

THE **CORDIS**  
PRIZE FOR  
TAPESTRY

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## BUT IS IT TAPESTRY?

*Some of you (we hope) will have found the cover art on this publication a little puzzling. Maybe even challenging.*

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Miranda Harvey -  
Cordis Trust

The criteria for submission to this third Cordis Prize for Tapestry were different from previous awards.

We knew artists would have a shorter lead time to prepare entries, and that we would need to make the most of the fine exhibition space made available to us by Visual Arts Scotland in the Royal Scottish Academy building. We decided to use this opportunity to investigate the world of smaller works, setting a maximum rather than a minimum size. We also required that while works should reference classical Gobelin weaving techniques, they need not necessarily be fully woven. We positively encouraged artists to think beyond traditional wall-hung pieces.

The result of this change in criteria was fascinating. There were submissions from around the globe but in this contemporary take on tapestry, all of our selections come from the United Kingdom. Why this should be is open to speculation – are we benefiting from a wider British willingness to experiment in the arts? Were overseas artists concerned about complex transport and hanging issues? Is it a legacy of British art school training? The range of works from concrete objects to abstract symbols is vast – or is it? There are ‘things’ and there are ‘images’, but are the objects not symbolic? And with tapestry, the abstract ‘painting-like’ images are very concrete objects. There seems a playful element of subverting sophistication, yet focusing on simplicity.

As interesting as the works themselves, will be to observe the reaction of the viewers – will they love them? Will they be provoked? Will they be inspired? Why not record your own reaction on the Cordis social media and website. We would be fascinated to find out.

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## OUR THANKS

are due to our 2017 judges,  
Robbie Bushe, Miranda Harvey,  
Fiona Mathison, Susan Mowatt  
and Nicky Wilson

All text written in pages 4-13  
by Fiona Mathison

*(Artist & lecturer in Intermedia, formerly  
Tapestry – Edinburgh College of Art)*

# RACHEL JOHNSTON

Portsmouth

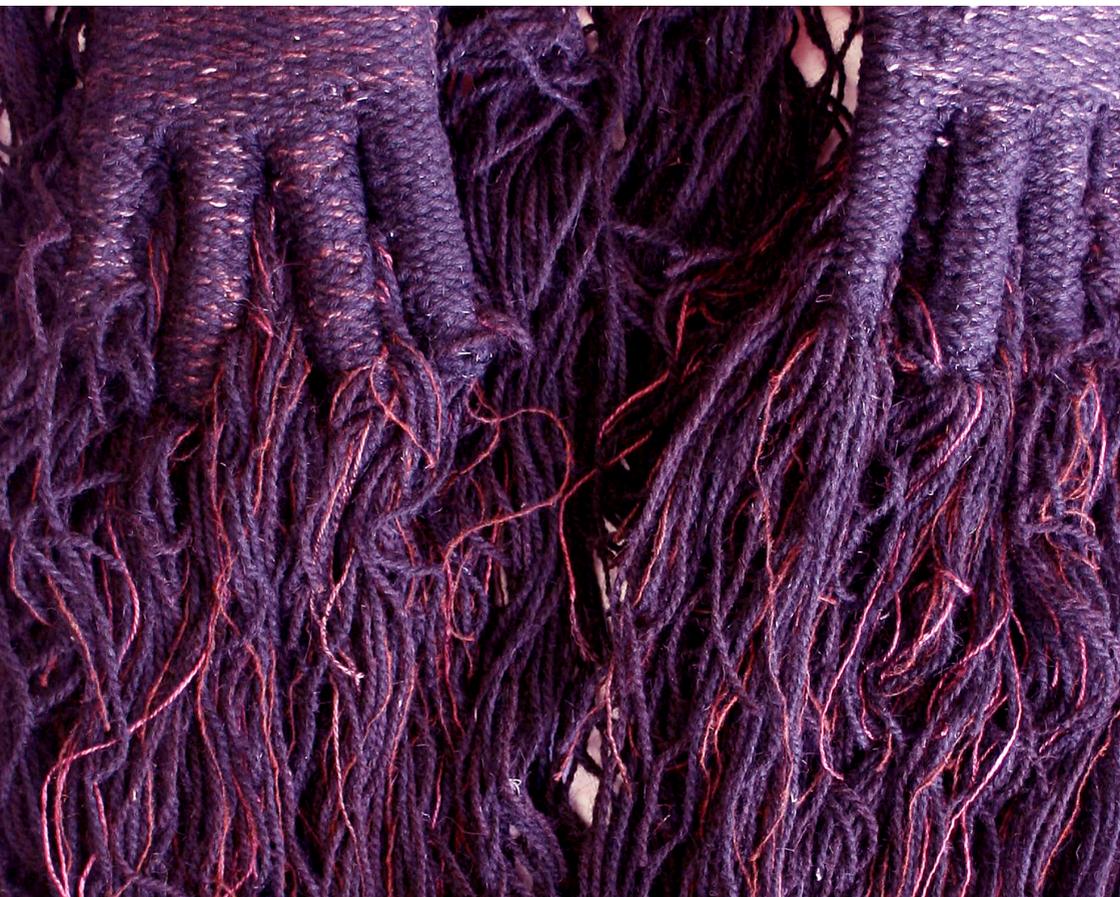
CUT GLOVES AND RIVER SHOES – Enamelled copper wire, wool and silk yarn

