Celebrate!
250th Special Edition

TESSA EASTMAN
Fantasy Cakes

FENELLA ELMS
Swirls and Illusions

LOTTE GLOB
A Sense of Place
250th Special Edition

250 issues ago, Ceramic Review made the leap from UK newsletter by potters for potters to international magazine for anyone and everyone interested in ceramics. With the Craft Potters Association behind it, Ceramic Review has grown from strength to strength. As a wholly-owned subsidiary of the CPA, Ceramic Review operates with complete editorial independence, but continues the CPA aims of promoting ceramics. We cover ceramics from pots to performance, showcasing British ceramists to the world at large and bringing the best and most interesting of what's happening on the international stage to the UK.

In this special celebratory supplement we look at Tessa Eastman's weird and wonderful ceramic cakes (how could we not?!); we look back to the heyday of British studio pottery with photos and stories by Ben Boswell never before published; we have reprinted a classic article from 1977 on Bernard Leach, written by Emmanuel Cooper; and we profile an up and coming ceramist, Fenella Elms, the winner of the Ceramic Art London Ceramic Review Award 2011. We also highlight our growing archive and encourage you to make use of it – forty years of British ceramics waiting for you to explore.

So raise your glass or make a wish and blow out the candles – Ceramic Review leaps into the future!
Sweets for My Sweet Sugar for My Honey...

Melissa Gamwell explores Tessa Eastman's fantasy cakes.

The act of finding Tessa Eastman in her West London studio complex was a perfect prelude for our meeting. A labyrinth of hallways and doors slowed my arrival to a crawl, and revealed that what I thought was a circular floor plan was actually spoofographic. After a series of misinformed turns I was surprised to find myself in front of studio 185. Tessa opened the door to the narrow space; it was one possible galaxy in the universe. The studio was practically tropical with work, colour, and indefinable toys that initially seemed arbitrarily grown. Tessa herself was equally part of the wildlife, clothed in eccentric prints, yet clearly pivotal to the surroundings. As everything came into focus, I found that all of the small press moulds and subsequent shapes were in fact standing in correct organisations, existing fused together as the artist's sculptures, her everyday flora and fauna. The cakes, which were a specific target of my visit, were lined up on the table, covered in cellophane as if to protect a recent frosting. The kiln was tucked in quietly at the end of one table, a most ferocious counterpart. Finally, the complete workshop emerged, and like other ceramics studios, I felt the familiar tone of an otherworldly bakery, a concept that proved to be an appropriate platform, for the figurative and symbolic expressions that are borne from Tessa Eastman are all spinning on poles of opulent sustenance and childhood fantasies.

COLOURS OF NOURISHMENT The role of eating is a fixation for the artist, existing in many forms as a lush, overflowing bounty, a pregnant fruit-filled goddess, a fulfilled or insatiable recipient. Bosch's triptych The Garden of Earthly Delights (c1480-1503) comes to mind as a grandparent to the small humans trying to crack out of decorative eggs and collections of small goddesses comprised of food. The themes are nutrients for her portrayals of life and death, which she insists in the work with child-like tools. Kitsch assemblages of press-moulded action figures, plastic hearts, and doll parts laden with the colours of nail polish and candy make compositions of adult ideas, ideas that she considers to be dark undertones of life. While the work meanders through themes of the artist's fantasies, each piece is native to the roots and topics of an unwinding childhood, becoming hypersensitive snowballs of Eastman's categorical nomenclature.

CHILD WITHIN Despite working in a fragile material, Eastman encourages interaction with her pieces, hoping someone, a parent or child, will turn them over and inquire underneath. Referencing her own childhood as 'very bright and happy but having dark moments' she feels that 'these two extremes playing together are very important'. Best exemplifying this is Pussy Cat Dolls, a work named after the contemporary pop band and inspired by Hello Kitty, the iconic Japanese doll. 'I always found it fascinating that she has no mouth, so as a child one can choose whether she is happy or sad according to the child's own feelings.' The small statue is a god, a glossy black cat whose body is made of two dolls giving birth to one another. A halo on its head is grasped by a hand that doubles as the torso of a butterfly. The arms are nemeses, one hand evil and animated and the other natural and honest, inspired by the growth of a plant. This ambiguity within the form is a staple in all of Eastman's work; her employment of toys for parents and children is one way for her to speak in sculptural sentences that are dually loaded with what seems an unwanted maturity and innocence.

MOTHER NATURE Birth and death are parental to most of the work, usually modelled in the form of the female characters, Mother Nature being one of the artist's most coveted employees. Two
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fantasies in particular illustrate her affinity for the character, one being her desire to own a four-poster bed with curtains and the other to acquire a boat she saw as a child named Gypsy Princess. Upon closer inspection of the piece, titled Spider on Skeleton under Tropical Miss Figgy Midnight Fruit Bulge Bed Binge, we find the well-known character on such a bed in the midst of an explosion from gorging or birth. Death from satisfaction and abundance inspired The Gypsy Princess, one of the series titled The Three Graces. As on the bed, any figure is an explosion of food, loosely contained in a voluptuous Disney-esque dress, playing out the roles to Botticelli’s painting Primavera. Her Mother Nature is the ultimate provider, recreationally experiencing birth, pleasure, and death with her act of offering.

**WEDDING CAKES** The cakes are the most delectable items in the studio. It seems unlikely that they could exist in any alternative state, such as chalky, unfired clay. Eastman has always held colour in her mind, a perfect attribute since the cakes each take a month to complete, with at least three firings for the colour alone. It’s a painstaking process: ‘I tried so many colours — there are so many flesh-like but I really wanted that bubblegum,’ she notes as we look at Cam Eat Me Cake’s pink frosted landscape. The completely saturated Care Bare Love Cake and the nearly white Bumpy Humpy Death Cake are both decorated with casts of toys, skeletons, and visual cliches of love and death, reminiscent of the Mexican Day of the Dead sugar casts. The latter is even more colorful than the others in its use of colour and imagery, slightly more curated and grossly sweet. ‘I’m trying to get the pieces to look like plastic, to have that tacky look. I’m also trying to enhance the form, but to make the components look very different.’ Surprisingly, she begins to unstack the commissioned cake, removing the top layer to reveal a lid. ‘The idea was that they would have a wedding cake...Everything in a wedding disappears, the cake gets eaten, the money gets spent on all the dresses that are only worn once, and this is something that would last forever, and it would be like a memento.’ She further explains, ‘One was meant to be a happy cake, one was an unhappy one, and now I think there is a mixture of happy and unhappy for all of them.’ Ultimately, most of the work reaches this conclusion with a saccharine stamp of closure for the denoted good or evil of life’s modern and ancient rituals.

Glancing over the scene Eastman quietly continues, ‘The theme is cakes but they are a contrast between love and death, life and marriage; marriage can be happy and wonderful, like a movie, but can be very dark and challenging as well. There are many things under the surface which one suddenly becomes aware of.’ She also feels that she feeds her own soul in making them, as if she were choosing nuptials with her work and rejecting societal expectations. There is no choice, of course, it is something she does as part of her breath, seemingly with an air of excitement to reject the imposition. ‘Whenever I’m rejecting something, there is a part of me that craves it as well.’ We were talking about marriage but it’s an analogy that flickers everywhere — the idea of consuming happiness with sadness, wealth with soulful poverty, playful naivety with adult truth. Opposite the trio of cakes is a new piece Eastman is working on. Rising on her banding wheel if it were a serving plate, is a ring of individually decorated cake slices, a perfect take-away ration of existential nourishment.