

# UK DIY: CRAFT

## RESEARCH REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION

This research came out of a chance referral to the website [www.supernaturale.com](http://www.supernaturale.com) at the start of 2006 which led to a realisation of the existence a new wave of inclusive contemporary craft and general 'making'. Initial research around this well developed movement in the United States prompted questions about whether a parallel practice existed in the UK. In posing this question to various people in the contemporary craft world it seemed not, nor that any understanding of what DIY crafts is, does or looks like had permeated the UK craft culture. Ultimately, this turns out not be entirely true, though its shape and presence is still forming.

The research aims to help the movement and associated practice, interest, and infrastructures form by assembling some preliminary information about what characterises DIY Craft and its current format in the UK compared to America. This research is phase one of a project intended to lead to a second phase working with cultural partners to create mid to large scale support of DIY crafts, thus attracting new audiences to craft, and find ways to support emerging contemporary DIY craft makers.

## DEFINING DIY

What is DIY Crafts? There is no straight answer, just as there is no clear definition of what craft in general is – or art or design, and where the boundaries of each blur. However it is possible to build up a picture of what DIY crafts looks like through characteristics present across the depth and breadth of the movement and through statements around DIY craft and its ethics.

- ...this is craft or crafting, just not craft as we know it. It is slightly reminiscent of the 1970s craft movement, but this is a remix; it is witty and it is often nostalgically ironic and it offers biting sarcasm with regard to the presumed role of domestic creativity...<sup>1</sup>
- DIY is a mash-up of the post-industrial enterprise economy and good old unreconstructed communism<sup>2</sup>
- The DIY ethic is based on the power of creative re-use and re-appropriation<sup>3</sup>
- Using 'DIY Culture' would lead me into street-cool avant-garde punk territory<sup>4</sup>
- "accomplishment without professional help... people providing for themselves services which they could otherwise be expected to pay a professional to do"<sup>5</sup>
- DIY culture refers to a wide range of grassroots political activism...demonstrating the desire for an economy of mutual aid and co-operation, the commitment to the non-commodification of art, the appropriation of digital and communication technologies for free community purposes, and the commitment to alternative technologies...these subcultures blur the lines between creator and consumer by constructing a social network that ties users and makers close together<sup>6</sup>.
- These new crafters are mostly young women, in their 20's and 30's, who delight in combining retro images with traditional craft techniques to produce practical items with an off-kilter, humorous streak. There is no right or wrong. If anything, the movement is defined by its eclecticism<sup>7</sup>.
- Refers to a form of domestic creativity that emerges from a DIY ethos that seeks to confront mass market consumerism and the homogenisation of culture as a result if the aggressive expansion of big box retailers. This creative handiwork is often nostalgically ironic, concerned with style, irony and occasionally kitsch; often contains wit and humour; it is about choice. It does not seek validation within traditional art methodology rather it is motivated by a desire for creative and economic freedom<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Press, M *DIY Craft* on [www.craftresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.craftresearch.blogspot.com) 28 April 2006

<sup>2</sup> Press, M *Crafters of the World Unite* on [www.craftresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.craftresearch.blogspot.com) 9 May 2006

<sup>3</sup> Press, M quoting Galloway, A in *Crafters of the World Unite* on [www.craftresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.craftresearch.blogspot.com) 9 May 2006

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, J *Defining Vernacular Creativity* on [www.creativitymachine.net](http://www.creativitymachine.net) 10 May 2006

<sup>5</sup> Shove, E & Watson, M 2005 pp2-3

<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>7</sup> <http://leedscraftmafia.co.uk/2007/03/15/craft-congress-pittsburgh-310307-010107/> 15.03.07

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, *DIY Craft in Redefining Craft for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* CODA Keynote 2006

Characteristics which frame, and exist within, DIY Crafts:

- Use of subversive slogans
- Using recycled, found and repurposed materials
- Sharing ideas, resources and techniques
- Use of retro, ironic, satirical, humorous and shock motifs and symbols
- Appropriation of 1940s-1970s imagery and design as source material
- Inclusion of digital technologies as visuals (eg Super Mario quilting, Pac-man purses), materials (LED patterned clothing) or product (circuit bending, Nintendo console purses).
- Cross-over with indie / alternative music especially punk, goth, rock and grunge
- Anti-consumerist / anti-capitalism
- Public and group crafting activity
- Digital / virtual communities
- Challenging gender stereotypes
- Entrepreneurialism
- Anti-elitist, pro-inclusive
- Promotion of notion of craft as hip, urban, street, cool, young, funky
- Pro-individualism
- Alternative exchange values (i.e. not financial)
- Pro-handmade

From this, five core qualities can be identified which frame work as part of DIY craft culture:

1. Work will be hand-made and individual. Machines might help make the work (or indeed become composite parts and materials) – for example computers, printers, sewing machines, looms, kilns and so on; but they only form one part of the process towards the final piece. The work itself couldn't be mass produced and will be unique due to the individual attentions of the maker.
2. It will have its heart in making a statement. Not necessarily in being loud and gregarious in its aesthetic, but it reacts to a social or political position; comes from a tradition based in social, political or economic issues.
3. It will be innovative – using old crafts in new ways; traditional materials for contemporary uses; unlikely equipment, resources and components as materials; or turn new technology on its head and find ways to make it simple.
4. It borrows and references from the past or other disciplines – anything from 1930s cartoons and 1950s B-movies, to botany, maths, music and 1980s computer technology.
5. Work is often finger-wagging tongue-in-cheek, utilising irony, humour, satire and subversion.

Many other cultural practices include these qualities, and working in any of these ways does not automatically define the work or maker as DIY craft. Rather, the more of these ingredients a maker or their work includes, the more they become part of the DIY craft movement.

DIY Craft can be leisure or profession. It involves production and consumption, takes in public and private spaces and activity, and is practiced in groups or individually. It both relies upon and opposes mass industry (both digital and capital). It crosses many sociological, psychological, physical, political, economic and educational systems and needs; and touches craft, art, design, technology, electronics, public realm, play, science and maths. It involves any or no mix of technical ability, creative capability, aesthetic judgement, community spirit, innovation and experimentation. It values process and product in equal part. It is, on the whole, a field of contradictions.

