
Grayson Perry, *In Its Familiarity, Golden*, 2015, tapestry, 290 x 343 cm. Published by Paragon © Grayson Perry
Courtesy the artist, Paragon | Contemporary Editions Ltd and Victoria Miro, London

Grayson Perry

The Life of Julie Cope



Information

18 November 2017 – 18 February 2018

Opening Event

Friday, 17 November, 6 – 9pm

Firstsite, Colchester, is delighted to announce *The Life of Julie Cope*, an exhibition of works by the Turner Prize-winning artist Grayson Perry.

The show is made up of four large-scale tapestries, as well as material related to *A House for Essex* (2015), the building designed by Perry in collaboration with Charles Holland of FAT Architecture. An ornate ceramic-clad, gingerbread-like edifice, *A House for Essex* serves as a secular chapel to the memory of a fictional Essex woman, Julie Cope. Situated overlooking the scenic Stour Estuary in the village of Wrabness in north-east Essex, the House is both an artwork in itself and the setting for a number of works by Perry that explore the special character and unique qualities of the county. *A House for Essex* was commissioned by Living Architecture, which was founded to change public perceptions about modern architecture by building houses that are rented by the public for holidays.

The exhibition at Firstsite will be a unique presentation consisting of tapestries, woodcuts, ceramics and tiles designed for the House as well as sketchbooks and photographs that chart its development. Included are *The Essex House Tapestries: The Life of Julie Cope* (2015), on loan from the Crafts Council Collection. The two major tapestries illustrate the key events in the protagonist's journey, from her birth on Canvey Island during the great flood of 1953 to her untimely death in a tragic accident on Colchester High Street. Overflowing with cultural and architectural detail, the tapestries contain a social history of Essex and modern Britain that reflects Firstsite's year-long focus on contemporary identity.

The first, *A Perfect Match* (2015) is centered upon Julie's conventional early life and ultimately doomed relationship with her first husband Dave. The second, *In Its Familiarity, Golden* (2015) depicts Julie's 'second act', in which she takes control of her life and widens her horizons. She relocates to Maldon with her children and attends university in Colchester, where she meets her second husband Rob. Together Julie and Rob share a profound happiness that lasts until her sudden and untimely death at the age of 61, the result of a freak accident with a curry delivery scooter. It is this shocking incident that prompts Rob to build a 'temple' in memory of his beloved Julie – the '*Taj Mahal upon the Stour*.'

The two further tapestries, made for the bedrooms at *A House for Essex*, are portraits of Julie and her life with each of her husbands: *Julie and Rob* (2013), and *Julie and Dave* (2015). Also included in the show is a series of black and white woodcuts, entitled *Six Snapshots of Julie* (2015), which depict the six decades of Julie's life.

The tapestries and woodcuts are displayed alongside an audio recording of *The Ballad of Julie Cope*, a 3000-word narrative written and read by Perry that builds upon his own childhood in Essex to illuminate Julie's hopes and fears as she journeys through life. When writing Julie's biography, Perry looked to the English ballad and folktale tradition, narrating a life that conveys the beauty, vibrancy and contradictions of the ordinary individual.

These artworks represent, in Perry's words, '*the trials, tribulations, celebrations and mistakes of an average life*.' Historically, large-scale tapestry provided insulation for grand domestic interiors; here Perry has juxtaposed its associations of status, wealth and heritage with the concerns of class, feminism, social aspiration and taste. To create the tapestries, Perry first

sketched on a computer, then worked closely with a digital mediator and tapestry weavers to translate the vivid colour and detail of his original drawings into a woven textile.

Both Grayson Perry and Charles Holland grew up in Essex, and the building was designed to evoke a tradition of wayside and pilgrimage chapels – including the nearby seventh-century St Peter-on-the-Wall at Bradwell-on-Sea – while charting Julie's life from Canvey Island to Wrabness, traversing Essex and various socioeconomic boundaries. It is clad in a pattern of green and white tiles that depict totems of Julie's life: a nappy pin, a mixtape, a heart, a wheel, a letter J, the Essex county badge and a pregnant Julie imagined as a goddess-like fertility symbol. A *Julie Tile* (2014) as well as mouldings for several others will be shown at Firstsite.

Engaging with notions of Britishness, decoration and architectural history, the project has been described by Holland as a radical statement about the capacity of architecture for narrative and communication to tell a rich and complex story – that of the 'Essex Everywoman' Julie Cope. A riotous exhibition of joy and colour, *The Life of Julie Cope* celebrates the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Says Firstsite Director Sally Shaw: 'The Life of Julie Cope is an intimate and personal exploration of an 'average' life – one which is made all the more poignant by the fact that Grayson Perry's artistic creation is, like himself, from Essex. The protagonist's life story, as told through the various works, is both sad and funny, reflective and rowdy, real and surreal, triggering reflections in the minds of the viewers that transcend the subject matter. Grayson Perry is one of the most renowned British contemporary artists and we are honoured to be staging this major presentation of his work at Firstsite.'

