



# Dovecot Gallery

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## Press Release

### DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE



- Women artists and weavers who have contributed to Dovecot's past and present
- Interweaves works exploring textile by contemporary artists with women's work at Dovecot
- Explores the history and cultural identity of women through histories of textile making
- Supporting programme of events includes artist performances and seminars
- Curated by Dovecot's Exhibitions Curator Kate Grenyer
- Partner exhibition for Edinburgh Art Festival 2017

**Exhibition open:** Thursday 20 July 2017 to Saturday 20 January 2018

**Press week:** Thursday 20 to Thursday 27 July (not Sunday 23) 2017 10.30am-5.30pm

**Photography/film:** Please contact [info@dovecotstudios.com](mailto:info@dovecotstudios.com) to make an appointment

**Install images:** Press images available from Monday 24 July 2017

**Private view for the opening of Edinburgh Art Festival:** Thursday 27 July 6-8pm

**Exhibition open to the public (free admission):**

Mon-Sat 10.30am-5.30pm | Daily during August 10am-6pm

Exhibition webpage: <http://ow.ly/t7og30aZe0c> | Social media: #daughtersofpenelope

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The exhibition *Daughters of Penelope*, at Dovecot Gallery from 20 July 2017 to 20 January 2018, looks at the work of selected women weavers and artists who have contributed to Dovecot's past and present, including work by Fiona Mathison, Maureen Hodge, Naomi Robertson, Joanne Soroka, and studio collaborations with Linder, Julie Brook and Claire Barclay. These significant Dovecot tapestry and rug pieces will be shown alongside contemporary works by artists who are exploring the history and cultural identity of women through textile including recent work by Christine Borland, Hanna Tuulikki, Georgia Horgan and Caroline Dear, as well as contemporary weavers Erin Riley and Aino Kajaniemi.

The Greek figure of Penelope – Odysseus' faithful wife – is a much discussed and potentially controversial character in ancient mythology. Is she the embodiment of female loyalty and chastity, patiently weaving a tapestry while she waits for her adventurous husband to return home? Or is she a strong and assertive protagonist - using her intelligence and wit to outsmart unwanted suitors, unpicking each night the shroud she was required to weave, thus maintaining control over her own destiny. *Daughters of Penelope* takes on this second view, featuring women artists who adopt the medium of textile and create something that gives voice to their work, lives and cultures.

The story of women's work in both the textile industry and in fibre art and tapestry making is a complex one and the history of Dovecot intertwines with both. The Arts and Crafts movement and the revival of the weaver apprenticeship had led to the formation of tapestry studios such as Dovecot, but reflecting the times in which they were established, men were behind this

reinstatement of tapestry making as a profession. Weaving was an artisan trade and young men were apprenticed as weavers to learn from their male masters, whilst women's role in creating textile was still considered a domestic folk art form. Dovecot's first female weaver, Maureen Hodge, came to work at the studio in the 1960s.

However, major cultural changes were afoot in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century impacting on art, fashion and textile, a significant moment reflected in *Daughters of Penelope* in through a Sonia Delaunay rug which opens the exhibition. The rise of modernism led to the growth in the recognition of the individual artist-weaver separate from tapestry studio collectives. Often educated through art schools, these weavers were artists in their own right and, as often as not, women. Dovecot's current Master Weaver and Studio Manager Naomi Robertson did not enter the Studio via an apprenticeship, but instead came directly from Edinburgh College of Art with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Tapestry.

Naomi Robertson, Studio Manager and Master Weaver at Dovecot comments; *"Following in the footsteps of other female Edinburgh Art College graduates, I joined Dovecot in 1990 after finishing my degree in Tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art from 1986-1990 where I was trained by both Maureen Hodge and Fiona Mathison. I became Studio Manager in 2013. Over my time at Dovecot I have collaborated on some incredible tapestries with female artists including Elizabeth Blackadder, Julie Brook, Alison Watt, Christine Borland, Vicky Crowe and Chrissie Clyne; all very inspiring and diverse projects."*

There are many and varied reasons why a significant number of women artists have been drawn to work in textile. It may be because of the historic and cultural role that women have had in working with fabric in both domestic and industrial settings - these social histories provide a rich seam of inspiration from which many artists have drawn. Perhaps this is what has attracted the female artists with whom the Tapestry Studio have collaborated with over the past 50 years.

Dovecot's Exhibitions Curator Kate Grenyer comments; *"This exhibition acknowledges that tapestry, although a unique art form with specific skills and artistic values, does not operate in isolation from other areas of art and culture. Where tapestry is at its most powerful is when something, be it an image or idea, is woven in rather than printed on to a fabric, bringing structure, form and image together. This exhibition therefore interweaves the work of artists who are investigating women's stories and textile histories with the unique story of women's work at Dovecot, providing a new structure within which both can be held, re-examined and strengthened"*.

The *Daughters of Penelope* exhibition is supported by a programme of accessible events including artist performances, seminars, storytelling sessions, audio-descriptive and curator's tours and talks, providing further opportunity for the visitor to deepen their experience.

***Daughters of Penelope* confirmed exhibiting artists:**

Claire Barclay | Elizabeth Blackadder | Christine Borland | Julie Brook | Caroline Dear | Sonia Delaunay | Maureen Hodge | Georgia Horgan | Aino Kajaniemi | Linder | Fiona Mathison | Erin Riley | Naomi Robertson | Joanne Soroka | Hanna Tuulikki

**-ENDS-**

**Press release image credit:** Caroline Dear, *Reed Veils (detail)*, 2016, three panels of reed leaves using loop technique, approx. 60 x 170cm, image courtesy the artist.

**Notes to Editors:**

- The *Daughters of Penelope* exhibition will headline as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival which runs from 27 July to 27 August 2017.
- The reference to Penelope is from Homer's *Odysseus*. Penelope was Odysseus' wife. She wove a funeral shroud for her father-in-law whilst Odysseus was away, unpicking it every night in secret so that she would never have to finish it and therefore be expected to remarry. To this day, in tapestry weaving, unpicking yarn is known as a 'Penelope stitch'.
- Dovecot's current Apprentice Weaver Ben Hymers, who is mentored by Master Weaver Naomi Robertson, took the story of Penelope as the basis for the design of his own apprentice tapestry piece in 2016, creating a work of art depicting the faithful woman weaver, secretly unpicking the weft of her endless tapestry.
- Claire Barclay, Elizabeth Blackadder, Julie Brook and Linder are all artists who have previously collaborated with weavers at Dovecot to create a tapestry or rug artwork to commission or speculatively for an exhibition.
- Maureen Hodge, Fiona Mathison and Joanne Soroka were Master Weavers and worked for Dovecot between 1964-1973, 1970-1981, 1982-1987 respectively. Mathison and Soroka were both Artistic Directors in their time. Naomi Robertson joined Dovecot in 1990 as a weaver and is currently Studio Manager and Master Weaver.
- Christine Borland, Caroline Dear, Georgia Horgan, Aino Kajaniemi, Erin Riley and Hanna Tuulikki are all artists who have used textile in their artwork to explore textile histories and women's stories.

***Daughters of Penelope* images here (image credit document in folder):**

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pxecdyriol5elr3/AADpbjp5lvcGyRKfUHWdVvQFxa?dl=0>

**Exhibition events:**

Information regarding the *Daughters of Penelope* supporting exhibition events programme can be accessed via: <https://dovecotstudios.com/programme/> or by contacting [info@dovecotstudios.com](mailto:info@dovecotstudios.com).

**For press information, early access 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 Chris Ofili's *The Caged Bird's Song* exhibited at the National Gallery and commissioned by The Clothworker's Company, 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.