

# **Women and Pattern**

## **Charlotte Hodes**

# Charlotte Hodes: Pots with a Point of View

*The Bowes Museum's collection of ceramics is very wide-ranging. The combined collections of Joséphine Bowes, Susan Davidson and more recently Enid Goldblatt have produced a remarkable study collection, with examples from almost every porcelain factory in 18th c Europe, including some key pieces. There are good collections of European faience from the 16th century and many very fine examples of porcelain and pottery bought at International Exhibitions, especially those of 1867 and 1871, besides items from the Bowes' homes. There are representative examples of many British factories, seen within a European context. There are several hundred examples of oriental porcelain, are mostly productions of the 17th-18th centuries for the European market, with some rare examples.*

**Howard Coutts:** So reads the rather bald statement that is part of the Bowes Museum's written collecting policy. Officially, the museum collects ceramics in the way that some people collect stamps or bus tickets; a piece of all types and styles, paying special attention to

rarities and [above all] from every factory. Such policies 'work' at the basic level of collecting, but they fail to explain the subject to the wider audience and miss much of the meaning that these once so-highly-valued objects had.

**Charlotte Hodes:** I agree, a banal but informative text but it's a good way into the rationale of Cabinet 39 and why you are showing my ceramics. I would hope they engage the viewer through the interface of the contemporary and collections of historical porcelain from which I trawl source material and inspiration.

**HC:** Porcelain was like magic or gold dust in the 18th century: kings presented a complete dinner service from their State factory to their rivals, ladies bought naturalistically decorated porcelain to decorate the dessert table. Sometimes the decoration would be specially commissioned and meant much to the original purchaser, who seldom left a record of his/her intention in buying the piece – certainly not for display in a glass case as they are seen today!

Museums probably show a selection of everyone's best china, displaying items that were not used every day, but only on special occasions (excavations on house or kitchen sites rarely come up with pieces of the very finest pottery or porcelain). It is difficult to get this across in a museum gallery containing several hundred fine ceramics, whose very multiplicity of objects seems to contradict the concept of a rare art form from the past. It is thus with great pleasure that The Bowes Museum is pleased to exhibit the work of Charlotte Hodes, an artist on ceramics who uses the translucent medium of porcelain to tell stories and develop ideas, many of a personal nature.

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**CH:** It's wonderful for me to see my work in the context of the collection. The tableware that I include in the cabinet, is part of my new installation *After the Taking of Tea*, where I use factory china ware from Stoke. I am drawn to the contradiction – of investing in time and resources to make images onto everyday ware of very little actual value, items most people think of being of no importance, but that form such an integral part of all our everyday lives.

**HC:** The themes, to do with person or pattern, are specific to the artist, but also relevant to us all, as they are 'shared' through the ultra permanent medium of high-fired ceramics (which can be broken but never disappear completely, unless they are deliberately ground down to powder).

[ 5 ]

(Above) *After the Taking of Tea; for coffee*  
dimensions various, hand-cut enamel  
transfer on china, 2018

(Overleaf) *Dressed in Pattern: Waiting*  
31cm & 12cm diameters, hand-cut  
enamel transfer on china, 2016



**CH:** Yes, you have identified another contradiction/tension, that of the very permanence of ceramics being in opposition to a sense movement and fluidity. My women are momentary and transient, flat silhouettes not bodily physical beings, though they are trapped in the body of the ceramic form.

**HC:** Charlotte talks in her text on decoration of 'slippage' of images from print or painting to ceramics, which might remind us of the most famous artistic 'slippage' of all – Andy Warhol's use of the publicity photograph by Gene Kornman of Marilyn Monroe from the film 'Niagara' (1953) in his 'My Marilyn' print series where she is piled up high in garish colours like a supermarket commodity, akin to the Campbell soup cans he also used or caricatured [and were replicated in three dimensions by the Rosenthal porcelain factory a few years ago, long after his death].

Some items identified by Charlotte as having special 'resonance' or 'slippage' in The Bowes Museum are:

A figure of a reclining nymph with a few touches of enamel colours, but not enough to hide the black speckling caused by firing imperfections. It was made at Vincennes during the early days of French porcelain in the 1740s. The great historian Sir Geoffrey de Bellaigue wrote of similar figures presented by the King of France to his father-in-law the King of Saxony (owner of the Meissen porcelain factory) in 1749, that they would not have presented any rivalry, owing to 'their thick glaze obscuring much of the originally fine detail' [1988.419 in Room 39].

