1 · INTRODUCTION
CRAFT IN A CHANGING WORLD

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After decades of deliberation it has become obvious what the crafts are. In late modern culture the crafts are a consortium of genres in the visual arts, genres that make sense collectively because for artistic, economic and institutional reasons, they have been deliberately placed together. At different times in the 20th century they have been forced together, have drifted towards one another in a more accidental fashion, or have volunteered to sit together. They have no intrinsic cohesion; they have no a priori relationship that makes them a permanently peculiar or special gathering; there could be fewer or more of them; they are together now, as we move into the next century, because the complex forces that brought them together, despite shifts in circumstance, hold them in proximity. This proximity is not stable and is certainly in a process of change. Nevertheless they are in consortium still.

Craft has always been a supremely messy word. For centuries it was normally used in contexts that had nothing to do with creative artistic practice of any kind, but when it is used in the context of art, its multifarious nomenclatic heritage has rendered it so ambivalent that many who are associated with it consider it a drawback. Those of us who have spent time in the field are at a stage, I am sure, at which earnest definitions and descriptions of craft as something which is (or is not) art, is (or is not) design, as technophobia, as an anthropological signifier, as a protector of apparent traditions, as old (or new) age lifestyle, as patriarchy, as airport trinket, as ethnic iconography, as communist Utopia, as eco-protest, as redundant technology, as aromatherapy, and most emphatically as victim of an unloving world, have ground us all down. There have been so many worthy agendas and maudling laments that we barely know what it is anymore and a lot of very sensible people no longer care.

This pejorative picture, of an arbitrary group of practices languishing together in an unloved condition is – of course – an overstatement. For while the crafts have certainly been corralled into a particular enclosure during the 20th century, and have developed some problems because of this, there is no doubt the confinement has resulted in the growth of ties and the recognition of correspondences. Alliances have been formed, affecting the way things have been made and consumed. Like a Roman legion forming a tortoise of shields, there have been times when the individual genres have successfully protected themselves as a collective. And while it is important not to fantasise or fetishise craft as a thing in itself, ultimately, it really doesn’t matter how it all came together; the point is, it is together. What really matters at this juncture is where all these genres are going and how they are going to develop in the next period of years.

Craft is presented in this book as a fluid set of practices, propositions and positions that shift and develop, sometimes rapidly. This depiction is deliberate because in the past craft too often has been described in restrictive and defensive rather than in inclusive and expansive terms. Too often it has been a history and philosophy of excuses and apologies rather than a confident striding out of a vital part of visual culture.

Peter Fleming; Canadian; Pelican Cabinet; afrormosia, cast bronze and green slate; 1996.
The following chapters do not avoid the definitions and descriptions listed above (and debated less flippantly below). Rather, they use them as a starting point in order to outline the integrity of practice, the vitality of the object, and the ideas of makers and consumers, in the larger world of visual culture.

Three main aims provide the underlying agenda for this book. First, it explores the key issues, ideas and developments that have been current on the international scene over the last 15 or so years. Historical contexts, sometimes reaching back a century, are provided where necessary. It has been a turbulent period for the modern crafts and this turbulence needs to be described and explained. Second, a number of the chapters will explore the intellectual, social and economic context of practice, often making use of disciplines outside the immediate realm of craft or craft history. Third, and in some ways most important, the book summarises the intellectual and ideological condition of objects. The nature and role of cultural artefacts have been under question for some time. Issues surrounding both of these will be presented.

On a superficial level it is not difficult to characterise the way that the crafts have unfolded through the last three decades. The 1970s is for the most part seen as the decade in which a radical wave of activity sought to explore the meanings and roles of the various genres. The contemporary jewellery movement, the new ceramics, fibre art, the studio glass movement and book arts, for example, while they grew as experimental practices during the 1960s, were fully realised in the next decade. It might be best defined as the period in which, internationally, a consolidated avant-garde emerged in most media. It was when official crafts institutions were founded in many countries, courses were developed in leading colleges of art and design, and publications grew in number.

