



ASSEMBLE 2010: AUDIO TRANSCRIPTS

Session: Making and Creative Production

Speaker: Michael Eden, Maker

Chair: Dr Jane Harris, Director, Textile Futures Research Centre, University of the Arts, London

Introduced by: Prof. Mike Press, Chair, Assemble 2010, Associate Dean of Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee

MIKE PRESS: I think Mary [Schwarz] and Karen [Yair] have provided us with a unique, timely, and rigorously researched insight into what makers do and how they make a difference. They're focusing on portfolio working, giving us a very rich, nuanced picture of that; they're looking at the nature of craft knowledge and how that's applied in different ways. For me particularly, one of the key issues that comes out of the report, [...] is this notion of the community value of craft knowledge, and how that is applied and exercised and valued across the sector. To borrow a phrase that we've just heard, sociable experts in different sector settings, and laying down the challenge for us as to how we use those stories and how we connect with policy. So we need to hang on to those challenges, to those questions and those insights, as we move on to our first panel discussion of the day on making and creative production. And I'm now going to hand over the chair to Dr Jane Harris who will conduct the session and introduce the panel.

Jane's work as an artist and designer has been exhibited worldwide. She's currently Reader in Digital Textile Design at Central Saint Martins College, and she's co-founder and director of the Textile Futures Research Centre at the University of the Arts, London. Jane Harris.

JANE HARRIS: Thank you very much Mike. And thank you to the Crafts Council for inviting me to participate today, and, as Rosy [*Rosy Greenlees*,

Executive Director, Crafts Council] said, like many of you, participate in contributing to the various publications that are being referenced today.

[...]The amount of work and thought that's gone into this event is incredible, and I think it really is testimony to, when you start looking over, under and around what we're considering today, a seismic shift that, as Mike also references, we've really got the opportunity now to, potentially, fully take on board. And when Karen and I were talking about the next set of speakers that are about to come on board, and what we were looking for, we were looking for individuals who are really contributing to that seismic shift, either by way of material process, a relationship in some way with industry that we hadn't imagined, or an influence to an outside sector that we hadn't imagined. It's a sign of our time when in fact it's recently, last night, dawned on me that all the speakers are in some way connected by digital media, and for those that know my own practice, ten years ago that's not something we would necessarily have expected at this point, but I think is an interesting reference; because maybe that's one of the ways that what we all do is now being enabled by digital media and opening us up into sectors, perhaps more comfortably than we would have otherwise expected. I then came across a quote from Gandhi: 'There is more to life than increasing its speed.' I have to say, it wasn't selected by me but Turner Prize winner artist Jeremy Deller, who's been working on a series of pieces in the London Underground.

So, there is more to life than increasing its speed. We'll see. I think that's an interesting point, given the media that we're about to hear about, both analogue and digital.

There isn't going to be enough time for each of these speakers to explore fully their practice; this is close to a Pecha Kucha session. However, the result is intended to be rich and thought-provoking, and propel consideration of making practices and approaches to a level beyond perception of this sector. So, our first speaker, Michael Eden, will lead us through a combined practice of traditional ceramic craft skills, digital 3D printing, additive layer manufacturing, and non-fired ceramic materials and processes. Followed by our second speaker, Andrew Cornell Robinson, who will explore material narratives, human histories and folklore, and professes to shape the dialogue between traditions of

handcraftsmanship and the aesthetics of digital modernity. Lynne Murray's design sensibility has informed her as a jeweller, and now a business design consultant in launching augmented reality solutions for global brands. And our final speaker, artist Tom Gallant, works seamlessly between slow construction processes and the speedy multitasking options of computer imaging, to create beguiling artworks that find new resonance in fashion. So the format will be that each of these speakers will talk back-to-back, and then we're going to have a panel discussion which I hope you will also participate in towards the end. So Michael Eden, our first speaker.

MICHAEL EDEN: Thank you Jane, and thank you to the Crafts Council for inviting me along to speak today. [...] Yes, in simple terms, I make things. I've always made things, but my tools now are digital software and 3D printing, and additive manufacturing as Jane was saying, and things like non-fired ceramic materials. But there's a bit more to the story. I spent twenty-odd years as a potter supplying handmade pots to shops, to galleries, department stores like Barneys in the US and Japan, and designing and making pots for Habitat in the UK. I was a studio potter, working out of a barn in Cumbria.

However, in my bucolic idyll, I wasn't letting the digital revolution pass me by. I'm inquisitive, and practical, and maybe a bit of a nerd alongside, and I wanted to know what computers had to offer. So, as soon as websites became the thing to have, I wanted one, but I wanted to make it myself. So, learning HTML code awakened a different way of thinking, a different way of problem-solving, because HTML code is rigid, it can't be stretched and twisted like clay.

