

An abstract artwork featuring a collage of torn paper and paint. The background is a mix of vibrant colors including purple, blue, green, and yellow. Overlaid on this are bold, black, expressive brushstrokes and splatters. The overall effect is dynamic and layered.

John Hinchcliffe

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CRAFTS STUDY CENTRE

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Preface

This book, published at the same time as the exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre, shows how my work has developed and changed over the last thirty years or so and reflects how I have responded to rapidly changing circumstances and fashions. My interest in crafts and construction, together with a love of decoration and colour, have led my work into many different areas, taking me through a series of disciplines that includes woven and printed textiles and ceramics. My recent work uses much of the knowledge that I have gained from all these areas for it is undoubtedly true that one has to know the rules in order to break them.

Materials fascinate me. Early on in my career, Barbara Sawyer, who was teaching weaving at Camberwell School of Art and Design, introduced me to the collections of yarns produced by Paul Rodier at the end of the last century in northern France. These yarns were wonderful constructions in themselves and I found that the combination of different colours, twists and fleeces suggested the eventual fabric, which in most cases was a simple plain weave. The colourful cut, abstract, twisting strips of my recent work draws on these pieces, comprising of tangled masses of fibres, yarns, waste paper, discarded printed cloth, unrestricted but confined in space.

I am delighted to be showing in a museum dedicated to craftsmanship. The crafts these days are something of an anachronism and have as many bad as good connotations, so that when given the opportunity to design and make an exhibition of new work for the exciting new building that houses the Crafts Study Centre at Farnham I found that I was happy to be constructing works in the tradition of craftsmanship, that take into account both function

and purpose. The new works shown at the Crafts Study Centre were truly fun to make. This is an essential ingredient for me. These constructions possess many of the qualities of richness and spontaneity that I strove to achieve in my early work but without the laborious processes that were involved.

I should like to thank Simon Olding for offering me the exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre and, furthermore, for writing this story of my work; also Tom and Kuljit Singh for sponsoring the exhibition, thus giving me the opportunity to explore my ideas more freely than might otherwise have been possible. I am grateful to Andrew and Vicky Booth and Michael Woodhouse for providing much needed overflow studio space. Finally I should like to thank my wife, Wendy Barber, for her unfailing support of my work.

John Hinchcliffe

Dewlish, Dorset

2006

John Hinchcliffe: weaver

Arundel, West Sussex 1973 to 1980

The artistic career of John Hinchcliffe has encompassed several roles and embraced diverse media. He has enjoyed acclaim as a weaver; achieved success as a designer and maker of studio and commercial ceramics, as well as printed textiles. Latterly he has worked in the fields of painting and linocuts. This versatility of expression and the range of audiences addressed by Hinchcliffe's work have set a groundbreaking example in British crafts. In his most recent work, he has emerged as the experimental maker still fascinated by colour and texture in surface decoration.

This publication marks a major one-person exhibition held at the Crafts Study Centre, University College for the Creative Arts at Farnham, in 2006. A bold array of new works was produced for this show, modestly titled ***John Hinchcliffe: recent work***. Paper strips, felt, ceramics and industrial materials were utilised in innovative arrangements to demonstrate a lifetime's creative obsession with decoration and surface patterning. The outcome of two years of intense consideration and research, it is the most abstract of his creative statements. The hallmarks of Hinchcliffe's work came to fruition in the exhibition: rigorous determination; self confidence and the joy of manipulating swathes of colour into complex forms. But they were present from the outset.

John Hinchcliffe (born 1949 in Chichester) quickly established an international reputation as a textile artist in the 1970s. His earliest training was at the West Sussex College of Art and Design in Worthing in a one year foundation course (1967-68). This course emphasised design and pattern

over investigation into the nature of materials. It was run on a 'Bauhaus' principle, emphasising the coordination of creative effort. Well equipped studios surrounded a central workspace, encouraging the collaboration of thought and the sharing of creative ideas. Experimentation was nurtured by the College's young tutors. It established a lifelong interest, where the choice of the material (especially in his later career) was a means to a creative end. Hinchcliffe weaves with paper if that suits his needs.

He responded intuitively to the design-led teaching at the College. He enjoyed the stress on experimentation, the investigation into evolving patterns, developing an understanding of the range of techniques required to achieve the desired results. He learned not to be dominated by technique. Technical ability could lead not just down one creative path, but could open the door to new pathways. Hinchcliffe continued at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (1968-71), gaining a Diploma in Art and Design with an impressive first class degree in printed and woven textiles. Camberwell was noted at this time for the outstanding quality of its teaching staff and the range of external tutors and lecturers. Influential teachers such as Peter Collingwood, Tadek Beutlich, Joe Dixon and Barbara Sawyer helped to consolidate his belief in the expressive use of colour in woven design. The quality of materials and their textural possibilities influenced his early work. Hinchcliffe responded warmly to the creative interplay of the teaching at Camberwell. Tutors in the textile department taught across the range of disciplines, and not simply in their specialist subject areas. Camberwell's powerhouse of ideas left Hinchcliffe with a determination to succeed as a creative practitioner, unrestricted by a specific form of work. He was an artist first, a weaver second, and perhaps only a weaver for the time being. Already his aptitude and energy for work were receiving accolades. He won a scholarship to work in the weaving department of the Konstfachskolan,

Stockholm. The observation of the Scandinavian craft tradition and in particular the focus on textiles as an integral part of 'home working' activity (where seemingly every house in Sweden would have a loom) proved significant influences on his first professional works.

Hinchcliffe moved on to take an MA degree at the Royal College of Art (RCA), 1971-73. His main subject was woven textiles, with printed textiles and knitting as subsidiary subjects. One of his most important tutors was Humphrey Spender.¹ He also recalls sessions by Marianne Straub.² He deeply appreciated the creative play between the individual teachers within this team environment, where there was no single dominant figure, but a collegiate group of experienced colleagues who stayed the course with the student cohort. He learned in particular from the emphasis that the College placed on insights into industrial practice. The RCA at this time took students to work with the Huddersfield Polytechnic (the tutor there was Tom Halstead) giving direct access to industrial methods of production in woven textiles. Access was gained to the full production cycle. Hinchcliffe began at this stage to spin, design and dye his own wool, in the classical craft tradition laid down by pioneer makers such as Ethel Mairet and Rita Beales.³

This was a defining period for Hinchcliffe. He concentrated his thought on the individual characteristics of his chosen materials, as well as studying particular textile artists such as Rodier. Hinchcliffe especially admired Rodier's perfection of technique and the 'ravishing feel' of his woven textiles.⁴ This interest was also focused on Rodier's discerning emphasis on the character of fibre and yarns which produced a high quality effect when woven. Hinchcliffe also notes the influence of Lida and Zika Ascher.⁵ He 'organised and channelled' his creative thoughts and began to put these ideas into tangible form. He developed confidence in new technical skills, and,

after a deep consideration of the best material that could be used to express his ideas, embarked on the making of rugs and wall-mounted pieces.

After completing his formal education, Hinchcliffe, with characteristic strength of purpose and the fierce dedication that has marked his whole creative career, established his own printing and weaving studio. He set up first in a tied cottage in South Stoke (his studio housed in the village's old rectory) aided by his wife Frances, the textile historian, author and paper conservator. She had been a fellow student at Camberwell.⁶ They later moved to Tarrant Street, in the nearby town of Arundel, West Sussex.⁷ This long and often isolated period (1973-80) is remarkable for the intensity and the consistency of work. His rugs and wall hangings, singing with colour and densely surfaced, were assured and to English eyes, innovative and exceptional.

Hinchcliffe supplemented his income from the sale of individual works by part-time teaching at the West Sussex College of Art and Design and Camberwell, and by lecturing during trips to America and Australia. The American experience was especially valuable. He taught at prestigious craft schools such as the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, and the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Tennessee, appreciating the dynamic results that were brought about by groups of experienced makers working to a common cause. In 1979-80 he organised an intensive series of summer schools with Ann Sutton at Arundel, teaching in the areas of textile design and manufacture, and recreating the American model by drawing together prestigious makers such as Peter Collingwood, Kaffe Fassett and Michael Brennand-Wood.

Hinchcliffe's textile work during the 1970s has a strong signature, and a lively and painterly use of colour, demonstrated for example in two kneelers for the altar at Romsey Abbey in Hampshire in 1977, commissioned by the Crafts Advisory Committee. He particularly emphasises the contrast and collusion

between warm and carefully organised batches of coloured materials in rugs and wall hangings. Cloths and wools are used not only for differences or harmonies in colour, but also differences and harmonies in the intrinsic qualities of the materials. His search for materials, purchased directly from mills, scrap cloth merchants or laundries, gives integrity to the whole artistic process. This, together with his gathering interest in dyeing, imbues each work with a strong individual character. Marianne Straub, in her introduction to a Kettle's Yard touring exhibition in 1981 noted that 'the dyeing of the yarn, the character and the colours of the materials he uses are as important to him as the techniques of weaving them'.⁸

But the Arundel studio was a precarious place, as most first studios can be. The celebrated textile artist, confronting another long-term commission for a large rag rug is bound to face a degree of isolation. There was some consolation in his growing national and international reputation. The 'craft revival' of the 1970s was a period of impressive developments and opportunities, and an increasing media interest in the crafts. Many of the students in the 'class of 1973' at the RCA went on to establish distinguished reputations - Alison Britton (ceramics) and Fiona Mathison (tapestry and constructions), and Susanna Heron (jewellery), for example. In 1975, Hinchcliffe was profiled in Melvyn Bragg's *Second House* documentary for BBC2. In 1977 he won the *Telegraph Sunday Magazine* British Craft award in the woven textiles category (the specialist judge was Peter Collingwood).⁹ In the same year he gave a lecture tour in America with funding from the American Craft Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Hinchcliffe worked mainly to commission in this, his first solo studio.¹⁰ Learning the skills of negotiation with a client was to prove invaluable for the later process of making and selling ceramics.¹¹ Hinchcliffe's commissions

during this period started from guidelines discussed with the client. Working drawings would be produced after a site visit, and then the plan of the work would gradually take shape. Michael Regan described ‘the heaps of rugs... scattered around his loom...as he works he picks pieces from these mounds and adds them to his weaving as they suggest new combinations or colours. In this way his rugs acquire a random quality which creates liveliness and freedom of movement across their surfaces’.¹²

Hinchcliffe also thought beyond the individual work, seeing his output as a whole, a dramatic sequence of pieces with related themes and colour ways. His development of the idea of the series in textiles was to have a strong influence on the later decision to work in ceramics. It gave an intellectual foundation to the purpose of making tablewares where repeat patterns were fundamental, where a ‘line’ could be developed consistently over a period of years, and where a ‘look’ could be fashioned for the wider market. It was not so great a leap to move from the textile studio concentrating on the individual unique work to the ceramic studio concentrating on multiples of individualistic, but not necessarily unique, named pieces. It could be construed as a natural progression for an ambitious creative practitioner who wanted to explore a larger body of design ideas more quickly, and in a more social setting.

Hinchcliffe’s commitment to this seven-year period of work as a textile artist may also be understood, to some degree, as a self-taught apprenticeship in technique, creativity and in the economics of craft. His genuine interest in the process of selling and working with the client, and in the value of placing work in public collections, were also forged at this time. Hinchcliffe remarked during a teaching engagement at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education in the 1970s, that he always focused on the audience when considering a new piece.

*‘I consciously tried to reach design firms or critics or people involved in the arts. In a way I sold my pieces from the point of view of where they would be and who would see them, rather than how much I would get for them. It was quite a long-term publicity exercise’.*¹³

The frustration of this process is clear. It took such a long time to complete each work, and Hinchcliffe began to consider alternatives. He resolved the problem by changing his material, and exerting a more complete control over making, selling and distribution, through the Hinchcliffe and Barber partnership. In this model, the maker is more likely to gift important work to public collections than to negotiate a sale, as happened by gifts of early spongeware ceramics to the Salisbury Museum, Wiltshire in 1983, after a groundbreaking exhibition in the same year at the Salisbury Arts Centre.

