

Architecture: seven small structures at the V&A
Fashion: how Horrockses brought Paris to Preston
Photography: classic pictures from *New Society*
Ceramics: the weird wit of Richard Slee

magazine

Reuniting Raphael

The Vatican tapestries meet the
V&A cartoons 495 years on

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This September, after 495 years apart, Raphael's legendary tapestries for the Vatican will be reunited with the V&A "cartoons", the blueprints the Flanders weavers used to make them. Jan Dalley unpicks a tale involving three popes, two rival artists, a beheaded king, a puritan dictator and a small army of craftsmen-weavers

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Thirty years after they were taken, the photographs from the pages of *New Society* that feature in a new V&A display portray a vision of Britain which has now largely disappeared. Paul Barker, *New Society's* editor for eighteen years, recalls the magazine, while some of the photographers remember their pictures

Contributors

Paul Barker

Paul Barker was editor of *New Society* from 1968 to 1986. He is a writer and broadcaster, and a senior research fellow of the Young Foundation in east London. His collection, *Arts in Society* (new edition 2006), includes essays on photography by *New Society* writers John Berger and Angela Carter. His latest book is *The Freedoms of Suburbia* (2009)



Kate Finnigan

Kate Finnigan is the style editor of the *Sunday Telegraph's Stella* magazine. She has been a journalist for more than ten years, writing about fashion and entertainment for publications such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and *Elle*. She lives in London with her husband and daughter



Sarah Strickland

After graduating with a photography degree from the Arts Institute at Bournemouth, Sarah Strickland has worked within the arts publishing industry on a variety of media platforms and has now taken on the role of assistant editor of *V&A Magazine*



Horrockses style



Preston-à-porter

A new V&A book looks at how the vivid colours and adventurous patterns of Horrockses ready-to-wear collections appealed to a generation starved of fashion fun by wartime austerity. **Kate Finnigan** remembers Preston's answer to Christian Dior's New Look

Horrockses style

Previous pages (l to r): green-striped button-through dress in lightweight cotton; the fabric design also came in grey, yellow, mauve and pink colourways. The dress was illustrated in a Jenners catalogue of spring 1955, with a retail price of 4½ guineas. Christine Boydell. Photo: Nigel Essex. **Greta Hetherington bought this dress in Blackpool in 1954. The arrangement of floral designs in stripes was a particularly popular treatment for Horrockses cottons.** Harris Museum & Art Gallery. **Sundress and bolero printed with a design of plates of food.** Harris Museum & Art Gallery. Photo: Norwyn Ltd. **A typical Horrockses Fashions cotton dress worn by Mrs Elizabeth Payze as a teenager, 1953** © V&A Images



“A t sixteen, everything they made I wanted. I had a sundress and bolero in an Alistair Morton print and it was my proudest possession.” Like many young women of the 1940s and 1950s, designer Pat

Albeck recalls with great affection the gaily printed cotton dresses made by the British ready-to-wear label Horrockses Fashions. That she went on to be scooped up as a designer by the company while a student at the Royal College of Art, and so in turn created frocks which were squealed and sighed over by other young women, remains one of the most thrilling events of her career. “It was my dream job,” Albeck says, now aged 80. “Such a privilege.”

In May the V&A published *Horrockses Fashions: Off-the-Peg Style in the '40s and '50s*, a book by Dr Christine Boydell of De Montford University, who also curates an upcoming exhibition of the same name at the Fashion and Textile Museum in London. For those who came after the heyday of the label – dreamed up in the gloomy mills of the north west and worn by no lesser person than the Queen – the book and show will doubtless act as an introduction to the brand, which faded from popularity in the 1960s. But the memories of those women who wore it and the bold designs and colours of the dresses themselves – singing of an idealised femininity and a pre-Carnaby Street innocence – remain vivid.

“I remember a long dress when I was seventeen,” says Ruth Addison, who grew up in Lytham St Annes. “It was in



Horrockses Fashions

in Fine Cotton

Top: detail of Greta Hetherington's dress (see caption above). Right: advertisement for Horrockses Fashions in *Vogue*, June 1950. Facing page: illustration by “Robb” in *The Queen*, 2 March 1949



“That the brand ended up being worn by royalty, as well as thousands of ordinary teenagers and housewives, was no accident”

Horrockses style

autumn colours, strapless, with a gathered waist. I loved wearing it. It was the softness of the cotton – other cottons were so stiff. And it was the name. It was a bit of a social thing to have a Horrockses.”

From the off Horrockses Fashions was a sophisticated brand with big ambitions. That it ended up being worn by royalty, Margot Fonteyn and Vivien Leigh, as well as thousands of ordinary teenagers and housewives, was no accident. It was always intended to be a cut above.

