

FULHAM

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Stepping into Tessa Eastman's workspace, I feel like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland. On the work benches, the ceramicist's latest creations sit, emanating a childish fantasy. However, on closer inspection, the weird and wonderful, topsyturvy display of objects and bodies are tinged with a darker, more disturbing energy.

'Juxtaposition inspires me,' Tessa begins, showing me around her small studio which is crammed with plastic toys, moulds and tools. 'I find the transition from childhood to adulthood fascinating, and I try to recreate the dual meanings hidden within childhood fantasy and fairytales.'

The playful colours and shapes might momentarily distract from the enormous amount of intricate detail and skill involved, but all of Tessa's designs are unique and fired several times to achieve a richness of gloss and colour. 'I was lucky enough to have a ceramics studio at my school and that led me towards a ceramics degree from the University of Westminster and my current masters at the Royal College of Art. I like the challenge of working with clay. You need to practise repeatedly in order to perfect things.'

As we talk, I am distracted by a strangely macabre-looking, ceramic wedding cake sitting on the shelf. 'One of my favourite pieces of work is entitled *Burning Slices of Death*,' Tessa says, clocking my fascination. 'It explores the seduction, pleasure and pain of gluttony and represents the greed in society – how we want to have our cake and eat it without thinking about the consequences. It consists of 17 different slices that have all been sold individually. I would love all the purchasers to get together and have a celebration with their cake,' she concludes. I have no doubt that it would put the Mad Hatter's tea party to shame.

(tessaeastman.com)

From top / *Burning Slices of Death*; *Great Little Britain*; Tessa in her studio; *Straw Sea Shore Berry*. Photography by Sussie Ahlburg (images 1&4) and Stephen Brayne (images 2&3)

