

PRESS RELEASE

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May Morris: Art & Life

28 November 2019 – 14 March 2020

Press Preview: Monday 25 November 10am-12pm



Honeysuckle wallpaper (c)William Morris Gallery London Borough of Waltham Forest

May Morris c.1890s (c) William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest

'I'm a remarkable woman – always was, though none of you seemed to think so.'

May Morris in a letter to George Bernard Shaw, 1936

- **Dovecot Studios brings the first-ever exhibition about the work of May Morris to Scotland**
- **Art & Life tells the overlooked story of May Morris (1862–1938), the youngest daughter of William Morris, and her extraordinary work and contribution to the British Arts and Crafts Movement**
- **The exhibition repositions May Morris as a key female force in securing the legacy and international influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement**
- **Exhibition organised by the William Morris Gallery London in association with Dovecot Studios**

Dovecot Studios stage a landmark exhibition exploring the life and work of May Morris (1862–1938), the youngest daughter of William Morris (1834–96) and one of the most significant artists of the British Arts and Crafts movement in the early 20th century. Bringing together over 80 original textiles and

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drawings from collections around the UK, *May Morris Art & Life* will explore May's extraordinary body of work, and why she deserves recognition outside her familial namesake.

For more than 100 years May's contribution to the decorative arts, in particular to embroidery, has languished behind her father's illustrious career. Revealing the breadth of May's creative pursuits, the exhibition features wallpaper and embroidery alongside jewellery, dresses and book designs, as well as sketches and watercolours, which May painted throughout her lifetime.

At the age of 23 May took charge of the Morris & Co. embroidery department and was responsible for creating some of the company's most iconic textile and wallpaper designs. With a focus on May's role in the development of art embroidery – elevating needlework from a domestic craft to a serious art form – the show highlights the extent of her influence in the UK and abroad, particularly the US.

Alongside her artistic background, May was exposed to political influences from an early age. She would often model for her parents' artist friends, including the pre-Raphaelite painters Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and George Howard. Through her father, May was drawn into political activity in the emergent Socialist movement becoming close to Eleanor Marx, George Bernard Shaw, and future Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

Seeking an alternative to the Art Workers Guild, which did not accept female members until as late as 1964, May founded the Women's Guild of Art in 1907. Painter Evelyn De Morgan, jeweller Georgie Gaskin, bookbinder Katherine Adams, and sculptor Mabel White were some of the earliest members of the Women's Guild whose mission was to provide a forum for social and professional networking within the arts and in May's words '... to meet women who are not playing at art'.

May was a prolific creator throughout her lifetime and continued to receive commissions right up to the final months of her life. While her own artistic reputation was overlooked after her death, May was instrumental in preserving and shaping her father's legacy. As well as publishing 24 volumes of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, May ensured examples of her father's designs were donated to the V&A and secured the future of Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire, the Morris's country residence, as a house of historic interest.

Celia Joicey, Director Dovecot Studios says, "Dovecot is delighted to showcase the exquisite artwork, embroidery and jewellery of May Morris in this important Arts and Crafts exhibition. As a Tapestry Studio, we hope 21st century audiences will take inspiration from May Morris' distinctive engagement with the politics and economics of making work by hand."

Kate Grenyer, Dovecot Exhibitions Curator says, "May was extraordinary, a brilliant craftswoman and a dynamic presence to all whose lives she affected. It has been a joy to work with the archives of William Morris Gallery and to bring these together with extraordinary objects from the UK's major collections to bring May's story to Edinburgh and to wider public attention."

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Related Events:

May Morris Art & Life Preview, Tuesday 26 November 2019, 10am

£15, includes tea and coffee

Be the first to see May Morris Art & Life at this exclusive preview event with a chance to chat to the Dovecot team and Curator.

May Morris Curator Lunchtime Talk, Tuesday 26 November 2019, 1pm

£12

Join the exhibition curator Rowan Bain from The William Morris Gallery, to trace May Morris' extraordinary life and career, and the artist and designer's role in preserving her father's legacy.

May Morris Curator Breakfast Talk, Thursday 5 December 2019, 10am

£12

Dovecot Curator Kate Grenyer explores the life, work, and legacy of May Morris, the younger daughter of William Morris and a key figure in the British Arts and Crafts Movement.

May Morris Exhibition Tuesday Lunchtime Highlights Tour, every Tuesday, 1pm

FREE with exhibition ticket

Enjoy a guided tour of the May Morris exhibition with a member of the Dovecot team.

May Morris Exhibition Thursday Lunchtime Highlights Tour, every Thursday, 1pm

FREE with exhibition ticket

Arts & Crafts Talks Programme, Wednesday evenings 5, 12, 19 and 26 February, 6pm

£15

A programme of talks about Arts & Crafts designers, furniture, jewellery, ceramics and textiles.

Notes to Editors:

About Dovecot Studios

Dovecot is a world-renowned tapestry studio in the heart of Edinburgh and a landmark centre for contemporary art, craft, and design. Established in 1912, Dovecot continues a century-long heritage of collaboration with international artists to make exceptional and engaging works of art.

Dovecot Studios undertakes public and private textile commissions, with major tapestry projects including collaborations with Chris Ofili, Alison Watt, and Gary Fabian Miller. Also specialising in handcrafted rugs, Dovecot has worked with various artists such as Linder, Jim Lambie, and Nicolas Party. Occupying an extraordinary building, formerly Victorian baths, Dovecot also has an engaging programme of exhibitions and events, which expand the conversation around art, craft, and design.

About William Morris Gallery

The William Morris Gallery is the only public Gallery devoted to William Morris: designer, craftsman, and radical socialist. Housed in the Grade II listed building that was Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, it displays the world's largest collection of his work. In recent years the Gallery has developed an ambitious programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions by artists including Jeremy Deller, Yinka Shonibare, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Frank Brangwyn. Other special exhibitions have explored 20th political posters and African textiles.

The Gallery, which is owned and run by Waltham Forest Council, was awarded the Art Fund prize for Museum of the Year in 2013 and was nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award in 2014.

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