William Morris in Wimbledon.
- Founding Master Weavers Glassbrook and Berry died in World War 1 which caused temporary closure of the Studio. Apprentices from local school in Edinburgh, completed first tapestry *The Lord of the Hunt* weaving in Glassbrook and Berry's initials.
- The founding Dovecot Master Weavers, John Glassbrook and Gordon Berry, both lost their lives in the Great War in 1917. Their initials are woven into the border of the first Dovecot tapestry, *The Lord of the Hunt* beside a bobbin, its wool thread severed by scissors symbolising cutting the thread of life. The two young men had completed the right half of this tapestry before the war forced the studio closure in 1916. The tapestry was then completed by Dovecot weavers between 1919 and 1924. Gordon Berry's year of death in the commemorative inscription should read 1917 not 1916.
- The Dovecot Apprenticeship has evolved from seven-year instruction to a modern day equivalent three year programme of hands-on learning – technique, design practice and artistic collaboration.
- The current new Apprentice learns the craft of traditional tapestry weaving from Master Weavers at Dovecot Tapestry Studio now housed in converted Victorian Baths on Infirmary Street, in Edinburgh's Old Town.
- Dovecot Tapestry Studio collaborates with renowned contemporary artists including recent projects with Chris Ofili, Linder and Garry Fabian Miller to create tapestries and rugs for private and public commissions.

#### Interviews and comments:

Sandra Crow (Head of Studio Projects), Naomi Robertson (Studio Manager and Master Weaver) and Ben Hymers (Apprentice Weaver) are available for comment.

#### Further information and images:

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#### About Dovecot Studios:

##### Dovecot Gallery

Dovecot Gallery is a landmark centre for contemporary art, craft and design built around a leading

international tapestry studio. Occupying an extraordinary building in the heart of Edinburgh, the Gallery works to programme, commission and produce exhibitions and events for audiences and clients who share Dovecot's passion for making and the creative arts.

### **Dovecot Tapestry Studio**

Dovecot Tapestry Studio is a world-renowned producer of hand-woven tapestry and gun-tufted rugs. Continuing a century-long heritage of making and collaboration with leading international contemporary artists, the Studio weavers are dedicated to producing extraordinary and engaging works of art by commission from private and public collectors from across the globe.

### **Dovecot Foundation**

Dovecot Foundation exists to champion Dovecot Tapestry Studio and its place in the world of contemporary art, design and making. The Foundation puts the Studio at the heart of this mission in supporting the Dovecot Apprenticeship Programme, collaborations with leading artists from around the world and development of cultural and educational partnerships. Ultimately, the Foundation seeks to bring the innovative work of contemporary artists and makers to a wider audience.

### **History**

Dovecot Studios was founded in 1912 by the Marquess of Bute, a patron of the arts. The first weavers at Dovecot, Gordon Berry and John Glassbrook, came from the renowned William Morris Studios at Merton Abbey in Wimbledon. Dovecot's first commission was for a series of monumental tapestries for the Marquess' own home at Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute.

In 1946, the Studios were incorporated as The Edinburgh Tapestry Company. Dovecot soon became established as a leading contemporary fine art tapestry studio, with works commissioned for major public, corporate and academic institutions worldwide. As a key player in the renaissance of tapestry in the 20th century, Dovecot's Master Weavers worked with many leading contemporary artists including David Hockney, Henry Moore, Frank Stella and RB Kitaj.

Dovecot's Master Weavers continue to work to commission, producing tapestry and tufted rugs for private and public collectors. Major tapestry projects include Alison Watt's *Butterfly* for Scottish Opera's new Theatre Royal, Peter Saville's *Monarch of the Glen* and Magne Furuholmen's *Glass Onion*. Working with artists such as Linder, Than Clark and Garry Fabian Miller on recent rug commissions have further tested the boundaries of creativity and play with what the process allows.



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