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## EDITORIAL

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## Matters of concern: mapping past and future craft identities

### Abstract

Volume 16.1 features a variety of contributions that explore the transformative power of craft, highlighting its cultural, material and personal significance in shaping identities, connecting the past and present, and offering possibilities for sustainable futures. Chatterjee et al. reflect on the struggle to sustain the heritage craft of linen making in Portugal. Shaw's Portrait showcases the work of the last remaining lapidaire in France. Writing on batik, Ciptandi and Utami Bastaman similarly discuss the challenges of maintaining traditional practices amidst an ever-changing craft landscape, suggesting that transformation is inevitable. Ferraro illustrates a mindful way to navigate the unknown, by reflecting on her personal experiences and stitching practice, whilst Setyawan explores the transformative experiences of working with clay. Themes of self-exploration and identity are also present in a book review of *The Point of the Needle: Why Sewing Matters* (2023) and the *Locating Menswear* conference review. Craft's role in sustainable development is discussed by Baidoo et al. in their article on the upcycling of metal to create mosaics and the review of the *Green Making | Materials | Objects* exhibition and the Remarkable Image further explore craft's transformative potential in relation to sustainability.

Keywords: identity, tradition, transformation, wellbeing, mindfulness, cultural heritage, self-exploration,

### Introduction

In common with many past issues, in Vol. 16.1 we draw together multiple crafts and contexts, encompassing the transformation of textiles, clay, stone and metal into artefacts, functional items and clothing, whilst shining a light on the diverse lifestyles and identities of those who research, practice and make use of craft in their everyday lives. As both a verb and noun 'craft' can constitute a process and outcome as well as an embodied experience of doing and becoming. Craft is informed by cultural, social and historical influences, personal circumstances and material resources and can foster a sense of agency, belonging and wellbeing (Pöllänen 2013; Grace and Gandolfo 2014). In this sense, craft often acts as a significant point of continuity; a tangible reference for communities and individuals to connect past with present through 'embodied activity facilitated by a person's active engagement with their material and social environment' (Groth and Nimkulrat, 2024: 1). In spite of its undisputed socio-material and cultural value, contemporary craft is threatened by the impacts of mass manufacture and the climate crisis, both of which are perpetuated by the

growth model. However, craft also offers solutions towards degrowth based on autonomy, hand making, small-scale and localized production and working within environmental limits (Rennstam and Paulsson 2024). In this issue we explore the tension between these two scenarios, by mapping the heritage, reinvention and constantly evolving role of craft in challenging times.

### Articles

In the first article, Chatterjee, Schifelbein de Menezes and Dias discuss different ways of *Interpreting Innovation and Change in Traditional Portuguese Linen Making*. Using a combination of ethnographic and design methods, the authors research the history and map the current state of the millennia-old tradition of flax and linen production at Castelões, in the region of Minho, northern Portugal. The authors highlight the ‘thirty steps’ of the making cycle ‘from seed to tablecloth’ (Chatterjee et al., p. this issue), highlighting the fact that only four craftswomen remain, aged between 69 and 88. This is a familiar situation for many heritage crafts and is the result of dynamically evolving socio-economic realities, such as population decline in rural areas and younger generations continuing to migrate to bigger cities. The remaining artisans are therefore, ‘custodians of a unique ethos that binds praxis, nature, and culture within an immutable loop’ (p. this issue) to make a local product imbued with related qualities of material and territorial resources, knowledge and skills, that contribute to ‘making the history of the product visible to society’ (Krucken 2009: 22).

Chatterjee et al. raise parallels with Latour's (2004) view of ‘matters of concern’ being beyond the facts of a situation – e.g. the decline of a heritage textile craft - by acknowledging that facts are not neutral or detached from the world, but are deeply interconnected with human practices and their environmental realities. The Castelões artisans' persistence in maintaining their linen making craft is indicative of a struggle to sustain a way of life, demonstrating how the said matter of concern is deeply embedded in their and their community's identity and sense of worth.

