

New Papercuts by

Charlotte Hodes

Drawing Skirts



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This publication has been made to accompany the exhibition 'Drawing Skirts' at the University Gallery and Baring Wing. Charlotte Hodes is represented by Marlborough Fine Art

18 April–30 May 2008

University Gallery
and Baring Wing
Northumbria University
Sandyford Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
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Introduction
Mara-Helen Wood
 Director University Gallery,
 Northumbria University

It was inevitable that Charlotte Hodes, who has worked with ceramics as a counterpoint to her paintings for almost a decade, would find herself appointed the Wallace Collection's first Associate Artist, for the last two years. Drawn to the collection's 18th century paintings and particularly the Sèvres porcelain vases with their wild Rococo sculptural elements, Hodes' synthesis of the fine and decorative arts reveals how exciting these works of 'utility and ornament' are, and how well they lend themselves to modern reinterpretation through her own intricately designed ceramics and papercuts.

Although she continues to use art historical references, her current exhibition of figurative silhouettes and motifs, based on dressmakers' paper patterns, reveals her combined technical and artistic skills to produce works of considerable scale and invention using the scalpel blade as the equivalent of the fine line of a pencil.

Charlotte Hodes was the 2006 winner of the Jerwood Drawing Prize, and Associate Artist at the Wallace Collection, London from 2005–2007. In her current role as Senior Research Fellow in Drawing at the London College of Fashion, Charlotte Hodes' combines scholarship and a unique ability to translate the sartorial conventions of the past into compelling contemporary imagery.

**Hidden and revealed:
 investigating the creative process**
Cathy Treadaway

The work exhibited in 'Drawing Skirts' provides evidence of the impact technological change is having on creative practice in the visual arts. New ways of collecting and manipulating imagery combined with the accessibility and flexibility of digital print production methods are stimulating novel approaches for developing visual ideas. Hodes' artworks reveal juxtapositions of detailed digitally printed imagery, bold areas of colour combined with line work that is a product of both hand and machine. Her practice explores the sensibilities and variations between the physical characteristics of hand rendered and computer generated line. The artworks reveal the contrasting qualities of hand and digital processes through a variety of drawing and cutting techniques.

This new hybrid practice raises a number of intriguing questions about how technology affects the artist's creative process and influences the development of the artwork. The research project that has run concurrently with the development of the body of work for this exhibition has sought to address these fundamental issues that lie at the heart of Hodes' art making. The study exposes the role of human experience in a creative practice which combines physical with virtual digital process. Through the use of video recording techniques and photography, the artist's journey of creative exploration has been documented in detail. By analysing the resulting material it has been possible to identify the ways in which new ideas are generated by the artist and how these are probed and tested. Evidence has been gathered that indicates how decisions are made concerning the development of an image within the overall framework of the artist's deeper vision for the entire body of work exhibited in 'Drawing Skirts'. An underlying narrative emerges that combines the material properties of the paper cuts with themes engaging the depiction of the female figure, and the ways in which decorative pattern and colour are perceived and apprehended within the picture plane.

Using a fly on the wall documentary process in which the artist articulates her actions as they occur, each stage of the creative process has been video recorded for the research. One particular artwork has been traced from its conception: through the stages of drawing and development on the computer, large format digital ink-jet paper printing, to the cutting and collage process in the studio. Hodes' reflection on her process, including comparisons made between hand drawing and cutting, and digital cut and paste techniques, have provided insight into the important emotional connection the artist feels with the work that results from her direct physical manipulation of materials and tools. Computer generated imagery by comparison does not convey these palpable human qualities, nevertheless, it produces its own that are uniquely digital and provides methods of depicting detailed imagery that would be impossible to replicate by hand. This dichotomy between hand and machine provides a tension that is evident in both the creative process and the resulting artworks.