**CH:** For me, it reads as an intimate piece, not only because of the imperfections but also its small scale - you have to look close and as such you can't miss the imperfections, that in turn makes you aware of

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Vincennes porcelain figure of a reclining nymph, c.1748  
Width 13.2cm



Sèvres porcelain teapot, 1759  
Height 9.6 cm

how it is made - at a time when informality in porcelain was not the focus.

**HC:** ...and a pink ground teapot from Sèvres, unusual in having peacock feathers painted above. Was it ever used? (French and English soft-paste porcelain cracks on contact with boiling water). A small cup and saucer with this decoration and marks was recorded at Christie's in 1911, suggesting it once formed part of a small teaset with tray or 'dejeuner' for one or two people (X.1271 in Room 39).

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Derby porcelain  
figure of the  
goddess Diana,  
c.1760  
23.5cm



**CH:** I love the jewel-like decoration in this piece, over the top for such a little object. The juxtaposition of the intense emerald and pink is startling, the motifs that envelop the form, become pattern and the feathers (why feathers on a teapot?) splay out from the gorgeous flower and leaf sprigs on the lid read as pure pleasure.

**HC:** A Derby porcelain figure of the huntress Diana, based on a famous classical statue now at Versailles. Presumably 18th century audiences were not disconcerted by the vivid colours applied in the enamelling process, and may indeed have realised the original might also have been painted! (X.1924 in room 39).

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**CH:** Although Diana looks out and is a huntress, she is contained on



Ceramic plaque  
painted by Paul  
Helleu c.1885  
67 X 36.5cm

her little pedestal, a small mound of earth; she is not going anywhere! There is no suggestion of the external world or of its dangerous realities. Neither does she seem capable of hunting, she is after all a goddess, an ideal of a woman, she is ornament. She looks out, she is caught in a moment, without any concern that she may be being looked at. From a contemporary viewpoint, I see her as having a slight air of irony as if captured thinking 'why has anyone has put me here and what am I supposed to be doing?' Either way, she is definitely not moving off her plinth.

**HC:** A ceramic plaque by Théodore Deck but painted with a very smart young lady by the up-and-coming Impressionist artist Paul Helleu in about 1885. Here the boundary between 'fine' and 'decorative' arts is

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truly blurred – currently the plaque is hung in our picture galleries, amidst the late 19th century French paintings (2005.32 in Room 37).

**CH:** This is such an interesting juxtaposition that connects to my practice in which I bring my fine art education and experience as a painter to ceramics. As in your case, your start in prints and drawings must give you a particular angle on art history and curation?

**HC:** Very much so. Together in this display we hope the public will see ceramics as the curator and artist sees them, not as three-dimensional artefacts to fill a gallery or clutter a store, but as windows onto another world, be it from the past, from another part of the world, or simply another personality and/or purchaser who cared deeply about what they were making or buying. They (the clients or makers) would have had a firm intention in view in the purchase or creation, of trying to place themselves in society or the world, but in the end, ultimately using a utilitarian medium readily accessible and understandable by the public (even if fewer and fewer people today aspire to own a 'best' teaset or dinner service to keep in store for use only on special occasions)...

*Howard Coutts (Keeper of Ceramics, The Bowes Museum) in dialogue with the artist Charlotte Hodes on 7th September 2018.*

## Women and Pattern

Charlotte Hodes is a British artist whose work crosses a range of processes and is renowned for her large intricate papercuts and ornate ceramic vessels.

Central to her work is an exploration of the female figure and its relationship to decoration and pattern. She uses archetypal vessel forms and everyday tableware which she treats as her 'canvas', building up rich and complex surfaces through a direct process of drawing and collage.

Hodes studied Fine Art at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in the early eighties. Her work has subsequently been recognized through numerous prizes and grants including the Jerwood Drawing Prize (2006) as well as awards from Arts Council England; solo exhibitions at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Marlborough Fine Art, Jagged Art London, Clara Scremini Gallery Paris, the Wallace Collection, and numerous group exhibitions including the Victoria & Albert Museum, Jerwood Gallery London, Design Museum and Venice Biennial. In 2012 she was appointed Professor in Fine Art at London College of Fashion, UAL.



