15.2 Editorial

Abstract

This issue features a range of contributions which reflect on how through engagement in craft practices that are entangled with nature, economy and place, both individuals and communities can be sustained culturally, socially and economically. Anthony Rausch examines how craft can represent both 'cultural commodity' and 'cultural economy' through his study of Japanese Tsugaru Nuri lacquerware. In their exploration of Khatwa Appliqué among craftswomen in India, Sweta Rajan Sharma and Meenakshi Gupta uncover how craft can facilitate socioeconomic empowerment and provide opportunity to break away from regional patriarchal norms. The Craft & Industry Report by Rena Mehta, Pallavi Singh, Toolika Gupta and Madan Meena presents an ethnographic study and design intervention to sustain Kalbelia quilt making in Rajasthan, India. Leonardo Hidalgo Uribe explores biocolourant foraging in southern Finland, framing dyeing as a place-making practice that is dependent on closely attuned human-environment relations. This issue's Remarkable Image features a collection of images created by Hidalgo Uribe during his fieldwork in Finnish forests. Related to this theme, Urs Dierker reviews the BioColours 2024 conference held at the University of Helsinki, Finland in June 2024, which presented multidisciplinary perspectives of future visions for biocolourants. Human and nature entanglements are further explored in Aysenur Ceran Asmaz and Nizam Orcun Onal's portrait of Taiwanese-Australian contemporary ceramic artist Ruth Ju-Shih Li, whose raw clay work is featured as this issue's cover image. Mara Urdzina-Deruma evaluates the development of an approach for structuring learning assignments of textile crafts for students of Design and Technology at the University of Latvia. Nithikul Nimkulrat reviews the book 'Prairie Interlace: Weaving, Modernisms, and the Exapnded Frame, 1960-2000' edited by Michele Hardy, Timothy Long, and Julia Krueger. Whilst Kärt Summatavet reviews the book 'Silver treasure from the land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni jewellery' by Marjorie Ransom and Bethany Turner-Pemberton reviews the exhibition 'Collecting Innovation: Innovating Collecting'.

Entanglements of craft: Between nature, culture and economy

In this issue many of the contributors reflect upon how individual and communities of makers are sustained and thrive culturally and economically as a direct result of engaging in crafts aligned with their natural and social environments. In contrast with the manufacture of goods within the capitalist growth model, which is often based on the extraction and mass commodification of natural resources, many craftspeople are attuned to the unique and finite resources found in their locality, and the traditions of cultural production and craft practice that have evolved over time to make positive use of them. This reciprocal, logical approach to the earth, often present in craft, requires greater respect and understanding of the more-than-human fellow travellers in the world we cohabit, as supported by a post-growth system (Hickel, 2021). As Ingold observes, 'human beings do not dwell on the other side of a boundary between society and nature but in the same world that is inhabited by creatures of all kinds, human and non-human' (Ingold, 2005: 501). Such a holistic philosophy is reliant upon access to 'the wealth of the commons' and is in sharp contrast to where we find ourselves in the face of the climate emergency, somehow paralysed between 'an old world that doesn't work and a new one struggling to be born' (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). In a recent *Commoning Beyond Growth* research workshop, Massimo De Angelis[i] discussed his pyramid

model representation of the hierarchical growth system; how the dominant focus on capital reproduction (top) needs to be reversed by prioritising social reproduction (centre), which sits closer to the earth (bottom). Such a reversal requires greater connection with the earth, and soil itself, as proposed by Fletcher and Tham (2023) who use 'gardening' as a metaphor for activating systems change by rooting work in local communities, recognising the needs of other beings and paying attention to how we work. Many craftspeople already understand this philosophy or are well-placed to enact it by forming a transversal conduit between nature, social and capital reproduction, as illustrated by the following articles.