Drawing

Embryonic ideas for artworks are captured and explored in Hodes' journals and sketchbooks. Written notes, diagrams sketches and drawings are used to plan and explore themes and ideas in a systematic way. The visual research for 'Drawing Skirts' has combined research drawing from historic fashion pattern books in the archives at the



Drawing in the archive at
 London College of Fashion
 fig.1



Pencil drawing 30 x 42cm
fig.2

London College of Fashion (fig.1, p.3) with drawing of the human form (fig.2, p.4). Hodes used her own body for the poses in order to fully engage with the muscular tension and body position – how it felt to be in a particular position. This body knowledge, a deep understanding of how the pose feels, has informed the schematic depiction of the human form created in her line drawings of figures within the paper cuts. Working from photographs of selected poses she has created drawings using pencil on paper with an economy of line that conveys, in two dimensions, the essence of the pose; a distillation of how it felt for the body to experience the position in physical space (fig.3, p.5). The line drawings are scanned into the computer in the subsequent stage of the process, providing a template for the digital rendition of the figure within the printed image. Using a graphics tablet and pen (fig.4, p.5), and working with Adobe Photoshop® software, the scanned line drawings are traced to produce a digital outline that can be manipulated and transformed in scale and position in the developing image.

Intriguing differences between the rendition of line work by hand and using the digital tools was evident from the research video. Frustrations and tensions in using the graphics tablet and pen resulted from the inaccuracy of the mapping of the hand movement and the line as it appears on the computer screen. The dimensional distortion that occurs has to be accommodated requiring the practitioner to revise and relearn drawing skills. To learn any hand skill requires hand-eye coordination and demands practice. Despite of the many similarities of the physical properties of the tool, it is evident that a digital pen requires new skills and sensitivities to be experienced and learnt by the artist.

Composition

Once the figure has been traced digitally, the composition of the image to be printed can begin. In the artworks prepared for 'Drawing Skirts', Hodes has included drawn and scanned paper patterns of clothing from archived fashion books; these clothing pattern diagrams form the first layer of the image. The relationship between the diagrams and the figure motifs is digitally adjusted and manipulated until Hodes is satisfied with the interaction between the elements and the spaces between within the picture plane. Each movement and distortion of imagery is considered carefully before the decision is made that an element is the correct size and position. Sometimes the decision is guided by emotion, an intuitive sense of balance, at other times memories of paintings and drawings the artist has seen in the past influence decisions about the composition. Once each layer is complete the digital artwork is saved onto the computer hard drive. The advantage of working with the technology is clear; the opportunity to adjust and fine tune position and scale of motifs speeds up the process. To trace each motif by hand would be time consuming and inevitably reduce the likelihood of experimentation with the composition. The facility to 'save' and step backwards in the process reduces risk and provides the artist with greater flexibility and creative freedom to play with elements in the picture.

When the arrangement of the key motifs in the image has been finalised, Hodes returns to the visual research process to find an historic repeating pattern to flow between the motifs. An appropriate pattern is selected and rescaled from a library of saved high resolution scanned patterns on her computer and then digitally layered between motifs in the image.

Digital ink-jet printing

Once the layers of drawing, schematic diagrams, patterns and blocks of colour are considered to be appropriately composed, the image is flattened to combine the digital layers. It is then saved and taken to a bureau to be printed onto paper using a large format Epson digital ink-jet paper printer. The process is relatively quick and a full colour image is reproduced in a matter of a couple of hours. A test strip is created initially to ensure colour balance is correct and so long as no fine tuning is required, the print process can proceed. The printed image is left overnight to dry before being put through the printer a second time so that a lighter version of the repeating pattern can be printed on the reverse. This is used later as a cutting guide, enabling corresponding pattern motifs to be hand cut with a scalpel blade from the image, creating a lace like pattern layer within the picture. The relationship between the repeating patterns on each face of the paper relies on the visual characteristics of the pattern and does not require accurate registration front and back. The incongruity of the juxtaposed pattern elements is considered important since it provides additional tension and unpredictability in the development of the image.