## A POTTED HISTORY

- ⇒ **1984:** Rozsika Parker's book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* – repositions embroidery as an opportunity and outlet for women rather than an oppression of their domestic roles.
- ⇒ **Early 1990s:** Martha Stewart legitimises the quality and widens the general interest in home crafts via the use of mainstream media.
- ⇒ **Late 80s and 1990s:** occurrence of post-punk Riot Girrl activity including advent and increase of zines and rise of DIY ethic in general.
- ⇒ **Late 90s:** Debbie Stoller, editor of her own magazine, BUST, takes up knitting and via her publication aligns it to creating zines and mix tapes. Debbie starts up knitting group in public round New York and calls it Stitch n Bitch. Stitch n Bitch advocates knitting in public spaces and moves the start of DIY craft into the public sphere.
- ⇒ **2000:** Stitch n Bitch reaches UK: inspired, Rachel Matthews and Amy Plant start up 'Cast Off' – a public knitting group in London, knitting in pubs and holding meetings on the underground circle line.
- ⇒ **2000+:** other needlecrafts become swept along with the developments eg sewing, embroidery and crochet.
- ⇒ **2000s:** publishing spreads the word with 'how to' craft books – short snappy informal tutorials: magazines feature DIY craft articles, then specialist magazines start up such as Adorn (US) and Craft (US) in 2006.
- ⇒ **2003:** Leah Kramer sets up craftster.org – an online blog and forum for exchanging information about DIY crafts, with the motto 'no tea cosies without irony'
- ⇒ Blogs and online forums continue to increase in number and popularity, populating a new digital community upping the spread of interest, commentary on the scene, and adding to the wealth of tutorials available.
- ⇒ 3 women in Austin, US create the Austin Craft Mafia arranging public craft events and collaborating to cross-promote one another's work ..... The idea spreads so they upload guidelines of how other areas can set up other craft mafias and a network begins.
- ⇒ Betsy Greer begins the Craftivism blog: activism + craft = craftivism, the idea that DIY craft can have political impact takes hold...
- ⇒ **2005:** Etsy is created as an online marketplace for any and all types of handmade crafting on an individual scale
- ⇒ Knitta Please set up as a group and began adorning street furniture with unfinished knitting projects, then knitting specially created pieces.
- ⇒ Online DIY collective craft boutique Velvet Boutique opens from Scotland.
- ⇒ Craftermath the blog is set up by Sally Blaise with Lucy Mason to provide a UK forum for DIY crafts.
- ⇒ **2006:** mainstream media picks up the movement as Knitta Please! are featured on Saturday Night Live (US), and London's Craft Night at Notting Hill Arts Ctr features on BBC's The Culture Show.
- ⇒ Jo Bartlett and Claire Brown start up Miso Funky in Glasgow, an alternative craft market and online boutique with associated craft forums and meetings

- ⇒ Michelle Duxbury-Townsley sets up the first UK Craft Mafia in Leeds with a handful of crafting colleagues. Leeds Craft Mafia's first project is the creation of Pretty Crafty Things, a monthly alternative craft market in Leeds.
- ⇒ Sally Blaise establishes Hip Hip Handmade, an alternative craft market in Northampton.
- ⇒ Online DIY craft boutique Betty Joy opens in Sheffield, stocking a variety of makers' work.
- ⇒ Jewellery designer Laura Clark sets up Love Craft Fair in York.
  
- ⇒ **2007:** craftster.org has 55,000 members and 25m hits per month
- ⇒ DaWanda established - a European Etsy style online handmade marketplace: 130 members by April
- ⇒ The Guardian publishes its craft supplement and co-produces the 'Making Stuff: An Alternative Craft Book'
- ⇒ The Times features Etsy and Miso Funky in its Cyber Craft article
- ⇒ Etsy features 243 UK makers, over 200,000 members overall, with an average of 1000 new people joining as buyers or sellers every day
- ⇒ The second U Craft Mafia is established – Glasgow Craft Mafia
- ⇒ The first UK Etsy sellers residential weekend is planned.
- ⇒ Late 2007: follow up to Making Stuff is due, 'Making Stuff for Kids'
  
- ⇒ **2008:** DIY craft film due out 'Handmade nation' (formerly known in production phase as Indie Craft Documentary)

## TEXTILES

The DIY craft movement is dominated by textile activity. 74% of UK DIY craft makers surveyed currently work with textiles, with 52% citing fabric as their main source material, and 61% listing the sewing machine as one of their making tools (all three results were the highest percentages in their individual categories). The potted history above shows why and how this has come about with the knit and stitch leading the way in the emergence of the movement.

Though other factors include the ways in which crafters pick up their skill and knowledge – often through family members in the first place – being taught to sew or knit by mothers or grandmothers at an early age then revisiting the interest later on.

*"I got my crafting inclinations from my mother, who taught me to knit and sew when I was quite young<sup>9</sup>".*

Also these activities can be taken up at little or no cost with the right tools being very easily available both second hand and in main stream shops. In contrast to other craft practices, no specialist knowledge or space is needed, and no great expense need be involved. Textile and needlecrafts can be picked up easily, cheaply and quickly, are portable and can take place anywhere, anytime.

As of April 2007, there were 108 official Stitch N Bitch groups in the UK (i.e. registered on the Stitch n Bitch website), with the highest proportion taking place in the North West of England:

Ireland - 4

Scotland – 7

Wales – 6

England – 91 (including 14 in London; 18 in NW)

This doesn't include the many other groups based on this model which aren't registered or go by a different name.

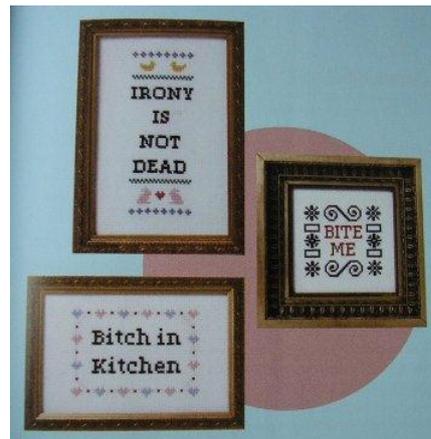
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<sup>9</sup> Raine, L in Spencer, A *The Crafter Culture Handbook* Marion Boyars, London 2007. p25  
 UK DIY Craft research report  
 © Sally Fort [www.sallyfort.com](http://www.sallyfort.com)

## GENDER STORIES

Whilst Rozika Parker and Debbie Stoller found their initial interest ignited by feminist approaches, and women provide a historical thread through which skills are developed and creative identities created in this field, gender assumptions are being challenged on both sides in DIY craft.

Original punk Greg der Ananian set up his alternative craft fair Bizarre Bazaar and created an accompanying book *Bizarre Bazaar: Not Your Granny's Craft* which includes parental advisory slogans and motifs. Men's public knitting groups are also starting up across the US under deliberately masculine names and include the tongue-in-cheek Stitch n Pitch series of events based on knitting groups at baseball games.



Julie Jackson, *Subversive Cross-Stitch*

Much of the DIY craft 'history' evolves from feminist theory – the reanalysis of the values of textile production, domestic homecrafts, and the private / public places and spaces of women. This is already well documented. However an interesting point is a parallel masculine history which carries much of the same lines of enquiry, and leads to many of the same parallel positions today. Like Rozika Parker's re-evaluation of the relationships between restriction, women's roles and needlework crafts, Shove and Watson suggest that DIY moved from "a largely unwanted responsibility being increasingly thrust on male householders, to a desirable pastime for a man, enabling release from alienated paid work through being a part-time craftsman."<sup>10</sup> I.e. that these roles once thought to be obstructive drudgery imposed on men or women, depending on their situation, are now being revisited and reclaimed through choice.

Where once 10 or more years ago men would have felt put upon to tackle DIY, and women patronised by the suggestion that they might choose to take up needle based craft, now the option that they might choose to do so is being embraced – that actually such activity is a marker of what has made a woman's identity what it is today. Women are more increasingly recognising that taking up these crafts can link them to their own private histories, to their individual identities shaped by mothers, grandmothers and beyond.

*"We are taking back craftyness from what we remember as kids – all my mum's dresses were handmade, and my grandmother sewed all of her clothing."*<sup>11</sup>

*"There are many people who grew up like me, with mothers who had been taught all these craft skills by their mothers. So many of us had those skills lying dormant for years, after rejecting everything our parents taught us as teenagers. We've come back to it, in part because of social and political ideas."*<sup>12</sup>

At the same time women (and men) are acknowledging, as Rozika Parker suggested, that the development of these skills enables them to fulfil other needs, be they personal, physical, intellectual, creative, communal, political, societal and indeed financial. For some women what starts as 'dabbling' becomes a career which can be shaped on an individual's own terms, working whatever hours and from whatever space fits in with their other priorities, in a way which few other professions can. For this reason DIY craft is often discovered and populated by mothers who are finding it allows them the freedom to work on their own terms. Other makers (male and female) are choosing to spend more time on DIY crafts for the same reason – balancing it with part time work so they have greater control over their working / life balance, and in some cases giving up other full time professions entirely to focus on making precisely because of the freedom it affords them.

