

# Gemma Tipton

## The joy, and possible value, of postcards



My dad used to travel a lot for work. After a while I asked him to stop sending me pictures of airports. Another favourite was a blank blue rectangle with the text "The Sea in Brittany" (or wherever) overlaid. Whatever the picture was, I loved getting his postcards.

As I began to travel I became a committed postcard-sender. The ritual of choosing the cards, and choosing my cafe from

which to write them, followed by the hunt for a post office, became a feature of my holidays. "Having a lovely time, wish you were here..."

Does anyone still send postcards? Now that "posting" means something entirely different, selfies and iPhone snaps, text messages and emails on-the-go have severely dented the postcard industry; but what have we lost in the process?

The world's first postcard and, for a

while, the most expensive ever auctioned, was from – and to – Theodore Hook. He was a 19th-century composer, writer, man about town, and practical joker extraordinaire.

One of Hook's hilarious japes was to arrange for a host of tradespeople and luminaries, including the Duke of Gloucester and the governor of the Bank of England, to visit the otherwise unremarkable Mrs Tottenham of 54 Berners Street, thus winning a bet he had made with a friend – that he could transform any house in London into the most talked-about address in just one week.

After pulling off a feat like that, it must have seemed small potatoes to send a card to oneself. The fact that it was stamped with a Penny Black enabled it to sell at auction in 2002 for £31,750 (€27,000).

Stamps are another thing I miss about postcards. Those exotic stickers and their often equally beguiling postmarks were part and parcel of the receiving experience. Just over a decade later, the Hook postcard record was trumped, and this time it had nothing to do with the value of the stamp. A postcard of the otherwise unremarkable French town of Pau sold at the Gaertner auction house in Germany for \$188,000 (€160,000).

In fairness, the postcard was from Picasso to his pal Guillaume Apollinaire. Dated September 5th, 1918, Picasso had

eschewed the more typical "nice weather, hope to see you soon" sentiments, for a cubist portrait of his friend, titled *Sainte Apollinaire*. Old postcards look lovely in a frame, but this time, it's clear which side you'd have facing out.

Closer to home, Whyte's sold a postcard from James Joyce to his publisher for £9,000 (€11,400) in 2001, which Ian Whyte described at the time as "probably the highest price ever paid for a postcard". It possibly was, until the Hook came along a year later.

Looking through old boxes in the hopes of finding auction gold is one thing, but it also gives you gorgeous little vistas on the past. Ireland of the late 1950s to 1970s is forever characterised for me by John Hinde's ultra bright and ultra cheery images of Aran sweaters, red-headed children and malevolent donkeys. He also had some pretty nifty shots of Dublin Airport, which would have undoubtedly delighted my Dad.

Until I first went there, Paris was, for me, a city entirely written in art nouveau with the Eiffel Tower poking up, due to a series of postcards from some source or other. And then there was the writing on the back. Never mind being designated Snowflakes, today's generation have never experienced the crushing blankness of mind that falls when faced with that tiny rectangle of card, and the need to write

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Until I first went there, Paris was, for me, a city entirely written in art nouveau with the Eiffel Tower poking up, due to a series of postcards from some source or other

just two or three lines. Those little vignettes of a trip can be glorious, however – especially out of context, as Tom Jackson's Twitter account @PastPostcard goes to show.

Discovering and (virtually) posting such gems as a gorgeous country scene with the ominous legend: "Are under siege by seven savage geese who attack us when we emerge from caravan," quickly led to more than 20,000 followers and a book deal. Now with more than twice that number of devotees, the book is just out (*Postcards from the Past*, Fourth Estate, £9.98). Within its pages you can find an

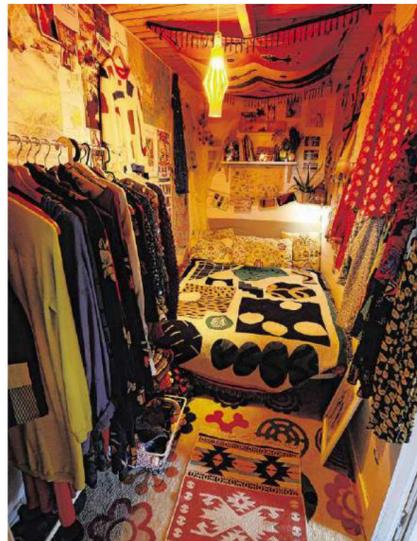
admittedly very English, but also very hilarious sense of the recent past. "Dear Auntie – you will be surprised to hear I am going to prison tomorrow" on a postcard of the parish church in Gillingham is another treat from the Twitter feed.

