Craft Revolution

5 June to 13 July 2008

QUT Art Museum

Craft Revolution explores the idea that craft is radical and revolutionary, through an exhibition and online discussion.

Craft Revolution: The Exhibition...
Rejecting the dominant culture of consumption and the loss of community, craft is a means of creation and engagement that is slow, purposeful and often cooperative. It is this rejection of the dominant consumptive culture and the return to historic or traditional practices that makes craft revolutionary.

Craft Revolution is a celebration of craft in all its naïve and sophisticated forms. The exhibition intends to reclaim the word craft and reject the negative associations this term has acquired. Essentially, Craft Revolution recognises the importance of a practice that has been a part of all cultures for thousands of years and rejoices in the impact craft has had and continues to have on the world.

Craft Revolution: The Blog.....
Join the debate, hear the stories of craft lovers, and craft creators using the new hot medium in the craft world a ‘blog’. Craft makers, lovers, writers and theorists are all jumping online and using blogs to tell stories, share ideas, and debate the big craft questions, and now so are we! Monday will start our craft blog week with 'Craftie stories' featuring craft makers telling their personal stories of creation. Tuesdays features ‘Collective Craft’ stories, spilling the beans on what goes on inside the craft guilds of Queensland. Then on Wednesdays we will get down and dirty with 'Exploring the revolution' as craft writers and theorists discuss their opinion on the importance and future of craft. And finally on Fridays 'I (heart) craft!' posts will appear, with craft lovers talking about their affiliation with this practice. Log on to craft-revolution.blogspot.com and add your comments, or start your own craft revolution!

Curated by Cate Brown, QUT Art Museum Intern
Presented by QUT Art Museum
Public Programs associated with Craft Revolution

The Art of Lace
12.06.08

Thursday 12 June Free 10am @ QUT Art Museum
Members of the Australian Lace Guild (Queensland) will talk about the art of lace making and will present a demonstration. Guild members include tool makers, collectors and historians as well as those engaged in making lace in many forms including bobbin lace, needle lace, tatting, macramé and crochet. *Includes morning tea with lamingtons.

Bookings essential on (07) 3138 5370 or via artmuseum@qut.com.

Craft Fair
18.06.08

Wednesday 18 June 2008 5-7pm
Come one, come all, to purchase the beautiful wares of talented Brisbane artisans Tallulah Filloy, Andrea Fisher, Kylie Johnson, Liana Kabel, Biddy Bags and Marisa Molin among others. These talented makers will sell their carefully handcrafted jewellery, toys, ceramics and handbags with prices starting from $20.
Also enjoy some delicious fairground treats including cupcakes, fairy bread and tea.

Talking about a revolution
02.07.08

Wednesday 2 July 2008 6-7pm
Join the conversation- hear diverse opinions on the nature of craft, whether it is revolutionary and what the future is for this practice? Kevin Murray, Robyn Daw and Kylie Johnston will share their opinions on craft and then it’s over to you, to ask questions, start debate and talk about a craft revolution.
The Real Deal

Recently I heard an interesting take on the Australian film industry. This sector insider outlined that he thought the Australian film industry would never thrive until Australians learnt to love their culture. He said film industries that are successful, such as those in Korea, India and the USA, are so because the people there truly appreciate and are proud of their culture. I thought this was a really interesting point, and quickly saw his meaning - most Australian films explore stories of abject, outsider characters, or take the mickey out of working class Australian lifestyles.

Not unique to Australia but a comparable circumstance is the denial and the degradation of craft. Some within the sector rail, fight and push for recognition, asking at all costs to not be associated with ‘country craft’ or ‘cottage craft’ and won’t accept that this is part and parcel of the craft movement. We, as writers and theorists on craft wax lyrical about the beauty, and deep meaning of a pot or a bowl, as Robert Cook put it, though this seems to demean our case further. Cook (2004) writes, “Craft objects are propositions. Even knowing this, I can never get the balance right. I focus on the material, make a hash of that, and then over-compensate by over-intellectualising, or being overly categorical with the signification”.

We often seem to strive to be in the fine arts, but we’re not, we are in the business of craft. Craft comes in many forms: parochial, traditional, historic, contemporary, and sometimes ‘fine’ . I began curating Craft Revolution with very high notions of what craft is - that it is careful, slow, a rejection of a fast paced lifestyle, it is anti-consumerist, it is personal, and connecting. And craft is all of those things, but it is also kitschy, local, and sometimes very ugly; and accepting all of these things would be a revolutionary act.

