



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
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# **TRACING EMERGING MODES OF PRACTICE: CRAFT SECTOR REVIEW**

**Prepared for the Ontario Arts Council**

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“Craft today is...a subject marked by infinite diversity and internal conflict.”

Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader*

“Exciting times lie ahead.”

Sandra Alföldy, *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*

## INTRODUCTION

The craft sector in Ontario and beyond has changed tremendously in recent years, with practices continuing to evolve and transform contemporary understandings of craft and its relationships with other sectors. The Ontario Arts Council (OAC) first began providing funding to craft artists in 1989 through the Craft Projects—Individuals program, and then expanded its craft mandate in 1999 to support collectives and organizations through a separate project grant program for craft collectives and organizations. In addition to these programs, the OAC supports key institutions in Ontario’s craft infrastructure through a number of operating grant programs. As there has not been a comprehensive review of the sector since 1995, OAC programs lack a point of reference from which to evaluate whether they are in step with current modes of practice.

The Ontario Arts Council has commissioned this review of the craft sector to gain a deeper understanding of emerging craft practices and related issues and themes in Ontario. The specific areas of interest identified by the OAC for exploration in this report include digital technology, design, DIY/craftivism and creative collaboration. The review begins with a survey of the literature, in which these areas of interest are investigated and other emerging trends in practice are noted. A synthesis of fifteen interviews conducted with Canadian and international thought leaders in the craft sector follows the literature review. The interviews shed light on key themes and trends in current craft practice, and the thought leaders advised on how best to support growth and development in the sector. National and international perspectives are included throughout to provide context for Ontario-based practice. A concluding discussion highlights gaps between emerging practice and existing supports and includes specific recommendations for addressing these gaps. Woven throughout the report is an exploration of how our understanding of what is defined as “craft” is affected by recent developments in practice. While a range of practices is profiled, the report is not an examination of the entire craft sector or spectrum of practice, but is strictly concerned with *emerging* modes of practice. Established modes such as fine craft and traditional studio-based practice are of ongoing concern to the Ontario Arts Council. However, as they are well understood and accommodated by OAC programs, they have not been targeted in this review of the sector.

The primary function of this report is to provide the Ontario Arts Council with an overview of the emerging trends and issues in the craft sector so the OAC may consider whether OAC craft project grant programs reflect and accommodate the full range of current practice. In identifying gaps, the OAC may choose to update program restrictions and priorities, adjust models of support and identify opportunities for further outreach and development in the craft sector. The findings may also inform other OAC programs that support organizations in the craft community. Where vital areas of practice fall outside the OAC’s mandate, OAC staff may seek to facilitate connections between external parties and organizations to address community needs. As well as influencing the Ontario Arts Council’s future activities, this review serves as a

snapshot of the contemporary craft landscape and may be of value to craft practitioners, educators and administrators who seek to understand and adapt to current conditions in craft.

## **REPORT ON LITERATURE REVIEW**

In consultation with the associate officer of Visual and Media Arts and Craft, several sources were identified for the initial phase of the Literature Review. In reviewing these sources and speaking with Thought Leaders who brought new themes to light, further pertinent materials were consulted. Unfortunately materials in some areas of interest were not readily available: new generation artist issues and critical literature on Ontario-based practice. Ultimately, a diverse array of sources was consulted, including essays in journals and books, magazine articles, blog posts and discussions in comment sections, exhibition catalogues, conference proceedings and podcasts of panel discussions. The following is a synthesis of emerging themes, trends and practices in crafts as described in the collected literature.

### **DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY**

#### *Craft, design and “the hand”*

The importance of the hand emerges as a contentious issue in discussions about the intersection of craft and design, particularly where production is assisted by digital technology. Some traditionalists do not believe production aided by digital technology qualifies as craft practice because the “making process” is mediated by technology. Contemporary theorist Rafael Cordoso questions this view by pointing out that many traditional crafts do not require the maker to handle his or her materials directly. He points to glass blowing as an example. Glenn Adamson offers a definition of craft that describes technology as just another tool in the maker’s box: “Craft is almost always a matter of triangulation between maker, tool and material (after all, the naked hand might be considered a tool), and there is no obvious reason why any particular type of tool should be considered ineligible for this relation.”

Ezra Shales advocates a “technophilic”<sup>1</sup> approach to the use of technology in craft and warns against defining craft in limited ways by fetishizing the role of the hand. Shales believes this idealization encourages attitudes of self-righteousness and victimization among makers and separates craft from its contemporary social context. He notes that in previous centuries craftspeople produced objects that engaged with society’s chaos and complexity. Conversely, while the modern-day craftsman may have a website and

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<sup>1</sup> Possessing a strong enthusiasm for technology.

a blog, his or her approach and attitudes toward technology in the studio often lag behind.

Theorists indicate that embracing digital technologies does not necessitate eschewing traditional processes and materials. According to Grace Cochrane (*NeoCraft*), many designers contend that their production work is more successful when it emerges from a materials-based designing and making process. Typically, production craftspeople construct a prototype with actual materials, produce drawings and then render them on a computer. A material process often lies behind the creative process, whether for a single maker or through collaboration with other artists, craftspeople, designers or skilled people in industry.

The late Toronto-based jewellery artist Lily Yung, well known as a proponent of rapid prototyping and “mass customization” in production work, similarly drew attention to the degree of involvement of the designer in digitized production processes. During a 2010 panel discussion (“Craft: Shifting Directions”) on craft and design at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), Yung described rapid prototyping as an “additive process.” Designers create objects separately rather than simultaneously and build each object one layer at a time to make articulated pieces. The designer is thoroughly engaged throughout the process and customizes properties such as shape, colour and size for a market that desires uniqueness. Here Cordoso’s notion of the “practiced digital hand” applies, in which form continues to be determined by the knowledge and approach of the maker, as in traditional craft practice.

### *Craft’s impact on design*

While design-oriented processes may be supplementing some elements of traditional handwork in craft production, designers are emulating craft attributes such as uniqueness to endear wares to customers. Many contemporary designers employ texture, demonstrate evidence of process and make reference to domestic crafts in their designs, often using materials produced or enhanced by skilled workers (Cochrane, *Victoria*). In experimental factory production, designers are exploring ways to make pieces unique in serial runs, for example using computer algorithms to generate varying surface geometries. The Automatic Group at Falmouth University uses the technologies of mass manufacture to mimic handwork in the craftspeople’s studio as part of a broad shift away from craftsmanship for its own sake. Tavs Jorgenson, a member of the Automatic Group, uses an animator’s motion-capture glove to translate physical movements into three-dimensional modelling data. His pieces are output through industrial processes such as digital printing and computer-numerical control (CNC) milled wood (Parsons).

### *The new craft skills*

In the OCAD panel on craft and design, Lily Yung argued that one technique or tool—for example, embroidery versus computer-aided design (CAD)—does not hold more value than another (“Craft: Shifting Directions”). Approaches to practice should be determined on the basis of which practices are most appropriate for a particular piece or project. In the same discussion, Eric Nay, associate dean of the Faculty of Liberal Studies, OCAD, says disciplinary definitions are “our worst enemy.” If specialized expertise in a particular craft medium is no longer essential for the contemporary maker, *what skill sets are required?*

In an essay entitled “Deskilled Craft and Borrowed Skill,” in the European journal *Think Tank*, Liesbeth den Besten identifies several essential strategies for contemporary makers. Though craft today still involves making and thinking through one’s hands, den Besten observes that contemporary makers approach the creative process differently than in the past. They begin by conceiving an idea they wish to realize and then identify the appropriate materials, techniques and technologies, or they create their own if they’re unsatisfied with available options. If they don’t possess the skills required, they learn new skills or cooperate with specialists and borrow a skill without the intention of becoming a master in the field. Skill in contemporary practice frequently involves cooperating with fellow craftspeople and with technical companies that specialize in audiovisual, digital, new technology and other techniques. Den Besten advises today’s makers to develop non-technical proficiencies, such as the ability to write and talk about their work, to communicate, network and organize. Eric Nay expresses a similar viewpoint and observes that as things are dematerialized with the proliferation of digital technology, craft is no longer about objects and is instead about relationships and communication (“Craft: Shifting Directions”). A shift to a relational view of craft is also expressed by Rafael Cardoso, who envisions craft and design ultimately becoming synonyms, “complementary aspects of the same ongoing process of shaping experience through the interaction between people and things.”

### *Technological innovations and applications*

Developments in digital technology have opened up many doors for craft practitioners in ways that frequently intersect with design practice. Textiles is one area that has embraced digital techniques and tools, with digital printing facilitating greater freedom for experimentation as designers are freed from concerns about repeat patterns and colour separation (Bowles and Isaac). Digital printing allows for one-off production, smaller print runs and prints engineered to fit the form of the garment. Advantages afforded by this technology include: the speed of translation from design to fabric, greater levels of detail and increased number of colour possibilities, the ability to produce very large-scale images, and reduced effect on environment.

Some practitioners prefer to imbue fabric produced through this method with a more tactile quality and do so through craft-based embellishment and surface manipulation techniques such as devore, discharge print, flocking, foiling, laminating, shibori and embroidery. Bowles and Isaac note a more mature style of design emerging because of increased experimentation with computer-aided design. Effects such as *trompe l'oeil* and graphic and illustrative styles are made possible by computerized drawing and manipulation tools.

While much of the activity chronicled by Bowles and Isaac takes place in England, technology and textiles are mingling in progressive ways closer to home. Professor Robin Muller of the Division of Craft at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) and Dr. Sarah Bonnemaison of Dalhousie University's School of Architecture are leading a collaborative project to develop "smart" textiles for architectural applications (Muller and Bonnemaison). Textiles developed in this project are interwoven with lights, sensors and actuators and will respond to sound, movement, sunlight and touch. These textiles are prototypes for products including curtains, free-standing walls, theatrical backdrops and hung ceilings for tensile roofs.

