

# Going Digital All Makers Now? Craft Values in 21st Century Production

8th – 11th July 2014. Falmouth University  
Rebecca Skeels

**The ‘All Makers Now?’ workshop and conference held at Falmouth University, and organised by the Autonomic Research Group, was amongst many digital technology exhibitions and events taking place across the UK this year.** The constituency of the delegates was broad and as the organisers state: ‘This event was aimed at makers and researchers of all shapes and codes including hackers, crafters, inventors, designers, economists, curators and critical theorists.’ All the participants were eager to work out their focus and direction, by exploring how combining crafts and digital skills can bring about new opportunities and debates.

The event started with a two-day workshop in which the attendees were split into three groups in order to design and make a piece of work to be exhibited at Trelissick House. The teams worked extremely well together, combining skills and knowledge of a variety of digital technologies, from researching online, designing on computer, to programming and finally producing the work with computer-aided machines.

The workshop was followed by a two-day conference with a huge variety of talks and lectures, leaving all visitors in

thought, questioning and relating the digital technologies to their own work, how they will use or avoid technology.

For me the four days were a big learning curve. I felt a little out of my depth when I arrived in Falmouth having only used a laser cutter and three-dimensional printer a handful of times and really only having tried and tested the digital engraver regularly. However, I did discover I have dabbled in much more, starting in 1990 with Autocad training at University to my constant online research and development of ideas through computer skills today.

The broad area that these technologies cover was highlighted through the conference and workshops themes: Materiality and Aesthetics, Enhancing the Object, and Democratising Technology. Discussions were broad, including topics such as the use Raspberry Pi and Arduino, mass data collection, materials, 3D printing, making, crafting and hacking equipment to enable production of unique and unusual items as well as digitally augmented pieces that can communicate, listen and learn.

The final discussion at the conference was overwhelming for some, however like all tools, equipment and development, we need to select an area in which we are interested.



Laser cutter in the MakerNow facility in Falmouth University, Peryn campus. Photo: Rebecca Skeels

We cannot use or learn it all, but keeping in touch will allow us to add to our toolbox whether it is for researching, designing, making, marketing or even just for fun. The opportunities are endless and are, along with the tools, more affordable even for our lower paid craftspeople to have a go. I do not believe digital will replace established crafts and craftsmanship, but it will give craftspeople and designers more opportunities to take part in yet another area of discovery and opportunity.

It was a great four days, from which I feel I still need to record all of my thoughts from the talks, lectures and experience. And like most conferences I met a great group of practitioners. Nothing quite beats meeting like-minded people face-to-face for the debates and discussions to help our own minds and work develop further.

<http://www.autonomic.org.uk/>

Exhibition at Trelissick House. Photo: Rebecca Skeels



'In Memoriam' by Rebecca Skeels, Barney Townsend, Caro Woods, Armando Chant. 'Can objects produced through the use of digital technologies (over the course of a two day creative workshop), recapture the character of artefacts that have been displaced?' Photo: Rebecca Skeels



**Dr Justin Marshall, one of the conference organisers and leader of the pre-conference workshop reflects:**

'For me this conference highlighted the interest in, and need for, debate, discussion and celebration of practices which blur the boundaries between established craft activities and newer digitally-empowered "making". Projects and completed works were presented that point towards a future where digital capabilities are combined with the poetics and material sensitivity of craft in exciting and challenging ways.'



Exhibition opening at Trelissick House. Photo: Rebecca Skeels

Fred Baier delivers the evening dinner lecture. Photo: Rebecca Skeels