This new model was deeply important for Hinchcliffe. It offered new creative opportunities, the chance to work with new materials, and, because significantly more work could be made and sold, a more profitable outcome was realised. Seven long years in the textile studio, producing perhaps ten or fifteen works a year was by any account, a committed exploration of one method of working. In a less confident or resourceful maker it could have led to compromise or economic failure. Hinchcliffe took the long-term view. He learned how to put a plan into operation. He could see how his design ideas had both immediate impact on the unique work in hand, but also helped to support future activity where refinement, testing and trial were essential components of the creative process. His ideas needed to be translatable to the studio setting, where other makers would bring them to life. Hinchcliffe remarked on this process in his article on ‘Colour’ in *The Weavers Journal*:

‘The gap between conceiving an idea and finishing it is sometimes very wide; therefore I prefer to make the initial ‘idea’ only, and the work grows and

*strengthens as I work and as colours suggest themselves. In this way each piece of work becomes an experiment for the next.*¹⁴

The innate desire for experimentation perhaps helps to explain Hinchcliffe's search for new creative directions, realised in his partnership with Wendy Barber. His influence on the art of textiles in the UK was significant in the 1970s - he established the craft of rag weaving as a 'modern vehicle for design and produced the most exciting, durable rugs of the 1970s'.¹⁵ Hinchcliffe's artistic temperament sought new direction. The rugs and wall hangings were not ends in themselves. They were means of exploring colour and texture for the designer-maker. The method offered depth but not speed. Hinchcliffe's bold move to become a studio and production potter was a natural development of his personal creative endeavours, not a radical departure of mission. He was attracted by the way a potter could make one-off pieces relatively quickly (and with lightning speed when compared with the three to six months required for one of his major wall hangings). He remarked in 1978 that 'I'm very interested in the possibilities of industrial design and I would enjoy working on a range of fabrics for industrial manufacture'.¹⁶ He was also attracted by the possibilities of the 'series'.

Hinchcliffe once said that 'surface qualities have always fascinated me'. This play of surface has become the basis for a career's work. He used the different means of textile, paint, glaze and the linocut press to create a body of work which explores colour and texture for their own sake. He said later, 'having gained a reputation for one area of my work I felt I was in danger of not developing all my other ideas'.¹⁷ Once an idea and a medium have been worked through, Hinchcliffe rarely returns to the same means of delivering it.

¹ Humphrey Spender was a celebrated press photographer. Hinchcliffe was particularly interested in his work for the 'Mass Observation' project in Bolton, Lancashire, in the 1930s.

- ² Marianne Straub pursued a career as an industrial textile designer from the 1930s to 1970. She taught at the Royal College of Art from 1968-74.
- ³ Hinchcliffe had met Rita Beales at the Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen in Painswick. She had been rather dismissive of his use of colour, perhaps predictably in light of her more monochromatic palette, just at the point that he had established a virtuoso reputation as a weaver.
- ⁴ Paul Rodier's designs were very fashionable in the 1920s, building on the reputation of the French textile company first established in 1810. Rodier designed woollen fabrics with modernist patterns, as well as silk scarves and other fabrics. See Paul Rodier, *The Romance of French Weaving* (New York, 1936), a volume held in Hinchcliffe's own library.
- ⁵ Lida and Zika Ascher came to England from Prague in 1939, and set up a small textile business in London. They commissioned artists such as Matisse and Henry Moore to design head scarves after the war, and were known for their lively screen-printed designs.
- ⁶ Frances Hinchcliffe pursued a career in the Victoria & Albert Museum, and, currently, as a paper conservator for the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. She is a past member of the Crafts Study Centre's Acquisition Committee.
- ⁷ Ann Sutton currently lives in Tarrant Street, Arundel, the base of the Ann Sutton Foundation, an educational charity giving two year fellowships to young woven textile artists.
- ⁸ *Textiles today: woven and embroidered works selected by Marianne Straub* (Kettle's Yard, 1981).
- ⁹ See Bevis Hillier 'Four of the best' *Telegraph Sunday Magazine* 42 (3 July 1977) pp.34-35. The British Craft Awards were launched in 1976 'to make four or five awards in different categories each year'. The prize was £500 and the other winners in 1977 were Judith Gilmour, functional pottery; Rosamund Conway, jewellery and Sally Lou Smith, bookbinding.
- ¹⁰ Sheila Hale, in 'Hard craft', *Harpers and Queen* (April 1978) pp. 160-165 notes that Hinchcliffe was making rugs for clients in Arundel and Germany as well as for the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and the Hadler Gallery, Houston.
- ¹¹ Commissions would continue to play an important part in his career, for example in two large tile panels for the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum.
- ¹² Michael Regan, 'Rag rugs', first reproduced in *Crafts*, 15 (July/August 1975), p.16.
- ¹³ Quoted in Beth Hatton, 'John Hinchcliffe', *Crafts Australia* (October 1980), pp. 26-29. Hinchcliffe's class in the summer school, organised by Grace Cochrane, was in rug weaving.
- ¹⁴ John Hinchcliffe, 'Colour', *The Weavers Journal*, 106 (summer 1978), pp. 26-28.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in *A closer look at rugs* (Crafts Council), an exhibition researched by Peter Dormer and touring from 1983-1985.
- ¹⁶ Quoted in Hale, p. 164.
- ¹⁷ A personal statement attached to Hinchcliffe's C.V. 2004.

Dorset and France

The first Dorset studio 1981 to 1986

Charlton Cottage, Charlton Marshall

By 1980, Hinchcliffe was reaching a natural period of closure for his textile output. He wanted a new set of challenges, and the chance to develop a new body of work around the notion of the multiple image. He decided that working in a production environment would provide the scope to design and make complex and complementary ranges, over the longer term. A new professional partnership with the artist Wendy Barber galvanised these ambitions.

The Hinchcliffe and Barber partnership began in earnest in 1981 at an influential time for both makers. Barber was trained as a painter (Slade School of Art 1963-65), and unusually combined her practice in fine art with a long-standing interest in tapestry weaving. This interest in textiles had been inspired by an influential meeting with Ann Sutton during Barber's time at the West Sussex College of Art and Design (Sutton, at the age of 21, was in charge of the woven textile department between 1956 and 1963).¹⁸ Barber painted coastal and rural landscapes in oil and watercolour, and made tapestries featuring landscape and coastal settings. She brought to the partnership a highly developed creative eye, especially in sensing how a ceramic and textile range would look in the domestic arena. Her judgement on the 'Hinchcliffe and Barber look' was very influential. Barber also brought formidable skills of organisation and marketing to the partnership, quickly establishing a forceful media presence, as well as ensuring that key national journals and magazines promoted the new wares.

Barber sensed, too, that she could gain the focus she needed in her own practice through collaboration. Their sympathy for each other's work formed the strong basis for an enduring partnership which was to lead to a highly successful range of ceramics and textiles especially throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Hinchcliffe and Barber were both motivated by the desire to explore new processes, and to move away from the 'precious' simplicity of the unique object. Both partners used their training, experience and foresight to think in multiples.

Hinchcliffe sensed that the designer-maker could influence a wider audience, rather than the individual collector. He would even take the view that the artist who creates solely unique work is compromising artistic value, not celebrating it. He remarked that 'in the seventies...there was either craft stoneware or mass-produced pottery. We became fascinated by small potteries like the ones at Cortona in Tuscany that were making regional pottery in the traditional peasant way. It was neither craft-based nor industrial'.¹⁹ This may sound idiosyncratic when spoken by Hinchcliffe from the high position of international acclaim for the work he produced in the early 1980s. In fact, this commitment to pragmatic production underpinned more than a decade of important and prolific creative work.

*'Ceramics is to do with surface decoration and shape. There seemed to be a division between industrial shapes, on the one hand, and 'art' pottery on the other. We felt our ideas could bridge that gap.'*²⁰

Hinchcliffe's assertion that a move to the production of ceramics was a natural transition for two makers specialising in woven textiles (albeit with a long standing interest in painting and drawing) has a characteristically confident ring to it. It belies, of course, years of disciplined work and thought. The progression to a craft form where the disciplines of marketing and direct

selling were important factors would have seemed, however, well within their reach to anyone acquainted with the new partners. Neither of them had ever dismissed the idea of selling as a second-rank operation, something that merely takes place after the creative process. Selling, in the sense that the work is conceived for the domestic buyer, is intrinsic to this notion of craft (as it is for many craft practitioners).

Working in the field of domestic pottery, with the particular demands of regular production, the need to sustain ranges of work, the precise similarities of this output, and the maintenance of the same standard across the body of work, established a substantial challenge for the makers. But their goal was also aesthetically challenging: to create useful wares that were immediately recognizable as ‘Hinchcliffe and Barber’ and which brought individuality and panache to the dining table, kitchen dresser and the kitchen itself.

The first work of the partnership (established in 1981) was delivered by overseeing the production of furnishing fabrics and rugs made in India and America to their designs. Hinchcliffe saw this as a welcome release from making ‘interminable rag rugs’. He wanted to create an entirely new range which combined his flair for surface decoration with the requirements of purely functional items. The initial involvement in textile production in India was short-lived but practically useful. Hinchcliffe and Barber went to India specifically to study Indian hand weaving, as well as to identify the range of production facilities. Tom Singh, the founder and director of New Look²¹, was researching a home wares collection at this time. He approached Hinchcliffe and invited him to travel to India and work in the villages of the Punjab and Rajasthan to produce a textile collection, setting up the Indian Handloom Company to facilitate this activity. The rugs generated from this venture were sold in Bloomingdales in New York amongst other American stores.

In India they found an extraordinary range of machinery from high to low technology, and a breathtaking variety of work. India, Hinchcliffe remarked, was a ‘weaver’s paradise’ where every technical request could be met by a skilled workforce. But he also felt that any business proposition to set up craft production based in India would be too time consuming. It could mean a lifetime’s commitment to commercially-based production, and perhaps a permanent move. The trip did lead to a long discussion about reconciling the requirements of producing work to a set standard, yet still meeting artistic objectives, with the demands of long runs and relatively high volumes. They did not bring this model to fruition in India, but they would use it to inform their first studio in England.

Their objective was to learn from scratch a new craft form: studio ceramics for small scale industrial production. This was both a commercial and an artistic decision. Hinchcliffe decried the ‘boringly brown’ craft and studio pottery market, with the long tail of the Leach tradition still in force. The picture was even bleaker, in his view, as far as industrial production was concerned, with UK designs wholly lacking in inventiveness and originality. So they visited museums and galleries in Crete, Spain and Italy, and began to experiment with traditional maiolica. The fresh Mediterranean palette enthused them. It looked bright and dynamic beside the crafted brown pot of England.

Hinchcliffe and Barber managed their own ceramic training. They asked the acclaimed College of Ceramics at Alfred University in New York to send a graduate student to advise them on the specifics of throwing, mass production techniques, decorating, glazing and firing. Chuck Adler came to England to fulfil this role helping them to focus the training on the production of colourful glazed earthenwares. Hinchcliffe had long admired the openness with which American craft colleagues discussed techniques and aesthetics.

He felt that this easy exchange of information would be hard to find in England and Adler's vitality and guidance were welcomed.

In the early days of the studio, set up in the Dorset village of Charlton Marshall, near Blandford Forum²², there was a practical division of labour. Hinchcliffe designed and made the blank pots, Barber marketed the wares and found selling destinations, both makers painted and glazed the pots. Hinchcliffe concentrated on tablewares and Barber specialised in tile panels, led by her own interest in large, naturalistic wall hangings. The Charlton Marshall studio was seen by Hinchcliffe as a 'small highly versatile studio, with the ability to produce ranges of products as well as design them, working closely with industry as well as the media, the retailer and the consumer'. He wanted to create a 'formidable and distinctive design style'²³ which might have product spin-offs in areas even more diverse than ceramics and textiles. The studio and home was a lively place, full of creative energy and debate. Wendy's four children (including the painter Harriet Barber)²⁴ and a host of students lived and were trained at Charlton Marshall, some of the students leaving to pursue careers as professional potters.

The early studio ware concentrated on three basic shapes: an open necked jug with a small spout; a simple round plate and a rectangular/oval platter. The focus on flatware was deliberate. There could be economy of effort, and the plates and platters were relatively straightforward to decorate. The shapes provided a good decorative surface, as well as being functional. The tableware had to look good in the kitchen and on the table, especially in the larger form of a platter, for example. Some of the first ceramic designs were in blue spongwares. Their abstract colourful feeling was set in precise contrast to deadpan industrially produced ceramics, and the leaden brown studio wares.

This studio work had an attractive 'velvet' feel to it, directly attributable to the maiolica technique (Hinchcliffe used the English Victorian derivation 'majolica' to describe it). Biscuit fired earthenware is dipped into an opaque maiolica or tin glaze which dries as a powdery surface rather like blotting paper. The decoration is then applied by directly sponging onto the surface, followed by a second firing to fix the glaze. The sponged decoration is therefore fused within the glaze, applied directly, or through stencils designed and cut out by Hinchcliffe. Resist techniques were employed on the ceramics, drawing on Hinchcliffe's experience of textile techniques. This first studio work was instantly successful. It looked unusual, dynamic and fresh, certainly as far as British tableware was concerned. In fact, the makers had first seen spongware in America and 'fallen in love with its primitive charm'. The work, sometimes simply in blue and white, sometimes with the addition of sponged decoration in dashes of red, green and yellow, was direct and cheerful. It sold instantly.

