

Growth of Studio Craft

Paul J. Smith, the Director Emeritus of the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design): “In looking back one can see a drastic change. Acceptance and growth best describe the studio movement today. First, there are many more practicing ceramists, fiber artists, blacksmiths, and artists working in each media.”¹

Early Tradition

“Handmade objects have been an obvious part of our national environment as far back as there have been inhabitants. The earliest settlers brought their skilled workers with them, and once here discovered the traditions of the Indian”²

Industrial Revolution

“The coming of the Industrial Revolution augured the end of handmade traditions. As the amount of mass production increased, fewer people turned to craftsmen. ... manufactured objects were in general of better quality than those most poor people could make, and they were priced within almost everyone’s reach. ... Reproduction by machine became the national aesthetic.”³

“Modernity defined itself, centrally, against craft. ... Craft became the primary instance of the not-modern, the anachronistic. The overwhelming success of mass production/consumption modernity in the early and mid-twentieth century left craft as the obvious signifier of modernity’s opposite: tradition. All the basic elements of craft—learning through apprenticeship, accumulated knowledge of past practice, individual conception, ingenious adaptation, adjustments between utility and decoration, fashioning by hand, tooling skills, close communities of taste—were displaced from the centres of our working, public, domestic and private lives.”⁴

Craft Movements Abroad

“In the 1880s, as a reaction to the ever-diminishing quality of mass produced goods, a revival commenced. The studio workers in this movement had undoubtedly been encouraged by the pre-Raphaelite painters whose accent on medieval form had rekindled an interest in design, thereby indicating, in bold relief, the banality of contemporary industrial forms. ... One of the leaders of the movement, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**, designed furniture himself. Another influence emanated from the workshop of **William Morris**, himself a poet, weaver, book designer, illuminator, wood engraver, and most important, catalyst to all who surrounded him. The climate was favorable for artist-craftsmen: they emerged in numbers and not only banded together (in 1844) in an Art Workers’ Guild, but in 1888, when it became obvious that the painting and sculpture salons would not include their work on an equally dignified level, arranged an audacious

¹ Smith, Paul J. “Remembering the American Craft Museum” *Studio Potter* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2003): 13.

² Nordess, Lee. *Objects: USA* pg 8

³ Nordess, Lee. *Objects: Usa* pg 8

⁴ Smith, Terry. *Craft, modernity and postmodernity*

Arts and Crafts Exhibition. This exhibition restored the artist-craftsman to his position in creative society and, as well, rejuvenated the craft tradition in England.”⁵

According to Paul Greenhalgh’s model of craft through history, 18th century aesthetics incorporated genius, originality, and sentiment. Academies were created at this time, and what was “irrational was made rational.” The problem for Greenhalgh was that this structure was universally misunderstood. Through the 19th century, fine art was measurable by the cost of production, value of materials, and the status of the patron. Due to this, a space had opened up between the actuality of practice and the discourse of classification. In theory, fine arts seemed to work; but in practice, the stiff boundary of fine art left many out of an intellectual life that was restricted to museums, academies, and universities. What actually created a class of decorative art was not a decided category. “The decorative arts steadily congealed into a salon de refuse of genres that cohered only by virtue of exclusion.” This circumstance ousted the seemingly non-intellectual into a category that made the decorative arts inferior to the fine arts, by banishment from academia.⁶

“The Arts and Crafts Movement, in retrospect can be seen to be the most successful construction of a theory and practice of ethical art...the crafts were to be a politicized form of work which produced art objects to decorate society.”⁷ **William Morris** advocates the hand of the maker, claiming that our civilization has “brutalized the crafts by cutting them off from the intellectual part of us...making us more dependent on one another, destroying individuality, which is the breath of life to art.”⁸

William Morris and the “lesser arts”

In 1882, **William Morris**, in a speech titled *The Lesser Arts of Life*, addresses those bound by classificatory academics: “All of the greater arts appeal directly to that intricate combination of intuitive perceptions, feelings, experience, and memory which is called imagination. All artists, who deal with those arts, have these qualities superabundantly, and have them balanced in such exquisite order that they can use them for purposes of creation. But we must not forget that all men who are not naturally deficient, or who have not been spoiled by defective or perverse education, have imagination in some measure, and also have some order which guides it...even the lesser arts are well worthy (of) the attention of reasonable men, and those who despise them must do so either out of ignorance as to what they really are, or because they themselves are in some way or other enemies of civilization, either outlaws of it or corrupters of it.”⁹