Launched just after the end of the Second World War on 3 April 1946 by Horrockses, Crewdson & Co, a renowned Preston-based cotton manufacturer, the mass-market, ready-to-wear dress collection was created to show off its superior cotton – with high fashion values and what Boydell calls “a veneer of exclusivity”.

Ready-to-wear clothes fell into three categories at that time: model, medium quality and cheap. Horrockses was a combination of the first two. The fashion and styling of the dresses closely followed Paris and London couture. “They sent designers over to the Paris fashion shows, which, for that time, was a huge thing for a company from Preston to do and shows how serious they were,” says Boydell.

Although the parent company and factory were in Preston and Manchester, the establishment of a London headquarters in Hanover Square set the couture tone. This is

where the designers and showroom were based, where VIPs were fitted and where fashion shows were held. Pauline Altham, who joined the company aged sixteen in 1946 as an assistant and rose to run the sample room, remembers its grand entrance: “There was a wide, swerving staircase and weekly arrangements of flowers by Constance Spry. We had an ex-sergeant major on the door and we were saluted every day when we arrived at work. It was marvellous.”

The debut collection featured day dresses, beachwear and full-length housescoats. A contemporary advertisement declares Horrockses has “made clothes history by producing a cotton treated for permanent crispness”. It singles out a striped day dress for its “non-austerity unpressed pleats”, underlining the sense of luxury returning to garments after the war. When the following year Christian Dior introduced his New Look, with its crisp lines and voluminous skirts, it was clear that Horrockses’s timing was spot-on; the yardage in those skirts...

The vibrant patterns and colours of the fabrics set the frocks apart. Fabric designer Alistair Morton’s characteristic bright florals started a national trend. And the designs became more progressive when in 1948 the charismatic James Cleveland Belle took over as managing director. The former director of the Cotton Board’s Colour, Design and Style Centre in Manchester, it was he who sought young

Facing page: poplin shirtwaister, spring/summer 1956. The skirt is cut with a square peplum from which a full skirt falls in a host of unpressed pleats. Photo: John French © V&A Images. Below left: buyers being shown Horrockses Fashions products at 15 St George Street © V&A Images. Below: Alistair Morton fabric design, 1947. Christine Boydell



Horrockses style

talent such as Albeck from art colleges and brought in contemporary artists of the calibre of Graham Sutherland. “He never said, ‘We must do a flower print because that’s what the buyers want’,” recalls Albeck. “I was given such freedom. I went to a Venice market and did drawings of asparagus and they printed it.”

Clever distribution added to the “exclusive veneer” of a Horrockses frock. The company limited the number and type of retail outlets to boutiques and well-to-do department stores. Ruth Addison remembers: “When the dresses came into store, you were quite special if you got the call to ask if you’d like to see them.” The company also knew the value of celebrity endorsement. “Specials” were made up at Hanover Square in limited editions or as bespoke items for VIPs including Margot Fonteyn and Vivien Leigh. Pauline Altham recalls fitting Princess Olga: “She had a deep masculine voice and a slight accent, and as I pinned her the pin went through the slip and she said in this wonderful, sombre voice, ‘I seem to be attached’. Afterwards, that became a workroom catchphrase.”

The highest compliment was paid to Horrockses in 1953 when Elizabeth, the new Queen of England, wore several off-the-peg styles during her Commonwealth tour. “The phrase the democratisation of fashion is overused, but I believe that in this case it’s true,” says Boydell. “It was the

first time ever that people could buy something that the Queen of England had worn.”

Horrockses Fashions began to fade from the spotlight at the end of the 1950s. James Cleveland Belle left in 1958, followed by Pat Albeck. Production was switched to the Far East, and although the brand continued until the 1980s, its glory years were over. But when Albeck thinks of Horrockses, she recalls a conversation she had with Cleveland Belle over a design. “He said, ‘I’d like that bright.’ I asked how bright and he said, ‘Bright as you know how!’ It’s one of those things I always say to myself – bright as you know how!” There seems no better way to sum up the best of Horrockses Fashions than that.

