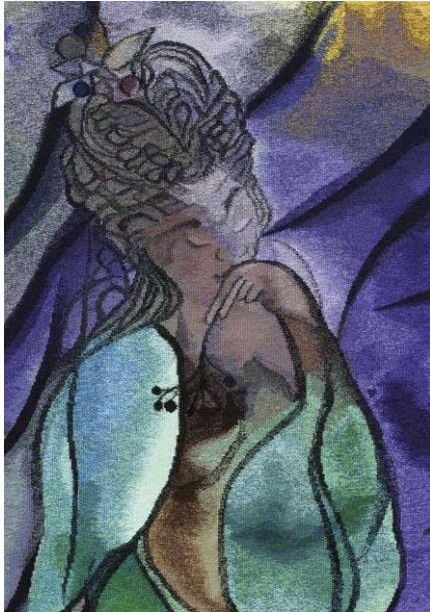


# PRESS RELEASE

THE  
NATIONAL  
GALLERY



## CHRIS OFILI WEAVING MAGIC

**26 April – 28 August 2017**  
**Sunley Room**  
**Admission free**

In spring 2017, the National Gallery will unveil *The Caged Bird's Song*, a new tapestry by Turner Prize-winning artist Chris Ofili.

The exhibition marks the first time the artist has worked in the medium of tapestry and will include a series of preparatory works on paper in an installation conceived by the artist for the Gallery's Sunley Room.

Ofili is returning to the National Gallery following the exhibition *Titian: Metamorphosis 2012*. In this he was one of three contemporary artists asked to respond to Titian's great mythological paintings, *Diana and Actaeon*, *The Death of Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, which depict stories from the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ofili produced new paintings in which the classical world was transposed to Trinidad, where he lives and works. He also designed a related series of costumes and sets for a new ballet performed by the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

The imagery in this new tapestry reflects Ofili's ongoing interest in classical mythology and contemporary 'demigods', together with the stories, magic and colour of the Trinidadian landscape he inhabits.

Like Rubens, Goya and many artists before him who have engaged with this medium, Chris Ofili has been collaborating closely with master weavers to see his design translated into a tapestry. It is being hand-woven by the internationally renowned, Edinburgh-based Dovecot Tapestry Studio, and has taken two and a half years to complete.

Commissioned by The Clothworkers' Company, a Livery Company established in 1528 to oversee the cloth-finishing trade in the City of London, *The Caged Bird's Song* will go on permanent display in Clothworkers' Hall following the National Gallery's exhibition of the work.

Chris Ofili says: "*The Caged Bird's Song is a marriage of watercolour and weaving. I set out to challenge the weaving process, by doing something free-flowing in making a watercolour, encouraging the liquid pigment to form the image,*

*a contrast to the weaving process. With their response, which is an interpretation rather than a reproduction, the weavers have paid a type of homage to the watercolour that I gave them as well as to the process of weaving.”*

Dr Minna Moore Ede, Curator of *Weaving Magic*, says “*We are delighted to be working with Chris Ofili again and to be able to unveil this remarkable body of new work in such an imaginative and novel exhibition environment.*”

Director of the National Gallery, Dr Gabriele Finaldi, says “*In designing a large tapestry, Chris Ofili follows in the footsteps of painters like Raphael, Goya and Miro. His fascination with mythical landscapes has been nourished by pictures in the National Gallery and in ‘The Caged Bird’s Song’ one senses the excitement of the fusion of different strands of his own art coming together with the historic tradition of tapestry-making.*”

Peter Langley, Chair of the Clothworkers’ Collections and Archives Committee, says “*We wanted to commission a work designed by a major artist which will be hung and enjoyed in our Hall for hundreds of years. Our roots are in the textiles trade and we have been keen to support the craft of tapestry weaving. We are delighted that this commission and Ofili’s vibrant design have allowed Dovecot’s weavers to employ all their artistry to create a truly stunning work of art.*”

Dovecot Studios Director David Weir says “*We were thrilled when The Clothworkers’ Company embraced Dovecot’s proposal for a Chris Ofili designed tapestry for their Livery Hall, and by Chris’ interest in accepting the commission. Chris’ instinctive response to the medium and openness to collaborate is wonderful. The time taken for thoughtful interchanges with the weaving team to understand the medium, have resulted in an extraordinarily beautiful design.*”

The Sunley Room exhibition programme is supported by the Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **CHRIS OFILI**

Chris Ofili came to prominence in the early 1990s with richly orchestrated paintings combining rippling dots of paint, drifts of glitter, collaged images and elephant dung. His is a seductive art of braided connections that draws on a wide range of sources including jazz and hip hop music, Blaxploitation movies, the Bible, and the works of artist and poet William Blake. Ofili's recent works adopt more gestural, pared-down forms, inspired by his relocation to Trinidad, while maintaining a sense of the expansive, dramatic and romantic. Chris Ofili was born in Manchester, England, in 1968, and currently lives and works in Trinidad. He received his BA in Fine Art from the Chelsea School of Art in 1991 and his MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art in 1993. Work by Ofili has been the subject of solo exhibitions worldwide, including recent shows at the New Museum, New York (2014), travelling to The Aspen Art Museum (2015); The Arts Club of Chicago (2010); Tate Britain, London (2010 and 2005); kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2006), The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005), and Serpentine Gallery, London (1998). He represented Britain in the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and won the Turner Prize in 1998.

### **THE CLOTHWORKERS COMPANY**

The Clothworkers’ Company is a City of London Livery Company, established by Royal Charter in 1528, to oversee the craft of cloth finishing in London. Today it is a philanthropic membership organisation which supports a broad range of charitable causes, distributing over £5m each year through its sister Clothworkers’ Foundation. Reflecting its roots, the Company is keen to continue its support of the UK textile industry and its heritage. In addition to education and research, the Clothworkers are significant supporters of textile conservation and have been major funders of the V&A Clothworkers’ Centre for the Study and Conservation of Textiles and the British Museum Organics Conservation Studio.

### **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 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.

## **IMAGE**

Chris Ofili

*The Caged Bird's Song*, 2014–2017 (detail)

Wool, cotton, and viscose

© Chris Ofili. Courtesy the Artist and Victoria Miro, London, The Clothworkers' Company and Dovecot Tapestry Studio, Edinburgh. Photography: Gautier Deblonde

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