Morris eloquently argues for intellectual consideration of the lesser arts. This quotation is swift by complementing those in balance of the greater arts, while equally chastising of those who fail to see beyond this strategic understanding. In what I initially interpreted as a cry for inclusion into academia, I carefully replace as a simple call for respect. The

⁵ Nordess, Lee. *Objects: USA* pg 8

⁶ Greenhalgh, Paul “The History of Craft” in *The Culture of Craft* pg 26

⁷ Greenhalgh, Paul “The History of Craft” in *The Culture of Craft* pg 35

⁸ Morris, William “The Lesser Arts if Life” in *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 7

⁹ Morris, William “The Lesser Arts if Life” in *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 6

enemies of civilization are those who fail to rationalize intellect beyond established borders. To some, a solution would be to admit the decorative arts into academia, while others seek to disavow the restrictive nature of classification.¹⁰

Guilds America vs. Europe:

In England and on the Continent, workers established guilds that controlled entrance to the trades, maintained standards of quality, and regulated training and employment. In contrast, the open environment of the New World discouraged the establishment of guilds or state regulation of trades. Instead, individual craftsmen in all specialties employed their own apprentices and journeymen for fixed periods and remained responsible for their food and lodging, along with their initiation into the trade. Whereas in Europe technological innovations tended to produce more and more narrowly specialized artisans, in America constant migration and the resulting need for new construction produced workers who were good at many trades and ingenious at inventing makeshift machines to solve immediate problems.¹¹

Germany and the Bauhaus 1919:

“A significant art movement was systematized by the architect **Walter Gropius**—the **Bauhaus** group. Its schools tuned the creative person into harmony with all the visual arts: each student was trained by a painter or sculptor or master craftsman, the same aesthetic intent to be applied to a painting, a chair, or pot.”¹²

Bauhaus declared no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman, paying homage to William Morris with in The First Proclamation of Bauhaus by stating “Let us create a new guild of craftsman, without class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist.”¹³ Greenhalgh refers to this interpretation of craft as an emphasis on political and ideological points of view that sought to reanimate disenfranchised art forms. Bauhaus was not interested in the avocation of the individual that Morris so vehemently guarded. Within the Bauhaus craft, lost were the appeals for handicrafts, while politics between art and craft centralized.¹⁴

Craft Movements in the US in the early 20th century

“**Louis Comfort Tiffany** was in the midst of his robust mission to rebeautify the object. ... Tiffany set up his famous glass-production studios in Corona, Long Island in 1893. ... While Morris rejected the machine, Tiffany welcomed it enthusiastically: it could rapidly reproduce enough handsome objects to replace all the tastelessly designed ones in use. ... Tiffany’s efforts to encourage craftsmen to work hand-in-hand with the machine by

¹⁰ My notes.

¹¹ Article abstract for Garrett, Wendell. “Antiques.” *The Magazine Antiques* 165, no. 5 (May 2004):92-93.

¹² Nordess, Lee. *Objects: USA* pg 8

¹³ Greenhalgh, Paul “The History of Craft” in *The Culture of Craft* pg 36 reprinted from ‘The First Proclamation of the Bauhaus, 1919’, quoted from Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius and Ise Gropius, *The Bauhaus 1919-1928* exhibition catalogue pg 16. Greenhalgh, Paul “The History of Craft” in *The Culture of Craft* pg 36

¹⁴ Greenhalgh, Paul “The History of Craft” in *The Culture of Craft* pg 37

designing for industry did not have much immediate effect; but certainly did focus attention back on the object.”¹⁵

Unions/labor

“With the growth of union influence, working hours grew shorter and leisure time increased.”¹⁶

Depression

“The public was hardly in the mood for the luxury of buying one-of-a-kind objects, nor was the number of major craftsmen working very impressive for a nation so large, but the message was spreading—even if only by word of mouth.”¹⁷

1920s in America: period of isolation, growth in clay:

