

A 21st-century artist's take on Sèvres

Visual arts

CHARLOTTE HODES: FRAGMENTED IMAGES

Wallace Collection

LONDON ★★★★★

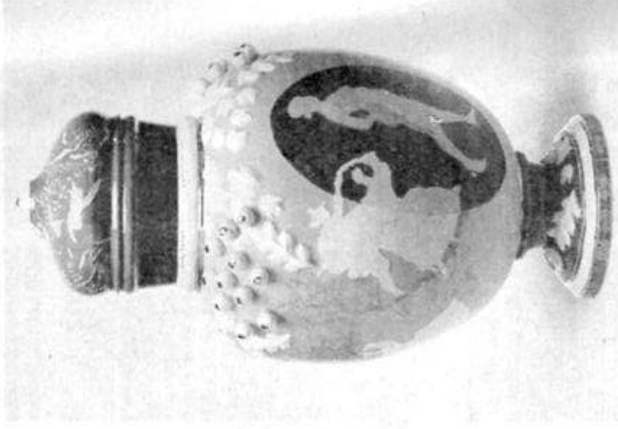
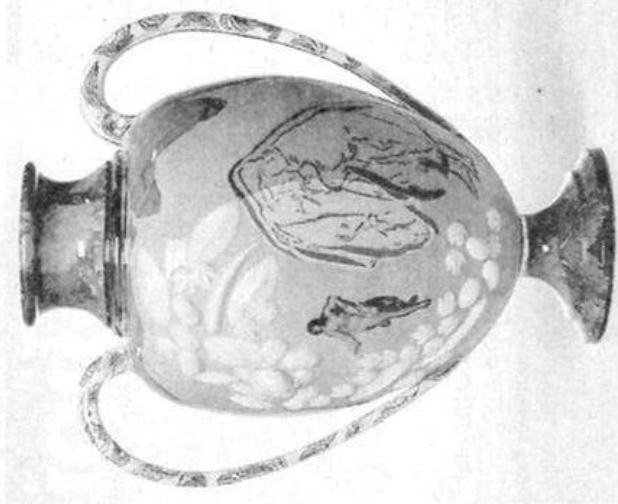
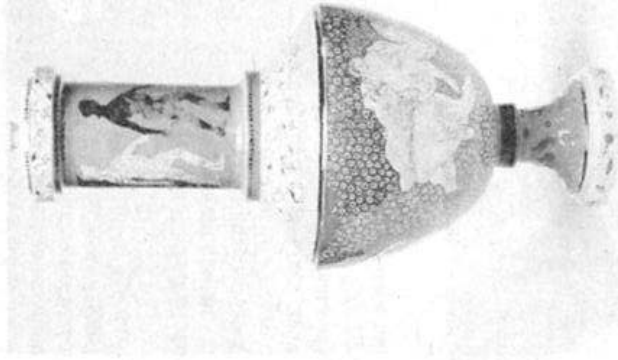
Charlotte Hodes is that unusual thing, a truly innovative artist – one who, through those unfashionable attributes of persistence, skill and technique, has found a highly individual way of working. Winner of the 2006 Jerwood Drawing Prize, and trained as a painter, she has, in this first artist's residency at the Wallace Collection, created a synthesis between the fine and decorative arts, which has resulted in a body of work that is intelligent, original and highly decorative.

As a student at the Slade, Hodes loved the rococo excesses of the Wallace's 18th-century collection. This abundance, along with the collection's more austere neoclassical artefacts, has proved to be the perfect breeding ground for her new body of work, which includes a collection of highly decorated ceramic vases, painstakingly built, layer upon layer, with a fusion of sculptural, painterly and

gilding techniques to create daring objects that meld postmodern fragmentation with historic reference and motif. Alongside these are her intricately hand-cut collages. Here, the lace-like patterns of these paper-cuts suggest not only the skills of the 18th-century embroiderer or seamstress, but also acknowledge, through use of colour and computer, an awareness of contemporary painting.

Attracted to the lavish collection at the Wallace, which, for Hodes seems to embody something about female sensuality, her main focus has been the 18th-century Sèvres vases, along with paintings, particularly the *fêtes galantes* by Antoine Watteau, with their cultivated, knowing eroticism. Drawing has always been her starting point, and as well as pencils and pens, she uses the computer as a further drawing tool, scanning in sketches done in the museum, before freely and intuitively manipulating and reinterpreting them on the screen to create alterations of line, scale and colour.

