

PREFACE

Over the last 130 years, the crafts were rethought and revitalized not once but twice. The first instance, the Arts and Crafts movement at the end of the nineteenth century, involved a philosophical, aesthetic, social, and political response to the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution—from the horrors of child labor and environmental pollution to the disheartening production of shoddy and ugly goods. Exploration of the crafts by architects and artists led to a new valuing of these age-old genres for their utility and cultural symbolism as well as for the satisfying labor inherent in their production.

The Arts and Crafts era as a whole and the folk and ethnic crafts that subsequently attracted artistic appreciation have been studied by scholars and documented in exhibitions, catalogs, and books. The public has responded as well. Arts and Crafts artifacts—Tiffany glass and Stickley furniture, for instance—are enjoying wide popularity.

The second great period of change in the crafts, which began just after World War II, has not yet come to an end. This resurgence moved craft in the direction of design and, even more, in the direction of art's expressive and sociopolitical concerns. Many who were in the first wave of this change are still living, and two generations have come after those pioneers. This second craft resurgence has begun to receive its own analysis and measurement. The literature is growing exponentially, and material is available now that was unknown only ten years ago. Moreover, new funding for research and the recent establishment of a scholarly periodical (the *Journal of Modern Craft*) are encouraging additional study. While many gaps remain, the accumulation of scholarship calls for consolidation and review.

Makers: A History of American Studio Craft does that. This book is a five-year effort by an art critic and a studio jeweler. We make use of our deep experience and differing perspectives to look for the commonalities among craft mediums and their patterns of development. We draw on existing literature to consider why it makes sense to group these practices under the heading of craft, and we tell the story of many individuals who represent the larger phenomena.

The American Craft Museum's History of Twentieth-Century American Craft: A Centenary Project, regrettably unfinished, was an important precedent for this effort. Its books and exhibitions demonstrated a com-

mitment to the "multivoiced and multileveled" nature of craft history, and its curators declared, "We are writing history with objects." Our approach is broader—the whole sweep from 1876 to 1999 in one book—and although we offer no exhibition, we, too, are devoted to objects. But not objects alone: we also recall the words of M. C. Richards, writing an exhibition review in *Craft Horizons* magazine in 1965: "We think about craft as if it were objects, forgetting [that] it's people, and pretending that we are not people reacting to them." She also said, "It is inexact and therefore uninteresting to ignore the fact that history evolves, that individuals evolve and so does their perception." The ceramic artist Jun Kaneko states the complaint in a different way: "The problem with art history and criticism is that it lacks the smell of human beings." Histories remind us of what came before and what remains the same. We need a history told in human terms.

Truly, *people making things* is what the craft field is all about. Our choice, therefore, was to take an approach uncommon in art history. We raise issues and describe events as they occurred in people's lives, not in the scholarly abstract. Every story in this book is bound up in a time, a place, a set of political and social conditions, and an aesthetic philosophy.

The first difficulty is defining terms. Craft is a broad category of handwork. Studio craft means handwork with aesthetic intent, largely or wholly created by individuals (usually art school or university trained) to their own designs. Craft is no more difficult to pin down than art is—which is to say, nearly impossible. We have operated using a blend of definitions, some historical and some current. One is based on materials: today the word generally applies to work in clay, fiber, glass, metal, and wood. Sometimes handmade paper and bookbinding are associated with the term (although neither is included in this text). Craft can also be defined by the use of certain techniques, such as throwing, turning, forging, or felting. It is also possible to follow self-definition: if jewelers think of themselves as craftspeople, then they are. One understanding of craft today is: a self-defined community oriented to specific materials and techniques, usually with an attitude of respect for both, and reliant upon handwork.

Unfortunately, none of these definitions is adequate. Craft materials are used in industry and art as well as in

studio craft, and techniques have the same multiplicity of applications. Neither does self-definition always coincide with objective observation, pro or con. Nor is function or utility a useful determinant, in the first place because there have always been craft objects for display and for symbolic purposes. Moreover, everyday needs have been met by industry since the middle of the nineteenth century, so even utilitarian craft today is made for philosophical and aesthetic reasons.

Craft is not a neat package with defined edges. It overlaps with design, fashion, art, and industrial and folk practices. That breadth may be taken, however, as a sign of its vitality and relevance, as can the fact that a great number of people who do not think of themselves as craftspeople are currently using craft materials, processes, or attitudes to create both art and design. Today artists build furniture, create laborious installations, or talk of bringing their work closer to life. Craft is already there.

