

# New Designers

A LAUNCH PAD FOR TALENTED TEXTILE GRADUATES FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS. WE



**Name:** Jillie Blackwood  
**College:** Glasgow School of Art  
**Course:** Embroidery and Woven Textiles  
**Graduated:** 1986



**Name:** Victoria Saunders  
**College:** University of Plymouth  
**Course:** Interior Textiles and Surface Design  
**Graduated:** 2008



**Name:** Margo Selby  
**College:** Chelsea College of Art  
**Course:** Textile Design  
**Graduated:** 1999



**Name:** Poppy Treffry  
**College:** Winchester School of Art  
**Course:** Fashion and Textile Design  
**Graduated:** 1999



**Name:** Alison Willoughby  
**College:** Glasgow School of Art  
**Course:** Printed and Knitted Textiles  
**Graduated:** 1999

**Casting her mind back** to the start of her enviably diverse career Jillie Blackwood recalls both the exhaustion and exhilaration of her first show. “In one way there is the sense that you are being cast out to sink or swim. I remember being so grateful when the Head of Department of Printed Textiles, Barbara Santos Shaw took me for a coffee and showed the tutors hadn’t forgotten us!” New Designers also led to some wonderful opportunities. “A job offer from designer Jean Muir was a marvellous vote of confidence. In fact I astounded myself by turning it down. Yet staying true to myself in the midst of many options was the greatest lesson of that time. I’ve never regretted pursuing my own career as an artist.” ●●●

**The stereotype of lazy student** life, late night parties and long lie-ins could not be further from the experience of a textile student close to graduation as Victoria can testify. With just two days to tear down her final show in Taunton, take it 200 miles to London and set it up for New Designers, the pressure is intense. But she isn’t complaining; ‘it’s good practice for someone who plans to set up as a designer maker.’

Victoria’s final collection ‘Ageing beauty’, which uses innovative corrosive techniques and the staining effects of smoke has caught the attention of her tutors and could gain her a job offer or two; but her aim is to pursue her interest in craft independently and resist the lure of industry. ●●●

**The thrill of being selected** is an enduring memory when Margo Selby recalls New Designers; “not everyone could take part so it was wonderful to be chosen and have my work curated by tutors.” The reaction from the public was even better; “it was lovely to be appreciated. I had produced a length of fine hand-woven silk, it had taken over three weeks. Looking back I can see the luxury of lavishing that much time on a single piece.” Given the labour intensive nature of her work you might assume Margo pursued a career making bespoke items but the commercial world beckoned; “I hand weave samples but having my cloth produced in a mill means I can bring craft skills to a wider audience.” ●●●

**After the excitement** and expectation of New Designers not all students walk away with a prize or the perfect job. Some, like Poppy Treffry, have a dawning realisation of what life in the ‘real world’ is really like. “New Designers taught me I wasn’t ready,” admits Poppy; “it was part of a steep learning curve. My goal at the show was simply to find a job. I managed to find an agent which led to work as a freelance textile designer but ultimately I found it wasn’t for me. The design briefs were restricting and I realised I would be happier making things on my own.” Poppy has since found her niche and has international stockists and legions of admirers of her stitched accessories. ●●●

**“New Designers was upsetting.** That summer I was leaving my friends and would never see some of them again. On a brighter note I was heading to The Royal College of Art to start an MA and was already working on the new project they had set.”

Alison Willoughby typifies the highs and low of the end of student days but on reflection she sees the experience of New Designers as positive; “I met lots of people, a designer who wanted fabric for his London Fashion Week collection, a tutor at Central Saint Martins, who wanted me to do a MA and Donna Karan walked past my stand! New Designers taught me how small the design world actually is – everyone knows everyone. ●●●

## CATCH UP WITH NEW DESIGNERS OF THE PAST AND FUTURE...



**Name:** Hannah Lamb  
**College:** Manchester Metropolitan University  
**Course:** Embroidery  
**Graduated:** 2001



**Name:** James Donald  
**College:** Duncan of Jordanstone College  
**Course:** Constructed Textiles  
**Graduated:** 1996



**Name:** Victoria Bain  
**College:** Edinburgh College of Art  
**Course:** Printed Textiles  
**Graduated:** 1993



**Name:** Neil Bottle  
**College:** Middlesex University  
**Course:** Printed Textiles  
**Graduated:** 1989

**In the frenzy of** the show, surrounded by other graduates generating dozens of leads and contacts, it's easy to feel overlooked: but remember not everyone has success handed to them on a plate. This is the advice Hannah Lamb, now a lecturer, offers her students. "There is so much talent at New Designers it's almost overwhelming. I was glad I had two shots at it; my graduate show and One Year On.

My first experience was positive, I had lots of interest but no sales and no firm offers. Though quirky and novel my work was difficult to place so I chose to become more commercial. For One Year On I was prepared and my work was properly resolved... all these things take time." ●●●

**"For the duration of my degree** I was isolated, working in my own wee world. New Designers suddenly exposed me to people who were interested in my work, not just clients but students from other colleges and the public. It was satisfying to know that there was going to be a life outside and after art school. Talking to people gave me confidence. It also showed me ways of selling and getting exposure for my work.

After I graduation I travelled to America and Australia, where I taught in Art Schools. Eventually returned and settled in Edinburgh where I set up my shop Concrete Wardrobe and the weave label, PickOne. New Designers informed how I work today as a designer, it was a real stepping stone." ●●●

**It doesn't seem likely** but it was at New Designers 'One Year On' that Victoria Bain discovered she was a sales woman at heart "I loved selling because it was a product that I was proud of. It also made me see that I needed to be commercially aware to survive. It was an opportunity to gauge how commercial my work was and how prepared I would have to be on costings, delivery lead times, and bespoke orders. I learnt I would need to create marketing material in order for customers to remember me.

That was combined with being in a room filled with wonderful young designers who were equally naïve about the process but eager to learn. Their strength and excitement was mine too." ●●●

**It's probably true** to say that New Designers put Neil Bottle where he is today. It was with the £1,000 prize money from his Painter-Stainers Award for printed textiles that he purchased the second-hand equipment from his print studio. "After a brief spell renting a studio in London I moved to the Kent coast where I set up my first studio which is still operational today.

New Designers provided me with my first taste of selling work and obtaining feedback. I was lucky, my work hit market trends and I sold most of my show. In short, without New Designers and the support that followed I would not have been able to establish the business or enjoy my career in the creative industries." ●●●

"New Designers is now a British institution; people look to it for the creative talent it produces."

Gordon Brown, MP, 2006