Drawing with a pencil from artist's photographs
fig.3

Digital drawing using a graphics tablet and pen
fig.4

In the studio: making the paper cuts

Once the image has been digitally printed onto paper the physical 'cut and paste' of the collage process begins. Careful consideration is given to the structure of the developing image and cut areas are created to link motifs within the composition. Pattern elements are cut from both sides of the image and each small fragment of cut paper is saved to be applied later to the front of the image as required. Once the pattern sections have been cut away, areas of background colour are reintroduced by sliding painted or printed paper behind the resulting lace paper cut (fig.5, p.7). The choice of appropriate colour, tone and surface is given considerable attention as the balance of the composition as a whole can be radically altered through the decisions made at this stage. Colours introduced behind the lace paper cut are either painted or digitally printed and are selected to work with both the printed artwork and colour relationships within the series as a whole. The painted papers are coloured using acrylic paints; the variations in tone and density of colour created by the brush marks are intentionally used to create movement in the coloured surface.

Repeating elements are reintroduced into the work by incorporating the shapes that have been removed in the cutting process. These are reassembled through the collage process in order to build layers of physical patterned surface in conjunction with the digitally printed layered pattern. Trial and error is used to determine the precise placement of the applied motifs within the composition in a similar manner as the digital copy, cut and paste process on the electronic page. Experimentation, intuition and playfulness are the key elements that direct this creative process. Physical cut and paste however, is more time consuming and less easily changed. Once a motif or fragment has been glued in place it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to step backwards and undo the creative decision.

Cut

Hodes uses a scalpel with a blade that is replaced daily to ensure sharp precision of the cut line. The scalpel is wrapped in a pad to soften the impact on the hands from the physical pressure of cutting (fig.6, p.8). She plans her time carefully and alternates cutting and sticking so as not to spend too long in any one day putting strain on muscles in her body. Cutting by hand takes time and the slowness of the process requires less intensive decision making than when working digitally. The cutting process is also in sharp contrast to Hodes' previous painting technique; the more dynamic and fluid medium of paint requires the artist to respond more rapidly in the creative decision making process. Time is an essential ingredient in her creative practice, enabling her to reflect on the work in progress and to plan how to move forward with the next stage of the collage.

Lines are integral to Hodes' visual language and provide the primary means of communication between artist and her audience. The contrasting qualities of the flowing drawn line and the formality and crispness of the cut line provides a tension to lead the eye through the image. The printed patterns provide a guide for the cutting but are not stuck to rigidly. Choices about which side of the line to cut and which bits are to be removed create variations in the appearance of the repeating



Placement of coloured sheets of paper behind cut sections of work fig.5

pattern. The cut line can be perceived to have its own unique qualities in much the same way as a drawn line; however, the resistant nature of the cutting process inhibits the flowing movement normally achieved using a pencil or brush. Consequently only a simplified form of drawing that describes the shape and curve of a line can be created. The thickness of the paper used also affects the character of the cut edges. Hodes uses paper that is 188gsm in weight as she has found this is the optimum thickness for cutting; occasionally thicker papers are incorporated to provide tactile interest to the surface. Although the majority of the work is cut using a scalpel, scissors are sometimes used to provide a different kind of cut edge that has a more fragmented line. The physicality of the hand cutting process seems to imbue the artwork with an intrinsic human quality linking the artist's body and mind with what is being created. An emotional connection with the art work occurs through the physical satisfaction of the hand cutting technique that is difficult to perceive in digitally rendered collage.

Copy

Hodes uses sheets of tracing paper to copy various motifs and patterns as the work progresses. Although a laborious process, it provides flexibility for extending areas of pattern and enables her to experiment with layers of imagery and line work over pasted areas of the picture. Carbon paper is sometimes used to copy sections of drawing and provides a different line character compared with the tracing paper; sometimes this is left visible to enhance the cut line. The hand process inevitably results in mistakes; Hodes exploits



The paper cut process
fig.6

these serendipitous actions and sees them as creative opportunities to be responded to and exploited. Mistakes keep the process human and charge the artwork with emotion. Nothing is wasted; every tracing and cut paper fragment is saved and carefully stored in the studio for use in subsequent projects. There is both generosity and thrift in the way Hodes develops her work: everything produced in the collage process has 'potential'.

Although Hodes has experimented with digital laser cutting techniques and is excited to explore the technique in future work, she enjoys the particular distinctive quality that can only be achieved by hand cutting. Machine cut edges are uniform and lack the unpredictability that can be perceived in hand cut paper. Tactile interest is created in the picture through subtle visual effects that are perceived as the eye responds to the movement provided by the flashes of cut edge against printed colour and pattern.

