Klaus Moje (b. 1936) is one of the most influential glass practitioners in Australia. This is not only because of his exemplary personal work and 10 years of teaching, but because of the opportunities he has opened up around the world, especially in the United States, for others. Trained as a glass cutter in the family business in Germany in the 1950s, he made his first kiln-formed mosaic works, based on a very ancient process, in 1975. An association with the Bullseye Glass company in the United States in the 1980s has been fruitful for both: ideas can now be resolved through the materials and technologies developed to carry them out. This coincided with his arrival in Australia in 1982 and a confrontation with the colours and light in a different environment.

When Moje first went to the United States: 'There were a lot of slogans like “Blow glass for peace.” People would say, “We don’t need technique, we push our breath into the glass and we have a piece of art.” ...So technique and skill was a four-letter word...’. His work has often been linked visually to painters like Stella and Pollock, but he says: 'Those comparisons have always been made without my ever intending them in my work...One of the possibilities of glass, as opposed to paint, is that it offers transparency...My principal concern is working with colour and achieving something out of it.'

Klaus Moje, in Anne Brennan 'Interview: Klaus Moje' Glass 68 Fall 1997
Chapter 5: Finding a new voice: questioning art ideals, 1980s and 1990s

This chapter will discuss some of the factors, in a different social and political climate, that prompted a number of crafts practitioners and writers to begin to question their dependence on the values and structures of the art world. It will consider the moves to revalue traditional ideals and affiliations through the observations of contemporary cultural theory, through new interpretations of an artist's role, and through the changes in priorities of education, funding and the marketplace. It will also document some of the ways practitioners made changes to the ways in which they worked in response to a broader view of how their work might be considered and valued.

Introduction

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, craftspeople continued to pursue art ideals; the emphasis on making 'craft-as-art' was reinforced by visitors, by overseas exhibitions in most media, by collectors, and by the courses that developed in art schools, now in universities.

In this work, craftspeople used the medium in which they worked as a means for making personal statements: sometimes the works denied the history of their practice, and sometimes this history was used as part of the meaning of the work. The prevailing interest in art theory was now to provoke in this area of practice, at its best, reflective work that addressed the histories and significance of the practical and symbolic functions of the objects that were made.

However, not all the work was considered successful, let alone successful as 'art', and questions were increasingly asked about the validity of some of the work produced. British writer Peter Fuller, a relentless critic of 'art-craft', damned both the influential British ceramic exhibition, Image and Idea, in 1980, and also the British textile exhibition, Fibre and Form, selected by Michael Brennand-Wood to travel to Australia in 1982. Here Fuller blamed the influence of recent art:

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396 Art-oriented exhibitions included Image and Idea (British ceramics, 1980), International Directions in Glass Art (1982) and Fabric and Form (British textile art, 1982).

397 See for example, the ways in which 'crafts' media addressed themselves to sculpture, in exhibitions such as Sculptors as Craftsmen, associated with the second Sculpture Triennial in Melbourne in 1984-85; Figurative Ceramics, Vessel as Metaphor and Common Ground: Sculptural Works in Clay and Mixed Media - all associated with the fifth Potters Conference in Sydney in 1988; and the controversial Terra Incognita in Perth in 1989 where heated exchanges about the identity and purpose of the work took place in arts journals between writers such as David Bromfield (CraftWest) and Anne Brennan (Broadsheet) in 1989.
As we all know, the officially sponsored salon avant-garde in painting and sculpture of the last quarter century hurled itself headlong into a headlong "questioning of the media" which involved the suppression of the imaginative faculties; the erosion of basic skills and knowledge; a confusion of boundaries of the arts and their particular expressive possibilities; a denigration of aesthetic judgement; a ruthless determination to dissolve painting and sculpture into anything that is neither painting, nor sculpture; an indifference to tradition, material quality, or realised value; and a mindlessly destructive elevation of "innovation" as the sole criterion of worth...and all Brennand-Wood is doing is applying it...to textiles.398

Michael Brennand-Wood had claimed that the study of painting and sculpture had changed the terms of reference within which contemporary textiles are produced, and hoped that this would lead to 'a little more emphasis on imagination and originality as opposed to just technique...'. Fabric and Form, he said:

...was not meant to be a neat exercise containing familiar work. It was meant to take risks and provoke.'399 Fuller called for the exhibition to be recalled and dismantled, saying "Those of us who have been involved in the Fine Arts know what will happen next...Within a few months, we can confidently expect Minimal Textiles - exhibitions of mounds of raw wool and silk worms; Conceptual Textiles, consisting of photographs and documentation of the way the warp would have interacted with the weft if any weaving were to take place which, of course, it won't; and Video Textiles, say wall-hangings made from inter-meshed lengths of videotape which, if they could be viewed, would reveal images of an erstwhile weaver picking his nose because now he has nothing better to do...400

Other criticisms have been noted in Chapter I: for example, in discussing the touring exhibition American Figurative Ceramics in 1990, Anne Brennan pointed out that:

...a lot of its rhetoric stems from subversive strategies which have subsequently become conventions. Some artists appear not to have been able to make the leap from the burning deck in time, and as a result, their work suffers something of a credibility gap.401

Jenny Zimmer similarly observed of textile works that:

...freedom from the loom and tapestry tradition does not necessarily presuppose greater freedom to choose an aesthetic over a utilitarian mode...it can and has produced senseless woven monsters...the medium must be pushed to

398Peter Fuller 'Fabric and Form' review Crafts 59 Nov/Dec 1982 43-44
399Michael Brennand-Wood, response to Peter Fuller's review of 'Fabric and Form'
Crafts 59 Nov/Dec 1982 44-45
400Peter Fuller op cit (1982)
401Anne Brennan Broadsheet 19 March 1990 12, 13; referring to Matthew Kangas,
catalogue essay and exhibition 'American Figurative Ceramics' in Perth International
Craft Triennial Art Gallery of Western Australia 12
the limits of contemporary expression and fully involve itself with contemporary conceptual and visual problems.  

British writer Peter Dormer observed of the art-craft object that 'a combination of postmodernist excess and ambition to be seen as an artist has tempted many a contemporary craftsperson into some highly skilled work of exaggerated design, size and complexity and hugely inflated prices.' And in the United States, pointing out that she expected a lot from art, and suggesting that in her opinion only a microscopic, almost invisible group working in studio glass, were making it, curator Susanne Frantz said, 'The most glaring ways this situation manifests itself is in the mistaking of decorative objects for art.' Her point was that 'everyone working in studio glass has to face [the fact] that they are makers of luxury goods which can only be purchased by people with disposable income'.

At the 8th National Ceramic Conference in Canberra in 1996, John Teschendorf discussed the 'bane of his life': the term 'ceramic sculpture', and cited Edward Lebow in the journal *American Ceramics*, as sharing his view:

> Just the nomenclature [of ceramic sculpture] is unfortunate...that term has been used to isolate all the work within that category for market purposes. Those purposes are to confer the status of art upon a whole body of generally mediocre works. If you put much of what passes as ceramic sculpture alongside work in other media, it would be seen as trite doodads for people who have a lot of time on their hands and for people who have an awful lot of money and very little taste.'

This was not to say, Teschendorf continued:

> ...that great sculpture cannot be made in clay, and this will be done from time to time from those working from a craft base. There is, however, a tendency in Australia and elsewhere to confuse sculptural intent with the figurative tradition of the decorative arts...May I suggest that there is an urgent need to put our house in order...by establishing the primacy of language to recognise that sculpture will be sculpture regardless of its material or methodology.

Why were such informed and influential people expressing such concerns? Why were they now so distinctly critical of a prevailing aspiration? Their criticisms appeared to be made partly in accord with a changing, critical cultural and political climate. But they were also a reflection of a new...
critical context for the arts provided by different education and market opportunities and realities; a context that served to reinforce a more positive role for crafts practice as a contemporary development from a wider range of traditions - that also included an informed pursuit of art ideals.

**A changing society**

By the beginning of the 1980s it was clear that craftspeople (and, in fact, artists across all artforms) were working in a different social and political climate: one that affected their own aspirations as well as the market or audience they were addressing. There was a marked shift in the values and expectations of the Western world from idealism to pragmatism, and from reform to conservatism, in a definite political and ideological move to the right.

In trying to deal with such issues as unemployment, inflation, trade deficits and an ageing population, governments argued that exports must be increased and markets expanded. Increasingly, they viewed accountability in both the arts and the sciences as related less to personal and social development, the experimental, the marginal or for research (which typified the 1970s), than to vocational achievements, export products and Australian corporate identity and business success overseas.

Pressure was put on research and educational institutions to work towards tangible economic products for export. Both the arts and science communities argued that this was a short-term goal, and that what was equally, if not more, important was to address wider social, ecological and cultural issues first. Increased numbers of arts graduates in a small competitive marketplace caused some practitioners to seek alternative methods of production and new markets, and an increased flexibility within the scope of their own professional employment.

Public galleries and museums were encouraged to cater more for public education, enjoyment and entertainment, presenting their collections in wider social and cultural contexts. They sought corporate sponsorship for their programs in order to do this - often, according to their critics, at the expense of scholarship and research. The 1988 Bicentennial celebrations brought to the surface many questions about who Australians thought they were, what they thought they were doing, and where they believed they should be going. People began to recognise something called 'fragmented radicalism', as there seemed to be no common radical cause any more.406

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406 In 1986, for example, Greg Sheridan pointed out that 'all of the workable parts of the left’s agenda have been carried through in Western democratic societies...Single-issue groups of all types are immensely helpful to the left in gaining recruits and building up an adversary culture, a culture of opposition to the way society runs. But these groups also have a life of their own.' Greg Sheridan ‘The New Left: Is there Life After Socialism?’ *Weekend Australian* 5-6 April 1986
Chapter 5: Finding a new voice

There were many related changes in the art world. Rather than dismissing the art market, as visual artists had tried to do in the 1970s, Australian involvement in the international market flourished. The art market also celebrated a skill-based ‘return to painting’ - a return that now included those that were decorative, narrative and figurative, all approaches that had been subsumed in the conceptual and minimal work of the 1970s. In spite of social and cultural changes, values were placed on traditional practices in all art forms, and critics now consistently wrote in positive terms about the ‘craft’ of painting, film-making and writing novels.

At the same time, interest in semiotic and cultural theory also provoked visual art works that were intellectual and literary rather than visual (or well-crafted) in their primary intent. Eventually these works attracted some criticism for their dependence on literary rather than visual languages.

Meanwhile, from the early 1980s Australian Aboriginal art became accepted by the international art world, partly, no doubt, because it became more accessible on Western art media like canvas and paper, but also because the art world at that time was interested in the abstract symbolic and semiotic codes that it appeared to represent.

In the early 1980s there were many projects employing artists in the community, often now as teams with designers and landscape architects for inner city street-scaping, while commissions for public art projects also increased in number throughout the decade. People willingly accepted and sought out the designer-label clothing and postmodern furniture of the time, while at the same time seeking ‘spiritual’ alternatives in their personal lives.

Craftspeople, it seemed, could work successfully in a number of different contexts. Art ideals might not be the only ones to consider, but when they were considered, they needed to be clearly understood.

Changing perceptions: art and cultural theory

By the beginning of the 1980s artists in all fields became increasingly involved in theoretical discussions about their work. For craftspeople, these ideas provided rationales for being less dependent on validation of the crafts through art.

The arts provided just one forum for philosophical questioning on a much wider social and political scale, which had started much earlier in a number of different ways. Historians and social commentators in Australia found arguments to show that they believed many existing written histories included biases that might be identified as partisan, class-based, racist,

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407 See for example, Leon Paroissien’s Australian Art Review 2 (1983)
408 See for example a review of the Australian exhibition in Paris, ‘From Another Continent: the Dream is Real’, by Joan Davila in Art Network 13 Spring 1984 50
nationalist, colonialist-imperialist and sexist. They set out to explain and redress previously ignored ideologies and histories.

Modernism, as it advocated the autonomy of the artist and the ideal of an autonomous aesthetic in art, came to be seen as a tool of reaction where it refused to acknowledge the historical and social context of art production, or the notion that its 'truths' were not free of culturally constructed value. It was pointed out that the art world or art institutions (in the form of art schools, galleries, museums, investors, publications, governments and the general public), had reinforced what was essentially an elitist practice focused on a selective, usually male, mainstream. As historian Penny Sparke said of the parallel world of design, in 1987, "The designed artefact is on its simplest level...a form of communication and what it conveys depends on the framework within which it functions."\(^{409}\)

The philosophy and aesthetic of Postmodernism, associated with these changes in thought in the 1980s, was difficult to define. In one way it was simply an acknowledgement of the period after Modernism (although Modernism persisted), and a rejection of reductivist, late modernist, ideals. But it also became more commonly identified with a recognisable stylistic change. Postmodernism adopted what late Modernism had rejected in the form of figurative, decorative and ornamental, mythological, cross-cultural and historical references. 'At an extreme,' said Sandy Nairne in 1987:

\[\ldots\] the post-modern world is seen as totally commodified; culture is flattened out, with little remaining difference between "high" and "low" culture, little argument between fine art and kitsch, or between the "avant-garde" and the academic. The world is reduced to a series of simulacra: there is a new depthlessness, appearance is everything. Nothing is original or authentic because the world is experienced second-hand. There is a new sense of nostalgia as we lose a secure sense of our place in history; all culture becomes a parody of past forms.\(^{410}\)

For many, Postmodernism was a superficial style, instantly recognisable, particularly in architecture and design, where 'quoting' of historical form and decoration, central to the new thinking, was commonly practised.\(^{411}\) In art, design, literature, and video and film-making, it 'plundered' high art, popular culture, the mass media and kitsch, mixing them together as 'pastiche'. It was exciting, irreverent and popular.

\(^{409}\)Penny Sparke Design in Context (1987) 8

\(^{410}\)Sandy Nairne The State of the Art, Ideas and Images in the '80s (1987) 22. See also the writings on simulacra by Jean Baudrillard.

\(^{411}\)One can not help but observe that, 100 years before, the design reformers in England had campaigned strongly to counter what they saw at that time as the excesses of decoration and eclectic reference to past traditions, in a time of 'stylistic anarchy' where manufactured objects 'displayed a general enthusiasm for ornament for ornament's sake and an overall neglect for any fixed principle of design, other than those motivated by the marketplace.' See Penny Sparke Design in Context (1987) 63 discussing the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.
But Postmodernism was not welcomed by everyone. In a 1984 revision of his controversial 1972 publication *Design For the Real World*, Victor Papanek complained that:

...the cancerous growth of the creative individual expressing himself egotistically at the expense of the spectator and/or consumer has spread from the arts, overrun most of the crafts, and finally reached into design...A whole elitist nostalgia craze has elevated some of the most uncomfortable seating arrangements yet devised by man into trendy and expensive status symbols that lie halfway between refined torture-racks and “art objects”.

Papanek argued that what may have been a 'disengaged surrealist act' fifty years before was being revived in 1983 as 'kitschy nostalgia'.

Postmodern stylistic developments were accompanied by new ways of considering both how meanings are made and how they are valued. These 'cultural theories' came from a number of different sources. In particular, over some decades a body of literature had developed in France around the studies of semiotics and structuralism (from linguistic, psychoanalytic and anthropological sources), which explored the ways in which meanings are constructed through 'signs' and perceptions of those signs. Archaeology provided related models through studies of the objects of material culture of different societies; psychology and psychoanalysis contributed to explaining in part how it is that people are motivated to do certain things, including their desire for creative or symbolic expression; and socialist thought continued to advocate the democratic expression of this need.

In particular, from the 1970s sociological methodology had been used to identify the frameworks within which the arts are produced, understood and valued, and how arts hierarchies are constructed. Arguments were mounted for dismantling these hierarchies: the women’s movement, for example, had showed how socially constructed patriarchal attitudes and language had affected perceptions of value, and in places like Australia, with its increasingly multicultural population, it was realised that measures of cultural significance had been clearly Eurocentric in their focus.