Craft can be contentious. It can explore notions of race, colonisation and history, all of which are on display in Craft Revolution, and this can be done with great depth and eloquence. Craft can question feminine constructs; the current loud and proud return to craft by young women could be seen as an ‘up yours’ to old notions of femaleness and domesticity (Spencer; 2005). Initially, when women were fighting to be heard we had to get out of the kitchen or the sewing circle, and enter new spaces and claim them. Now, we can exist in new spaces, traditional spaces and in between. Craft offers one way of doing this.

Craft creates community. Who could deny the beauty and kindness of the Queensland Smocking Guild’s ‘Sew Precious Gowns’ project, for which they smock tiny gowns for premature babies who don’t survive their early arrival, but leave this world clothed in a garment so lovingly made by a collective of compassionate, benevolent women. Craft is historic. Stories, yarns, journeys and histories are woven into baskets, or sculpted into and painted onto pots. We can dig a piece of gold jewellery out of the dirt, and this can reveal something of the history and lifestyle of people who lived thousands of years ago.

I won’t say that design is a vague label (Riedelbauch; 2004). You may well think it is, but how does rambling on about the perceived pointlessness of another practice help us at all? And we can start yelling about how craft is as important, and perhaps more historic than art, but where would that get us?

The real deal is with loving craft, all of it, because it is spectacular. Even kitschy cupi doll toilet roll covers are made by someone who skilfully knits a doll sized skirt and then stitches it carefully so it fits the dimensions of a toilet roll. But, yes, I agree, they are not my favourite items and the aesthetic difference between them and a paper thin Mel Robson ceramic bowl with her grandmother’s recipes decaled on the inside could not be more profound.

This marked difference though means that we don’t have to get into a dirty debate over the meaning of the word ‘craft’. Craft is both an object and a practice (Attiwell; 2004), and we cannot prevent people from associating things we don’t like with the term. All we can do is accept it, and keep making beautiful objects with dense meaning and also understand that there is something lovely in women coming together, enjoying a cup of tea and making toilet roll covers. It’s not the same kind of lovely as a beautifully set, classic cut Barbara Heath ring, but ‘craft’ is just a word isn’t it. The real revolution of craft will begin if we can get over all of this, learn to love craft, and accept the many facets of craft culture. Then we can begin to deal with a real issue, like the fact that glass and ceramics schools are closing left, right and centre, and soon there will be nothing left to debate about.
Always inspiring, Ann-Maree Hanna uses fine craft techniques to create art works that explore wider social and political concepts. Her work in *Craft Revolution*, titled ‘Our Father Who Art in Heaven’ pays homage to her family’s experience of work and life in Australia.

Hanna’s husband is Lebanese, and this work is an exploration of his family’s move to Australia and their cross-cultural experience.

It is the hybridity and diversity of Australian experience that informs much of Hanna’s work. Hanna highlights the true marvel of the contemporary multicultural experience, and encourages a movement forward from multiculturalism being seen as a ‘social issue’ to instead a reality, that is sometimes contentious but always enriching.
Joanna Bone

Joanna Bone’s work breaks the mould of what glass can be. Her work is intriguing, mysterious, tactile and coercing. There is not really adequate language to describe Bone’s style. Terms such as ‘luminescent, colourful and glowing’ are repeatedly used to describe glass works, but offer no real analysis of the style. Perhaps this analysis hasn’t been further developed because so much glass work is not taken seriously within a fine arts context.

Bone’s work sits in the junction between craft and art. Using detailed and arduous craft techniques she makes glass canes, which she then tenderly cuts to create patterns and stories in the objects created.

Born in the UK, Bone trained extensively, first in art theory across a number of disciplines and then more specifically in glass making. Stirred by the colour and diversity of the flora, fauna and climate in Australia she is compelled to craft works that speak of the antipodean landscape.
Andrea Fisher makes work that is so honest it is jarring. Her chosen medium of jewellery is not normally a space of political contestation, and therefore her work is all the more affecting. On first observation one could see the works simply as beautifully crafted items, yet upon further analysis deeper messages emerge.

Fisher’s aboriginality is the main informant of her work; she speaks with honesty about her experience of being Aboriginal, and her understanding of collective Indigenous history. Fisher’s approach is almost brutal, she ‘tells it like it is’, in a social and political climate that is often all about evading the truth. Fisher will not let her audience ignore the reality of her experience and the experiences of her people.

Fisher’s ‘Shield’ works are explorations of identity, but simultaneously represent a defensive weapon, perhaps a means of defence of her cultural history and personal story.

Fisher’s newest body of work is called the ‘Shackle’ series. In this series she subverts the term ‘a black armband’ view of history. Fisher will not allow the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous Australians to be discussed using derogatory terms, and hence she uses the imprimatur of ‘blak armband’ to reclaim this term, and reclaim the rights of Indigenous people to their history.