Danish craft practitioners are actively experimenting to combine traditional techniques with new materials and processes, often with the goal of addressing the challenge of environmentally sustainable development. *PAPCoRN* creators Anne Bannick and Lene Vad Jensen use the latest plastics, based on renewable resources such as wheat, maize and lactic acid, to create a dinner set that is compostable and can return to a biological cycle after single or multiple use. The makers move beyond a concern with function and sustainability to explore multiple possibilities for new shapes and surfaces ("Sustainability by Design").

New technologies also have many practical, operational applications. According to Julie Nicholson of MADE Design (Toronto), textile artist Bev Hisey and other craft practitioners depend on digital design files to commission skilled craftspeople overseas if pertinent skills are not available locally ("Craft: Shifting Directions"). Emerging designers, artists and crafters who do not have access to digital printing equipment can upload files to web-based services such as Spoonflower or Fabric on Demand and receive affordable, small-run printings of their work within a week or two by mail (Forker). Similar services exist for furniture: CAD files are uploaded, and laser-cut pieces are delivered to workshops.

Digital-age technology is also being employed in a contemporary fine craft context. In a 2010 exhibition entitled *The New Materiality: Digital Dialogues at the Boundaries of Contemporary Craft* at the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts curator and furniture maker Fo Wilson brought together 14 artists whose work combines traditional craft disciplines with 21st-century technologies. Wilson believes that practitioners are moving beyond a long-held wariness about the use of technology in craft and are "becoming more comfortable with the idea that technology itself is something that can

be used or manipulated for creative ends.” Though the works integrate technologies such as computers, video monitors and motion detectors, many are rooted in traditional modes of craftsmanship and construction (Van Siclen).

## **MAKING A LIVING/SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE**

### *Craft, design and financial sustainability*

In her contribution to *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, Grace Cochrane notes, “[A]s well as providing pleasure and satisfaction to the maker and designer, a practice also has to be a sustainable, viable reality and successfully find its marketplace.” Lily Yung said the wage-to-labour ratio did not favour traditional craftspeople who had to pay high overhead costs in a competitive market (“Craft: Shifting Directions”). Makers are encouraged to be nimble in their practice if they hope to sustain themselves, to stay on top of technological and material developments and to reach out to wider audiences by integrating design-oriented practice. Creative experimentation and one-off pieces traditionally associated with craft remain important but are increasingly becoming the basis for the production of commercial products (“Sustainability by Design”).

Melanie Egan heads the craft department at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. She commends Eva Milinkovic and Kriston Gene of Windsor-based Tsunami Glassworks for their shrewd business acumen. They seamlessly meld strong craft training with design methodology (“Craft: Shifting Directions”). Tsunami Glassworks markets itself using the language and tenets of design, just as certain marketing-savvy designers use the language of craft to push their products. Egan sees this approach as contemporary, relevant and an excellent model for young craft students to follow. Julie Nicholson similarly recommends that craftspeople train in design technologies so they don’t have to take unrelated jobs to meet financial needs. This kind of training can open up opportunities to work in areas related to a person’s craft, to make skilled connections that nurture career and practice and to inspire new directions for craft work (“Craft: Shifting Directions”).

### *Don’t fear the factory*

Grace Cochrane notes that craftspeople tend to steer clear of associations with industrial manufacture because of its impersonal connotations (*Victoria*). The studio crafts marketplace and culture have not been receptive to the idea of production lines or commissioned series as a means to financial stability; the marketplace emphasizes individual makers producing craft objects from start to finish. Ezra Shales insists that craft history cannot afford to hold onto the stereotype of industry as “alienation.” Craft includes collaborative and interdependent production, and some areas of manufacture require truly artistic skill sets. In fact, according to Shales, a greater proportion of the

history of Western craft is rooted in small-scale, skilled-labour factories (“manufactories”) than in rural traditions or back-to-the-land experiments. Cochrane too notes a strong history of craftspeople and designers working with industry, particularly in European and Nordic countries (*Victoria*).

Also according to Cochrane, Australia and New Zealand have begun to nurture small-scale creative industries, where highly skilled designer-makers specialize in particular technologies such as laser or water-jet cutting, digital printing and prototyping, resin prototyping, metal casting and pressing and computerized textile weaving and printing (*NeoCraft*). An increasing number of practitioners who previously made all components of their work themselves has developed strong relationships with specialist local industry, contracting parts of their production processes. As it is no longer practical for large-scale manufacturing to operate in Western nations, these relationships are vital for the health of the craft and of the manufacturing sectors; the relationships hold great potential for wealth and job creation through intellectual property.

According to a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, craft can also play a research-and-development role in various industries (“Sustainability by Design”). This report states that Danish craftspeople use “an approach rooted in tradition to give expression to new materials and technologies” through which they “question our lifestyles, prototypes and visualize how our sustainable futures might look”. Craft practitioners’ work can inform fundamental research within industrial design and manufacturing.

UK-based company E&KO, which produces upcycled<sup>2</sup> bags from commercial and industrial waste, is a fine example of craft sensibilities being brought to a mass-production scale (Harvey). Working with materials such as disused fire hoses, E&KO makes bags that are produced by combining craft techniques and a larger-scale production model. At the UK Design Council event Greenengaged, presented as part of the 2009 London Design Festival, E&KO co-founder Kresse Weslin proclaimed, “[I]f you've got something good, do it big.”

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<sup>2</sup> Upcycling is the process of converting waste materials into products of better quality and greater use value.

## **NOT A SOLITARY PURSUIT**

### *Expanding practice beyond the individual*

As indicated in the literature on craft and manufacturing, contemporary craft practice often involves work that is collaborative or that depends on the knowledge and skills of others. This model of practice challenges the commonly held notion of the autonomous “artist-craftsman” formulation based on interpretations of romantic and political ideals espoused in the era of John Ruskin, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement (den Besten). den Besten asserts that public conceptions of craft have fossilized. She also contends that the field is viewed as “conservative, static, and impervious to change, and therefore anachronistic, and of minor importance.” Rafael Cordoso suggests that the “antiquated” notion of the autonomous craftsman is a threat to the health of the craft sector. If we limit our conception of craft to the direct experience of the maker — “personal, hands-on and masterful” — we diminish the role of craft in a contemporary world. The world has become increasingly impersonal, virtual and chaotic says Cordoso. In his view craft is doomed to become an arcane curiosity if we hold on to limiting definitions that exclude collaborative and collective models of practice.

### *Creative collaboration*

Creative collaboration can take many forms, including partnerships with industry and small-scale manufacturers, as described above, and collaborations between craft practitioners with sectors outside of craft and with communities abroad. Ontario-based glass artist Kevin Lockau reflects on his history of collaborative engagement with artists working in glass and other craft mediums and says collaboration brought the greatest degree of creative satisfaction to his practice. He views collaboration as a setting aside of artistic ego to join skills, trade vision and share creative voices.

There are many other examples of collaborative practice among craftspeople. A particularly interesting incarnation is the 100-mile suit, “a literal examination of the question ‘where did you get your outfit?’” Inspired by sustainability initiatives such as the 100-mile diet, community-supported agriculture, local car-share transport and creative collectives, the 100-mile suit engages 21 Philadelphia-area makers in collaboration to create a single outfit comprising locally raised and processed materials. Processes include brain-tanning, spinning, weaving and felting (“100 Mile Suit”). Some collaborative projects emerge out of a similar concern about the environmental and ethical dimensions of manufacturing in developing nations (to be discussed further in the section on thought leader interviews.).

Another area of interest is the cultural effect of skilled artisans who work with imported designs. Some designers work with communities to revive and recreate traditional work that contributes to the financial and cultural health of these communities. In a 2003

article in *Crafts* (UK), Sir Christopher Frayling predicted that the “heartland of the crafts will lie with contemporary interiors and the makers will work more and more closely in teams with interior designers, architects, product designers, computer interaction engineers and installation people” (Cochrane, *NeoCraft*). Another interesting industry in which craft practitioners are increasingly active is animation. Textile artists worked as part of the team that created intricate miniatures for the stop-frame animation set of *Coraline*, for example (Love). Collaborative projects with players in and out of the craft sector often produce truly innovative creative results and are a key step in the process of adapting to new markets in the struggle for financial sustainability.

## **DIY CRAFT**

### *What is DIY craft?*

As evidenced by the awe-inspiring assortment of blogs, magazines and books produced by and serving DIY crafters, it is a futile endeavor to attempt a pat definition of DIY craft. DIY intersects with a vast range of aesthetics, practices, communities and concerns that include (but are not limited to) goth, punk, queer, feminism, anti-globalization, kawaii (cute), art, techno, eco, interior design, fine art, kids and parenting and small business. As Faythe Levine, director of the extraordinarily popular 2009 documentary *Handmade Nation*, wrote in response to a blog, “Our community is so broad and vast that it is very difficult to define, clarify and pinpoint. Our community has taken the word ‘craft’ and uses it freely, carelessly, and uses it without restraint and without definition... What effortlessly ties us all together is the motivation, passion and empowerment to create creative work” (Faythe Levine on Imogene).

Glenn Adamson sees DIY craft as a trend in search of a label, with “neo-craft” and “subcultural craft” as contenders, but with “crafters” as the more unanimous choice. He appreciates the active, verb-like quality of this term compared to “craftsperson” and designates this quality as a key distinction between the DIY and studio craft realms. The latter strives for professionalization, whereas the new crafters embrace vocationalism.

