

CRAFT IN STYLE

SUSAN COCHRANE introduces the makers at CraftNSW's launch of their new outlet in Sydney's Rocks



PASSION FOR THE HANDMADE is thriving in Sydney's historic heartland, The Rocks. On 1 November 2018, CraftNSW celebrated in style its move to new premises at 12 Argyle Place. The significance of change and continuity through its 113-year history was acknowledged by its patron The Honorable Professor Dame Marie Bashir. Fashion icon Claudia Chan Shaw headlined the event in her inimitable style, saying: 'Style is not about convention. It is about individuality. Trends fade. Style remains. The most memorable aesthetics remain relevant forever. They exude a quality that is effortless, that doesn't submit to standards of beauty.'

Maret Kalmar, Jeweller

When the centenary exhibition of Craft NSW was held in 2006, I did a series on Australian history, including the Harrington Street terraces, the first gallery/shop of the Society.

Opposite: CraftNSW Honorary Member and Ambassador Claudia Chan Shaw featured In Style at the new Argyle Place premises. *Style is knowing who you are and what you want to say.* Window display Pam de Groot, photo Yaja Hadrys

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC'.



'Trends fade. Style remains.'

Taking the 113-year old Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW and its current membership of studio practitioners as exemplary, we can explore their core values and how they are transmuted both individually and collectively through a community of makers and the activities of their association.

The beautifully appointed CraftNSW gallery is the makers' space, with displays featuring a constantly changing kaleidoscope of original, one-off pieces - all objects of desire. There are no employees. Visitors and clients encounter makers who are well informed

about all aspects of the diverse range of objects and their respective makers. A revolving calendar of exhibitions of members' work is augmented by a program of specialist workshops.

The members, past and present, are studio practitioners across a diversity of genres, makers of contemporary Australian craft and design. Tantamount in their productions is a profound knowledge of and relationship with the materials, nuances beyond form, texture and colour to the inner meaning and symbolism of elements and how they intersect. The



art flows through eyes and hands that feel, weave, twist, turn, pour, smelt and fire until the desired composition is achieved. The ethos of makers encompasses self-sustainability as a realizable way of life.

Craft and design makers respect tradition but constantly ignore convention. Semantically, 'craft' includes the word 'art' but is not subordinate to it. In the mid 20th century certain Western institutional and academic tropes supposed an art/craft definition and imposed a hierarchy of values on it. Towards the turn of the 21st century, such artificial constructs around Western cultural production were discarded as irrelevant. As art critic Sasha Grishin commented: 'A craft versus fine art divide made little sense half a century ago and makes even less sense today - great studio glass and high quality studio ceramics belong firmly in the art category.'

Opposite page

Top:

Jane Hinde, Silk Painter

Watching the dye spread and merge on the silk, taking on a life of its own, is always captivating. Photo by the artist

Bottom left:

Judith Linder, Spinner and Weaver

My passion is for the fleece of suri alpaca, its lustre, silkiness and tactile sensuality. Photo Michael Walsh

Bottom right:

Jo Ann Hopkins, Woodcraft

Marquetry was the answer! It balances both my furniture making and love of botanical art.



Over the past 50 years, there has been a worldwide expansion of contemporary forms of artistic expression with the multiplier effects of new technologies in the creation and display of electronic works, the deliberate blurring of borders between 'performance' and 'art', the emergence of ephemeral environmental installations and socially potent street art. Despite this exponential explosion of creative energy in new directions, craft and design have retained core values, recognizing that the handmade is as old as human history and as infinitely variable.

Many skills are directly inherited, literally passed from hand to hand. Australia's craftmakers come from all backgrounds; their particular life experiences and cultural memories are wellsprings for their creativity. Dame Marie Bashir recalls that her mother was passionate about craft and

Sasha Grishin 'How hierarchies happen in contemporary Australian art', The Conversation December 9, 2014 <https://theconversation.com/how-hierarchies-happen-in-contemporary-australian-art-35088>

This page

Below: Brigitte Sieber, Fibre Artist

Nothing is so fulfilling as working with beautiful yarns, wool, silk, soft cottons and linens in a large variety of colours and textures.

Left: Kryisia St. Clair, Ceramic Artist, her glazes a kaleidoscope of colour, she is a practitioner of Alchemy. Photo by the artist



A black signature or mark, possibly the artist's name, written in a stylized, cursive font.