“With no craft tradition from which to work, it is a miracle that a revival was able to be generated. In the twenties there were several artist-craftsmen establishing reputations, but they were working in isolation. Most of them were working in clay, and in general the growth of the entire craft movement in the U.S. will be approached in this text through ceramics.”¹⁸ **Adelade Robineau** (Syracuse University) was “one of the influential artist-craftsmen in the twenties.”¹⁹ “Since there were **no** studio artists (or if there were, they worked privately), **no** potters who started and finished a piece with the same pair of hands, there were also **no** teachers to impart the technique: Robineau not only taught herself to throw on a wheel, but also how to work out glazes. ... Her influence extended far beyond the studio and classroom: she founded a magazine, *Keramic Studio* ... its articles on techniques and design not only furthered knowledge in the field but maintained a dignified attitude toward the medium.”²⁰ Also significant potters: **Charles Binns** and **Val Cushing** (Alfred University).

1930s: isolation in metal work:

“**Margaret Craver**, silversmith-enamelist-jeweler, has said that in thirties she could find no one to teacher her to raise a container from a flat piece of silver; in frustration she finally sought training in Sweden.”²¹

1930s increasing enrichment in clay:

Important studio artists: **Charles Harder**, **Glen Lukens**, **Arthur Baggs**, and **Henry Varnum Poor**. “One of the most dynamic personalities in ceramics—and one of the first to emigrate from Europe—was **Maija Grotell**. After receiving her training at the Central School of Industrial Art in Helsinki, she came to New York in 1927, where she taught for several years at the Henry Street Craft School. The she accepted a position of head of the

¹⁵ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 8-9

¹⁶ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 9

¹⁷ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

¹⁸ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 9

¹⁹ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 9

²⁰ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 9

²¹ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

department of ceramics at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Like most of the transplanted Europeans, her technical knowledge was advanced.”²²

WPA/FPA

Federal Art Project (FAP). The FAP, inaugurated in 1935, was the largest artist relief program established under the Works Progress Administration as part of the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The program was America's first large-scale experiment in federal support for the arts and fostered artists who created tens of thousands of murals, sculptures, paintings, prints, and photographs.²³

More information on WPA/FAP information on specific programs found in *Craft in the Machine Age: The History of American Craft*.²⁴

WWII Migration Bauhaus disciples:

“The war years were noteworthy for stimulating the migration of several mature artists to this country—many of whom turned to teaching. ... the craft scene was enlivened by the appearance of distinguished European reputations. Four such personalities were **Marguerite and Franz Wildenhain, Anni Albers, and Trude Germonprez**, disciples of the Bauhaus. ... Marguerite’s writings on the integrity of the art of the potter are some of the most eloquent in print. Anni Albers and Trude Germonprez, both weavers, taught craftsmen to re-evaluate the loom as an expressive tool by demonstrating that fibers could be bound in non-functional forms with the probing validity of a work of art.”²⁵ “Weaving was not regarded as and art form until the forties”²⁶

America House in New York

“Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb, a wealthy patron of crafts, opened America house in New York, the first major retail outlet designed to acquaint the public with the richness of the handmade object.”²⁷

Opening of art schools with craft courses: Alfred and Syracuse, the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Post WWII Reapprochement

“The war effected a serious reassessment of values by the younger generation ... the WWII graduate turned to object making so that he could symbolize through earth and fire (or wool and loom, hammer and metal) his individual reapprochement with the universe. And because he could create his object from start to finish with his own **hands** ... he could hope to integrate the meaning of his labor with the dictates of his spirit.”²⁸ “For the

²² Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

²³ Article abstract from Wallis, Stephen “The Federal Art Project: a New Deal for artists” *Art & Antiques* v. 19 (June 1996) :58-65.

²⁴ Specifically in essay by Manhart, Marcia Yockey “Charteing a New Educational Visiton.” Pgs 66-68.

²⁵ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

²⁶ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 9

²⁷ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

²⁸ Nordess. Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 10

creative person seeking spiritual harmony, working by hand in craft media was the answer.”²⁹

Crafts in the University, postwar philosophical motivations

“After WWII crafts found an additional outlet in the university. Unlike the earlier tradition where the young man was apprenticed to a master, learning more skill than philosophy, the contemporary object maker as a college student concentrated more on philosophy than skill.”