Watteau placed groups of composed figures within previously painted landscapes, which he could reuse again and again. This created odd perspectives and juxtapositions. In her



own *fêtes galantes* series, Hodes makes reference to Watteau's practice through her collaged elements, in which she explores the female form. Drawings from Watteau's figures, alongside studies made of herself in the studio, have been incorporated in a variety of styles, including cut-outs, outlines and silhouettes.

Responding to the pictorial and decorative spaces suggested by the Sèvres vases, she has used visual archives created during her residency, along with imaginative appropriations of figures from paintings such as Nicolas Lancret's

Layers of meaning: three of Charlotte Hodes' exquisite ceramic creations, inspired by her residency at the Wallace Collection

PETER ABRAHAM

Mademoiselle de Camargo Dancing, in such a way that her forms seem to break free from the surface of her ceramics.

The making of her pots – she worked closely with a ceramicist and had already spent a year working at the Spode factory in the Midlands – was a high-risk business: only 10 out of the 25 she attempted survive. Thrown in sections that are then painstakingly put together by hand, they differ from the slightly lifeless perfection of the original Sèvres, which were made from moulds. Covered with a series of hand-glazed slips,

they are then decorated with a cornucopia of leaves, petals, little gold balls and blobs, all applied by hand. Transfers are then added for further decoration. Never simply pastiches, these labour-intensive works stand as a contemporary coda to the original Sèvres. Both wry parody and informed homage, they have a vibrancy and integrity entirely their own.

While embedded in historical research, Hodes' work is, with its emphasis on fragmentation and appropriation, thoroughly innovative and contemporary,

while her witty, playful explorations of the female form are both knowing and self-aware – in her *fêtes galantes*, her voluptuous female figures glide naked, with chutzpah and panache, through her flower-strewn glades, quite at one with themselves. As with Shakespeare's Hermione, released from her block of stone in *The Winter's Tale*, Hodes has set free her female figures from their inert existence in the 18th century, to be reconfigured as utterly modern women.

SUE HUBBARD

To 24 June (020-7563 9500)

Review

EXHIBITIONS



Charlotte Hodes 1 *In the Glade*, 2005-6
H46cm 2 *Pink Reflections*, 2009, H46cm
3 *Floral*, 2006, Ø36cm

FRAGMENTED IMAGES: NEW ART WORKS BY CHARLOTTE HODES

THE WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON

3 MAY-24 JUNE 2007

This exhibition is the outcome of the Wallace Collection's first resident Associate Artist Charlotte Hodes whose ceramics and prints are sympathetically displayed in the downstairs gallery, enabling visitors to appreciate the dialogue between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks she has produced. Working with archives has become something that Hodes has excelled at, having previously spent time on artist placements at Spode (1998-2004), and working with the imagery from collections at the V&A in 2002.

The works in *Fragmented Images*, therefore, draw on the outstanding collections of eighteenth century French Sèvres porcelain, and Antoine Watteau's paintings of *Fêtes Galantes* (c. 1718-20). The vase forms echo their rococo originals having been glazed in the luscious rose and green of their sources. The intricate detailing and patterns of the Sèvres ware have been abstracted and collaged onto the forms while the digitally manipulated images of rococo femininity intensify the decorative pictorial space of the vases. Small digital motifs surround some of the bases in delicate profusion, highlighting the sources of contemporary pattern making.

The ceramics were thrown and assembled rather than moulded in the Sèvres tradition and this adds to their abstracted quality; they are sturdier, less effete, without the remorseless decadent perfection of the originals. There is a convincing paradox in the pieces between Charlotte Hodes's obvious admiration for the imagery and the world it represents, and the need to reinterpret rococo feminine froth for a modern audience. Through her own drawings, and by digitally manipulating the found images and making them her own, Hodes is able to liberate the female figure as both the subject and object of decoration; the figure becomes a picturesque theme within the context of the decorated vessel.

There are ten mostly lidded vases, each titled to reflect some aspect of their sources; *Pink Reflections*, for instance, shows silhouette mirror images of Nicholas Lancret's *Mademoiselle de Camargo Dancing* (1730), patterned in the cut-out motif Hodes has used extensively in some of her prints which surround the gallery walls. The exhibition provides a thoughtful but exuberant interpretation of eighteenth century French sources while also rearticulating the language of pattern making and its forms.

