

# CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

Alice Kettle for COLLECT at Somerset House, London, Feb 2022.

## THE QUEENS OF SOMERSET HOUSE

Originally built as a glamorous, palatial building for Edward Seymour the Duke of Somerset in 1547, Somerset House has had many occupants; from exiled Queens and parliament offices to art galleries. The building itself has been torn down, rebuilt and extended to form the iconic building we know today. The original house was built in the Renaissance style of architecture, featuring both iconic and doric columns. In 1775 Sir William Chambers was commissioned to design the 'new' Somerset House. The existing structure is an imposing neo-classical building.

In 1552 when the Duke of Somerset was executed, the unfinished house became the property of the King, young Edward VI. When his sister Mary I became Queen following his death a year later, Somerset House became the home of the young Elizabeth I, the first Queen to reside here. From the mid 16th Century to the beginning of the 18th Century it housed the often foreign born wives of various British Kings, seen below in order:

The Queens included Elizabeth I (reign 1558 – 1603) daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, who establishment the English Protestant church and is sometimes referred to as the Virgin Queen.



Queen Elizabeth by Alice Kettle  
Thread on linen, 174 x 129 cm

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Queen Anne, 2021 by Alice Kettle  
Thread on linen, 128 x 128 cm

Seen here is Anne of Denmark (1574-1619). Following James I's accession to the English throne in 1603, the next Royal resident was his wife, Anne of Denmark. She lived briefly in Greenwich Palace before moving to Somerset House. Renamed Denmark House in her honour, she commissioned Inigo Jones and others to undertake a huge number of additions and improvements, including terracing of the garden and the introduction of an orangery. This resonated with Kettle whose recent work has been preoccupied by a newly planted garden that she watched grow over many months of working from home in 2020.



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Queen Henrietta Maria, by Alice Kettle  
Thread on linen, 125 x 158 cm

Henrietta Maria of France (1609-1669) wife of Charles I, who although modest externally, opened the most elaborate Roman Catholic chapel in a particularly grand ceremony in 1636.

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Catherine of Braganza, by Alice Kettle  
Thread of linen, 112 x 80 cm

Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705) wife of Charles II, who commissioned a refurbishment by Christopher Wren and opened the River Terrace to the public, then painted by Canaletto twice in c1750.

Its present tenants are a mixture of various organisations, generally centred around the arts and education.

Alice Kettle

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Alice Kettle's work explores the human condition, with a particular focus on the female condition, through stitch. She draws references from the history of figurative textiles and monumental narrative tapestry. In her role as Professor at Manchester School of Art, Alice Kettle has researched the meeting place of traditional analogue stitching skills and digitised contemporary methodologies. She has developed a unique practice, creating textile works which employ a combination of stitch techniques, combining the use of antique machines from early last century with hand stitch and contemporary digital technology.

"Alice Kettle's textile art is fundamentally and unequivocally ambitious. She elicits moral and narrative density from her artworks. The span of time expressed in the work locates us in the deep past and the urgent present." Simon Olding. Her work has been referred to as magisterial, appropriate for this series of new portraits made in response to the history of the Queens who resided in the palace at Somerset House. Stitch is a method of repetition, coverage and endlessness, a bit like the history of a great place.