



# PUSHING *the* BOUNDARIES

This October, Salisbury Museum kicks off the first retrospective exhibition devoted to the life and work of the talented weaver, painter and ceramicist John Hinchcliffe. Photography by Jac Arnold

By VERONICA TERRY



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(Clockwise from top left): Selection of stoneware jugs, in collaboration with Dartington Pottery, 1999; stoneware bowls decorated at Dartington Pottery, 1999; White Flower and Hypericum red earthenware plates with majolica glaze, 1982; small paper image, paint and paper collage; (above) small weaving sample c1979

Curated by his wife and design partner Wendy Barber, John Hinchcliffe: the Definitive Works of a Decorative Artist will focus on the artist's experimentalism, versatility of expression and immense output, revealing previously unseen experimental pieces and paintings.

The show will also take a look at how Salisbury and the surrounding area played a part in Hinchcliffe's creations, from his boundary-pushing exhibition of ceramics at Salisbury Arts Centre in 1983, to the work he did in his studio in Six Penny Handley. Salisbury Museum's Louise Tunnard is here to tell us more.

**So, Louise, what led the museum to stage a retrospective of Hinchcliffe's work?**

John Hinchcliffe was a multi-talented artist who lived in and was inspired by the landscape of Wessex, and his first major exhibition of majolica platters took place in the Salisbury Arts Centre in 1983. In fact the museum holds several pieces from that exhibition in its permanent collection, some of which are on display in the Ceramics Gallery. It therefore seemed fitting for us to hold an exhibition about his life and work.

**What do you think will be the stand out pieces of the show?**

I think it will probably be the sumptuous rag rug, made by Hinchcliffe in the 1970s and very kindly loaned to us by the V&A. It is an iconic piece of his textile work and we are thrilled to be able to have this on show. One of the main characteristics of his textiles is the infinite gradation of colour and the tactile quality of the pieces. Hinchcliffe made his work to be used and anyone who has been to Romsey Abbey will have seen the beautiful rag rug kneelers in front of the High Altar.

**The show is being guest curated by his wife, Wendy Barber – do you think it makes a difference when someone who knows the artist personally curates a show of their work?**

I think it gives a whole additional layer of insight into the artist's work. Wendy is an artist

in her own right and worked alongside John for many years, so she knew him intimately both as a person and as an artist. It has therefore enabled us to have some very unique events and workshops surrounding the exhibition. Wendy and artist Rachel Sargent will be leading a three-part lino block printing workshop and local artist Suzie Gutteridge will be leading a textiles workshop inspired by the textiles of John Hinchcliffe.

**The exhibition will include works that have never been shown before – can you give us some examples?**

We have been so fortunate that many works have been loaned to us which are normally held in private collections. This includes both paintings and ceramics. For the visitor, this means that they will be able to see the whole sweep of Hinchcliffe's work across the different crafts. My personal favourite is a painting called *Daffodils with Ethel Mairet Fabric*. This features his trademark vibrant colours and bold lines.

**The colour blue was an important element in his work, wasn't it?**

The colour blue featured predominantly throughout Hinchcliffe's work and can be seen from his early interest and experiments with indigo, through to his cobalt ceramic glazes. These blues, along with his innovative methods of decoration, show his continual experimentation. The deep blues and bold imagery of *White Flower* and *Hypericum* were to become the hallmark of Hinchcliffe's relationship with shape, texture and colour, along with his love of the simple forms of nature. Blue is a colour that holds both emotional and spiritual significance throughout art history, and I think it adds a timelessness to Hinchcliffe's work.

**Finally, how does the show make a case for Hinchcliffe being, as the museum describes it, "one of the foremost British craftsmen of the 20th century?"**

Professor Simon Olding, who is director of the Crafts Study Centre, has called John Hinchcliffe a craft maverick. I think this gives you some idea that his creative work spanned so many processes and materials, including weaving, textile printing, hand-painted ceramics, linocuts, and paper constructions. He was a prolific artist, across all of these fields of craft practice. I think he is particularly inspiring because he never stopped thinking about new avenues for exploration and his deep interest in colour, pattern and surface decoration continually emerges in his work. We are looking forward to Professor Olding coming to the museum on 3 December to talk about Hinchcliffe with Wendy Barber. **SL**

John Hinchcliffe: the Definitive Works of a Decorative Artist runs from 10 October to 16 January at Salisbury Museum; [www.salisburymuseum.org.uk](http://www.salisburymuseum.org.uk)