The 1980s carried on much of this activity, though the character of the craft world changed as the decade progressed. This was simultaneously the decade of voracious consumption and Post-Modern discourse; both affected the visual arts directly. On the material front, institutional life was squeezed all over the industrialised world. Consequently, fewer practitioners enjoyed the protection of salaried posts and commerce visited craft as it had never done before. In some countries private patronage developed dramatically. The number of private galleries selling craft, often integrated with the Fine Arts, steeply rose (although numbers fell away somewhat when the economy went into recession at the end of the decade). As public money shrunk, private enterprise became the key to survival. On the
intellectual front, the growth of interest in the histories of design, craft and decorative art among historians and practitioners led to the development of a fascinating eclecticism. The specific histories of ceramic, glass, furniture, jewellery and metalwork began to play a vital role, and the gestural abstraction of the 1970s receded significantly before a wave of figurines, cabrioles, rocailles, gold fittings, arches and tazzas. History became a key element in the revitalisation of narrative and symbolism. Irony became an important weapon. As one has to be ironic about something, the use of a wide range of historical imagery, became a necessary feature of much new work.

The 1990s are still too close to draw clear conclusions about, but several chapters identify trends that were highly significant. First of all, however, it is important to remember that the decades are not in any way hermetic. The developments of the 1970s and 1980s continued on in various forms in the 1990s. This is especially true of historical eclecticism, which reached an extraordinary pitch in the last decade.

An interesting aspect of the classification debate during the course of the 1990s has been a shift in emphasis from the ideology of negative complaint (why am I not treated like an artist?) to an integrationalist spirit (what does it matter as long as I create and communicate?). In this regard the 1990s could be best characterised as being to do with interdisciplinarity. The desire to set an intellectual agenda that crosses boundaries has been a key feature of the humanities generally, and while it still has to yield significant results in most fields, there have been promising and provocative results within visual culture. The key to success has been found in the willingness to collaborate. Facilitated by high technology, co-operatives and companies are changing the way radical material culture is produced. These new companies and co-operatives have fused areas of art and craft practice with media, communication and interior design. Thus, if the previous 20 years had been fraught with anxiety about the status of craft in relation to the Fine Arts, the last ten years have witnessed the beginnings of a promising fusion of craft with everything else.

Small co-operative businesses in Britain and the European mainland have sprung up and occupied areas that straddle communication design, architecture, design and craft media. Jam (Britain), Tomato (Britain), Neissing (Germany) and Droog Design (Holland), for example, are driven by concepts, not processes, and operate across media. In some areas of the world, and most notably in Holland, Germany and the Nordic countries, designer craftsmen are employed directly by manufacturers to produce prototypes for batch-run production. Alternatively, individual craft practices have expanded in order to become industry-scale producers of large-scale works. Albert Paley and Dale Chihuly offer the most impressive examples of the trend. (See Chapter 9 and p.5) The avant-garde of the future will not be based on individuals, it seems, but individualised companies.

Jurgen Bey; Droog Design; Dutch; Tree Trunk Bench; bronze, trunk; 1999
An aspect of the last 30 years has been a steady shift in the geography of craft. While all nations enjoy solid craft production of one kind or another, radical Modernist developments have tended to be primarily associated with relatively few nations, the most regularly important of these being America, the Scandinavian nations, Japan and Britain. This can barely be sustained now. As the character of craft evolves, and especially as it interfaces more fully with other disciplines, other nations have come to the fore. Interestingly, a number of nations that enjoyed the status of being at the forefront of the avant-garde in the first half of the 20th century have increasingly returned to the fore in the last two decades. These include the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and the Czech Republic (see pp.3, 7 and 15). Nations that have rarely been positioned in the avant-garde spotlight are now confidently in the fore. Canada and Australia contain leading movements in ceramics, jewellery, textiles and furniture and have set powerful new intellectual agendas through publications and conferences.\(^1\) Nations not usually associated with Modernist invention, such as India, Mexico and Korea have entered strongly into the international arena (see pp.8, 9 and 11). The increasing number of international congresses on the crafts shows the shift to be less a chance emergence of a few new schools of thought, and more a general opening up, a de-centring of craft, as travel gets cheaper and the internet gets sharper.

Throughout the last 30 years there have been a variety of issues (some already alluded to) that have at one time or another come to the fore to worry us. I will list the most important:

1. Classification
2. Economy
3. Amateurism
4. Technology
5. Morality
6. Ethnicity
7. Place
8. Domesticity
9. Museology
10. Gender
11. History
12. Modernity
13. Quality

All of these are addressed by the various authors in this volume, and indeed, every one of them could and should be the subject of a book in its own right. For the rest of this introduction, I will identify the nature of the discussions and debates that have circled around these subjects.