Paste

An acrylic water soluble archival adhesive is used to paste the cut fragments in place. The adhesive is applied sparingly and with precision as any excess dries with a gloss finish on surface of the paper. A number of cut paper pieces are selected and moved into position before they are individually glued into place. Hodes states she knows 'exactly where each piece is to go...I respond to the pattern underneath.' Each area of applied collaged pattern influences the development of the next across the picture plane in order to create physical surface; sometimes through application of glued paper shapes and sometimes by cutting away elements. Although her attention may be focused on a minute fragment of cut paper, Hodes continues to keep at the forefront of her mind how each piece relates to the imagery and the overall pictorial space that is being constructed.

Research

Observations of art practice this kind reveal both the singular approach of an individual practitioner and also insight into creative processes in general. It is evident from this study that making by hand, the emotional weight conveyed by human touch and the relationship between working the medium and the time it takes to create the artwork are fundamental to the artist's creative thinking. Differences between tools grasped in the hand that directly shape a medium and digital tools used in the creative process are also clear. Each has value and produces unique characteristics that can be combined as a visual language to achieve the artist's intent. In the artworks created for 'Drawing Skirts', Hodes integrates the physical processes with her themes to develop the pictures. The collage and paper cut processes involve layering and positioning of elements that are hidden and exposed in a similar way to fabric in a piece of folded cloth or the flesh of the clothed female figure. The skirt motif is used in the works as a flat pattern but when read as a schematic diagram, is also able to suggest folds and layers. Hodes strives to echo this in the collage and paper cut technique, through both the spatial relationships of the motifs as well as the colours of the applied paper pieces and cut patterns.

Drawing Skirts Charlotte Hodes

My interest in using skirts as subject matter within artworks developed out of my period of research as Associate Artist at the Wallace Collection 2005–2007. During this time I had the opportunity to look closely at both the ornate and highly decorated eighteenth century Sèvres vases as well as the Fêtes Galantes paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau. I was drawn to the way in which the female figure represented in Watteau's paintings¹ invariably wear lush pastel coloured silk dresses with generous folds. I particularly noticed the contrast between the large areas depicting voluptuous silk fabric of the clothes and areas of bare skin; the petite head, neck and hands that peep out are contained within this expanse. The figure appears articulated and 'defined' by her dress.

Through my engagement with the research department at London College of Fashion I have found a way to apply the image of the skirt into these recent paper cuts, 'Drawing Skirts'. The archive library at LCF holds some early twentieth century pattern books containing linear diagrams of flat skirt shapes. These diagrams² reference the female figure but exist without depicting the female figure itself. The formal arrangement of the flat skirt shapes, depicted on a single page, owes more to practicality than to aesthetic judgement. From my perspective as a painter, these pages suggested potential compositions. They reveal a dynamic tension between the flat skirt shapes and the final volumous, animated skirt that they would become. The drawings that I made directly from the skirt diagrams formed the starting point for the papercuts. In the completed paper cuts, the skirt diagrams are re-presented with a new function and context in which they are no longer of practical use. I have also introduced linear or silhouetted female figures as a counterpoint to the diagrammatic skirt shapes; both the skirt shapes and figures are depicted 'in motion' but are held in check by the cut and collaged drawing across the patterned surface.

The skirt diagrams are solely constituted of graphic marks; dots, dashes and lines, of varying width and interval. I drew these diagrams as a way of incorporating the marks into my visual vocabulary. My drawings were then scanned and imported alongside linear pencil drawings of figures, which I derived from photographs of myself. Once in the computer, all these drawings were redrawn, the scale, line and colour modified. Once the compositions were resolved, the resulting large scale images were printed on a large format printer and were subsequently developed in the studio using the 'hands-on' process of collage with a scalpel blade and glue. The cut edge of the scalpel blade defined both the lines and the flat and patterned forms. The cut line is similar to graphic marks of the skirt diagrams and is in effect a 'drawn' line but unlike the pencil it has a limited capability. The lines have a flat quality, like a contour, rather than suggesting a rounded space or shape. They emphasize the surface and when repeated, act to build up patterned areas reminiscent of embroidery. The sweeps of printed and cut pattern in the completed paper cuts appear quite painterly and so it is paradoxical that it is the drawing and more specifically line drawing, which underlie the making of the work.