Opposite page:
Gillian Hodes,
Ceramic Artist:
The making of fine translucent porcelain pieces which are inspired by the colours of the sky and ocean, tunes me into nature's rhythm and flow. I find Australia's ever-changing beach landscape gives me peace and tranquility.
Photo artist and David Hodes

Left: Merrie Hamilton and Greg Sugden
A big influence on our collaborative ceramic work has been Margaret Preston, an early member of our Society and a legendary Australian painter and printmaker. She gave us permission to celebrate our local landscape and small events like cups of tea and the washing.
Photo Greg Sugden



schemed with her brother against patriarchal restrictions, he to lend her money for classes in painting and pottery, she to conceal his late nights out. Liz Gemmell recalls: 'My grandmother and mother were wonderful seamstresses. It was a necessity. They could transform a few meters of fabric into beautiful garments for me and for themselves. I was surrounded by fabric, remnants, threads, pins and needles. Now I realise they left me with a legacy of techniques for innovative garment design and garment construction.'

No matter how many thousands of times over millennia a fibre, filament, clay or precious metal has passed through the hands of an expert maker, each transformation from its base elements to a completed piece is extraordinary and unique. Judith Linder recounts: 'Such was my passion for the fleece of suri alpaca, its lustre, silkiness and tactile sensuality that we embarked on a 20-year

Left: Maret Kalmar, Jeweller
Reverse — *When the centenary exhibition of CraftNSW was held in 2006, I did a series on Australian history, including the Harrington Street terraces, the first gallery/shop of the Society.*

Michael Ripoll, Jeweller: *Jewellery inspired by life in our often chaotic, sometimes wonderful and always complex urban landscape.*





Pam de Groot, Textile Artist and Designer:
My work has often a playful quality and I think it is because I approach each new development or innovation from playing with the material. Photo Pam de Groot

journey to breed the best fleece we could. When I presented some fine-spun samples in Milan, I was well rewarded when the mill representative asked 'which company has done this spinning for you?' and wouldn't believe it has been handspun by a local artisan in Australia!

Ceramics is one of the oldest human arts, arising from the necessity to preserve food, drinks and other substances. Apart from the multiple utilitarian functions of ceramic containers, the desire for decoration is profound, evidenced in



the distinctive styles of decorated pottery and art objects found in the archaeological record of ancient cultures across the world. Krysia St. Clair is fascinated by the 'kaleidoscope of colour' achievable with different glazes and oxides in combination with the temperature and time of firing for her teapots and vessels: 'Presently I am working with porcelain and copper slip and a 90% lithium based glaze – the results are ALCHEMY!'

Since the emergence of the Australian Arts and Crafts movement of the 1880s, a definitive Australian idiom imbued craft and design, a breakaway from the influence of Victorian and Edwardian styles. Today Australian landscape, flora and fauna remains a robust source of inspiration, but the styles of referencing have diversified away from the stylised waratahs, flannel flowers, kangaroos and emus gracing colonial furniture and objets d'art, they have veered away from the kitsch 1950s 'Australian native' souvenir style.

Outstanding studio-based practitioners designed hallmark works that intuitively expressed their pride in Australian identity, such as artist and printmaker Margaret Preston, jeweller Rhoda Wager and ceramic artist Ethel Warburton.

The lasting impression of talented teacher, or the influence of a particular artist, is a stimulus, but one which becomes transformed in the hands of other makers. Early members, like potter Merric Boyd, enriched their glazes with the colours of the bush. Likewise Grace Levis, who arrived in Sydney from Poland in 1990, was immediately drawn to the environment as a wellspring of inspiration. 'My ceramic jewellery and artistic textiles capture the distinctive themes and breathtaking colours of Australia. . . oceanic greens and blues, sun drenched earthy reds and purples as well as glowing gold from Australian mines.'

There is often a symbiotic relationship between iconic architecture and the art that is incorporated into building construction or designed as an integral part of its furniture and fittings - think Art Deco. Equally intriguing is the way in which urban infrastructure and the built environment alert artists to possibilities of capturing some of their essence. Michael Ripoll's structured jewellery pieces reference Sydney's urban underbelly and take a

FASHION ON THE ROCKS

humorous slant on Australian suburban icons like the backyard swimming pool.

As well as being creative and entrepreneurial, craft makers' lifestyles and activities are not marginalised by living in regional areas. Increasingly, mobile and digital technologies open remote work and entrepreneurship opportunities so that productive lives are connected to global economies through the internet (video workshops, role models and mentors setting goals).