Back home, and I recently found an old postcard when it fell out of a book I hadn't read for years. It was from my best friend from college, and it took me right back to a weekend we had spent together in Edinburgh. Showing a quiet scene of the High Street, it was nevertheless soaked in the sights, sounds and smells of the Edinburgh Festival, and an old man leaning out of a window shouting "I f\*\*\*ing hate jugglers", which is what she'd written on the back.

I'm still addicted to sending postcards, and a UK study, carried out for Gatwick Airport (I'm sure I have one of those in my collection too) suggests that the habit may be back on the rise. It could be they're using one of the brilliant new postcard apps – such as MyPostcard, which turns any phone snap into a real, physical postcard, and posts it as well for just £1.99. Try it, it's addictive.

However, a look at @PastPostcard is inspiring me to greater things, such as the one from the Isle of Wight: "Today I have disposed of unnecessary extra belongings". Wherever you're going, or staying, happy holidays.

## Pieces of me Pearl Reddington



# 'I use clothes as decoration'

Pearl Reddington won this year's Design Award from the Craft Council of Ireland's Future Makers programme

## Deirdre McQuillan

Pearl Reddington is an up-and-coming young knitwear designer who won this year's Design Award from the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland's Future Makers programme and has also been shortlisted for this year's RDS Craft Awards. Reddington is a graduate of NCAD whose degree show in 2016 was sponsored by Donegal Yarns. Her first commercial capsule collection of eight pieces in merino wool will make its debut in September in Made in the Powerscourt Centre. She lives in Raheny.

### Describe your interiors style

A lot of people would say that it is cluttered, but for me it is the detail – everything has a meaning as I am a collector. Whatever catches my eye I take home, whether it's sweet wrappings or broken belts. I use my clothes as decoration and believe that anything I have can be used as decoration. I re-created my room in two shirts for my first project in NCAD. I catalogued every single item in my room – 100 items or so – and then remapped them on the shirts, hand-embroidering them with numbers and catalogues.

### What room do you most enjoy?

I live in a wooden cabin in my parents' garden. It is a studio and bedroom combined space that my dad helped to build. Only I know where everything is and because I sleep and work there it has to be a stimulating place. We are a big family – I am the eldest of five – so I need a quiet place to work. My knitting machine is there too.

### What items do you love most?

I have a sarong that my grandmother brought back from India and I have brought it everywhere with me. It is my comfort piece. When I lived in New York, like a lot of students, the place was very crowded, so I used the sarong to create my own space as a divider. It's over my bed now. I am not acquiring important pieces of furniture at this stage in my life but I have a National Geographic collection which is very dear to me. Last week my boyfriend gave me a handwoven blanket, which I picture as being a future heirloom. It is from the Slow Down Studio in New York and a collaboration with a print designer called Atelier Bingo. It was a limited edition and in a mix of colours and abstract patterns.

### Who are your favourite designers?

I follow a lot of people like me, young independent knitwear designers, like Annie Lee Larson and Lindsay Degen – both are from New York – and like me they are trying to reinvent an ancient craft. They are modern knitters using really strong colours and bold prints and it is great to see knit elevated to the realm of contemporary fashion.

Neon yellow is my signature colour and I try to include it in everything I make and



■ Pearl Reddington lives in a log cabin in her parents' back garden. It is a studio and bedroom combined. PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAN BETSON

they [Larsen and Degen] show that you can be bold in knitwear.

preserve everything about my room in a new space.

### What artists do you admire?

I remember Rachel Whiteread's ghost home of the '90s [a plaster cast of a Victorian living room], which had a big impact on me. It was about preserving space – that is what I do, so I connect with her. She wanted to mummify the space and at that time I was moving from my teenage bedroom into the cabin and I wanted to

**Biggest interior turn-off?** Glass dinner tables and any space that is cold and makes you feel uncomfortable. Dinner should be a warm, cosy affair and glass is cold.