Two public exhibitions of the ceramic work were particularly important in these early days of the partnership (which was put on a more formal business basis in 1983). The first arose out of the offer made to Hinchcliffe in 1982 of an exhibition at the craft shop in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Hinchcliffe - whose textile work already featured in the permanent collections there - was originally asked to produce a show of his rag rugs and woven pieces, but he declined. Instead he embarked on a short-lived collaborative venture with the potter Janice Tchalenko, whose coloured stoneware glazes he had previously admired.²⁵ He wanted specifically to stretch his ceramic range. His approach to Tchalenko was conceived as an artistic collaboration, a pooling of skills, and satisfied a requirement on his part for his fellow maker's technical expertise. The makers produced an impressive body of work (key examples of which are now held in the Crafts Council's permanent collection), revealing bold floral and fish designs (using sponging and stencilling). A deep blue and

purple palette was used on the stoneware body. Hinchcliffe discovered as a result of the collaboration that stoneware was not suitable for the decorative effects that he wanted to achieve, and he focused on underglaze earthenware and 'majolica'. He did not use stoneware again until the 1990s in a project with the Dart Pottery. His work for the craft shop exhibition influenced Hinchcliffe's later renowned *Hypericum* design. Tchalenko carried through design ideas into her very successful work for the Dart Pottery.²⁶

Tchalenko recalled that 'one of the most important things about that small exhibition was the fact of colour - of glaze and colour - that we experimented with'.²⁷ As this was Hinchcliffe's first substantial public exposure as a potter, it was both a moment to achieve a new status in an unexpected craft form, and a brave departure from familiar ground. The exhibition at the V&A Museum crafts shop acted as a stimulus for the developing long-term partnership with Wendy Barber. It suggested that there was a substantial market for their work.

The next public exhibition, this time of Hinchcliffe and Barber's work, was in 1983. The show of blue and white spongeware and hand-painted wares was held at the Salisbury Arts Centre, a venue that regularly presented craft exhibitions with regional significance. The ceramics sold out completely, and promoted the partnership to a large and enthusiastic audience. Many private collectors began their purchase of Hinchcliffe's ceramics here. In the show, Hinchcliffe's pots were shown alongside Barber's tapestries of the topiary and fountain at Athelhampton House in Dorset, and the apple blossom walk at Cranborne Manor. They also promoted a textile range designed to complement the blue and white ceramics. Fabrics were available by the yard, or ready made as duvet covers and quilts. The affinity of the 'surface quality' in both ceramics and textiles reinforced both makers' belief in the importance of presentation and the application to the domestic setting.

The show led to a commission from the Salisbury Museum, the partnership's first large scale museum piece. Wendy Barber painted a big tile panel at the entrance of the newly created ceramics gallery at the museum in 1985. It also prompted fertile relationships with retailers, keen to exploit this contemporary look in textiles and ceramics. Mary Wiggen, the owner of Coexistence, with her household design and furniture store (then in Bath and now in Islington), was an enthusiastic champion of the work, placing it alongside her imported contemporary Italian furniture. On a more local level, the partners sold their work at this time at the Christmas sales hosted by the painter and engraver Robert Tilleard from his house outside Tisbury, Wiltshire, in collaboration with other local design and craft businesses such as the Natural Dye Company and Compton Marbling.

Hinchcliffe's hand-painted platters for the Salisbury exhibition contain the seeds for design ideas which have remained throughout his work. Bold, fresh flowers stand out against freely brush-painted blue backgrounds, occasionally brightened with touches of yellow, adding spectacle to the plate. These flower plates, whose designs were translated into the later *Hypericum* range and some early, rare, platters with fish designs, have a sprightly sense of purpose. They indicate a potter of confidence, at ease with his new craft form, who had learned rapidly from his partnership with Tchalenko. Hinchcliffe now enjoyed being in control of the whole ceramic process, rather than being a painter of plates.

This very first studio ware, painted by Hinchcliffe and marketed alongside the partnership's textiles, still has a fresh, vibrant feel to it. The drawing and the sponge-work match the shapes with unassuming ease. The free-painting style (owing, perhaps to Barber's artistic influence) achieves something of the effect of watercolour on paper. The first *Hypericum* designs were collected

instantly, as were blue fish plates and the *White Flower* and *Vine Leaf* designs. These were later reworked as studio production pieces. The freedom of the painting was matched by the robust, press-moulded shapes.

The choice of blue and white earthenwares for the first commercial work put a Victorian original back into use for the contemporary kitchen. There was direct appeal in the wares; they were well made in comfortably proportioned sizes. The mugs were large, and felt agreeably French. The use of spongeware showed how the partnership could rework a 19th century idea for the contemporary market. Design with a history has been a feature of the pottery designs from the partnership ever since. The work seems both original and familiar at the same time. This proved the key to the outright success of the Salisbury exhibition, and gave Hinchcliffe and Barber the confidence to press home the accuracy of their artistic and commercial judgements. They pressed at a national level too, exhibiting at the Chelsea Crafts Fair from 1983 to 1987, at a time when they felt Chelsea had a special role as a showcase for ambitious designer-makers who wanted to reach wider outlets. Here they came forcefully to the attention of trade buyers, as well as individual collectors. Marketing the work became more than a means of promotion; it was an integral part of the partnership's philosophy of work. Hinchcliffe also started his long association as a part time lecturer at West Dean College, West Sussex at this time.

Hinchcliffe conceived his earliest studio pieces both in relation to the market place and his own creative interests. Designing, making and selling were considered as aspects of an integrated activity, and the distribution of the work to preferred outlets was given the same attention. In this studio model the Hinchcliffe and Barber partnership own the idea for the work, the product itself and the method by which the work reached buyers. Neither

of them conceived of their pots as rarefied art forms which others sell and market (through the mechanism of the independent gallery, for example). They strove to make the buyer feel good about the purchase, often selling directly to clients. (Celebrated private buyers included Michael Caine, Dame Elizabeth Frink and Julie Christie). The studio became the launch pad not just for the pot, but also for the 'Hinchcliffe and Barber' brand. There was something surprisingly self-effacing (although it is a remark borne out of creative confidence and authority) about Hinchcliffe's commentary on their role as practitioners. He described themselves as 'designers' not 'potters', remarking that 'the word sounded too rarefied to us...it brings to mind very precious people who get so wrapped up in the pleasure of making that they disregard the end, the finished article and the customer'.

The nature of this studio in its early days, producing hand decorated earthenwares, was to be flexible and innovative enough to gauge customer and retail demands with speed, and certainly more quickly than a large manufacturer. Hinchcliffe and Barber wanted to establish in this way a recognizable identity for their ceramic work within a very short space of time. They were highly disciplined about bringing the new style and the ranges to the attention of potential customers by gaining regular and enthusiastic media coverage. Such a push for publicity in the local and the national press (where they were quick to gain praise) led as planned to ever increasing demand for the work by private customers and eventually by retailers.

Despite this pressure they decided not to take on more staff to undertake hand painting and printing in the modest studio at their home in Charlton Marshall. Instead, they located studios nearby, and used the new accommodation to develop innovative ways of mechanising the manufacturing process. The nature of this challenge had been commented on by Alan Caiger-Smith in

1976. Caiger-Smith's Aldermaston pottery in Berkshire produced domestic pottery from a small workshop of six or seven potters, and had some similarities with Hinchcliffe and Barber's second studio. (The Aldermaston pottery did not seek, for example to work with a larger commercial partner). Caiger-Smith commented on the challenge that the Dorset makers were forcefully to address:

'...it seems to me that it would be desirable from both logical and commercial points of view to enter into some contract with a larger producer, who would say, "You have something you can't make enough of, I have surplus space where I could increase my range. Let me make some of these things, and perhaps pay you a small royalty". In theory, it sounds absolutely logical and easy, but in practice it is very difficult to find a larger producer who is willing and sufficiently adaptable'.²⁸

These matters were also being addressed by other design partnerships, notably Queensberry Hunt, who 'deliberately sought to prove that good design and mass market appeal are not irreconcilable concepts'.²⁹ Queensberry Hunt worked mostly for ceramic companies outside the UK, finding that the British ceramic industry had become so centralised that it was smaller, independent makers who were more likely to take an experimental approach to design.³⁰

Hinchcliffe wanted the second studio of the partnership to observe the division between industrial ceramics and studio ceramics and create new ideas to bridge the gap, and to do so without compromise in terms of design and quality.

Hinchcliffe and Barber sought to find a way that was still creatively stimulating to marry mass production (speed and quantity) with the best of the artistic insight (individuality and a clear visual identity). They laid down

a philosophy for the creative and production base somewhere in between the conventional potter's studio and an industrial design workshop. The new studio was ideally placed to open up new markets and to feed larger networks of distribution and supply.

¹⁸ See Diane Sheehan and Susan Tebby, *Ann Sutton* (Crafts Council in association with Lund Humphries, 2003), p. 115.

¹⁹ Quoted in Leslie Geddes-Brown, 'A rich palette', *Homes and Gardens*, (May 1995), p. 29. In actual fact, they had seen small scale potteries in Deruta rather than Cortona.

²⁰ Quoted in Audrey Slaughter, 'Cottage capitalists', *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 53.

²¹ Tom Singh opened New Look's first store in Taunton, Somerset in 1969. By 1994 New Look had 200 stores, and was a major fashion retailer in the UK.

²² Pictures of the house, studio and gardens are to be seen in: Suzanne Askham, *Country homes and interiors*, (August 1986), pp. 78-83. The photographs are by George Wright.

²³ Sales brochure *Hinchcliffe and Barber*, based at 5 Town Farm Workshop, Dean Lane, Sixpenny Handley, described as being in 'the heart of Dorset'. The village is in the county of Dorset but has a postal address in Salisbury, Wiltshire.

²⁴ Harriet Barber forged a notable career as a landscape and portrait painter, specialising in oils of Dorset, Cornwall and Normandy. See www.harrietbarber.com

²⁵ Emmanuel Cooper, *Ten thousand years of pottery* (British Museum Press, 2000) p.318. 'A collaboration with textile designer John Hinchcliffe pushed her ideas forward so that large, flat press-moulded dishes and large open bowls provided clear surfaces for experiments with colour and pattern'.

²⁶ See John Tchalenko and Oliver Watson, *Janice Tchalenko: ceramics in studio* (Bellew Publishing, 1992).

²⁷ Tchalenko and Watson, p. 29.

²⁸ Elisabeth Cameron and Philippa Lewis, *Potters on pottery* (Evans Brothers Limited, 1976), p. 46.

²⁹ Susannah Walker, *Queensberry Hunt: creativity and industry* (Fourth Estate, 1992) p. 7.

³⁰ 'The few independent potteries which did survive faced a considerable struggle and became less and less able or willing to invest in risky modern design'. Walker, p. 34.

The second studio 1986 to 1991

Sixpenny Handley

'...pottery is a ghetto art which for the most part has turned its back upon contemporary design and art. The miracle is that so much good pottery sustains itself by drawing on its traditions. Interestingly, the introspective and escapist aspect of pottery is attractive to British householders, who decorate their houses with a view to retreating from the outside world and the present'.³¹

Peter Dormer's analysis of British ceramics chimes with the success of the Hinchcliffe and Barber studio. Their work, in common with many ceramics for the marketplace, did acknowledge earlier traditions. It did provide a pleasant reminder of the rural retreat from the position of the urban kitchen dresser. As Hinchcliffe and Barber moved to their second studio, in modern workshops in Sixpenny Handley on the north Dorset and Wiltshire border, questions of the taste of the British householder were very much in their minds.

They moved so that the studio was completely removed from the home they had set up together, and to separate an increasingly busy professional life from their own domestic lives. They invested a good deal of creative energy on their new home, in the village of Bryanston, near Blandford Forum. Bryanston became the first exploration of the total 'Hinchcliffe and Barber' look, as applied to a domestic interior: a showcase for their own pottery, tiles, textiles and the careful painting and arrangement of rooms.³²

At the point when the first Hinchcliffe/Tchalenko stoneware pots were entering the Crafts Council's permanent collections (acknowledged formally as part of the nation's ceramic history), Hinchcliffe and Barber were building

enthusiastically on the success of their first blue and white earthenwares. The entire product of the partnership was to be in earthenware, although Hinchcliffe was to use stoneware for his first non-figurative pots in 1998.

The combination of factors which made the early work successful - bold, fresh designs allied to uncomplicated and generously-sized forms - remained constant during the second studio period. Work from this Dorset studio confirmed their national reputation, and gave rise to individually hand-decorated studio ware and highly competent commercial ware. Behind the success lay a dependence on Hinchcliffe's drawing and stencilling skills (his ceramic designs almost always begin as works on paper) and Barber's aesthetic judgement as well as her incisive marketing and business acumen. During this formative period both makers kept true to their own creative ideas. They did not allow other influences to affect their own design vocabulary. This was less a matter of introspection than of self belief. A small set of designs was judged to be within the creative capacities of a small team of potters. The work was not derivative for the market's sake; it was intended to lead the market for domestic pottery out of a rut, and offer a bold, fresh alternative based on colour and the appearance of surface texture.