Every skirt has a distinct and specific shape and character, containing within it meaning and reference to its context. The paper cuts work as images containing their own logic and structure, carrying a sense of a fleeting female presence, which is, for me, so connected to the idea of 'the skirt'.

¹ See *Fête in The Park* 1718–1720
Jean-Antoine Watteau
The Wallace Collection

² *The Cutters Practical Guide to Cutting Ladies Garments*,
John Williamson Co. Ltd London
College of Fashion Library,
Tailoring Archive



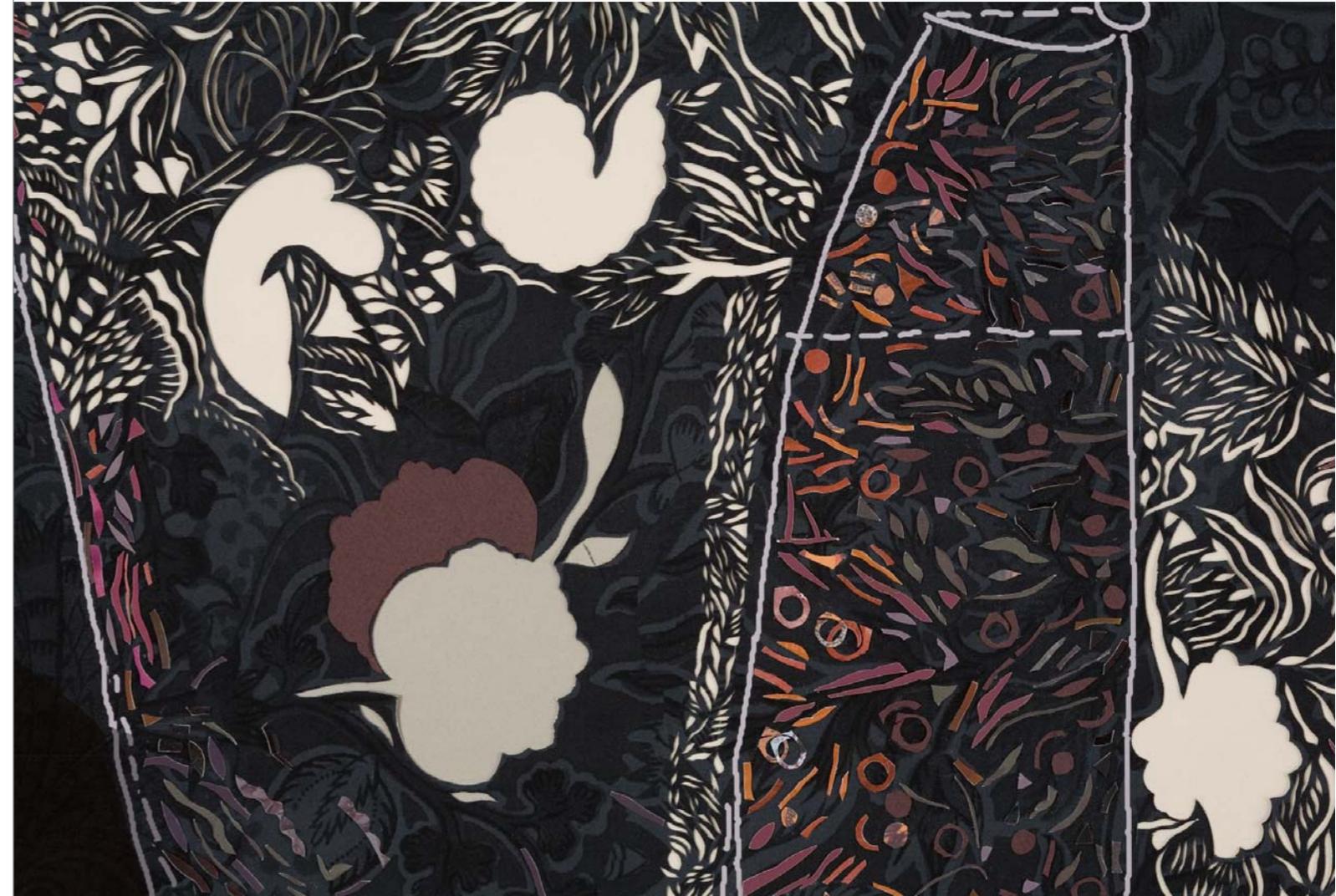
Floating, touch of pink 2007
134cm x 112cm, digitally-manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage



detail



Skirts, deep shadow 2008
98cm x 137cm, digitally-manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage



detail



Floating, apricot pink 2008
 101cm x 150cm, digitally-manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage



detail



Floating, grey fragments 2007-08
139cm x 112cm, digitally-manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage



Promenade 2007
109cm x 112cm, digitally-manipulated drawing, inkjet and collage

Charlotte Hodes

B.A. (Hons), MA.

Charlotte Hodes artwork for 'Drawing Skirts' has been the focus of a AHRC funded research project involving a collaboration with University of the Arts London, London College of Fashion and University of Wales Institute Cardiff.

Education

1982–1984

Slade School of Art:
M.A. Painting

1978–1982

Slade School of Art:
BA Hons. Fine Art

1977–1978

Brighton School of Art:
Foundation Studies

Solo Exhibitions

2007 Fragmented Images:
New Artworks The Wallace
Collection, London

2006 New ceramic Works and
Collages Flow Gallery, London

2002 Digital Responses –
cacophony, a cabinet of vases
Victoria & Albert Museum

London - 2 person show

2001 Fragmented Histories Quay
Art, Yorkshire Arts, Hull

Retroperspective III
Eagle Gallery, London - 2
person show

1999 Surfing History Eagle Gallery,
London

1997 Pattern in Painting City
Museum & Art Gallery,
Staffordshire

1993 Figurines Worcester City
Museum & Art Gallery

Selected Exhibitions

2008 Totem City World Economic
Forum, Davos, Switzerland
(Berengo Studios, Murano)

2008 Small Show, Huge Talent
Hillgate St., London curated
by Janice Blackburn

2008 Drawing Breath Royal West of
England Academy, Bristol &
The Robert Gordon University,
Scotland

2007 Christmas Exhibition, Works
on Paper, Marlborough Fine
Art, London

2006 Jerwood Drawing Prize
Jerwood Space, London

Cartoon, Collage and The
Decorative Motif Eagle Gallery,
London

2005 40 Artists- 40 Drawings, The
Drawing Gallery, London

2005 Spirit of Liberty , Liberty,
London (commissioned works)

2003 Somewhere Totally Else-
European Design Biennial
Design Museum, London

Waste to Taste Sotheby's

Awards, Commissions and Residencies

2007 Arts & Business 29th year
Glass Awards Commission
Murano, Italy

2005–2007

Associate Artist
The Wallace Collection,
London

2006 Jerwood Drawing Prize, 1st
prize winner

2005 Small Grant, Arts and
Humanities Research Council

2004–2005

Individual Artist Grant ,
Research & Development,
Arts Council England

Research

2006–cont

Senior Research Fellow
London College of Fashion,
University of the Arts London

1995–2004

The Integration of Computers
& Fine Art Practice research
artist, Camberwell & Chelsea
Colleges of Art, University of
the Arts, London

Work in Public Collections

Arthur Andersen,
Birmingham City Art Gallery,
British Council,

Cathy Treadaway

B.A. (Hons), MA. Cert.Ed. PhD

Cathy Treadaway is an artist, researcher, writer and educator. Her specific research interests lie in the areas of human computer interaction and creative practice. As co-investigator in the research project, Cathy has been responsible for documenting the development of artwork for this exhibition. This study aims illuminate how the use of digital tools influences creativity and to assess the importance of physical experience and making by hand in creative cognition. The investigation has involved the collection and analysis of audio and video recordings, photography and informal interviews with Charlotte Hodes during the making of this body of artwork for 'Drawing Skirts'.