These ideas came to Australia through publications and magazines from the various centres of study, through Australian travel and study overseas,
through visitors, and through migrant lecturers who were appointed to teach in universities and art schools. What had been mainly literary and philosophical ideas were largely aired in the art media first. Conservative courses in university literature, philosophy, and history departments in Australia caused those interested in new ideas to seek forums for discussion elsewhere. Some found them through film studies courses and studies of popular culture, while some university fine arts history departments, and programs in media studies and communications introduced a cultural theory component into their courses.\textsuperscript{418} In the early 1980s a number of small visual arts and cultural theory magazines appeared and proved to be appropriate vehicles for the discussions that were taking place.\textsuperscript{419}

Theoretical issues were introduced, unevenly at first, into Australian art institutions. One response was that terminology changed as it was now realised that some words carried with them perceptions that were being called into question. Cultural or art theory was now discussed as part of art history, and consideration of work often took the form of ‘discourse’ rather than ‘review’ and ‘critique’ rather than ‘criticism’. In trying to find less value-laden words (or to redefine values), the term ‘art practice’ began to be used, rather than ‘art’; and the terms ‘art practitioner’ or ‘artworker’ instead of ‘visual’ or ‘fine’ artist. ‘Artist’ was increasingly used as a neutral term that could be applied to any practitioner in any art form. What was produced, whether painting, pot, item of jewellery or video, was more frequently simply called an ‘artwork’, or ‘a work’. This move sometimes subsumed the crafts (and other art forms) into ‘art’ by ‘blurring boundaries’, but in contradiction, it also reflected an attempt to be more inclusive of a range of specific practices.

‘Craftspeople’ eventually replaced ‘craftsmen’, and the term ‘craft’ itself often seemed to have either too wide or too narrow a meaning. Apart from the increasing use of specialist terms, such as jeweller, painter and weaver, other specific combinations, such as ‘glassworker’, ‘ceramic artist’ or ‘textile designer’ became more common, demonstrating more clearly where practitioners now placed themselves ideologically. The term ‘designer-maker’ found increasing favour among those with a commitment to designing for production and some started to again call themselves ‘decorative artists’.

The ‘new’ cultural theory was of quite some importance to the crafts movement. This was not so that craftspeople would direct their efforts towards theory (and therefore become more acceptable to the art world), but

\textsuperscript{418} Ross Gibson, unpublished lecture discussing the introduction of new ideas through visual arts publications, to postgraduate students, Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart 1985. Gibson had been editor of the arts journal \textit{On the Beach}.

\textsuperscript{419} See list of publications, including \textit{Art Network, On the Beach, Art\&Text} and others, in Margriet Bonnin \textit{Visual Arts/Crafts Board Publications Review} (1988)
because it provided a framework for discussing their specific positions, and arguing for separate, but equally important, acknowledgement of value.

Having ‘emerged’ from artisan trades, studio crafts practitioners spent decades caught between industrial and interior design and the fine arts.\(^{420}\) They had had little alternative but to emulate the art world as a system because it provided the most successful mechanism for the validation of their status as professional people. As sociologist Janet Wolff pointed out:

...the conditions in which craft aspires to be art are essentially social...Craft: “becomes” art when it develops an equivalent system of shows, sales, criticism, academic recognition and educational support. This has nothing to do with the nature of the product, which can remain entirely unchanged. The debate is centrally one about social, organisational setting.\(^{421}\)

Now craftspeople could place themselves in an equally valid, but different, position. It could now be argued that the histories and practices of working in, for example, glass, metal, ceramics and textiles were just as important and valid as a history of painting; that vessels had as long a social, ritual and ceremonial function as sculpture; and equally, that stained glass windows and textiles had as long a cultural function as painting and printmaking. Thus, rather than arguing for the crafts to ‘be’ art, a number of critics argued that the crafts represented a series of histories and values that were distinct from, but not of lesser value than, art - and that one of those histories was the relationship of the crafts to art.

This realisation, or acceptance, not only ‘allowed’ the acknowledgement of specialist crafts histories in discussing the field, but also provided craftspeople with the confidence to draw on these histories metaphorically as well as technically in the production of their work. They did not have to ‘deny’ either technological or symbolic crafts references, in order to make significant works (whether or not they were also called ‘art’). For example, in her work Pineforest Quilt – Applied, Used, Discarded, tapestry weaver Valerie Kirk brings together a collection of traditions:

The image in the tapestry...has been developed from drawings of the pineforest plantations and areas of native vegetation around Canberra...Replacing the bush with development continues as the nation's capital grows. The overall format is that of a quilt, playing on the idea of the quilt/forest as a covering and looking at women in the domestic environment reshaping fabrics to provide a cover.\(^{422}\)

Kirk was drawing firstly on memories of a quilt of Scottish tweed and plaid suiting samples made within her own family in the Selkirk area in Scotland. However, integrated into her drawings of pineforests around Canberra, she

\(^{420}\) See, for example, Sylvia Kleinert ‘The Historical Context’ Ausglass postconference edition I 1991


\(^{422}\) Valerie Kirk, artist’s statement 1994
has placed motifs from two early Australian quilts: The *Medallion Quilt* of about 1895 and a 'Wagga' quilt made from woollen suiting samples in about 1930.\(^{423}\) (see Plate 5: before page 33)

Furthermore, it could now be pointed out that some visual artists who, from the 1970s, had ‘adopted’ the crafts in their artworks, in the context of the art world, had practised another form of appropriation. They had revalued the crafts, especially women’s crafts, by, in fact, turning them into something else - by politicising them, when in most cases the objects they were revaluing were not political in their original intent.

Feminist critics and historians were among those who traced this complex history. Norma Broude, for example, identified in 1980 that ‘as art in the twentieth century became increasingly abstract’, artists and critics had struggled:

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\ldots\text{to create a clear distinction between the abstract and the “merely” decorative. In order to define and maintain the position of abstract art as “high” art, its supporters and apologists have been obliged to literally fight off the taint of association with so-called low art, variously defined as the decorative and often domestic handicraft productions of commercial artists, women, peasants and savages}.\]^{424}

Broude pointed out that male artists like Henri Matisse borrowed from the decorative arts in their work, but ‘without ever really raising them from their lowly status, and without ever allowing his stature to be diminished because of them’ - even though art historians sought in various ways to ‘excuse’ these connections.

She suggested that an artist like Miriam Shapiro in the 1970s, was therefore making a conscious effort to re-establish her connections with older and more authentic traditions of Modernism (with roots both in Symbolism and the Arts and Crafts movement) and that it was not helpful to consider her, like many other (male) artists of the 1970s, as merely ‘anti-Minimalist’ in her style and intent. She criticised writers who ‘packaged together’ the new ‘decorative’ artists, and who engaged us again in the dated exercise of ‘attempting to elevate the “decorative” to the “abstract” by endowing it with arcane and self-referential meanings. ‘By doing so’, she claimed, ‘of course, it continues to deny to the decorative, the right to exist as art on its own terms.’\(^{425}\)

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\(^{423}\) The *Medallion Quilt* was made by Mrs ‘Grannie’ Brown, from Bowning in NSW about 1895. The ‘Wagga’ quilt was made from woollen suiting samples by Caroline West, in Trundle, NSW in about 1930. Both in the collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.


\(^{425}\) Norma Broude ibid 326-7
However, Broude also acknowledged that in working within decorative and crafts traditions, and in politicising these traditions to reinstate them in value within the art world, Shapiro had also ‘inadvertently’ separated her works from the traditions themselves. While she ‘reveals’ them - perhaps fully for the first time - as objects of aesthetic value and expressive significance...she has inadvertently and unavoidably separated her works from that tradition, allying them to some extent with the modernist mainstream.’ Feminist art, Broude claimed, by virtue of its human, social and political significance, ‘can never be “merely decorative.”’ But it was the content of this kind of work ‘that may some day secure for other artists the right to be “merely decorative”, and to produce a “high art” that is free to eschew significance other than the “merely” visual’.426

By the 1990s one of the visual artists who could be considered to be highly successful in making connections between art ideals and craft skills was artist Fiona Hall. Her well-researched, powerfully subjective and yet political works incorporated at various times metalworking, crochet, glass engraving and ceramic forming that she carried out herself, and that reflected a strong understanding of skills, materials and their meanings.

In exposing the social construction of cultural hierarchies and hegemonies,427 the theories of the 1980s therefore provided crafts practitioners with a rationale for their own historical and theoretical validity, independent from, although often overlapping, those of design and the fine arts.

There were words of warning however. In accommodating contemporary theory, the crafts had celebrated, along with other artforms, the idea of ‘crossing borders’ and ‘breaking down barriers’ that had served to distinguish hierarchies in the arts. But Jenny Zimmer pointed out in 1990 that in pursuing this course, the crafts were ‘in danger of being homogenised within an all-encompassing definition of art.’ She argued that:

...if the definition of art were genuinely extended to cover the legitimate concerns of the crafts there would be a good case for abandoning the distinction. But contemporary theory simply blurs it. Under these circumstances the crafts are better served by maintaining and refining the distinction to highlight their particular qualities.428

But even the pursuit of some of the ‘particular qualities’ of the crafts, like continuing links with traditions, could now remain problematic. ‘The great value we put on individualism means a loss of belief in what used to be called the common weal,’ said Peter Timms:

426Norma Broude ibid 322, 328
427These theories also provided a similar framework of validity for other previously marginal groups, such as those separated from the mainstream by race, class or gender, and for those studying other cultural histories such as music, theatre, sport and games.
428Jenny Zimmer ‘Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater’ The Sydney Review October 1990 10-11
It should hardly be surprising, then, that when artists and craftspeople express an interest in revitalising connections with the past, they tend to use cultural traditions indiscriminately as a kind of database in the service of narcissism. How often do we hear of artists and craftspeople drawing on some tradition (one which is perceived to be ‘their own’ or one that they have just picked up along the way) to explore the self? This way of using traditions to restore individual identity is problematic because it assumes that the crossover from the communal to the personal can be achieved without doing violence to the social fabric, and that individual needs and desires somehow automatically serve as a microcosm or distillation of communal interests’.

However, rather than argue against calling on tradition and heritage to validate a particular approach to one’s work, he suggested instead that it was necessary to offer a realistic appraisal of what is possible: ‘What can, perhaps, be achieved is some degree of personal understanding which might lead to others discovering something about themselves in tum. What decisively cannot be achieved is a revival of those traditions.’

The 1980s provided new opportunities for such appraisals through infrastructural changes in education, funding and the marketplace, and through new attitudes about the identity of the crafts.

Changing identity: the artist as worker

New circumstances

The confidence with which craftspeople could now seek to redefine their practice on their own terms was made more possible through the changing perceptions in the art world about the nature of art practice itself. Art practitioners in all fields started to realise that the other activities in which they were engaged, like teaching, working with the community, giving a lecture or demonstration, sitting on a board or committee, researching and writing, presenting exhibitions, or carrying out some administrative work, were also complementary to their practice and contributed to their professional lives, like any other professional practice.

As the 1980s progressed, craftspeople were part of new moves to identify artists as part of the workforce, and they formed new liaisons with other art industry groups. This occurred in the face of a persistent attitude in the art world that these related professional activities were detrimental to art-making and demonstrated a lack of commitment to it. Alison Fraser, for example, involved in commissioning artists for public art projects in Melbourne, suggested that a basic and continuing education was necessary, one that would allow artists to operate in an informed way about the legal, ethical and organisational issues that were bound to arise. ‘Much greater attention has to be paid by educational institutions, by funding authorities and by artists

themselves', she said, 'to professionalism in operation as well as professionalism in content.'

The complexity, diversity and changing nature of attitudes to crafts practice were surveyed and analysed by Susan McHattie for the Crafts Council of New South Wales in 1988. Responses from fifty-six professional practitioners reflected some 'clear threads' within this diversity. These were summarised in order of priority as: **Pleasure** (gratification, enjoyment, preference, choice, pleasure); **Power** (potency, ability, control, autonomy, power), and **Reward** (acknowledgement, fame, fortune, prestige, reward). The 'liberal individualism' evident in the responses, she observed:

...indicates that few of the participants seek a political framework in understanding and constructing a role and position. The desire for power and autonomy is located within the personal, together with notions of talent, self-expression and work.

In noting the significant shift in the crafts movement from amateurism to professionalism, McHattie suggested that conducting practice on a professional level required a shift from 'self-indulgent individualism' towards an understanding of and contribution to a wider social context.

The main measure of professional achievement had been the acquisition of works into state and private collections through the dealer gallery system, but exhibitions did not always lead to sales and, until now, artists had almost always subsidised their work through other employment, often teaching. For craftspeople, working in a generally lower price-range, this was a comparatively narrow marketplace; they also subsidised their income through teaching or some other employment, or more often developed production lines that were also sold through galleries and shops. However, as the 1980s progressed, teaching in art schools was losing ground for all, as a work option. The combination of reduction in staff numbers, particularly of part-time staff, and the increasing numbers of trained practitioners wanting work meant there was not enough of this employment to go round. As a further complication, this situation fuelled distrust between 'real', or full-time, practitioners and those who subsidised their practice through what was seen as highly paid teaching, engendering a new discussion on the nature of

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430 Alison Fraser ‘Darwinism and the Arts, Community Arts and Natural Selection’ *Artlink* June/July 86

431 Susan McHattie *Pleasure, Power and Reward, A Survey of the Practice of 56 Craftspeople* (1988) 177
professionalism. Subsidised practitioners more often than not made ‘art-craft’ items, because they were not so dependent on sales.

As the political and social climate changed, less value was placed by governments on ‘unproductive’ activities - activities for cultural rather than direct economic benefit. Education, welfare, research and the arts had to be ‘accountable’ in measurable terms. By 1996, for example, the taxation department started to tighten up its conditions for artists, and to require that their practices be profitable as businesses, if they were to attract taxation deductions. One reported interview even reflected a view that artists might carry out market research into painting styles that had a high market value.432 Both government and the broad general public tended to consider the arts in traditional (usually European) terms, and the 1980s saw great controversies as marginal or experimental groups criticised what they saw as the disproportionate funding going to, for example, the ‘flagship’ arts companies, especially performing arts companies.433

Art world responses
The art world responded by realising that it was itself an industry, and to its surprise a large one: well-educated, heavily subsidised by its own participants, labour-intensive, a high contributor to the gross national product, and, needless to say, not recognised as such.

The art workforce was no longer largely self-trained or ‘cringing culturally’ in its attitude. It included practising tertiary-trained, often well-travelled, practitioners, many widely experienced in a range of personal, political, community and public practices, and many who had been involved in the administration, management and development of arts programs. In 1989, drawing on figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australia Council surveys, Arts Facts posters and newspaper advertisements from the Australia Council identified the arts and arts-related industries as forming a $3.8 billion industry. Highly labour intensive, and expanding at more than three times the rate of the general workforce, the arts and related industry groups had a turnover that was comparable to those of Australia’s petroleum and coal production industries.

Many of the arguments for the need for cultural reassessment and research and development were similar to those used by the similarly beleaguered scientific research groups. For example, Rhonda Galbally, director of the Commission for the Future, said in 1987:

It’s no good separating science and biotechnology from culture and creativity. The arts give us a respect, understanding and enhancement of Australian culture which is absolutely essential if we’re going to have a

432David Marr ‘Cents and Sensibility’ Sydney Morning Herald July 12 1996 Arts 13
433Tim Rowse Arguing the Arts (1985) 116
uniquely Australian productivity - especially in the design and quality of exports.434

The response in the art world was not merely a joining in with the flow of current arguments for slices of the various funding cakes. Having invested as much time in their careers as any other professionals, they wanted to make their art work for them. They argued that for too long artists including practitioners in all arts fields, including the crafts, as well as writers, dancers and others) had accepted the view that their low remuneration was the penalty paid for their art being to do with pleasure and personal choice rather than work, or that they had a responsibility, through, for example, donating works for charities or giving free demonstrations, to provide these services for the cultural and educational good of society. As When are You Going to get a Real Job? this perception was deliberately reflected in the title of David Throsby and Devon Mills’s economic study of Australian Artists for the Australia Council in 1989.435

It was realised that because art had not been considered ‘work’, many visual artists and craftspeople had no tangible measures of payment for many of the activities they carried out as part of their professional life. Performing artists could be paid by the hour, but the gallery system provided only for income at the point of sale. Other professional activities, such as lectures, demonstrations and consultative advice, normally charged for by, for example, architects, designers and doctors, were more often than not expected to be given free. Something had to be decided about conditions of service for artists-in-residence, artists working in the community, and those researching and presenting exhibitions or writing articles. Art and crafts production was not clearly visible as a work option in employment services or census statistics, and artists often identified themselves by their subsidising occupation.