<sup>10</sup> Shove, E & Watson, M *Doing it yourself? Products, competence and meaning in the practices of DIY* Durham / Lancaster 2005

<sup>11</sup> Keohane, S in Levine, F *Handmade Nation* Sneak Peek on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evDFo6-RBVc> 5 April 2007

<sup>12</sup> Raine, L in Spencer, A *The Crafter Culture Handbook* Marion Boyars, London 2007. p 25

Whilst the freedom of a work / life balance is one motivator, for others it is the very opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes which is the pull. Some women use the opportunity to challenge the notion that needlecraft– or craft in general – is loaded with ‘feminine’ characteristics. They choose radical, industrial materials, use subversive slogans, choose technological imagery and component parts, include ironic or political statements in their work and so on – using any opportunity to subvert traditional notions of what craft is. This is one characteristic of DIY crafts which is perhaps not evident in any other craft form.

Men are using the movement to challenge the idea that crafts should be dominated either by women or by feministic characteristics, as the male knitting groups above demonstrate. It is interesting that men are choosing to use these textile based craft forms traditionally associated specifically with women to change assumptions. However the presence of print in DIY craft also sees an increasing male presence merge amongst makers, with zines and screen printing being popular formats for production by men in the DIY craft world. Again these carry qualities typical of DIY crafts such as irony, satire, political opinion, kitsch, and references to popular culture icons and anti-heroes.

## **INCLUSIVITY / ANTI-ELITISM**

The above demonstrates another of DIY craft’s characteristics – that of inclusivity or anti-elitism. DIY Craft as a practice differs from other cultural forms in that education and training is not a prerequisite for status, recognition or validation.

*“It’s easy to look at much of the production on Craftster, Etsy and WhipUp as amateurish. But it’s not always clear what separates the most original and technically accomplished work on these sites from ‘professional’ work.”<sup>13</sup>*

This statement is problematic in that it assumes by default work on craftster and etsy is not professional (how is professional being defined here? Trained? Something by which a living is made? Something which carries an exchange value? All of which are entirely possible for makers on craftster and indeed obligatory for makers on etsy which is a selling site not an exchange forum). However it does serve to demonstrate that the same standards are visible within DIY craft as in more mainstream design retail environments which do rely on a specific set of training and educational histories. DIY Craft is not about which training or degree the maker took, where they have researched or exhibited, it doesn’t have a hierarchy.

*“You don’t need a license or a set of initials after your name to become a graphic designer. Indeed, you don’t need special permission from anyone to put something on paper, or on a shirt, or on the world wide web as long its your own work or in the public domain”<sup>14</sup>*

Of the makers surveyed for this research, 53% are self taught in their varied fields of fashion, textiles, jewellery, zine production etc.

Some argue that DIY crafts is for those in the know. However this research shows that whilst some makers may know there is a movement which they are part of, or that some styles, materials and trends may be more popular than others, it is possible to be highly active in DIY crafts without knowing that there is a larger movement or defining characteristics framing the work that maker is creating. It is a craft for women and men as outlined above – but also for any age or level of ability. As a practice it includes DIY makers who have trained in some form of art, craft or design, but is equally based on self-taught and family / community taught practice. Many public craft groups have members who bring parents and grandparents along (often from whom they learned their craft in the first place). The Knitta Please group includes a 70 year old as a regular member, whilst Cast-Off has a constitution explicitly stating ‘anyone, regardless of age, cultural background, gender, disability and health status is welcomed’.

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<sup>13</sup> Press, M *Fine Craft – let’s have a debate!* on [www.craftresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.craftresearch.blogspot.com) 29 May 2006

<sup>14</sup> Lupton, E (Ed.) *D.I.Y. Design it Yourself* Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2006. p19

## ANTI-CONSUMERISM & THE INDIVIDUAL

A series of slogans demonstrates the individuality so valued by DIY crafters. For example 'yeah I made it myself'...'craft and proud'...'I made this'...At a time when mass production and global industry means any item or fashion is available cheaply in any corner of the established economic world the "yeah I made it myself" value of an item becomes an integral part of DIY craft's currency. The presence of an individual from start to finish of the design and production process means that no two items will be the same – even if two people were to work alongside one another using exactly the same tools and materials. For some, the opportunity to create something entirely unique is one of the main benefits of this type of creativity.

*"teenage girls and guys say they prefer secondhand or small design brands because mass-manufactured clothes are totally uncool. For many of us, wearing something unique is a form of self-expression – partly by rejecting readymade mainstream designs offered by global fashion brands, but also, more interestingly, by inventing completely new designs of our own. Services like threadless.com, the online T-shirt action, represent an alternative to the centralised creativity of ready-made brands. Threadless sells to the idea that the T-shirt is a medium and my logo is my message<sup>15</sup>."*

Another quality of the handmade for some makers, is the opportunity to choose not to rely on mass-industry or capitalist modes of production. In some ways this echoes the theories of Karl Marx and William Morris surrounding the values of work / labour / production – the role of an individual and the handmade from start to finish versus involvement in component parts and reliance on machines, production-line style. True, an occasional work might be created from found or natural products, without the intervention of any tools at all (for example the bag shaped out of knotted recycled carrier bags, or the felted i-pod cover made with a hand-sheared fleece and natural dyes applied in the maker's sink), but this cannot be so for most crafters, who rely on bought materials, tools and machines as part of their process. Though one person may control the design to production process by their own hand, in most cases this also involves for example, bought dyes, thread, fabric, paper, plastic etc as well as perhaps a computer, printer, sewing machine, drill, printing press and so on. It would be naive to suggest that DIY crafting is anti-consumerist entirely. It is precisely the easy availabilities of materials and technologies which facilitate the development of DIY crafts and its rapidly spreading popularity. Only because these components are so freely and widely available can the movement be so inclusive. It does not have to rely on knowledge of specialist techniques or suppliers in the way that some other crafts or production skills might.

One differentiation between DIY craft and the 1970s handmade movement is that it isn't just about rediscovering craft techniques, or working for political causes, or joining communities. DIY crafters are also motivated by personal gain – not necessarily financial, but still a personal, sometimes self-indulgent reward. A feeling of achievement, accomplishment, control over their life and other priorities / pressures, of creative, intellectual or kinaesthetic satisfaction. It can be about a greater good or political cause, but it can also simply be 'me-time'. John Narisbitt's *high tech / high touch* theory explains that the more time we spend at a computer 'the more high touch and sensual our leisure time activities become'.<sup>16</sup>

There are further conscious anti-consumerist motives for DIY crafting - people feel they are able to make a choice not to support sweat-shop labour and manufacture. Knitter Cat Mazza encourages people to make the connection between globalised brands and unethical production processes. She has created and uploaded to her website a programme which translates any digital image into a custom knit or crochet pattern (based on a principle of one pixel = one stitch). Thus instantly recognisable logos are subverted and used for the purpose of promoting unique, customised garments.