Another element distinguishing studio and DIY craft is the social dimension of the practices. In a presentation at the 2010 Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) Conference, Gabriel Craig says studio craft production is characterized by individualization, whereas the “Indie Craft Movement demonstrates how consumers can form communities through handmade objects.” Faythe Levine corroborates this view by describing DIY as embodying “community, sharing and support.” Craig believes that DIY crafters have become engaged in handmaking as a response to feeling separated from the means to produce the goods they consume. They create together in energetic and inclusive communities, both online and off. Technology plays a central connective role through blogs, websites, online shops and online forums. Glenn Adamson sees in

crafters “an alliance of the oldest and newest social technologies —the sewing circle and the blog.”

In the literature, DIY is frequently identified as a non-hierarchical, anarchistic approach to craft. Dennis Stevens notes that studio craft values skill, connoisseurship and tradition, and its social structure is characterized by educational and professional hierarchies. He says that, conversely, “DIY craft emerges from a culture that does not seek professional validation within traditional art methodology but rather is motivated by joining with others socially in shared, creative activity.” Faythe Levine claims that to be part of DIY craft, you simply have to participate.

Garth Johnson, who writes the popular DIY blog *Extreme Craft*, questions the necessity of formal training to participate in the gallery context. He believes there are many non-academically trained craft artists who are making museum-worthy work and that through sharing work online, the bar for ambitious and savvy work is continually raised. Andrew Wagner, editor-in-chief of *American Craft Magazine*, recognizes that there are many talented and, yes, trained makers in the DIY craft scene, however he does not believe that the training and talent are as central to the work as in other areas of craft practice. He appreciates that DIY craft invites the viewer to experience objects on their own terms rather than demanding approval because of the schooling and connections of the maker (Wagner 2008).

Many DIY craft artists have established hybrid practices in which they create one-of-a-kind pieces for galleries and other art venues while securing a more steady income with market-ready production work. In a *New York Times* article entitled “Handmade 2.0,” Rob Walker identifies DIY as, at its core, a “work movement.” Walker attended the 2007 Craft Congress in Pittsburgh (a gathering of more than 50 DIY craft organizers) and reports that one crafter articulated the commerce-and-ideals dilemma of the crafty businessperson: “If we can’t have a job where we make enough money, then this movement isn’t sustainable.”

### *DIY and studio craft*

In light of some of the essential differences between DIY and more traditional studio craft explored above, it should come as no surprise that there are tensions between these communities of makers. Garth Johnson believes that studio craft practitioners’ self-esteem is tied to their facility with (and relation to) their materials, whereas DIY artists tend to focus on concept and their reasons for making craft. It follows that a particular point of contention for these communities is the quality of work produced by DIY crafters and the rigidity of standards applied to their work by craft traditionalists.

Nowhere was this point as hotly debated online as in response to a March 2008 post on the DIY blog Imogene about the 2008 SNAG conference. The post, titled “confession,”

was written by blog author Annie, who heard a craft professional she respected and admired disparage the work produced by Annie's community. The comment was made by Bruce Metcalf, a jewellery artist and American Studio Craft historian, in his speech "DIY, Websites, and Energy: The New Alternative Craft." According to Annie, Metcalf—a representative of the studio craft realm—used the word "dreadful" to describe the level of professionalism, skill, training and overall quality of DIY craft. The dialogue that followed (152 comments in July 2010) affirmed and disputed Metcalf's view of DIY craft. Metcalf's co-presenter, Andrew Wagner, posted an excerpt from Metcalf's speech that clarified Metcalf's position and characterized the tension between DIY and studio crafts:

The mainstream—largely populated and guided by baby-boomers— has become totally invested in building and maintaining a set of standards, particularly of quality and professionalism. And here's the sad truth: those standards are killing craft. Juries for craft shows, rules of what's allowed and what's not, principles by which teachers critique their students—all these standards make the new kind of craft look amateurish, or sloppy, or insufficiently aesthetic. But these old criteria are emphatically NOT THE POINT. The only conclusion I can reach is those standards must be changed or given up entirely. (Metcalf 2008).

### *Learning from DIY*

Several writers encourage studio crafters to see beyond these tensions and absorb some of the more productive aspects of DIY practice for the sake of growth and financial sustainability in the craft sector. Garth Johnson observes: "Judging from the number of 'new craft' conferences sponsored by old guard institutions like the American Craft Council, the established craft world knows which way the wind is blowing, and are anxious to work with (and profit from) DIY Craft." Eriko Oye suggests that studio crafters can learn from DIY craft's "infectious enthusiasm for making," where anyone can access his or her inner crafter and make without fear of judgment. Oye believes that as people engage more with craft they will gain a greater appreciation for the skill required to produce something special and will be willing to invest more money in craft goods accordingly. Johnson affirms this view and proclaims that purchasing handmade sushi barrettes at a craft fair, for example, may lead to a lifetime of buying handmade, which may include the odd turned walnut bowl or piece of turquoise jewellery.

DIY crafters who operate on a grassroots level have been successful in branding their goods as an alternative to mass consumption. As a result their goods become appealing to consumers who are concerned with issues of environmental sustainability and ethical labour practices. This is something that traditional studio craft practitioners have yet to do in significant numbers (Craig). Moreover, DIY practitioners consider the design aspect of their work and therefore its marketability to consumers who are going to buy and use what they make. Perhaps the most important idea for studio crafters to adopt is the use of the internet to its full potential for direct and indirect marketing purposes. DIY

crafters are wizards at spreading buzz through social networking, blogs, websites, tweets and so on (Oye). DIY crafters could certainly benefit from studio craft practitioners' experience and knowledge, but available literature does not address this viewpoint. This perspective will be explored further in the thought leader section.

### *Craftivism*

The DIY emphasis on community and social context is perhaps addressed most overtly in "craftivism." The term was coined in 2003 by Betsy Greer when she registered her domain name Craftivism.com to explore the symbiotic relationship between craft and activism through language. Craftivism, in Greer's view, employs craft skills and engaged creativity to advocate political viewpoints, particularly political or social causes (Greer). Some areas of political concern to craftivists are globalized labour, war, digital culture, feminism, collaboration and queer identity. Cat Mazza enters the craftivism dialogue through her concept of "microRevolt," the idea that social and cultural change can occur through small acts of resistance, not just through governing or economic policy (in Bryan-Wilson et al.). Dennis Stevens similarly defines DIY craft as making cultural statements indirectly and quietly through the "unassuming aesthetic of DIY craft's remixed domestic creativity." Stevens refers to an aesthetic and theme popular in craftivism that involves an ironic or satirical reimagining of domestic crafts of the 1950s to 1970s.

Manifestations of craftivism vary. The simple act of creating functional goods instead of purchasing them is considered by some to be an act of political dissent, a passive resistance to corporate capitalism (Gabriel Craig). Many craftivist projects, however, involve direct action, such as knitting for the homeless or for disadvantaged communities abroad. The emphasis can be on the concept behind a piece, the radical potential of a craft activity or the work involved in making rather than the end product (Black and Burisch). In most cases, community-based activity and relationships are at play and reflect DIY's and craftivism's roots in the 1980s punk movement, 'zine activity and the Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s (Black and Burisch, Stevens).

Craftivist projects can be found in a range of contexts which include political demonstrations, public spaces and galleries and museums. Newfoundland-based textile artist Barb Hunt creates knitted and stuffed pink anti-personnel landmines to bring awareness to landmine issues abroad and explore themes related to the body, security and care (Bursey). Also exploring themes of war, Marianne Jørgensen collaborated with the London-based Cast Off knitters group and knitters around the world in 2006 to assemble more than 4,000 squares to cover a World War II tank (a public war monument) as a protest against the war in Iraq. Each square was created in a unique style to reflect multiple voices in collective resistance against the war (Black and Burisch). Projects such as Afghans for Afghans and Toronto-based StreetKnit partner

with local knitting shops or community knitting groups to produce warm garments and blankets for the homeless or for disadvantaged communities abroad.

Allison Smith is a craftivist engaged in projects such as *Notions Nanny*, which engages traditional makers and the public in dialogues about the politics and the economies of the handmade. In an article for the *Journal of Modern Craft*, Smith describes a wave of craftivist projects characterized by the “radical, the relational, and the queer.” She describes an interactive project by Ginger Brooks Takahashi entitled “An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail” (a slogan taken from a vintage protest poster for gay rights). Brooks Takahashi initiated a series of quilting forums in which participants from across the United States and Canada worked collaboratively on a quilt depicting personal slogans and imagery of bunnies in various modes of erotic engagement. The artist believes the forums uphold the same ideals as her queer community—dialogue, inclusiveness and community-building (Smith).

Though textiles are a popular medium employed by craftivists, there are some interesting examples of political expression through other materials. Ebran Tool, a former U.S. Marine and a ceramic artist, created and shot 393 ceramic cups to commemorate the number of U.S. combat deaths in the first year of the Iraq war. He has initiated multiple projects that aim to bring greater public attention to the experience of war through ceramics, war imagery and performance (Azab Powell). In his “Collegiate and Pro Bono Jeweller” performance series, Gabriel Craig takes jewellery-making to the street to expose handmaking to a public that may never enter a gallery, museum or craft fair, to engage them in dialogue about the cultural value of jewellery and craft. He creates jewellery while engaging in conversation with the public and gives the objects away as a memento, hoping to solidify the memory of the exchange in the participant’s minds. In a more overt approach to spreading the good crafty word, Craig dons preachers’ garb and stands on a handmade soapbox to preach his “Gospel According to Craft.”

## **OTHER TRENDS IN CRAFT**

While the topics discussed above are some of the more frequently discussed craft practices in contemporary literature, there are other trends worth noting. In the past decade, growing numbers of fine artists are creating work using methods and materials associated with craft. Tami Katz-Frieberg postulates that art consumers seek authenticity and desire to see the hand of the maker and view work that reflects individual expression and significant investment on the part of the artist. A sub-trend of craft-based art is male artists who employ time-consuming, labour-intensive, repetitive and monotonous processes to explore gender-related issues from a male point of view; this approach counters the modernist male approach to art-making, which values concept over the process of execution. Exhibitions such as *BoysCraft* (2007) at the Art Gallery of the University of Haifa and *Boys Who Sew* (2004) at the British Crafts Council

featured works by these male artists. Concept and narrative “play an increasing role in the creation of value in craft works. Pieces with a story that speak to more than a revealed process of production are ascribed greater worth” (Parsons).