So, I wanted it to do what I wanted. So, you have to practice, it takes time, it takes trial and error, and eventually the results start to be half decent. You explore the tricks of the professional, you steal code and you rewrite it, and eventually you develop your own language, your own signature. Do you think that sounds familiar?

Meanwhile, back in the workshop, I was still making pots but thinking about these contrasting approaches to creativity, and eventually the opportunity came to take a couple of years out and I exchanged my workshop for the RCA [*Royal College of Art*]. And what came out of my project is a body of work that

attempts to use digital technology as just another tool, but to exploit it as fully as possible. There's no point in employing these methods if I can make these objects from clay; the new tools have to offer me something, something else, something different. Now my aim is to create visually arresting objects that draw in the viewer and then engage those that care to look, in a story.

The Wedgwood tureen was a test of the software, the hardware and the materials of 3D printing. It was designed on Rhino and Freeform software, printed on a Z Corp machine, out of a kind of plaster, a gypsum material, and then coated in a new, non-fired ceramic material that can be stained to almost any colour really.

As a potter, my practice was very much concerned with expressing the qualities of the materials that I was using. With additive manufacturing, I am constrained by a range of materials that were produced primarily for engineers, and their requirements are different to mine. So, I'm interested in bringing these two worlds together, the potter and the digital potter, the ipotter, whatever you want to call me. And, I began to undertake some experiments.

First of all, I've been glazing 3D printed Z Corp plaster test pieces that have been treated with a refractory infiltrate that makes them heat-resistant. And then I started to collaborate with Mark Ganter of the University of Washington in Seattle, to produce some clay pieces that had been printed on a Z Corp machine. So, this was printed in clay, biscuit fired, and then FedEx'd to me. I then sanded it down a little bit and coated it in a vitreous slip and fired it. I then coated it in the same, lovely lead glazes that we used in our wood-fired slipware, and fired it again. So what you have here in these experiments is, I suppose it's pre-, almost pre-industrial technology of clay and glaze combined with post-industrial manufacturing.

And the new tools that I used can be applied in other areas. At a straightforward level, they were transposed into traditional glassmaking through a series of designs made by Vanini for Established & Sons' launch recently in Milan. And in these pieces the software was a very effective tool for creating the illusion of Audrey Hepburn's head sort of floating in space there.

Applying my creative thinking and personal aesthetic to other fields is very exciting. One collaboration that I'm hoping to take further is with Nokia. Their colour and material research centres are very interested in the handmade. They are particularly interested in the way that makers are constantly evolving new ways of working with materials, but, reversing that and combining mobile technology with my way of thinking can sometimes provoke some interesting spin-offs, for instance in QR Codes. And these things, I don't know whether you're familiar with them, they're very similar to barcodes that you find on almost every product in the shops these days, and they can be read by an app available through mobile phones, and basically they're used to store different kinds of information. So, what I've done is, I've extruded that 2D image into a 3D object, and it was then shaped to resemble a sixth-century BC Chinese wine vessel. You may wonder why, but, in the ten minutes I have, I'm not going to tell you, you'll have to wait for another occasion. There is a story, as I hope there is in all the pieces that I produce.

This is the piece after it's been printed. It's just been sort of de-powdered, it's still waiting to be coated. I'm probably going to coat it in bronze, but, that's all part of the story that I'm not going to tell you.

So, the result is that the viewer will be able to have a simultaneous actual and virtual experience. So by scanning the vase with your phone, it will connect to my website where the full story can be told. This investigation is going to be extended shortly in a collaborative project involving the University of Nottingham and Central Saint Martins to create trackable tableware. Wouldn't it be interesting if Grandma's teapot, gathering dust in the attic, could tell its own story? Information, as we have seen, can be embedded in simple graphic markers, and they're becoming more functionally sophisticated yet simpler in a graphic way, and more aesthetically appealing. So when incorporated with an object as surface pattern for instance, information can be stored that can serve a number of functions. It can enable people to associate their stories with objects. So, Grandma's teapot for instance could index old photos and family memories; it could add value to an antique in a museum setting, by telling people about its history of use and ownership. And the outcome of this project will be a range of tableware produced in Stoke-on-Trent.

ASSEMBLE 2010: AUDIO TRANSCRIPTS
Making and Creative Production: Michael Eden

Well that's my sort of, taste of what I'm doing and the areas that I'm concerned with, so, thank you very much indeed.

Further information about Michael Eden's work can be found at his website: www.edenceramics.co.uk.



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**