During this period, the shapes of the pots were dictated by function. There were no superfluous items in the ranges and no embellishments, only robust simplicity of form. Dinner plates and platters were seen as a canvas for a painting, but never self-consciously so. Very careful attention was given to the feel and weight of each pot. Mugs and cups and saucers were generous in size, but easy to handle. Jugs poured properly. Plates were designed in well-matched and generous sizes. The pots were resiliently made with tough, well-fitting glazes. The domestic ware was strong without feeling industrial, and only the very early studio ceramics had something of a tendency to chip (an occupational hazard with maiolica).

The early success of the studio enabled Hinchcliffe and Barber to resolve the increasing demand for stock without losing authority over the standard and presentation of the designs. They resisted the temptation to take on increasing numbers of staff³³ to do more hand-painting, keeping a small nucleus of assistants and increasing output through a direct collaboration with industry. The key development of the period was adopting an industrial manufacturer as a partner to the small, creative, studio. Hinchcliffe and Barber remained as self-employed designer-makers yet met the challenge to expand and increase the range, and increase the quantity of work to commercially-sized editions, designing ranges which were made under licence by a factory to their specification. Control, however, also meant that the makers took a heavy financial risk on themselves.

At the same time, the partnership retained control over the manufacture and marketing of the ceramic range, sold under the joint names of Hinchcliffe and Barber and the manufacturer. This innovative solution enabled the studio to retain its creative role as the design-house and the research and development studio, generating the concepts and the ideas separately from commercial pressures. The model guaranteed both editorial independence and editorial control over the processes of design, manufacture and, to a degree, distribution: the ethics of work that have driven Hinchcliffe in particular.

The demands placed on the studio through this relationship with a larger commercial manufacturer changed, albeit subtly, the nature of the creative work. The partnership remained grounded in the need to create original ideas, fit for purpose and reflecting the brand, but the work required new attention in monitoring the standards of the chosen manufacturer. Hinchcliffe was called on to advise on the best markets and outlets, as well as to ensure that the product adequately reflected the Hinchcliffe and Barber 'look'. The

benefits to the makers lay in the protection of their work as designers at the creative edge, and the removal of the extraordinarily time-consuming work in wholesale distribution, production and large scale marketing. The studio was able to direct its resources, necessarily small-scale, to the generation of new designs and limited studio production. This resolution also left the partnership with a new challenge. The small company had to design without the complete experimental freedom for which they had stayed small. Hinchcliffe and Barber had to negotiate their own ideas in the knowledge that a bigger company might press for a safer commercial product. Their skill lay in identifying companies which would respect their artistic integrity, and allow them to maintain their 'house style' as well as develop the bigger company's support of it within their portfolio.

In the commentary on the exhibition *A contemporary tradition* at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum in 1991 Hinchcliffe observed that the strength of the studio in collaboration with industry was its ability to get work out to a large market. The resources of a small rural studio producing highly-priced one off work could not gain access to these international markets with the same facility. He argued that the full range of resources within the marketplace had to be used without compromise. Hinchcliffe compared the ceramic studio with the textile studio: 'certainly within the fashion industry there had always been an essential element that interested us, whereby the one-off designer couture collection, properly managed, influenced or directed a far larger manufactured 'off-the-peg' garment industry'. He went on to say:

'Techniques, styles of printing, innovation and design are lost in the need to speed production and be competitive. Middle-class management style has become synonymous with no-risk, no problems, company car, don't rock the boat attitudes. Even the suffering art schools are being asked to justify

creativity and innovation by producing a computer-aided, business trained designer generation for what amounts anyway to a sterile industry.

The reverse should be happening, and to some extent it is: research and design ability nurtured, innovation encouraged and factories left to manufacture.

The period of innovative, family-owned small producers is over. Design groups and companies like Next set the trend and factories produce their designs. Now, more than at any other time, art schools and art organisations should be encouraged'.³⁴

Hinchcliffe and Barber put this philosophy of work into action with the Sixpenny Handley studio. The close proximity of the studio to Poole in Dorset made the partners approach the Poole Pottery headquarters. The Poole Pottery had a sound reputation for its hand-painted domestic wares, especially its tiles. The long interest of the pottery in 'artistic' wares and its range of architectural and decorative ceramics also influenced this decision. It had the right company resources and the in house expertise of designers and studio artists to collaborate successfully with Hinchcliffe and Barber. Hinchcliffe and Barber at first asked the Poole Pottery to make the biscuit ware³⁵ for their existing studio wares. Hinchcliffe was invited to decorate pots at Poole, and, in order to speed up production, these pieces were placed in the Poole kilns. Trevor Wright, the Managing Director, then asked the partners to develop designs simultaneously for Poole's own shapes. These collaborative designs included dolphins (Poole's mark), and the title **Poole Blue**³⁶ was used for this ware, taken from 'Blue Pool', the name of the china quarry originally used to supply the Pottery.

Trevor Wright remarked that 'though the factory has worked with artists and craftsmen in the past, this is the first time that we have been approached by the designers to produce their range'. Hinchcliffe was frank about the caution on both sides about this sort of deal. By 1985 he noted that 'we had reached

a point where we either needed to expand or delegate. The first solution was to delegate the slip-casting, and I remember approaching a very reticent Poole Pottery. Our answer was to license our designs, firstly the shapes then the patterns to potteries to produce for us rather than the other way around. This meant that we, as designer-craftsmen, were free to develop and research new ideas...the blocks, cases and moulds and the artwork for the transfers are owned outright by us'.³⁷

The commercial range produced by Poole included six entirely new lines, mainly in blue and white but also in a green glaze. They were marked with both Poole Pottery and Hinchcliffe and Barber marks. Some rare pieces from this venture were decorated by Hinchcliffe himself at the Poole studios and marked with his signature and a Poole mark. There was a steep learning curve for everyone involved in the project. The Poole studio decorators had some initial difficulties in getting the designs to an agreed standard, particularly the plates with bold stencilled flowers on a blue sponged background (a continuation of the vine leaf pattern first seen in the Salisbury Arts Centre exhibition). There was a high wastage of hand-decorated work, which led to anxieties in the project. Some workshop artists responded very creatively to the challenge of hand decoration, but the quality was not always consistent.

However there was some very good work from the Poole partnership. Leslie Hayward, the Poole Pottery historian, remarked that the Hinchcliffe and Barber range 'became the foundation for a whole new tableware style based on broad, naturalistic patterns applied to the pottery by both traditional and new techniques'.³⁸ Dolphins and flying fish career across blue sponged plates, and a series of beautiful terracotta sponge-stencilled large shrimps appear on large platters. The classically simple **Blue rim** design (a hand painted deep cobalt blue rim on a plain white earthenware plate, jug and mug) was also

a successful line. Hinchcliffe and Barber worked with the Poole Pottery on one other project, which resulted in a very small trial production of wares designed in 1989 but never made commercially. The *Atrium* range is atypical. It was commissioned from the furniture designers G Plan who were seeking to create a range of signature ceramics to embellish new black wood and chrome furniture. The pots had a plain angular style new to Hinchcliffe's work. The matt colour used for the *Atrium* pots (turquoise green and terracotta-red) were related to the first monochrome green Poole ceramics. They were typically 1980s 'designer ceramics', professionally and clinically produced, but without the warmth and sociability of the customary work.

The studio ware at Sixpenny Handley reached a high standard. This was a prolific and confident period for the makers. Ideas matured as they developed on the ware itself, and the small team of talented assistants kept a close eye on standards. The work characteristically had a sponged background, with a lively palette of colours: reds, yellows, greens and grey black predominate. Animal, fish and bird imagery was used, with studio assistants as well as Hinchcliffe and Barber all contributing. The vine leaf pattern achieved notable success, a more subtle and restrained motif than the ever popular *Hypericum*. A tulip design around a deep blue 'speckled-sponge' border and bowl made an appearance. The *Steeplechase* pattern was introduced, with confident riders and horses galloping across the plates, alluding both to the studio's rural location and the tradition of early 19th century engravings. All of this imagery was uncomplicated and used naturalistic motifs in a way that celebrated the spontaneity of hand painting.

These ceramics looked good in the 1980s urban kitchen (whether in Islington or Shaftesbury) where either the French provincial, scrubbed-pine look prevailed, or that fostered by smaller, design-conscious specialist manufacturers featuring the extensive use of expensive woods. The partnership marketed the

studio's work to emphasise the look that managed to be both sophisticated and unpretentious. To complete the rural idyll image (as seen by urban readers in numerous interior design magazines) the vases were filled exuberantly with fresh, country flowers to complement the poised wooden furniture and the terracotta or flagstone floors. These magazines constantly used the studio's designs to create the desirable 'country-kitchen' effect for metropolitans dreaming of their weekend retreat to the country. The Hinchcliffe and Barber look enlivened the iroko worktops and double butler sinks of the 1980s middle class kitchen. Hinchcliffe was to say that 'our designs move easily from the kitchen to the dining room and we try to produce something that would blend in with antiques. The look we like is a blend of old and new'.³⁹

A second commercial partnership was developed in this period with the Honiton Pottery, Devon, which needed a biscuit ware provider for their studio ranges. The production of some of the pots developed at Poole was transferred to Honiton in 1987, though the Honiton Pottery did not, initially, market the studio ware. The concept was to produce sufficiently large quantities of a 'designer range' to complement the more highly decorated studio wares. At this time, too, the makers explored the idea of producing kitchen furniture specifically to complement their ceramics. They designed dressers in a traditional style but given a modern edge by a finish of soft colour washes. Stools, chairs and tables were added. The simple pine furniture foreshadowed a vogue in the period for Shaker style furniture with its emphasis on quality of wood and honest simplicity of design, perfectly fit for function. The furniture was made by Clive Frampton at a workshop in Sixpenny Handley next to their own studio.

An important indicator of the national recognition of the studio's work (and its commercial derivatives) was announced in 1987-88 when the company

Next contracted Hinchcliffe and Barber to design and supply ceramics for the very first, and groundbreaking *Next Directory*.⁴⁰ The first commercial range with the Poole Pottery was shown internationally at the Frankfurt Trade Fair in 1987. It was presented in the UK in the same year at the Chelsea Crafts Fair. Here it came to the attention of executive staff from Next which gave rise to important developments. George Davis, who founded the retail chain Next in 1982, had been insistent that artists were involved in Next's first ranges. Hinchcliffe and Barber's work for Next included the *Blue rim* design first seen at Poole, a hand-decorated *Daisy* design and the ever popular blue spongeware here called *Speckle*.⁴¹ Next also commissioned a very early tulip design, although it was not made in large numbers. The partners supervised the modelling, trained the assistants and saw the products through to their launch. The pots were made in Stoke-on-Trent. The philosophy of Next was to bring good individual designs across a wide spectrum of items for the home. In this arrangement, Hinchcliffe and Barber received full credit as the designers. The licence that they granted to Next fully realised their ambition to work creatively with a company which shared their own passion for good domestic design in tableware, and had the financial resources to bring the work to the widest marketplace, through stores and mail order sales. The association with Next added cachet to the partnership's achievements, and enabled them to concentrate on the production of innovative studio work, conscious that the main supply was being handled efficiently by others.

These studio/factory partnerships reached a climax with a new arrangement with the Staffordshire-based company Saville Pottery from 1989 onwards. Hinchcliffe and Barber's experiences with the Poole and Honiton potteries taught them to refrain from work requiring onerous monitoring of hand-painted pots in the factory; and to be wary of the largest ceramic producers. Saville also appealed to them because it was a small pottery without a strong

visual identity, driven by a very purposeful Director (Gordon Saville) and a committed workforce. This partnership led quickly to the production of new ranges of ceramics (often based on ideas 'triallyed' in the studio), complemented by independently produced textiles.

The fabrics for the kitchen accessories, tablecloths and bags to complement the Saville Pottery wares were licensed to Sari Designs in 1989 and were highly successful. The concept of integrating designs on tablecloths, tiles and domestic pots (as well as prints) was a feature of the partnership's thinking from the very first days. The work across the ceramic range was delivered by stencilled designs, taking the original hand-painted design as its source, with sponged elements. Designs included *Pansy* and *Tulip* where individual flowers in soft pastel shades are crisply placed on white earthenware forms, and the rims treated with a sponged blue border. The *Pansy* range was developed in the studio and was marketed first as an exclusive jug offer for *Homes and Gardens* in 1990 for three months prior to general distribution by the Saville Pottery. This idea was also used, such was the success of the *Homes and Gardens* launch, in May and June 1991 with the exclusive offer of a breakfast set incorporating a posy design.