Interactivity and performance are also strong themes in emerging craft practice. Liesbeth den Besten believes craft artists are creating temporary projects, such as interventions in public spaces, installations and cooperative engagement with the public in response to a changing infrastructure. Similar to Gabriel Craig’s performative practice described previously, Ted Noten engages the end user in guiding the production process in a live performance involving 3-D printing of a twenty-four-karat gold ring (Melanie Egan, “Craft: Shifting Directions”). In the “Common Sense” exhibition, artist Sheila Pepe and curator Elizabeth Dunbar invite visitors to become interpreters and collaborators. By unravelling Pepe’s crochet stitches and using the same yarn to knit items for personal or domestic use, visitors explore relationships between DIY culture, craft and contemporary art (Pepe and Dunbar). “Tweave,” inspired by the behaviour of weaver birds who gather fibres and build networks of intricately woven nests in large social groups, responds to the increased presence of textiles online. All tweets<sup>3</sup> “fed” to “Tweave” become part of a collective online artwork, which takes the form of interactive and ever-evolving virtual woven textiles (“Tweave”).

Concerns about environmental sustainability in materials and techniques are a recurrent theme in contemporary practice. Researchers at Plymouth College of Art have produced several case studies of craft and sustainability for their project “Specialist Subjects in the Context of Emerging Global Sustainability and Environmental Agendas.” In one case study, Ian Hankey’s glass-firing kiln is profiled. Designed using new materials to create a pre-seventeenth-century-style kiln with a small combustion system, Hankey’s model uses less energy than contemporary kilns. “Ethical Metalsmiths” is a project founded by metalsmiths Christina Miller and Susan Kingsley to address the social and environmental damage caused by the extraction of precious metals. Their website serves as a campaign for “clean” metals, an information resource for positive action and a central space to exchange ideas and engage in debate. Sustainable practice in furniture-making is the subject of another Plymouth case study. Trannon furniture is made by steam-bending locally produced ash thinnings, thereby reducing transport for materials and energy used in production (steam supplants the need to use kilns to season the wood) and creating a long-lasting product (Edwards et al., Trannon).

Artists deeply concerned with environmental sustainability may question the logic of producing more “stuff.” They may attempt to make work in ways that lighten their impact on the environment, or may focus their energies in making objects that come from and can return to the earth. Drawn from Clay by Atelier NL is a project executed by Dutch designers who travel around the Netherlands collecting natural clay and stories from farmers, ultimately producing cups in a variety of different colours and textures

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<sup>3</sup> Text-based messages posted via Twitter.com

unique to the deposits (Voyce). Innovations in sustainable craft practice such as those described here may ultimately influence fields outside craft, repositioning craft practice as less marginal and as a more productive force in society (Edwards et al., Ideological).

## **REPORT ON THOUGHT LEADER INTERVIEWS**

A range of thought leaders was invited to participate in interviews; the final fifteen represent the breadth of evolving craft practices in Ontario and beyond. Potential respondents were identified in consultation with the OAC's Associate Officer, Visual and Media Arts and Crafts. Variables considered in the selection process included diversity in craft medium, geographical location (in and outside Ontario and Canada), occupation (practicing artists, curators, instructors and administrators) and area of practice (digital technology, design, social/environmental practice, DIY practice, creative collaboration). Urban/rural location was not considered, and the great majority of respondents are based in urban centres. The urban context of viewpoints should therefore be acknowledged when readers are evaluating the synthesis of interview findings that follow, as the experience and conditions of the rural practitioner may not be wholly represented here.

Guides for semi-structured interviews were developed based on topics of interest identified by the OAC and themes that emerged in the review of literature. Interviews lasted 45 to 75 minutes. Thought leaders were informed that specific statements would not be attributed to them, to encourage candid opinions, and that their participation would be acknowledged.

## **CROSS-POLLINATION BETWEEN CRAFT AND DESIGN**

The topic of craft's intersection with design elicits an impassioned response from many thought leaders, with the majority emphasizing the importance of incorporating design considerations in contemporary craft practice. Terms used to express the association between these two fields include "utterly interwoven," "co-existence," "inseparable," "hybrid," "synergy" and a "growing" or "naturally evolving" "re-relationship." Design is said to be an essential element of a well-crafted item and tied to any object that is made. A couple of respondents dismiss the need for any distinction between the two concepts, echoing Rafael Cordoso's premonition that craft and design will one day become synonyms. One respondent identifies the reasoning behind the separation of these fields to be institutional and financial. Notably, however, another thought leader emphasizes that design-oriented practice is but one branch of the craft tree, and efforts to support craft should not ignore more traditional areas of practice.

### *Historical context*

Understandings of the relationship between craft and design have been fluid over time, reflecting social context and changing interests. According to several people interviewed, ties between craft and design were particularly strong in the 1930s and 1950s. Siloed practice became the norm in the 1960s and 1970s—when the “craft practitioner” was reimagined as an individual working alone in a traditional craft medium distinct from the design field. Two thought leaders note that a number of organizations and programs for crafts in Canada were formalized during this period, and their approach to craft today reflects this view. They feel that this has contributed to the “fossilization” of the traditional view of craft as described by Rafael Cordoso and Liesbeth den Besten above. One respondent indicated that, though Esther Shipman and other Canadian design advocates pushed collaborations between design and craft in the 1980s, divisions between the two areas became pronounced in the 1990s.

### *Current practice*

In the past ten to fifteen years, practitioners in the design field have increasingly used craft techniques and processes in their work, and several thought leaders identify a shift toward craft practitioners using design practices in the past ten years. This is particularly the case among younger practitioners. Some have more traditional craft education and backgrounds and have started to employ design-oriented approaches and technologies. Others are coming out of design and industrial-design programs in schools such as Humber College and the Ontario College of Art and Design and are attracted to a craft approach. While one non-Canadian respondent felt that hybrid craft-design practice is more respected in Canada than in the United States, several Canadian respondents agreed that there is a greater incidence of this crossover between craft and design internationally, particularly in Europe and the United Kingdom. One respondent with a great deal of international experience went so far as to state that Ontario and the rest of Canada are lagging sadly behind on both an educational and granting level in recognizing design in the crafts.

Several respondents suggest that encouraging a greater practical marriage of the two fields would be fruitful and would produce practitioners who have an understanding of design, material and technique. Working in design benefits craft practitioners by relieving them of the responsibility of being technical and material experts, enabling them to focus on the value function of the objects they produce and to have a broader practice. Moreover, design training encourages craft practitioners to consider the end user and stay on top of design trends; this training leads to work that has a better chance of success in the market. A craft focus allows designers to be more creative, independent and individual within their practices. It enables designers to express what they are thinking in a physical form, to work for themselves instead of for large companies, and to focus on small-scale manufacturing processes. Several respondents

feel that designers, who generally have limited access to materials and rely on technology, should know how to navigate around a workshop. Knowledge of materials may open up more creative avenues and introduce the elements of surprise and risk that comes when artists experiment with materials.

While hybrid practice as described above could be taught in schools, according to a number of respondents, craft and design are not well integrated within the educational system. Though some respondents support the trend of adding basic design courses to craft programs, others lament the fact that design is taught separately from material arts and crafts. They feel the basic tenets of design should be integrated into craft education. Several respondents active in the design field note that many designers do not have the opportunity to produce work using craft methods after they graduate because they don't have access to machines and tools.

There is general consensus that a design-oriented practice in craft is integral to commercial success in today's market. To quote a thought leader: "Those based in craft of a 100% handmade nature have it tough." One craft program leader explains that a design focus increases an applicant's chances of acceptance into the program because he or she is more likely to develop a sustainable practice. Those craft practitioners who lack design training (which considers the end user, as noted above) often produce work that doesn't sell. Pure craftspeople are generally not trained to approach their work in a design-oriented way.

Several thought leaders note that traditional practitioners reject commercialization. Some thought leaders trace the rejection to fine arts training in formal education. One thought leader believes that traditional practitioners are increasingly open to commercial considerations and attributes this openness to greater crossover between craft and design practices. Craftspeople are benefiting from a design orientation in marketing, say several thought leaders. The general public has become more engaged with design through blogs, websites and magazines, and more craftspeople are identifying themselves as designers.

### *What's in a name?*

While some thought leaders express concern about the disappearance of the term "craft" from the realm of object production, others are excited about the opening up of possibilities that fluidity in craft and design practices and lexicon brings. An international thought leader describes a broadening scope in their craft institution's mandate over the past ten years, moving beyond a focus on individual makers to include a range of practices within craft and design. The institution curates programs and exhibitions that include architecture, fashion and design alongside craft despite criticism from traditional craft practitioners about manufactured and commercial elements.

Another respondent looks at craft and design as modalities of thinking rather than as work categories. Craft is a way of thinking about and approaching material. Design thinking happens through research, experimentation and development and allows the practitioner to develop a concept and story; the choice of material, colour, form and shape naturally follow.

### *Mediums and design*

We asked thought leaders about the incidence of design-oriented practice within specific craft mediums. Perceptions differed. Some thought leaders believe textile, metal and ceramics practitioners do not embrace design as much as makers in other mediums do. Some note that textile students integrate design in their practice but that Ontario-based ceramicists do not, and that design is a key element in ceramics in other provinces. Thought leaders agree that furniture, glass and jewellery practitioners in particular embrace design.