Kate Finnigan is the style editor of the *Sunday Telegraph’s Stella* magazine. She has been a journalist for more than ten years, writing about fashion and entertainment for publications such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and *Elle*

‘Horrockses Fashions: Off-the-Peg Style in the ‘40s and ‘50s’, Fashion and Textile Museum, London SE1 (020 7407 8664, www.ftmlondon.org), 9 July-24 October. *Horrockses Fashions: Off-the-Peg Style in the ‘40s and ‘50s*, by Christine Boydell, is published by V&A Publishing, £24.99, with the V&A Shop offering a ten per cent discount for Members

Right: Horrockses summer dress photographed in *The Ambassador*, 1951. Far right: sketch (and photograph, inset) of an off-the-peg dress chosen by Queen Elizabeth II for her Commonwealth tour of 1953-1954, published in *The Ambassador* in 1954. She continued to wear Horrockses dresses for several years, choosing styles at the start of the season. The company refused to reveal her selections to retailers, who had to trust their instinct and keep their fingers crossed



Above: strapless cotton cocktail dress in a fabric designed by Eduardo Paolozzi, as shown in *The Ambassador*, 1953. Left: the print was based on a Paolozzi painting which featured in the ‘Painting into Textiles’ exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1953. Harris Museum & Art Gallery. Photo: Norwyn Ltd

A WIZARD WITH CLAY

You don't have to talk to Richard Slee, the ceramics artist, for long to realise that he's never much liked being told what to do, not by teachers, colleagues, or gallerists. Which is probably why he likes clay so very much. "It comes in a bag, it has no shape," he says at one point. "You do what you want with it." Though he doesn't say it, you can imagine he sometimes wished that the same applied to people too.

Slee is one of Britain's most slyly witty and stylistically wilful potters, though "potter" is a title that feels increasingly irrelevant as his career goes by. This summer a solo exhibition of his work – which through the years has moved from perverted ceramics archetypes to experiments with ready-mades to the re-creations of day-to-day tools and objects in exquisite porcelain that he is making today – comes to the V&A. In an (unintentional) celebration of his 30 years of practice, he has filled the five large vitrines that occupy the light-filled temporary exhibition space at the eastern end of the spectacular new Ceramics Galleries with new work in a show called 'From

His work is made of clay, but Richard Slee goes out of his way to shatter the cosy certainties of ceramic convention. As a display of his latest strange, witty and iconoclastic pieces opens in the V&A Ceramics Galleries, **Caroline Roux** gets to grips with "the wizard of studio pottery"

Portraits by
Edina van der Wyck

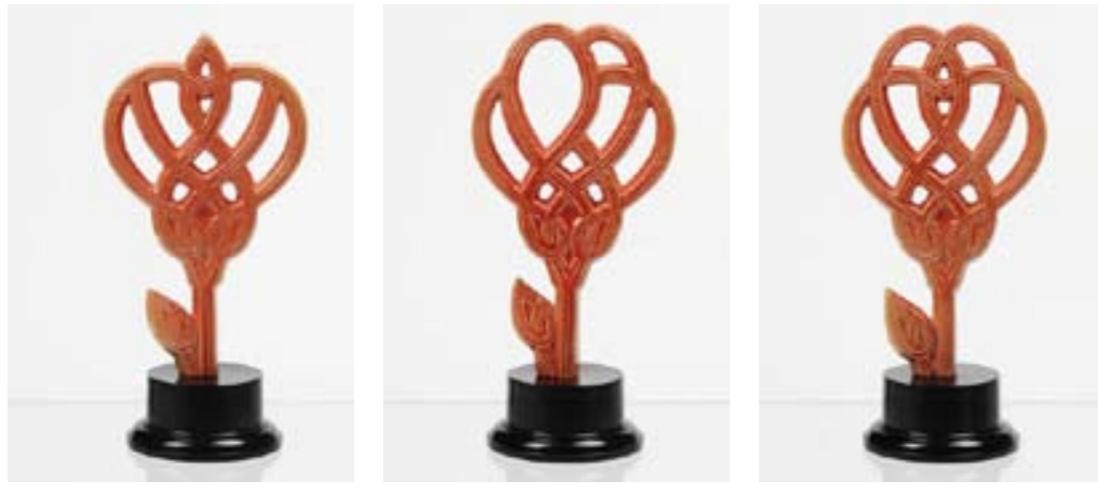
Utility to Futility'. Ceramic hammer heads, glossy black ceramic ropes suspended in a cloud formation and carpet beaters rendered in clay and presented like trophies have been amassed to confuse and entertain visitors, not least those who have come to the galleries expecting to see a profusion of pots.

As the show's curator, Amanda Fielding, says: "The timing is significant because Slee is now very consciously untying the strings that bind him to the specialised world of ceramics." Indeed, his first solo exhibition in a gallery associated primarily with fine art and which represents artists including Spencer Tunick and Bob and Roberta Smith (Hales Gallery in the art-centric area of Shoreditch, London) opened on the same day, 4 June. Previously Slee was represented by the applied art specialists Barrett Marsden in London.