Also as part of this collection were a series of plates which were decorated with fish, reflecting Hinchcliffe's abiding interest in the natural world, and an empathy with landscape and seascape alike. They retain, in the Saville Pottery production, the vitality of the original hand-painted work. Lively transfer-printed mackerel, in little shoals, shoot across the whole range, from teapots to bowls and jugs. The fish design also appears on platters with sponged and flower backgrounds, looking uncannily like Hinchcliffe's original drawings, and reflecting the success of his first studio wares. A particularly popular series, *Dorset Delft*, revealed a range of animals (hares, cows and pigs) in

repeat stencil patterns around the borders of platters, mugs and jugs. Strategic marketing was used to raise awareness of these ceramics. *Dorset Delft*, for example, started life as a hand-decorated series specifically produced for the Bath and West show, making its first commercial outing as a limited edition offer in *Country Living* magazine in 1988.

Tile panels were part of the partners' first studio output, and were freely painted, using naturalistic imagery. They were produced to commission and for specific locations. These first panels featured fish, cockerels, small finches and long stemmed flowers. They expressed the confident handling of original designs that worked both as a single image on one tile, and across the panel as a repeat image. These were developed by the Sixpenny Handley studio and painted by the studio decorators. *Animal Delft* (which was to become the popular *Dorset Delft* range for Saville) was consistently popular as were the *Hypericum* and *Humming Bird* patterns. *Animal Delft* was inspired by classic Dutch 18th century tile panels in tin glazed earthenware, and used sparse and uncomplicated designs in a strong cobalt blue. The *Farmyard* and *Ducks and Fish* studio tile patterns were extrovertly painted with a rich sponged background. The development of a new range of 'system tiles' for the Saville pottery also demonstrates the successful transposition of the hand-painted image through to the commercial version. The Saville Pottery 'system tiles' were launched in 1991, in a range of seventeen individual tile designs and two complete tile panels. *Tulip* and *Dorset Delft* remained proven bestsellers.

Public recognition of the ceramic work was to come in 1991. A major exhibition was held at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth. The relationship with the Russell-Cotes was to prove an enduring one, facilitated by the museum's then Director, Simon Olding. In 1990 he had commissioned Hinchcliffe and Barber to make a large decorative tile panel to commemorate

the opening of a new museum extension by the Mayor of Bournemouth and the then Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce MP. The panel showed a dynamic arrangement of stencilled and hand-painted fish, alluding to the museum's seaside location, as well as the long tradition of public tile panels championed by the nearby Poole Pottery.

The 1991 exhibition for the Russell-Cotes presented two new studio ranges that were later developed into commercially-produced wares. A highly-coloured series of plates with birds were shown, painted by Hinchcliffe, and amongst his best ceramic work. Tropical finches, parrots and toucans were executed with compelling rhythm, surrounded by vibrant yellow and green borders. These were plates made for show, unusually, and not primarily for use. A range of black and white tablewares was also introduced. African animals such as zebras, giraffes and antelopes, as well as a swan and dolphin, were crisply painted in a deep grey-black with a hatched border. The drawings vividly expressed movement. They owe something, perhaps, to Hinchcliffe's interest in the Omega Workshops, and in particular marquetry furniture by both Duncan Grant and Roger Fry, which showed stylised patterns of African animals.⁴²

A rare series of plates showed, for the first time, nude female figures, with a pre-Raphaelite abundance of hair sketched in dramatic, simple strokes of grey-black glaze. Hinchcliffe used the exhibition to demonstrate his skill as a painter as well as a ceramic designer. The new ranges for the Russell-Cotes exhibition recalled their early enthusiasm for studio production and the production of hand-painted limited editions. The freedom and painterly effectiveness of these works contrasted with the demands of the studio, where there was an increasing emphasis on monitoring standards. Perhaps Hinchcliffe and Barber wanted to find a way of recapturing freedom and creativity. They were to seek this freedom by setting up a third studio, and transferring their home and workshop to France.

The exhibition *A contemporary tradition* at the Russell-Cotes reviewed a decade's work at an important point in Hinchcliffe's and Barber's careers, just at the point when they were preparing to take up permanent residence in France. The exhibition had a retrospective element, celebrating the imaginative experiment of creating a 'craft studio', producing, licensing and designing work for industry. It was also a staging point. The new grey-black pots stood out decisively and crisply amongst the richly coloured tableware with which they had made - to use Hinchcliffe's favoured adjective - such a formidable reputation.

³¹ Peter Dormer, 'Ceramics', in *Crafts Council Collection 1972-1985* (Crafts Council, 1985), p. 22.

³² See Joanna Laidlaw, 'Breaking the mould', *Homes and Gardens* (May 1990), pp. 96-101 for an illustrated account of Bryanston. Bryanston was used as the centre for the business administration, as well as providing studio space.

³³ At the busiest period, there were three decorators and two support staff.

³⁴ Exhibition panel in *A contemporary tradition: pots, textiles and prints by Hinchcliffe and Barber*, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, 27 April to 25 May 1991.

³⁵ Biscuit is the term given to fired, but unglazed pottery, ready for decorating and a second firing.

³⁶ *Poole Blue* wares were made on Poole shapes, with designs by Hinchcliffe and Barber, decorated by Poole decorators under Hinchcliffe's direction. Wares marked with an incised 'H/B' were made on Poole shapes and decorated by Hinchcliffe and Barber in the Poole studio or their own studio and usually signed in addition 'John Hinchcliffe' or 'H/B'.

³⁷ Simon Olding, 'Finding new directions', *Ceramic Review* 182 (March/April 2000), pp.20-23.

³⁸ Leslie Hayward, *Poole Pottery* (Richard Dennis, 1995), p.178.

³⁹ From an interview in the *Weekend Telegraph*, 20 February 1988.

⁴⁰ See Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University press, 1995), p.416. 'In 1985 the chain store Next Interiors under the artistic direction of Tricia Guild reproduced a range of ceramics by Janice Tchalenko and Carol McNicholl. Although Next offered £50,000 of orders most Stoke-on-Trent factories saw this as too small to change working practices'.

⁴¹ The Hinchcliffe and Barber ranges - *Daisy*, *Blue rim* and *Speckle* were shown in the first *Next Directory* (1988) pp. 320-321, and again in volumes 2 (Autumn/Winter 1988) and 3 (Summer 1989).

⁴² See Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (Secker & Warburg, 1983), plates vi and vii.

The third studio, Normandy 1991 to 1996

John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber's move to France put pressure on them. They were trying to balance the demands of finding a new creative voice, fitting for a new country, as well as to keep the business operation based in Staffordshire on track, in an increasingly difficult trading situation. Hinchcliffe strongly felt that gearing work obsessively for the market was ultimately destructive of the creative expression and risk that most motivated him. The move from rural Dorset to rural Northern France in the summer of 1991 indicated a desire for both change and continuity. They wanted a new creative impulse, as well as the time and space to rediscover values which had made the partnership and the studio so successful. They based their new home in a large group of 18th century farm buildings in the tiny Normandy village of Octeville l'Avenel. *La Ferme de Cabourg*⁴³ was built around a square courtyard. The tranquillity of the surrounding countryside, and the grave, simple beauty of the nearby beaches (only one mile away), made an ideal place for a new long term project.

This studio had some similarities with the Charlton Marshall studio, with the exception that space was no longer at a premium. The workshop was on the same site, but now in a completely separate building. The move from England was a symbolic break as well as a physical one. It represented for both makers a return to a period of reflection, privacy and the primacy of original creative work. Hinchcliffe wanted to become more closely engaged with making and designing, and less engaged with overseeing. He wanted time and space to think through new directions of practice, and to use his remarkable skills as a designer of gardens, meadows and orchards to nourish his thinking as a practitioner.

The French period also saw the Hinchcliffe and Barber brand struggling to position itself within the larger ceramic marketplace. The difficulties of selling and producing ceramic work in England, undercut by international markets, especially in China, heralded the end for the Saville Pottery, although both makers still had to expend considerable effort back in England to ensure that the licensing agreements were being delivered. Hinchcliffe and Barber both felt that the long toll of gearing work obsessively for the demands of the market (seven years since the first association with the Poole Pottery), had meant putting creative expression at some risk.

The first plan in France was to market studio work locally and regionally, as well as to consolidate new designs for the Saville Pottery. A dedicated gallery (*Le Pressoir*) for the sale of the full Hinchcliffe and Barber range was opened with commercial success at *La Ferme de Cabourg* in the summer of 1992. It built on the achievements of sales in a local fair held at Valognes, the nearest town. This craft gallery, complete with the original cider press, had a romantic atmosphere, with home-grown herbs and flowers scenting the airy barn, and photogenic kitchen dressers full of colourful pots surrounding the walls. The French-designed work for the Saville Pottery showed no early changes of style. *Devon Farm* revealed a perky cockerel (Hinchcliffe was to produce fine painted plates with this typically French motif) and a well-fed cow against a deep blue sponged border. *White Flower* marked the industrial application of the very first flower plates from the Charlton Marshall studio. *Carousel* had a paler design of ducks and cockerels. This range was commissioned by the retailers Boots to complement the traditional Cornish Blue ceramic range on sale in their home ware stores.

The most popular design for the Saville Pottery, *Dorset Delft* reached new markets in the UK by advertisements in catalogues of varied goods by sources

such as the Natural History Museum, London (in the 1992-93 *Catalogue of the unusual*) and Kitchen Store, where the product was sold with the name *Country breakfast crockery*. Hinchcliffe and Barber were commissioned by Greenpeace to produce a domestic range which was sold through the Greenpeace catalogue in 1992. This *Marine* range, made by the Saville Pottery shows images derived from the Zoo range of studio work seen at the Russell-Cotes exhibition, though here in light turquoise rather than grey black. Dolphins, seagulls and whales are interspersed with fronds of seaweed. There is an almost cartoon-like crispness to the images, each fresh line depicting the animal or bird in a cheerful and efficient manner. The Hinchcliffe and Barber ranges were still sold through the General Trading Company stores in the UK and in American and Australian stores.

One of the most interesting collaborations at this time was with Wedgwood. Hinchcliffe and Barber were commissioned in 1994 to produce designs, delivered in a prototype series of finished plates and jugs, for a new range called *Bluebell and Campion*. This was something of a stylistic departure. One version showed the precisely drawn flowers in black outline across the plate, with a turquoise and green hand painted border. A second design was more overtly colourful (and characteristic), with naturalistic flower patterns running vertically, interspersed with cross-hatched wide turquoise borders. Despite extensive work, the range did not develop into commercial production, after a decision by Wedgwood's parent company. However the designs were used as a concept to feed through into later tableware designs produced by the Wedgwood Group.

Hinchcliffe has always put a good deal of store by the responsibility he feels to transfer craft skills to the widest possible audience. After long immersion in research, the application of a technique to ceramic or textile forms, and then the development of new work, there comes a period of dissemination.

In France, this took two forms. Hinchcliffe wanted first to make space and time for informal adult education at the French residence. He offered the first summer schools in 1992 (they went on to 1995) for both advanced and beginner groups seeking to develop their own ideas in surface decoration in ceramics and textiles. In this way he was perhaps mindful of the achievements of the famed Arundel summer schools with Ann Sutton. The courses focused on the exploration of surface decorations, with a good deal of drawing and painting onto unglazed pots and tiles, as well as onto cotton and silk fabrics for block printing, wax resist work and dyeing. Hinchcliffe and Barber took students through 'the process of evolving a pattern from sketches, drawings or just ideas'.⁴⁴

The second educational outcome was in the form of two instructional, strongly design-based books. Hinchcliffe and Barber co-authored *Ceramic style* and *Print style* published in the UK by Cassell.⁴⁵ These volumes explored in unfussy language a host of craft and art techniques enabling both first time and more advanced students alike to develop their own decorative ideas. They could fulfil creative ambitions in the areas of ceramics, textiles and printing on paper, the core areas of Hinchcliffe's craft practice. The key message of the books was that these methods could be developed by anyone with the inclination to do so. Craft is a democratic form of creative endeavour, without mystery, but with rich creative potential. The books heralded this positive statement, explaining methods that are 'practical, uncomplicated, inexpensive and versatile'. Craft was 'entirely original and tailored exactly to your requirements'.⁴⁶

The two books were carefully styled by the makers, giving art direction to their colleague the photographer George Wright.⁴⁷ All of the images were set up at *La Ferme de Cabourg*, and mix mostly new work with 'archive' material from their personal collection of 'Hinchcliffe and Barber' ceramics and textiles. In this way the two technical manuals can also be read as a

quasi-catalogue of Hinchcliffe's creative work from the 1990s. The books are more than a formal account of process, however. They are explanations, primers almost, of a way of working, a call for more individual thoughtfulness in design, and a reminder that craft skills, within everyone's reach at some level, still need nourishment and practice, a grounding of skills, and the organic development of both technique and artistry.