Education

2003–2006

PhD. University of Wales

2003 Certificate in Research
Methodology, University of
Wales

1986–1987

M.A. (Ceramics) University of
Wales

1983–1984

Post Graduate Certificate in
Education University of Leeds

1978–1980

B.A. (Hons.) Textiles and
Fashion (Printed textile
design), Loughborough
College of Art and Design

Research and teaching experience

2006–cont

Research Fellow, University of
Wales Institute Cardiff

2005–cont

Visiting Research Fellow
(Computer Science), University
of Bath

2003–2005

Research Assistant ,
University of Wales Institute
Cardiff

1986–2003

University of Wales Institute
Cardiff –
Part-time lecturer/
consultant

1987–2003

CTDesign - Design consultant

1980–1986

Great Yarmouth College of Art
and Design - Lecturer

Brighton City Museum
& Art Gallery,
Clifford Chance,
Deutsche Bank,
New Hall Cambridge,
Potteries Museum & Art
Gallery, Staffordshire,
Spode Museum,
Worcester City Museum
& Art Gallery,
Victoria & Albert Museum.

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2007 Pearson, Lizz
Women's Hour Radio 3 May
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2007 Hubbard, Sue
A 21st - century artist's take
on Sèvres The Independent
May 30th

2007 Blackburn, Janice
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2007 Howell, Veronica
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Magazine No.207

2007 Cook, Juliet
The Sensual Surface
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- Publications and Conference Proceedings**
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- 2007 'Digit – making connections between hand and mind' NeoCraft Conference, Halifax Nova Scotia, Canada
- 2007 'Digital Crafting and Crafting the Digital', The Design Journal - Volume 10, Issue 2 (New Craft Future Voices) October 2007, Lancaster University, UK ISBN 9780754670353 ISSN 1460- 6925 pp 35- 48
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- 2007 'Using empathy to research creativity: collaborative investigations into distributed digital textile art and design practice' - Creativity and Cognition Conference Proceedings, Washington, USA 2007 Pub. ACM New York ISBN 978-1-59593-712-4
- 2007 'Crafting the digital and digital crafting' - New Craft Future Visions Conference Proceedings, University of Dundee, 2007 ISBN 1899837558
- 2006 'Digital Imaging: It's current and future influence upon the creative practice of textile and surface pattern designers' PhD thesis, University of Wales
- 2006 'Distributed creativity: collaborative digital textile design practice' - D2B: Conference Proceedings 2006 ISBN 0-9552338-1-x
- 2006 'Painting by numbers: zeros + ones = printed cloth' - essay for 'Digital Perceptions' Collins Gallery Glasgow, University of Strathclyde, Scotland, UK January 2006 ISBN 0 947649 47 6
- 2005 'Digital printing' – gallery essay for 'Recursions: Material Expressions of Zeroes and Ones' Museum of Design, Atlanta, USA January - March 2005
- 2004 'Digital Imagination' – Textile, the Journal of Cloth and Culture, Volume 2 Issue 3 Pub. Berg ISBN 1-85973764-1
- 2004 'Digital reflection' – The Design Journal, Volume 7 Issue 2 (2004) Pub. Ashgate ISBN 0-7546-4107-4
- 2004 'Digital Creativity' - Journal of Textile and Apparel, Technology and Management: http://www.tx.ncsu.edu/jtatm/volume4issue1/vo4_issue1_abstracts.htm
- 2004 'Making Sense' – Text, The Textile Society Journal Nov. 2004
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- 2004 Digital Design and Printing for Ceramic Surface Decoration and Textiles in China and Hong Kong. July 2004, Cardiff, Welsh Development Agency: 1-21



This project is supported by:



Marlborough Fine Art

Charlotte Hodes and Cathy Treadway would like to thank the following:

Dr. Frances Corner
Professor Helen Thomas
Katherine Baird
Mara-Helen Wood
Laurie Greenall
Mathew Sant

Texts © The Authors

Images © Charlotte Hodes

Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art
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Tel: +44(0)20 7629 5161

Digital Prints www.matsant.com

Photography Peter Abrahams

Design Shine Design

Print tba

