



Craftwerk 2.0 – New Household Tactics for the Popular Crafts

Over the last decade there has been a surge in crafts among young practitioners, often combined with political aspirations and networked efforts over the internet. From being a personal hobby the textile crafts have gone public and methods, techniques and tools are shared among users in ways similar to what we have seen in internet phenomena like Facebook and Wikipedia.

Craftwerk 2.0 is an exhibition that explores the new “updated” textile crafts that are developed by a new generation of serious amateurs, innovative craftsmen, engaged entrepreneurs and political practitioners. Once again the home, the Greek *Oikos*, is the workshop where economic and ecologic innovation happens – not only in the labs of the industrial expertise. After decades of outsourcing the new modes of production are in the hands of the layperson.

It is here, among the professional-amateurs, the Pro-Ams, we can see the seeds for new forms of practice and where craftsmanship is developed into innovative and high standards – parallel to the dominant industrial or knowledge economy. Here, the division of labour between producer and consumer, expert and dilettante, work and hobby have been blurred and once again the love of the amateur (from the French root *Amare* – to love) is the driving work ethic.

Craft and activism merges into craftivism and the politics of the future are shaped hands-on by the kitchen table. This is where micro-utopias are formed through new shared and distributed household tactics. Welcome to Craftwerk 2.0.

Craftwerk 2.0 takes place sept2009-jan2010 at Jönköpings Läns Museum (Jönköping County Museum) and is curated by Clara Åhlvik and Otto von Busch (www.jkpglm.se)

It is also worth noting that that venerable old class distinction, “Good taste”, has been further weakened. Instead, mixing and blending, the breaking up of class barriers, examining new solutions and questioning old concepts and methods have created new aesthetic principles that follow a completely different set of rules. Of course, it is of interest to see how the aesthetics of the designer and the craftsmen and DIY fixers are drawing closer to each other. Yet more intriguing is the fact that power and influence has slowly been regained by the individual and that his particular voice and creativity begun to gain due recognition. It is no longer considered to be somewhat pathetic to crochet your own potholder, but rather as an expression of practical common sense and of a personal standpoint. We do not need to declare our lifestyle by going shopping for we are perfectly capable of making or doing things ourselves and by extension, if we take our collective power as consumers seriously, can bring about real changes. As an experiment say, that instead of buying our clothes, we altered, knitted and swapped every tenth garment, imagine the effect this would have on commercial production and retail trade.

DIY design concentrates on products and processes that pose questions in regard to economy, durability and sustainability and bring to the fore such solid values as participation, transparency, activism and long-term economic planning.



The latest craze?

There are many who wonder if the increased interest that young people have for making things with their hands is little more than a passing fad. To be sure, much “Do-it yourself” is a matter of lifestyle but it is one of the major paradoxes of our time that it has shown such remarkable vigour. We are better off than ever before but there is no place in our lives for any impulsive leisure activities; we can fly at will for a modest cost to anywhere on the planet, but to places that tend to be evermore uniform. Shops with the latest fashions are being opened all over the place, but it is the same brands that lie behind the various labels of the garments on display; we are drowning in overabundance, but by things that are ever more meaningless. It would appear that too many of us DIY might provide the answer, insofar that by working with our hands we could discover a reasonably satisfactory place in the world.

“Do it yourself” is more than just a lifestyle. A cynic would claim that it is yet another angst-filled expression of a personal “makeover” in a time where we in all ways expected to achieve total perfection. However, the DIY movement has gathered together numerous banks of knowledge and experience, and is particularly concerned with those who are connected with self-fulfilment by direct and concrete involvement with their immediate environment. Here we can see an extensive movement that covers a broad economic spectrum from television

personalities who encourage us to get to work improving our homes but have unholy links to the producers of DIY tools and appliances, to traditional craftsmen, unruly punkers and economically minded handymen. In addition, this umbrella gives shelter to all the conscientious craftsmen, autonomous amateurs, hardy handymen, progressive punkers, contrary circular-knitters, well-grounded whittlers, cerebral cabinet-makers and curious crocheters.

We can see the extent of this phenomenon by looking at one of the many e-trading sites that have sprouted up on the web during the last few years. The Etsy site concentrates solely on handmade products and has all the potential to become a new type of global market for handcrafts. Compared with local handcraft centres in Sweden, the number of transactions conducted on Etsy is simply enormous. In May 2009 alone, 1.3 million articles were displayed on Etsy of which more than 800,000 changed owners, the site had almost 500 million visits and 150,000 new members were registered there. Even DIY books have succeeded in achieving major sales. To take an example, Megan Nicolay's "Generation T" describes 108 ways to alter a T-shirt and enjoyed a lengthy stay on the New York Times bestseller list.