Not only did governments and the general public have to alter their perceptions, but artists needed to as well. In discussing cultural rights, the chair of the Australia Council, Donald Horne, said in 1985:

...we must also seek forms of organising new experience, forming new perspectives, constructing new perspectives of the world, and the place humans might play...But if we accept that right we have to consider the problem of art production in a modern industrial society...we expect our artists to subsidise the community in ways we do not expect from for example museum curators, librarians, scientists or university professors.436

Changes started on a number of fronts. At one level, artists formed themselves into a number of lobby groups and membership unions that

434Rhonda Galbally, cited in Martin Portius Sydney Morning Herald 23 May 1987
435David Throsby and Devon Mills’s report for the Australia Council: When are You Going to get a Real Job? an economic study of Australian Artists (1989)
436Donald Horne ‘The Arts and the Economy’ (paper) Australia Council February 1985
advocated changes in attitudes and working practices. In this sense, artists were organising themselves in the ways in which the Crafts Councils had done over a decade before. They became interested in some of the issues the Crafts Councils had already addressed, such as changes to sales tax laws, small business management, fee scales, marketing and employment alternatives. At another level, state and federal cultural ministers met for the first time in Perth in 1979. Bodies such as the Australia Council, state arts funding bodies and education institutions started compiling information and commissioning reports to identify the scope of what now became described as 'the arts industry'. In 1982 the conference Future Challenge: Administering the Arts in the '80s, the first large-scale national conference on administration in the arts, was held at the Adelaide Festival. Various courses were soon established around the country to help train people in this task.

The Artworkers Union was formed in Sydney in 1979, following demonstrations at the 1979 Sydney Biennale, where, in their protests and in their fringe publication White Elephant, Red Herring, artists demanded to know why there was not greater Australian representation and 50 per cent female participation. This group effectively managed, among other things, to negotiate with the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards a scale of fees for loan of work for exhibitions, a policy that became effective from the early 1980s and became accepted practice for all loan exhibitions of contemporary work. During the 1980s the merits of registering an artists' group as a trade union were discussed by a number of artists' groups like the Artworkers Union. At that time, facing possible future amalgamation of 'craft-based' unions to create 'industry-based' unions, and the need to increase membership, some existing trade unions, in particular the Operative Painters and Decorators Unions in Victoria and Western Australia, sought to include artists among their members, starting with those who had been working on art projects on building sites. By 1991 the advantages of having support, such as clearly identified working terms and conditions for artists like muralists, were being considered against the disadvantages of strict controls imposed by these unions.438

In 1983 the issues associated with treating art as work prompted the establishment of the Arts Law Centre, funded by the Australia Council to advise artists on legal matters. Director Shane Simpson published The Visual Artist and the Law in 1982, and the long-planned associated Arts

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437 The New South Wales Artworkers Union in Sydney had gained partial trade union registration in that state by the nineties; the Artworkers Alliance in Queensland discussed the issue and resolved to remain an advocacy group.

438 In Victoria, for example, controls ranged from compulsory unionism for anyone on site, including government funding agency staff organising public art programs, to suggestions of possible industrial action if architects did not use 'union' artists for artworks in buildings being constructed.
Accountancy scheme was also set up as part of the centre’s activity in 1985. The 1985 annual report showed that visual artists were the largest user group of the centre, with music and crafts equal second, and that enquiries covered aspects of contract, copyright, employment, insurance, tax and obscenity.

Along the lines of the Experimental Arts Foundation (1975) in Adelaide, major contemporary art spaces were established in each state in the 1980s, and numerous other artist-run spaces emerged as well. A national network that extended opportunities for visual artists and craftspeople, through touring exhibitions, and providing administrative and curatorial involvement in them, was the National Exhibition Touring Services (NETS) scheme. At the same time, Community Arts Network offices, generally jointly funded by federal, state and local governments to house community arts officers, also existed in all capital cities. Wayne Hutchins’s book *Artists at Work: Your Rights and Responsibilities* (1987) gave legal, financial and administrative advice, particularly for artists working in the community.

One of the most exciting and influential conferences about arts and the community in the late 1980s was the Creative City conference in Melbourne in 1988. And in 1981 twenty organisations had met to form the National Arts Industry Training Committee (NAITC), one of twenty committees of the Australian Council for Education and Training (ACET), designed to provide a major forum of advice on employment and training in art-based industries.

From about 1975 to 1977 the directors of the Crafts Council of Australia, Musica Viva and the Australian Gallery Directors Council (AGDC) formed Arts Lobby, through which the organisations’ chairpeople went with their directors to Canberra each year to raise matters of common interest with the Minister for the Arts. The Visual Arts Lobby, later the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), which included the crafts, was formed in 1983, supported by the Australia Council through various boards, when it was realised once again that, compared with the well-established performing arts and music unions, there was no cohesive force or voice for the visual arts. The Arts Alliance was established in 1986 to present a combined art form force to lobby, exchange information and be a point of contact. When the

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439 First Artspace in Sydney, and then Praxis (later PICA) in Fremantle, the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne, Chameleon in Hobart, then Contemporary Art Spaces in Canberra and Darwin. An Australian Centre for Photography had also formed in the early 1970s, a specialist organisation set up at the same time as the Crafts Council of Australia.

440 NETS was established in 1985 by the Australia Council’s Visual Arts and Crafts Boards, in conjunction with state funding, and succeeded the defunct Australian Gallery Directors Council. It operated in association with the Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency (AETA), a national touring agency (until 1996) to bring exhibitions to regional and non-government galleries, and an information network through the Arts Museums Association of Australia (AMAA).

441 The Arts Alliance comprised twelve arts organisations, including the Crafts Council of Australia, NAVA and the Artworkers Union, and the Community Arts Networks.
Australia Council’s funding was reduced by a million dollars, and its structure threatened by the recommendations of the McLeay Report in 1986, the Alliance mounted Future Arts Rallies in all capital cities to defend the funding principles of the council.\textsuperscript{442}

Representatives of crafts organisations were central to many of these professional co-ordinating and lobby groups that now made up an organised professional art and craft network throughout the country. The Crafts Council of Australia was involved in the development of many of the new groups, and the Crafts Board and later Visual Arts/Crafts Board in funding some of them. Artists and craftspeople extended their own professional experience through participation in administration, policy development and programs. They in turn benefited from the professional gains made by the efforts of these groups, in setting up a professional working framework for the arts, like any other professional working framework.

In theory, if not in practice, there was now a framework where visual artists and craftspeople could be considered together - as workers in a cultural industry. It was now also possible, in theory if not in practice, to consider crafts ideals as significant on their own terms, without the defining imprimatur of art values alone.

\textbf{A changing infrastructure}

\textit{Education}

During the 1980s a number of significant structural changes occurred, which affected the purpose and practice of education in the arts, and identity of crafts education within the overall provision of visual arts education. These changes were to contribute to challenges to the crafts movement’s perception of art ideals, and indeed, to perceptions of what the crafts themselves might now be, and where their histories and allegiances lay - and might lead.

The decline in teacher education enrolments in the early 1980s, as well as a pruning of education funding, meant that a number of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were amalgamated, and for many this meant that some art departments or schools became part of multi-campus institutes where they competed with other non-arts courses for funds.\textsuperscript{443} Many of these institutions, some of them former teachers colleges, began to offer, for survival reasons,

\textsuperscript{442}The Arts Alliance press releases in 1986 argued that the arts industry at that time comprised 120,000 people, contributed $6.5 billion to the Australian economy, paid $360 million in personal income tax, took only about 52 per cent of the Commonwealth government’s entire arts and cultural budget, and was created by artists whose average annual income was less than $10,000.

\textsuperscript{443}Interview with Geoff Parr (1990) who pointed out that studio equipment and materials for processes such as photography, film, fibre, clay, glass, wood and metal, and later audio and video art, were more costly than those required for painting and drawing. Many of the art departments were never adequately resourced within their larger institutions for such developments, either in facilities or in recurrent funding.
full-time and part-time undergraduate associate diploma programs in the visual arts and crafts. A number of art schools started making wider connections with the community, which few had thought was necessary before. They picked up a great many students who had previously been unable to go beyond adult education or society and guild training, because they had been unable to study full-time. This effort was partly because of a need for community support, and for enrolment numbers, but also because of the changing and more democratic nature of art practice at that time. Summer schools, seminars and conferences were hosted, galleries maintained and catalogues published, and connections made with Crafts Councils, Contemporary Art Spaces and artist-run galleries and studios. Visiting lecturer programs were established; residencies and workshops continued; and some public and community programs embarked on.

Another result of the economic circumstances of tertiary art education, was to increase student enrolments by extending courses into higher degrees. During the 1980s, masters courses were developed in a number of institutions, so that for the first time students did not have to travel overseas for postgraduate study; by the mid-1980s it was possible to study at a masters level in Australia in every major crafts area, and by the 1990s doctoral opportunities were offered in some schools as well. Lecturers in art schools felt increasing pressure to upgrade their own qualifications, as the courses they were teaching were upgraded.

In some art schools, 'cultural theory' or 'art theory' started to be discussed in conjunction with art history, and by the mid-1980s, many also realised that some form of vocational studies course was necessary for students to be able to address the complexities of making a living in the arts, after graduation. A number of institutions made a conscious commitment to the option of designer-making for future small production, alongside, or instead of, the by now more common, craft-as-art direction. However, not all students, or all staff, or even all institutions, shared a commitment to these directions, and for many the separations between art, craft, design and teacher education were still clearly defined and upheld.

For many years, technical colleges and CAEs had been critical of the favoured treatment of universities in relation to research funding, staffing resources and status. The 'binary system' of tertiary education, which was perceived to separate vocational training from intellectual studies, was no longer acceptable to many.444 In 1987, further reform proposals were announced through federal education minister John Dawkins's Green Paper on tertiary education. The proposals recommended further amalgamations of...
tertiary institutions, competition for resources, private sponsorship and a focus on a vocationally specific education; it anticipated changes to tenure for staff and forecast a reintroduction of student fees. The new moves were unpopular: it had already been said by commentators and politicians themselves that government was now run like a corporate business, which paid less attention to ideology than to economic management. In the long term the proposed Unified National System of education eliminated CAEs, and provided a range of universities on the one hand, and state-run TAFE college systems on the other, with art schools or departments in both. By 1990 most educational institutions had amalgamated towards these ends.

By this stage, many of the art schools that had moved with their CAEs to out-of-town campuses in the 1970s were trying to move back to the central city, where, they believed, the art interests of their students were more oriented. During the 1980s some of the major technical institutes also sought university status, and the art departments in these institutions became university faculties or colleges. In 1996 Sophia Errey noted that the 18 universities and 100 CAEs operating in 1977 had collapsed into 36 universities.

Some design departments in the former CAEs had argued against the 1970s philosophy of allying art and design, saying their field had become so specialised in its use of technology and in the way designers addressed themselves to their social task, and that art had removed itself so far from social and shared symbolic links with its society, that the continued

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445 David McKnight *Sydney Morning Herald* December 1987, documented some of the common concerns felt by those in art schools, noting that 'the 126-page Green Paper...takes one paragraph to mention goals and purposes of education other than those connected with economic growth and restrained government spending'. In making education more responsive to economic demands, he observed that many feared a depletion of funding for the humanities and social sciences, believing that 'commercial values will intrude even further through research, course content, and choice of staff.'

446 For example, the local press in Adelaide, for example, in 1988 and 1989 documented the desire of the South Australian School of Art at the SACAE at Underdale to move back to the city. The School of Art in Hobart struggled out of its place in the TCAE, and joined the University of Tasmania in the early 1980s, eventually operating as the Centre for the Arts in the city, from 1986. In the 1990s the Queensland College of Art was attempting to return from its suburban campus to the Brisbane city area.

447 The Western Australian Institute of Technology became Curtin University in 1987; the New South Wales Institute of Technology became the University of Technology, Sydney in 1988; and the Darwin Institute of Technology, which grew out of the Darwin Community College in 1984, became the Northern Territory University in 1989. Numerous amalgamations occurred in Melbourne, with institutions housing art schools or departments becoming part of, for example, Monash University, Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and the new University of Victoria. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the largest of the CAEs and institutes, was the last to finalise its university status.

448 Sophia Errey 'Going a Degree Higher' *Lemel*, Summer 1995-6 2, citing Don Aitken 'The Astonishing Rise of Higher Education' *Quadrant* Jan-Feb 1996 77-82
association of design with art schools hindered and smothered it. In the various institutional amalgamations, a number of design departments wanted to associate themselves more closely with technology and design for production than with philosophies of art or art-craft.\textsuperscript{449} Students entering some institutions to study, for example, jewellery or ceramics, found their allegiance to either art (as expression) or design (for production) made for them by the structure of the institution, with little opportunity to experience the other point of view, and the history and theory associated with it.\textsuperscript{450} As well, by the 1990s many of the major design faculties were advocating 'green design' or 'integrated' design, where all aspects of design - interior, graphic, environmental and industrial - were considered in the context of social and environmental responsibility.

By the nineties, art departments in technical colleges were particularly concerned by the expectation, in New South Wales at least, that Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses should be 50 per cent funded by industry within a number of years, because many of their courses had no immediate industries to sponsor training or equipment. There were also controversial moves to develop national competency-based training curricula for TAFE courses,\textsuperscript{451} and it became necessary to rationalise courses across institutions, and to define what 'industry' might mean in the arts.

By 1996 it was clear, with further fee increases to students, and further funding cuts to universities by the new federal Liberal government, that Australia was unlikely to be able to sustain the approximately 40 university art schools (some institutions had multiple campuses) that currently operated. Within all art schools, cuts in funding increased the problem of trying to fund the resource-expensive courses of both the visual arts and crafts, especially within a university system that was oriented, by and large, to tuition in mass lecture rooms. Many sought solvency through reducing costs by offering early retirement for staff, and increasing income through enrolling foreign fee-paying students. University management and heads of schools also started to seriously consider amalgamating departments and schools, closing

\textsuperscript{449}This was one argument used by the Design School at Sydney College of the Arts, when opting to separate from the Art School and its amalgamation to Sydney University, and join instead the University of Technology, Sydney.

\textsuperscript{450}In the Underdale campus of the South Australian CAE, for example, in 1986 jewellery was taught in the design school, ceramics in the art school, and glass as part of teacher education.

\textsuperscript{451}In New South Wales, for example, an Arts and Media Industry division was one of seven divisions set up by TAFE, and in 1991 Rod Bamford was appointed first industry specialist for ceramics. His job was to consult with industry and review ceramics courses in TAFE colleges. At this stage there was very little ceramics manufacturing industry in Australia, and apart from colleges such as Holmesglen in Melbourne which offered industrial training, most TAFE colleges courses had been focused on studio production. At RMIT in Melbourne, responding to a need to be competitive in exports, courses were offered in 1991 to train paraprofessionals in the furniture industry in production planning and supervision, quality control and marketing.
courses, and focusing on centres of specialisation rather than providing a broad program in each institution.

One of the repercussions of funding cutbacks in art schools was the pruning of administrative costs through amalgamating 'like' departments such as painting and printmaking. This meant that new juxtapositions were made for crafts courses, such as subsuming ceramics, textiles, jewellery and glass departments into either sculpture or design; or amalgamating them as departments of three-dimensional studies in opposition to sculpture. In many of these amalgamations, the specific characteristics and qualities of crafts histories and processes tended to be overwhelmed by both art ideals and design (and technology) ideals.

There was now also a noticeable change in student demand for vocational education. It was evident to those enrolling students in art schools that there was a shift of interest from crafts courses offering personal expression and development, to those offering more vocationally oriented 'design' programs - not only crafts-design courses like ceramics, textiles and metalwork, but also industrial, product, fashion, graphic and computer-aided design courses. These were more likely to ensure that graduates would earn a living. A major factor in the choice was now the requirement that students pay fees for tertiary education. By the 1990s, the system of mark scalings in the secondary school Higher School Certificate, which was perceived to favour scientific and vocational subjects over liberal arts subjects, was also considered to be affecting entries to art schools. Students started to seek more advantageous courses in secondary school in order to be accepted into universities.

Contributing to this circumstance was a revision of secondary school curricula in the 1990s, where, apart from the visual arts, a new emphasis was placed on design and technology studies. While this direction also applied to science, the teaching of these new subjects was mostly carried out in art and craft departments. The change in emphasis was met with some concern as many values associated with crafts practice, such as the expression of ideas through a concern for materials and skills, and the importance to the individual of crafts production as a way of life, now appeared not to be taken into account. The word 'craft' had now been largely eliminated from art, design and technology syllabus statements. Thus, secondary students enrolling in art schools had had little preliminary experience of the crafts, and nor had the teachers who advised them.