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<sup>15</sup> Mutanen, U-M *My Logo, Not No Logo Craft: Volume 2* p20

<sup>16</sup> Hanaor, Z (Ed.) *Making Stuff: An Alternative Craft Book* Black Dog Publishing, London 2006. p11

The capacity for recycling is also a strong factor and features directly as a political choice, and directly through the movement's reliance on reusing and repurposing existing objects and materials into new ones.

## **POLITICAL CRAFTING**

"Activism + Craft = Craftivism"<sup>17</sup>

In the UK, any conscious political motivations to making are mainly personal – to be able to control the work / life balance for example, to support a choice to support the individual and handmade over mass-consumerism, to minimise waste by using found / recycled / repurposed materials.

UK DIY crafters prioritised their main reasons for making as follows (makers were asked to choose their top two reasons so percentages are over 100% in total):

68% - for enjoyment

45% - for a better control over the work / life balance

32% - to make a living

23% - to promote handmade work over mass production

10% - to reclaim 'women's' crafts; or to be part of a like minded community

Though the sum of each individual's choice has wider collective impacts, political activity as organised group effort isn't yet an explicit feature of DIY crafts in the UK in the way it is in the US. Cat Mazza using subverting the use of global logos above is one such example of collaborative crafting's intent to express overt political action. Other examples show how the communities which populate craft can have direct action sometimes through protest:

Sonja Todd, Threadymade - "I did a cross-stitch protest outside Downing Street for the campaign for electoral reform. I got members of the public to stitch a sampler saying, 'Make my cross count.'<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes however this 'craftivity' manifests in quieter, more directly effective ways. Recently Alison Gordon - co-organizer of Bazaar Bizarre ([bazaarbizarre.org](http://bazaarbizarre.org)), and maker and seller through her own shop faced a medical emergency. Like many other independent artists and crafters in America, Alison is without health insurance. Her colleagues and friends organised a shop on Etsy through which makers could donate work, and buyers purchase these. The income was used to contribute to Alison's medical fees. Around 250 works were donated. Similarly in December, a family in San Francisco ultimately lost their husband / father in December 2006 earthquakes. Friends and suppliers of their boutique collaborated to arrange a charity auction, selling products made by the makers who sold through the family's two boutiques and online store.

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<sup>17</sup> Betsy Greer [www.craftivism.com](http://www.craftivism.com)

<sup>18</sup> Farry, *E Viva las craftivistas* *The Guardian*, 29 May 2006

## INTER-DISCIPLINARY & CROSSOVER CONTENT

DIY Crafts references a varied cultural history borrowing from music, science, maths, contemporary / fine art, films, animation, branding and digital / new media. It imports motifs, icons, slogans and structures from these fields and translates them, tongue in cheek, into and onto everyday objects – bags, shoes, prints, jewellery, clothing, cards, ceramics, kitchen goods and other housewares.

**Vintage media / popular culture:** It also favours vintage design and surface pattern, particularly from 1950s onwards, with vintage fabric and jewellery components being especially popular as materials for makers. The interest in vintage / retro culture is a strong characteristic, with B-movie heroines and poster designs being reprinted or fixed to fabrics for all types of textile works, and digital communities developing for the sole purpose of swapping 1950s / 60s knitting patterns.



**Music:** DIY Crafts links with music are prevalent. The movement recalls elements of punk in its attitude to just getting on with it, using whatever resources are available and adapting them to suit, its anti-capitalist approach, and its fondness for advocating the shock value of swear words (though more likely cross-stitched into a framed plaque for the kitchen or embroidered onto a towel than verbalised in an interview). London based Sonja Todd of Threadymade works in this way, creating cross stitch and other sewing kits based on punk record album covers.

*The Stitch Pistols, Threadymade (UK)*

The movement also offers an outlet for individual print as punk did, continuing the tradition of producing zines and embracing disenfranchised fall out from the publishing industry:

*"We're not specifically people that were crafters, but we definitely identified that we liked that a lot more than the manufactured stuff we looked at. So it felt more of a natural fit because we like it. We both made zines so from that self-publishing background we had an appreciation of DIY stuff"<sup>19</sup>.*

10% of makers selling at alternative craft markets in the UK such as Miso Funky and Pretty Crafty Things produce zines, two thirds of these also sell at gigs and music collectors outlets. Part of this is due to the continuity of zine culture starting up with Punk and Riot Grrrl movements, and partly because the zine falls naturally into handmade craft camps with the individualised print production process. Content still revolves heavily around music, though increasingly they are being used to stimulate discussion around anti-capitalism, and as outlets for sharing craft ideas too.

The music world is also seen as an opportunity for expansion and promotion by individual craft entrepreneurs - 9% of makers surveyed in the UK sell their work at gigs (amongst other outlets), an opportunity also picked up on in the US:

*"I make these polar fleece mittens for KittenGiant because everyone had t-shirts for their bands but who had mittens for their band? Nobody! And so I just kept making these mittens and ended up making them for K Records."<sup>20</sup>*

**Science:** DIY craft also crosses over with science, not just in technological ways, but also through biology, botany and molecular structures. On its most basic level flora and fauna have always been influential reference points for crafts and DIY is no exception, though there is often a preference for stylised motifs rather than pure representation.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy & Yvonne in Levine, F *Handmade Nation*::: Sneak Peek on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evDFo6-RBVc> 5 April 2007

<sup>20</sup> Nikki McClure in Levine, F *Handmade Nation*::: Sneak Peek on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evDFo6-RBVc> 5 April 2007



On a more innovative level however, it is the structural composition of forms which have been picked up and developed. The basis of this work arose from scientific exploration and demonstrations of hyperbolic planes – a geometric phenomenon which causes the edges of what would otherwise be a sphere to continually curve away from itself, creating a rippling effect such as that on the edge of a sea slug. The mathematical formulations underlying crochet enable the medium to be used to create models which demonstrate these properties more durably, effectively and accessibly than other

earlier demonstration models. Mathematician Dr Daina Taimina has worked developing these models for the past 10 years, and was invited to collaborate with The Institute for Figuring (a virtual research project) to explore this further. This work incorporates more academic themes exploring the likes of 'knot theory' and 'tensegrity structures'. The work evolved to a point at which its three core researchers noticed that the forms they were creating bore a striking similarity to coral. As a result of this interest in their work also organically uncovered a shared interest amongst many non-academic crafters who have been using crochet to develop the same sorts of creations. The institute began to invite crafters to submit 'coral' to create a collaborative reef under the project's working title of 'I've got a coral reef too'. This project demonstrates many qualities of DIY craft not least the open sharing of ideas and techniques; collaborative and community activity; a level playing field between the trained and self taught or academic and amateur; development of activity via online projects; use of needlecraft; anti-elitism and inclusivity.



*Lorenz Manifold  
Dr Hinke Osinga*

In the UK Drs Hinke Osinga and Bernd Krauskopf at Bristol University have been working on a parallel project using crochet and knitting to explore the 'Lorenz Manifold', a 3d manifestation of one of the theories demonstrating the mathematics behind chaos theory, which looks at the unexpected flow of space and impacts on for example, the behaviour of water, solar satellites, molecular vibrations and weather / climate systems. Though Osinga's model of working is available for anyone to try out through her online instructions, she states that it is complex, requires absolute concentration and perhaps only achievable for very experienced crocheters. The pattern given also includes complex mathematical equations and dense text so on first glance it lacks the accessibility and inclusivity the coral reef project offers. Nor has it found any outlet as a collaborative project yet and remains in the academic sphere for the most part. Whilst it perhaps lacks enough DIY craft qualities to be categorised as such, it does demonstrate the further potential to develop the crossover between DIY craft and science in the future, and particularly through a UK perspective.