Again, the cynic might comment that increased consumption, albeit of handmade products, is hardly a suitable rejoinder to the consumption paradox. Those who grew up during the war when almost everything was rationed, regard the DIY movement with understandable scepticism and are scarcely inclined to regard it as being particularly radical. However, DIY must be seen within a present-day context. A voluntary return, or rather the insight to understand the necessity of, to thriftiness, reuse, and self-sufficiency and to choose simplicity and a more unhurried way of living, can be seen as a fusion of 1970's punk and contemporary "slow" movements. DIY is a response to the dominant throwaway culture and a political system that encourages an ever-escalating consumption.

DIY has an intensive and deep-felt concern for traditional handcraft, and although the present-day wave of DIY enthusiasm envelops progressive, alternative groupings and rebellious defiance, it bears an unmistakable strain of cultural conservatism.



Art concept 2.0?

The DIY movement has a considerable potential to bring about change, and the effect of its ideology has begun to be felt in the fields of culture and the arts. The arts community has drawn up its own definitions as to what should be classed as fine art, craft or handcraft and who may rightly call themselves artists, craftsmen or qualified artisans. The consequence of this thinking has been the need to ring in those who fall outside the professionally qualified

practitioner and who are variously described as amateurs, eccentrics, naives, originators, hobbyists, handymen or just odd customers. By long-established practice, Jönköping County Museum has had clear borderlines in the organization of their art collections and here the Naïve School of artists is designated as a separate entity. Likewise, a similar differentiation has been drawn between the works of professional artists and those who are broadly considered amateurs. During this past year, the Göteborg Museum of Art has enjoyed considerable public success with their exhibition “A different sort of art” where the exhibition title serves to emphasise and underline the point that this is about “different”, and not “real” art. Artists have begun to erase these borderlines and it is apparent they are beginning to take an increasingly active part in community life. Indeed, in some cases these artists can be compared those working in what are usually the domains of researchers, anthropologists and amateurs. The same pattern is evident in regard to designers and craftsmen. In addition, the “Wiki” community, You-tube, Facebook and Twitter open the possibility for us to participate in discussions about art, and for art to be made known through wholly different channels than galleries or in the arts sections of newspapers. This of course has consequences for the established art institutions who must find ways of navigating through these new and uncharted seas.

What now if we could completely renegotiate and update our artistic definitions so that they would better correspond to present-day needs, that is formulate an Art concept 2.0 ?

The crafts tradition in our local community

The traditional crafts movement and local folklore societies now face a number of challenges. Both these movements have often been seen to have a rather romantic attitude towards local history but have now been rudely awakened by a polite kick from the DIY people. To take one point, historically the folklorists have concentrated on Nordic traditions. This approach has begun to unravel for in today’s Sweden, a Swedish citizen may have his birthplace and emotional home in a Turkish village and similarly a newly nationalised Swede say that for him, traditional craft is a wooden bowl from Azerbaijan. These developments will surely infuse new life to the movement and better enable it to adapt to contemporary conditions in Swedish society.



The romantic attitude to folklore and traditional handcrafts has resulted in inherited craft techniques and skills being somewhat overvalued. Always doing it the “right” way can all too easily lead to a certain amount of ossification and the old dictum “it was better before” to the exclusion of new practices and materials. In their manual, the stick-graffiti duo Masquerade point out that the usefulness of simple glue should not be underestimated, and they urge us to think outside the box. A dropped stitch is not a mistake: on the contrary, it is a possibility!

A new generation of political activists has shown that the traditional handcraft movement is a repository of skills and experience that are eminently suited to our times. Handcrafts are firmly rooted in local communities; they fulfil an important social function, encourage quiet contemplation, unite us with our past, sharpen our skills and teach us to see our surroundings within an ecological framework. This is extremely relevant and access to these skills and wealth of experience is much in demand. The handcraft and folklore movement can no longer be accused of lagging behind the times and defined as little more than a conservative opposition to industrialisation, but rather that it has discovered its inherent creative powers, powers that can be utilized to grapple with the many complicated conditions of modern life. Although the movement can sometimes have seemed to be rather dusty and old-fashioned, it has to be acknowledged that for almost a century they have probably been on the right track.

Jönköping County Museum as a “Powerhouse”?

