

Fine Art Meets Fine Dining

Molly Hatch merges design and fine art to create one-of-a-kind works in ceramics.

by Allison Malafronte

Molly Hatch has two identities as a ceramist. In the retail space, she is highly regarded for her whimsical decorative plates and dinnerware designed for such boho-chic trendsetters as Anthropologie. In the art world, she is equally respected for her one-of-a-kind “plate-painting” installations that have been exhibited at such major institutions as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the High Museum of Art, in Atlanta. A designer, painter and decorative artist, Hatch earned her B.F.A. at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, at Tufts, before receiving her M.F.A. in ceramics from the University of Colorado. She now works at her studio in Massachusetts, where she conceives limited-edition collections, collaborates with curators on museum



A CONTEMPORARY RECITATION

A detail from Hatch's 2014 *Recite* installation at the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City. For this project, the artist worked with the museum's textile curator in a collaborative exploration of their textile and wall-covering collections. Hatch decided on an 18th-century floral textile as the source imagery. She deconstructed the repeated pattern by highlighting select floral motifs on the surface of 200 hand-thrown, hand-painted porcelain plates.

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—MOLLY HATCH, FROM HER BOOK
A PASSION FOR CHINA: A LITTLE BOOK ABOUT THE OBJECTS WE EAT FROM, LIVE WITH AND LOVE



DINE IN STYLE

Hatch's *Heritage Collection*—a line of tableware and teaware designed exclusively for Twig New York—was inspired by teacups from 18th-century European factories. Seeing each piece as a blank slate, Hatch decorated not only visible surfaces but also the backs and bases of pots, plates and cups. “Imagine seeing the decoration on the base when having the last sip of tea, or the the illustrations on the back of the plates in a dish rack,” she says. “It’s traditional with a twist!”

installations and shares her creative approach through online workshops, college courses and instructional books.

Hatch's design process is built on the principles of form, function, surface and color. She considers herself a painter “who just happens to choose the surface of ceramics instead of canvas.” For her tableware designs, Hatch is not only thinking of the aesthetic aspects that the plates present but also the personal context in which they will be used and appreciated. In her book *A Passion for China: A Little Book About the Objects We Eat From, Live With and Love*, Hatch delves into the history behind treasured pieces of china and tableware while celebrating the role that ceramics plays in the everyday. “As we move through our daily lives, eating breakfast, sipping an afternoon cup of tea or gathering for a family dinner, the patterned ceramic objects we live with are precious witnesses to our stories,” she writes. “We eat from them, they warm our hands after a cold walk outdoors, and we pull them out to celebrate the births, marriages and lives of our loved ones.” Throughout the book, Hatch shares the stories behind beloved ceramics from her childhood and traces the provenance of several vintage pottery patterns to their origins.

THE CHINA BLUE COLLECTION

This whimsical place setting from Hatch's debut collection, *China Blue*, was designed in collaboration with Nashville-based company, Hester & Cook. The personality of the place setting perfectly captures Hatch's ability to bring art, design and functionality together to celebrate special occasions and everyday moments.





Continually intrigued by decorative art history, Hatch has also dedicated significant time to reimagining ceramics from the past with a contemporary point of view. “The skill and detail in decorative art history is always rich with ideas,” the artist says. “I love studying 18th-century European and Chinese export items, and I often see ways to make these objects from the past relevant in a new way through my work.” For her museum partnerships, Hatch works with a curator to identify a piece or collection from their decorative arts or fine art departments that she feels is worthy of fresh attention. She will then gather source imagery and information from that collection to create a new composition, the design of which she hand paints on a multiplate arrangement. The plates are then displayed as a finished work of art.

One of Hatch’s proudest and most ambitious achievements to date is her two-story,

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—MOLLY HATCH

 **A CONTEMPORARY DISPLAY OF HISTORY**

Molly Hatch stands in front of her 2015 plate-painting installation *Deconstructed Lace*. Hatch used the timeless patterns of the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Manufacturer as her inspiration for this piece, exploring the relationship between the historical and the contemporary by studying a traditional pattern.



 **BRINGING ART TO THE TABLE**

Hatch’s first major solo exhibition premiered within a year of her finishing graduate school. Titled *Mimesis* and held at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia, the show included this painterly collection of ceramics-as-fine-art cups. The illustrative display framing the collection adds to the artistry to the presentation.





A LITTLE PIECE OF LONDON

The full view of Hatch's *Physic Garden*, installed in the main lobby of the High Museum of Art in the spring of 2014, makes an impressive statement. Hatch took inspiration from the museum's Frances and Emory Cocke Collection of English Ceramics in the creation of this plate-painting installation, which assumes floral imagery from the Chelsea Physic Garden in London.

400-plus plate installation at the High Museum of Art, *Physic Garden* (page 28). Hatch drew inspiration for this series from two 1755 Chelsea factory plates from the High Museum's Frances and Emory Cocke Collection of English ceramics. These historical plates depict realistic flora and fauna from the Chelsea Physic Garden—a botanical garden founded by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in London in 1673—and were created in the Chelsea “Hans Sloane” style of the early 1750s. Sarah Schleuning, curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the High Museum of Art, stated, “One of the most exciting aspects of *Physic Garden* is seeing the historic decorative arts and design collection through the lens of a creative young artist.”

Hatch does indeed provide a renewed vision in the decorative arts world. She is also playing a pivotal role in helping ceramics be seen as a viable part of the fine art continuum. “I want people to view plates as one would view a painting,” she says. “Rethinking a medium that is so familiar and part of our daily lives is essential to exploring the relationship of history and the contemporary.”

Allison Malafronte is an arts writer, editor and curator based in the greater New York City area.

▶ HATCH RECENTLY COMPLETED A PLATE-PAINTING INSTALLATION, *REPertoire*, FOR THE NEWARK MUSEUM'S PERMANENT COLLECTION. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HATCH AND HER PROJECTS, VISIT MOLLYHATCH.COM AND MOLLYHATCHSTUDIO.COM.

