

May Morris – Art and Life

Dovecot Studios are staging a landmark exhibition exploring the life and work of May Morris (1862–1938). The youngest daughter of William Morris (1834–96), she is one the most significant artists of the British Arts and Crafts movement in the early 20th century.

Bringing together over 80 original textiles and 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.



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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.







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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.





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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.”

May Morris – Art & Life is on from 28 November 2019 to 14 March 2020

Details and tickets are available from [Dovecot Studios](#)

Exhibition organised by the William Morris Gallery London in association with [Dovecot Studios](#)

In order to protect the exhibits, they are displayed under subdued lighting, therefore the above images have been chosen to reflect this situation.