Linda Sandino

**FRAGMENTED IMAGES:
NEW ARTWORKS BY
CHARLOTTE HODES**

THE WALLACE COLLECTION,
MANCHESTER SQUARE,
LONDON W1
3 MAY - 24 JUNE 2007
CATALOGUE £10
BY VERONICA HORWELL

CHARLOTTE HODES'S riffs on the rococo in the Wallace Collection, the output of her time as associate artist there, are displayed in a small basement gallery down the steps from its restaurant. The location matters. Unlike the interiors of the main house, it's a plain space in the shade, with no scintillation from the chandelier drops, not so much as a slight glint off the silverware. The show is just a few walls of printed and cut paper, with some pots making gentle jokes about the Sèvres porcelain upstairs. And yet I was lost in there for an entire early summer morning, drawn in by the complexity and intensity of Hodes's techniques, how they recreate the hand-made past on display everywhere else in the building with just a pen, a computer screen and a scalpel.

On entry, the pots are the more obvious attraction. Hodes worked with a ceramist to shape them, simplifying the moulded sprays on Sèvres down to cake-icing dollops and filling the vacant panels with transfers. The urns and vases borrow their forms from Sèvres, and the transfers their dancers and serenaders from the paintings of Nicolas Lancret elsewhere in the museum: now and again a silhouette of Hodes herself, digitally manipulated into a Rococo bodyform (tiny tits and a Mademoiselle O'Murphy bum), wanders across the kaolin, which is jelly-shiny with factory glaze. The works have the innate silliness of non-utilitarian porcelain – those huge pieces never meant to store or pour anything – but tinged with a forlorn quality never hinted at in the originals. Partly this is a result of the colouring, the grounds of a sombre rose Pompadour and dark green not relieved by the brighter enamels of the 1750s.

But maybe it's more a realisation, shared with the sequences of prints on the walls, that there's nothing so melancholy as frivolity in its rococo aspect. So much effort – oh, the strain of being delicate and exquisite all the time, especially for the women. Marie Camargo, the 18th-century dancer whose image, adapted from Lancret, flits in and fades out around the exhibition, worked hard as a carthorse on her ballet technique to suggest effortlessness and shortened her light

skirts to reveal nimble ankles. Hodes's prints required the same determined but concealed industry. Her initial sketches were computerised, cut and pasted with other, often floral, images into onscreen collages and then inkjet-printed. The prints were physically slit and snicked into patterns and the liberated scraps stuck back on to further complicate the surface, like embroidery. Larger pictorial cut-outs were pasted atop. All those movements of the hands can be observed flowing through the finished pieces.

Each Hodes artwork reproduces in paper the complex lightness of rococo fashion in which brocades were overlaid with the new mesh laces of Mechlin and Valenciennes, while passementerie assembled from minute, distinct silk creations, linked together, meandered over the ensemble. Our appreciation of luxury lingerie – hide-and-seek with fretted textiles next the skin – dates from the rococo; previously shifts were of stiffer, more rigid linen, not so peekaboo. Hodes's cutaways permit glimpses of pale peach behind her greige or ivory foregrounds, hints of epidermis that are more nude than her full figures of lady bathers slipping out of their towels. Her females are inspired by the subjects of paintings up in the galleries, but in her view the women aren't sex objects (or worse, in the art of François Boucher, sex toys – giggling, jiggling knicker-pink things): they go through their toilette and piroquette for their own pleasure, not that of a spectator. They do not flirt, and have no coquetry. Some walk away behind an opaque layer or amble half out of frame, self-possessed rather than playing coy. This is a female definition of the feminine: composed of accretions of decoration created by patient, repetitive skill, and still part of the natural world. It's permanent and substantial, in a very quiet way of course.

From close up to the prints, tiny flecks of wit show up – components of a patterned insert turn out to be silhouettes of modern kitchen utensils, domestic relatives of curvy Sèvres vases. Further away the tulips are reduced to slashes signifying their stripes and the grisaille bouquets dissolve into a pastoral of bocage, every separate leaf present although no longer individually visible. This made me feel like a bird on a branch at the heart of a tree at dawn or sunset. A slight sadness hangs in the foliage, particularly in the series of prints Hodes calls *fêtes Galantes*, after Antoine Watteau. Everybody's alone in these, even when dancing as a couple. Watteau drew his characters separately and composited them in a fantasyscape



arranged from theatrical elements, Hodes reproduces the same isolation through collage. Although her appliquéd women are more contented than his, more grounded in their solitude, since the cut edge of a piece of paper is a line of beauty that also bounds a solid, reliable mass. These women have a garden to tend and china to wash. They have somewhere to get to, and sail calmly on.

