

Craftivism: the Art of Craft and Activism

Edited by Betsy Greer

Book review

By Amy Twigger Holroyd

Just what *is* craftivism? As she explains in the introduction to this book, Betsy Greer came up with the term in 2001 to describe craft that is motivated by social or political activism. The concept of this ‘quiet activism’ clearly hit a nerve, having been enthusiastically adopted by makers and activists across the world.

The strength of the craftivism concept – and this book – is its flexibility and diversity. I have always been struck by Greer’s openness: she has offered a word to the world and actively encouraged others to stretch and shape it to fit their own purposes. This is also the strength of many craftivist projects: as Greer explains, craftivism invites people to ask questions, rather than hectoring or lecturing, and the act of making creates space for individual responses.

The book successfully communicates the diversity of contemporary craftivist activity by gathering together over thirty accounts, varying from one-page summaries to longer essays and interviews. Crucially, these accounts are written by the makers themselves, giving the reader direct access to their personal motivations, concerns and priorities. The majority of the examples are gathered from the USA and the UK, and one potential criticism could be the scarcity of contributions from the global south. However, I see this book as documenting a network of *self-identifying* craftivists working today. Perhaps the absence of politically and socially engaged craft projects from South America, Africa and Asia – save for a couple of interesting examples – merely indicates the presence of alternative networks (and terminology) in these regions.

The book is structured in four sections, moving from personal and style-related acts of craftivism to political and community-based projects. The political category is the clearest, and holds the most immediately obvious approaches. I found the section on craft-based adornment to be well-conceived, but a little thin – perhaps because many of us who work in this area tend, for whatever reason, not to place our activities squarely under the craftivism umbrella. The boundaries between the four categories are often breached by the multifaceted nature of the projects being discussed, which I found a little frustrating at first. However, I came to welcome this untidiness, which allows the reader to make connections between the diverse narratives and viewpoints they encounter.

Greer explains that the book is intended to inspire, saying ‘it is my hope that you find a way to incorporate craftivism into your own life’. There is little in the way of ‘how-to’ advice, which I found refreshing – so often, craft books of this type feel the need to build in ‘quick and easy’, yet often rather spurious, projects. There is, however, much to inspire the reader, including direct invitations to take part in

projects or adapt ideas – and, perhaps even more powerfully, many nods by the writers to those who have influenced them. I am sure that the rich material contained in this important and timely volume will provoke many conversations and debates, and feed the minds of a new wave of committed, creative and questioning craftivists.