Classification refers to the ongoing – and inevitable – struggle between the different types of practice at large within the visual arts. We classify our arts and, for one reason or another, we have always done so. Through much of the 20th century within the European and North American traditions, we have grouped the various genres under the headings, art, craft and design. While there is an historical and intellectual rationale for this arrangement, the structure has held principally for economic, institutional and political reasons. In short, the system is understood by (and benefits) the marketplace, galleries and government. The so-called art/craft debate, whereby we wonder where exactly craft is situated in relation to the Fine Arts, has rolled on too long, and has accrued a full and very mixed literature.\(^2\) Suffice it to say that the debate has until recently been dogged by the absence of a clear historiography. Craft has been depicted as a separate, self-contained entity, or alternatively as a part of the Fine Arts. The debate has also been wilfully ignorant of key social economic determinants, it has been Eurocentric, it has failed to deal with the gender issue and, unlike 19th century forebears, has openly ignored social class.\(^3\)

Abstractions and theories to one side, at root, classification is to do with money. Kings are richer than peasants. On the contemporary art market, one can get considerably more decorative art for one’s money than fine art. The very finest and greatest ancient Greek vase will cost a fraction of the allocated price of a modest minor Impressionist painting. There are tacitly agreed price levels and controls that effectively dictate what any genre, and any period of any genre, will cost at one time. Fluctuations in prices occur of course, and works by key craftspeople occasionally break out of the established framework, but on the whole, the modern age has established a financial pecking order which remains pretty well in place. Most art historians, theoreticians and critics have followed the money. Some will specialise in connoisseurship, some lean toward sociology, yet others politics and feminism. What they hold in common, however, is that they prefer to write about art that costs a lot.

This pared down analysis now needs some moderation. Artists, designers and craftspeople alike are driven not by economic considerations but by an incessant creative urge. It would be unfair to imply that they set themselves against one another as rival producers in the arts economy. They are all subjected to the established way of things and in the end relatively few of them significantly benefit from it. To depict fine artists in general as having cornered the market, for example, would be a very incomplete view. Few practitioners are able to sell
Dale Chihuly; American; *Installation*; glass; 1994; Dallas Museum of Art; Photograph by Scott Hagar
their works at consistently high prices over the span of a career, and the majority struggle along on the edge of penury.

Nevertheless the craft economy is a particularly problematic area and has been for some time, not because it has been in some way deliberately attacked or marginalised by rivals, but because it at present sits in a very awkward place within the socio-economic infrastructure of the arts.

There are two ways to make money selling artefacts: through exclusivity or quantity. The fine artist classically makes a living by selling a small number of handmade objects very expensively. The designer makes a living by creating templates for objects that go into mass-production. The unit price in both spheres, quite without the manipulations of the market, has its logic in the mechanisms of production. Paintings need to be expensive and mass-produced products must be cheap. Marketing can make cheap things expensive, but the underlying principle remains unvarnished. Straddled between an art and a design economy, craft often gets the worst of both worlds. It occupies an economic space where objects, though individually handmade, sell at mass-production prices. Lacking the prestige of high art or the reproductability of product design — both characteristics economically viable — the craftspeople are obliged to sell unique works at mass prices.

Of course there are exceptions. 'High' designers have effectively entered into the art economy and many fine artists have found ways of reducing unit costs, usually by publishing, making prints or multiples, and some leading craftspeople have risen into the economic stratosphere. But, the underlying depiction remains accurate: to survive, it is necessary either to make a lot of affordable things or a very few prestigious things. It is most important that these things are not mistaken for one another. In both instances, objects have to be convincingly sold. Each individual craftsman has to position himself appropriately within this economic reality, or risk a life of anonymous financial hardship.

A central issue throughout the century, and one which is still vibrantly current, is that of the relationship of the professional (with the vast numbers of amateur craftspeople. Understood as those groups who engage with some form of making on a part-time, non-specialist or hobbyist level, amateurism is an important element in all the arts. There is nothing pejorative in describing areas of practice amateur, of course. The enthusiasm and commitment of those who engage physically with the arts is vital to their maintenance and dissemination. But in many ways the amateur sphere in the crafts has come to symbolise the whole. Craft as a word does not immediately and automatically conjure up an image of works of high excellence displayed in marbled halls; it is as likely to materialise images of wooden stalls crammed with baskets, pots and jars of jam under a canvas awning. Craft has been imaged as a pleasurable way of filling time, or alternatively as a subsistence practice that is done alongside other things.

