

#4
The
Future Craft
Issue



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In recent years, craft has seen an enormous growth in popularity. The value of handmade over machine-made has never been more pronounced, and people are increasingly interested in process as well as product. So is this all just some knee-jerk reaction to the recession doom-and-gloom, or perhaps a fetishisation of the unique, the rare? This issue proposes that there's more to it than either of these.

The rise of the handmade may be borne from necessity: young designers on a limited budget seek ways to create their products themselves. For others, the contemporary design method alienates the designer from the end product, and they are looking for ways to recoup this loss. For the consumer, being inundated with cheap, poorly made objects has become tiresome, and they begin to crave quality over quantity.

While a return to a true craft economy – as was once the fantasy of the Arts and Crafts movement – isn't feasible with 7 billion people on the planet, there are some who are looking to ensure that craft is more relevant than ever. In this issue we meet those who are shaping the future of craft; from how the artisan's workshop can combine with industrial technology, to the educational power of open-access craft centres.

Crafters have the potential to reshape modern consumerism: how and what people buy, and how often. Who knows where it can take us in the future.

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Craft as fine art

There's a fine line between craft and art, but what happens when the two meet? We discover more about the art of Freddie Robins.

Words *Maya Dudok de Wit*

Knitting and weaving aren't the first things that spring to mind when we think of creating fine art – yet this distinction seems strange. Like art, craft allows us to explore the possibilities of tactile materials, engaging the senses of sight and sound. Yet, as the artist-crafter Grayson Perry once said, craft is at risk of being viewed as 'second-class' when placed alongside art, in part because its techniques are associated with functionality and the domestic sphere.

However, as contemporary artists combine the two disciplines in their work, this could all be about to change. Perhaps we can begin to rethink our idea of what craft actually is, and its relation to fine art.

For artist Freddie Robins, craft is a way of fulfilling a deep-rooted desire to create. After studying for a degree in knitted textiles, Freddie decided to use knitting as her main form of creative expression. I was curious to discover more about her practice and the subversive potential for her craft.

Why did you choose craft, focusing especially on knitted materials?

I loved knitting as a child. I was taught to knit by my godmother, who I saw as a modern, non-conformist woman. She was young – or so I thought – unmarried, without children – again, or so I thought – and worked. She looked after herself her own way. I always associated knitting, sewing and other needle-based crafts with her and with freedom. I didn't realise that for most other people in the 1970s, these activities often represented unwanted knitted jumpers, money-saving endeavours and domestic confinement.

I am a fluent knitter, and being very skilled makes it the perfect medium for me to express myself. Knitting is a non-threatening medium that most audiences are comfortable with, which makes it a powerful tool when expressing difficult or emotive issues.

What are your views on using traditional craft techniques for subversion?

Craft is often viewed as benign, or passive. It's often held in low regard, particularly when it uses a 'domestic female' skill such as knitting. This makes it ripe for subversion.

Would you consider yourself to be primarily an artist or a craftsperson?

I trained as a designer, but it would be disingenuous to call myself one now. I refer to myself as an artist and always use the term when referring to anyone that creates things, but my work crosses the boundaries between art, design and craft.

I think that there is a distinction between craft and art, but I don't want to define it. What is important is the work that you make, not what it is called.

What motivates you as an artist?

I feel grounded by material objects. I think this is something to do with needing reassurance that I exist, and that I can leave something of myself behind when I am long dead. My work is a way of exploring and expressing my feelings of anger, frustration, sadness and fear. •



Craft Kills (2002), knitted by hand and machine