**For more information, please contact
Albany Arts Communications**

Mark Inglefield,
mark@albanyartscommunications.com

t: + 44 (0) 20 73 88 09 97
m: + 44 (0) 75 84 19 95 00

Carla von der Becke,
carla@albanyartscommunications.com

t: + 44 (0) 20 73 88 09 97
m: + 44 (0) 79 74 25 29 94

Notes to Editors:

**About Grayson Perry
(b.1960, Chelmsford, Essex):**

Grayson Perry is one of Britain's best-known contemporary artists. He works with traditional media such as ceramics, cast iron, bronze, printmaking and tapestry, and is interested in how each historic category of object accrues intellectual and emotional baggage over time. Perry is a great chronicler of contemporary life, drawing viewers in with beauty, wit, affecting sentiment and nostalgia as well as fear and anger. His hard-hitting and exquisitely crafted works reference his own childhood and life as a transvestite while also engaging with wider social issues from class and politics to sex and religion.

Institutional venues for major national and international solo exhibitions by the artist include Arnolfini, Bristol (2017), The Serpentine Galleries, London (2017); AROS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus (2016); Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2015 – 2016) and Turner Contemporary, Margate (2015). In 2011, The British Museum opened *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, a critically acclaimed show in which Perry combined his own works with historical artefacts chosen from the vast British Museum collection. *The Vanity of Small Differences*, Perry's monumental suite of tapestries exploring the subject of taste in contemporary Britain, was acquired by The Arts Council Collection and British Council and has subsequently toured throughout the UK and Europe. The making of these works was chronicled in the first of Perry's Channel 4 television series, *In the Best Possible Taste*, a 2013 Bafta Specialist Factual winner. Perry's second Bafta-winning television series *Who Are You?*, about identity, was broadcast in 2014, accompanied by a solo presentation of works at the National Portrait Gallery, London. The series *All Man*, which considered masculinity, followed in 2016, with Allen Lane publishing the related book *The Descent of Man*. Perry delivered The Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4's annual flagship talk series, in 2013; his ensuing book *Playing to the Gallery* is published by Penguin. The artist's *A House for Essex*, a permanent building designed in collaboration with FAT Architecture, was constructed in the North Essex countryside in 2015.

Winner of the 2003 Turner Prize, Perry was elected a Royal Academician in 2012, and received a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2013; he has been awarded the prestigious appointments of Trustee of the British Museum and Chancellor of the University of the Arts London (both in 2015), and received a RIBA Honorary Fellowship in 2016. Born in Chelmsford, Essex in 1960, Grayson Perry lives and works in London.

About FAT Architecture:

FAT (1994 – 2013) was a cross-disciplinary architecture, art and design practice. Formed originally as a loose collective of architects, artists, film makers and designers, the practice was known for its provocative and playful approach and a desire to expand the definitions

of each discipline. FAT went on to design a number of the most influential buildings of the era including the Islington Square housing estate in Manchester, the Hoogvliet civic centre in Holland and the Blue House in Hackney. Their work has been published and exhibited worldwide and has won numerous awards.

FAT was run by three directors: Sean Griffiths, Charles Holland and Sam Jacob. In 2013, they decided to close the practice stating that it had achieved all that it had set out to do. *A House for Essex* was the practice's final project. It was run by FAT Director Charles Holland, who continued to oversee the project until its completion in 2015. Following this, Charles set up Charles Holland Architects and is also Professor of Architecture at the University of Brighton.

About Living Architecture:

Living Architecture is an organisation dedicated to using world class architects to build houses for rent around the UK. *A House for Essex*, like all Living Architecture's properties, is available to rent on a short-term holiday let basis. Other Living Architecture houses include: Dune House, Suffolk by Jarmund / Vignsnæs Architects; Balancing Barn, Suffolk by MVRDV; Shingle House, Kent by NORD Architecture; Long House, Norfolk by Hopkins Architects; and Life House, Wales by John Pawson.

About the Crafts Council:

The Crafts Council Collection is the national collection of contemporary craft. It comprises some 1600 works of ceramic, glass, textiles, furniture, bookbinding, jewellery, textiles and automata. *The Essex House Tapestries: the Life of Julie Cope* (2015) were acquired for the Crafts Council Collection with Art Fund support (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation) and a donation from Maylis and James Grand. The audio reading of *'The Ballad of Julie Cope'* was commissioned by Crafts Council for their exhibition Julie Cope's Grand Tour, currently touring the UK. For more information please visit www.craftscouncil.org.uk

About Firstsite:

Firstsite is a public contemporary art gallery in Colchester, Essex. Over the last fifteen years it has gained a strong reputation, presenting ambitious work to new audiences in the East of England and beyond. Situated in Colchester's 'cultural quarter,' the present building was designed by Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly, and opened in 2011. Firstsite is a partner of Plus Tate, which uses Tate's resources to contribute to a network of arts organisations across the country, and to increase public access to the national collection of British and international modern and contemporary art. In December 2017, it will also stage an exhibition of works by Rose Finn-Kelcey, as well as the ongoing display *Wunderkammer*, a cabinet of curiosities drawn from the Ipswich and Colchester Museums.

The Life of Julie Cope is generously supported by the Coode-Adams Firstsite Trust.

Firstsite opening hours:
Monday – Sunday, 10am – 5pm

Please visit the Firstsite website for more information:

www.firstsite.uk

#GraysonPerryFirstsite



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**TATE
PLUS**