'Pink Reflections',
Charlotte Hodes,
coloured slips, digital
and hand-drawn
transfers, sprigs
on earthenware,
40 x 28 cm, 2006

VERONICA HORWELL WORE A RABUHI
COSTUME LAST WEEK

ONE TO WATCH

Why go potty for ceramics?

You could call it the Perry Effect. Since the ceramicist Grayson Perry became the recipient of the 2003 Turner Prize, his success has spawned a rising generation of decorative ceramicists in its wake.

Perry is unrivalled in the field with his ability to attract serious collectors – Charles Saatchi ranks among them. Prices realised for his work at auction are moving ever upwards; the current sales record was made at Sotheby's in February where a 40cm-high pot (fairly small in comparison with most of Perry's recent work), entitled 'Hunters In The Snow' made £54,000 (the estimate was £20,000–£30,000). According to Sotheby's contemporary expert, Francis Outred, Perry "is most ferociously collected by committed UK collectors who generally build up a body of work and like to acquire at least five or six pieces".

So it seems prescient to consider the pick of the new ceramicists, many of whom often choose to exhibit in a craft context, rather than loftier fine art

galleries, and so fly slightly below the collecting radar.

Carol McNicoll is a potter who mixes whimsy with hard-edged, subversive political references – Iraq, the oil crisis, globalization. Here shapes, whether teapots (usually with at least two spouts), jugs, fruit bowls or tea sets, are often distorted with patterns of wild colours – brilliant blues, pinks and greens. Prices range from £70 for a cup up to £2,800 for larger pieces such as bowls, vases and urns with decorative figures.

Carole Wyndham is another name to watch. As a mature student at the Royal College of Art, her fascination with the Toby Jug was the inspiration for her work – but the heads of artists she uses in traditional Toby Jug form make you look twice. Lucian Freud,

Francis Bacon and Perry himself are among her muses. RCA rector Sir Christopher Frayling is already a huge fan and owns a large Wyndham "bust" from her graduation show.

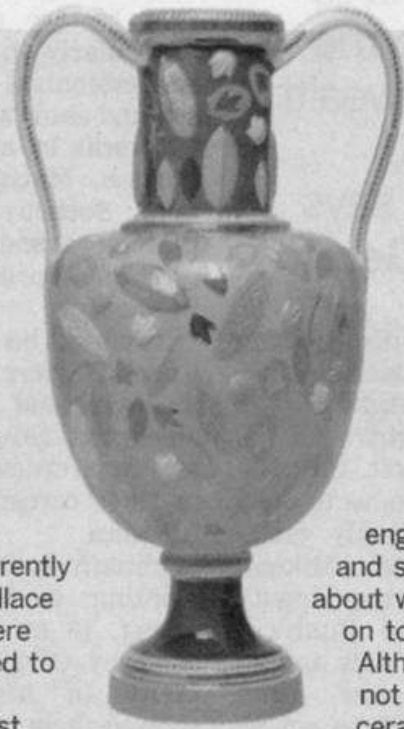
But it is Charlotte Hodes who really stands out in the crowd.

Hodes is a multi-faceted British

artist (she was winner of the Jerwood Prize for drawing in 2006) and an exhibition of her work, *Fragmented Images*, is currently on at The Wallace Collection where she was invited to be its first Associate Artist.

She created the pieces on display by interpreting her personal responses to the paintings and objects housed in the collection; over the past year that has resulted in contemporary vases inspired by female figures on original Sevres porcelain as well as intricate paper cuts inspired by the 18th-century Fete Galante paintings of Antoine Watteau (prices from £2,200 to £3,525). Hodes says that "following an initial period of self-consciousness, I soon felt as if the museum had become an extension of my studio".

After studying drawing as a postgraduate under Sir Lawrence Gowing at the Slade School of Art, Hodes became fascinated by the imagery of 18th and 19th-century ceramic figurines. But it was during a visit to the Spode china factory that Hodes "rather fell in love with the copper



Left and bottom: Charlotte Hodes at The Eagle Gallery

engraved transfers and started to think about working them on to ceramics".

Although she had not worked with ceramics before,

Spode invited her to work in its factory where, she says, "I produced all my work, using pattern, decoration and the female form as my influences, on to existing factory ware".

Though few contemporary art collectors have heard of Hodes before, it is surely only a matter of time before the art cognoscenti wake up.

'Fragmented Images': Charlotte Hodes, The Wallace Collection, Hertford House, Manchester Square, London W1, until June 24.

