

# Weaving Sounds and Words



St John's has a long tradition of commissioning art for its architecture, an early example being William Laud's invitation to Hubert Le Sueur in 1633 to create the statues of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria for the Canterbury Quadrangle. More recent projects, including the architecture of the Garden and Kendrew Quadrangles and the new Library and Study Centre, have also allowed artists to create site-specific works inspired by their context. The works commissioned have often led to significant developments in an artist's career, as was the case with Wendy Ramshaw, a jewellery designer originally, who designed the gate to the garden from Garden Quad and the gates for Kendrew Quad. She went on to further commissions, including Hyde Park Gate.

Alongside Susanna Heron's 'Stone Drawing' and Kirsty Brook's glasswork in the Otranto Passage, two new tapestries have been installed in the Library and Study Centre: Susan Morris's work, *Silence*, is a series of tapestries in the ground floor reading room, and Mary Lum's *St John's Primer* hangs on the wall above the new staircase connecting the historic Laudian Library with the new Study Centre.

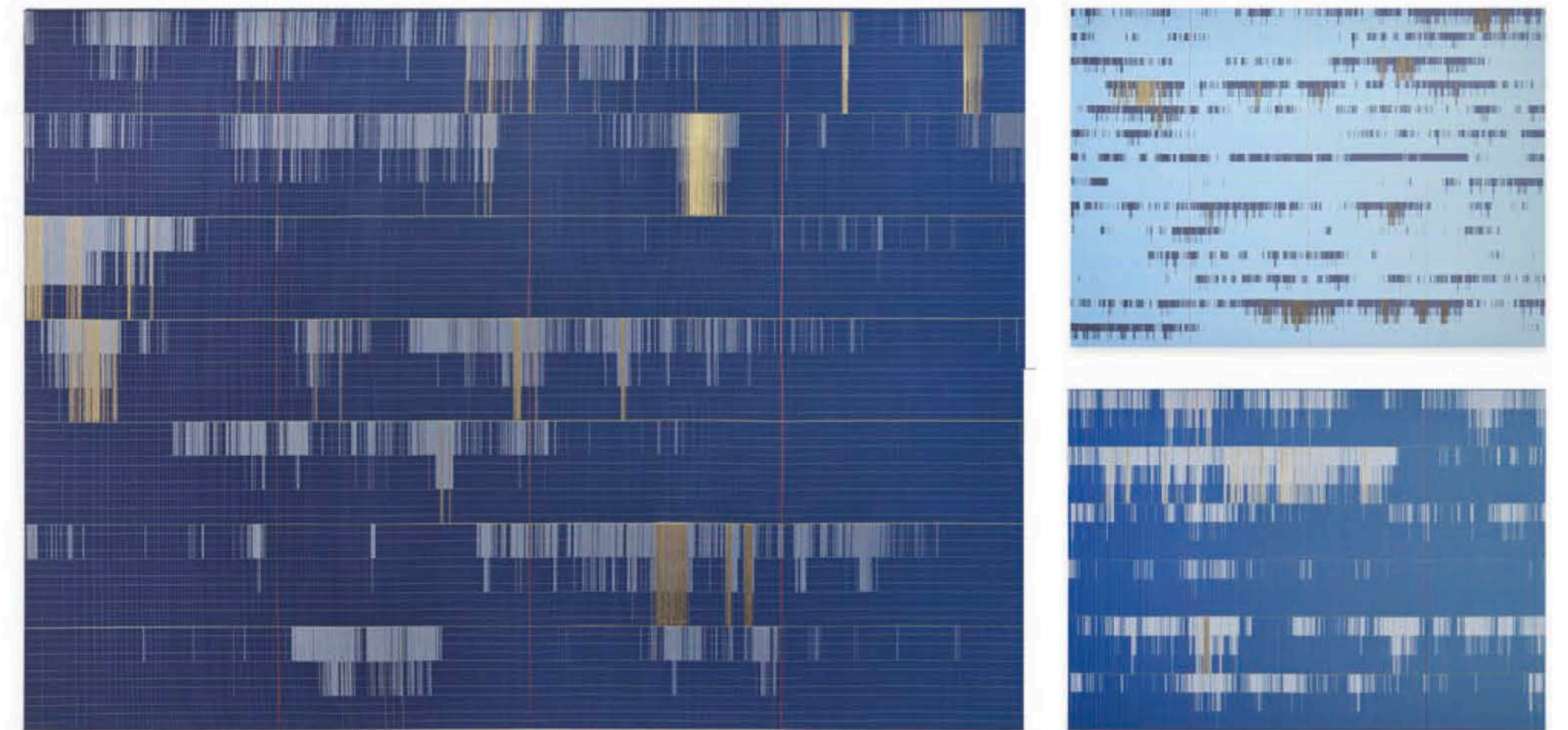
At the official opening in September, the President thanked the selection panel (Professor Andrew Parker (former Principal Bursar), Dr Georgy Kantor, Professor Hannah Skoda, and Professor Alastair Wright) as well as the Works Department for their work on the project.

Susan Morris (left), Professor Catherine Whistler (centre) and Mary Lum (right) at the official opening of the tapestries in September



Mary Lum, *St John's Primer*, 2021, Tapestry

“An introduction to the St John's library collection of rare books and manuscripts, comprising fragments of texts and symbols from many languages, fields of study, cultures, and time periods. The tapestry speaks to the importance of the written word, how texts are put together, how they endure over time, and how meaning can be lost, transformed, or expanded. It invites viewers to read in individual ways that prioritise how language looks, as well as what it says. Mary Lum



Susan Morris, *Silence (on Prepared Loom)*, 2021, Six Jacquard tapestries

“These tapestries were woven directly from a 50-minute sound recording made in the garden on the other side of Sprott's Wall, a boundary shared between the garden and the library. Through the application of a specially written script, the recorded sound was configured to the 'score' for John Cage's 1952 *Lecture on Nothing*, a spoken word performance that has silence at its core. The garden itself is visible through the single window in the second bay of the reading room, and can be regarded as part of the overall piece. Susan Morris