The artist in her London studio, 2018



This display presents a survey of Hodes' ceramics over a ten year period, highlighting the manner in which historical collections and archives have provided inspiration and context for much of her work.

In 2005 she was invited to be the first Associate Artist at the Wallace Collection, culminating in the exhibition *Fragmented Images* at the Museum which drew upon her research into the Sèvres porcelain collection and the figurative groupings in the 'fête galante' paintings of Antoine Watteau and Nicolas Lancret. Her resulting work focused on the relationship between the excessive ornamentation and the pictorial (cartouches) on the porcelain as well as their colour palette of pink, green and gold.

Hodes expanded her range of motifs, references and forms with a new body of work *Silhouettes and Filigree* at Marlborough Fine Art (2009). She developed her unique approach to working on the ceramic surface through hand cut stencils and collage in order to explore the graphic potential of the silhouette and decorative passages. Through her pencil drawings, photographs and extensive use of fine art and decorative imagery (as well as domestic motifs) she has built a personal visual archive from which she draws upon.



*Fragmented Images: Revelry II*  
44 x 23cm, slip, sprigs, hand-cut  
enamel transfer on earthenware, 2006



*Silhouettes & Filigree: Silhouette swirl*  
49 x 22cm, slip, hand-cut  
enamel transfer on earthenware, 2009

*A Concise History of Vessels* features the largest ceramics on display. Each vase has its own character, which is then, in turn, set against the graphic depiction of women and vessels, thereby playing with the interplay of form and decoration, object and representation.

Hodes has had a long association with ceramics at Spode, in 1998 being the first contemporary artist to work on unique pieces at the factory using their extensive archive of transfers. In 2014, an Arts Council England grant enabled her, together with artist Paul Scott, to further research the Spode Museum Trust's archive of copper engravings. *Dressed in Pattern* was the resulting body of work, consisting of a tabletop installation (commissioned by and exhibited with the British Ceramic Biennial 2015) alongside groupings of unique ceramics, paintings and prints. These artworks brought to the fore Hodes' engagement with the figure within a landscape of decoration and pattern.



(Above) *Dressed in Pattern: Dusk*  
30 x 38cm, hand-cut enamel transfer on china, 2016

(Opposite) *A Concise History of Vessels: Goblet*  
58 x 23cm, slip, hand-cut enamel transfer on earthenware, 2013



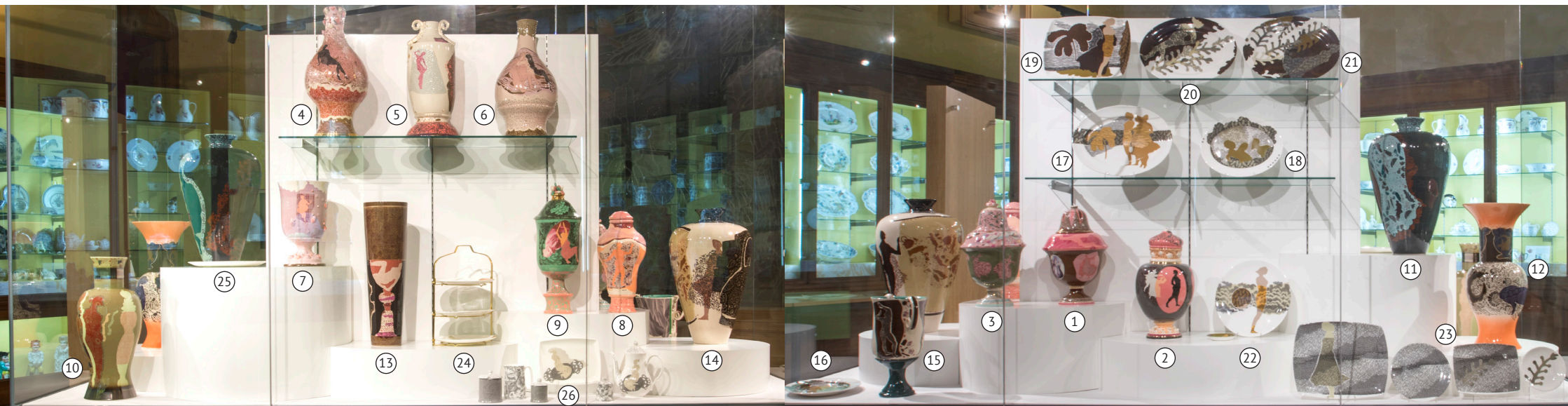
In 2018 Hodes embarked on a fourteen metre long table installation *After the Taking of Tea* with over two hundred and fifty pieces that reference the cultural and social conventions of tea. Here, the women are not defined by domestic duties, rather they make their own way through their patterned and imagined environment, oblivious to any 'gaze'. In this way Hodes asserts the feminist framework within which her creative practice should be addressed.