### **Techno-crafting:**

Craft takes on new meaning in this DIY arena as makers modify existing technologies to create new objects or built and incorporate new circuits and objects from scratch. Music influences and incorporation of new technologies combine in some cases. For example circuit bending sees makers reusing (recycling, repurposing) 1980s computer technologies. By reconfiguring the electronic circuits products are given new life and purpose by turning them into musical objects – their original soundtrack becomes rewired and played as a new composition. By working with old materials to repurpose them as new this activity becomes part of the list of features which define DIY crafts, and widens the type of products falling into the movement.

New technologies are utilised in a variety of other ways by way of recycling, repurposing and referencing. Tutorials are being shared on craft forums explaining how to wire LED bulbs into handmade fashion items and 'retro' computer imagery is being used to decorate handmade work.

*“By making electronics crafty I hope to make them friendly and more approachable to a wider audience of people who may not otherwise want to work with electricity or computation.”<sup>21</sup>*

Once the domain of the latest in digital technology and animation, icons such as Super Mario Brothers and Tetris are now being used as motifs for quilting, subverting all their initial qualities of high-tech, cutting edge, mass cultural consumer goods.

Early model Nintendo controls are being reconstructed as purses, wallets and other objects, whilst typewriters are being wired up as keyboard for the latest model i-macs.

*“Taking electronics apart was always fascinating for me and I finally started to put them back together – but often in ways unintended by the manufacturer. I am an avid recycler and truly enjoy finding new uses for objects. People have copied my projects, people have offered to buy them – but I suggest they give it a try. It is just so satisfying to make something of your own.”<sup>22</sup>*



Zenilorac: No Sew NES Controller Wallet (UK)



Monkeycraft, Tetris quilt

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, A in A *The Crafter Culture Handbook* Marion Boyars, London 2007. p108

<sup>22</sup> McFarland, R in Spencer, A *The Crafter Culture Handbook* Marion Boyars, London 2007. p122

## STREET CRAFTING

Demonstrating parallels with street art, street crafting takes place in public spaces, often in hidden spaces, sometimes under the cover of night.

Knitta Please is one such group, taking all the hallmarks of street art / graffiti and throwing a woolly jumper over it. Knitta Please are a growing group of maverick knitters with a regular core of around 10 people of all ages. They create scarves and jumpers for lampposts, bridges, trees and other urban features, sneaking out at night to anonymously dress the cities in knitting, securing their work at with cable ties. Whilst they mostly adopt pseudonyms such as PolyCotn and SonofaStitch, cofounder Magda Sayeg dropped her codename to respond to queries from press and curators. Unlike much street art, these works are received with charm, warmth and humour. This has led to commissions for public art for the purposes of exhibitions and PR activity.



*James Victore, Plate tagging*

James Victore is a 'dinner plate pirate'. Spontaneously attacking porcelain with a fat black paint pen drawing skulls, and birds and fish (dead ones). What drove him to start tagging plates in public? "I love the look and feel of the marker on the off-white plate surface" He used to use his plate drawings to entertain friends and waiters. "I thought they would be mad if they caught me but they usually wanted one". Each of Victor's plates is done with a recipient in mind, "I love to give people things uniquely for them. Each plate is a one-of-a-kind."<sup>23</sup>

Jenny Hart is an embroiderer and founder of Sublime Stitching, 'a pioneering design company launched to revitalize the craft of hand embroidery'. Her work and kits include motifs from popular and subcultures, as well as embroidered portraits of A-list celebrities. More recently she has begun to work on public and street-inspired pieces such as the Embroidered Skateboard in which she drilled holes at points the needle would normally intersect the fabric and used a series of embroidery stitches to decorate the underside of the board. All the boards were created, and then auctioned off to fund a new skate park.



*Jenny Hart, Embroidered Skateboard*

<sup>23</sup> [www.jamesvictore.com](http://www.jamesvictore.com) pp85-88  
UK DIY Craft research report  
© Sally Fort

## SHARING, AUTHORSHIP & CURRENCY

As explored above, traditional values of capitalism are not always appropriate in the world of DIY crafts and indeed are often actively opposed. This includes notions of invention, property and exchange – or currency. In the mainstream industrial / capitalist society, an item is designed, copyrighted, put into production on an industrial scale (however large or small) and sold as a retail item for fixed wholesale or retail prices. In DIY craft different circumstances are deliberately created. Ideas and production techniques are shared, and this act of sharing is wilfully promoted and encouraged.

*“For people who have grown up in the digital age, the impulse to make and share one’s own work is second nature.”<sup>24</sup>*

The nature of craft and making means that works cannot be produced on an industrial scale, but created at individual and cottage industry levels. Items are individual, or could be replicated by the same person so limited in output levels, and are handmade / hand controlled so never actually an exact reproduction. They carry a much wider range of exchange values. Only 15% of crafters claim an interest in selling their creations<sup>25</sup>.

DIY crafts are populated with online forums, collective websites, blogs, tutorials, image banks – all brimming with ‘how tos’. How to find your idea, how to translate it into... (a bag, t-shirt, stationery, toys etc) complete with tutorials featuring step-by-step instructions and detailed images for reference, often with links to suppliers or other people selling, designing and creating the component parts – the cottage or mainstream industries that can feed your own, or tips about which tools to use, how to adapt it for different sizes, materials and so on. Some take this a step further and produce kits.

Such explanations are usually set up in a system which allows feedback, comment, somewhere to show your image of the version you created, and so the sharing circle increases with each variation on the theme, each person who adds their thoughts.

How does this sharing work in terms of production and exchange in a time of patents, intellectual property, copyright and rip-offs? If someone sells their work based on an idea or pattern someone else created and shared freely, who does or should benefit from the credit, or where relevant, the profit? If craft is produced and exchanged, what mechanisms and payment is swapped if not finance?

Firstly, they may indeed be made available for sale. For example a maker adds a price tag and sells their work on Etsy, Ebay, through a boutique, at a craft market, through their online website or wherever. The maker defines the price and a buyer agrees and pays.

Secondly, the process begins as above. However the maker creating the piece isn’t actually working for financial motivation in the first place, and sells their work more as a means of sharing, or simply to avoid stock building up in their home or studio. They advertise a price they think reasonable, but respond positively to negotiation and sell at a price the buyer thinks reasonable, though it may be lower than the one advertised.

Thirdly, the process was never financially motivated and the maker produced the work for their own personal reasons or to test out new creative ideas. The work has fulfilled its purpose, the maker doesn’t need to keep the final product. This maker enjoys the communal nature of the DIY craft movement and regularly visits other makers’ blogs or other DIY craft forums. They see an item they like by another maker, and arrange a swap.

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<sup>24</sup> Lupton, E. *DIY Design it Yourself* Princeton Architectural Press, 2006, New York p18

<sup>25</sup> Mutanen, U-M Craft Volume 1, 2006 p39

Lastly, the maker has enjoyed making the work, there may have been a particular personal motive involved for them, or they may have had a particular 'client' in mind whilst making. Exchange of any kind was never the issue. The maker gives the work away or posts the instructions on the internet, enjoying the feedback as a by-product of their creative process.