There are long-standing reasons why these images cling and often hold centre-stage. From the mid-19th century onwards, a consistent thread in craft theory had been the idea that craft is not to do with a single-minded striving for high excellence by individuals, but rather that the process of making was a key to a humane society. For a thinker like John Ruskin, every person in society could achieve the sense of being an individual through the medium of universally-practised, anonymous craft. The humane intent of the position is laudable, but it does present problems.

Surveys have shown that more people write poetry than read it. Poetry is a complex thing. A pattern of words configured to promote semiotic pregnancy, a medium that allows us to explore ourselves in a concise manner. Because it is not onerous to do, many of us write it; because it is so difficult to understand, few of us read it.

At the amateur level, the crafts are like that. Despite the given wisdom of our time, which tells us that we are all consumers but few of us are producers, the reality is really very different and in some ways less desirable. Many of us make things with creative intent, picturing ourselves as

Neissing; German; Spheres; gold and platinum; 1998
being on a special, self-exploratory quest. But often we don’t look at, consume, absorb or contemplate the works of others to the same extent. Millions of people in the industrialised world are amateur craftspeople: the evening classes, DIY stores, garden sheds and basements of our cities are full of people making pots, baskets, embroideries, dresses, cupboards and watercolours, much of it of an extremely high technical quality. Statistics show – in Britain at least – that not nearly so many visit museums specifically to look at masterworks in these media. For example, many hundreds of thousands of Britons make pots and various forms of textile as amateurs at various levels, yet the ceramics and textiles study galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which hold among the very finest and largest collections in the world, are visited by a tiny fraction of these. This considerable percentage of the British population are more interested in making their own craft objects than in looking at those of others. They want to make their own poetry not consume the poetry of others.

A key element of the idea of modern craft lies in these observations. In an affirmation of process over product, amateur craft is to do with the need to physically engage with things in an overly pre-packaged world. It is a vital element in any healthy society, but it is not the same thing as the obsessive, intense search that is central to the professional sphere. The former is to do with the injection of the subjective self into objective phenomena, the latter is to do with the objectification of subjective impulses. The former strives for locality and the latter universality of consciousness. The real difference is in the way the work is situated, and in the research conducted. The great poets are the ones who read poetry.

Technology has had a decisive effect on the way the whole of visual culture has unfolded since the Renaissance. As the physical realisation of scientific advance, technology has been present at every level of artistic invention, facilitating the physical construction of innumerable quantities of things, and being responsible for the development of entirely new forms of practice. It is important to recognise this because, since the later 19th century, craft has continually been defined as being anti-technological, and as a corollary to this, anti-urban. Certainly, in the later 19th century, the period in which
craft formed itself as a lobby and a distinct zone of practice, hatred of technology was a major motivating force among various groups. A wave of utopian activity across the industrialised nations hoped to save the world by marching backwards into an invented perfect past. Socialist Luddism – this term not being necessarily pejorative – has remained a fierce and loud force within the craft world and at its most aggressive has constituted a blind resistance to mechanical, electronic and mass-production technologies of all types, and the embracing of a rustic, mythologised vision of handmade objects. This lobby is understood by many to represent the whole of craft, rather than a single thread within a far more complex fabric.

Kristine Michael; Indian; Animal double-walled vessel; wheel thrown and altered stoneware; 1998

Designer-craftspeople who have engaged with alternative technologies during the last several decades present a more constructive, albeit still Luddite, model. This has been at least partly in response to widespread disillusionment with science and technology as benchmarks of human progress. Some thinkers have even suggested that technology does not imply any form of progress, while others have developed bio-technological models as alternatives to existing ‘hard sciences’. Environmental disasters, technological redundancy and the corruption of high capital have, since the 1970s, led to increasingly well-articulated and forceful protest against the uncontrolled advance of industrialism. Most of these have been committed to creating environmentally responsive products than run in tandem with rather than against the eco-system. Some have created designs specifically for Third World nations and for the poor in the larger industrial economies. During the 1990s, many have engaged with the issue of recycling used products and raw materials. This has taken the form, at one end of the spectrum, of designer-craftspeople incorporating old furniture, receptacles and industrial materials into objects, often with ironic or didactic intent. At the other end, materials have been broken down and recycled. Paper pulp and various forms of recycled plastic, for example, have been widely used for the creation of one-off and batch-produced furniture and jewellery. At root, these responses to technology are to do with lifestyle and the power of the individual to resist the imposition of an alien way of living.