France gave Hinchcliffe what he needed in terms of creative thinking time. The abundant space of *La Ferme de Cabourg* also gave him the challenge - always readily accepted - of bringing large exterior spaces both into order, and into a natural creative shape. Hinchcliffe's gardening skills, based also on hard work and technique, led to the creation of a spectacular meadow as well as more formal rose borders. France consolidated Hinchcliffe's career-long interest in the imagery and inspiration that could be drawn from the uninhabited natural landscapes of the coast. The rural setting, with the Staffordshire potteries a long day's journey away (this both a blessing and a trial) fed his need for isolation and gave him the time and space to think with renewed creative intensity.

⁴³ *La Ferme de Cabourg* was described and illustrated in a number of magazines including: Jackie Cole, 'Norman conquest', *Country Homes and Interiors*, (September 1994), pp. 102-107; Agnes Waendendries, 'Bienvenue a la ferme du coq... anglais', *L'Ami des jardins et de la maison*, (822, January 1996), pp. 72-75.

⁴⁴ Information leaflet promoting the education courses.

⁴⁵ John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber, *Ceramic style: making and decorating patterned ceramic ware*, (Angus and Robertson, 1994); John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber, *Print style: hand-printed patterns for home decoration* (Cassell, 1995).

⁴⁶ *Print style*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ George Wright's professional photographs have appeared in a wide variety of national publications in the UK. He has a particular interest in art and both the built and natural heritage projects, realised for example in his photographs accompanying poems by James Crowden in the book about the Somerset Levels and the River Parrett *In time of flood* (Parrett Trail partnership, 1996). Wright lives in Dorset.

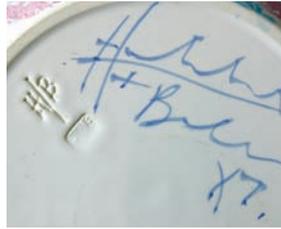
Hinchcliffe and Barber studio marks



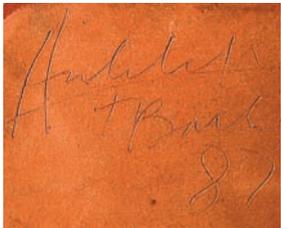
Early incised John Hinchcliffe signature, with date, on red earthenware



Hinchcliffe and Barber signature on Poole Blue



Hinchcliffe and Barber mark plus Poole Pottery's mark, in this case over signed by Hinchcliffe and Barber



Hinchcliffe and Barber incised mark, with date, on red earthenware



Hinchcliffe and Barber mark plus Poole Pottery's mark, in this case over signed by Hinchcliffe and Barber



Hinchcliffe and Barber Studio



Hinchcliffe and Barber Studio mark with decorator's mark



Hinchcliffe and Barber France; work produced in the Normandy studio



Hinchcliffe and Barber studio mark with sponged decoration



Hinchcliffe and Barber France; work produced in the Normandy studio

production marks



One of Hinchcliffe and Barber's marks for designs produced by Saville Pottery with date of design



Hinchcliffe and Barber's Dorset Delft mark with date of design; produced by Saville Pottery



Poole Blue mark incorporating Poole Pottery's Dolphin



Hinchcliffe and Barber incised mark together with Poole Pottery's mark



Hinchcliffe and Barber stamped mark redesigned to incorporate RC for 'Wave' tableware commissioned by Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum together with Dartington Pottery's own mark



Hinchcliffe and Barber mark for work produced by Honiton Pottery

Return to Dorset

Connegar Farm, 1996 to 2002

The Hinchcliffes⁴⁸ returned to Dorset in 1996. They set about consolidating their joint work, launching a Hinchcliffe and Barber website to promote the brand and build up sales.⁴⁹ They also held successful sales of work from the courtyard buildings adjacent to their Victorian farmhouse, near to the Blackmore Vale town of Sturminster Newton. Once again, Hinchcliffe found a peaceful location, next to rich farmland in terrain marked by ancient drove roads and farm tracks, with enough ground around the farm house to plant a small apple orchard, create bravura flower borders and to sustain a vegetable plot.⁵⁰

His studio was enhanced by the addition of a printing press, and he quickly developed a range of linocuts for sale (although he had been making linocuts for private uses for many years). This range was called the *Dorset decorative arts collection*. The work helped to re-establish firm roots back in the favoured county of Dorset, and also helped him identify a new creative direction. He spent time travelling, on the lookout for vernacular and formal images on buildings, churches and roadsides. Motifs were then transformed into bold linocuts capturing the essence of the chosen item. These were mainly selected from the built heritage, though the sense of the natural world is never far behind the crisp symbols of medieval church tiles or Saxon stone carvings. The series was an attempt 'to portray and raise awareness of Dorset's rich and varied heritage'⁵¹ in a manner akin to the great precedent set out in the 1930s by Paul Nash in his watercolours and photographs of Dorset for the Shell Guide.⁵² He liked the focus on 'the particularity of things, everything

from tin roofs to road signs'⁵³ This work came to the attention of the environmental charity Common Ground, and they commissioned Hinchcliffe to design a linocut showing the famous view of Gold Hill, Shaftesbury, which was successfully reproduced on a reusable organic cotton shopping bag.⁵⁴ Hinchcliffe also spent time painting, using flowers from his garden to create richly colourful still lifes.

Hinchcliffe and Barber also returned to work for the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum. This time they did not work independently, but as part of a wider team of craft practitioners, invited after a national selection process, to create a striking new identity for the museum café. This was a challenging brief, given the strong personalities involved, and the requirement to create a dynamic but also homogenous public room, with all of the considerations of a busy café. The project formed the creative element of a major refurbishment of the Russell-Cotes between 1997 and 2000, funded by a significant grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.⁵⁵

The team of makers were joined by museum staff as well as Stephen Levrant the conservation architect for the overall refurbishment scheme.⁵⁶ Four other makers contributed to the scheme: Matthew Burt (furniture); Natalie Woolf (floor tiles); Sasha Ward (glass ceiling); Miriam Troth (lighting and wall motifs). Wendy Barber made an imposing and popular three-part tapestry woven in linen and silk, with a naturalistic rendition of the coastline landscape at the nearby Hengistbury Head, Christchurch. Hinchcliffe designed and painted a substantial tile panel for the north retaining wall of the café. This marked a complete departure in his ceramic vocabulary: the first time that he had created, in public, an entirely abstract ceramic scheme. The vibrant pattern of convoluted seaweed-like shapes, interspersed with rainbow motifs, was held in a structured and balanced arrangement. But the overall effect

was one of dynamic pattern and bold colour. It is a piece that harked back to his very first rugs from the 1970s, in the emphasis on swathes of colour, and the attempt to give a rich surface texture to the tiles.

The makers also jointly produced a new ceramic range - *Wave* - for the Russell-Cotes café. Matt and highly-glazed stoneware mugs, jugs and plates were given simple, elegant forms, with an incised wave-like border below the rim, and colours reminiscent of sea-washed pebbles and flints. The work, unusually, relied on form rather than surface decoration for its appeal, and as such recalls the earlier commission by G Plan in the 1980s for a ceramic range that also had to fulfil an external brief. The range was produced in association with the Dart Pottery, Devon. Hinchcliffe's newly-found interest in ceramics with plain colour effects was also expressed by the production of some thirty massive conical stoneware vases made at Dartington, and covered with shiny grey or blue glazes reminiscent of a turbulent sky or sea. The shape was subsequently licensed in 1998 to the Poole Pottery. The *Conical vase* was first used as an exclusive shape for sale at John Lewis stores with the Poole *Gemstones* pattern, in four sizes.⁵⁷ At an exhibition in 1999 at the Dartington Cider Press, the stoneware vases and the *Wave* range were shown alongside some striking large plates freely painted with bold stripes of green, terracotta and black overlaid by angular black lines establishing a dynamic sense of movement.⁵⁸

Hinchcliffe also designed at Connegar Farm a new range of tiles for British Ceramic Tiles, based in Newton Abbot in Devon. His textile designs for a silk scarf collection brought him more creative pleasure. Song birds, flowers and leaves in a style close to his linocuts were printed onto silk crepe and sold under the 'Hinchcliffe and Barber' title. Hinchcliffe's abiding interest in the promotion of craft process by direct, personal means, led him to continue

with workshop and lecturing commitments at West Dean College, and closer to home at Yeovil College and also, as part of the Russell-Cotes project, with schools in Bournemouth. He also featured in a BBC television series *The arts and crafts show*, broadcast between November 1998 and January 1999, with four programmes on printing techniques.⁵⁹

⁴⁸ They had married in 1991.

⁴⁹ The website address was www.h-and-b.demon.co.uk. This URL is now defunct. At the time of writing, two new websites are being designed: www.johnhinchcliffe.co.uk and www.hinchcliffeandbarber.co.uk

⁵⁰ See Simon Olding, 'Sources of inspiration', *Crafts* 148 (September/October 1997), pp. 48-51.

⁵¹ John Hinchcliffe, text for the sales leaflet to promote the *Dorset decorative arts collection*.

⁵² Paul Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide* (Architectural Press 1936).

⁵³ Conversation with Hinchcliffe, December 2005.

⁵⁴ See www.england-in-particular.info/goods/g-case7-02.html

⁵⁵ For further information about the Russell-Cotes, see www.russell-cotes.bournemouth.gov.uk

⁵⁶ The Director of Heritage Architecture Limited.

⁵⁷ The *Conical vase* shape was also used by the Poole Pottery with *Galaxy* and *Seafire* patterns. The shape was discontinued in late 2003.

⁵⁸ One of these plates is illustrated on the front cover of *Ceramic Review* 182, (March/April, 2000).

⁵⁹ The programmes covered the subjects of resist printing with wax; silkscreen printing; potato printing and lino printing.

Higher Melcombe 2002 to the present

The Hinchcliffes moved to the rural hamlet of Higher Melcombe, near Dorchester in 2002, primarily to be close to Milton Abbey School. Hinchcliffe had decided to take up a permanent teaching appointment, and, for the first time in his career, became an employee rather than a freelance designer-maker. His job was to develop the school's fine art, print making, ceramics and textiles programme. Milton Abbey School had a track record in employing eminent practitioners, such as the potter Ian Godfrey who had previously worked in the art department. Hinchcliffe's role as Art Teacher for the school was important for practical reasons as well as creative ones. Financial security was one factor, but the post also gave him a sustained didactic voice, and it enabled him to put his long passion as an advocate for craft process into daily effect. Teaching has been integral to his career, and the Milton Abbey post is an extension of the desire to explain the crafts and motivate new efforts in craft process that has been at the core of his belief as a practitioner.

Hinchcliffe's creative work has flourished in these circumstances, especially after setting up his studio in the nearby village of Dewlish. He continued, for example, his association with the conservation work of Common Ground.⁶⁰ Along with other very well established British illustrators and artists such as Peter Blake, Anthony Gormley, Lucinda Rogers and David Nash, Hinchcliffe was selected to produce original art work for a new book *England in particular*.⁶¹ Hinchcliffe's linocuts for the book build on the portfolio and the approach taken in the earlier *Dorset decorative arts collection*, this time with more of a focus on Dorset natural history and vernacular building signs. Common Ground's research into, and championing of, local

distinctiveness in the rural environment, was close to Hinchcliffe's heart and his own values. He has a long-established track record in this territory as a practitioner and as a talented gardener. His respect for nurturing the landscape and using it as a creative source for his designs, fitted with the environmental values espoused by Common Ground, and there was mutual respect for the methodology and research that underpinned the linocuts. Hinchcliffe has always been motivated by the power of land and sea, and has drawn his imagery, whether in representational or abstract forms, from the natural environment, and, selectively (especially in linocuts) from the local built heritage.

The key focus of Hinchcliffe's creative work since 2003 has been in the research and development of his first solo museum exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham. The Crafts Study Centre's collections, housed from the 1970s to 2000 at the Holburne of Menstrie Museum in Bath,⁶² are well known to Hinchcliffe. He has researched textile items made by Ethel Mairet, as well as examples from her rich source collection held at the Centre. The major collection of textile samples and lengths by Barron and Larcher⁶³ have been of particular interest to him. His motivation for the exhibition has not been driven by these historic collections; it has a very contemporary concern. In keeping with his general philosophy that progress in a maker could only be measured by change, his approach has been to start from a blank sheet, to consider afresh his fascination for colour and texture, and to create new work.