452 Interview with David Williams (1995)
453 See Lee Emery Art Teachers Teaching Technology Studies: A Research Study (1989); see also ‘Draft Design and Technology (7-10) Syllabus’ New South Wales Education Department (1991)
454 Interview with Helge Larsen (1993)
By the mid-1990s art and design schools within universities were finding, further, that the provision of research grants through the Australian Research Council, the major body for funding university research, was heavily weighted to the sciences rather than the humanities, which now included schools of art and design. Within the humanities, and with regard to both the examination of higher degrees and the application for research funds, art schools found they had to argue the nature of ‘research’ in the making of artworks, against disciplines that had always depended on written documentation of research findings.455

Sophia Errey suggested that here, the crafts streams of the visual arts:

...were in many respects better placed in relationship to the practice of research than other areas, and perhaps paradoxically, that a conceptual orientation is not an overriding advantage. Investigation of materials and techniques, whether contemporary high-tech or historical, development of tools (in the widest sense) and processes, evaluation of production and commercial feasibilities are all extremely important aspects of practice which overlap with traditionally defined technical, scientific and economic disciplines, while simultaneously interacting with aesthetic potentialities.456

In this regard, in the 1990s the glass workshop and the textiles workshop at the Canberra School of Art, and the post-graduate ceramic production studio at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart were among those that successfully gained substantial university research funding for equipment to carry out expansion to their research programs.

In response to these various challenges, some art schools in the early 1990s developed new ‘design and production’ programs like the post-graduate courses in furniture design and production ceramics at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart; the textile design course at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology; and the Centre for Ceramic Research, Design and Production at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur. These institutions worked towards an ideology of a viable design and production practice and a relationship with industry.

Others started to suggest that if students in crafts courses, like ceramics, wanted to make sculpture they had to be also enrolled in, or assessed in, the sculpture department. These shifts were a radical departure from the art-oriented emphasis of a decade earlier.

The prevailing model provided by fine arts and art history/theory departments of art schools remained that of arts ideals (reflecting the experience of most of the staff), although crafts and design issues were taught in some

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455 See Peter Hill ‘Is there a doctor in the art school?’ *Art Monthly Australia* October 1995 and ‘Mrs Aristotle’s Teeth: the challenges for research funding in art schools’ *Art Monthly Australia* November, 1995, and subsequent letters to the editor.

456 Sophia Errey op cit (1995-96) 3
institutions, and specific histories and issues were discussed in studio areas. But by the mid-1990s visual artists themselves were expressing concern at what was being taught. While artist and lecturer Pat Hoffie thought that the move of art schools to universities did a lot to shake out some of the complacencies of art lecturers in the seventies and eighties who had been trained by 'a process of education-by-osmosis', and where 'all an art teacher had to do was hang around for his (usually his) artistic genius to rub off', she nonetheless observed a growing sense of unease about the kind of information that was being disseminated. 'It became almost de rigeur for art students to assume a “critical position” even before they had acquired sufficient knowledge to back it up' she said:

More focus was placed on emulating contemporary styles than on gaining knowledge and skills. So-called ‘critical art practice’ was often more a veneer-thin adoption of style than an informed, engaged response to ideas. It was enough for a work to look ‘alternative’ (that is, for the creator to have successfully feigned total disregard for aesthetics and craftsmanship) for it to be accepted as critical. A ‘bad art’ look and a ‘bad attitude’ automatically meant that you were posing a critical assessment of outmoded values. But it was often difficult to tell whether it might all have just been the result of complete ineptitude.457

Indeed, some lecturers of sculpture were agreeing in 1997, that recent interest in making ‘installation’ works, usually with found objects, had resulted in a recent generation of students who had few skills (other than photocopying) with which to resolve their ideas and could not ‘make anything’, even with basic welding and joinery.458

What did this mean for the crafts? Did craftspeople still need to pursue art ideals that were contradictory to their practices, especially if the visual arts were now (or again) advocating some crafts ideals? Or were they still two distinct, but related, approaches? How did the wider field respond to changes in approach?

Funding
At the same time as education was ‘rationalised’, a similar economic and ideological rationalisation of administration of the arts in the Australia Council saw the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards (see Chapter 4). While there were many positive aspects to the notion of shared ideals and joint funding, it was noticeable that not only were craftspeople receiving a smaller proportion of grant funding, but that fewer were applying in the first place.

Of those craftspeople who were successful, the tendency was to support those whose work mostly resembled ‘art’ or took its place in the art world infrastructures. This occurred despite efforts to find alternative grant

457Pat Hoffie Art Monthly Australia May 1996 89 4-6
458Interview with Colin Reaney (1997)
programs for craftspeople and designers; despite a clear revision of objectives amongst many practitioners themselves about the direction of their work, and its audience or market; and a clear revaluation of the status of artists as part of the workforce. At the same time, both the visual arts and the crafts were now competing with a new genre: the as yet ill-defined art practice associated with ‘new technologies’ that combined, for example, videos, computers and internet information technology.

By 1992 a strong lobby was mounted to identify and redress some of the perceived inequities between ‘art’ and ‘craft’ in both education and funding. It became increasingly clear, although by no means commonly accepted, that it was no longer always in the best interests of craftspeople to try to join art as a preferred option, but to define more clearly the identity of their practice, and insist that others acknowledge it as a valid alternative with its own set of histories and traditions.

The ideals that craftspeople held and the work that they produced, were not only the result of new education and funding opportunities. They were also affected by the both the changing demands of the marketplace and the opportunities it presented.

A changing marketplace
Developing confidence in their own histories and traditions, and reflecting changes in values, craftspeople started to seek different markets from those in the art world. Alongside an increasing market for unique objects, they also developed a number of ‘commercial’ options that had previously been associated by the art world with a loss of professional artistic integrity.

Contributing to confusion of identity in the visual arts and crafts, was the way in which some government departments perpetuated hierarchies through laws dealing with sales and income taxation, customs and employment. In each of these areas, guidelines remained in place that no longer reflected, in either education or funding institutions, the ways in which the identity and value of the arts were now assessed. For example, while it was acknowledged that a work of art was no longer simply a painting or sculpture, the defending potter in a test case for sales tax exemption in 1990 had still to demonstrate his intent to make articles that had aesthetic appeal, within an interpretation of the ‘fine arts’ as ‘any application of skill and taste to the production of articles which are beautiful in themselves or which have appeal to aesthetic taste’.

The art-craft market: an ideal
The art-craft ideal was still very much a priority for many. There was, in fact,

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459 See for example Darani Lewers ‘The Crafts in Crisis’ *Art Monthly Australia* 47 March 1992 14-16
a marked expansion in the market for unique art-craft objects, particularly the affluent private markets of the United States, but also in Japan.

Many craftspeople expanded their preference, as an ideal, to produce such major virtuoso works for public and private collections. Even though they sometimes ran a concurrent production business, or became involved in commissions for public spaces, the 'collector's item' or 'museum piece' remained, as in the art world, the aspect of their practice that was most attractive. It not only provided an opportunity for conceptual and technical challenges, but also a larger selling price for the effort than for many small items, an important line on a curriculum vitae and moreover, the attraction of reinforcement of a status as an artist.

The best works were well-researched, well-designed and skilfully made by craftspeople who were critically informed about issues to do with ideals and identity. They were also often those that retained a connection, sometimes metaphorical, with previous forms and functions and where the materials and processes of production contributed to the meaning of the work (see for example, Plate 16: following page).

However, expansion of this market was not without criticism, especially where the objects made for it were identified as sculpture. Encouraged by art ideals, craftspeople had tended to deny that they were making decorative objects or ornaments in favour of a term that implied greater intellect. Even works that were described as something else were still presented as art objects in certain contexts. For example, reviewing the exhibition Australia: New Design Visions, in Perth in 1992, Peter Timms asked:

> Which of these objects were individual showpieces...which were prototypes capable of production and which were designed in response to a particular industry commission? Surely [being design] they were not all intended purely as personal artistic expressions?

But of course, they were: none of those selected had been intended as designs for production.

Australian public and private collections were not large enough to sustain all those who sought fulfilment through having their work acquired in this way. Eyes were turned towards the larger, richer populations and markets overseas, especially those of the United States and Asia. From the mid-1980s strong connections started to develop between Australian craftspeople and international dealers, galleries, exhibitions, art schools and collectors.

With the amalgamation of the Visual Arts and Crafts Boards in 1987, the new board tried to provide equity between the two areas: support was given to individuals and organisations taking Australian crafts overseas, and events

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461 Peter Timms, 'Designing Visions - Australian Work at the Craft Triennial' *CraftWest* Summer 1992
Plate 16: Brian Hirst
(see page 170) Bowl, Votive Bowl, blown-cast glass, hand-finished, decorated with gold lustre and diamond-point engraving, made in Sydney in 1992. (29 x 34 x 30cm)

Brian Hirst (b.1956) is interested in ancient vessel forms, and especially Cycladic art from around 3000-2000BC. This bowl form is derived from ancient three-footed bronzes from a range of cultures such as in Mexico and China. The decoration, however, is a development of a number of personal iconographic motifs he uses on other works. Hirst also studied printmaking, and likes to exhibit some of his bowls in front of prints etched on glass, that depict the same form in two dimensions. As well as these large one-off pieces, which are exhibited successfully and collected overseas as well as in Australia, Brian Hirst is equally involved in making blown production wares for retail, as well as taking on a range of large and small commissions for awards and corporate gifts.
and venues were sought that might be the equivalent of major promotions for visual artists such as the Venice Biennale in Italy and the Documenta exhibition in Germany. As part of its focus on the support of its professional constituency, and its resultant export strategy, the Crafts Council of Australia worked from 1991 with the Australia Council and Austrade to co-ordinate dealer galleries at the Chicago New Art Forms Exposition (CINAFE), and later Sculpture, Object, Functional Arts (SOFA), with a view to developing 'top-end' markets and market connections for Australian craftspeople.

The work that was of most interest to this particular market was the 'art-craft' object, and indeed, CINAFE included specifically, the term 'New Art Forms' in its title. As collectors became familiar with the work over the ensuing years, and the 'names' of the people who made it, some Australians developed strong markets in the United States (as well as Europe and Japan), made connections with dealer galleries, and were visited in Australia by travelling groups of collectors. The success of a few fuelled the interest of many others, who aspired to the same acclaim, income and opportunity to make large one-off pieces.

These collectors represented the whole spectrum of the crafts, but the most noticeable were those collecting glass. 462 'If you can't afford art', the rationale was given, 'with a million dollars you can develop a collection of glass-art instead'. 463 By the 1990s in the United States, the efforts of a few key dealer galleries, combined with the strong presence of affluent glass collectors and the establishment of specialist museum collections, and about forty glass education and training courses, provided a combined circumstance that was far beyond what occurred for any other media outside painting-related art, and which prompted great envy and admiration in Australia. 464 Glass artists responded by making the works that this market demanded: a product had little or no other function than to be collected, and which most closely approximated art, that is, a sculptural object. The positive view of this phenomenon, was that patronage of any sort whether collectors, working spouses, state funding bodies or royal courts, had always offered opportunity through sustained time for research into ideas, and experimental, technical and production challenges otherwise not affordable.

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462 See Grace Cochrane 'Collecting our Thoughts' Art Monthly Australia June 1993, for an extended discussion on the role of collectors of 'art-craft' objects.
463 Discussion with glass collectors at Ausglass conference, Canberra 1991
464 The 400 members of the Art Alliance, an organisation of glass collectors originally set up around the Heller Gallery in New York in the early 1980s, organised weekends for exhibitions and collecting, while members built extra rooms and specific buildings to house their personal collections. They helped establish a glass workshop and a glass magazine; supported scholarships to train glassmakers; organised conferences, and in one weekend in the early 1990s, with 20-odd dealer stalls; turned over $650,000 in sales, a percentage of which was turned back into training scholarships.
But the phenomenon also had its critics. The Western art market had long encouraged the making of works whose only purpose and function was to appear on gallery walls and in gallery spaces. In Australia, Ian Burn and Annette van den Bosch were just two who had independently discussed the effect the art market has had on art production. British critic Peter Dormer criticised the development of this kind of work, across a range of crafts media, and blamed the collectors for encouraging it:

This phenomenon is most widespread in America, where there are many rich men and women prepared to buy the work for their new art-craft collections. The collections are frequently appalling and are, in essence, handicraft gone to fat. Nothing in art or design or architecture or craft is more foolish than the sight of modest ideas ballooning and buffeting on the thermals of rich ignorance.

In particular, the massive network support for 'art-glass' could be seen to be provoking an artificial product, a 'super-niche' product, where, significant as the best pieces may have been, most had had no function outside a collection, and not everyone agreed they worked as 'art'. For these collectors of glass the chase was thrilling; the presentation of trophies competitive. They did not have to buy as part of any wider understanding that might contribute to their judgement, as, for example, a museum might. Collectors were mobile and very aware of the scope, scale and movement of the market. Usually successful business people in another part of their lives, they knew how to research, how to set up supporting frameworks and how to organise 'deals'.

Many of the collectors saw as the end point for their collections, their incorporation (often as complete collections) into public art museums. But despite their interest in, and dependence on, donated collections, museums in Australia at least, knew they could rarely take entire unselected collections whose initiating acquisition policy might not always be shared by the institution. It was clear that there were many more kinds of works being produced than 'art-craft', and many practices in other media that also had to be considered as well.

Australian craftspeople, through the topics addressed at their conferences and the lateral ways in which many organised their practices, consistently demonstrated by the 1990s a noticeable self-critical assessment of their work practice from their geographical 'margins', that was not always as evident in

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466 Peter Dormer 'The Ideal World of Vermeer's Little Lacemaker' in John Thackara Design after Modernism (1988) 142

467 See Susanne Frantz op cit (1991) for a critique of this field, also discussed in Chapter 1.

468 Collections in Australia are greatly enhanced by the opportunity for taxation incentives to donors, through the Taxation Incentives for the Arts scheme.
the attitudes of those in the ‘centres’ overseas. Supported by their enthusiastic market, some of those overseas appear not always to have been forced to assess their work in a wider context. As John Bentley-Mays had observed from the United States in 1985:

...the quest for certification has undammed a sea of incredibly vulgar, imitative ‘clay art’ and ‘fiber art’ - a flow that continues to the present day, unchecked by a craft press that is too cozy with the people it should be criticizing, and far too enchanted by the goal of validation itself to say much about emperors and new clothes.

While Australian craftspeople aspired to the support and acclaim of these enthusiastic markets, by the 1990s the best work of those seeking connections with art ideals was nonetheless demonstrating evidence of a more critical awareness of the richness of crafts histories and of the contradictory relationships between the crafts and art. Fewer actually called their work ‘art’: they spoke more specifically of, for example, tapestry, glasswork, ceramics or metalwork, whether or not the work was utilitarian or interpretive in intent. Those making interpretive work appeared more inclined to draw on the previous forms and functions of their field, rather than simulate what they (or some of their audiences) thought sculpture was meant to look like. These works were informed from their own broad histories, rather than being, as had been more prevalent fifteen years before, a superficial attempt to look like art.

**Design and production: an alternative**

Australians were conscious that their less affluent marketplace and smaller population could not sustain livelihoods through making expensive unique objects alone. As they developed broader views of crafts practice they started to explore the broader marketplace associated with them.

It was recognised that, for well-designed objects, the marketplace could be legitimately expanded, and that exhibitions could also include such events as trade fairs, fashion parades and shop showcases. Much of this work was sold, or intended to be sold, less in galleries than in shops and boutiques, department stores and design showrooms, or was commissioned by architects and interior designers for public, commercial and corporate buildings.

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469 These comments are based on attendance at conferences of ceramics, jewellery and metalsmithing, glass and textiles over 10 years in Australia, listening to contributions from Australian and overseas practitioners; study tour in the United States and Great Britain in 1992; attendance at the 1995 GAS (Glass Artists Society) conference in the United States; and personal discussions with practitioners and curators from a number of countries.

470 John Bentley Mays ‘Comment’ *American Craft* Oct/Nov 1985

471 In the late 1980s for example, Whitehall Industries in Melbourne established a link with the Artists Garden at the Fitzroy Garden Shop; boutiques like Cash Palace in Sydney displayed contemporary jewellery with fashion clothes; the exhibition La Boutique
relation to business and the marketplace, Garth Clark in the United States said in 1987:

We...need to realise that the world of the applied arts is a sleeping giant that has the potential of offering...a challenging home from which to grow intellectually and commercially...which can present the craftsman in the context of traditions from which work has evolved.472

From 1981 to 1987, and again in 1991, the Crafts Council of Australia organised a series of Craft Expo trade fairs. In some ways these were a development from the crafts markets that had been a characteristic of the crafts movement both in Australia and overseas for thirty years. Craftspeople who took stalls at Expo were able to take direct orders as well as make sales, and make personal contacts with outlets and those wanting to commission. Similar results occurred with various fashion shows and furniture trade fairs.473

New skills were needed to market the work in different ways. At the 1981 Conference of Production Workshop Managers, about thirty managers met in Adelaide to discuss training, workshop development, production management and design and marketing and promotion. Crafts councils also organised a range of training programs, such as the Crafts Council of New South Wales which organised a month-long course in 1988 to train potential marketing ‘crafts agents’, and also launched the service Designed and Made in 1989, to promote the commissioning of work for corporate gifts and public art.