The sharing elements of DIY craft culture are motivated not so much by actually having the finished items to own or to sell, more to find a common element with a community – a way to personalise an international population, discovered and played out online.

*“The DIY movement relies on and stimulates public dialogue... In the process of sharing their practical know-how with other people, they build a community of individuals joined together around shared interests.”<sup>26</sup>*

Currency is built up by recommendation, peer review and respect, sharing patterns, tutorials, downloads. It would be naive to suggest that straight forward sale doesn't exist – it does, many makers are very successful in their sales and make a full time living from it. However it's one of a number of forms of currency. The currency of value in DIY culture is *commonality*. It may be represented by cash, by other goods, or by peer respect and recommendation, but it is the act of one person finding a way to symbolise a kinship with another person, a form of 'social capital'<sup>27</sup>. They may be in the same town and meet at events, workshops, social occasions etc; or may live thousands of miles apart of different sides of the globe arranging exchanges online, but it is the quality of a shared interest that motivates exchange.

Practices which dominate other cultural referencing; and underpin copyright, patents and intellectual property regulations are still at play in such sharing spaces. However the etiquette associated with them functions differently as economic safeguarding of the 'original' is not the main objective. Though copyrights and patents are not applied, there is an informal etiquette to the system which mirrors the ethos of copyrights and patents, but isn't legally set out or enforced. There are two main protocols involved with sharing, borrowing and using the work of another DIY maker. Firstly that no money is made from the work borrowed or referenced. Downloadable patterns and tutorials are prefaced with wording along the lines of 'please don't sell anything made from this pattern'. Secondly that where a shared set of instructions is replicated outside of its original source, as with any reproduction, a credit is required. However there is no formalised format for such a credit. A 'thanks to Jenny's template' with a link to the online original version is enough. What is required is that the spirit of sharing is maintained, but as with other innovations and inventions, the author is not lost amongst the sharing. As referred to earlier however, this is not about safeguarding the finances attached to intellectual property of the author, so much as the author maintaining the free access to all that they had intended when the pattern or tutorial was published. If another person is profiting from it, it means their customers have been denied the free access intended originally. This flags up a new style of entrepreneurship where the goal is not to generate as much profit as possible, but to increase or in some cases challenge ownership and enjoyment of that field of activity.

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<sup>26</sup> Lupton, E (Ed.) *D.I.Y. Design it Yourself* Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2006. p18

<sup>27</sup> Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster, 2000, New York

## ART & ANTI-ART

There are debates in DIY craft around how the field does / doesn't or should / shouldn't cross-over with art.

On the one hand there is a feeling that DIY craft is anti-establishment, inclusive, non-hierarchical and in general less elitist than the fine art / contemporary art / high art world. DIY crafts is about anyone joining in no matter what their training, background, contacts and so on. It doesn't have a set of values wrapped up in institutionalised or niche / specialist opinion, and can be more embracing, welcoming and sharing than what is perceived as the white cube syndrome of the art world.

*"The craft movement is a really supportive creative community which I feel doesn't necessarily exist with other art worlds or art communities as much... I feel that people are really willing to share their resources and ideas and business plans. I think it's incredible that there are all these people looking to help each other and at the same time further their own businesses and creativity."*<sup>28</sup>

*"After a move to art school in the big city I began to feel like there was a place for me and my work. My enthusiasm was soon squashed however, by the sense of alienation I felt from the pretentious and exclusive gallery scene. It was simply a game I could not bear playing. This inspiration caused me to look towards craft, namely textiles work..."*<sup>29</sup>

On the other what makes DIY craft something beyond what has been described as the hippy crafts of the 1970s, is its capacity for innovation and experimentation, and in this it does cross over with contemporary art practice. It explores ideas, finds new ways to use materials – or indeed new matter to use as its materials. It poses questions and provokes thought, discussion and debate. And with the movement's increasing popularity it is benefiting from the wider curatorial interest in contemporary craft – as such individual makers are being spotlighted, commissioned, exhibited and theorised by curators in the same way rising and established fine artists are. At the same time the entrepreneurial nature of DIY crafters means many makers also run galleries, shops or studios with changing displays and are exhibiting more and more DIY craft themed shows.

Audiences, visitors and the public at large are more familiar with buying craft products than art, it is easier for many people to buy an object they see as having a functional or decorative purpose in their home or life, than it might be for them to buy a work of art. For this reason, and the disempowering experiences they have had with the contemporary art world, some artists are finding it a more financially sustainable and generally more satisfying option to move over into a making style of work. One example is the artists collaborative Poketo who invite artists to fulfil a craft production brief. A recent project worked with artists to create miniature works which were then incorporated into wallets.

*"Poketo merges arts and crafts – but it's not your mother's crafts, there's nothing Martha Stewart about this. We're merging arts and crafts in a hip, urban way that is the new subculture in the craft world these days. The line between arts and crafts has blurred, and that's where Poketo sits. Our artists are working in the world of galleries and crafts, producing utilitarian art for a different world."*<sup>30</sup>

Hung and Magliaro<sup>31</sup> observe that artists are using craft techniques too in antithesis to the web propelled globalisation and slick MTV and internet begotten graphics – individuals who grew up surfing the internet and are now impassioned by the DIY generation. They take on crafting into their work to refer to the input of hand, nature, the body into production.

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<sup>28</sup> Levine, F, [CraftyPod #49: Handmade Nation, with Faythe Levine](#) 22 April 2007

<sup>29</sup> Rowley, C in Spencer, A *The Crafter Culture Handbook* Marion Boyars, London 2007. p46

<sup>30</sup> Sheriden, P *A Painting fit for a Pocket Craft: Volume 02* p42

<sup>31</sup> Hung, S. & Magliaro, J. (Eds.) *By Hand: The use of Craft in Contemporary Art* Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2007. pp11-12

Performance artist Shane Waltener agrees, stating,

*“Contemporary art reinvents itself by looking outside its own area for inspiration – be it politics, science or technology. Right now craft seems to play a bigger part in how and why art is produced.”*<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps where artists differ from makers then, is that the use of crafting in art is a deliberate coding or reference system, a symbolic gesture; craft appropriated and used as a tool to signify something else. A hijacking of sorts. For makers, though work may be inspired, consciously or subconsciously by political preferences, and so the aesthetic or materials may refer to this, it is a clear choice to make, to craft first and foremost, rather than to present a message.

DIY craft, as already established, is an activity which is open to all, and there is no crystal clear answer to what craft is, or what art is, or where the two meet. What is clear in the art versus craft debates is that presently, boundaries are blurring with contemporary artists using craft as a medium, and craft being increasingly respected, researched, commissioned and exhibited by a widening range of galleries, museums and other spaces. As such the only clear definition of what is craft or art then, is in how the worker describes themselves.

## ENTREPRENEURIALISM

A recent survey of 100 indie crafters found that more than 25% have recently switched from part time crafting to full time. Almost 85% report their 2006 sales were up from 2005. They sell via their own Web sites, (56%), at fairs (90%) and in brick and mortar stores (47%)<sup>33</sup>.

A quality of the DIY craft scene is that anyone can do it so potentially, anyone can sell what they make. The advent of digital marketplaces like eBay and the rise of specialist outlets such as Etsy means that any maker can set up their ‘store’ quickly, easily and cheaply with no specialist retail or computer programming skills required. Others develop their own selling websites or promote their products through online indie boutiques.