*'....her work is not polemical, it is quietly subversive. What strikes one most – and what gives the work its playful power – is that what she grants her women through her art, is freedom.'* – Kate Kellaway, journalist, 'The Observer'



*After the Taking of Tea: Tassel Dress*  
31cm diameter, hand-cut enamel transfer  
on china, 2018

Display in Cabinet 39 Room 39, The Bowes Museum



**Fragmented Images 2006**

Slip, sprigs, hand-cut enamel transfer on earthenware

- 1 Vase for Mademoiselle Camargo, 40 x 28cm
- 2 Revelry II, 44 x 23cm (p.17)
- 3 Pink Reflections, 40 x 28cm

**Silhouettes & Filigree**

2008-2010

Slip, sprigs, hand-cut enamel transfer on earthenware

- 4 Filigree; Floral Sprigs, 54 x 26cm
- 5 Filigree; gold icons, 50 x 25cm

- 6 Filigree; swirling cloth, 50 x 26cm
- 7 Silhouette; floral pink, 34.5 x 22cm
- 8 Silhouette; swirl, 49 x 22cm
- 9 Silhouette; urn, 46 x 22cm (p.27)
- 15 Filigree; floral, 38 x 32cm

**A Concise History of Vessels**

2012-14

Slip, hand-cut enamel transfer on earthenware

- 10 Pepper-pot, 58 x 25cm (p.26)
- 11 Lip-spout-pitcher, 58 x 29cm
- 12 Petal Bowl, 58 x 28cm (p.26)
- 13 Goblet, 58 x 23cm (p.19)
- 14 Kettle on Brown, 58 x 29cm