By this stage a number of designer-makers, particularly of furniture and ‘art-clothing’, were also making their own contacts for marketing, and sometimes production, overseas. For those wanting to make a high quality design production line, it was clear that again, markets in, for example, Tokyo and the United States were better than in Australia, where the buying population was smaller. In 1985 the Texas store chain Neiman-Marcus decided to promote Australian works through its Dallas store in 1986; and in late 1988 the marketing and buying group Uniquely Australian, acting as an international marketing agent for furniture and a range of interior design products, started selecting the work of Australian designers for contract production in Australia, and sale and display in Los Angeles. A number of opportunities also opened up through Japanese department store galleries.

Fantastique was shown in a department store in Adelaide in 1990 and in 1991 David Jones in Sydney placed craftworks in prime window display spaces.

472 Garth Clark American Craft Dec 86/Jan 87 vol 46/6 14
473 Examples include Fashion Expo in Sydney in 1985, the Winter Collections in Tasmania from 1983 to 1985 and events organised by the Fashion Design Council in Victoria; the 1985 Australian Furnishing Expo ‘85, which included furniture prototypes from nine designers and nine furniture-makers; Sydney’s Darling Harbour Furniture Exhibitions from 1988, and later DESIGNEX trade fairs in Sydney and Melbourne.
The Meat Market Crafts Centre in Melbourne was associated with the Nieman-Marcus scheme, set up a pilot Craft Export Agency in 1988, and organised Australian participation at the New York Gift Fair in 1989, to which individuals made their own connections from 1990. From Sydney, the Crafts Council of Australia started to develop information and skills to assist in this new area, making it a major area of activity from 1989 through a Craft Export Strategy proposal for major international crafts promotion.

Efforts were also made by numbers of individuals and groups to use opportunities provided by the federal government’s advisory and marketing agency for exports overseas, Austrade. In 1989 Senator Button, federal Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, held a design summit conference in Canberra. He also commissioned consultants to report on the export of Australian manufacturing industries and the role of the government trade advisory service, Austrade, which included, in a small way, the export of craft and design products. By the nineties, the Visual Arts/Craft Board also recognised that marketing was becoming a crucial element for all visual artists and craftspeople, and that a range of strategies was necessary.

Some special groups emerged, such as the Crafts Council of Victoria’s Practising Craftspeople Australia (PCA) program from 1984, which concentrated on marketing, publicising and promoting those who were making a living solely from their production. Established to help practising craftspeople to run their businesses successfully, CCV said: ‘What they have in common is a way of making a living...They make it.’ This project was developed further in 1997 by the national crafts council body, now called Craft Australia, as the national Craftmark branding scheme, as a way of identifying approved quality wares. By the 1990s Craft Australia had established a franchise in David Jones stores in Sydney, as a marketing model where a number of craftspeople made a commitment to supply agreed works, which were sold through the ceramics and glassware department along with commercial products.

Commissions: crafts in the wider world

For those pursuing art ideals, commissions for clients had also been seen as leading to a loss of individual, creative, artistic independence. But commissions could also provide challenges that stretched both imagination and skills in projects that brought a new, public and often permanent audiences.

The 1980s saw an increase in the numbers of commissions, and also in the ways in which some of them were carried out. From 1979 to 1989 over 3000 commissions had been registered on the Crafts Council of Australia’s Craftline register, which still represented only a small proportion of what was carried out. Many commissions were associated with community projects for stained glass windows or ceramic murals, and numerous banner, tapestry and
embroidery projects, while others were major public art commissions. The corporate world increasingly became both a client and a sponsor, and organisations like Crafts Councils and some small agencies worked to link craftspeople with these opportunities.

Artists and craftspeople became more involved in these projects from the early planning stages, so the works could be properly incorporated in the building rather than being a hasty addition at the end. As well as the Crafts Board’s Public Art Program of funding for seeding grants, some state governments, notably in Tasmania and South Australia, and later in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, also devised supportive schemes. Early in the eighties Tasmania endorsed the long-hoped-for legislation that allocated 1 per cent of costs (with a limit of $10,000) associated with constructing new public buildings towards the commissioning of artworks; South Australia developed a vigorous program that ‘seeded’ projects from a special public art budget, and employed many craftspeople in the innovative development of large individual and collaborative projects; and Victoria supported many public projects through its community arts schemes and its public art program.\(^{474}\)

Interior designers started to come to trade fairs and Craft Expos to find people whose work could be commissioned. Both individuals, and groups like Biltmoderne and Urban Works in Melbourne, and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative, became increasingly competent at presenting themselves to clients, and ensuring that projects could be successfully completed. In 1987 Melbourne interior designer Janne Faulkner said:

> I wish that students were taught to work with more emphasis on the marketplace. They should be looking at making a good kitchen table for $120 but I go to places and they are making a pink vinyl love seat you can’t even sit on.\(^{475}\)

As well as furniture designer-makers, a number of others moved away from gallery exhibitions almost entirely, as their commissions took them more consistently into ‘real’ environments, and consequently out of the promotional media that would include them in any art world narrative. By the 1980s, for example, an increasing number of small, stained-glass design businesses were working full-time on commissioned work, carving out their own sections of a market that included church, secular and domestic commissions. Some institutions like the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, and smaller weaving enterprises, such as Liz Nettleton’s Tapestry Studios of Australia, in Melbourne, worked almost entirely on commissioned works. The surf fashion company, Mambo, in Sydney, consistently commissioned

\(^{474}\)See *Artlink* 9 2 1989; Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board *Arts Report* 1989; *Public Art, Public Space* NSW Ministry for the Arts 1989; *Art for Public Places* Department for the Arts and Cultural Heritage, Arts Program Division, Adelaide 1991

\(^{475}\)Janne Faulkner *Craft Australia* 1987/1 28
artists and craftspeople like Bruce Goold, Reg Mombasa and Gerry Wedd to design for its screenprinted surf-wear and furnishing fabrics.

Undertaking major commissions required a great many more skills than simply making the work, and while some had successfully and consistently worked in this way for some time, most craftspeople and architects entered this decade relatively inexperienced in such collaborations. By the nineties, however, many craftspeople had acquired a great deal of experience not only in making large works for public places or designing and making for corporate gifts and trophies, but also in planning, negotiating, interpreting needs and ideas, and carrying a project through. Some craftspeople, like glass artist Meza Rijsdijk, in Sydney, found that the term ‘small business person’ best described what they did. She made unique art works, used the same processes to make production works, designed and made trophies and light fittings for limited niche production and also carried out large scale commissioned sculptural works, most significantly in 1996-97 for ships in a Scandinavian shipping line.

The most influential example and training ground for commissions in the 1980s was the way in which the architects for the design and construction of the new Parliament House between 1982 and 1988 believed that art and craft works should be incorporated in the building. This project had not only the completion of the building with all its artworks inside it as its goal, but also the long-term professional effect of the new working relationships and practices that were entered into. It affected not only the makers, but also the 150 or so young architects who left the project experienced in, and presumably committed to, similar associations. Within the firm Mitchell, Giurgola and Thorp Architects, partners Romaldo Giurgola and Pamille Berg provided both the philosophical base for the incorporation of artworks within the building, as well as much of the practical method for their selection, commissioning, fabrication and installation.476

Giurgola and Berg set about finding people - artists, designers, craftspeople, small businesses and artisans - who could realise some of their ambitions for the project through the 80 commissions that were given to artists and craftspeople, and the acquisition of almost 3000 works. As many of the people eventually selected had never before been asked to produce work of the scale and perhaps importance of these projects, the particular flair of Giurgola and Berg was the way in which they could recognise potential.

476They worked with the Parliament House Construction Authority and curator Katrina Rumley, as well as with the authority’s national art advisory committee. This working group was responsible for all aspects of the nearly all the commissions and acquisitions of artworks for the rotating collection of the building, with a total budget of $13 million by 1988. See also Haig Beck (ed) Parliament House, Canberra: a Building for the Nation (1988); see also Craft Australia 1987/3 63
extract ingenuity and initiative from those commissioned, and set up
connexions between designers and makers in rewarding partnerships.477

Many makers found that professional activity through commissions largely
took them away from galleries. For many the contact and challenge of
working with a client was fulfilling, carrying its own integrity through
seeking mutual agreement on interpretation of needs. Others still believed
that this ‘compromised’ their identity as artists. New skills were needed to
run an art-based practice as a small business, and arts accountancy practices
developed, as well as small business advisory groups focusing on the arts.

Finally, the growing interest shown by architects and developers in faithfully
restoring old buildings not only caused searches for earlier plans and
drawings, but also for people with skills in almost-lost areas. Those who
could blow glass for large lamps, cast or shape metal, work with wood or
marble, or recall even more obscure skills and processes began to be sought
after. A number of practitioners, like glass-artist Brian Hirst in Sydney,
entered into important collaborative exercises with restoration architects,
often finding associated work for others in the projects they were
commissioned to do.

Exhibitions like Collaborative Designs - Working Together in Architecture,
in Melbourne in 1988, and seminars like Creative City in Melbourne in 1988
and Urban Thresholds in Perth in 1989, were characteristic of events that
encouraged thinking along these lines.

Changing work practices
The social, theoretical and institutional changes that took place, and the
shifting of values in art, crafts and design practice that accompanied them,
were reflected in the different ways in which craftspeople (by the 1990s more
often called makers, designer-makers, or artists, depending on how they
positioned themselves) chose to work, or to value their work. There remained
a strong view that the pursuit of art ideals was the prime target to aim for, but
there was increasing evidence that a broader view was not only being
accepted, but preferred.

Specialisation
Despite the broadening of approach through multi-craft organisations, and the
inclusion of crafts courses in the wider frameworks of art schools, one
significant aspect of professional practice in the 1980s was the further
development of media specialisation. This was significant as, in

477 Artists and craftspeople were involved from the very early stages of architectural
planning, and most of these people successfully entered not only into collaborative design,
but also into employment and contracting arrangements that greatly extended their
professional capacities.
contradiction, between and even within, media practices, possibilities were seen as opening up rather than narrowing, and people celebrated 'crossing boundaries'.

It was becoming more apparent that craftspeople were reasserting their specific identities within their own traditions. Not only did they need wider references, broader skills and contact with other artforms and ideas, but they also reinforced specific connections with their specialist fields. From the late 1970s new specialist organisations formed for the support and development of, for example, jewellery and metalsmithing, glass, quiltmaking, textiles and musical-instrument-making, and remained very active into the 1990s.

The 1980s were significant for the numbers of national specialist conferences that were held - especially in ceramics, glass, textiles, jewellery and metalwork - in which hundreds of participants enrolled, and to which international and national speakers were invited. Branches of specialist organisations formed, specialist national newsletters were published, and for most national organisations a biennially rotating national administration round the states shared the workload for major events such as conferences and related exhibitions.478 Often art school combined with specialist organisations to host these events; sometimes the schools hosted their own seminars and symposia.

It was specialist organisations, and the events that took place around them, that drew together the diverse elements of each area and began to force a more philosophical assessment of the purpose of 'making' in that area and its relationship to a wider society. Established associations, like potters societies and handspinning and weaving guilds, as well as the new glass, and jewellery and metalsmithing organisations in particular, started to discuss broader social and cultural questions in relation to their field, alongside technical and practical concerns.479

The role of technology
An associated issue was the question of whether technology was something the crafts should adopt or reject. Much of the postwar crafts ethos had been founded on the notion of the handmade, the natural, and a concern for materials, which was associated with a rejection of the mass produced, the anonymous and the artificial.

But as early as 1922, in response to the Bauhaus message to 'return to the crafts', designer/critic Adolf Behne provided a response that was still pertinent:

478Even groups like leatherworkers, woodworkers and quiltmakers that had some state bodies, but no national organisation, organised national conferences.
Craftsmanship has become a catchword. Today we have ascribed everything positive to the word craftsmanship, everything negative to technology. But...craftsmanship is not the good angel, nor is technology the evil demon of art and culture...Can one really dispute the fact that there are innumerable handcrafted products which are loveless, indifferent, banal and superficial? Is there not mechanical work in handiwork, and can one maintain that work aided by technology cannot be exceptionally inspired and conscientious? If the difference between craft and technology is not a simple qualitative one...what is the actual difference?480

In Australia, contact over many decades with developing countries through the World Crafts Council had shown that many underdeveloped countries, however romantic their situation might seem, would gladly have adopted any technology - starting with electricity - that would make their production more streamlined and economic.

In 1984 design writer John Thackara visited Australia to look at the role played by design in tackling the economic problems of developing industry in a country with a small population, a large land mass and competitive neighbours. He interviewed the federal minister of science and technology, Barry Jones, and commented:

'In many ways Australia has become an industrial museum', Jones says; 'many of our factories are working models of the craft skills of the 'fifties. Where Japan has an industrial revolution every ten years, Australia's “turnaround” time has been 30-50 years.' But are all such skills outdated? Australian industry cannot compete on price; volume production is not its strength. But...the outdated skills dismissed by Jones and the lively crafts sector date back to the fifties, when a new generation of European immigrants arrived. And it is to the 'fifties that Australia's design community today looks with interest - not just for nostalgia, but for an era in which product quality was higher than today.481

A special art and technology issue of the journal, Artlink, in 1987, identified a large number of craftspeople using some of the new technologies available at the time. Here jeweller and designer Lyn Tune summarised her view of the reasons for some craftspeople adopting new technology without losing integrity as makers, and in fact possibly enhancing it:

Notions of the unique object...lifestyle...and the value of the handmade...have unfortunately led to many extremes of maintaining the situation of the Middle Ages, shunning any machine, and in tertiary education ignoring information about possible methods of manufacture. The traditional process of making as a means of creative expression is an end in itself and a small market will always exist for its products...but is not the only area of practice which is valid. An object which has been well-designed, makes use of the quality of

480Adolf Behne Art, Handicraft, Technology (Kunst, Handwerk, Technik) first published 1922, cited in Frayling and Snowdon, in John Houston Crafts Classics Since the 1940s op cit (1988) 133
481John Thackara Design 424 (UK) April 1984 38-47
the materials and fills a need in the community is of no less value than one which is available to only one person... We now have to compete with our products in an arena where innovation and design are the trade, and new technology is the currency. We cannot do this very successfully unless we have some designers and innovators... Countries like Scandinavia and Italy which had continued to involve craftspeople and designers in their industries, evolved a manufacturing ethic based on the premise that design is a cultural activity.\textsuperscript{482}

In 1989 the Australian Network for Art and Technology in Adelaide, was one of the first to teach three-dimensional computer-aided design (3D-CAD), which could be linked to computer-aided manufacture (CAM).\textsuperscript{483} In the following years a number of crafts designers enrolled in courses here, and elsewhere, to learn how to design their work in this way. Art and design schools also recognised the value of computer-aided design and manufacture, and saw that it would be necessary to introduce these systems to their courses. As the technology became more accessible they were quick to develop centres that enabled students to experiment with, and become proficient in both computer-based art, and also computer-aided design and manufacture.

Jill Smith was notable as one who used computer aided design to enable her to carry out commissions to apply designs to ceramic wares for Australian Fine China in Perth, and Rob Knottenbelt used new high speed water jets to cut plate glass. Jewellers, metalsmiths and woodworkers increasingly linked their work through computer aided design to laser-cutting technology. In the nineties metalworker Robert Foster, in Fink Design, was, as far as he knew, the first person to use American military-developed plastic explosives for decorative purposes: he used this technology to force metal into a mould for making anodised aluminium vases.

The new technologies were liberating to those who chose to address them. Pointing out that the Industrial Revolution was over and that industrialism was on its knees, Peter Timms asked in 1990 why many craftspeople were still trying to come to terms with them:

Electronic technologies are now tending to eliminate the nexus between mass production and endless repetition and to bring industrial practice closer to the nineteenth-century ideals of handcraft...which allow for more dispersed forms of production.\textsuperscript{484}

Lyn Tune's view was similar: 'Perhaps we can now look again at our relationship with objects', she suggested:

\textsuperscript{482} Lyn Tune 'Hands and heads: a survey of new production technology' \textit{Artlink: Art and Technology} vol 7 nos 2&3 1987 78

\textsuperscript{483} See Richard Brecknock \textit{SA Crafts} 2/89

\textsuperscript{484} Peter Timms 'An Evolutionary Backwater: Craft, Bassett Hounds and Oblivion' \textit{Craft Victoria} Dec/Jan 1990-91 4
The importance of an article is not just that it is handmade but that it comes from a creative thought process that utilises the qualities of the materials, that it reflects the culture where it was developed and that it is innovative in its design, both physically in how well it works for its purpose, but also in its aesthetic. I feel that a new technology contains the possibility of our being able to design and manufacture within a brief closely aligned with the ethic of craft, and even make a living.