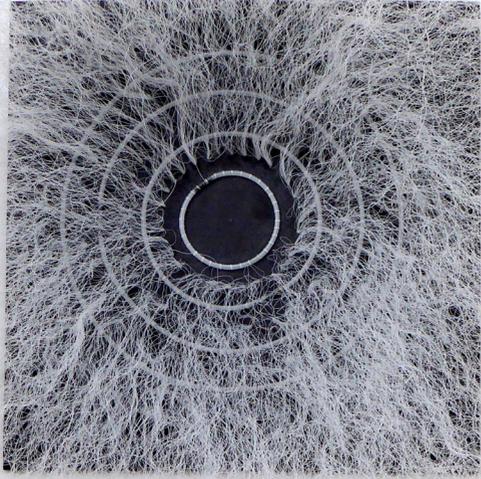
The life-size three-dimensional gloves are constructed from woven enamelled copper wire and yarn. There are extrusions from the fingertips and edges of each glove. The shoes are made from woven enamelled copper wire and yarn with a handmade felt sole. One pair

has been worn, so is a little stained and shaped; the other is unworn and clean.

The technique of woven tapestry is central to these sculptural pieces. As items of clothing they relate to the ongoing theme of journey-making and narrative in

Rachel's work. The shoes become shaped by wearing, thereby embodying a sense of memory and physical engagement with a place. The gloves reflect a long-held interest in cloth production and trade, often the breeding ground for misunderstanding and entanglement.





## LINDA GREEN

Edinburgh

*RELUCTANT REVOLUTIONS* – Acrylic paint, polypropylene fibres, mohair, cotton, horsehair

This work explores and celebrates a cyclical, cosmological theme, responding to the behaviour of material, woven cloth, with radiated as well as implied action. Although the objects

have a spatial relationship to each other and imply movement in many planes, the issue of why is left deliberately vague. Radiating movement from the black hole is suggested

by the large black square with concentric tufted fibres, while the other pieces suggest floating, gravity and the arcing of a pendulum.