A similar quality is identified by the cultural thinktank Demos which it calls the Pro-Am Revolution. (Pro-Am being professional amateur). It describes the rise of “amateurs who work to professional standards...Pro-Ams are knowledgeable, educated, committed and networked, by new technology. The twentieth century was shaped by large hierarchical organisations with professionals at the top. Pro-Ams are creating new, distributed organisational models that will be innovative, adaptive and low cost.”<sup>34</sup>

However the desire to be part of a community is also strong amongst makers and as such the need to meet like minded makers in person is also valued. This has led to the development of an increasing number of contemporary craft fairs such as Pretty Crafty Things, Miso Funky and Hip Hip Handmade in the UK (alongside a plethora of US fairs). The mix of online and real marketplaces also increases the reach of these makers and allows them to sell in both places simultaneously.

The occurrence of such specialist / alternative craft fairs and markets is still new and undeveloped overall across the UK however. This, and an innovative entrepreneurial spirit have led makers to think about the market in other ways. As outlined earlier, some makers are maximising the music-cross over potential and selling their work at gigs.

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<sup>32</sup> Walter, S in Hung, S. & Magliaro, J. (Eds.) *By Hand: The use of Craft in Contemporary Art* Princeton Architectural Press, New York 2007. p160

<sup>33</sup> <http://leedscraftmafia.co.uk/2007/03/15/craft-congress-pittsburgh-310307-010107/> 15.03.07

<sup>34</sup> Press, M quoting Leadbetter, C & Miller, P on *Crafters of the World Unite* on [www.craftresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.craftresearch.blogspot.com) 9 May 2006

Elsewhere a 'loophole' is being used by others testing out the potential for selling at farmers markets. The criteria for selling at UK farmers markets is surprisingly similar to criteria for selling through online craft marketplaces with an emphasis on the producer of the work also being the seller; with additional criteria that work (or ingredients) are produced locally. However the criteria do not state what the products are – there is nothing specifically to say it should be food or farm produce for example. Crafters who have explicitly enquired about the eligibility of their produce have been told as long as they / their work meet the criteria, it can be included.

A further alternative opportunity starting to emerge in the UK is to develop craft events – part workshop and part market. Often making the most of the sub-cultural aspects of the movement, pubs and bars are playing host to day and evening events which enable makers to sell their work and promote the craft community to non-makers. Workshops and demonstrations may be part of these events, sometimes accompanied with a free body of materials for anyone to 'have a go', others times with specially assembled kits for people to join in with on the spot or take home and try later. The benefits of this arrangement are mutual to all – the host venue receives more trade from the specialist craft visitors; the craft sellers attract new audiences from the pub customers (many of whom are new to craft entirely); the customers and craft visitors both get added value in being able to join in making as well as well as potentially buying; and over time theoretically the craft audience grows by taking in and nurturing 'new audiences' or 'non-attenders'. This is typical of DIY crafts in that it not only exchanges goods and finance, but also knowledge, tutorials, materials, advice, ideas and community spirit. In organisational and business terms it also demonstrates PR and sponsorship potential by creating mutually beneficial partnerships with non-craft organisations.

## QUALITY

"Craft consumption explicitly entails production, of a product made and design by the same person' involving the application of skill, knowledge, judgement and passion"<sup>35</sup>

A characteristic of DIY craft is that anyone can participate and so the above assumption is problematic. Is it always true in all cases that by default skill and judgement will be applied? If a maker is self taught and for them the buzz is in the making rather than the finished article or a sale, they might not place value on the skill – the technical aptitude for example, or the potential for developing a specialist knowledge of which tools and materials to best facilitate their processes. Would they care about judgement – by what definition, who's judgement? Possibly not if the making of the work was for their own physical, kinaesthetic, creative gain.

For some the need to craft leads to a continual testing and revisiting of different ideas, materials, tools, patterns, practices, templates and so on. Over time their expertise grows, however this only becomes recognised as being of a particular quality by a wider audience when it enters the public realm and becomes accessible to a wider audience. Without that, its quality can only be measured by its maker and is subjective. To be established as being of quality by others, it needs to be open to wider comment. As outlined, there appears to be a lack of elitism about whose work has quality, which college or university they went to (if any) or the economic value of the materials involved. Instead profile is built and validated by other people enjoying or appreciating their work, by being part of the communities above, and by being flagged up by other makers or buyers. It's a peer-led system that builds profile for makers. For others, wider public opinion is not important – making fulfils a personal need and that is enough in itself. This means that inevitably the output of DIY craft is highly mixed in its levels of quality.

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<sup>35</sup> Shove, E & Watson, M 2005 p9, quoting C. Campbell 2005  
UK DIY Craft research report  
© Sally Fort [www.sallyfort.com](http://www.sallyfort.com)

## EXHIBITION / PROJECT POTENTIAL

**The gallery context:** To place works in an exhibition within organisations who have a history of displaying professional work – be it or art, craft, design or any other cultural modes of production, an expectation is built up both internally and in visitors (consciously or otherwise) about the level of exhibits on show. Audiences don't expect to see something they can make at home, and curators would expect to show the best in the field, works which demonstrate quality, innovation or critical engagement.

### UK vs US DIY crafts

The UK DIY scene as it currently stands exists through a few, but increasing number of specialist markets and bazaars, a cluster of online forums and blogs, and individual selling through non-specialist online forums such as ebay and myspace.

Most makers create their work for enjoyment, some to contribute towards a living, and a minority of makers focus entirely on their craft as their work and income. Most makers are young women still at, or recently emerging from university who see their craft as a hobby or something which may in time grow to be their main work and income. In the meantime they subsidise their practice with other jobs. Many have had some applied arts / textile training though often not in the same field as they are now working (for example a popular route is textiles training leading to jewellery or stationary making).

The percentage of makers in the UK with political, community or other conscious motivations is barely enough to register overall as yet.

This leaves the UK scene in a position whereby makers on the whole are not yet financially established enough to solely concentrate on their craft; or where finance / income is not the main objective. This absolutely matches the ethos of the DIY scene where anti-consumerism is promoted. However it also means that unlike the US, the majority of makers are not yet confident in finding ways to make their craft support their lifestyle and living costs – whether this be through the creation of their goods, or associated opportunities such as exhibiting, publishing, writing, broadcasting, running workshops / demonstrations etc.

This makes the potential for showing DIY craft products problematic. The field is as much (if not more) about process and motivation, as it is product. The 'feelgood factor' of making DIY crafts is the main motivator of the scene in the UK. It isn't necessarily the point to create an admirable example of work. A characteristic of the movement is that anyone can be part of it. This does mean inevitably that notions of quality aren't always important in the making process and whilst this isn't an issue at all for the movement, it very well may be for a gallery aiming to explore and exhibit the field.

In the US DIY Crafts as a movement is more developed and motivations for participating have advanced further. In the UK however, there are gaps in terms of political, social and economic motivation, much of the work lacks innovation. This feature is far more developed in the US scene where politics are never far from the discussion about DIY crafts, and the cross-over with other cultural arenas is becoming more rife. For example commercial and major galleries in America are promoting work emerging from the DIY movement; and as explored earlier, scientists and mathematicians are using homemade textiles work to illustrate detailed exploration of chaos theory and biological development; electronics and DIY craft are meeting through advanced textile and fashion productions and product / furniture design; street art / street games are incorporating the subversive and home-made qualities of DIY craft. In turn this pushes the boundaries of what is achieved. Combined with the larger numbers of people involved in DIY crafts in the US, this leads naturally to a greater depth and breadth of potential exhibitors and work than exists in the UK at present.