A couple of thought leaders note that jewellery and design practices both require precision, mathematics and measurement. Jewellery requires design before production. Glass and textile artists work closely with industrial designers and architects to create upholstery, interior furnishings and installations. Slip-cast ceramics is taught at OCAD and Emily Carr University of Art and Design. One thought leader says the technique is particularly accessible because it does not require a large investment in materials or tools, and it is a small-batch production-based technique. A respondent who works with students observes that emerging artists in all mediums are becoming interested in working with architects and interior designers.

Thought leaders identify specific practitioners who embrace both craft and design principles in their work: Denise Goyer and Alain Bonneau, whose work incorporates ceramics and graphic design; Eva Milinkovic and Kriston Gene of Tsunami Glass, who work with architects and interior designers to produce sculptural lighting, installations and glass tile; and Sheridan furniture graduate Jonathan Sabine, who creates conceptual furniture and manufactured interior accessories, which he exhibits at design shows. The 2007 touring exhibition *On the Table* (originating at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto) featured work by ceramists and manufacturers, the two skills sometimes combined in a single piece.

### **TECHNOLOGY**

The thought leaders share a positive view of the strategic integration of digital technologies in craft practice and encourage practitioners to move beyond traditional techniques and traditional materials. One instructor (based outside Ontario) notes a shift toward the use of new technologies; eight years ago many students resisted

integration. A Toronto-based respondent observes some continued resistance among craft and design students. Many thought leaders view technology as a tool for the craft practitioner; the quality of the work remains tied to knowledge of materials and finishing techniques. One thought leader says fears that technology will overtake traditional handwork are unfounded; there will always be a place in our culture for reverence of the handmade.

Techniques discussed in interviews include computer numerical control (CNC); computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacture (CAM), rapid prototyping or 3-D printing, digital modelling, laser cutting, die stamping and digital printing. These techniques are not yet employed by craft practitioners in abundance, but most thought leaders reported an increased use in the past three to five years; they expect greater engagement in the next five to ten years.

### *Digital practice in Canada*

More basic digital practices—for example CAD, digital file sharing and general internet use—are common among craft practitioners in Canada. Use of more advanced digital technologies, particularly those related to output, are more prevalent outside Canada, according to several interview respondents. Digital textiles are more commonly found on London catwalks and in shows at the British Crafts Council because digital textile printers are more commonly available (though still limited) in schools and private facilities in London, England. Funding for the required machines is limited in Canadian craft schools. One thought leader cited an MIT-based project called *Fablabs*, which gives hobbyists and makers access to expensive large-scale equipment, such as laser cutters, at multiple sites. Users bring in digital files and work with a technician to produce their projects. *Fablabs* is networked, so if one piece of equipment is not available at a particular site, a technician can send the file to another site to complete the project.

One thought leader remarks that Canadian practitioners aren't pushing boundaries and are, for the most part, still focused on a single one-off product made entirely by hand. The thought leaders indicate that in countries where small-scale manufacturing is prevalent, digital production can keep work fresh and moving fast enough to satisfy public demand. Some respondents note that digital technologies can reduce time spent on less important aspects of practice and allow makers to focus on conceptual and technical concerns. Access to machines and companies that facilitate small-batch production is a major limitation for Canadian designers and makers. Though some production technologies are accessible from any location, for example MIT's *Fablabs*, makers cannot always work closely with the machine operator to refine prototypes. One thought leader encourages practitioners to capitalize on Canada's gaps in technology by applying for federal funding to develop technology.

Quebec encourages prototype development more than Ontario does. The Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec/Quebec Arts Council, for example, provides research grants to develop prototypes of products that will ultimately be produced for the market. Support at this early stage is particularly needed. One respondent seeks to dispel the myth that prototype development always leads to commercial success. Many prototypes do not lead to production, but creating the prototype is an important exercise.

### *Opportunities in technology*

Though exploration of digital technology in craft work is still in its early stages, most thought leaders we talked to identify areas where techniques have opened up opportunities for practitioners. Perhaps the most frequently cited advantage is efficiency in production. If makers can easily create multiples or work in small batches using digital technology, they improve the wage-to-labour ratio and reduce the price point of their work, making it more accessible and attractive to the media. One-of-a-kind craft works tend not to penetrate the mainstream; they remain available to elite buyers, collectors and makers. If they're given greater access to affordable crafts, people can support local makers. Our thought leaders agreed that craft is more mainstream in countries abroad because the infrastructure supports lower-cost production.

Several respondents celebrate technology because it facilitates creative exploration. A couple of thought leaders touch on the concept of mass customization, which allows practitioners to design and produce a series of pieces rather than a single piece. One respondent notes that with new technologies a maker can execute an ambitious project easily and quickly. Some makers cannot afford to complete a project using manual processes. Technologies can open up new possibilities in colour, texture and form. Toronto-based textile artist Shana Anderson creates digital-print cushions derived from source images of textiles; her work features colours and textures that cannot be achievable using dyes and screen printing.

Several thought leaders remark that tools are creating new crafts for a new generation of makers. One respondent observes that in DIY practice, makers are experimenting with household technologies and materials, such as inkjet printing on onion skins. Another thought leader says the digital technologies provide potential for widespread social change. For example, a jewellery artist based in Australia is prototyping a ring that releases insulin into the wearer's body at timed intervals. Textile designers are developing fabrics that will resurface damaged buildings. The experimental potential of digital technologies opens up compelling possibilities for the future of craft.

## **NEW GENERATION**

### *Formalized training*

Formalized institutional training of the emerging craft practitioner continues to be important for artistic and commercial success, according to the majority of thought leaders we talked to. One program director who works closely with emerging artists notes that a high-calibre work rarely comes from someone who has not had professional training. Canada lacks a formalized apprenticeship program. The thought leaders say school is the best place to learn history, develop technique, learn how to develop ideas and develop critical language in talking about and evaluating one's work. It is very difficult to achieve depth in these areas independently. The strongest practitioners tend to have a theoretical degree and technical training.

On the other hand, a smaller number of respondents feel that it is possible for self-taught practitioners to produce compelling work. One thought leader says, "Over concern about cultural context or over drilling in regurgitated theory seems to create mindless art school drones." Several respondents note that need for training may depend on the intention behind the work and the complexity of techniques and materials. For artists without formal education, life experience and a very strong work ethic are important elements in producing strong work. One respondent feels that a good student of craft will study in the presence or absence of a formal educational structure.

### *Financial challenges*

Thought leaders say that when new graduates emerge from craft institutions, the most common challenge is gathering funds to practice outside of school. Many new artists have a large amount of student debt. Almost all the thought leaders cite a dearth of employment opportunities—for example, teaching positions—in the craft field; lack of jobs is a barrier to financial success, as are lack of capital for rent and equipment. In Quebec there is some funding for setting up a studio via the Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC); Ontario has the Ontario Crafts Council; not everyone is able to access these subsidies and grants. Economic limitations are exacerbated by the high (and rising) cost of living in cities such as Toronto. According to one thought leader, in the first couple of years after graduation, attrition is common.

### *Changes in market structure*

Thought leaders describe many changes in the past few decades to the infrastructure that supports emerging artists. They agree that a few decades ago, craft practitioners had a better chance of receiving support from galleries, collectors, institutions, the

artistic community and media-specific guilds and sector groups. A newly graduated ceramicist, for example, knew where to show work and find other ceramicists for mutual support.

Several thought leaders say today's graduates are presented with an outdated model; they expect to earn a living making one-of-a-kind work and selling it to collectors via galleries. But many Canadian galleries have closed. Our thought leaders declare the fine art model of business unrealistic for most craft artists. The collector cadre active in the 1960s is aging, and the collectors' children are not interested in maintaining the collections. Several thought leaders say we have no strong infrastructure, no robust range of educational facilities at all levels, no national magazines, no public galleries that show craft, no collectors and patrons.

Consequently, the independent studio artist is finding it much harder to survive and is forced to rely on grants from public agencies; the grants may not be enough to support the artist. Some artists leave the city, which can be isolating. Some use their skills in ways that are a "waste of talent," says one thought leader, who describes furniture makers who build bathroom vanities and kitchen cabinets to make ends meet. Few practitioners can sustain themselves through sales of their work alone, and while teaching remains an option, departments are closing and positions are few. In light of these conditions, several respondents advocate that artists redefine their practice and seek new ways to distribute and exhibit their work.

### *Support in schools*

Diverging viewpoints are expressed regarding whether schools are effectively preparing graduates for the contemporary market. One thought leader says some schools in Ontario offer professional-practice classes but few students attend. Another respondent based outside of Ontario expressed that schools have adopted a more realistic approach to the skill sets craft practitioners require and are better preparing students for the job sector; students are being groomed for both commercial and studio practice. Schools seek instructors with strong backgrounds in technology and marketing to equip students in these areas. One respondent notes that marketing is emphasized more in craft programs today. Another observes that schools in Europe place industrial design, material design and interior design alongside craft. One thought leader reports that Sheridan College is preparing a proposal to integrate product design within the existing craft programs; students in the course will have access to craft facilities, and craft students and product-design students will work on collaborative projects. The introduction of a strong commercial design element in the craft program is intended to produce employable graduates.

### *Contemporary business practice*

New generation artists are fighting for a place, a voice and an opportunity to thrive as they struggle to fit into the existing system. Several thought leaders challenge emerging artists with specific questions: Do they operate as conceptual or functional makers? Fine craft practitioners or production crafters? Visual artists or designers? How much do they rely on digital technology? How much do they emphasize traditional handwork techniques? Emerging artists may need to apply different labels for different purposes and markets, for example “craft artist” for grants; “designer” for design trade shows or media coverage. Once they determine their market, they can find the best ways to navigate the morphing system they use to produce, promote and sell their work, all the while sustaining themselves financially.