The desire to preserve and protect heritage crafts is further explored by Shaw in *The Last Lapidaire*. In this Portrait, Shaw shares a photographic record of Francis Bourjot, a recognized ‘Living Treasure of French Handicrafts’ (p. this issue) and the last remaining lapidaire in France. Working from a site rich with history and using workmanship rooted in its location, Shaw captures the work of Bourjot who sculpts from semi-precious stones that have remained in the workshops’ gardens since they were buried there by previous craftsmen during the Second World War. In a similar vein, Ciptandi and Utami Bastaman’s Craft and Industry Paper, focused on the *Development of Gedog Batik Crafts* reflects on the challenges of maintaining traditions of making, suggesting that survival inevitably requires transformation (Grünewald 2002; Chen et al. 2020). Through a case study of Gedog batik cloth that is representative of the traditions of Tuban in East Java, Indonesia, the authors test the implementation of a pyramid guide concept for the innovation of traditional artefacts (as put forward by Ciptandi in 2018). The authors warn that although the concept seeks to minimize conflict between the balance of tradition and modernity, hybridization can present unforeseen issues that impact upon philosophical values.

In *Cartographies of the Unknown*, Ferraro reflects and expands upon the personal realities of a changing situation. For Ferraro the matter of concern is how she can adapt to an unexpected new life as an amputee, resulting in her creating her own map by using stitching as an instinctive and mindful way to negotiate unknown territory. Ferraro is not a textile practitioner and prior to this sudden life changing event had only held a needle in her hands

to carry out some basic repairs. In fact, her interest in craft up to this time had come purely through researching, rather than practicing, having spent over a decade conducting ethnographic research into indigenous communities. Coming to it as an amateur makes Ferraro's use of sewing even more powerful illustrating how repetitive actions can mitigate physical and emotional discomfort leading to the emergence of flow and wellbeing (Niedderer and Townsend, 2024: 70)

By finding a sense of direction and solace through hand stitching, Ferraro illustrates the intrinsic value of 'plain sewing', which Barbara Burnham suggests has been overlooked in the craft and textile canon in her recent book, *The Point of the Needle: Why Sewing Matters* (2023). Reviewed by Wood, the aim of the publication is to focus on the kind of 'unadorned sewing that constructs things we wear on our bodies, use in homes and other settings or are intended as uniquely expressive artefacts' (Burnham, 2023: 12). In their introduction, Wood uses a memorable example of the power of sewing, citing the Ōtsuchi Recovery Sashiko Project in Japan, instigated by an aid worker following the devastating 2011 tsunami and earthquake. Taken up by female survivors, the *sashiko* technique involves plain stitching to embellish and reinforce fabric. The accessibility of the process provided the sewers with a distraction from the disaster, a small opportunity to find joy at being able to sew again and a sense of mindfulness from concentrating on the task in hand (Tomo and Inglesby 2024).

Themes of sewing, self-identity and cultural heritage are also implicit in Dairo's review of the Locating Menswear conference and exhibition held in July 2024, which showcased research into another overlooked area: the craft of making and wearing men's clothing. Attempting to bridge the gap, the AHRC-funded Locating Menswear network focuses on the impact of the cultural-creative interchange in four cities - London, Liverpool, Manchester and Milan - on British menswear. Day one, at Manchester Metropolitan University, featured presentations divided into six thematic tracks: Biographical, Design practices, Dialects, Obsessions, Heritage and Subcultures reflecting on different perspectives of menswear. Day two at The Space and Sevenstore, Liverpool, focused on exhibits and panel discussions, celebrating the work of academics, industry and enthusiasts.

Making as a way of exploring the self is discussed in *Clay to Shards*, in which Ichsan elaborates on the artistic making practices of Japan-based Indonesian artist Albert Yonathan Setyawan. Ichsan discusses Setyawan's comprehensive approach through the lenses of 'Clay impulses' – the physical and almost primal interaction with clay in its raw state, and 'Ceramic clues' – our daily experiences with ceramics as cultural objects. Through time-based works such as *Dissolving Bowl* (2015) Setyawan attempts to explore the transformative experiences of clay as a material, whereas the symmetrical configurations of palm-sized fired objects enable the enactment of mindful repetitive actions. Ichsan argues that these artistic practices demonstrate how 'our activities and creations [as makers] are not isolated events but parts of a larger tapestry of human existence' (p. this issue). [add statement about cover image TBC upon seeing mock-ups].

