

# Richard Stratton

b.1970

Diploma in Ceramics (Hons): Otago School of Art

Richard Stratton studied ceramics at art school in New Zealand in the late 1980s and later worked as a production ‘thrower’ at a commercial pottery in Scotland. His work displays an avid interest in historic European forms of domestic pottery, somewhat improbably combined with autobiographical reflection.

In 2007, Stratton produced a ‘teapot growth chart’ to accompany *Nurturing Dialectics*, an exhibition of 15 of his extravagantly constructed and decorated teapots that carried many references to his role as a stay-at-home-dad. The reverse of the chart carries a timeline that tracks the scope of his concerns: the history of pottery; the evolution of the teapot; war and peace; obesity, anorexia and famine.

*Alice Ate Too Much* is an example of Stratton’s fascination with building conglomerative forms or unruly fusions of his enthusiasm for historic ceramic components and riffling through local op shops. *Alice Ate Too Much* is an elaborate confection: a lush, greedily pilfered miscellany of forms brought into conjunction in much the same way as personal stories merge with ceramic history and East-West conflicts in his 2007 show. As if Alice’s somewhat incredulously constructed body was not enough, every aspect of her surface has also received elaborate graphic embellishment. The imagery references disparate sources including Tenniel’s illustrations for the original 1865 edition of *Alice In Wonderland*.

Stratton views world politics through a domestic prism: a teapot sitting on a suburban kitchen table is the culmination of a long history of East-West conflict and trade. Western ‘globesity’ and eating disorders are the flip-side of third world famine. By extension, *Alice Ate Too Much* is a kind of allegorical impersonation of the West’s political greed in relation to the East.

Appropriately enough, given the avarice Stratton alludes to, Alice is literally a lolly jar. She belongs to a tradition of lidded vessels on stands, a category of objects Stratton is drawn

to because these are items intended for ornamental rather than utilitarian use. Flagrantly made to be shown-off on the mantelpiece, these objects emphasise the fantasy world of ornament or the other-than-strictly-practical role objects play in our lives. Alice’s bulbous middle is reflected in the ample shape of the receptacle, which in ceramic terms emulates the form of an 18th century French bonbon jar. Continuing down the body, the base is modelled on a pressed metal plate. Befitting the excessive nature of this greedily piled-on creation, this base is then sandwiched against another, cast from a candelabra. Topping off the concoction, the face of Alice replicates a piece of plastic junk found at one of the second-hand shops Stratton likes to haunt.

Stratton’s compulsive interest in the technical demands of the ceramic medium, coupled with his passion for the history and origins of ceramic forms, relates him to the revered West Coast American ceramicist, Adrian Saxe. On the other hand, Stratton’s predilection for biographical revelation links him to the cross-dressing English ceramicist, Grayson Perry. The ceramic-centricity of Stratton’s practice means he is an active participant in an international revision of what in art terms has previously been much maligned: the significance of the decorative.

## Anna Miles

### Galleries and museums:

[www.annamilesgallery.com](http://www.annamilesgallery.com)

### Web search:

Grayson Perry

Adrian Saxe

