New Papercuts by
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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

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University Gallery
and Baring Wing
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Introduction
Mara-Helen Wood
Director University Gallery,
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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 Sévres 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Although she continues to use art historical references, her current exhibition of figurative silhouettes and motifs, based on dressmakers’ paper patterns, reveals her combined technical and artistic skills to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 papercuts 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 this 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
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 papercuts. 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 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 a 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.
In the studio: making the papercuts

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 papercut (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 papercut 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 provide a tension that leads 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 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 artwork 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
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 that 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 of 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 papercut 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 papercut technique, through both the spatial relationships of the motifs as well as the colours of the applied paper pieces and cut patterns.
Cathy Treadaway  
B.A. (Hons), M.A. 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 to 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'.

Research and teaching experience

2008–continued
- Research Fellow, University of Wales Institute Cardiff

2005–continued
- Visiting Research Fellow (Computer Science), University of Bath

2003–2005
- Research Assistant, University of Wales Institute Cardiff

1986–2003
- Part-time lecturer/consultant, University of Wales Institute Cardiff
- Design consultant, CTDesign

1980–1986
- Lecturer, Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design

Education

2003–2006
- PhD, University of Wales

2003
- Certificate in Research Methodology, University of Wales

1986–1987
- M.A. (Ceramics), University of Wales

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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
Publications and Conference Proceedings

2008 'Materiality, memory, and imagination: using empathy to research creativity' Leonardo, MIT (Pending publication)

2007 'Digit - making connections between hand and mind' NeoCraft Conference, Halifax Nova Scotia, Canada


2006 'Digital Imaging: It's current and future influence upon the creative practice of textile and surface pattern designers' PhD thesis, University of Wales


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