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Niedderer, Kristina  and Townsend, Katherine (2022) Editorial: Nature as source and inspiration for materials and making. Craft Research Journal, 13 (1). pp. 3-8. ISSN 2040-4689

**DOI:** [https://doi.org/10.1386/crre\\_00063\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1386/crre_00063_2)

**Publisher:** Intellect

**Version:** Accepted Version

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## EDITORIAL

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### **Nature as source and inspiration for materials and making**

Craft has its roots in nature in many ways through materials and processes, but perhaps most intrinsically through the interaction of the human body with the natural environment and its lifegiving and invaluable resources. In his philosophical account on 'The Hands and the Birth of Objects', Elias Canetti (1973) captures the central role of the hand in fostering imagination, insight and creation through his poetic description of the interaction of the hands with our surroundings. He muses:

The hand which scoops up water is the first vessel. The fingers of both hands intertwined are the first basket. The rich development of all kinds of intertwining, from the game of cat's cradle to weaving, seems to me to have its origin here. One feels that hands live their own life and their own transformations. It is not enough that this or that shape should exist in the surrounding world. Before early man could create it himself, his hands and fingers had to enact it. Empty fruit husks in the shape of cups, like coconut shells, may have existed for a long time, but were thrown away heedlessly. It was the fingers forming a hollow to scoop up water which made the cup real. (p. 217)

This enactment through the body enables empathy and understanding of our surroundings in manifold ways, which have led humans to make and be creative. Shusterman calls this mind-body unity 'somaesthetics' (Shusterman, 2012), wherein he proposes 'the body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning' (Shusterman, 2000, p. 2). In the crafts, this unity of body and mind is often expressed as 'thinking through making' and encompasses the sensory and intuitive interplay with materials through the hand or manual tools, which allows direct feedback between the hand and the mind in shaping material. This interaction may be playful and open-ended to allow for responsiveness to material qualities and their potential. Or it may seek to draw out inherent visual or tactile properties of organic matter, such as the grain in wood or stone, or the ductility in clay or metals. Such natural resources have a long tradition in the crafts, one that continues albeit from a shifting perspective of what is available and ethical to use, for example overlooked, everyday animal, mineral or vegetable substances which in the craftspeople's hands have possibilities for providing answers to some of the most pressing environmental and socioeconomic issues that we currently face (Solanki, 2019: 10). While craft practitioners have always looked to nature for inspiration and matter to work with, increasingly they are cultivating or sourcing their raw ingredients themselves to enable creative, conscientious exploration of the material within a 'holistic earth logic landscape' (Fletcher and Tham, 2019).

One example of such an approach is evident in work by Maarit Mäkelä who in collaboration with fellow researchers Camilla Groth and Bilge Aktas, describes her engagement with creativity, materials and making as a 'dialogue with the environment'. The article presents a practice-led case study of material thinking in the context of contemporary ceramics that Mäkelä experienced during a research sabbatical in New Zealand. The 'materially and bodily entangled process', synthesises the acts of making as thinking: the sourcing and preparation of the clay being intrinsic to the creative process itself. By walking through landscapes as a 'way of following' the material's natural, soil-based flow, the maker replaces 'the critical distance' of the studio with a 'sensuous and transformative proximity' (Konturri, 2018). The study illustrates how engagement with the natural environment can facilitate the physical, mental, biological and material knowledge and skills needed to craft with clay (Malafouris, 2008). The use of walking as an instrumental part of the methodology resonates with makers and people in general as a fundamental approach for living in a 'more-than-human world' (Springgay and Truman, 2018).

Anna Gustafsson discusses how she learnt the 'flow' of material-based making through the *The Anatomy of Lulesámi Handicraft*. The Lulesámi is one subgroup of the indigenous Sámi of northern Fennoscandia. Their craftwork is characterised by its rounded forms, rich decorations, woven bands and bright colours as well as its construction with local resources such as wool, wood, horn and skin; traditional forms that have been reproduced between the generations up until the present day. Gustafsson explains her ethnographic research processes, how the designs and techniques are recorded in the style of recipe books that can only be understood through a process of embodiment; 'a methodological standpoint in which bodily experience is understood to be the existential ground' (Csordas 1996: 269). In common with Mäkelä et al, and supported by references to 'enskilment' derived from sea and land (Pálsson, 1994; Ingold, 2000) the article conveys that craftwork is not merely the acquisition and execution of predetermined skills, but a continuous coordination and adjustment of movements with perceptual attention towards the surroundings.

