

World-famous tapestry studio enters brave new virtual world

A fine art studio established more than a century ago has been able to create and share its work with the world despite lockdown, thanks to a Scottish virtual tour pioneer.

Dovecot Studios was founded in 1912 and is an internationally-renowned centre for contemporary art, craft and design, based in Edinburgh's historic former Infirmary Street baths.

Now it has harnessed the latest hi-tech technology to keep visitors flocking in, albeit virtually, helping to engage audiences and raise vital funds to help safeguard Dovecot's future.

The project is one of the first successes for newly-launched [360 Virtual Studios](#), which is rolling out a suite of new products and services for galleries, museums, events spaces and retailers – aimed at helping them recover from the pandemic, which has hit those sectors disproportionately hard.



Tapestry Studio Dovecot

Celia Joicey, Director at Dovecot, revealed how a collaboration with Michelle Milnes, an entrepreneur from the Business Women Scotland network, helped them adapt to the pandemic.

She said: “Dovecot normally welcomes tens of thousands of visitors per year, including artists and tapestry partners. Lockdown forced us to shut and look at how to make our work accessible online.

“The collaboration with 360 Virtual Studios highlights what is possible when creative people collaborate to overcome the odds. Instead of despairing about the closure, we’ve brought our building to life in new ways for an international audience at home.”

Working together, Celia and Michelle realised that the same advanced technology being used to showcase and sell houses could be incredibly powerful in allowing visitors to browse and enjoy exhibitions at their leisure – in what is believed to be a first in Scotland.



360 Virtual Studios is the brainchild of award-winning entrepreneur Michelle, who already runs a successful property marketing business, with 32 staff and clients across Scotland. The tech uses state-of-the-art camera equipment and software from Matterport that creates detailed virtualisations of any setting, where a virtual visitor can take a hyper-realistic, self-guided 3D tour.

Michelle said: “I was approached by a range of different organisations during lockdown 2020, from the arts, tourism and hospitality sectors. That was the confirmation I needed that our cutting-edge technology can help businesses far beyond the property market.

“Frankly, the results so far with Dovecot have been nothing short of stunning. The pandemic has pulled the future forward and the public are now truly seeing the potential of the virtual tours in a way that might otherwise have taken five to 10 years to achieve. This is just the beginning. For galleries, exhibition spaces, venues and retailers, the

potential is incredible.”



Celia Joicey

Celia, who moved to Dovecot from the Fashion and Textile Museum in London, says the technology has helped the venue to weather the worst of lockdown. She added: “Virtual tapestry studio tours and exhibition visits using the 360-degree technology have highlighted Dovecot’s global reach.

“Even while closed, we’ve continued to make artworks that we can share with partners and visitors in incredible detail. The technology from Michelle’s team has given us the flexibility to experiment and lead innovation in our programming as well as the format of exhibitions.

“Crucially, we can record the exact number of visits and collect information about geographical reach, which is extremely helpful when it comes to exploring further international interest.”

The collaboration has been so successful that it has led to a dedicated interiors and fashion exhibition, *Mid Century Modern: Conran to Quant*, with customers taking live virtual tours in the company of the curator.



The Mary Quant exhibition featured Terence Conran and Paolozzi. Celia added: “We’ve staged both live and recorded curator tours with fantastic feedback. This kind of digital engagement is vital if we are to sustain the development of Dovecot as a self-funding organisation.”

Financial pressures on museums and galleries have seen many adopt a mixed economy model, meaning there is often a gift shop and café alongside paid exhibitions. While Dovecot has a café, shop and events programme, the pandemic showed the need for more resilience and reinvention. Virtual tours, which can be archived, allow the venue to explore new ways of making

money from its global audience.

Since 1912, Dovecot has welcomed world famous artists to make breath taking tapestries in Scotland and has a programme of exhibitions and events with the likes of Grayson Perry and Mary Quant – both of which lockdown had prevented.

Dovecot will soon make the Tapestry Studio tour free via its website. It also runs paid, ticketed tours featuring live, interactive commentary provided by Celia on the last Saturday of every month.

The parent company of 360 Virtual Studios is called [Property Studios](#). It has 32 staff, turnover close to £1m and national contracts with 30 estate agents and 12 major homebuilders.