**Dressed in Pattern**

2015-2016

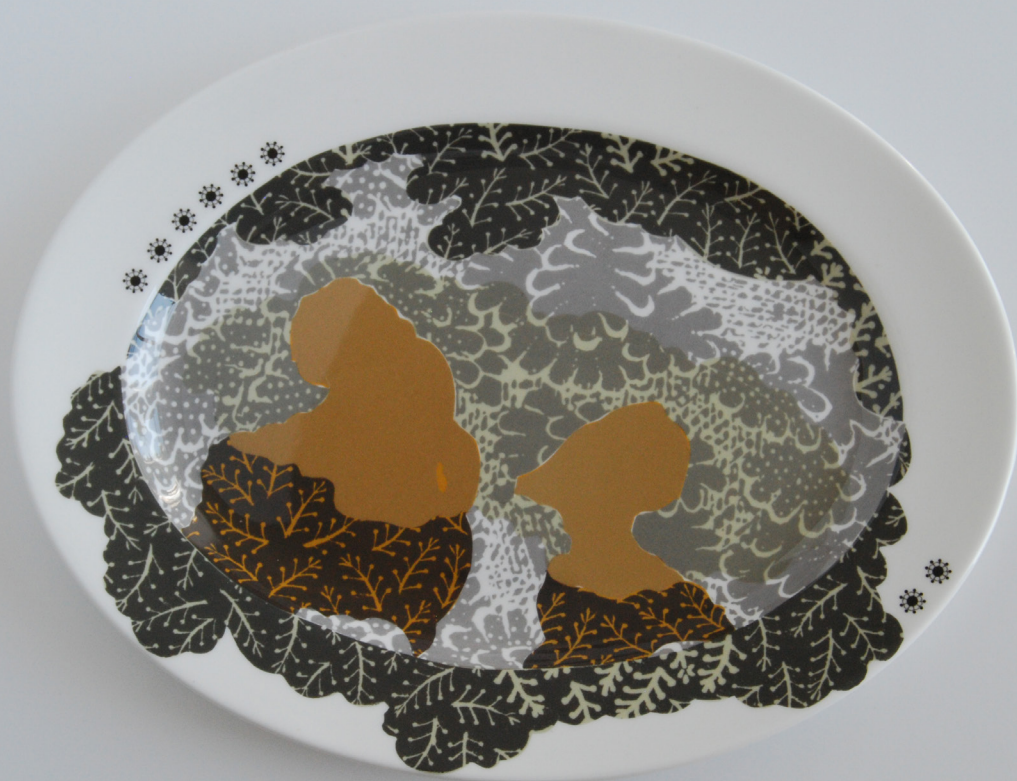
Hand-cut enamel transfer on china

- 16 Portraits, 26 x 34cm (p.24)
- 17 Dusk, 30 x 38cm (p.18)
- 18 Gold, Shadows, 26 x 34cm (p.25)
- 19 Linear Landscape, 28 x 35cm
- 20 Pattern Twig, 30 x 38cm
- 21 Leaf Edge, 30 x 38cm
- 22 Waiting, 31cm & 12cm diameters (p.6/7)
- 23 Blizzard, 26 x 34cm/19 x 25cm/22 & 16.5cm diameters (cover)

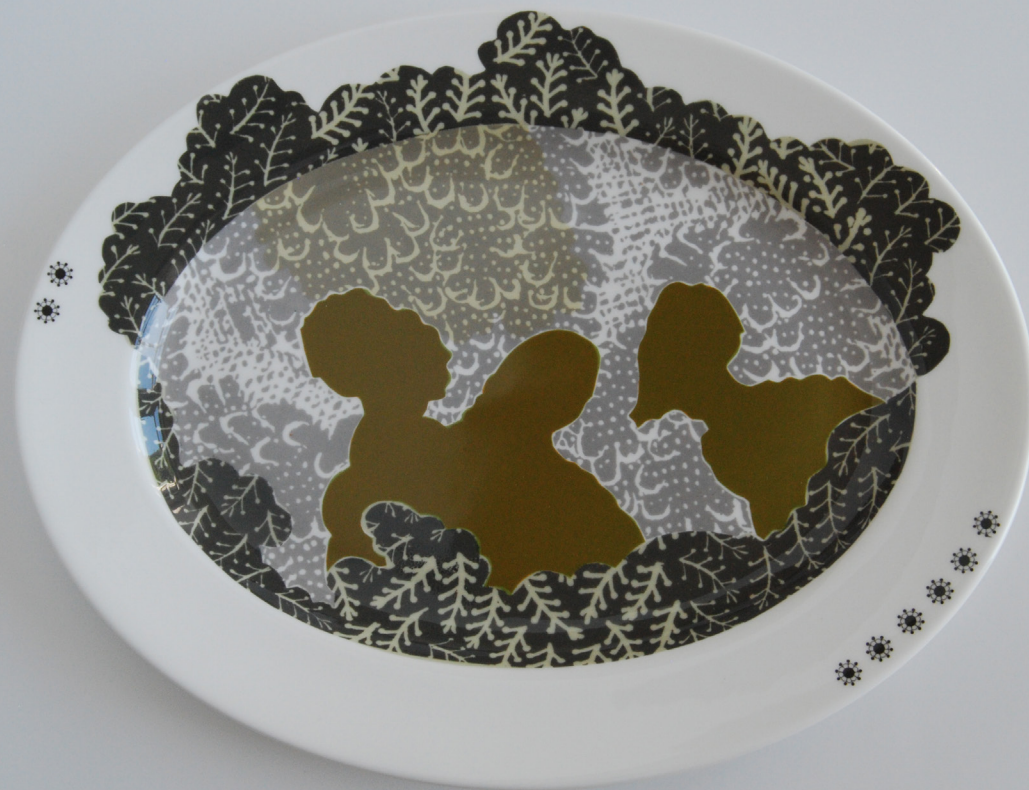
**After the Taking of Tea 2018**

Hand-cut enamel transfer on china

- 24 Lookout, 3@26cm diameter & metal stand
- 25 Tassel Dress, 31cm diameter (p.21)
- 26 For coffee, a selection of pieces (p.5)



*Portraits, 26 x 34cm*



*Gold, Shadows, 26 x 34cm*



*Pepper-pot, 58 x 25cm*

*Petal Bowl, 58 x 28cm*

Opposite:  
*Silhouette; urn, 46 x 22cm*



## Charlotte Hodes: Women and Pattern

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