These works are beautifully constructed using jewellery making techniques. Carefully crafted they are works by an emerging, clearly talented maker. Perhaps it is because Fisher is so young that she can speak the truth with such velocity, but it is a quality that lifts these works from being merely objects to contentious, contemporary art works of gravity.
A deep love of the Pacific informs Tallulah Filloy’s work. Filloy grew up in New Zealand until she was seven, when her family relocated to Australia. Her New Zealand experience and appreciation of the culture informs the work shown in *Craft Revolution*.

Filloy creates crossover works: they are not fashion or costumes, but are more like museum pieces which illustrate the combination of the historic and the modern. In the two modelled works she has dissected components of traditional Maori costume and produced works that speak of the colonisation of culture and the loss of cultural habitat. These works also embrace the nature of contemporary New Zealand society as it attempts to recognise a fraught history and change future processes.

Her works represent cultural cross pollination, and it is her obvious passion and regard for the history of the Maori people in Aotearoa that rescues her works from being another colonising practice. Instead she engages with history as an anthropologist would, search for the truth, and then becoming enlightened by it.

Filloy is a skilled designer, but most particularly a brilliant craftsperson. For the Te Moko piece she hand stitched the Te Moko pattern in the centre of the bodice. Her hands are her tools by which she explores, explains and discovers history.
Marisa Molin

Image: Marisa Molin, 2007, Mushroom Tummy (from the series ‘Symbiosis), Bronze, Sterling Silver

Symbiosis is a close and committed relationship between two different biological species. This relationship can take three forms: mutualism, an exchange through which both species benefit; commensual, an association where one species benefits, while the other neither benefits nor is harmed; and parasitism, a relationship through which one species benefits and the other is harmed.

Through her most recent series of work Marisa Molin has investigated the theory of symbiosis. Molin extensively researched and analysed the fungus and saprophytes found in Tasmanian forests and created pieces of jewellery that examine the form, colour, and shape of these organisms. She then presents these forms as pieces of body adornment, exploring the symbiotic relationship between the environment and the human form, and interrogating the way in which humans disengage from their organic form and the harm this causes.

The relationship between humans and the earth is clearly one of symbiosis, and is scarily parasitic, or ecoparasitic where a species lives on the hosts’ surface and uses it with no benefit to the host.
Aurukun Weaving

Aurukun is a region south of Weipa on the west coast of Cape York which is home to the Wik people. In 1904 Aurukun was established as a Presbyterian mission and as was the case with many European settlements, the displacement of Indigenous people was severe.

Craft practice, including basket weaving distinct to this area, was severely threatened by this relocation of Wik people as the practices were not being passed on to subsequent generations. Another of the major causes of the loss of basket weaving practice has been the clearing of land in this region which has threatened the diversity of plants used in weaving. Somewhat controversially in her text about basket making in Queensland, Trish Barnard (2005) makes the observation that if anthropologists and enthusiasts hadn’t collected artefacts from this region there would be no way for young people to see this type of work.

Traditionally groups from Aurukun used up to five different weaves in their bags and baskets, depending on the purpose of the item. Traditional style bags from the Aurukun region often have significance culturally and are used in ceremonies.

Most of the current weaving in Aurukun is made with pandanus fibre, using a coiled technique which was introduced into the community during the mission days, and was heavily influenced by pacific island traditions.

To create these baskets the weaver starts with a central ring and then threading outwards, the shape of the object is determined by the tension applied.

Hermannsburg Potters

By Stephen Rainbird

Central Australia comes vividly to life in the Arrernte ceramics of the Hermannsburg women potters. The clarity of sunlight, intense colour and powerful landscape of the region are boldly embodied in their coiled and hand built terracotta pots. The artists’ spiritual affinity with this land, the sacred narratives it holds and their individual artistic freedom enable them to capture a unique perspective of their homeland.

Hermannsburg is located to the west of Alice Springs. Formerly a small Lutheran mission, the settlement is now a thriving independent Aboriginal community. Made famous in the 1940s and 1950s by the Arrernte watercolour artists such as Albert Namatjira, Hermannsburg has been the focus of contemporary Indigenous ceramics production since the early 1990s.

Guided by the American Naomi Sharp, the potters were introduced to the coiling technique, which remains the method of construction today. Sharp also made them aware of the importance of decoration, thus the choice of imagery, application of the under glaze and elaborate moulded lids are distinctive components of their work. Sharp’s support and encouragement of the potters have been of vital importance to their development and success, which is nationally recognised.

Sharp has always promoted freedom of expression and diversity among the potters. Although they work in a communal environment, their pots impart uniqueness and variety. Largely consistent in form, the full-bellied vessels are embellished with decoration that blends Arrernte aesthetics with ancient cultural knowledge and contemporary perspectives of the landscape.