The etymology of craft relates it to power. The power to control one’s own pattern of life, its shape and speed, to resist through the process of making and designing. Many craftspeople have embraced new technology and exploited it brilliantly to achieve their ends; they perceive its primary function to be to add to the quality of life, not solely to the economic advancement of those who exploit it.

Throughout the modern period mortality has been a constant issue. Many schools of thought have insisted that art cannot simply be about aesthetics or technics. But the aesthetic dimension never switches off. I pondered on this point one winter evening as I bunched and swayed my way out of London among several hundred others on an evening train. It was raining and as I stared out into the gloom my eyes flickered backwards and forwards between a dishevelled image of myself in the glass and the cityscape beyond. The two fused in front of me, achieving a simultaneity of subjective and objective visions. I was struck by my now automatic tendency to see the world through art, in this case a kind of Cubist or Futurist sensibility. But suddenly I was shaken out of my complacency by a quick, rat-like movement down in a street we drifted past. A horrendously broken man, stroboscopically lit with filthy yellow light, stirred and scuttled among trash cans. A typical south London street, unconsciously customised through decades to match the general detritus we recognise as an inevitable element of industrial culture; a street to lengthen the stride past, to piss on or be raped in. I wondered, as I stared at this pitiful sight, how that man felt about being part of my Cubo-Futurist vision.

The artist-craftsperson-designer has been invited to engage directly with the moral dimension of life throughout the modern period. The extreme position
was set out by John Ruskin, who effectively made art a moral reflection of the culture that produced it. Art Nouveau, De Stijl, Constructivism, Purism, the Bauhaus and the Studio Craft movement were all mediated by the perceived need to engage with the moral condition of society. While many practitioners and movements have doggedly maintained the right to disinterested thought – to art for art’s sake – the rejection of the moral prerogative has been less successful in the crafts than elsewhere.

Timing is never coincidental. Over the last two centuries, whenever the industrial society appears to tip into an especially consumerist phase, real or imagined, and particularly when respected thinkers identify the age as decadent and greedy, craft and design are wont to reveal themselves as the forces of anti-Mammon. Practice has revealed itself capable of instantaneous change: the production of luxury goods and the styling of products to enhance saleability can seamlessly translate into a moral drive to conserve the material fabric of the world. The 1970s saw the publication of seminal texts on craft and design as vehicles for the improvement of society, but it was during the 1980s that the lobby was consolidated as a fierce resistance to the ethos of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. It was in this period that the ‘new age travellers’, the disenfranchised urban youth of the industrial world, set off to live a life on the road, in defiance of the ideology of careerism. In many respects this activity was an earthen, Post-Modern version of the escape to rurality practised by adherents of the Arts and Crafts Movement a century before.

Work as a concept came under much scrutiny during the 1980s. For some thinkers, craft could be interpreted as no more than creative work, or the elevation of the necessary activities of life to the level of creative practice. Derived centrally from the social theory of William Morris, craft here became an entire means of living, whereby one engaged with all aspects of the material world and literally made one’s own environment. Fiercely anti-consumerism, this vision of life would see most people working for much of the day in activities which directly related to their own comfort and survival, and, perhaps, the well-being of those immediately around them.  

While an attractive proposition in many respects, to define craft in terms of its social functionality, as a philosophy of making intrinsically tied to environment and lifestyle – to a politics of living – is extremely problematic. Oscar Wilde, among others, famously attacked the idea that any art form had to be socially responsible. As a socialist himself, he believed that society had to change in order to enjoy art, rather than art changing society or, worse still, art changing itself to suit society. Art as an agent for change; art as the reward after change: throughout the 20th century these were – and remain – tensely opposed alternatives.

Ethnicity implies race, place and national identity. The role of ethnic traditions, customs, practices, local and vernacular approaches to art and life have become increasingly significant in the globalised atmosphere of late Modern culture, so much so that particular emphasis is laid on ethnic issues in this volume. The artistic iconographies and mannersisms of individual races have rarely been more important, providing not simply stylistic identity, but communal and political focus also. We must take care, however, not to see the forces of ethnicity as being simply in opposition to internationalism. Ethnic identity only becomes a self-conscious cultural issue when an international environment exists. It has been a condition of modernity from the Enlightenment onwards that the steady advance toward a global condition simultaneously leads to the positive appropriation and preservation of local difference and its artificial transmission to new geographic centres, as well as to the negative, and deliberate destruction of those cultures.  