The exhibition, unlike the 1991 show *A contemporary tradition* had no retrospective element. It revealed, through more experimental forms, his interests in manipulating material, and in creating complex colour surfaces and textures. He has always treated his materials experimentally. As early

as 1978, in his essay on colour for the *The Weavers Journal*, for example, he said that he was ‘using paper, raffia, cellophane, all kinds of materials - and all producing such different qualities’.⁶⁴ This investigative use of seemingly mundane materials was a keystone of the Crafts Study Centre exhibition. The works on show were formed from, for example, shredded and finely cut paper, felt, straw and plastic as well as, more conventionally, clay and cloth. The ceramics in the exhibition departed from his conventional hollow ware, too, taking a step further from the Matisse-like blocks of colour in his abstract tile panel for the Russell-Cotes. The new pieces combined twisted arrangements of brightly decorated strips of clay, with the clay laid on occasion into locally sourced wood. The use of all of these materials fitted the cause of the extravagantly coloured surface, giving it a dynamic character, and expressing his ‘delight in the intertwining of things’. Texture was exposed without finesse so that ‘the materials work for themselves’.⁶⁵

There is also a serious point about the process and place of the crafts within the methodology of his exhibition. The Crafts Study Centre itself is laden with the values of craft stemming from the work of established and highly celebrated makers, from the pioneer practitioners such as Bernard Leach and Ethel Mairet onwards. The conventional groupings of subjects within the collections (ceramics, textiles, lettering, and wood) have been scrupulously overseen by distinguished craft makers. It has sometimes been difficult to break out of the orthodoxy of this history. Hinchcliffe, who acknowledges this history, indeed respects and researches it, has also seen its limitations. The Centre’s home since 2000 has been at the front of the campus of a specialist University College.⁶⁶ This has meant that the Centre’s collections and exhibition programme must be relevant to a new academic and student audience, as well as the wider public. Hinchcliffe has identified this challenge at the Centre, and responded very directly. *Recent*

*work*⁶⁷ asserts that a craft exhibition in a craft museum need not espouse traditional craft techniques, nor its values or even its materials. Hinchcliffe was inspired by materials with and without a traditional craft history.

He also revelled in the chance to experiment, and to use the two-year period of research and development for the show to consolidate and stretch his new vocabulary for the exhibition. But he also wanted to treat the exhibition gallery holistically, in a reflection of his long practice as the designer-maker used to planning a ‘total’ look for a Hinchcliffe and Barber kitchen or bathroom. He created a coherent and integrated style for the exhibition.

The exhibition offered a more radical approach to content and style than he had ever achieved before. But in its love of colour and the joyous, freely-applied decoration of surface, the exhibition respected and reworked his earliest interests and decorative obsession. In this sense, *Recent work* ‘has some of the handwriting of my earlier work’.⁶⁸ Hinchcliffe has remarked that, as a designer-maker, ‘you have to move on. Dismissing what you have learnt is as important as selecting. The pieces that I have made for the Crafts Study Centre exhibition are of the moment. They can’t be made like Ethel Mairet’s textile lengths any more. Life is too risky’.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Common Ground is a ‘national environment charity with a special focus on playing a unique role in the arts and environmental fields’. See www.commonground.org.uk

⁶¹ Sue Clifford and Angela King, *England in particular: a celebration of the commonplace, the vernacular and the distinctive* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2006).

⁶² Now the Holburne Museum of Art.

⁶³ Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher were renowned for their hand-block printed textiles, using natural dyes, from the 1920s to 1940. They worked, from 1930 onwards, in Painswick.

⁶⁴ *The Weavers Journal*, 106, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Conversation with John Hinchcliffe, November 2005.

⁶⁶ University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester. The University College was created in 2005 out of the merger of The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College and the Kent Institute of Art & Design.

⁶⁷ *John Hinchcliffe: recent work* Crafts Study Centre, University College for the Creative Arts at Farnham, 7 March to 1 July 2006.

⁶⁸ Conversation with John Hinchcliffe, November 2005.

⁶⁹ Conversation with John Hinchcliffe, December 2005.

John Hinchcliffe: career summary

1949 Born in Chichester, West Sussex and spends childhood in Arundel

1967 West Sussex College of Art and Design, Worthing

1968 Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts

Meets fellow student Frances Newland

1970 Awarded travel scholarship to attend the weaving department at the Konstfachskolan, Stockholm, Sweden

1971 Royal College of Art, London

1973 Gains M.A. in woven textiles

Marries Frances and moves to South Stoke, near Arundel

Appointed visiting lecturer in printed and woven textiles at West Sussex College of Art - continuing until 1980

Appointed visiting lecturer in the woven textile department at Camberwell School of Art and Crafts

1974 Building Centre in Liverpool and the Design Centre, London - *Craftsmen and Commissions*

1975 Subject of BBC2 *Second House* documentary - *Two Contemporary Craftsmen*

1976 Exhibits at the British Crafts Centre, London and the Gardiner Centre, University of Sussex

1977 Lecture tour of USA funded by the American Craft Council and the National Endowment for the Arts

John Hinchcliffe and Angela Jeffs, *Rugs from rags* (Orbis Books, 1977)

Wins John Player *Telegraph Sunday Magazine* British Craft Award for textiles

- Whitworth Gallery, Manchester - *Crafts of the Seventies*
 Crafts Advisory Centre, London - *Masterpiece*
- 1978** Lecture tour of Australia funded by the Australian Crafts Council
 Exhibits in Frankfurt - *Contemporary German and British Crafts*
 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and Victoria & Albert Museum, London - *Objects*
- 1979** British Crafts Centre, London - *Star Quality*
 Teaches at Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers Summer School
 Meets Wendy Barber
- 1980** First Arundel summer school, with Ann Sutton
 Southern Arts Award
 City Arts Centre, Edinburgh - *Prescot in Edinburgh*
-
- 1981** Moves to Charlton Cottage, Charlton Marshall, Blandford Forum with Wendy Barber and her children, James, Polly, Rosie and Harriet
 Begins to research and develop ceramics
 Second Arundel summer school
 Exhibitions include the Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton - *Contemporary Craft*, Kettles Yard, Cambridge - *Textiles Today* and Knokke-Heist, Belgium - *British Ceramics and Textiles*
- 1982** First ceramic exhibition at the V&A craft shop - *John Hinchcliffe and Janice Tchalenko, Ceramics*
 First trip to India
 Receives major award from South West Arts
 Exhibits in the museum touring exhibition at Bristol - *Prophesy and Vision*
- 1983** Shows first majolica collection of platters at the Salisbury Arts Centre - *Hinchcliffe and Barber, Paintings, Ceramics and Textiles*
 Second trip to India
 Crafts Council - *A Closer Look at Rugs*
- 1984** Exhibits at the V&A shop - *The New Omega*, the Catherine House Gallery, Marlborough, and also with Wendy Barber (as Hinchcliffe and Barber) at the Bowen Gallery, Henley-on-Thames, Oxford Gallery, Oxford and the British Crafts Centre, London
 Exhibits in the Crafts Tent at the Edinburgh Festival and at the Chelsea Crafts Fair
- 1985** Develops relationship with Poole Pottery
 Starts teaching part time at West Dean College, West Sussex and appointed part-time teacher of textiles at Clayesmore School, Dorset
 Daughter, Georgia, born in December
- 1986-91** Sets up the Hinchcliffe and Barber Studio at Sixpenny Handley as a design studio for textiles and ceramics and for producing studioware, employing three decorators
 Designs ceramic tableware range, manufactured by James Kent Factory in Stoke-on-Trent, for Next stores and the first *Next Directory*
 Hinchcliffe and Barber issue Saville Pottery a license to produce Hinchcliffe and Barber's core commercial ranges in Stoke-on-Trent
 Honiton and Poole Potteries licensed to produce selected Hinchcliffe and Barber ceramic ranges
 Sari Fabrics and Blackstaff Textiles licensed to produce Hinchcliffe and Barber textiles
 Continues to show at Chelsea Craft Fair

Starts showing ceramics at trade fairs to include: the Birmingham and Frankfurt spring fairs; gift fairs in Harrogate and New York; **Creative Eye** in London and **Lifestyle** in Tokyo

Selected retailers who buy Hinchcliffe and Barber ranges include: London - Harvey Nichols, Harrods, General Trading Company, John Lewis Partnership; Tokyo - Isitan; Paris - Printemps; New York - Barneys, Lord and Taylor, Bloomingdales, Macy's; Australia - David Jones

1987 Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery - **Fish**

Exhibits indigo resist textiles at Smiths Art Gallery, Covent Garden, London and platters in the Welsh Arts Council touring exhibition

1998 Indigo resist textiles produced for Hinchcliffe and Barber in Malaysia

1991 Marries Wendy Barber

Hinchcliffe and Barber show at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum - **A contemporary tradition**

Move in August to Normandy, France and set up a studio, shop and gallery (Le Pressoir)

Continue to design tableware for production by Saville Pottery

1992 First summer schools at La Ferme de Cabourg

1993 Designs for the Wedgwood Group

1994 John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber, **Ceramic style: making and decorating patterned ceramic ware** (Angus and Robertson, 1994)

1995 John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber, **Print style: hand-printed patterns for home decoration** (Cassell, 1995)

Winter fair at Menton, France

1996 Moves back to Dorset

Lectures at various colleges

1998 A series of short instructional programmes on printed textiles for BBC2 - **The arts and crafts show**

1999 Dartington Cider Press - **Hinchcliffe and Barber, ceramics and textiles**

2000 Designs tile ranges for British Ceramic Tiles, Devon

2002 Teaching appointment at Milton Abbey School, Blandford Forum

2003 Moves studio to Dewlish

2006 Crafts Study Centre - **John Hinchcliffe: recent work**

John Hinchcliffe's work is held in the following public collections:

Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A)

Crafts Council

Southern Arts Association

Shipleigh Art Gallery

American Craft Council

Ulster Museum

Salisbury Museum

Portsmouth Museum

Romsey Abbey

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum



◀ **Woven hanging**

Dyed cut cloth;
Arundel Studio

photo: John Hinchcliffe

Hanging ▶

Dyed cut cloth woven
in strips and joined;
Arundel Studio

photo: John Hinchcliffe





◀ **Hanging**

Comprising two woven strips of cut dyed cotton cloth; Arundel Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe



Hanging ▶

Four woven strips of cut dyed cotton; Arundel Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe



◀ **Italian tulip**

Red earthenware platters with majolica decoration on John Hinchcliffe distinctive platter shape; Charlton Cottage Studio
photo: Dori Horlock

White flower ▶

Majolica decoration on red earthenware - an early example of this definitive John Hinchcliffe design; Charlton Cottage Studio
photo: Dori Horlock



◀ **Stoneware platter**

Decorated by John Hinchcliffe in collaboration with Janice Tchalenko, with John Hinchcliffe paper designs
photo: George Wright

A selection of sponged and splattered majolica mugs ▶

On Hinchcliffe and Barber slip cast mug shape; Charlton Cottage Studio
photo: Dori Horlock





◀ **Daffodil**

Hand blocked
indigo resist
cotton lawn,
one of a series
first shown at
Smiths Gallery,
Covent Garden;
Sixpenny
Handley Studio

photo:
George Wright

**Vineleaf ▶
with
spongeware
and blueware**

Sixpenny
Handley Studio

photo:
George Wright





◀ **Carousel**
Hinchcliffe
and Barber
production
tableware
produced by
Saville Pottery
photo:
George Wright

White ▶
**flower and
bird series**
Majolica.
The bird series
was first
shown at *A
contemporary
tradition* - the
Hinchcliffe and
Barber exhibition
at the Russell-
Cotes Art Gallery
and Museum;
Sixpenny
Handley Studio
photo:
George Wright





◀ **Selection of sponged
majolica platters**

Normandy Studio

photo: George Wright

**Kiln stacked with
Hinchcliffe and
Barber production
tableware** ▶

Saville Pottery, Stone,
Staffordshire





◀ **Fish platter**

Example of a large series of majolica fish platters; Sixpenny Handley Studio
photo: George Wright