Several thought leaders believe it is essential to network with other artists. Networking can provide opportunities to brainstorm ideas, work through business issues, hear about funding, sales and exhibitions and engage in collaborative marketing through group shows and sales. One respondent describes the digital revolution as the “new locus of promotion” and says that the fine art marketing model is no longer useful or necessary. Many consumers bypass the gallery: they order online. The respondent cites self-marketing online via blogs, websites, social networking and online shops (including Etsy.com) as effective contemporary strategies. Another respondent identifies two invaluable contemporary business skills: the ability to authentically communicate the uniqueness of work, and the ability to tell a personal story online.

On a positive note, several thought leaders say new generation artists possess an entrepreneurial spirit that will help them survive challenging new circumstances. One thought leader describes a newly formed partnership between the Pacific Northwest College of Arts and Etsy.com called “I Heart Art: Portland”; local makers are linked to small-business support services, for example product photographers, and to professional development workshops. This innovative initiative hosts Mixer Matches, where sixty artists speed-pitch their product to twenty local and regional buyers. I Heart Art is closing the gaps between craft practitioners and the market.

### *Re-emerging practitioners*

Our thought leaders have described new generation artists above, but their opinions could also apply to makers at any point in their careers. Most respondents agree that craftspeople operating in today’s market could, for the most part, benefit from a repositioning and refining of their practice. In addition to the challenges described above, thought leaders identify challenges faced by all craft practitioners. Large corporate homeware and accessory companies frequently use outsourced labour to copy and mass-manufacture craft practitioners’ designs. The outsourced goods are very affordable and have a “handmade” aesthetic. Small-scale makers must constantly

reinvent themselves and excel in quality to try to distinguish their work. One respondent says that although creating multiples is not essential to financial sustainability, if making strictly one-of-a-kind objects one must be able to produce a number of them in an efficient manner, altering each piece to be unique in the process.

Several respondents express the view that many practitioners do little to adjust to the challenges. One thought leader describes a uniquely Canadian tendency among craft artists to fault the public for not fulfilling a tacit obligation to purchase their work because it is “made in Canada.” The thought leader claims that international craft practitioners know people buy based on what they are attracted to, not on where an object was made. The thought leader encourages Canadian makers to be more creative and resourceful and to find joy in the intellectual game of working the market and maintaining originality in the process.

## **COLLABORATION**

As discussed above, thought leaders portray craft practice as increasingly social and interdependent; the thought leaders identify multiple benefits associated with collaborative work. One respondent notes that craftspeople tend to have an allegiance to a particular set of materials, attend openings and read books exclusively in their specific area of practice and have a narrow scope of experiences. Collaborative work is described by one respondent as “an antidote to myopia,” and by several other people as “broadening perspective and diversifying craft work produced.” Moreover, several thought leaders indicate that being exposed to different audiences can lead to economic opportunity. Working in collectives can bring exposure and provide a support network for emerging craft artists. One respondent does note, however, that it is important for early-career artists to have solo shows and establish their name if they wish to build a client base.

Working with others can provide fresh ideas, information and the exchange of skill sets. Our thought leaders think working with others can bring new energy to a craft practitioner’s work. Interest in other people’s work and techniques can invigorate a maker’s passion for his or her practice. Collaboration can inspire innovative approaches to technique, and multiple perspectives can enhance creative problem solving. Several respondents speak about finding unexpected and fruitful affinities in methodology and ideas between craft mediums and between craft and other modes of expression, for example jewellery and architecture.

### *Types of collaboration*

One thought leader believes that collaboration can lead to the creation of objects that contain greater cultural depth and that have a wider impact in a more multilayered way

for a larger variety of people than work produced by a single maker. The thought leader notes that this is particularly true when collaborations are inspired by worldwide social, environmental and cultural concerns. Our thought leaders cite Patty Johnson, who works with individual producers, small manufacturers, craft-based factories and business groups in indigenous communities abroad to develop new craft-based products, which are launched into international markets. Thought leaders also cite Los Angeles-based Artecnic, which partners high-profile designers with poverty-stricken groups and women's collectives to make decorative objects. Thought leaders describe these projects as "timely and inspirational."

Collaboration among craft practitioners frequently occurs on a local level. While respondents do not mention many specific collaborative partnerships between craft artists, they do note the emergence of many Toronto-based collectives, for example Joe and Josephine, VEST, Domestic and W Collective. Our thought leaders also celebrate the Quebec-based collaboration project Métiers d'Art Métissés (MAM), in which students mix and match mediums, for the healthy, creative energy it inspires in its participants.

Most respondents believe craft practitioners collaborate increasingly with non-craft artists and industries. As addressed in discussions about design (earlier in this report), craftspeople are working with interior and industrial designers as well as architects. Some other interesting examples of collaboration: furniture makers working with composers, food artists working with rap artists and craft artists working with scientists. One respondent describes a program in a U.S. visual arts school where established makers partner with law and MBA students to demonstrate how craft can provide a living and to discuss possibilities for collaboration in business.

Collaboration between the manufacturing industry and craft is common in Holland, in Italy and in other parts of Europe. Collaborative relationships are nurtured by internships. Several thought leaders describe the lack of connection between industry and makers in Canada as a lost opportunity. Similar to findings in the literature on financial sustainability in Australia and New Zealand, it is no longer viable for manufacturing in Canada to be competitive on a larger scale because operating costs are too high when compared to factories overseas. As an alternate approach, a couple of respondents advocate working on a more intimate scale, thus capitalizing on the creativity, resourcefulness and adaptability of craft practitioners, who can indicate fruitful niche areas of production. Such relationships between craft and industry could revive the local manufacturing sector and stimulate job opportunities for craft practitioners.

## DIY

### *Practice and impact*

In line with the literature review, several thought leaders say DIY crafters are focused on taking pleasure in the act of making and not on the objects that result. (They note a concern with aesthetics among many crafters, as well.) One respondent who works closely with DIY crafters believes they place greater emphasis on the idea and intention behind the work than on technique and materials. While contrasting views are expressed about the implications of this orientation not one respondent disputes the extent to which DIY has changed the craft sector as a whole. Several thought leaders say traditional practitioners have in general been slow to realize or accept it, yet DIY is influencing many aspects of the culture of craft.

Several respondents note an increased presence of DIY craft in museum and gallery programming, particularly when the programming is interactive in nature. DIY provides more opportunities for the public to participate in production. The opportunities provide exposure to the processes and skills required to create craft objects. Some non-artists are inspired to pursue formal training. One instructor observes that at least half the textile students in their institution participate in the DIY movement, or have come from there; many students continue DIY activity after graduation.

As DIY craft reflects (and informs) trends in design, thought leaders say that DIY makers encounter questions from consumers. For example: “Why would I buy this screen print or painting when I can buy a similar digital canvas print at Urban Outfitters for less?” According to one thought leader, DIY crafters advocate for the “handmade” and educate consumers about ethics, price and production of goods; these issues are pertinent to all aspects of craft practice. They communicate this information through dialogues with customers, marketing copy, and in conversations with the press.

DIY craft projects and shows have garnered a lot of media coverage. Several respondents believe DIY crafters have shone a brighter spotlight on fine craft by extension. DIY crafts tend to be less expensive than fine crafts, and they feature more design-oriented objects, so they attract a greater cross-section of the people who buy craft goods. One thought leader says that the public may not distinguish between fine craft—which is based on a solid knowledge of materials, techniques and intention in practice—and DIY crafts.

### *Studio craft and DIY*

There are many points of tension between DIY and studio craft practitioners. The tensions are often generational and geographical, that is, urban versus rural. But the commercial success of DIY craft and its price point also contribute to the divide. Thought

leaders remind us that the DIY movement is similar to the craft movement of the 1960s, and that many current studio practitioners took part in the 60s craft movement. Thought leaders say both movements are based on opposition to mass production and a commitment to producing on a local, sustainable level; they add that both movements are characterized by enthusiasm, energy and open-mindedness. Respondents see DIY as an urban, digital-age, modern version of the 1960s craft movement. Thought leaders share a hope that studio and DIY craft practitioners will let go of their prejudices, which are rooted in ageism and begin to cross-pollinate ideas and knowledge.

Most respondents believe DIY crafters could learn from studio practitioners. A couple of thought leaders add that DIY crafters could benefit from learning craft history and context. The thought leaders encourage DIY makers to understand why they do what they do and to explore the history of craft. Knowledge leads to longevity of practice and a greater sense of purpose.

Several respondents insist that good craft and design rely on well-made pieces, a standard they believe to be upheld to a greater extent by studio practitioners. One respondent celebrates the creativity and spontaneity of DIY work but suggests that knowledge about quality and material could produce more exciting objects. This thought leader points to the sculptural work of artist Kai Chan, who creates using recycled and found materials, both popular in DIY practice. The sculptures show the potential for DIY works that strive for a higher level of craftsmanship. Another respondent asks if the disposable nature of some DIY craft objects is in line with DIY values—a concern for environmental sustainability, for example. Should longevity be a greater priority?

One thought leader says that artists entering craft via DIY may be inspired to take their practice to a new level. As indicated above, some DIY makers do indeed seek training in craft, at universities or in workshops. A DIY-engaged respondent speculates that material and technique might be the next frontiers for DIY craft: “It used to be cool that your crafts don’t look like Grandma’s. Now we can learn from Grandma.”

DIY makers are leveraging digital communication to their advantage, and studio practitioners should be paying close attention. One respondent says that studio craft is about the maker and his or her work; finding an audience is secondary. The act of sharing through blogs, Facebook, Twitter and online forums is built into the process of DIY crafters. One Thought Leader points out that this can affect creative decisions through reader input and observing other DIY makers’ practices through online documentation. Blogs in particular are important tools for sharing new work. Curatorial blogs with large readerships sometimes pick up work from artist blogs.

In traditional craft circles, commercial success is considered “tantamount to prostitution,” one thought leader reminds us. Like designers, DIY practitioners often make work with the market in mind; thought leaders encourage studio craftspeople to

use distribution channels common among DIY makers. One thought leader observes that some studio makers are already on board; the respondent mentions the increasing presence of studio-based crafts on Etsy.com.