## ANNA RAY

Hertfordshire

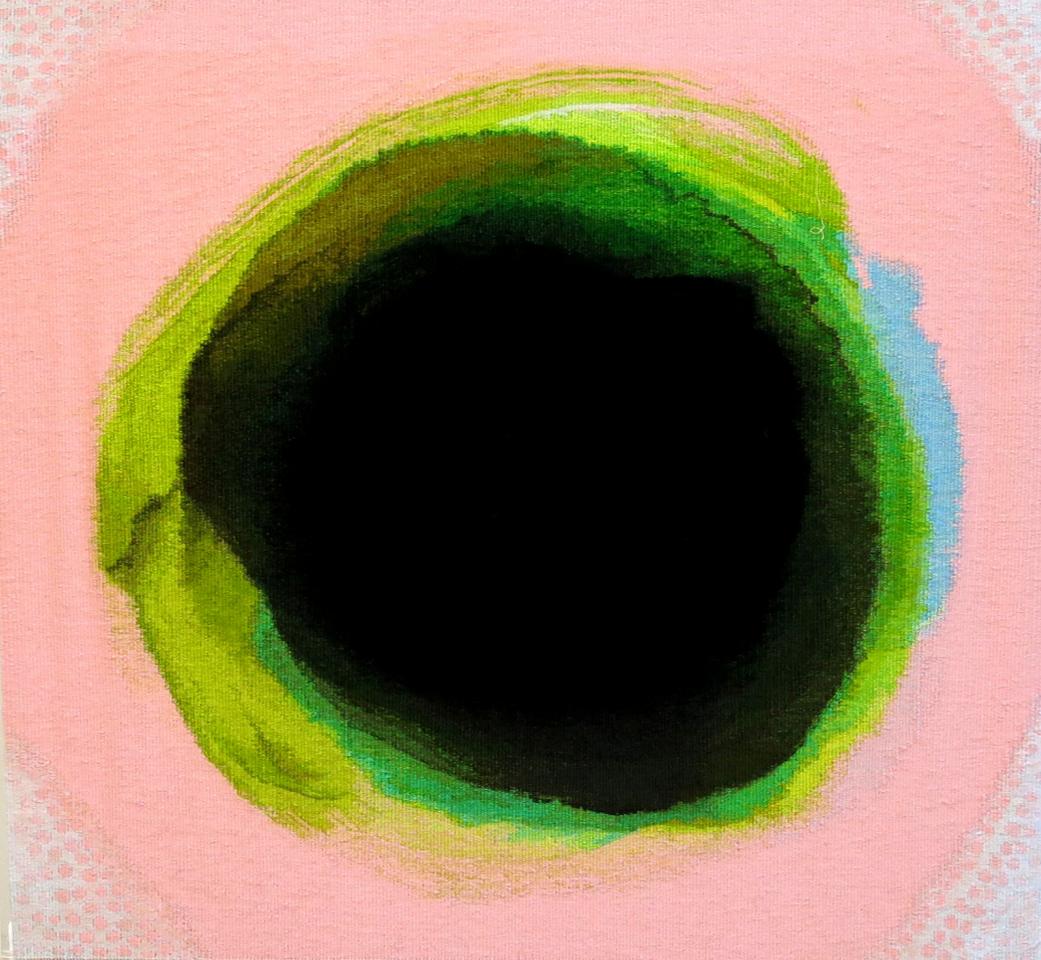
*POINTILLIST* – Wire mesh, oak dowels, oil-painted cotton

Anna absorbs visual textures and structures from the world around her: surfaces, patterns, networks. Childhood memories of the exciting multicoloured surfaces of post-impressionist paintings continue to inform Anna's



work. She is also interested in how the workings of the Jacquard loom are the basis of computer technology and digital pixelation. The complex surfaces she creates through the arrangement or build up

of many coloured units - the elements of Pointillist can be perpetually rearranged - allow the viewer to experience the visual pleasure of looking rather than being faced with a specific image.



## JO BARKER

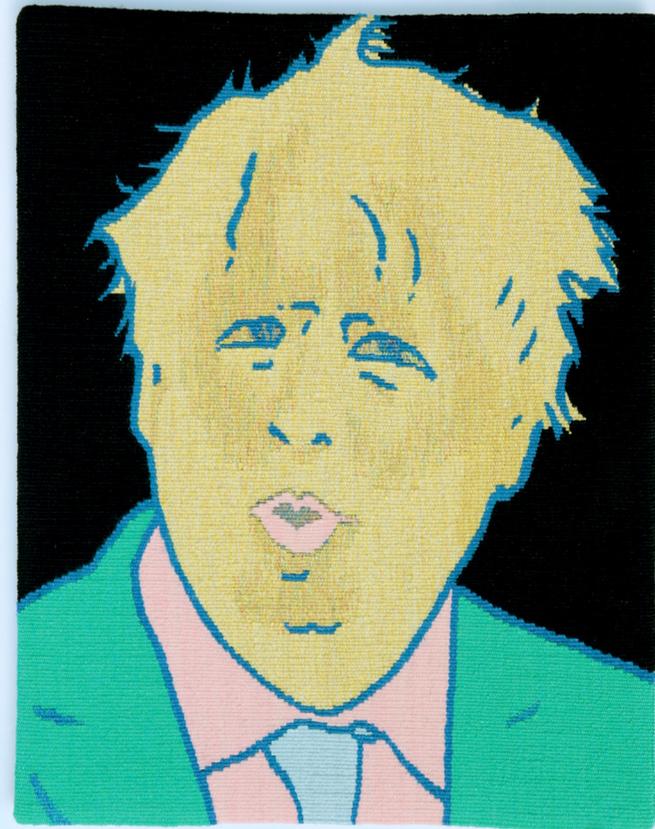
Edinburgh

*SWIRL* – Wool, cotton, linen, embroidery threads

This tapestry is part of an on-going series of works exploring the qualities of light. In *Swirl* the dense dark inky pools contrast with shimmering layers of rich colour and there is a feeling of

movement, floating, sinking, spinning. The designs are made in an intuitive way by building up layers of drawn or painted marks and gestures. When a feeling of excitement

occurs, then the image is right. The finished tapestries are consciously abstract and ambiguous, creating a sense of something as opposed to an identifiable object or picture.