It is generally accepted that Swedish museums face a period of fundamental change. The old ideal with the museum as merely an instrument of education and scholarship has been losing ground and the search for a new identity now prevails throughout the professional community. Hans Ulrich Obrist who has had considerable international experience as a curator, calls for a museum with a more elastic approach, a museum in contact with the community where it would provide an ongoing dynamic structure for culture and learning. Obrist cites Alexander Dorner, the director of Hannover Museum in Germany during the 1920's, who defined the museum as being a Kraftwerk, a powerhouse that functioned as a bridge between art and society as a whole. Consequently, the “elastic” museum would not be limited to the arts alone, but include the fruits of experience and learning gained in other fields and disciplines. It is no longer a matter of just working with classification and exclusion but of seeking a greater comprehension and understanding of our world. We must listen to, and learn from, many voices past, present and future and together endeavour to cast light on those important questions that undoubtedly face us.

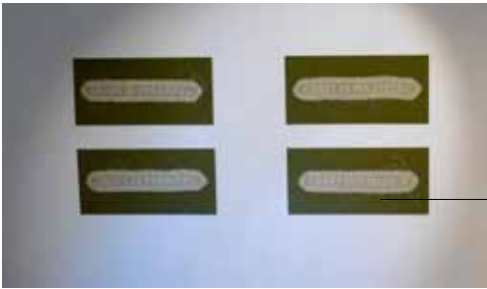
In the 1970's, Jönköping County Museum developed an innovative approach to folk art and design. Since then it has organized a number of exhibitions, symposia and publications in these fields and the exhibitions Craftwerk 2.0 and Eco Craft demonstrates that it continues to remain true to these principles. The primary focus of these exhibitions is not on the new or unique but rather to examine the way in which a new generation of craftsmen working from new frames of reference and new agendas are attempting to create handcraft compatible with present-day taste and demands. As it has ever been, the handcrafts on display encompass everything from those with the desire to preserve traditional skills, economical handymen and hobbyists to individuals with alternative life-styles or who just want to rebel against mainstream politics. The pure pleasure of the skill of the hand, inner contentment and the virtue of making something useful is unmistakable in these exhibitions and serves to prove how practicing a handcraft can have a tangible effect on our world.

Referenses:

Broeckmann, Andreas "Subject: Urban Agencies" i Read Me! ASCII Culture and the Revenge of Knowledge, New York: Autonomedia 1999

Leadbeater, Charles & Paul Miller The Pro-Am Revolution, London: Demos 2004

Obrist, Hans-Ulrich "Participation Lasts Forever" i Miessen, Markus och Shumon Basar (red.) Did someone say participate? Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 2006



Craftwerk 2.0
Participating artist:

Faythe Levine US
Handmade nation: video
Craftifesto

Stephanie Syjuco US
Counterfeit Crochet

House of Diehl US
Style Wars: video

Zoe Sheehan US
Shopdropping

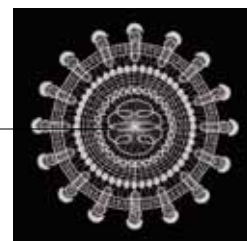
Cat Mazza US
Knitoscope - video
Stitch for Senate

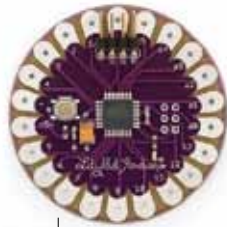
Lisa Anne Auerbach US
Body Count Mittens
Messy Piece

Rüdiger Schlömer DE
Schalalala

Åsa Ståhl och Kristina Lindström SE
stitching together:

Laura Splan US
Dollies





Sabrina Gschwandtner US
History of String: video

Kaywa CH
The Invader Scarf

Despina Papadopoulou US
Temperature sweater:
The Modules

Leah Buechley US
Lilypad
Microprocessors

Amy Twigger Holroyd UK
Keep and Share
Riot and Return

Masquerade SE
Knitting -graffiti

Ulrika Erdes SE
Embroided graffiti

Radical Cross Stitch "Ninja" Maria Halvarson, SE
Bostad åt alla
Supermario 3

Radical Cross Stitch – "Kakariki" (Reyna Fahey AUS)
QR embroidery
Tapesterri Nullus





Map of the world with zines, posters och object bought from Etsy

Joern Schmidt DE
T-shirts

A M Whitney US
Button Empire

Erin Dollar US
I Made You a Beard

Melanie Howard US
Finger puppet

Cigdem Kaya TR
Necklace





Jenny Hart US
Sublime Stitching

Kana Takahashi JP
Polka dot bird

Anna Boberg SE
T-shirt

Semra TR
Necklace

Jennifer Seeger US
Filted dalahorse

Kristin Roach US
The Craft Leftovers

Elizaveta Kameleon Yankelovich US
Necklace

Ann N Michy ID
Pink pig bag-charm

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