1950s period of expansion breaking patterns with fine-art terminology

“A period of creative expansion arrived in the fifties, as well as a period of serious (although still tentative) recognition of the artist-craftsman’s contribution. It was a period of cross-fertilizations among object makers themselves as organizations and national conferences were initiated. ... The studio artist during this period revolutionized the creative concept of the object. ... **Wendell Castle** ... his furniture was taken as near sculpture as possible while still remaining functional. In textiles, **Lenore Tawney**, for some time well known as a weaver, moved into three-dimensional forms, evoking the power and spatial relationships of sculpture. In ceramics **Peter Voulkos**(⁴) ... pot became a non-pot, a nonfunctional object. Not until the fifties, when many objectmakers trained in functional forms broke from the pattern to create objects per se, was fine-art terminology applied to the work of craftsmen.”³⁰

International crafts movement

The crafts movement developed at varying rates in different regions. At the start of the 60s, the Scandinavians were still rooted in the crafts whereas the Italians, having only recently managed to break away from their handicraft roots and embrace modern industrial design, had less interest in crafts per se. Strongest in the USA and Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia, the development of the 'new' crafts movement was even here by no means evenly distributed across all craft media. Internationally, textiles and studio glass were among the most interesting 'new' craft media during the 60s -- while less significant activity took place in studio ceramics, with the exception of a few outstanding individuals, than had during the 50s or would during the 70s.³¹

Capitalist modernity resistance

Resistances to capitalist modernity have been ever-present during the whole period. Craftwork of all sorts has played a role in them: from the insignia and needlework of suffragettes in England, and the banners of the burgeoning trade union movement here and elsewhere in the late 1960s, early 1970s, ranging from Earthworks posters to embroideries by Chilean women.³²

²⁹ Nordess, Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 11

³⁰ Nordess, Lee. OBJECTS: USA pgs 13

³¹ Jackson, Lesley. “Hand-made Revolution,” *Crafts* (London), no. 154(September/October 1998: 62.

³² many more strong examples on pg 24 of this book including Judy Chicago’s Dinner party.

Aileen Osborn Webb

The Museum of Contemporary Crafts opened in September 1956 at 29 West 53rd Street in New York City. The museum's founder was Aileen Osborn Webb, whose support and patronage of crafts began in the later 1920s. Her pioneer work had a profound effect on the development of the studio craft movement in America through the many programs she fostered, including the establishment of the American Craftsmen's Educational Council in 1943, now the American Craft Council. When MCC opened, it was the first museum in the country to focus on modern craft.³³

Founding the World Craft Council

In 1964, Mrs. Webb, feeling the need for a world craft organization, initiated the First World Congress of Craftsmen at Columbia University, New York. It was an outstanding event, with 250 representatives from 46 countries. At the conclusion of the gathering, the World Craft Council was formed. Subsequent conferences were held in Peru, Mexico, Austria, Japan and Australia, and several regional meetings took place. Each conference required the host country to staff and sponsor it. Mrs. Webb also gave financial support to the WCC, and in her later years it became her main interest. I think she had a basic philosophy that the world would be a better place through sharing of common interests. She felt that by bringing the craftspeople of the world together, a better understanding would develop. The WCC was successful in bringing people together and did inspire the birth of new organizations such as the British Craft Council, patterned after the ACC, with a magazine, a library and information center, exhibition center and later a marketing program. A similar organization was formed in Australia.³⁴

Objects USA

An important special project was "OBJECTS USA." The Johnson Collection of Contemporary American Crafts was conceived by Lee Nordness and sponsored by the Johnson Wax Company. Lee had previously organized a large painting collection called "Art USA," which Johnson Wax had sponsored. As a result of its success, he interested the company in sponsoring a sequel, to focus on contemporary craft. ... "OBJECTS USA" opened in 1969 at the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington with many of the artists present from all over the country. Through its national and international tour, the show generated vast press. It inspired serious collecting, new galleries, and cultivated a new audience. The show had a profound influence in giving attention to contemporary craft as a respected area of the arts, and gave it credibility and educated a lot of people.³⁵

Lee Nordness identified the problem facing the object and the object maker in the 1970s as a "problem of where the object and its creator are to be placed in the arbitrary hierarchy established between crafts and fine art."³⁶

³³ Smith, Paul J. "Remembering the American Craft Museum" *Studio Potter* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2003): 3.