### Destination that stands out?

I went to Berlin for the first time this year and it is such a positive place for designers and artists where you could survive as an artist very easily. It was design-oriented without being pretentious. I am actually considering moving there.

### If you had €100,000 to spend on anything for the home, what would that be?

Because I am 22, these figures don't mean anything to me. But what I would love to do is to be able to buy my friends' work. So many are not paid for what they do. My generation is struggling to find housing, so €100,000 would be a deposit on a house and that would be so far-fetched for me.

## 'You can't google how to make a lampshade'

### Nora-Ide McAuliffe

How do you learn to make lampshades? 'Unbelievable stubbornness,' says Sarah O'Dea

I never intended on becoming a lampshade maker. We were trying to find a pink lampshade; very standard, very straightforward and I couldn't find it. It didn't matter where I went at the time, it was just impossible.

The lighting conundrum was a fortuitous one for Sarah O'Dea, who took matters into her own hands and made the pink lampshade after a short entry-level course in England. Hooked on the craft, she went on to train under two of the UK's master lampshade makers, Ian McQueen and Moji Salehi, for about a month.

While she continued to work as an interior stylist upon her return to Dublin, she turned a spare bedroom into a studio and began to hone her skills day by day.

"There were no resources for me. You can't google how to make a lampshade," she says. "So while the courses improved my technique, everything else you have to self-teach. It's a case of repetition, repetition, repetition. There were so many times I was in the middle of making something and you really just wanted to be able to ask, 'How do I do this?' Because that person wasn't there, it was trial and error. It was a full year before I was able to do a hand-stitched lampshade perfectly."

Today, O'Dea is a full-time lampshade maker working out of her premises, Shady and the Lamp, on Francis Street in Dublin.

She makes both modern and traditional lampshades and is Ireland's only handmade lampshade maker – and one of only about 11 such makers in all of Europe.

### Rockefeller commission

Since opening in 2013 her business has gone from strength to strength, with an early vote of confidence coming in the form of a commission from New York's Rockefeller Center. "It was amazing," O'Dea recalls. "I still don't know how it happened or why. We thought it might have been an Irish connection. It was a very small commission but it was in our second year so it was really amazing to have the US get in touch."

Since then, O'Dea, who has one part-time employee, has worked with Lough Rynn

Castle, a large number of the country's manor houses, along with restaurants such as Marco Pierre White's Steakhouse and Grill, and Pacino's.

Along with a growing number of commercial commissions worldwide, she also makes bespoke pieces for clients across Europe, including Ireland, the UK and Germany, as well as the US, and with repeat business at 82 per cent, it's clear she has a lot of happy customers.

The modern, "drum" lampshade takes her about a fifth of the time of the same-sized handmade piece; the latter can take whole days or more.

The craft is so precise that making even the smallest mistake at any stage of the process means the whole lampshade has to be remade.

"There's quite a lot of maths and physics involved, and I'm terrible at maths. I specifically remember saying to my teacher at school I will never use pi, and



now I use it about 13 times a day, multiplying up and down with it. That number is everything. If you make a mistake at any stage, be it drafting, lining or stitching on the trim, the whole thing will have an error, so you have to go back to the beginning again."

### Expansive mindset

O'Dea has expansion in her sights, with plans to hire more staff next year as Shady and the Lamp gains a greater foothold on the global market. She is keen to promote Irish design wherever possible.

She's working with Magee to include their limited-edition tweeds in her upcoming autumn-winter collection and is also collaborating with Irish woodworker Tommy Carew on lamp bases.

Shady and the Lamp celebrates its fifth birthday this month. O'Dea has come a long way from honing her craft in a bedroom.

"It was unbelievable stubbornness on my part; I don't know what really propelled me. I just love working with my hands so much, and once I became proficient I realised that the sky really is the limit when it comes to designing fabric lighting effectively."

"Everybody has lights in their home. It's an endless world."



■ Sarah O'Dea at her shop Shady and The Lamp on Francis Street, Dublin. PHOTOGRAPH: BRENDA FITZSIMONS