Fashion! Our constant pursuit for beauty, aesthetic and sensual pleasure. Always seeking the new, the original, the perfect look for NOW. Designing and making fashion garments, accessories and jewellery is constantly demanding, even for the most passionate maker. Claudia Chan Shaw shared a vivid reflection of what her equally talented mother, Vivienne Chan Shaw, taught her. 'Never wish to look or act the same as someone else. Create your own sense of worth, your own look, your own sense of style. Style speaks louder than words.'

From ancient times hunting and gathering were essential to survival but also to provide materials for clothing and self-adornment. These skills remain a preferred regular part of the lifestyle of Aboriginal women in remote communities in Arnhem Land. The natural materials gathered by women are skilfully rendered into utilitarian objects such as fish-traps and nets, baskets and containers. Weavers with virtuosity create objects of art intended for exhibition or for sale through community arts centres. While working as the curator for Bulabula Arts in Ramingining, Yaja Hadrys went on many collecting trips with Yolgnu women, increasingly appreciating the nexus between art and nature. She says: 'As an artist I often collaborate with nature, feeling connected and an integral part of it. Wearing the textile creations later, having them close to the body, it's like being hugged by nature, almost feeling her subtle breath.'

Wearing an original creation is a thrill. Designing and making it requires ingenuity matched with an



Sandra Shaw, Textile Artist: *I joined the Society in the late 1990s producing handprinted silk devoré. The beautiful richness of the silk when dyed made this medium of printing irresistible and I have continued with it for many years, burning away more and more to the absolute limit of the material and design.* Photo Rob Eyre

intuitive understanding of the materials and desired effect. It may take years of consistent effort and experimentation for the spinner and weaver, felter, dyer or silk painter, to master skills and techniques.

Textile and fibre artist Pam de Groot describes her process: 'I combine methods of felting, embroidery and dyeing to create art works, garments and accessories. I try not to have the product too much in mind but see what happens when I push the envelope, do the unexpected.'

Since the 18th century, Europeans admired the level of perfection attained in Chinese and Japanese ceramics, cloisonné and textiles and were strongly influenced to emulate their processes. To achieve a high standard of finesse and make their own interpretation of the processes involved is a test for non-Japanese Australian makers. Liz Gemmell admits that there are challenges when employing an ancient technique in a contemporary style. 'Shibori is the Japanese art of dye resist and has a long tradition. It can be a very meticulous craft that can reproduce patterns exactly but I do enjoy contriving variations into the fabric. Thermoplastics comes under this craft as well with the use of polyester fabrics. Shibori techniques will give the polyester a permanent 3D texture and colour patterns in the same process.'

A theatrical element is a plus in high-end fashion design, which is international in character. Vera Alexanderova lived in Moscow, where she attained a degree in fashion design. As well as her dramatic felted coats in vibrant colours applied with giant flowers, she uses cyanotype, an early photographic process of natural printing. Vera says: 'Sun printing on fabric is a wonderful way to capture the summer sunshine and your favorite flowers, leaves, or seed pods. There really is no limit to the possibilities of how nature can be harnessed to create original art and how textiles seem to be the perfect medium to capture the rhythms and textures of the natural world.'

Susan Cochrane is an independent researcher, curator and writer based in the Blue Mountains

Below: Yaja Hadrys Textile Artist and Photographer: *Naure makes me happy, gives me energy. Wearing my eco-silks I adorn myself with nature.* Photo Yaja Hadrys, model Ann Grace



A stylized signature or logo.

*Sun printing
on fabric is
a wonderful
way to capture
the summer
sunshine*



Vera Alexanderova
Fashion and
Textile Designer:
*I developed my
own techniques
with nuno felting
and cyanotype
(sun printing). My
customers are
people from all
around the world
who appreciate the
beauty of natural
materials.*



Above:
Liz Gemmell,
Textile and Fashion
Designer:
*I have discovered
that thermoplastics
as well as polyester
fabrics can be
adapted to shibori
techniques, which
will give the polyester
permanent 3D
texture and colour
patterns in the same
process.*
Photo Leigh Gemmell

This page
Jan Spencer:
Bookbinding and
collage

OH



Natalie Fong: Waratah silver wire lapel pin



Telopea (Waratah) is the Craft Association of NSW emblem, re-imagined over time.