³⁴ Smith, Paul J. "Remembering the American Craft Museum" *Studio Potter* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2003): 10.

³⁵ Smith, Paul J. "Remembering the American Craft Museum" *Studio Potter* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2003): 9.

³⁶ Nordness, Lee in *Objects:USA* pg 7

Rose Slivka/Craft Horizons Magazine

Former American Craft editor Rose Slivka died on September 2, 2004. Slivka had a long connection to Craft Horizons magazine, beginning in 1955 as associate editor and in 1959 as editor, which gave her a remarkable vantage from which to view and chronicle the emergence and development of the studio craft movement in the United States. She also presided over the publication through April 1979, when it became American Craft. Her belief in the relationship between poetry and the object was the driving force behind "The Object As Poet," an exhibition sponsored by the Renwick Gallery of the National Collection of Fine Arts in 1977.³⁷

On beauty, Rose Slivka states, "In our involvement with practical matters, we were too busy really to cultivate the idea of beauty. Beauty as such—the classical precepts of harmonious completion, of perfection, of balance ... and it is entirely possible that it is not the aesthetic urgency of an artist functioning in an American climate."³⁸ This further reinforces a decline in the necessity to acquire the skill of form like that in traditional pottery. Slivka departs from the "practical matters," embracing the idea of a more immediate vehicle of expression.

Craft Horizons originally published Rose Slivka's "The New Ceramic Presence" in 1961. Garth Clark included this article in *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* on the basis that Slivka is credited as the first to acknowledge the influence of Abstract Expressionism in American Ceramics. Slivka claims, "Today the classical form has been subjected and even discarded in the interests of surface— an energetic, baroque clay surface with itself the formal canvas."³⁹ Slivka claims a rejection of the traditional methods of pottery in favor of other influences from painting and sculpture. "To pottery, sculpture has communicated its own sense of release from the tyranny of traditional tools and materials ..."⁴⁰ Further, Slivka proclaims "At the point that all links with the idea of function have been severed, it leaves the field of crafts."⁴¹ In referring to tradition as tyranny and suggesting the division of functional aspects from the medium—Slivka uncovers an interesting formula of bias against traditionalism.

Ceramics Abstract Expressionism: late 50s/early 60s

In *A Century of Ceramics in the United States*, Garth Clark describes the movement of Abstract Expressionism in ceramics by "The manner in which they handled the clay was looser and more informal than ever before, and generally there was a unifying sense of incompleteness in the seemingly cursory finish of works. What was taking place was a broad-ranging experiment taking craft to the point that the critic Harold Rosenberg proposed as the ideal in contemporary art, an unfocused play with materials."⁴²

³⁷ This is an article abstract of her obituary provided by the publisher of *American Craft* 65, no. 1 (Feb/March 2005): 20-21. Article not immediately accessible, will order on request.

³⁸ Slivka, Rose "The New Ceramic Presence" *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 132

³⁹ Slivka, Rose "The New Ceramic Presence" *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 137

⁴⁰ Slivka, Rose "The New Ceramic Presence" *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 139

⁴¹ Slivka, Rose "The New Ceramic Presence" *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 141

⁴² Clark, Garth *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* pg 134

Art fabric movement in the USA

The US enthusiasm for the Art Fabric arose for completely different reasons, because of their lack of tradition -- being virgin territory, the Art Fabric provided an avenue for Americans to assert their cultural identity. Particularly outstanding were the Poles **Magdalena Abakanowicz** and **Wojciech Sadley**, and the Americans **Sheila Hicks** and **Lenore Tawney**. Hicks moved from two-dimensional wall-based woven works to large-scale freestanding or suspended three-dimensional textile sculptures, while Abakanowicz went further with the creation of her textile 'situations' of the early 70s, complete environments rather than individual works.⁴³

Woodcraft Folk Movement

A Woodcraft folk movement continued Morris's individual romantic notion of the hand of the maker, however, it, did not attempt to elevate craft among the circles of art. The Woodcraft folk movement was an attempt to educate a younger generation following ecologically sound humanist principles. Ernest Thompson Seton promoted the idea of a wood-craft lifestyle. Becoming a way of life, woodworking was used as an ideal method of communicating values to a younger generation.⁴⁴