DIY makers can inspire studio crafters by their open-minded approach to materials, techniques and disciplines. One thought leader notes that many DIY practitioners come from a design or arts background, for example graphic design, theatre and painting. There is little rigid divide between design and craft for DIYers. They mix and match materials and are on the forefront of an emerging “interdisciplinarity” trend identified by several respondents. One thought leader suggests that the DIY approach—making do with what is readily at hand and producing intuitively— could free practitioners with formalized training in a single medium. Without the requirement to produce work through a proscribed method, a studio artist may find “magic in the chaos.” Resourcefulness and flexibility are appropriate when technology is changing rapidly and standard approaches quickly become out of date.

### *Craftivism*

We asked thought leaders if they felt craftivist projects should be supported by grant funding. For the most part responses were positive. A couple respondents believe craftivism will increase in relevance as craftspeople respond, through their work, to the growing worldwide tumult. One craft administrator who works in a gallery says craftivist work is no different than visual arts activist commentary, and should not be excluded from funding. Another draws attention to the counter-establishment nature of craftivism and questions the fruitfulness of incorporating the practice into institutions. Thought leaders agree that, if they are to be funded, craftivist projects should have grounding in craft media, and skill and technique should be considered when evaluating their merit.

Some respondents question funding conceptual craftivist projects. A couple describe graffiti-inspired projects that involve yarn (a popular craftivist practice) as a waste of skills and materials; these respondents think graffiti projects deface architecture and public design. They add that funding would be better allotted to projects that benefit a community, for example knitting for the homeless, teaching basic mending skill and organizing old-fashioned quilting bees.

## **SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

According to several thought leaders, craft at its core is an environmentally sustainable movement that produces long-lasting objects on a small scale and provides an alternative to disposable, mass-produced goods that contain dubious materials and processes. They say that craftpersons have long been concerned about sustainability.

This is not a universal belief, however. While all thought leaders acknowledge increased worldwide dialogue about environmental sustainability in craft and design, some question the extent to which environmental principles have been integrated into practice in Canada and Ontario. One observes that studio practitioners in Ontario tend to focus on their expressive abilities and skills as makers and rarely pay attention to large contemporary issues. A few respondents believe environmentalism is primarily a marketing tool; local artists are producing few quality green products.

The picture our thought leaders paint of green practice in Canada is not entirely bleak, however. One respondent says students at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design are extremely concerned with environmental sustainability in their practice and conduct research into processes and materials. Canadian furniture makers place a stronger emphasis on sustainable practice than do jewellery makers. One respondent notes that many screen-printing artists recycle their dyes and use vegetable dyes. Some glass artists are cold casting, which uses less energy, or are reclaiming heat from glass kilns. One international thought leader notices that craft products made for the retail market are increasingly made of upcycled or repurposed materials. At home, the Ontario Crafts Council presented a show entitled *Elemental Connections* curated by Arlene Gehring. The show featured the work of 22 Canadian practitioners and explored the link between sustainability and craft.

Several thought leaders suggest that innovative environmental initiatives in Australia could inspire Ontario makers and teachers. In Australia, environmentalism is not a separate dimension; it's integrated into practice. Thought leaders give us many examples. Dinosaur Designs is a Sydney-based homeware and jewellery company that integrates environmental sustainability into all aspects of the business, including a carbon-conscious courier company. An entire generation of Australian furniture makers who produce one-of-a-kind and manufactured works uses recycled materials for core structures and textiles. Australian jewellers explore environmental concerns by incorporating imagery of bushes and plants affected by urban environments. Students at the Glass Workshop at the Australian National University worked with a commercial recycling company to develop a material made from glass waste. The hybrid glass can be used in floors, walls and outdoor coverings for buildings.

## **OTHER TRENDS**

Thought leaders identify several additional trends in craft practice. A couple mention "creative reuse," in which artists promote sustainability by giving functional new life to discarded objects. Artists are conscious of the effect materials and techniques have on the environment. One thought leader notes that craftspeople are becoming more health-conscious: they select non-toxic materials and wear safety equipment (respirators and goggles).

An international respondent reports that in London, England, where bespoke and obviously handmade work is common in gift shops, consumers seek emotional connections in design. A Toronto-based thought leader identifies an increased interest in lighting among practitioners in multiple mediums. Strict regulations mean creations rarely make it beyond the prototyping phase. The thought leaders also note that architects Debs Wang and Will Elsworthy work in large-scale knitting projects. In shows at the Museum of Art and Design in New York City, respondents noticed that visual artists are borrowing craft techniques. One thought leader hopes the next generation of curators will let go of outdated art/craft hierarchies. Less hierarchy means “a toe in the door” for crafters. Another notes that it is becoming harder to distinguish who is a visual artist and who is a craft artist and relies on self-classification.

Is contemporary craft work tending toward the conceptual or the practical? Thought leaders express diverging views. One respondent says school programs encourage students to work more conceptually. As mentioned above, several thought leaders identified a trend toward interdisciplinarity: new generation makers use diverse materials, employ new technologies and use design practices. The new generation work emphasizes message rather than function. Other respondents mention conceptual focus and the influence of individual instructors. Thought leaders mention artists Sylvia Nan Cheng, Liz Aston, Rachel Robichaud and Caitlin Erskine-Smith (Ontario) and David Ross Harper (Nova Scotia).

One respondent describes DIY craft projects as “conceptual” because the artists play with cultural ideas. Yet the objects often look functional. One thought leader says that crafting for utility is an emerging theme in DIY, where makers focus on producing less waste. Another respondent notes that in an economically depressed market, consumers look not for luxury but for practicality, and makers respond. A different respondent believes craft work is becoming more functional and that design works are becoming more conceptual as industrial designers move toward greater self-expression.

## **PRAISE FOR THE ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL**

In concluding this synthesis of thought leader interviews, we note that many thought leaders thanked the Ontario Arts Council for commissioning this review of the craft sector. Several remarked that the review demonstrates leadership and vision, and one described the OAC as one of the most responsive arts councils in Canada. A couple of respondents urged the OAC to conduct surveys every two years and to apply pertinent results to policy, and thus ensure that craft programs are current. Thought leaders praised the OAC for its excellent community outreach and encouraged it to continue. Respondents recognized the value of the OAC’s project support, particularly funds to craft practitioners for professional development. Respondents also said explorative projects concerning First Nations culture are extremely meaningful. Thought leaders appreciated the OAC’s granting system as a whole, its arm’s-length approach and its

separate craft programs, which increase the chance that craftspeople will apply for and receive funding.

## **KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **OVERVIEW OF KEY ISSUES AND TRENDS**

In this section, we summarize key themes, trends and issues that came to light in the review of contemporary literature on craft and in conversation with thought leaders. The gaps and recommendations identified include those that clearly relate to Ontario Arts Council funding programs and broader issues that may be the responsibility of other institutions in the craft sector. If one predominant theme emerges, it is that most newly emerging craft practices defy the conventional concept of the craftspeople as a solitary maker producing single-medium, one of a kind work entirely by hand. Long-held notions of what constitutes “craft” are challenged by new practices. Though practitioners engaged in traditional modes of making certainly represent a vital aspect of the Ontario sector, the findings of this report suggest that a much broader range of approaches must be incorporated into a comprehensive understanding of contemporary craft practice.

Changes in the craft infrastructure, such as fewer collectors and galleries, have necessitated a reformulation of many individuals’ craft practices to ensure financial sustainability. Contemporary practice blurs lines between craft, art and design and encompasses work that is commercial, functional, technological, conceptual, performative and post-disciplinary. Design and arts practitioners are increasingly incorporating craft techniques, materials and aesthetics into their work. Labels are fluid, and their value is questionable as practices increase in hybridity. Emerging practitioners grapple with established categories and nomenclature as they look for a name and a place for their work in institutions and commercial markets.

Craft work has become more collaborative and interdependent. Makers are co-marketing; they’re working with and borrowing skills from practitioners in their field and in other sectors, including the manufacturing industry. Craft works are less inward-looking and more concerned with social, environmental and cultural effects as well as—taking a page from design—the end user. DIY practice embraces craft work values and incorporates experimentation with technique and materials. Digital technologies are gradually being integrated into craft design and production processes. Digital technology is an invaluable creative and production tool and can open up broader employment opportunities. Although craft is still somewhat marginalized in its more traditional form, innovation in craft practice is repositioning craft as a sector to watch.

## KEY GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The trends in practice described above are realized in certain countries, for example Australia and Denmark, where craft economies are thriving. There are several aspects of the Ontario craft sector worthy of further attention (see next section); they are not yet well supported by funding agencies, educational facilities or community projects. We outline recommendations and suggest ways to develop and encourage Ontario's craft sector in these vital areas of practice.

### DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY AND CRAFT

Today's craft practitioners face a new economic reality and infrastructure, and many are adjusting their practices. Many artists are using design practices in their work, for example, they may adopt a more commercial approach. Access to technologies such as rapid prototyping and digital textile printing is increasing in Ontario, and digital technology is becoming an integral tool in craft production. Although practitioners trained in craft are using design and new technologies, granting institutions that serve Canada and Ontario may not fund these practices. In several interviews, thought leaders describe specific designers with craft training who have been denied funding because their practice involves prototypes or commercial production. Artists may be forced to reframe their practice to be eligible for funding. Thought leaders believe European funding bodies recognize that craft careers need a design-and-production orientation; our granters may not acknowledge the economic realities in contemporary craft practice.