By 1997, not only were some craftspeople exploring computer-aided design and manufacturing, but most were now individually or collectively developing web-sites to promote their work, and using the internet to carry out research, communicate with colleagues and send designs on line for manufacture elsewhere.

Technologies, often described as extensions of the hand, could be tools that complemented the underlying values of the handmade. They inevitably contributed, along with other social and institutional changes, to the development of different work practices.

**Attitudes to production**

Earlier attitudes and practices involving studio production and exhibition work of functional forms were maintained by many at an increasingly accomplished level, reaching an audience and market that continued to sustain them. Many, like potters Col Levy, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and Milton Moon, and glass artist Klaus Moje (see Plate 15: before page 145), were practitioners who had been working since the 1960s, and younger people continued to set up similar practices. Some of the work produced in this way was very highly regarded by peers and started to fetch high prices for commissions and from collectors.

Within this framework, a number of craftspeople developed practices that centred on the production of unique objects, sometimes functional, and sometimes in sculptural forms. But sometimes the production of unique objects that required teamwork, as in glassblowing, posed problems for collectors and even other craftspeople, who believed that a work had to be made by the artist's own hands in order to be 'original' and therefore a work of art. A key example is the work of American glass artist, Dale Chihuly, who works with teams of up to 20 people to make the huge blown, vessel-oriented works for which he is famous. As Chihuly now only designs and oversees the pieces (he likens himself to a film director) his works were at first criticised (by glassworkers as well as collectors) for not being 'original',

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485Lyn Tune, op cit (1987); see also Artlink: Focus on Design vol 9/4 1989-90; see also Jane Gilmore and Ted Hopkins Our Own Future (1989)
486By the late 1980s some of the dealers and art auctioneers, like Christie's, Lawson's and Sotheby's in Australia, were becoming interested in work from the 1940s, and much of that which had been collected started appearing in auction houses as collectors moved to smaller houses, or died.
While the weavers of the immediate post-war years were most interested in working with the technique and design of weaving fine cloth, Liz Williamson (b.1946), working in the nineties, has benefitted from the freedom of expression explored in the 1970s by those who sought to free weaving from the loom. She is a loom weaver who makes functional shawls and wraps, but is deeply interested in exploring meanings through colour, through cloth structures and through the real and metaphoric functions of cloth and coverings. Drawing on techniques as varied as African strip cloth weaving traditions and domestic processes like darning and patching worn textiles, as well as deliberately using shrinking processes along with odd fibres, she makes seductive and challenging woven statements. In works like Surface she is often dealing with the construction of landforms as well as of weaving, and in ideas of ‘covering’.

Plate 17: Liz Williamson
(see page 183) Land folds (detail) handwoven in wool, wool blend, wool lycra, copper wire, nylon monofilament and gold threads, and (right) Tear (detail), cotton and polyester threads, both made in Sydney in 1993 and 1996. (40 x 165 and 40 x 160cm)
especially as he signs them. This team approach is the one used traditionally by the Murano glass factories which are Chihuly's model, and the model, now, on a smaller scale, for most contemporary glass blowers in Australia. The independent one-person glass studio as an ideal was an invention of the post-war American crafts movement and the influence of the art world that placed value on the expression of the artist as an individual.

During the 1980s there was a re-evaluation of designing and making for multiple production and a different marketplace. Craftspeople working in, for example, furniture design and glass and ceramic production, were able to find places in 'niche markets' because of the flexibility with which, compared with larger industries, they could develop custom-made 'designed' items in small production runs. They were able to use new technologies alongside handskills to produce unique or small-run items that retained a personal, or handmade, aesthetic - and that did not necessarily compromise their identity as individual designer-makers or 'artists'. Many people, like potter Bronwyn Kemp, weaver Liz Williamson (see Plate 17: previous page), metal worker Robert Foster and glass artists Brian Hirst and Warren Langley, worked across both art and semi-industrial production, sometimes to the extent of maintaining different labels or companies.487 Catherine Truman, for example, designed and made production items of jewellery with her colleagues in the Gray Street jewellery workshop in Adelaide, but also took on large public art commissions as well as maintaining a personal practice centred on carving small wooden objects that were metaphors for personal and social issues. (see Plate 2: before page 1) Designer Gerry Wedd successfully crossed jewellery designing and making, ceramic design and production in both large and small scale, and designing printed textiles for streetwear and furnishing. (see Plate 3: before page 11)

Designing for small series production did not mean carrying out the whole making process oneself; the notion of the craftsperson as designer-maker came to mean someone who would design and then, perhaps, contract aspects of the work either to an assistant or to an outside specialist business. This led in some instances to designing multiple, interchangeable, basic components for varying production work. Some potters had already been making interchangeable components for production, and furniture-makers, jewellers and clothing-makers now also 'contracted out' part of the production process.488 Jenny Kee, for example, had employed contract hand-knitters for her distinctive 'art-clothing' from the early 1970s (see Plate 25: before page 201).

487 For example, glass artist Warren Langley signs his one off works with his name, while also running a business making glass architectural blocks and tiles as 'Ozone'; metal worker Robert Foster similarly operates as 'Fink Design'.

488 Early examples include those making knitted clothing, like Jenny Kee, Linez at the Jam Factory, Jenni Dudley and others, who contracted out knitting and sewing. In jewellery, Margaret Kirkwood set up an arrangement with a casting business; Larsen and Lewers sent production work out to be anodised, and Lyn Tune used a local company for laser
Plate 18: Carlier Makigawa
(see page 184) Brooch, 925 sterling silver and monel, made in Melbourne in 1991. (5 x 13cm approx)

Carlier Makigawa (b.1952) combines her strong interest in the qualities of materials and the processes of working with them, with a clear sense of their presentation. Many of her works refer to a psychological and physical enclosure of space. While a student she saw a travelling exhibition of Japanese packaging, and in 1984, enclosing river stones in box-frames, said it 'has always had an impact on me, the subtle and simple use of natural material that highlights the Japanese aesthetic...I have always been a collector of natural objects...and I enjoy creating a special environment for them or by them.' Now using a range of traditional and new metals for their colour as well as their manipulability, she also determines how the works should be worn (pendants should be worn at the level of the belly button.)

Makigawa is also one of the many contemporary jewellers who, in being aware of the special relationship of jewellery to the body, have used photography with theatrical effect to display their work.
Les Blakebrough and Penny Smith, in Tasmania, both spent some time researching in Scandinavian and British ceramic factories in the 1990s, and then set up a ceramic production unit at the University of Tasmania's Centre for the Arts whose purpose was to design for semi-industrial production. This was one of a number of similar small enterprises that reflected a major shift from the philosophy that had rejected these processes in the 1960s.

Contracting out also applied to those undertaking major commissions. Peter Travis, for example, employed modellers to construct the maquettes of buildings into which he was placing aerial textile sculpture and sent work out for sewing and dyeing. Many aspects of the making of rugs and furniture and other commissions for the New Parliament House between 1982 and 1988 were contracted out by the designer-makers and by the architects, and this reinforced and stimulated an already discernable pattern of working.

It was not, however, possible for everyone to set up the individual studios they needed. While several attempts had been made in the 1970s to establish co-operatives or group workshops, shared studios like those of the jewellers in the Gray Street Workshops in Adelaide, the metalsmiths at EGS (Edgoose, Guest and Schlabowsky) studio in Melbourne and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative in Hobart, became increasingly common in the 1980s as craftspeople and designer-makers grouped together to share resources and equipment, and sometimes to share commissions.489

In the early 1990s some designers, like Marc Newson (see Plate 19: next page) and Susan Cohn, were entering into manufacturing arrangements with overseas companies. Susan Cohn's Cohn-cave bowl of perforated aluminium was taken up by the Italian company, Alessi. Newson increasingly worked directly on-line through the internet with manufacturers in Australia, France and Japan to put his product design, furniture and lighting into production.

The main difference in work practice at this time seemed to be that, whereas production work in the past had generally taken second place to exhibition work, these makers saw production for new markets other than galleries as a legitimate and exciting practice. Craftspeople also became much more professional about the presentation of their work. The days of wrapping things in newspaper were over: labels, swing-tags, packaging and promotional leaflets, as well as detailed biographical and photographic documentation became essential (see for example, Plate 18: previous page).

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489 Other examples of shared workshops included the Inner City Clayworkers (Sydney); the jewellery and silversmithing studios Workshop 3000 (Melbourne) and Ipso Facto (Sydney); the Glass Artists Gallery and Turkey Works in Sydney; Whitehall Industries in Melbourne; and the Designer-makers Tasmania Co-operative.
Marc Newson (b. 1963) reflects a particular kind of possibility for contemporary designer-makers. Trained in the early 1980s as a jeweller and sculptor rather than a designer, he continued to value making his own prototypes until the mid-1990s. ‘I developed a passion for technique, for geometry and for the possible rapport between art, science and technology.’ The Embryo chair, based on his trademark three-dimensional figure-eight shape, is now made in small series by the Japanese company Idée. Newson’s sources of ideas have ranged from furniture in classical paintings to forms suggested by the possibilities of high-tech materials and aeronautical technology, all with a concern for immaculate crafted finish.

Newson is now based in London but designs objects and building interiors on-line and communicates through internet to manufacturers and distributors world-wide. ‘I still conceive on paper,’ he says, ‘but with the computer I can totally prepare an object for tooling without having to create models...But after ten years in the trade, I’ve honed my knowledge enough to know what’s going to work and what’s not.’

Marc Newson in Stephen Todd, ‘Liquid Geometry’ Monument 20 1997 30-43
and the most effective promotion was through the innovative and well-designed pages of life-style magazines.

**Reviewing crafts ideals**

**Questions of value**

Such significant changes (in the perceptions that practitioners held of their own identity; in the direction and infrastructure of arts education and funding; in the expectations of audiences and markets; in the opportunities provided by new technologies; and through the challenges posed by cultural theories) gave craftspeople an opportunity to review some of the specific values to do with the crafts that had been controversial in relation to fine art. These included - alongside and often part of their expression of ideas - values associated with enjoyment of working with materials, the development of skill, an understanding of process, the roles of decoration and function and the consideration of a market.

From the time of the Crafts Enquiry survey in the early 1970s the age profile of professional craftspeople had been changing: by the mid-eighties, five to ten years of graduates from even the new courses had now entered the field. These younger people had had different and wider cultural associations throughout their training, and were also aware of a tightened economy and the need to find markets if they were going to keep working. Most had not been part of the fights for funding, equality of representation or education, and most certainly had little experience of the idealism of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Theirs was a fairly pragmatic view of the world, but in common with their predecessors they sought self-directed expressive activity or employment, and an enjoyment of materials, processes and purpose.

A series of short articles written by Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon under the general title ‘Perspectives on Craft’, and published in the British journal *Craft* in 1982, offered some of the earliest published provocative ideas to challenge art ideals. They surveyed a number of craftspeople in England at the time, and summarised their findings under the topics (equally pertinent in Australia) of: ‘The Myth of the Happy Artisan’, ‘Crafts: With or Without Art’, ‘Skill: a Word to Start an Argument’, ‘Crafts in the Market-Place’, and ‘Nostalgia Isn’t What It Used to Be’. They grouped the respondents to their survey into three areas that they suggested represented different traditions up to that time: Arts and Crafts (Cotswold version), Council of Industrial Design (Haymarket version) and Craftsman’s Art (South Kensington version) - and elsewhere, also added the Oriental Mystic (Cornish version).

Frayling and Snowdon concluded that although these groups might differ in the words they use: (”reason versus feelings”, “theory which grows out of good practice”, “theory versus practice”)...all are agreed that craft activity...
represents a type of knowledge the effectiveness of which can be demonstrated rather than articulated in a verbal way:

The distinction between craft and other types of knowledge is not one between theory (or reason) and practice (or feeling) - and it may well be disastrous to suggest it is. The distinction is between two ways of knowing. But if one is locked up in a black box and labelled ‘experience’, then it is in constant danger of not being counted as knowledge at all.

Some attempts had been made to penetrate this black box, they suggested:

...through research into how children can best develop the intelligence of feeling; through the sociology of ‘doing craft’ (as opposed to the sociology of craftspeople); through the history of how craft traditions are passed on; through the psychology of visual perception and the science of why materials behave as they do; and through an understanding of what the Victorians called the ‘grammar of ornament’.

Furthermore, they suggested that a second issue was ‘the widespread temptation to find substitutes for the analysis of craft knowledge in a series of attitudes and postures which are based on the mythology of craft - to put the black box on a pedestal and call it magic. Could it be,’ they asked, ‘that these attitudes, in the 1980s, sustain the makers, their market, and indeed the whole crafts revival?’ Frayling and Snowdon concluded that:

...while most accounts of craftsmanship depend for their support on sentimentality and conservatism and while most discussions of craft knowledge remain at the level of hippie folk-wisdom, proper assessment of craft and its contemporary value and significance will forever remain obscured.

Frayling and Snowdon were writing from a British perspective: one that was shaped by the experience of the Arts and Crafts movement, a history of legislation for good taste in the 1940s, a direct experience of industrialisation and a long history of British art and design education. Without such direct industrial contradictions, and despite its inheritance of British crafts ideals, Australia, by contrast, was equally aligned at this stage to the United States and its preoccupations with the personal expression of an individual through art. Personal expression, and the assertion of the artist as an individual, was associated with the belief that art, and therefore art-craft, was to do with idea rather than utility.

Because of the prolific scale of publication and more affluent marketplace in the United States, the kind of objects made there and the claims that were made for them were increasingly influential in Australia. At the Philbrook Museum of Art in the United States in 1987, curators Marcia and Tom Manhart titled an important exhibition, The Eloquent Object: American Art

490Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon ‘Nostalgia Isn’t What It Used to Be’ in John Houston Crafts Classics Since the 1940s (1988) 131
491Christopher Frayling and Helen Snowdon ibid (1988) 132
in Craft Media Since 1945'. The American catalogue essayists still appeared to hold a continuing commitment to the pursuit of with ‘craft-as-art’ ideals, and revealed continuing difficulty in dealing with issues of materials, functions and quality. John Perrault had claimed, for example: ‘Crafts and fine art are one...it is only quality that makes a difference. There is no such thing as a good craft object, for a good craft object is an art object.’ But querying even the term ‘art in craft media’, reviewer Tony Chastain-Chapman asked: ‘Can it be...that this is not a bold affirmation but rather an apology for the objects in their show not being made of the right materials?’ However, while criticising the positions of the curators, Chastain-Chapman went on to reveal his own prejudice, claiming as fact:

...that there are commonsense distinctions between art and craft. Much of what is shown...is clearly art (sculpture for the most part) rather than craft because of its lack of utility...and because its creators are clearly artists...whose work is distinguished from that of other artists by unique qualities arising out of the exercise of their individual imaginations.\(^{492}\)

For Australians, skill and materials were certainly issues, as had been demonstrated by the art world’s rejection of them in the 1970s, an attitude that had lingered into the 1980s. But perhaps an equal issue was ‘function’, or in fact, ‘non-function’, because it was non-functional work that so many people had aspired to: in the form of what they called ‘personal work’, ‘conceptual work’, ‘exhibition work’, ‘experimental work’, ‘real work’, ‘sculptural work’, ‘one off pieces’ and even ‘spiritual work’, despite that fact that functional work could also be personal, real, experimental, one-off and meaningful.\(^{493}\) People tended to sign non-functional works (as well as their functional exhibition pieces), but not always their production or commissioned work. Non-functional work was seen to give greater status as an artist, even over and above the production of functional exhibition pieces.

‘Function’ had been most generally discussed in terms of utility, implying a practical use for something: whether it worked or not.\(^{494}\) But it became clear to craftspeople in the 1980s, that ‘function’ could mean much more than this: art works could function as symbols of status and value. John Berger, for example, in discussing eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings of property and possessions, explained that they represented what the owner of the painting was able to own: these works functioned as a symbolic measure of the owner’s success.\(^{495}\) In the same way, contemporary works acquired by

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\(^{493}\)A point of view reinforced by Elizabeth McClure, paper to Ausglass conference, Sydney 1991

\(^{494}\)Functional ideals discredited an object if it did not ‘work’. What craftspeople had called ‘criticism’ had often been a measurement against functional expectations: teapots, for example, had to submit to the ‘pour test’.