The transformative potential of craft is further explored in this issue by authors discussing its role in sustainable development and in countering destructive consumer practices. Baidoo et al. discuss the rapid rise in demand for new materials and the exploitation of natural resources in their paper *Upcycling Metal Scraps to create Decorative Metal Mosaic*. The authors present a practice-based research methodology of making mosaics for decoration using metal scraps influenced by the theme of the 'beauty of the African Woman' (p. this issue). They reference the 'importance of women's ideas and voices in sustainable development' as

guardians of their communities. Macpherson and Russell review the *Green Making | Materials | Objects* exhibition held at the Levinsky Gallery at the University of Plymouth, UK between July and August 2024 which celebrated ‘green making practices’ (p. this issue) and sought to encourage visitors to reflect on their own decisions as consumers and owners of objects. The processes, materials and objects shared highlight the many ways craft can open up conversation and reflection upon how we might live more sustainably, now and in the future. Jones’ Remarkable Image provocatively highlights opportunities for future research, within craft and beyond, to explore a soil-led and local approach to replacing petroleum-based substrates that are causing ‘incomprehensible damage’(p. this issue) to the natural world.

The Portrait and Remarkable Image contributions in this issue illustrate a new direction in the content and formatting of these articles. We invite future contributors to these submission categories to consider how they might utilise the visual essay (Portrait) or short paper (Remarkable Image) formats.

### **Acknowledgements**

As is the case with each issue, many people have contributed to 16.1. We would like to thank all the authors featured here as well as those regrettably turned away on this occasion, and the many reviewers who have given their precious time and expertise to help us maintain the quality and build upon the diversity of each publication. Special thanks is extended to our advisory board and particularly our most recent journal editor Millie Helsing, who along with Intellect is supporting us in evolving the design and extending the reach of *Craft Research*.

### **Special note of thanks from Katherine**

In 2008 Kristina Niedderer approached me with the idea of developing a journal to capture and disseminate the emerging field of ‘craft research’ and it’s methodologies and context. I accepted the invitation and with the guidance of our advisory board and first editor Bethan Ball we published Volume 1 in spring 2010, with the following stated aim:

This new journal privileges the voice of the maker, a voice historically subordinated to that of historians, curators and critics. In recent years the tool of research within the academy has become available to craft practitioners, enabling them to find their own voice to express their interests and concerns, which emerge from their position as makers.

(Niedderer & Townsend, 2010: 3)

The inaugural and subsequent issues, growing to two per year from 2014, have featured the work of many contributors, initially from Europe but with an increasing inter-continental reach. Within this group, there are returning authors, others who have become reviewers, advisors and both critical and personal friends. While the challenges associated with managing and editing a journal alongside an academic career are well known, I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with so many craftspeople and researchers across the world who are invested in how and why we make things.

So, thank you Kristina, and following in your footsteps from a year ago, I am happy to take a backseat as a founding editor by handing over to Beth Pagett to act as co-editor with Dr Gemma Potter. Beth, who has recently submitted her PhD, has supported the journal since 2022, acting as Editorial Assistant since 2024. I wish both her and Gemma well in continuing to give voice to makers across the world.

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and ‘Redesigning PPE’ to be comfortable, reusable and recyclable in collaboration with NHS and industry partners (2021-2023, AHRC/ VO15842/1). Katherine led the research projects: *Crafting Anatomies* (2015/2020), *Emotional Fit* (2017) and has published in *The Design Journal*, *Textile*, *Textile Design Research and Practice* and *Clothing Cultures*.

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Beth Pagett is a postgraduate researcher at Nottingham School of Art & Design. Her research explores the contemporary practice of natural dyeing in the United Kingdom and reflects on how craft practice involving close engagement with plants and nature can nurture sociocultural change and help us to cultivate pathways to a more socio-ecologically sustainable future.

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