One possible reason for Canada's funding policy is the negative associations between design, technology and commercialism. In recent decades commercial success was not part of an evaluation of craft work or practice; sometimes commercial success devalued a craft. Granting agencies that deny support to craft artists who create multiples or whose work is affordable do a disservice to the craft sector as a whole. If craft works are too expensive, buyers are restricted and craft practitioners may not be able to support themselves by selling their work, due to limited audiences. Moreover, creative work with important social applications can emerge out of design and digital practices. As discussed above, lack of support for artists who use design and new technologies can affect the health of the craft sector as a whole.

#### Recommendations

**Expand craft grant programs to encompass design-oriented practice.** To facilitate growth in this thriving and financially healthy area of the craft sector, Canada's granting agencies should support individual and collaborative craft-design projects. Projects could include low-volume production crafts (runs of 200 to 300 pieces), prototype

development and product research, and could be supported through existing craft project grants. Or it may be fruitful to create a separate craft project grant that includes the word “design” in its title; juries who understand the importance of research, prototypes and the place of design in craft could be selected to evaluate applications. Small batch production work, research initiatives, and prototypes could be evaluated using criteria different from those applied to one-of-a-kind work.

**Support the use of digital technologies in craft.** Around the world, digital technologies play a growing role in craft production and are becoming accepted as just another craft tool. We should not exclude crafts that use digital methods from grant funding. If Ontario wishes to keep up with development around the world, we need to facilitate access to output devices by supporting shared public access to equipment or partnerships with small-scale manufacturing. In embracing a research and development role in this area craft artists could receive government funding for technological development, particularly when that development has applications for industrial design and manufacturing.

**Encourage practice that is geared towards financial sustainability.** Cultural and institutional entities should encourage an overall shift in attitude that embraces commercialism and production work as a necessary part of craft practice. We believe arts councils should encourage self-sufficiency among craft practitioners, especially when grant funding is limited. Craft artists cannot depend on public funding for their livelihood; we should encourage them to aim for financially sustainable practices.

## **SUPPORT FOR MARKETING AND OPERATIONS**

Most craft practitioners struggle to generate funds for marketing and promoting their work. They need money to conduct market research, to participate in trade shows (local and further afield), to construct booths, to produce business cards and flyers, to build websites, to photograph their work and, to pay designers if they do not have the skills to design their own materials. Emerging practitioners particularly need funds for operational costs such as studio set-up and equipment purchase.

Some individual practices do receive support, but there is little promotion of Canadian crafts here or abroad. There is a dearth of craft-related coverage in Canadian media. Crafts in Canada tend to be regionally isolated, and craft practitioners and the public seldom see work that was produced outside their own provinces. Some people believe Canadian craft and Ontario-based craft are competitive with the best work from around world, but there is very little funding for international exposure or trade initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

**Increase funding and develop programs to support business practice for individual makers.** As existing markets shrink, emerging craft artists in particular require support while they establish their practice. Support could take the form of direct funding for marketing and operational costs through council grants. Other grants could fund expertise, services, space and equipment.

**Boost exposure of craft in Canada.** Ontario should develop media relationships to increase exposure for Ontario craft in local and national news outlets. One suggestion: a campaign for greater public awareness of local craft activity. Grants could support projects that highlight work being done across the country.

Annual group exhibitions that feature Canadian or Ontario-based craft should be funded on a consistent basis such that they appear legitimate in the eyes of the public, facilitate greater public exposure, and receive ongoing media coverage. Commercial shows in which participants and organizers profit from sales of work should also be funded. Such shows contribute to the financial health of the sector and should not be excluded from funding.

**Reach out to markets outside Canada.** The United States has huge markets and a large consumer culture. Canadian makers could benefit from exposure in the United States. Practitioners from Great Britain, Australia and Scandinavia attend U.S.-based trade shows; Canadian representation is weak. U.S. shows include the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, DMG shows and SOFA. Collect in London is recommended as a good space to present concept-based work.

## **NEW GENERATION/SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS**

The success of students and emerging artists is critical to the overall health of the craft sector. Though funding and programming for students falls outside the mandate of the Ontario Arts Council, we note some areas where emerging artists could be better supported by the educational system. Educational institutions in Ontario should stop presenting the outdated model of the craft infrastructure and prepare students for current realities. (In the outdated model, students graduate, then make a living by selling one-of-a-kind work to collectors via galleries.)

## **Recommendations**

**Arm students with strategies and techniques relevant to the contemporary market.** Though craft schools in Ontario are including professional-practice classes and marketing training in their curriculums, they should make sure the students' preparation for the market is effective and realistic. Schools should invite successful craft

practitioners to serve as role models for students who will soon be positioning and marketing their own work. Mentors should include practitioners who have opened up their practice to industrial, material and interior design. Students should thoroughly explore contemporary marketing strategies and techniques; they should be given practical exercises using Web 2.0 networking strategies.

## **COLLABORATION**

The theme of collaboration and interdependency emerged in the literature review and continued in conversations with thought leaders. “Collaboration” includes craft artists working with other makers or with practitioners in other sectors, both in and outside the arts. Collaboration and interdependency are undernurtured in Ontario. In other parts of the world, there are strong connections between craftspeople and small-scale industry. Collaboration can open up new economic opportunities for both craftspeople and industry and can foster job creation.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Provide more robust financial and ideological support for collaborative projects.**

Ontario should recognize the creative value of collaboration and support collaborative projects through grant programs. (At present, a practice that involves more than one individual is excluded from funding.)

**Encourage stronger links between craft artists and industry.** Arts councils and educational institutions should organize discussions and networking events to bring members of different fields together, to discover opportunities and to connect emerging makers and designers with business and industry. Residency opportunities in manufacturing environments would be of value. Artists and industry should share information about local facilities, skilled manufacturers, material suppliers and fabricators through a centralized database, as one thought leader suggests.

## **SOCIAL IMPACT**

Some emerging practitioners produce work with a social-responsibility dimension. Pieces by such artists have moved beyond the expression of the individual maker. Socially responsible projects support economic and cultural sustainability among communities abroad and communities at risk at home; they identify concerns about the environment; they express political ideals. Some initiatives aim to make craft more accessible to the general public and have a cultural impact on the local community, for example festivals, creative events, cooperatives. Socially relevant craft activity is happening in Ontario, but there could be more. When artists engage the public, citizens

may become more interested in the cultural sector and put pressure on government to devote funding to the arts.

### **Recommendations**

**Provide greater support to craft practices that have a social impact.** Though facility with technique and knowledge of materials must remain factors in evaluating the merit of craft works and projects, granting institutions should fund a range of socially conscious activities, particularly those that encourage public participation in the craft arts.

### **CRITICAL ACTIVITY**

Critical discourse is sorely lacking in Ontario, perhaps because the craft world is so small its members hesitate to criticize. There is little discussion about what is being done well and what needs to be done differently.

### **Recommendations**

**Increase support and encourage critical activity.** Grant funding and public programs should encourage and support more research, writing, exhibitions, lectures, curation and publications, both online and off.

### **DIY ACTIVITIES**

DIY craft is a growing aspect of the craft sector and is a key to the craft sector's future. We can nurture growth in the craft sector by engaging in DIY practices – particularly in the areas of online marketing, social networking, and public engagement. Though some people disparage the level of skill in DIY works, DIY practitioners are turning to independent research and enrolment in formal education and workshops to learn about materials and techniques. As craft departments in Canadian schools are closing because of low enrolment, it is important to nurture interest in training. There are fissures within the craft sector between DIY practitioners and traditional studio craft artists due to misunderstandings and false assumptions. This culture of animosity inhibits sharing of knowledge and skills among these groups.

### **Recommendations**

**Enable communication between DIY crafters and traditional craft practitioners.** Councils or educational institutions could broker dialogues between the two groups; other suggestions include publications and panels. DIY crafters and traditional

practitioners could participate in workshops and discussions about techniques, craft history, marketing and social networking.

**Support growth in DIY craft.** Fund projects—publications, commissions, gallery projects and public engagement initiatives—by artists in DIY communities.

## **POST-DISCIPLINARITY AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICE**

No longer do all practitioners distinguish their craft practice by specific mediums, for example ceramics or textiles. Craftspeople are increasingly engaging with varying materials and techniques for each project. Individual craftspeople call themselves “designer,” “craftsperson” or “artist,” for example, depending on which project or aspect of a project they’re working on. Some practitioners find categorization a challenge when they’re applying for funding.

Thought leaders and the literature agree that artists are smart to have a hybrid practice (particularly combining craft and design) to survive in the market. Yet not all current practitioners need to have a hybrid practice. Some makers, particularly those in rural areas, create one-of-a-kind objects using predominantly manual means and are not interested in production or in participating at trade shows. These practitioners may be able to subsist on sales of one-off craft pieces and grant funding.

### **Recommendations**

**Expand options for describing types of practice.** Funders should continue to respect and retain single-craft specializations and increase categories for hybrid practices, for example “cross-discipline,” “multimedia” and “non-traditional.” Funders should add these descriptions to grant applications and revise jurying criteria for these areas.

**Continue to fund traditional craft practice.** Granting agencies should expand their mandate to include emerging practices, but not at the expense of traditional practice, which continues to be a vital component of the craft sector.

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

<http://iheartartpdx.com/>

<http://www.fashioningtech.com/>

<http://makingaslowrevolution.wordpress.com/>

<http://crafthaus.ning.com/forum/topics/computerized-craft-arts>

<http://www.etsy.com/storque/craftivism/>

<http://makeandmeaning.com/>

<http://whipup.net/>

<http://www.supernaturale.com/categories.html?id=al>

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<http://yarnbombing.com/>

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<http://www.stroudinternationaltextiles.org.uk/conference.html>

<http://www.mariabuszek.com/extraordinarybook/index.htm>

<http://www.Fab.cba.mit.edu>

<http://www.spoonflower.com>

<http://www.fabricondemand.com>

<http://www.textilemuseum.ca/>

[http://www.craft.on.ca/Publications/Studio Magazine](http://www.craft.on.ca/Publications/Studio_Magazine)

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