Studio Glass Movement

The second craft medium that the Americans co-opted during the 60s was glass, although it is generally acknowledged that, because of the technical difficulties they encountered, this did not reach maturity as a medium in the US until the following decade. As with the Art Fabric, US studio glassmakers sought to harness glass as a vehicle for direct creative expression. Hence the significance of working outside the factory system, in order to guarantee artistic freedom and ensure the direct involvement of the artist in the making process. The key date in the evolution of the studio glass movement was 1962, when potter **Harvey Littleton** and glass scientist **Dominick Labino** collaborated in two seminar workshops at the Toledo Museum of Art to create hot glass using a small tank furnace. Though the objects produced were extremely crude, the seminars were recognised as a breakthrough and led to the setting up of a host of glass programmes in universities across the USA, culminating in the establishment of the famous Pilchuck School near Seattle in 1971. Other important pioneers included **Marvin Lipofsky**, **Dale Chihuly** and **Sam Herman**, Herman being the vector for the movement into Britain, when he came to teach at the Royal College of Art and set up the Glasshouse in London.⁴⁵

Craft Markets/collecting/patrons

The market has undergone a major change. In the 1960s, one could purchase work for a very small amount, and even in the early 1970s, one could acquire major works for a few hundred dollars. Today at SOFA, one can observe sculptural forms with over \$100,000

⁴³ Jackson, Lesley. "Hand-made Revolution," *Crafts* (London), no. 154(September/October 1998: 62.

⁴⁴ Greenhalgh, Paul "The History of Craft" in *The Culture of Craft* pg 37

⁴⁵ Jackson, Lesley. "Hand-made Revolution," *Crafts* (London), no. 154(September/October 1998: 62.

price tags that sell at the opening preview. While many independent studios still produce a modest income, several have become very successful and produced a few millionaires. Serious collecting has drastically increased since the mid 1970s. In the early 1960s, there was a handful of collectors including Bob Pfannebecker, Joseph Monsen and Fred Marer. At present, it is estimated that there are over five hundred collections of studio glass. Also, many collector groups have formed, which further nurtures serious collecting. Marketing programs have also expanded. In 1904 the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts opened a selling shop and was very proud to gross \$4000 the first year. The American Craft Council Baltimore Fair featuring over a thousand exhibitors has reported over \$30,000,000 wholesale and retail sales last year. In looking back, the patron of the movement from the 1950s through the 1970s was the school. Today the market is the patron and the driving influence.⁴⁶

SOFA

Since the first Chicago store in 1994, sales for the now 90-plus galleries and dealers who exhibit at the annual expo have more than tripled to \$15 million, according to spokesperson Barbara Smithe-Jones. Meanwhile, the newer New York show annually attracts approximately 50 galleries and dealers with residual sales averaging about \$10 million. Said Lyman, attendance at the Chicago show has grown from less than 10,000 to more than 30,000 people. And functional art and sculpture objects show at SOFA are “selling in the six-digit range.”⁴⁷

themes/issues in Art since 1980:

The 1980s were concerned with the topics of: Globalism, Capitalism, Politics, Race, The Self, Spirituality, Environment, Beauty, Pleasure, **Identity**, AIDS, The Body, Image/Text, Formalism

Postmodern historical instability: a double view

According to Ihab Hassan the term postmodern has an unclear meaning and no real stability historically. The word “postmodern” in usage implies that it has been deemed an acceptable term. Our culture has no definite walls in which to mark episodes, and it is permeable. In order to understand we must take on a “double view” that allows us to see in not in contradiction.⁴⁸

State of mind in Contemporary (ish) Ceramics

“The main division between traditional and contemporary potter is the role of the ego. This is certainly the most volatile element of the craftsman’s mix. For the contemporary potter, it overrides all considerations. He is convinced ... that he must pursue self-expression.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Smith, Paul J. “Remembering the American Craft Museum” *Studio Potter* 32, no. 1 (Dec. 2003): 13.

⁴⁷ Tarateta, Maja “Functional Art Takes Form in Art Galleries Across America,” *Art Business News* 28, no. 6 (January 2001): 1, 32-4.