If Slee is now swimming from what Grayson Perry has described as the lagoon of the craft world into the ocean of the art world, it's only ever been a matter of time. For however much he might love clay ("I distrust the ceramics fundamentalist, the pottery bore," he says as we walk through the V&A, "but I'm so loyal to this material"), it has always been a starting point for pieces which comment on the world



Previous page: Richard Slee with *Pickaxe*, 2009, in the V&A Ceramics Galleries. Right: *Carpet Beater*, 2009. Below: *Hammers (detail)*, 2009/2010. All images of works courtesy Hales Gallery and the artist



Left: *Sausage*, 2006 © V&A Images. Below left: *Piggy*, 2009, ceramic and latex party ears, 24cm high. Below: *Syphoned Modernism*, 2001 © V&A Images



around us, as well as the state of ceramics, rather than an end in itself. In work which seamlessly elides popular culture with ceramics history in one super shiny piece (his ability with glaze is peerless), Slee conjures a sort of magic, producing brightly coloured, almost cartoonish art that makes the viewer laugh first and question later. It's not for nothing the ceramics expert Oliver Watson calls him "the great wizard of studio pottery"; and it's worth noting that Slee liked the title so much, he's even made it part of his email address.

Richard Slee was born in Carlisle in 1946. At the end of his secondary modern education (there were just three pupils in the sixth form; one of them was Bea Campbell, the campaigning feminist journalist), he failed to get into architecture school and, horrified by his accountant father's offer to help him to find a job in a bank, went to art school instead. He started studying industrial design at the Central School in London, but sidestepped that after presenting a coffee table in the new brightly coloured Italian style. The tutors "went ballistic", and Slee ("disillusioned") quietly slipped into the ceramics class. There, alongside fellow students including Alison Britton and Andrew Lord (now among the UK's most acclaimed practitioners), the eighteenth-century Staffordshire tradition was dissected and absorbed; the colours of Sèvres were consumed and digested. These influences, the perfection and the colour, have been part of his work ever since. "In Sèvres," he says, "I saw a juxtaposition of colour in an abstract way – that was exciting for me." He also saw a perfectionism that has become synonymous with his own work, now so flawless, so inhumanly exact – take the lustre-glazed butcher's hook "S" from 2005, for example – it would appear to be slip cast or machine made. "I wanted to be a potter back then, making things for ordinary folk, but not ordinary things. That was my mistake."

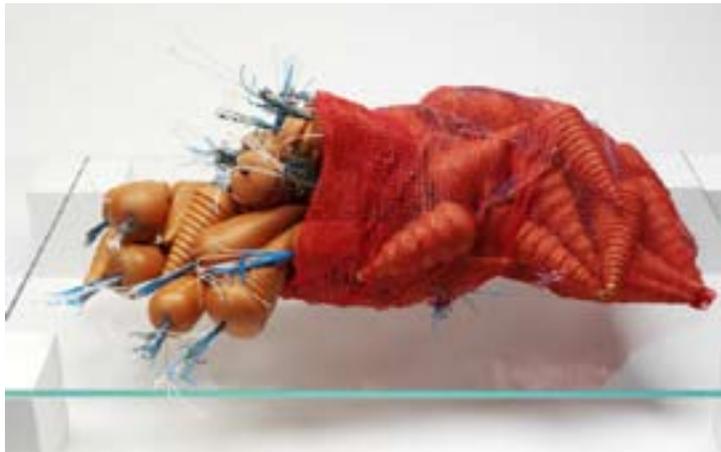
After years of getting by, doing shop fit-outs

with a company called the Electric Colour Company up and down the King's Road and murals based on Roman figures for the Golden Egg restaurant chain with Kate Weaver in Croydon ("absolutely dire!" he recalls), Slee set up his studio in Brighton in 1980. He played with the idea of pots, reducing them to their component parts and clumsily reassembling them. He looked back at the eighteenth century's love of creating mementoes from the natural world, and produced pieces that brought the past to the present, such as the baby blue 1980s *Conch Shell* in the V&A permanent collection, set on little feet that turn it into something you might expect to find in Alice's Wonderland. You can imagine it dancing on the table at the Mad Hatter's tea party.

He did a degree by project at the Royal College of Art in the mid-1980s and, though it was meant to be technical (to formulate a clay body), he took the opportunity to show his displeasure with the banality of contemporary ceramics decoration. "It was all spirals and stars then. I wanted to create a decorative system that was sophisticated and studio based." So he made a bean-shaped plate decorated with beans. "It was Pop Art, really," he says.