Charlotte Hodes at The Eagle Gallery, 159 Farringdon Road, London EC1; www.emmahilleagle.com

Carole Wyndham and Carol McNicoll at Barrett Marsden Gallery, 17-18, Great Sutton Street, London, EC1; www.bmgallery.co.uk

Janice Blackburn



One to watch

Painter Charlotte Hodes, who's exhibiting this month, uses exciting new methods to bring collage into the 21st century

Mixing old and new is a theme at the heart of the *Homes & Antiques* philosophy, and rarely is it so explicit (or gorgeous) as it is in Charlotte Hodes's strikingly bright, modern ceramics, which have drawn heavily on the ultra-classic Wallace Collection of works of art gathered in the 18th and 19th centuries.

"My latest work explores the female form and has grown from a series of pencil drawings that I did recently at the museum. I hope people will also see it in context of the Wallace Collection," explains Charlotte who won the Jerwood Prize for Drawing in 2006 and has just been appointed senior research fellow at the London College of Fashion. "I've been inspired by the Wallace Collection since 1984, when I was studying for my MA at the Slade School of Fine Art."

Having completed her drawings, she then scans them into a computer before working with them, simplifying and layering them to create a transferable contemporary collage.

The results are linear depictions of women who seem ready to walk off the paper, or ceramics, on which they are applied. Her work is on show this month in a solo exhibition, *Fragmented Images*, which is held, appropriately enough, at the Wallace Collection in London.

Fragmented Images runs until 24th June, Wallace Collection, London W1 02D (7553 9500, wallacecollection.org)





The sensual surface

ARTIST Charlotte Hodes combines computer imagery with collage to generate ornate ceramic and paper works celebrating the female form. Juliet Cook went to meet her

For an artist whose interests, inspirations and influences lie in the integration of pattern, form and colour and the representation of the female figure, Charlotte Hodes must have felt that she had found her artistic home when the Wallace Collection, London, invited her to become its Associate Artist. Both the collection and Hodes' work feature a multi-layered, ornate environment oozing a richness of decoration, depth of colour at every turn and a definite female sensuality. In May, Hodes will be exhibiting a body of over two years' work at the Wallace, representing the culmination of her involvement with the collection.

Consisting of a series of thrown ceramic vase forms and large collages on paper, Hodes' new works reveal a deep respect and understanding of painterly and decorative traditions, yet reflect a broader knowledge and talent for contemporary fine art practice. Hodes' response to the collection began with drawing. This, she says, was an intuitive starting point. She was initially attracted to 18th century French Sèvres porcelain vases and the paintings of Rococo artist Antoine Watteau. Watteau's methods of delving into his volumes of drawings of individual figures and groupings, then placing them into a variety of compositions, suited Hodes' predilection for collage-based works and allowed her to begin the repositioning of drawings of

herself and of Watteau's female figures within her own pieces. Once she had isolated her interests, Hodes could do what she does best: deconstruct and then re-build, fragment, construct, layer and collage; literally 'cut and paste' all the spatial elements together using collisions of old and new, historical and contemporary references.

Digital drawing and scalpel cuts

Although Hodes mostly thinks as a painter – preoccupations with edges and surfaces suffuse her practice – all her works start with drawing. Hodes uses a computer as an extension to pencils and pens, by scanning drawings and manipulating them as data, altering the size, scale and nature of the lines as if she were still drawing. Like Watteau, she has built an extensive archive of imagery, which, in turn, becomes the starting point for her paper-cuts and ceramic works. Hodes is keen to praise the possibilities digital technology presents: 'printing and printmaking in digital has opened up responsive and intuitive ways of working for me... I can create patterns and change scale very quickly.' The paper-cuts begin as large format, inkjet prints, which are extensively developed in the studio through collage. The cut line of the scalpel blade intuitively continues the drawn line. It was this return to concentrated drawing that inspired her to enter her piece entitled, *Wallace Collection Series 1* (2005/6), a digitally manipulated drawing and inkjet with collaged fragments, for the Jerwood Drawing Prize 2006 in which she was thrilled to be awarded first prize.

Hodes' use of collage and the surface quality of inkjet prints give works such as *Reflections 1 & 2* (2006) deep, beautifully layered, textured patterns and rich colours. The overall effect is created by two methods: the first being Hodes' ability to dissect, to cut, to replace, to layer one



Portrait of an Artist

Charlotte Hodes celebrated winning the 2006 Jerwood Drawing Prize at Marine Ices in London. **Virginia Boston** finds out more.

How has winning the £6,000 Jerwood Drawing Prize affected your life?