⁴⁸ My notes from Ihab Hassan *The Culture of Postmodernism*

⁴⁹ Clark, Garth *Michael Cardew* pg 95

In a simple analogy to handwriting Michael Cardew is able to explain the site of expression in functional pottery:

Learning to make pots is like learning to write. When as children we were being taught to write, they didn't tell us the great thing to aim at was to make the writing "express our personality"; personality is something too big and too mysterious to be treated that way. They taught us skill, or craftsmanship, that is to make our writing legible. But while you are learning to write legibly, your handwriting becomes yours and only yours. Legibility is not going to rob it of its personality; on the contrary, it makes it possible for your personality to flower and be seen; your handwriting is you and nobody else can imitate it exactly.⁵⁰

What is most striking about Cardew's analogy of pottery making to handwriting is the comparison to language – a vehicle of expression. Cardew describes pottery as forms in which to carry a legible disposition. In this careful appreciation for meaning, one is left to consider the boundaries of expression.⁵¹

Bob Rogers writes in his essay "Reflections on Freedom and Ceramics" about the decline of traditional pottery as an expressive vehicle:

"Art colleges are often accused of encouraging a belief that the "traditional disciplines of the craft" are unimportant and that the novelty of the *idea* is all that matters. Now it is certainly true that there is a strong swing away from traditionalist, functional studio pottery. ... Moreover, the central place of the wheel in studio pottery creates a problem. It is only after a great deal of determined practice that a thrower becomes proficient enough to achieve the kind of subtleties and refinements which make so much difference to the quality of thrown wares. ... The main reason why students are finding sculptural and decorative ceramics more exciting is that they seem to offer much greater opportunities for personal expression and the development of new ideas."⁵²

It would seem that in comparison to traditional pottery, methods that require less skill are more available to expression. Immediate gratification found within the sculptural or decorative seems to outweigh the expression embodied in the form of functional pottery.

Ceramics in the 70s: Funk

Garth Clark states that "(Funk) served its purpose as a purgative for the art, flushing out the last vestiges of formalism in ceramics and adding the second American mainstream to ceramic art within a decade."⁵³ Clark insinuates that the first "flush of formalism" was with Abstract Expressionist Ceramics. The method of disposal suggested is not without offense—equating the formal aspirations of tradition with feces. He goes on to state that "Funk artists compromise the second exorcism for American ceramics. ... This style broke completely with the role of the ceramist as the producer of tasteful, overly crafted bric-a-brac for middle-class sideboards and mantelpieces."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cardew, Michael "Potters and Amateur Potters" in *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 103

⁵¹ My notes

⁵² Rogers, Bob "Reflections on Freedom and Ceramics" in *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 115

⁵³ Clark, Garth *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* pg 164

⁵⁴ Clark, Garth *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* pg 163

Ceramics in the 1980s: Super Object

Funk eventually gave way to another trend—one in which Garth Clark refers to as “This high-craft approach, belonging to what I term the ‘Super Object’ tradition in ceramics.”⁵⁵ This Super Object seems an unnecessary designation of a current that is already prevalent in arguably all but the Abstract Expressionist movement. It cannot be just an object as it has been for centuries—to retain an art status it must be the Super Object. Erik Gronborg describes it as “Rather than trying to divorce themselves from the pottery tradition in order to gain respectability as sculptors, the makers of the decorated pot are expressing a belief in the vitality and the creative possibilities of a separate artistic tradition based on the pottery of the past.”⁵⁶ This hardly seems like news—it only illustrates the return to skill. Clark’s super object is conceived of as “immaculately crafted with a purist use of form, line, and acid colors. . . . Gradually a taste began to grow for finely crafted, or “fetish finish” objects, as they became known, as a counter to both the rawness of Funk (ideas) and the macho casualness of Abstract Expressionists.”⁵⁷