Using Japanese Tsugaru Nuri lacquerware as an example, Anthony Rausch explores how craft represents both 'cultural commodity' and 'cultural economy'. The article focuses on the challenge of defining craft as static objects, by proposing an interpretation that considers its 'conceptual and operational' characteristics, which are constantly reshaped through history due to an ever-changing relationship with local materials, techniques, communities and economies. Brulotte and Montoya convey craft as 'an equation that navigates the role of humans in relation to the passing of time and the changing of place' (2019: 21). Rausch builds on this to argue that, as a category, craft is an 'historic product of capitalist modernity' entangled with economy and place, as a result of being 'tied up with its capacity to carry cultural and individual meaning' (Rausch this issue, p.). The entanglements of craft with economy and place are further explored in 'Narratives of Empowerment: through the lens of Khatwa craftswomen of Bihar' by Sweta Rajan Sharma and Meenakshi Gupta. The authors highlight the multifaceted nature of socioeconomic empowerment through an exploration of the role of Khatwa Appliqué among craftswomen in Bihar, India. Through interviews with five women artisans the research reveals that through sustained engagement with the craft, these craftswomen can break away from the restrictive patriarchal norms of the region through: contributing to their households and elevating their family's status; partaking in independent travel and skill development; and developing independent identities that transition them from confined domestic spheres. In preserving and continuing Khatwa Appliqué, the craftswomen also sustaining and empowering themselves as individuals whilst promoting collective growth.

Rena Mehta, Pallavi Singh, Toolika Gupta and Madan Meena's Craft & Industry paper continues in a similar vein by discussing an ethnographic study and design intervention to help sustain Kalbelia quilt making in Rajasthan, India. The researchers focused on the unique art form of Kalbelia *guidadi* who historically made a living as snake charmers, as a way of contributing to the literature on the changing roles and income streams of nomadic textile communities (Berland, 2003). The paper documents the challenges of maintaining a craft process based on socio-cultural traditions alongside the evolving economic needs of a pastoral nomadic community in an increasingly urbanised landscape. The research includes experimental design interventions to help the craftswomen improvise their techniques and products, and to find alternative routes to and around centralized global markets (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012).

'Silver treasure from the land of Sheba: Regional Yemeni jewellery' by Marjorie Ransom (2023), reviewed by Kärt Summatavet, similarly charts the entanglements of silver jewellery with personal and collective experiences through its making and wearing. The author, Marjorie Ransom researched and collected silver jewellery in Yemen, from 1966, and interviewed women and local silversmiths 'to document the techniques, provenance and cultural context of the pieces' (this issue, p) she and her husband collected over their 30-year career as Arabic-speaking diplomats in the Foreign Service. The book shares empirical

source material, including fieldwork and photographs, to reveal the ‘many-layered culture, nature, buildings, living environments, customs of jewellery makers, women and their jewellery, their thoughts and clothes’ (Summatavet, this issue p), reflecting regional distinctiveness that can only be learned from engagement with local community members.

In ‘Dyeing as a place-making practice’, Leonardo Hidalgo Uribe examines the role of foraging and its reliance on developing human-environment relations to locate and select plants that will yield biocolourants. Unlike working in a lab with off-the shelf dyestuffs, sourcing plant dyes in the forests of southern Finland relies upon notions of ‘wayfaring and improvisation’ during foraging, involving ‘continuous readjustment to the changing circumstances they find in the environment’ (Hidalgo Uribe this issue, p). This approach to textile dyeing requires immersion in, and knowledge of the woodland where specific plants are found seasonally, requiring the kind of empathy and close attention to nature that both Hickel (2021) and Fletcher and Tham (2023) suggest we need to create a sustainable system based on stewardship rather than growth. Bio-colourants are further discussed in Urs Dierker’s review of the BioColours 2024 conference, also emerging from research in Finland and the second conference of six-year research project BioColour. Talks and discussions within the conference highlighted the challenges around completely replacing synthetic colourants with bio-colourants. Dierker summarises that ‘the conference suggested that the traditional belief that natural colourants are less harmful to humans and the environment cannot be broadly generalized’, pre-empted by keynote speaker Prof. Emeritus Harold S. Freeman who warned that ‘natural dyes are not “automatically safer to use”’. This thread of discussion was complemented ‘by [other speakers] highlighting the importance of cultural practices and indigenous craft knowledge’ (Dierker this issue, p) supporting the need for further research similar to that undertaken and reported on by Hidalgo Uribe here and by Valle-Noronha and Puppart (2024) in our previous issue.