It was exciting to have my work acknowledged, and confirmed my belief in the power of my vision to communicate. It's also a relief to know you are not completely crazy, cutting up minuscule pieces of paper and sticking them on other pieces of paper. It's a very childlike activity making what one hopes is a serious commentary. To celebrate winning, I took my kids to Marine Ices restaurant, London, and we binged on Italian ice cream.

Tell us about the winning drawing.

The winning drawing (pictured) was part of a series I made as associate artist at the Wallace Collection. I've been making work there for the past two years using the collection as a source and starting point for new collages. The Wallace Collection has always been of great interest to me because of its wonderful fine art and decorative art collection, and it's a great honour to be working there. In particular I am interested in the 18th century paintings of Antoine Watteau, and their world-class collection of French Sevres porcelain. The research and development of my project has also been supported by the Arts Council of England and more recently the ceramics have been supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Describe your involvement with ceramics.

In 1991, I made an exhibition of collages and paintings at the City Museum and Art Gallery in Worcester, where there was a dynamic curator called Deborah Dean. She invited me to work with the collection and I selected a group of 19th century porcelain figurines that had inspired my new collages and paintings, and exhibited them alongside my work. Then in the mid 90s I started teaching BA Ceramics students at Camberwell College of Art. I went on a visit with the students to the Spode factory in Staffordshire and in 1998 they invited me to work on the factory floor so I used their existing undecorated ceramics and their archive of ceramic transfers to make images. My work with ceramics is an extension of my ideas in painting.

Do you remember your first drawing?

It was of our family dog, a boxer called Kim, when I was eight. I was devoted to him and drew him in all sorts of poses – walking, sitting, sleeping. I've kept some of the drawings so I remember the experience well.

The first image that left an impression?

In 1968 when I was nine, I went to the *Cybernetic Serendipity* exhibition at the ICA in London and saw a computer drawing by Harold Cohen; he was one of the first artists to be involved in early computer art. The image was in colour and continually moving, and you could watch it being made. The whole show was wonderful.

Describe your typical day?

I wake at 6.45am, see my son, 17, off to school then walk with my daughter, 15, to the bus stop where I take the bus to my studio. I arrive at 8.30am. I work until 6pm; I may leave early to meet people or go to an exhibition. At home I cook dinner and work on the computer until midnight. Sometimes I make art on the computer, do art business, or work for college.

and fast-moving images. I've been appointed senior research fellow in drawing at the London College of Fashion.

Greatest artistic influence?

My mother, who's a painter – she went to the Slade and studied with Oskar Kokoschka; my partner Paul Coldwell who's an artist and professor at the University of the Arts in London; and Paula Rego.

Which work would you like to own?

Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c.1485).

Best and worst moments of your career?

Worst, being rejected for a purchase by the Arts Council for the second time; the best, meeting Rosalind Savill, director of the Wallace Collection.

How do you relax?

I'm not very good at it. I like theatre, cinema, opera and gardening, but get bored at the beach.

Best practical tip?

My father used to say, 'Every dog has its day'. So my tip would be to believe in yourself and don't give up.



"Drawing has to respond and change according to current issues such as new technology and fast-moving images"

Where do you work?

My studio is off Kingsland Road, East London, in an old warehouse housing 20 studios run by the Barbican Arts Group Trust. Mine, on the first floor, has skylights overlooking Kingsland Basin, so sometimes I'll see cormorants or swans flying over.

What is the current status of drawing?

Drawing is central to my practice in terms of thinking through the idea to the final image. When I am making a collage, I think of the cutting blade as an equivalent to the pencil where the cut line becomes the mark. Drawing has to respond and change according to current issues such as new technology

Charlotte Hodes is showing at **The Drawing Gallery** in their Christmas show, from 22 Nov-22 Dec at 37 Duke St, St James's, London SW1Y 6DF; Tel: 020 7839 4539, and with **The Drawing Gallery** in the Art London art fair, 17-21 January 2007, at the Business Design Centre, Islington, London N1. She has a solo show at the Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London W1 from 3 May-23 June 2007; Tel: 020 7563 9500, www.wallacecollection.org

Her work can also be viewed at the **Eagle Gallery**, 159 Farringdon Rd, London EC1; Tel: 020 7833 2674

Artist Biography

Charlotte Hodes attended the Slade School of Art, and has exhibited in Britain, India and the USA. She is associate artist at the Wallace Collection, senior research fellow at the London School of Fashion and winner of the Jerwood Drawing Prize 2006.