Apple ▶

Example of fruit series; Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe



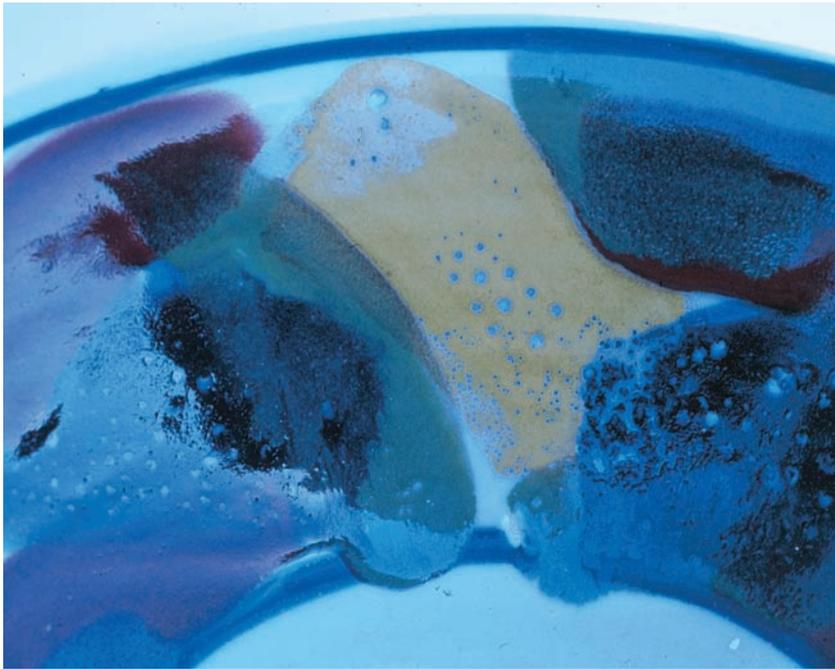
◀ **Lady plates**

Majolica; Sixpenny Handley Studio
photo: George Wright



Majolica platter ▶

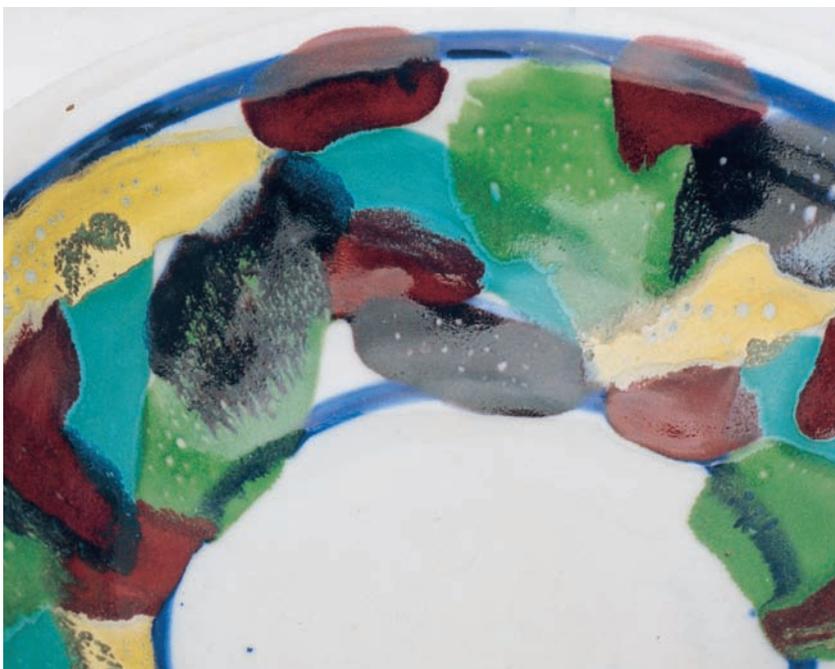
Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe



◀ **Stoneware platter**

Decorated at Dartington Pottery by John Hinchcliffe for Hinchcliffe and Barber exhibition at the Cider Press

photo: John Hinchcliffe



◀ **Stoneware bowl**

Decorated at Dartington Pottery by John Hinchcliffe for Hinchcliffe and Barber exhibition at the Cider Press

photo: John Hinchcliffe

Stoneware vase ▶

Designed and decorated at Dartington Pottery by John Hinchcliffe for Hinchcliffe and Barber exhibition at the Cider Press

photo: John Hinchcliffe







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Majolica tile panel

Commissioned by the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum - the photo also shows the woven tapestry by Wendy Barber

photo: David Westwood

◀ **Stoneware vase**

By Hinchcliffe and Barber - this example made by Dartington Pottery

photo: David Westwood

Wave ▶

Stoneware tableware range designed by Hinchcliffe and Barber and produced by Dartington Pottery for the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum Café

photo: David Westwood



Stoneware platter ▶

Decorated by John Hinchcliffe at Dartington Pottery

photo: John Hinchcliffe





◀ **Fish**

Lino blocked paper
(detail); Connegar Farm
Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe

Antelope ▶

Lino blocked and screen
printed fabric (detail);
Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe



Safari ▶

Lino blocked, wax resist
and dyed fabric (detail);
Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe





◀ **Wrasse**

Lino cut printed on card
- one of a series of lino
prints featuring fish;
Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe

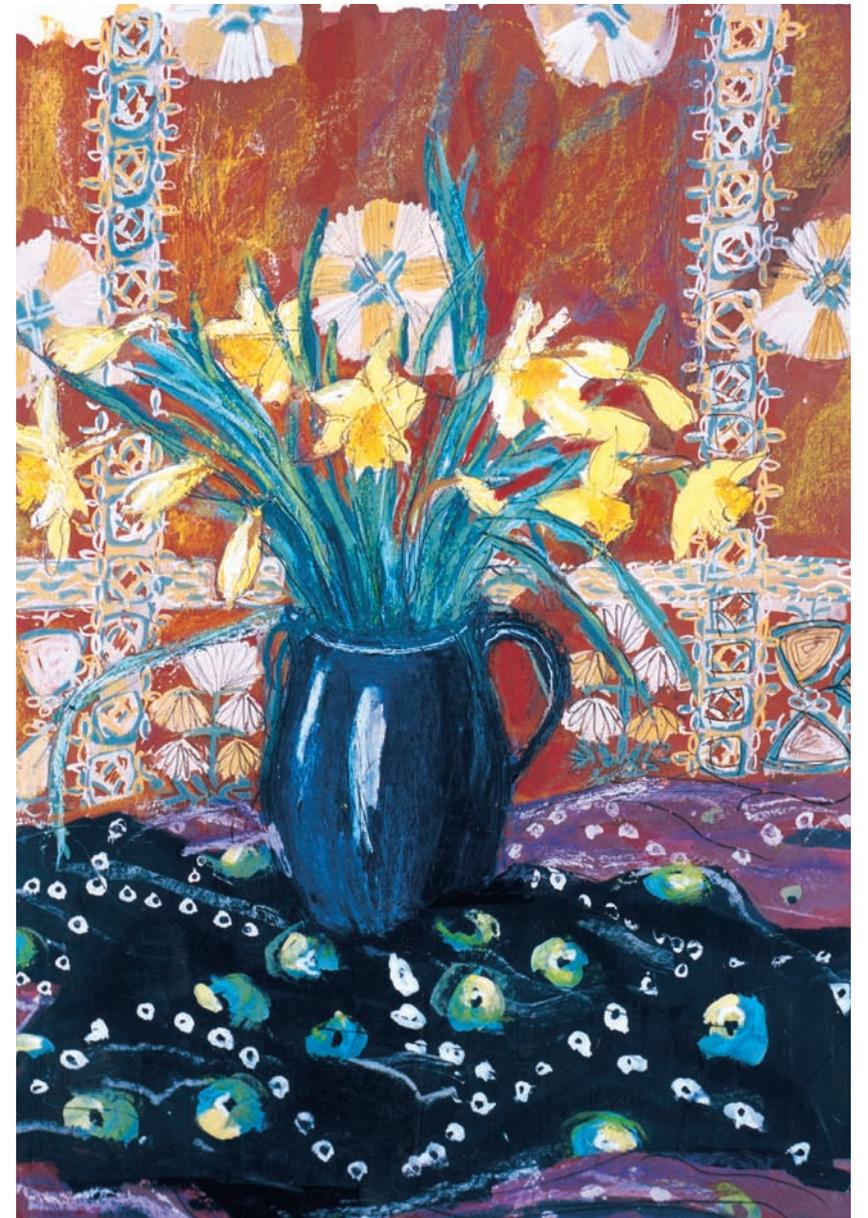


◀ **Lino block of roof boss
in Sherborne Abbey**

One of a series of lino
cuts featuring decorative
details in Dorset;
Connegar Farm studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe

Gouache ▶

With detail of Indian
embroidered fabric -
one of a series of flower
paintings featuring
Hinchcliffe and Barber jugs
and decorative textiles;
Connegar Farm Studio
photo: John Hinchcliffe







Previous page
Construction (detail)
 Underglaze and slip
 decorated earthenware;
 Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood

◀ **Relief Tile 10**
 Underglaze and slip
 decorated earthenware;
 Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood

Tile (detail) ▶
 Slip decorated
 earthenware;
 Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood



Construction 17 ▶
 Acrylic and canvas;
 Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood





◀ **Construction 3**

Handmade paper;
Dewlish Studio

photo: David Westwood

Arion ▶

Construction - acrylic,
cut paper and linen;
Dewlish Studio

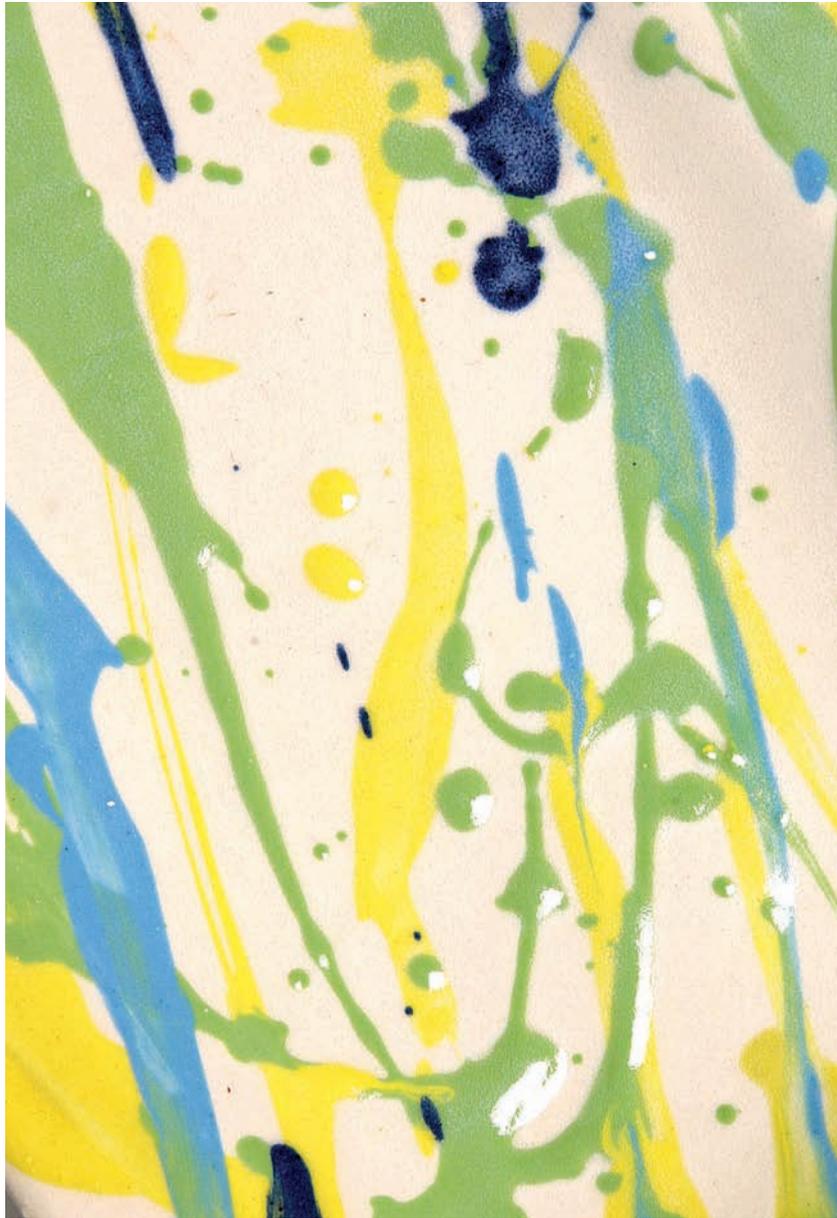
photo: John Hinchcliffe

Palladus ▶

Construction - acrylic
and linen; Dewlish Studio

photo: John Hinchcliffe





◀ **Tile 2 (detail)**
Slip decorated
earthenware;
Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood

Construction 5 (detail) ▶
White earthenware
with clear glaze;
Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood





◀ **Construction 8**

Underglaze and slip
decorated earthenware;
Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood



Construction 11 ▶

(detail)

Painted and shredded
paper; Dewlish Studio
photo: David Westwood

Acknowledgments

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John Hinchcliffe

Simon Olding

Published by Canterton Books in association
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The first monograph on the acclaimed designer-maker John Hinchcliffe is published to coincide with a major exhibition of his work at the Crafts Study Centre. Simon Olding (Director of the Centre) charts Hinchcliffe's work from the textiles of the 1970s, through to studio and commercial ceramics and the renowned Hinchcliffe and Barber partnership, ending with recent work, which explores Hinchcliffe's long interest in surface decoration and texture.

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