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Editorial

Sustaining Craft's Heritage: place, people and practice

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Craft has many manifestations, and there is an ebb and flow in how these are perceived and valued. At the heart of craft are its communities comprising place, people and regional practices. Craft practices, like traditions have tended to develop slowly, sometimes over centuries. Consequently, they may be overlooked or taken for granted because of their slow and organic pace providing a familiar background presence. At other times, heritage crafts can acquire special status through novel applications and/or comparisons with other cultures, throwing historical practices into sharp relief. While traditions of making endure in their original, 'authentic' form in some communities and cultures, the influence and impact of global change (e.g. politics, technology, and climate) are impacting upon the ways that craft is shaped and in turn how this shapes contemporary culture (Shales 2017). As Shales states, "contemporary production is like sand: it is not static" (Hemmings 2019), but neither is the traditional production of heritage crafts, which necessarily incorporate new materials and methods in response to shifting social, economic and sustainable developments. This local /global phenomenon underpins the international significance of, and concern for craft in a rapidly changing environment, as documented through the broad range of authors from different countries and craft practices contributing to this issue.

Researchers in this issue trace different manifestations of craft in relation to existing and changing parameters. Walker, Evans and Mullagh investigate the relationship between design for sustainability and traditional making practices. They emphasise the social, ecological and economic benefits of craft through case studies from Australia, China, the UK and the USA. They find that many of the 'meaningful' craft practices reviewed 'are intellectually consistent with broad, contemporary understandings of design for sustainability' particularly, utilitarian, symbolic and aesthetic qualities, but that 'it is often not easy to reconcile these practices with modern consumer culture'.

A similar dilemma is highlighted by Pontsioen concerning the pursuit and survival of traditional crafts in Japan relating to the regulations of materials and processes used by

artisans working in *kumiai* ('artisan guilds'). While on the one hand regulations regarding the pursuit of traditional crafts aims to protect them and give them greater visibility, on the other hand they can stifle the very same crafts because of problems relating to the use and accessibility of protected materials. For example, while government recognition and subsidies of crafts requires the use of specified traditional materials and processes, such as tortoise shell, the regulations can stifle new developments by restricting the use of alternative materials even though the original resources are no longer viable or permitted.

The third full research paper in this issue looks at craft from the opposite perspective – from that of archaeology. Bebber and Eren try to unravel past practices relating to the application of contrasting chemical compounds of 'temper' in pottery making to understand the causes for the changes in clay used by ancient potters for the vessels they made. For this purpose, they employed modern potters to understand the differences in the qualities of different green clays and their affordances for simple and challenging shapes from the experiential point of making. While researching into and trying to understand past craft practices, craft practice itself becomes the research tool, or method that enables the maker to elicit such knowledge. This approach to research is increasingly recognised and pursued by crafts people themselves, for example in the investigation onto Chinese glass design by Xue Lu (2009), which compared contemporary Western influences on Chinese glass design with those of the Qing dynasty to understand and develop the authentic Chinese character of and for contemporary Chinese Glass Design. Another such study is that by John Grayson (2013) who investigated Victorian enamel, using his own metalworking skills to restore and develop traditional processes and use them to create contemporary interpretations.

Like Pontsioen and Walker at al., Summatavet's self-portrait demonstrates how she interviews and works with traditional makers to learn about and understand traditional crafts. But Summatavet goes one step further in working with the community and reinterpreting traditional Nordic crafts to give them new life, as for example with the design of her beautiful commemorative coin.

Nga-wun Li and Chu-po Ho review *Sparks*, which is part of *Art Central 2019*. They focus on the work of Japanese artist Satoru Tamura, who writes: 'When we are born, we do not strive to find meaning in anything, but as we grow up, we begin to search for the meaning of life. I do not think that a meaningless existence is necessarily a bad thing'. In contrast to other crafts people portrayed in the contributions to this issue, Tamura attempts to stay away from

the meanings behind his light-based artefacts, allowing room for the viewer to define them in their own way.

Personal and professional forms of creative expression are combined in McDade's Position Paper on the under-researched craft of the tattoo artist. As stated by Lane, '...tattooists are embedded in a network of actors, who produce materials, create aesthetic ideologies, distribute equipment, construct a body of knowledge, and employ a method' (2014: 407). As both a researcher and practitioner, McDade reflects on this scenario by making the case for the tattoo artist as a multifaceted craftsperson requiring skills in visual art, design, craft, and not least the ability to communicate and collaborate with individuals commissioning artworks for their bodies. While some designs are classic in nature, many are emotive, symbolising a strong cultural and/or personal relationship, such as the matching 'heather' designs requested by a mother and daughter in Scotland. Pedersen and Skjold review the Sustainable Fashion Research Agenda Conference (SFRAC) held at the Carlsberg Business Centre, Copenhagen on 13th May. The day began with a keynote by Professor Kate Fletcher, reinforcing the event's alignment with the manifesto aims of the Union of Concerned Fashion Researchers, which calls for academics to take a more proactive role both in industry and in public debates in order to share with the world the knowledge we have developed through artistic, industry based and academic research. Sustainable fashion/business viewpoints were aired via three panel discussions and follow-on workshops on: Compliance, Circularity and Use. Key findings included the need to: educate consumers in selecting products that comply with high social and environmental standards; respect the value of clothing to drive sustainability; undertake further research into the terminology and practices of wear by considering real people's (as opposed to 'consumers') desires and concerns that occur in the 'craft of use' and significantly 're-use' (Fletcher 2016). Such considerations are aligned closely with a return to a craft approach to fashion through "sustaining culturally significant designs, products and practices" (Giard 2018).

Volume 10.2 features two book reviews which extend the topic of community heritage and sustainability. 'Design Roots' (Walker, Evans, Cassidy, Jung, and Twigger-Holroyd, 2018), reviewed by Martin Woolley, explores the role and contribution of design in developing and revitalising culturally significant products and practices to give them contemporary relevance. For example, in Chapter 15, Jaques Giard suggests how both educators and makers can learn much from indigenous cultures such as the Hohokam, Native American people who lived in the Sonoran Desert for 1500 years. "Despite the formidable challenges posed by the

inhospitable climate and minimal natural resources, the Hohokam became master potters...creating objects with attention to place, people and process, or... the 3P's of designing." (Giard in Walker et al 2018: 203).

In a similar vein, but from a different angle, *Craft Economies* (Luckman and Thomas, 2018), reviewed by Scott Taylor, offers a view on contemporary craft and the plethora of its manifestations which allow it to survive, emerge and grow in unusual forms and places. To exemplify this, the book brings together perspectives from sociology, geography, economics, design, art, public policy, computer science, and cultural studies, demonstrating the currency of craft practice, and particularly craft thinking today.

A word of thanks

We are delighted to present Volume 10.2 of *Craft Research*. As always, many people have been involved in the realization of this issue. We wish to thank all our contributors, as well as those authors whose submissions we regrettably had to turn away. Our gratitude also extends to all our advisors as well as to our reviewers for their excellent work. Their constructive advice and feedback to authors is an essential part in fulfilling the developmental role of the journal and in advancing the field. We further wish to thank Intellect Publishers for their amazing and unwavering support for our journal, in particular our new journal's manager, Laura Christopher, and her team.

Kristina Niedderer and Katherine Townsend

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