Defining modern and postmodern, slippery terms

To this point, the struggle over defining modernism and postmodernism has dealt with the perception of relationships to solve the problems of history. “The mainstream for Greenberg led to abstraction, all other styles were relegated to the dustbin of art history. Postmodernists rejected this deterministic and exclusivist notion. Instead of mainstream, postmodernists posited the image of a delta, all styles, even traditional ones, getting a fair share of art-world attention.”⁵⁸ However, “modernism and postmodernism are such ambiguous and slippery terms,”⁵⁹ after numerous applications to such a diversity of styles. It was never clear whether postmodernism constituted a radical break with what came before or was a continuation of modernism, which had always been critical of its own premises. “There were, however, two main approaches, contradictory in a number of ways. The first was art historical, treating postmodern as a bundle of styles superseding modernist ones. The other was primarily sociological. It posited a radical change—from an industrial society that had generated modernist art to a postindustrial society that gave rise to postmodernist art.”⁶⁰ In asserting that modernist art was progressing toward purity, Greenberg claimed to be empirical, but as he spelled it out, the progress of modernist art seemed to be dictated by historical necessity. There was an implied historical narrative in formalist dogma— a linear mainstream, propelled by an inexorable historical force.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Clark, Garth *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* pg 165

⁵⁶ Gronborg, Erik “Viewpoint: Ceramics 1977” *Ceramic Art Comment and Review* pg 192

⁵⁷ Clark, Garth *A Century of Ceramics in the United States* pg 164

⁵⁸ Sandler, Irving “Introduction” in *Art of the Postmodern Era* pg 7

⁵⁹ Sandler, Irving “Introduction” in *Art of the Postmodern Era* pg 5

⁶⁰ Sandler, Irving “Introduction” in *Art of the Postmodern Era* pg 4

⁶¹ Sandler, Irving “Introduction” in *Art of the Postmodern Era* pg 9

Contemporary relevance of craft

Garth Clark states, "Crafts will have to find a new *raison d'être* and develop contemporary relevance. Clever hands making pretty things is no longer good enough. This will require a revisionist view of what craft is."⁶²

Greenhalgh seeks to remedy "The negative sides of objectification and holism (that) have been forcibly revealed in the past two decades. They can lead to arrogant rejection of past values, on ideological rather than empirical grounds, and they can pull entire cultures towards a uniform blandness. Where holism reigns, there can be little precious diversity."⁶³ He argues for a universal, one that has permeates our understanding of history; "The idea that 'I made this *in my own style*' was as in conceivable in 1860 as it was natural in 1960."⁶⁴

Great Summary of Book in Article on the Profession of Craft

In an essay adapted from her forthcoming book, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Craft in Canada*, craft historian Sandra Alföldy addresses the issue of how professional craft can be identified within the contemporary North American context.⁶⁵

Crisis of Contemporary Confidence in Craft: Universities

Part of the "crisis of contemporary confidence" Greenhalgh refers to is visible in universities, where the crafts in relation to fine arts and design are losing equal consideration. "The fine arts see many of the demanding technical traditions of the crafts as trapping students into inappropriately unreflective activity."⁶⁶ In addition, the technological development of craft-related materials in more industrial facilities challenges the need for a third,⁶⁷ seemingly repetitious space for craft.

21st century Craft a dirty word in Institutions:

Several institutions have followed the lead of the American Craft Museum in dropping the word "craft" from their names. In fall 2002, the New York City museum became the Museum of Arts & Design. In a January 2003 letter, board members of the Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation announced that their organization would become the Kentucky Museum of Arts + Design and commented that consumers no longer perceive "craft" as something unique and appealing. In August 2003, the California College of Arts and Crafts will become the California College of the Arts.⁶⁸

⁶² Clark, Garth "Garth Clark: Life and Works" in *Studio Potter* D 2001 pg 13

⁶³ Greenhalgh, Paul "Maelstrom and Modernism" in *Craft* May/June 1992 pg 18

⁶⁴ Greenhalgh, Paul "Maelstrom and Modernism" in *Craft* May/June 1992 pg 18

⁶⁵ Alföldy, Sandra. "Defining Professional Craft" *Artichoke* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2004) pg 38-43

⁶⁶ Brown, N.C.M. "Theorizing the Crafts: new tricks of the trades" in *Craft and Contemporary Theory* pg 4

⁶⁷ Brown, N.C.M. "Theorizing the Crafts: new tricks of the trades" in *Craft and Contemporary Theory* pg 5

⁶⁸ Abstract of article "Is 'Craft' a dirty word?" *Fiberarts* 30, no. 2 pg 16