We have taken a subjective but commonsense approach to using the word and to the range of work incorporated into the book. Louis Comfort Tiffany and Gustav Stickley appear in these pages although they were manufacturers; Mary Frank is included although she is a painter who created a single body of work in clay. Jeff Koons, however, is not treated—even though he has directed the fabrication of ceramic sculptures that have sold for high prices—because he lacks the direct contact with and respect for the material that characterize craft. We exclude kits or hobby practices that involve copying set forms because studio craft strives for originality. Traditional crafts may similarly involve repetition of precedents, yet there are makers who take the tradition somewhere new, and a few of those individuals are included.

While we have made an effort to acknowledge the broad scope of studio craft and the places where it overlaps other practices, the heart of the book is studio craftspeople. Studio craft emerged in the late nineteenth century and expanded rapidly after World War II. Study of the entire period discloses some surprises, such as the fact that immigrants have had a major influence from the beginning to the present (not just in the 1930s, as is sometimes assumed). Changing definitions and questions of the American character of the work have been frequent, even as craft has maintained a constant openness to interchange with other cultures. Women have played important roles—makers, teachers, dealers, collectors, administrators—at every stage, and they have created important work in craft even when their participation in other arts was curtailed by social convention. Other contraventions of accepted wisdom: individual creative

work can emerge within a manufacturing context, and even a maker working alone constitutes a business.

The most important theme in this consideration of craft is probably its relationship, as a modern invention, to consumer society. In a world overfull of mass-produced goods, why would anyone want to make or buy handmade objects? As a field, craft proposes a range of answers to this crucial question. Over the century, there have been innumerable assertions of the value of handwork, some taking opposing viewpoints. As noted, studio craft can be regarded as a humane alternative to factory work. It can also be seen as a critique of the factory system and even of capitalism. At the same time, training in craft may prepare the individual to design for industry with sensitivity to material. It can be argued that studio craft encourages the making of objects that better respond to personal needs and desires than do mass-produced goods and that, as an instance of individual rather than standardized character, it advances the reform of public taste. Craft is also a form of personal expression and thus can invest meaning in an object. And of course craft can be valued as a satisfying process, or as an opportunity for manual virtuosity.

Studio craft has repeatedly offered an alternative way of life, starting during the Arts and Crafts movement, recurring in the Depression years and when servicemen returned from World War II, and taking new forms in the counterculture of the 1960s. A renewed interest in handwork—under the rubric *DIY* (for “do it yourself”)—is expanding as we write. Attentive readers will notice other themes and issues emerging repeatedly. Over the decades, debates continue about the relation of studio craft to movements in modern art and design, and the shifting status of functional works in studio craft.

The various mediums have their particular issues—the emergence of distinct concepts within each and the growth and decline of particular mediums over time—yet clay, fiber, glass, metal, and wood share common concerns, such as the tension between urban and rural craft attitudes and practices. The participation of minority populations in every medium of modern craft shows how these groups changed old folkways (or invented new ones) to adapt to changing social conditions. All craft mediums have experienced revisions in craft education that have expanded craft’s application and encouraged individual creativity.

As we examine the crafts over the course of the twentieth century, we look in particular at what distinguishes it from art, design, and popular culture. Its endorsement of traditional materials, techniques, and decoration suggests that these sources have not been exhausted and

retain potency. Craft recoups, revalues, and reclaims through its basic identity with materials and techniques. From that basis, the options widen.

Makers is intended to fill two needs. It is a reference book that can serve critics, collectors, or anyone interested in knowing more about the motivating ideas and stylistic currents that have led to today's crafts. It is also a survey that can add new dimensions to college-level programs on twentieth-century American art or material culture—as an accompaniment to existing courses or for new courses that focus on craft itself. The publication of this book breaks an impasse that has been noted for more than thirty years. Because craft was not included in art history curricula, there was not a tenured scholar of the field to write a history. Yet because there was no comprehensive textbook, it was dauntingly difficult to set up courses, even at schools that offered extensive studio coursework in craft.

The book follows a conventional chronological structure. It is organized by decades, and for the most part, artists are discussed and illustrated in the decade in which their most characteristic work was produced. That may

be early or late in a career. Only a handful of individuals appear in more than one chapter. Of course, people do not live, work, and die in neat decade increments, so some fuzzy edges are inevitable in our mapping of the larger pattern. Furthermore, craft has not developed as a succession of masterpieces, and we have tried not to reduce this account to that false simplicity.

The book is the product of a very modest amount of primary research and a great deal of secondary study. Information on craft appears in widely scattered and ephemeral forms. This book pulls together more than a century of research and documentation, drawing on innumerable published sources. We acknowledge our indebtedness to this previous work, and we urge readers to make use of the endnotes along with the bibliography and other material on the book's website to tap deeper and more detailed veins of information.

There are, inevitably, large numbers of worthy works and gifted makers who do not appear here. Many more stories can be told. Some will be found on the website. Others await the efforts of new researchers who will add to this body of knowledge.