## PATRICIA TAYLOR

Chichester

*BORIS* – Cotton warp, wool and linen weft

Patricia explores familiar political portraits, considering their familiarity, yet knowing that we know nothing of the person. Using colour and form she provokes both familiarity and estrangement in the same space. In *Boris* the endeavour has been to abstract, caricature and isolate, and so to stimulate

a virtual Boris. A fine example of traditional tapestry weaving, this very contemporary and instantly recognisable portrait is defined by strong colours and emphatic line. However the line that separates figure from background can be found in Sheldon tapestries of c.1610, and on closer inspection the apparently monochromatic

areas of the face reveal skilful subtleties of tone and colour, demonstrating the use of fine hatching, another ancient skill from the historical language of tapestry weaving. This is not just a clever instant graphic image but a more thoughtful exploration of something much deeper.



## DEMETRA BROWNING

Edinburgh

*RED TREES. SKIPPING* – Wool, linen, embroidery cotton, sewing cotton

Originally a painter, Demetra had her eyes opened to tapestry when she moved to Edinburgh and WASPS studios. She began to experiment with weaving miniatures, enjoying the tactile

and textural nature of weave and the intensity of colours available. Using images inspired by her love of the natural world, especially trees, Demetra works from small pencil sketches and gouaches.

She allows the imagery to grow and change through the course of weaving, sometimes finding that the weaving suggests its own direction.



## PHILIP SANDERSON

Portsmouth

*ALL DIFFERENT THINGS* – Cotton warp, weft of cotton fabric, wool and cotton threads

This work is the latest in a series exploring notions of scale, material and making within the process of tapestry weaving. The works are as much about the process as they are about the image, and many include less conventional materials such as strips of patterned fabric and

waste selvedge from the weaving industry combined with threads of wool and cotton that are woven on wide warp spacing. All Different Things takes this method of production to its logical conclusion: the warp and weft are scaled up to the point where the work becomes

a pure expression of materials and making. Any image present within the work is abstracted; the sense of scale is enhanced by the weight of the materials relative to the size of the work whilst the thickness of the weaving gives the tapestry an increased presence and sculptural quality.



## LOUISE MARTIN

Alva

*PLOUGHED* – Coloured cotton warps, wool, linen, cotton and silk weft

Landscape informs Louise's work, and the technique, structure and form of tapestry help her to distil its essence. The inspiration for this piece came from a visit to Orkney earlier in the year. A

continuous warp on a scaffolding loom provided the extra length needed to form the border. Once the tapestry had been cut from the loom the warps were pulled and manipulated into shape,

the exposed warps hinting at previous land use. The weft is woven eccentrically in places to give a different life, energy and movement to the piece.



## KATHARINE SWAILES

Arundel

*CROSSING THE AVENUE* – Yellow cotton warp, cotton, printed Gima, linen

Combining both traditional European and Egyptian tapestry techniques, Katharine's work evolves through considered repetition of process and

material. She uses natural good quality materials and allows them to dictate the image. Made on a low loom, a decorative yellow warp

selvage features, revealing the internal colour of the warp underlying the work.



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## BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS

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Any weaver, whether of cloth or fine art, will tell you that a complete row consists of a forwards and a backwards pass, to ensure that all the warp threads are covered. Now the Cordis Prize has come to the end of its initial three year phase, it seems like a good time to take stock, looking backwards at what we have achieved, and forwards at where we may be going.

This third exhibition brings forwards the 2017 award into December 2016. We aimed to bring the best of world tapestry to the Edinburgh public, to celebrate the key role which our city has played in the renaissance of this age-old art form, and to encourage tapestry artists to continue to create beautiful works of art. We have succeeded beyond our wildest expectations, and along the way we have also had enormous enjoyment and fun. The Cordis Prize is the world's largest prize for tapestry, and has renewed Edinburgh's position as a focus for makers and appreciation of this loveliest of artforms.

The impact of the prize would not have been possible without the collaboration of Visual Arts Scotland and the trustees would like to record their thanks to presidents, council members and the administrator. However, due to the changing circumstances of the Visual Arts Scotland exhibition over the next few years, it seems likely that our paths will diverge, at least for a while. The Cordis trustees have decided to extend the life of the Prize, and to award it again in 2018. Further details will be published on the Cordis Prize website. Meanwhile we hope that you enjoy the current exhibition of shortlisted works, and are inspired to seek out tapestries, or start weaving!

*Miranda Harvey -  
Cordis Trust*

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# CORDIS TAPESTRY PRIZES



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