Through much of the 20th century, craft was politicised by ethnic groups all over the world. It has been used as crude propaganda to exacerbate difference and tensions between peoples.
Ethnicity has a natural and inevitable relationship with race. But ethnic culture has not simply been about the struggles in and around this last splintering of barbarism. It has also given rise and breathed to communities, inspiring some of the very best aspects of human civilisation.

Specific groups have consolidated and differentiated themselves in order to preserve and invigorate their cultural heritage. This is obviously the case with ethnic groups that feel themselves threatened or subsumed into larger dominant cultures. Canadian First Nations peoples, the Québécois, Basques, Bretons, Catalans and Scots resist the paralysing anonymity of internationalisation through their material culture. Ethnic minorities in the world's major cities, the millions of Greeks, Afro-Caribbeans, Irish, Africans, Africans, Lebanese, Indians, Scandinavians, Chinese and many other peoples have developed hybrid forms based on a fusion of ancient heritage and modern environment. Migrant craftpeople have deliberately fused several ethnic traditions. Typically, Japanese, Chinese and African artists living in Europe and America have manipulated several traditions. Less common but increasingly, American and European craftpeople and designers have moved to Asian countries in order to expand their vision.

We go on vacation to places making use of the fiscal and mechanical devices of international, industrial, capitalist culture, when we get there we hope to find an environment that has resisted all of these things. In a world in which globalisation has finally brought everything into involuntary proximity, difference has become an intrinsic part of the macro-politics of culture. We all wish to be ethnic in a global environment. We all wish to be simultaneously somewhere and everywhere. The idea of place – specific, unique spaces that we allow to acquire history and symbolic meaning – has great importance here. Anthropologists have discussed place at length over the last several decades, and examined the need we seem to have to create 'places' or, sites with a density and weight of symbolic meaning. A natural corollary to places are 'non-places', such as airports and motorway restaurants, where the desirable thing is to swiftly pass by without psychological attachment. The crafts could be defined in this regard as being 'portable places'; objects that excite a sense of permanence, history and symbolic weight. A space filled with such objects has the potential to become a place. Those peoples who, for whatever reason, live away from the places that identify and give meaning to their cultural heritage, create places by surrounding themselves with artefacts. The consumption and display of ornamental objects is to do with the creation of places, with profound memorabilia, and the places we tend to return to regularly, that we associate with our own cultural heritage, are premised on the idea of permanence. We expect not only our greater cathedrals and squares but also our favourite pubs and restaurants to acquire a patina that is the result of a residual, ongoing presence. That is not to dismiss impermanence; transience is a most important quality in any vital and healthy society, but we need also a conception of permanence. We need cathedrals as well as bike sheds, ceramic cups as well as paper ones, and books as well as newspapers. A significant amount of activity within the crafts can be characterised, through the use of specific technologies and imagery, as deliberately setting out to deal with the idea of permanence.

Most obviously, permanence is a vital ingredient in the formulation of collective cultural memory. Things that last through generations pass on a core of values and encoded narratives, which succeeding generations reinterpret and embellish. Things that last are intrinsically bound up with the idea of memory, of memory recorded through tactile senses. To engage with many of the craft practices directly is literally to be touching history. To take an example, when a piece of ceramic is held it conveys through the inherent symbolism of its materiality, ten thousand years of activity, of things being made, substances being stored and consumed. The act of human hands clasping a clay body, of skin and clay lips meeting, is automatically and unavoidably endowed with the archaic depth of an act endlessly repeated back into antiquity. The clay vessels that survive imbue contemporary clay vessels with the concept of age. Innovation in ceramic practice is invariably achieved against the symbolic backdrop of unimaginable antiquity. The same can be said of most practice in the crafts. For all practitioners in these genres, from radical innovators to the celebrators of tradition, permanence is a central quality that constantly has to be mediated. Undoubtedly, acceptance or rejection of the idea of permanence sharply divides types of practice and practitioner in the visual arts.

The construction of places and the idea of permanence implies another major theme, one that will become even more significant in the next decades: durability. As high technology begins to undermine the external workplace as a necessity, domestic space comes to the fore in a way that it has not been for much of the last two centuries. Clearly, the need for places of work external to