Entanglements between humans and nature also underpin Aysenur Ceran Asmaz and Nizam Orcun Onal’s portrait of Taiwanese-Australian contemporary ceramic artist Ruth Ju-Shih Li’. Her ‘Metaphorical Flowers’ series, produced since 2019, reflects the ‘transient nature of human existence from a universal perspective’ (Asmaz and Onal this issue, p). Resembling self-portraits, her pieces are crafted from raw clay challenging ‘traditional notions of permanence in art’ and symbolizing ‘the human life cycle’ (Asmaz and Onal, this issue).

Also in this issue, Nithikul Nimkulrat reviews *Prairie Interlace: Weaving, Modernisms, and the Exapnded Frame, 1960-2000,* edited by Michele Hardy, Timothy Long, and Julia Krueger. The edited book, consisting of eleven essays across three sections, ‘offers an in-depth examination of the intersection between weaving and modernist art practices in the Canadian Prairie provinces over four decades’ (Nimkulrat, this issue). Following the *Prairie Interlace* exhibition that took place between December 2022 and February 2024 in locations across the Canada Prairies, the book explores the intersections that emerge through fibre artists located in a particular the region across time. Focusing on contributions to fibre art, the book reflects the diversity of artists associated with and the themes explored within the exhibition, works that ‘are not just artistic expressions but embodiments of cultural narratives, feminist ideals, and regional identities’ (Nimkulrat, this issue).

In ‘Constraints of assignments for learning the textile craft through the design process’ Mara Urdzina-Deruma discusses the development of an approach for structuring learning assignments for Design and Technology students at the University of Latvia. Students were tasked with creating products within four textile categories by following “design-oriented

craft process" (Urzdina-Deruma, this issue) with pre-identified end users and categories for inspiration sources given for each. Due to the need to switch to remote learning during Covid-19 related restrictions, many students used resources found at home and on the internet to inspire ideas and products, due to the lack of access to libraries and museums. Constraints, such as limiting the use of sketches, were implemented in some categories to encourage creative activity with results suggesting that "one can start the design process […] with visual pictures or materials" but that that this investment does not directly correlate with "the overall quality of a product" (Urzdina-Deruma, this issue).

In her exhibition review, of *Collecting Innovation: Innovating Collecting*, Bethany Turner-Pemberton discusses the contemporary collecting framework she has developed during her PhD research which seeks to address the question 'what does innovation, risk and storytelling mean in a contemporary craft and design collection?' (Turner-Pemberton, this issue, p). Staged at the Special Collections Museum, Manchester Metropolitan University from November 2023 to February 2024, the exhibition invited viewers to 'reflect on our ever-developing understanding and relationship with innovation' (Turner-Pemberton, this issue).

The notion of innovation remains central to craft, whether it be through rethinking the way we source and use materials and technology, how we design products and curricula. However, in the face of the climate emergency, the meaning of innovation is changing from making something new to doing something in a new way; how individuals and communities are interacting with the endangered resources of the commons to transform their cultures, making and lives (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012)

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

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[i] Keynote speech, *Commoning Beyond Growth, Workshop,* Nottingham Trent University, UK, 5-7 June, 2024, Centre for Research in Literature Linguistics and Culture, http: //www.ntu.ac.uk/research/groups-and-centres/centres/centre-for-research-in-literature,-linguistics-and-culture