He has always played around with contemporary culture and a rather British kind of knockabout humour. In 1991 he made the ecstatically happy *Acid Toby* – a toby jug with a big yellow smiley face – and its moody counterpart *Drunk Punch*, neatly representing a wave of good-times pill-popping that was making Britain's pub-bound, alcohol-sodden culture look old and tired. In *Sausage* (2006, in the V&A permanent collection), a piece with the sort of production values that would make Jeff Koons proud, an oversized gleaming white sausage is lagged to a workbench with bungee ropes, suggesting the current state of the middle-aged British man – no longer good with his hands, but asserting his masculinity through the lunacy of extreme sport. (This is classic Slee: to use the laughable, almost grotesque,





Above: *Saws*, 2009/2010.
Left: *Carrots*, 2009/2010.
Below: *Pair of Hammers*, 2009/2010

phallic symbol of the over-stuffed sausage to make a valid social comment.)

Not one to bore himself, though, Slee has consciously bookended his career at several points. His obsessive referral to ceramics history was terminated with a piece called *Plough* in 2004. In *Wheelbarrow of the Medusa* (2001) he marks the end of his pieces using ready-mades (such as *Sell* from 1990, belonging to collector Edgar Harden, where a found ornament of a tiny French rococo table is placed in a rolling Martian landscape). “To stick things on was seen as a terrible crime [in ceramics],” says Grayson Perry in an interview recorded for the V&A about Slee’s work. “I think in many ways that might be where Richard has to be careful. It’s the sign of a ceramist looking out, trying to expand what ceramics is, rather than an artist coming from the outside, saying what is ceramics?” Harden, however, disagrees. “The more I see the work, the more I appreciate the irony and admire the interpretation of the found object.”

Wheelbarrow of the Medusa is a riff on Delacroix’s *Raft of the Medusa*: the barrow piled high with valueless kitsch ornaments, ready to be discarded forever, in the same heart-wrenching way Delacroix’s raft is crowded with those doomed by shipwreck. Slee attributes his move away from this format to his chronic fear of romanticism: “I keep thinking I’m too romantic. It’s a continual danger in ceramics, it’s so prevalent.” Added to that is a deep dislike of the self-referential. “Like all those jewellers who go into their family history in their work. If I hear one more thing about absence and loss, I’ll scream.” It would seem, then, that in his current work he is on safe ground. “Now when I use a found object, it is a tool and it has been bought. It has no romantic associations for anyone,” he declares, an enthusiast of both the tool merchant’s and, more recently, eBay.

‘From Utility to Futility’ is, in fact, a comment on the story of contemporary ceramics. *Hammers*, a vitrine piled full of 102

“THERE IS SO MUCH MYTH ABOUT THE VALUE OF PORCELAIN, WHEN ITS ONLY VALUE IS WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO IT”

hammers with exquisitely wrought ceramic heads, and *Saws*, a landscape of saws with variously rococo and cartoonish handles, speak of a world in which aesthetics has superseded usefulness. “Look at Lucie Rie, who went from making tableware to completely useless long thin bottles,” says Slee. To reinforce the point, in another vitrine you will find *Pickaxe*, with what Amanda Fielding calls “its ceramic head of joke wood”, and *Shovel, Rake, Dust*, where the dust has been aggrandised with the addition of diamanté and the shovel and rake dignified with gold lustre handles. “There is so much myth about the value of porcelain,” sighs Slee, “when its only value is what has been done to it.”

Now that he is so clearly untying those strings that have bound him to the world of applied arts and floating into the big art sea, where will he come to rest? His frames of reference – 1940s Disney animation, especially *Pinocchio*; the endlessly returning phallus, in the form of carrots, sausages, sprouting plants – bring him into the space occupied by his own favourite artist, the American Paul McCarthy, whose work is also dominated by sexual emblems and human mess. Slee’s brightly coloured and perfectionistic renderings of popular cultural subjects, with knowing allusions to art history, mean some see him as the pottery equivalent of arch postmodernist Jeff Koons. Or perhaps Slee simply stands alone: an artist who has chosen the unlikely medium of clay to work his own special magic.

Caroline Roux writes about design for the *Guardian*, the *Observer* and the *New York Times*

‘Richard Slee: From Utility to Futility’, V&A, London SW7 (020 7942 2000, www.vam.ac.uk), until 3 April. The Ceramics Study Galleries have been funded thanks to a substantial gift from The Curtain Foundation. The British Pottery Gallery has been funded by Sir Harry Djanogly. ‘Richard Slee’, Hales Gallery, London E1 (020 7033 1938, www.halesgallery.com), until 17 July



Right: Richard Slee in the Ceramics Galleries.
Below: *Dust*, 2009

