

# The Crow in Heels: Edinburgh's Hidden Mosaicist

Have you seen the crow in heels? If not, you'll find her partying by the cycle path near Warriston Cemetery, along with her noisy set.

Her creator, Helen Miles, began making graffiti mosaics back in 2017, not long after arriving in Edinburgh. For the previous 14 years, she had been honing her skills in Greece and had other spells in the US and in the Middle East.

Helen explained: "I get up ludicrously early to install my graffiti mosaics and take Farook (my dog) with me. He sits in the grass looking serious while I get on with preparing the surface, spreading the adhesive and installing the mosaic. The first few times I did it I was petrified. Every siren was a speeding police car sending a squad to arrest me.

"When I was installing '*Why Me?*' on Calton Hill, I heard the sound of heavy footsteps pounding towards me and thought my time was up. I turned, heart racing, as the steps neared me and sensing the discomfiture of the young man – an off-duty

police officer perhaps – who stood before me.”



Miles is careful about where she installs her mosaics – she favours areas where there is already graffiti. An epiphany came when she realised that the council was actually sending someone to clean the graffiti off her mosaic. Here was recognition indeed!

It took a long time for Helen to find a studio large enough for all her materials and tools. In the meantime, she had an urge to create – she wanted to make her presence felt. What’s more, she had ‘a deep and almost desperate need to introduce the world to mosaics.’

“Mosaics aren’t talked about in the History of Art canon because they were made collectively; there was no one named creator. People just don’t get them. Perhaps because they don’t come across mosaics very often. They think you can just knock one up with a broken plate.”



Helen spent a year with a master craftsman in Thessaloniki, Greece, before continuing her training in Athens. She said: “I became obsessed with Roman mosaics, which have extraordinary designs. I used to think one didn’t really need to do more than that; now I’m much more adventurous.”

Known for her more traditional, classical technique, Helen explained: ‘If you look at the crow, the way the tiles are laid is very classical. There are rules about how the tesserae are arranged: the spaces are just as important as the tesserae themselves. You don’t want to create rivers or lines in the gaps. If you do, the eye will fall on them. It’s easy for a mosaic to get fussy and distracting.’

For more information about Helen Miles, or to read her fascinating blog [click here](#).