In *Theatre of the Imagination*, Robert Pulley extends this thinking through focusing on creative engagement through play with materials and co-production as a blueprint for primary education. Making three-dimensional objects becomes a conduit to express ideas and fuel imagination in interaction with the material as much as with the social and physical environment. The aim is to encourage a 'transformative way of thinking about the world while fostering independent learning skills in children'. This craft-based approach is illustrated on the cover on Vol.13.1 in 'Cabinet of Curiosities: Life on Land' (2018).

In her discussion of Catarina Branco's artwork, Ana Nolasco considers the use of paper and of gesture, both physical and metaphorical, within making the work. She highlights how - through migrating ecclesiastical forms into contemporary art - this reflects both tradition and political messages and draws attention to the unnamed women who used to make the artefacts for their local churches. The work further reflects the locality through its stunning floral character, which is based on the tradition of paper cutting, in a synergy of the natural and the artificial. An example of Branco's craft 'Ilha Desconhecida' (Unknown Island) (2010) is featured as the *Remarkable Image*.

Also looking at the relationship of women and craft, Roberta Bernabei reviews *Berber Memories: Women and Jewellery in Morocco* written by Michel Daguet (2020). According to the author, 'jewellery is key to understanding Berber culture' where women's highly ornamental silver jewellery is inspired by patterns based on flora, fauna from North Africa,

Berber jewellery is traditionally worn by women to accessorize the body and dress, as a form of protection, but also as a means of personal investment. For this reason, some of the ornaments are decorated with coins, which in the case of necessity could be removed and exchanged for goods.

The two *Craft and Industry Reports* continue the theme of exploring naturally sourced local, organic materials and traditional processes. Yen-fei Chou and Tsai-yun Lo's report from Taiwan discusses how their research through product design involved 'combining the traditional craft of twined flower making with stone'. The resulting contemporary object integrates the flower craft which originates from the Qing Dynasty (1885-1894), based on the iconic form of the orchid, with stylistic references to calligraphy, the inkstone and marble which is mined locally. Pharitporn Kawkamsue and Prachya Kritsanaphan report on their experimental research into creating different colourful and patterned fabric and product coatings with latex, a local material of Southern Thailand. The alternative, artistic applications of latex have the potential to support local small-scale craft industry.

South Korean maker, Taeyoun Kim's *Portrait* continues with the theme of exploring 'material agency' (Malafouris, 2008) but by working with manmade plastic bags as her starting point. Kim's understanding of the 'material facts and social life' of plastic and its 'double nature as both useful and dubious' is demonstrated through her 'fashioning' (Fisher, 2015) of plastic waste into objects that extend its useful life. Using her own waste streams and those of participants with whom she co-creates some of her exhibits, Kim transforms what many consider to be detritus into sophisticated yarns by cutting and stitching, then weaves it into tapestries, artworks and new, durable, plastic bags. This ironic, zero-waste crafting strategy is the result of over 10 years of dedication to exploring the physical and emotional values of plastic through meaningful making (Chapman, 2021).

Also concerned with the preservation of natural materials, Carol Murlak takes a material design approach. He has developed a process and lightweight structure for wood, to reduce the quantity of its usage to conserve precious resources, which speaks of an appreciation of the materials of nature, that is akin to the non-anthropocentric philosophy of Mäkelä et al. albeit in a very different form.

### **Acknowledgements**

We are delighted to present Volume 13.1 of *Craft Research*. As always, many people have been involved in the realization of this issue. We wish to thank all our contributors, and those authors whose submissions we regrettably had to turn away. Our gratitude also extends to all our advisors and 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. This is only made possible with the generous and unwavering support of Intellect Publishers in particular our journal's manager, Mareike Wehner, and her team.

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