\(^{495}\)John Berger Ways of Seeing (1971) Chapter 5
Chapter 5: Finding a new voice

museums and collectors functioned both to enhance the status of both the collector and collection, and the artist. The ‘neutral’ context of a gallery, designed to remove works from a ‘function’, in fact functioned as an agreed site that determined the significance of the work.

While art once ‘functioned’ within groups that shared a common symbolic order, a circumstance that still occurred in some societies (see for example, basket-weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie, Plate 20: following page), contemporary Western artists no longer worked in such confined frameworks: following current directions, they worked more independently with more personal symbolic references drawn from a wide range of sources. However, visual artists who may have believed that as individuals they controlled the meaning of their work - beyond function - were in reality still working within a distinct art world framework that had a history of attitudes and expectations of what art was believed to be, what an artist was and how both were expected to function. In turn, artists also had their own expectations of what they wanted from the (current) art world and the way it should function for them.

There was, after all, a shared social order: art functioned to provide both symbolic meaning for maker and viewer and economic value as income or investment.

In 1988 the Crafts Council of Australia sought to provide a forum where the social context of the crafts could be discussed. The intent was to draw this issue to the attention of both craftspeople and the wider art world in order to place equal cultural value on the crafts. But sociologist Janet Wolff, a speaker at the conference, believed that the event as a whole had failed to take up a social-historical perspective on the crafts. Speakers had tended to use the ‘social’ as a backdrop to descriptive detail, or had related their work to their experience and claimed that that made it ‘social’. It was still possible, she pointed out, ‘to avoid any analysis of the practices of craft-making in

496 The body and ground paintings of Aboriginal Australians, and the jewellery, textiles, and carved and modelled figures of the tribal peoples of Africa, South America and Asia, their usually abstracted forms often labelled primitive or naïve, succeed because the makers know their subjects so well. They share a spiritual and symbolic content of the objects with their group, and they also fully understand the materials and the processes of working with them.

497 Robert Hughes ‘Art and Money’ in Nothing if Not Critical (1987) 396. Hughes suggested that art collecting, for example, could be described to function as an aspect of corporate investment, a ‘creation of confidence’ that might be ‘the cultural artifact of the last half of the twentieth century.’ He identified the beginning of this phenomenon with the appearance of the Times-Sotheby Art Indexes around 1966 that gave reports and graphs from auction houses on the statistics of movements in art prices with ‘the trustworthy look of the Times financial page’.

498 This took place in Sydney in 1988 as the World Crafts Council’s International Conference, The Social Context of the Crafts and of Making.
Plate 20: Yvonne Koolmatrie
(see page 188) Yabbie trap, eel trap and fish trap, woven in sedge rush (lepidosperma canesens) by Ngarrindjeri artist Yvonne Koolmatrie, lower Murray River region, South Australia 1993. (45 x 46 x 76, 57 x 96, 38 x 88cm)

Yvonne Koolmatrie (b.1945) has been involved in the revival of this coil-bundle and loop-stitched process, traditional amongst her people in the lower Murray River area of South Australia. As well as functional forms like these, she also makes other items like aeroplanes and turtles. This process was taken by missionaries to other parts of Australia like Arnhemland, where local Aboriginal people have developed their own styles with local materials. The spectacular forms of these utilitarian object are viewed as sculpture by the art world, and Koolmatrie's fish-traps were included in the Venice Biennale in 1997.
terms of the social relations in which they occur, the social values that they represent, and social meanings which they produce and maintain.499

Wolff proposed that it was ‘less the question of social context that is at issue than the question of social production’. The question of whether craft is art, or what differentiates the two:

...simply cannot be answered in intrinsic terms - in terms of the particular characteristics of works of art or craft, of whether or not an object is functional, or of whether or not production is individual or sequential...nor can simple legislation remove the division.

Furthermore, pointing out that the artist/craftsperson is a social being, and that art is always collective action, she suggested that the second issue of handicraft versus design for industry, was also defused by a social-historical perspective:

For it is immediately clear that the implicit notion of ‘pure creativity,’ somehow contaminated by losing control over the entire process, was always a myth...although there can be more or less control over the production process, the stark opposition of individual creativity/autonomy and compromised collaboration is quite misconceived.500

‘What is it that we seek so desperately in this art-craft marriage?’ asked writer and gallery director Garth Clarke in the United States in 1987, looking at the ‘cultural orphans’ who denied the crafts as their parent, but where the fine arts, in turn, denied paternity. He proposed that it was not aesthetic freedom that people sought, because ‘that is tied to the human spirit and not to labels and definitions’, but to a political goal: to pursuit of wealth and power. He saw a the future in reviewing crafts practice within the applied, rather than the fine arts, saying:

...our reward will be the achievement will be the achievement of an honest context and a reconnection with the umbilical cords of the past. Our contribution to the applied arts will be to bring it in to the present and give it a new and dynamic role in the contemporary cultural arena.501

In 1990 Jenny Zimmer also concluded that in their pursuit of art ideals the crafts had, in the end, thrown the baby out with the bathwater. ‘The ’80s project of exploding or blurring the art/craft definition now seems futile, illogical and gratuitous,’ she said:

Futile because it is impossible to do so while one of the two terms is so firmly entrenched and value-laden; illogical, because to remove the distinction under current conditions may lead to losses on both sides rather than composite gains; and gratuitous because, over the broad span of history,

500Janet Wolff ibid (1988)
501Garth Clark ‘Comment’ American Craft Dec 1986/Jan 1987 14-15
good craft always takes its rightful place alongside good art. The museums are full of both.502

She argued that because art is the winner everyone wants to be an artist. But, despite the promises to the crafts offered by Postmodernism, she also pointed out that: ‘Postmodern theory as currently practised is ill-equipped to serve the crafts, and this has proven detrimental to their identity.’ Indeed, she suggested, ‘if form, function and decoration, and the media and techniques they entail, seem more prosaic than meaning, it is because modern interpretive theory has fixated on the latter.’ She acknowledged that there were perfectly acceptable instances of craftspeople abandoning their interest in opting for ideas-based crafts practice, and that there were are also craftspeople and artists who might fulfil the criteria for both art and craft, or move regularly back and forth between the two:

But there are some crafts practitioners who simply make high quality, useful, imaginative, ornamental craft objects but demand that they be categorised and criticised under the current definition of art. Their demands seem pretentious and misguided.503

In 1987 Peter Dormer reviewed the previous twenty years of jewellery-making. ‘Of all the decorative arts in Europe’, he said, ‘Jewellery has been...the most intelligent, the most reflective and the least historicist...The leaders of the new jewellery movement turned jewellery into an intellectual as well as an intelligent activity.’ But he also pointed out that by this time there had been a lot of pretentiousness and that all the more obvious questions about what jewellery is had been asked:

The contemporary jewellery movement must recognise and overcome its current weakness of having forgotten the consumer...Too many...have forgotten that their role is also...to serve a public as well as making their names in the tiny quasi art world of avant-garde jewellery.

Reminding us the greatest recent revolution in wearables had come from the Swatch watch and the Sony Walkman, he observed that:

The lesson here is that where a thing is both functional and genuinely entertaining, it will cross boundaries and break conventions...It seems strange that the greatest progress in innovative wearable objects is coming not from jewellery but from product designers.504

Speaking about jewellery, but also providing a framework that could be applied to others, he saw the roles for the modern jeweller as to: create objects that people want to wear for sheer pleasure; to have a role in applying their ideas to the design of consumable products; to continue to break new ground, recognising the challenge of new technologies; and also to be an

502 Jenny Zimmer ‘Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater’ The Sydney Review October 1990 10-11
503 Jenny Zimmer ibid (1990)
504 Peter Dormer ‘What is the Future for Contemporary Jewellery?’ Lemel Dec 1987 3-4
artist. However, he cautioned: 'The word artist is over-used and it should be employed rarely and only for the handful of individuals who are able to create metaphors that give us a new way of seeing the world.'

Nonetheless, even though these issues were increasingly discussed, prejudice about the superiority of 'art' remained.

In reviewing the exhibition, Symmetry, in 1995, which juxtaposed selected crafts practices with kindred trades: 'the first theorised craft exhibition, if you like', Anne Brennan cited a discussion with a painter who expressed the view that 'it was inappropriate to fund practice which was simply about "making things"...[and] didn't I agree that the most interesting craft was "intellectual" rather than functional?' Brennan wondered where all the writing she and others had been publishing was being read. 'Of course', she observed, it was:

...crucial that we perceive these theoretical developments as intended principally for the interest and extension of craftspeople, rather than as a strategy for justifying craft to the critical hierarchies of the visual arts. On the other hand, craft practice is part of a broader visual culture, and as such, one expects that a certain amount of what is written will be received and digested by practitioners in other fields...

This well-funded Australian exhibition was supported in the interests of crafts equity with the visual arts as an example of an intellectualisation of the crafts from their own traditions. However, despite its attempts to realign the crafts with trades rather than art (for example jewellery with dentistry, glass blowing with jazz, carpentry with surgery), the trades were 'curiously absent in the exhibition itself'.

The exhibition still took place in art galleries and was viewed by arts audiences, and Anne Brennan believed that it worked best in its documented form to art audiences, rather than through either its display or in the audiences it attracted. Not all the relationships and processes necessary to meet its goals were satisfactorily apparent.

This exhibition was perhaps an example of the crafts world's perceived need to theorise the crafts, usually expressed as the 'need for critical debate'. But Peter Timms argued that while 'no-one could seriously argue against the decoding of works of art', the increasing dominance of tertiary discourse seemed to be 'the result of the low priority given in universities to the direct confrontation with artworks.' He warned that in the pursuit of these particular art ideals, the crafts were in danger of being theory-driven by academics, in the way that many essays in a recent anthology managed 'to discuss quite complex theoretical ideas about craft without once referring to any specific examples of craftwork.' Instead of asking for more, he suggested 'it would be

505 Peter Dormer ibid (1987) 3-4
506 Anne Brennan 'Symmetry' Object 4 1994-95 10
507 Anne Brennan ibid (1994-95) 14
more constructive to ask ourselves what kind of theoretical debate we want, who we want to communicate it with and what we hope to achieve.'

Donald Kuspit, art critic and long-time observer of the crafts in New York, said, of the pursuit of art ideals by the crafts in 1990: 'It seems to me that if craft wants to be taken seriously, and move from artifact to art, it has to be willing to submit to various critical languages that are brought to bear on other arts.'

One could add that, at the same time, and especially if the pursuit of art ideals was not the only pursuit, that the languages of the crafts, applied arts, decorative arts, design and industry also needed to be better understood by critics and reviewers, as well as makers, and included in the discussion.

Questions of quality
Questioning the craft-as-art ideal, and whether and how a work might best be identified as art, craft or design, led to a reassessment of the criteria used to determine how any work might be judged as 'good'. Why, after all, would one question the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, if it did not seem to matter, to a great many people who have discussed what had become known as the 'art-craft debate' for some decades, where the pursuit was leading?

To address the issue of judgement, the 'peer-group' assessment system used by bodies like the Australia Council, and the practice of using changing selection committees for major exhibitions, appointments and events by a number of cultural institutions, were strategies devised to gauge professional opinions about excellence (or quality or significance), at any particular time. As Pru La Motte said in 1986 of the fickleness of the art world, 'Art is what you say it is, and that changes.'

The small group of curators responsible for crafts collections, within the various broader collections of decorative arts, fine arts and social history in state and national institutions, and the increasing number of people interested in developing temporary exhibitions that addressed intellectual aspects of the meaning of the crafts, all contributed to assessments and judgements of worth, significance and quality. Assessment of what was good or significant was determined at that time by their considered opinion and experience.

There were no clear guidelines for measurement. In late 1996, writer, curator and art journal editor Peter Timms was interviewed on this topic, along with a number of other writers, critics and publishers in the arts, on Arts National radio. He observed that he believed we all expect to have to work hard to

508 Peter Timms 'Yes, But What Kind of Craft Debate?' Craft Victoria Dec/Jan 1992-93 3,4
509 Donald Kuspit interviewed in Matthew Kangas 'Critics Talk Back' The Crafts Report Jan 1990
510 Interview with Pru La Motte 1986
511 Peter Timms, on Arts Today ABC radio with Julie Copeland 30 Nov 1996
understand such things as economics, philosophy or science, and that we should also be equally prepared to work to understand creative works in whatever form. He also pointed out that while our view of what art is, changes, at any time we must also accept that there is both good and bad art. He proposed that in making judgements, while we may or may not be right in our view, the issue is to have a position about it, and to say why one holds that position, and, more importantly, to be prepared to be contradicted, or even be wrong.

This was not just an issue for the visual arts and crafts. In a reply to Victor Margolin, who had ‘implied that a preoccupation with “good design” was entirely inappropriate, and had led design history astray’, design historian Adrian Forty pointed out in 1993 that ‘the whole question of judging quality in design, of discriminating between good and bad design, is essential to the entire activity of design.’

How we determine what makes one design better than another, relies, he said, upon being able to make critical judgements about quality. The whole question of how people arrive at these judgements, and the arguments they invoke to support them seem to me to be extremely important subjects.’ Like Timms, he suggested that we don’t have to accept all points of view, but should not be dismissive of other judgements and rather, be able to talk about areas of disagreement:

What, though, I do find unhelpful to design is the post-structuralist view that all judgements are as good, or as bad as each other...We should argue about the grounds on which those decisions are made, but we should not fall into the nihilistic trap of thinking that no judgements are worth making.\(^{512}\)

Some views on how such judgements could be made had rather regulatory solutions. Reviewing the design exhibition, Taste, in London in 1984, Peter Fuller argued that designers cannot opt out of considering the subjective responses of the marketplace, and discussed through historical examples, the way personal preferences are related to universal aesthetic responses. He claimed that the rupture of uniting social and religious beliefs, or illusions, had opened the way for a taste defined by a market economy, and advocated instead, for a legislated control of taste for design in industry that ‘would not be a limitation on aesthetic life so much as a *sine qua non* of its continued survival’.\(^{513}\)

In relation to making judgements in the crafts, contemporary thought and debate showed that, contrary to influential art ideals that had persisted since the 1970s, issues of function, decoration, skill and enjoyment of materials were important to the crafts, and could also apply to every art practice. They also showed that while we can see that hierarchies of value in art practice are

\(^{512}\)Adrian Forty ‘Debate’ *Journal of Design History* 6 2 1993 131

\(^{513}\)Peter Fuller ‘Taste - You can’t opt out’ *Design* 423 March 1984 41-42
culturally constructed and reinforced, those that place the fine arts above other visual arts practices, nevertheless prevail.

However, it was evident in both theory and practice that simply being 'non-functional' or 'without skill' or 'working with ideas' did not always make something 'art', let alone 'good art', regardless of what was intended in making it, how it was described or where it was exhibited.

What seemed to be needed was a sense of mutual respect for 'good' works (in both ideas and practical resolution) from a range of starting points that might not only be a painting or sculpture, but also a vessel, a length of cloth, a chair or an item of jewellery.

Case studies: art ideals from crafts traditions

Within the broad scope of crafts practice, where a range of approaches to practice are valid, it is possible in my view for art ideals and crafts traditions to come together successfully.

The following brief case studies demonstrate the ways some craftspeople have, in my opinion, successfully addressed art ideals from different traditions within one particular media-based practice, ceramics - although these particular practitioners would be unlikely to call their work 'art', and would be even more unlikely to call it 'art-craft'. Similar approaches can be found in for example, glass, textiles and jewellery and metalwork.

The four people discussed here have spent many years developing not only their ideas, but also the particular skills they need to carry them out. All have well-researched understandings of the history of ceramics, especially the cultural meanings and technical processes that lie behind their chosen ways of working. And they are all conversant with the issues of education, funding, marketing and theory in the wider art world. Together they present a contemporary expression of many of the issues that have confronted potters over several thousand years, especially the changing relationships between individuals and society, art and industry. However, each one is working from a different starting point within this history. It is interesting not only to trace their individual connections with the past, but also to identify contrasts and links between the intents and practices of the people themselves.

From handcraft traditions

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (born 1935) and Stephen Bowers (born 1952) make hand-thrown, functional vessel forms. Both have a long term interest in

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514 These studies have been adapted from Grace Cochrane [Ceramics: International and Australian histories, with case studies] in a proposed [untitled] publication for Department of School Education New South Wales Sydney 1998
developing particular forms and decoration, and in consciously placing their work in a space. Yet their work is very different.