The result of this in the US is that the space for exploration of where to take DIY craft becomes much wider, with a more varied pool of influences and set of references. In addition, since the movement is more established in the US, ways to make a living around the crafts are more tried and tested, and opportunities to promote and share work are more widely available. This all culminates in a significant difference between the UK and US, certainly in light of the potential for exhibitions of the movements, which is that US makers and work demonstrates much more innovation and experimentation. At present the UK work is still at the stages of largely being an update on existing ideas and goods. Applications of material, and indeed what counts as crafts material, may be changing, but what counts as craft itself is still mirroring traditional practice.

An interesting approach to a UK creative programme would be to combine the US and UK situations. For example for the UK mapping and documenting the rise in the DIY craft culture through documentary photography and interpretation information. This would be complemented well by a series of workshops sharing the community ethos of the movement. A pilot market / bazaar in the locality of the exhibition would also be very appropriate. Interpretation within the exhibition – or which could become an (or several) exhibits in itself – could be spaces, facilities, tutorials and patterns to make whilst visiting the show. Over time these could be incorporated / curated into the show. Links should also be made with existing DIY craft communities, and pilot Craft Night events could be held either at the exhibiting venues or local community / social spaces. Ultimately the sharing activities and pilot events will be where the opportunity for a legacy lies, where the movement can continue to develop long after the exhibition ends.

However it would be important in contributing to the development of the movement in the UK to showcase the kinds of ideas, applications, cross-overs and innovation existing in the US. Some actual works from America should be included, with the potential to showcase a wider variety – whether by film, photography, streaming and websites available in the galleries etc. Potentially a public programme could be linked with this, inviting one or two speakers over (budgets / funding permitting). Financially it would make sense to partner up with other relevant organisations around the UK to fundraise collaboratively and have speakers attend a few events around Britain (or find out about any potential publications being produced in the US which might enabled promoters to cover some costs).

## **NORTH WEST PROJECT OPTIONS**

1. Exhibition of *works* – which would rely almost entirely on imported work as explained above. Doesn't really represent the ethos of DIY crafts as it carries the danger of institutionalising the movement it too much, and has the potential to be hugely expensive and complicated to manage. DIY Crafts is propelled by community activity – it's out there and anyone can join in. The traditional curatorial approach can rely too much on an individual or niche selection showing 'what good DIY craft looks like' – this would be a mis-representation of the movement and how it functions.
2. Exhibition about the DIY craft *movement* – more interactive, interdisciplinary, hands-on and rely more on multi-media, interactive exhibition design and a variety of interpretation formats. More realistically achievable and truer to the spirit of DIY crafts, though still incurs costs around concept and build. However it enables a better curatorial system in which a wider number and type of participants create the representation and has the potential for user involvement, education, outreach, training, participation and collaboration activity. Though it would need a central co-ordinator / curator – this person's role would be more as a project manager / facilitator rather than a one-person vision and selector. To work in this way would offer a more accurate and integrated approach to what DIY craft practice is.
3. Exhibition of quality *UK makers' work* – however given the current early status of the movement in the UK, and issues around profile and quality of makers / works, to achieve this it would need to focus mainly on trained / professional makers whose work shares aesthetic qualities with DIY crafts. However this isn't really the intention of the project as it stands in opposition to the inclusive nature of DIY crafts, and is subject to the difficulties of option 1.
4. An exhibition exploring cross-overs of art and DIY style craft, for example working with artists who incorporate craft into their art. However the aim of this project is to promote and advance crafts as a specific field rather than to promote fine art which borrows from craft, i.e. to work with people who would call themselves makers, rather than artists. This too is subject to the issues of option 1.
5. A programme of events exploring characteristics of DIY crafts such as participation, inclusivity, entrepreneurship, tutorials / demonstrations and the development of live and digital communities. This would have the potential to boost the DIY craft scene in the region, leaving a legacy of activity and groups, and could lead to a wider interest in crafts in general. As with option 2, it could be achieved through a much more collaborative approach which is more representative of genuine DIY craft activity. Events could include talks, workshops, demonstrations, film screenings, discussions, public crafting events (eg in pubs, on public transport, in squares and gardens etc), alternative markets / fairs, craft nights etc. A DIY craft network drawing other regional groups in and broadening the spread and format of crafts involved could be created not only to promote and co-ordinate the above events, but also as the beginnings of a legacy to sustain activity beyond the lifetime of this specific project.

***Recommendation: a combination of options 2 and 5 would be most appropriate.***

## Potential exhibition sections:

### Display themes

- ⇒ Music influences
- ⇒ Technology cross-over
- ⇒ Street craft
- ⇒ Women's history
- ⇒ Digital communities
- ⇒ Science cross-over
- ⇒ Group crafting
- ⇒ Tutorials / how-to

### Participation & Interaction

- ⇒ Some of the above themes can be exhibited through existing work or commissions
- ⇒ There is also potential to work with local / regional HE to explore these themes and create new work for display with staff and students\*
- ⇒ Exhibits themselves should be interactive wherever possible either by presenting an interactive exhibit / object; or creating the opportunity to make something within the exhibition
- ⇒ Interpretation – can also include a range of computers featuring relevant blogs
- ⇒ Reading area of DIY craft books
- ⇒ Possible showing of Handmade Nation film (if completed + available)
- ⇒ Photography demonstrating craft groups and / or street crafting\*
- ⇒ Tutorials as vinyls on exhibition walls (with accompanying handouts / downloads available)
- ⇒ Creative industries programme – talks, DIY craft events, alternative market etc\*
- ⇒ No catalogue but zine based project would be an appropriate alternative\*, as well as website with tutorials, downloads, forum, links to local groups etc

*\*Potential for community / outreach / education / training / new audiences engagement*

A combined PR / outreach / sector development series of events, workshops, projects etc would be absolutely integral to the project – not just to widen the reach of the show but because DIY crafts is underpinned by an ethos of sharing and inclusion. To isolate it as to an institutionalised discipline within the gallery would be a mis-representation of the practices involved.

It would be ideal to include a few pieces of work from the US to demonstrate innovation and creative development; contribute to the quality of the show, and help raise the aspirations of DIY crafters in the UK. This will also help the development of the sector in the UK by prompting questions about thinking bigger and wider, ultimately with the potential to lead to a much more exploratory scene in this country. A public programme associated with US makers would be a costly, but very valuable addition to the project, with makers sharing details of their work and importantly, their different routes into current craft career paths.

Exhibits are likely to include some textiles pieces but may also incorporate electronics, print, possibly ceramics, and recycled / repurposed materials as well as multi-media interactives.

### **Project Partners**

Galleries\*  
Higher Education  
Creative industry networks  
Craft groups  
Guest US speakers / makers if possible  
Funders / sponsors

### **Key Staff Roles**

Central curator / project manager

Venue curators

Venue technicians

Exhibition designer

Venue public programme / education / outreach staff

Front of house staff

*\* Turnpike Gallery, Leigh are keen to develop the exhibition potential if funds can be secured. This offers a sizeable space and could form the main exhibition. Other partners across the region could be involved via smaller projects resulting in displayed work, and the events programme. Ideally the project should retain its original vision of being a multi-partner event in order to provide maximum support to the regional contemporary crafts sector - but if this is not possible (due to scheduling, funding or other issues) Turnpike Gallery would be happy to be the sole project venue.*

## **APPENDIX**

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