**Gwyn Hanssen Pigott**

In 1954 Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (at that time Gwyn John) was studying for a fine arts degree at the University of Melbourne. She was intrigued by the Chinese and Korean pottery in the National Gallery of Victoria and had read Bernard Leach’s *A Potters Book*. Her thesis required her to collect information from significant practising potters in Victoria and New South Wales, including Ivan McMeekin at the Sturt workshops. She was eventually apprenticed to McMeekin for three years and considers him her most important influence: ‘he showed me how to look at pots’.515

She moved to England and worked with key studio potters of the time, including Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew:

> Here I was witness to the daily commitment to quality, the constant curiosity and change, the personal involvements with the history of the craft and the obsessive reading for deeper insights’.516

Many of her experiences in these years are still contributing, years later, to her current work. She said of Hans Coper’s modernist work in 1965: ‘I walked down ... into a place so still; held, not immediately by the pots themselves, but by a sense that the space between the pots were recognised forms too: negatives.’517 Later, attracted by the freshness and vigour of traditional woodfired French stonewares, she set up a pottery in rural France, where she worked on refining glazes and woodfiring processes to make more subtle effects in her own work. In the early 1970s she also saw the work of the ‘still life’ painter Giorgio Morandi:

> I love his searching, obsessive, describing of the common objects that were his subject and measure...His work is substantial, tenuous; disturbing, resolved...It is about essence; the metaphysical expressed through the solidly physical and knowable.518

She returned to Australia in 1973, and focused on using Tasmanian clay and glaze materials to make hand thrown wood-fired domestic stonewares with subtle, beautiful surfaces. By the late 1980s, she had:

...started to look more closely at how pots, perfectly contained within themselves, sit with each other, changing each other. I was interested to find what could hold the pots together in a bonding that...could only be discovered after the firing when everything came into play: lushness, coolness, colour, weight, line.519

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515Interview, August 1997
516Gwyn Hanssen Pigott *Autobiographical Notes* 'The Studio Potter 20/ 1 Dec 1991 46
517Gwyn Hanssen Pigott *ibid* (1991) 46
518Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ‘Notes from Netherdale’ *Ceramics Art and Perception* 27 1997 79
519 Gwyn Hanssen Pigott *ibid* (1997)
Plate 21: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott
(see page 196) Family portrait, woodfired porcelain, made at Finch Hatton, Queensland, in 1996.

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (b. 1936) makes hand thrown wood-fired domestic stonewares with subtle, beautiful surfaces. In the late 1980s, she ‘started to look more closely at how pots, perfectly contained within themselves, sit with each other, changing each other. I was interested to find what could hold the pots together in a bonding that...could only be discovered after the firing when everything came into play: lushness, coolness, colour, weight, line’.

She started to make groupings of pots, calling them ‘inseparable’, or ‘still life’ groups. New works are more like families: ‘They are rather pale, like memories: matt like frescoes...Beauty, and our response to it, remains a mystery’, she said in 1997. ‘But it seems to me that, in the alchemy of making, the pot becomes subtly humanised. It is as though a kind of knowing - a history of understanding, and a sort of longing is translated, through care and consideration, and an intimate connecting with the stuff under our fingers...into a form with an independent life.’ Always made as pots first, but inevitably linked to still-life painting, Hanssen Pigott’s work is valued in both spheres.
She started to make groupings of pots, calling them ‘inseparable’, or ‘still life’ groups, because she wanted them to be considered in a way that ‘might raise a question, lengthen a glance (see Plate 21: previous page). The space between the pots became as important to her as their shapes and colours, and she is precise about the way they should be placed together, with ‘tensions and resolutions, quirky relationships and sometimes a certain, restful, classicism.’ She also prefers them to be viewed at certain eyelevels and in certain lighting.

Not all the work is still. A touring exhibition about landscape provoked her to make horizontal groupings, some ‘wandering’, some ‘craggy’ and some ‘dishes limpid and liquid as lagoons.’ Groups like Jug Parade came about because ‘sometimes the colour, shapes, juxtapositions and jostlings suggest more of a street theatre than a silence’, and the title Exodus was given to two long lines of small, anonymous domestic pots that appeared to be displaced, crossing borders and seeking refuge. New works are more like families: ‘They are rather pale, like memories: matt like frescoes.’ The first, Procession, was made after her father’s funeral; in another called Waiting, the pots huddle in groups or stand aloof. ‘Beauty, and our response to it, remains a mystery’, she said in 1997:

...But it seems to me that, in the alchemy of making, the pot becomes subtly humanised. It is as though a kind of knowing - a history of understanding, and a sort of longing is translated, through care and consideration, and an intimate connecting with the stuff under our fingers...into a form with an independent life. With its own power to move.’

Stephen Bowers

Stephen Bowers, initially from Sydney, became involved in ceramics in the late 1970s when looking for a challenge while teaching in a country town in South Australia. He did a traineeship in the Jam Factory’s ceramic workshop in Adelaide in 1982, and spent the next five years as an art teacher during the day and a potter at night. There was a strong influence in the early years from the Adelaide version of ‘Funk’ ceramics. In 1990, Bowers himself became head of the ceramics workshop at the Jam Factory, responsible for both training of staff and the workshop’s production output. At the same time he maintained his own practice of painting on vessels and also contributed to some large public art projects including a commemorative birdbath in a park and fittings for the ceiling in an inner city arcade.

His work is almost always functional in its form, and ranges from mugs, jugs, teapots, plates and platters that are mainly domestic in their purpose, to monumental urns and jardinières intended for large public places. For the large items he usually collaborates with colleague Mark Heidenreich who is

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520 Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1997)
521 Gwyn Hanssen Pigott ibid (1997)
Plate 22: Stephen Bowers
(see page 196) Chintz vase with Cockatoos, underglaze and on-glaze enamel and lustre decoration on a terracotta-earthenware clay, made in Adelaide in 1994. (85 x 56cm)

Bowers brings together in his work many of the traditions from the history of ceramics. In this work, for example, surrounded by the gold lustre used by Islamic potters and European porcelain factories, are suggestions of eighteenth century Indian textile prints and designs from 19th century Japanese dinnerware. A 'willow pattern' fragment includes the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Luna Park and the Opera House instead of the more familiar pagoda, bridge and teahouse. Scraps of May Gibbs's drawings of the Gunmut Babies are mixed with illustrations from Alice in Wonderland and a few contemporary motifs like light bulbs and band-aids. All are combined with some clearly Australian motifs like cockatoos and gum-nuts against an imitation 'classical' marble background.
an expert thrower of large pots. The forms themselves, large or small, are crucial in the meaning of each work, but at the same time they are the basis for ordering his interest in the decoration of their surfaces. His drawing skills, and the way these are carried out through ceramic materials, are considerable, but the drawings are more than decoration and illustration. They are witty collages that betray thoughtful research and intelligent observation. (see Plate 1: before Contents page)

Bowers brings together in his work many of the traditions from the history of ceramics. In any one piece, one might find traces of many familiar styles and decorations. In Chintz vase with Cockatoos, for example, surrounded by the gold lustre used by Islamic potters and European porcelain factories, are suggestions of eighteenth century Indian textile prints and designs from 19th century Japanese dinnerware. A ‘willow pattern’ fragment includes the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Luna Park and the Opera House instead of the more familiar pagoda, bridge and teahouse. Scraps of May Gibbs’s drawings of the Gum Nut Babies are mixed with illustrations from Alice in Wonderland and a few contemporary motifs like light bulbs and band-aids. All are combined with some clearly Australian motifs like cockatoos and gum-nuts against an imitation ‘classical’ marble background. (see Plate 22: previous page)

During a four-month stay in an Australia Council studio in Barcelona, Spain, Bowers had the opportunity to study the historical and architectural ceramic treasures there. ‘The opportunity to observe and research those ceramic collections,’ he confirmed, ‘has strengthened my desire to be informed by historical practice and technique, and to strive for a personal contemporary output that is supported by acquired skills.’

Painstakingly painting and drawing over a white slip or on a light-bodied clay, using both under-glaze and on-glaze enamels, Stephen Bowers manages to condense the roughly two-thousand-year history of porcelain decoration, tin-glaze, lustred maiolica and china-painting onto contemporary works that also say something very particular about his view of Australia.

From industrial traditions
Rod Bamford (born 1958) and Patsy Hely (born 1946) both trained as studio potters but are now using aspects of semi-industrial processes in their work. They are not designing for industry, although, at times this has been a consideration for them. Instead, they could be described as now dealing as much with the idea of ceramic production and of the function of ceramic objects, as in making objects that can actually be used.

Rod Bamford
After graduating in 1979, Rod Bamford continued to study the social and technological aspects of ceramic traditions, through experiences as broad as

522 Stephen Bowers, interview 1998
Plate 23: Rod Bamford
(see page 198) This ceramic form, *Cone Aspire*, was made in five parts using a range of production processes including moulding, brick-extrusion, glazing and transfer-printing, in Sydney, in 1988-89. (180 x 63cm)

In the late 1980s Rod Bamford (b1958) worked with architectural or geometric forms such as spires, cones, spheres and finials to contrast two aspects of celebration - of death and achievement. *Cone Aspire* is a metaphor for both form (a spire) and intent (aspire). Modern industrial extruded clay is combined with transfer-printed images (or decals) of roses that one would expect to find on old domestic porcelain, and fragments of moulded classical figures. The deep-gouged spiral groove, in which the figures are embedded, is meant to suggest the Tower of Babel, the energy of a driving tool and the path of civilisation. Interview with Rod Bamford 1989.
working in a village in India and investigating collections in the museums of Europe and England. He is now most interested in using ceramic forms as the starting point of a narrative. The purpose of an object like a cup or a brick is now purely to tell part of a story, but a story that is still saying something about its function and the process of making it.

In 1986 he made some works in painted and glazed earthenware that were presented as ceramic shards or fragments, reminiscent of an archaeologist’s catalogued collection. However, the familiar domestic cup-handles and saucer rims in this ‘collection’ were disconcertingly gigantic in scale. He also began to combine fragments of well-known historical pieces or styles in new contexts, with titles that were amusing in their relation to ceramic history, for example: The contemplation of Josiah on Wedgwood, Willow pattern revisited, and Kändler’s last laugh.523 He observed at the time:

Part of my work is about the struggle between craft and the fine arts. I want to present the extraordinary breadth of the history of ceramics and excite interest in it. The social history of pottery is fascinating. The making of porcelain created a link between European and Chinese civilisations. The alchemists turned their skill to the making of porcelain and developed the first European porcelain, which was then taken up by the aristocracy for their own use and so played a part in the creation of social hierarchies.524

Later, Bamford worked with architectural or geometric forms such as spires, cones, spheres and finials. Through these he contrasted two aspects of celebration - of death (using the form of the gravestone) or of achievement (through shapes such as spires). In these works he consciously used a range of production processes for both aesthetic and metaphorical reasons. In Cone Aspire, for example, modern industrial extruded clay is combined with transfer-printed images (or decals) of roses that one would expect to find on old domestic porcelain, and fragments of moulded classical figures. The deep-gouged spiral groove, in which the figures are embedded, is meant to suggest the Tower of Babel, the energy of a driving tool and the path of civilisation. (see Plate 23: previous page)

Developing his interest in the ways in which meanings are related to materials and processes as well as ideas, he worked, in 1989, as an artist-in-residence in the huge Kohler Company Factory in Wisconsin in the United States that makes sanitary wares from industrial porcelain. Here he had the opportunity to assemble large installations from small industrially-made components of his own design (see Plate 24: following page):

I was taken over by the immense physicality of the place...The only way to deal with it was to forget preconceived plans, and instead to work from what

523 Wedgwood was an eighteenth century British ceramic manufacturer. Willow pattern was an English version of an Oriental blue-and white design style, and Kändler discovered the secret of making true porcelain for the German Meissen manufactory.

524 Rod Bamford in Kim Oldroyd ‘Unearthing the Future’ Craft Arts International Oct/Dec 1987 82
Plate 24: Rod Bamford
(see page 198) *In sensible Order* 2 is an installation of industrial 165 components made from industrial porcelain in the Kohler factory, USA, in 1989 (2.2 x 1.1 x 1.1m).

Most studio potters in the postwar period rejected industrial processes, and favoured a handmade aesthetic. But contemporary potters draw on many traditions. Rod Bamford (b1958) trained as studio potter but could be described as now dealing as much with the idea of ceramic production as in making objects that can actually be used.

In 1989 he worked as an artist-in-residence in the Kohler Company Factory in Wisconsin in the United States that makes sanitary wares from industrial porcelain. 'I was taken over by the immense physicality of the place...The only way to deal with it was to forget preconceived plans, and instead to work from what the place offered, realising that their materials and processes were inseparably linked. The restrictions of the factory moulded me as much as the product, and the only solution was to go with it, making work that linked conceptual ideas to the medium itself.' Interview, Rod Bamford 1997.
the place offered, realising that their materials and processes were inseparably linked. The restrictions of the factory moulded me as much as the product, and the only solution was to go with it, making work that linked conceptual ideas to the medium itself.\textsuperscript{525}

In 1994 he was one of a number of artists who were invited to the regional gallery in Ipswich, Queensland, to participate in a project where each would use local bricks. The Ipswich area has rich clay deposits and a long industrial ceramic history. Rod Bamford made a number of works around the idea that bricks are not only a module for building a dwelling, but also a symbol of a progressive society. He also saw connections between building with with bricks and the physical and genetic development of biological structures:

The functional red brick rash has spread across the landscape for decades as a building material...becoming a symbol, a backbone or spine that has supported the societal organism as both a physical structure and a cipher for progress.\textsuperscript{526}

The meanings in Rod Bamford's work are found in the ways viewers are provoked to make new associations by questioning their familiar experiences of functional and ornamental ceramic forms, as well as the processes that are used to make them.

\textit{Patsy Hely}

Trained as a potter in the 1970s, and working at first in wheel-thrown stoneware, Patsy Hely started making decorated earthenware in the early 1980s. Always influenced by industrially produced ceramics, she started to develop ways of making moulds for slipcasting in 1982. The forms she eventually produced reflected a contemporary interpretation of perhaps commercial Art Deco wares from the 1930s, but she drew on visual images from many cultures and traditions, and was influenced as much by architecture and printed or woven fabrics, as by ceramics. While on the one hand Hely was interested in making a production range in the most efficient way possible, on the other hand she was very conscious of these visual sources of her ideas.

In the 1990s she set up a project in Lismore, where she now lives, where studio ceramists can work in the art school using small manufacturing equipment like jigger and jolley moulding machines. Despite this very practical enterprise, Patsy Hely has maintained a particular interest in more philosophical issues. She is interested in the value we have placed on the hand-made object over the industrially produced one: she argues that it is too simple to say that one is warm and good and that the other is cold and bad - people, including potters, have always used tools. Now using porcelain in her work, she observes that:

\textsuperscript{525} Rod Bamford, interview 1997  
\textsuperscript{526} Rod Bamford ibid (1997)
...because this material when thin is capable of transmitting light, I have increasingly sought to produce objects that require frequent lifting up, principally cups and jugs. This focus on the way we experience an object has now led me to explore the way objects are held, how they fit in the hand, the way they are passed from one user to another, their potential for transferring heat and cold to the skin. In short to see the ‘using’ of functional objects as an active event rather than a passive one.527

By 1995, interested in the dual issues of value and touch, she started to incorporate into her work objects that showed obvious signs of having being previously used, showing wear and tear:

I started collecting old lids and handles at first, but quickly became an avid collector of all kinds of kitchen bits and pieces...all of the objects I found were machine made, yet I found I had a fondness for a lot of them...anodised aluminium, to green plastic knobs...it has made me question all manner of things - including what it is about objects that we value, and how those things are manifested in both hand and machine made ceramics.528

She combined these well-used objects that have had a previous, sometimes unrelated, function with her own undecorated, translucent porcelain forms. In one exhibition these groups or ‘selections’ of teapots, lidded bowls, coffeepots and beakers were displayed on special benches with kitchen surfaces like stainless steel, marble and wooden slats. The works combined recognisable components that had been well-used in their original function, with ghost-like forms that were seductively familiar in appearance and feel, and yet did not seem ‘real’. Combining the familiar and unfamiliar, the industrial and the handmade, the social and the personal - these works reflected an intelligent understanding of a long ceramic history.

Conclusion
A combination of social, economic and philosophical factors in the 1980s caused some crafts practitioners and writers to start to question their dependence on the values and structures of art and the art world.

Many recognised that if they were going to direct their practice towards the ideals of ‘art’ (or design), they must accept that they need also to address the current issues of the art, or design, world at that time.

It also became clear that, within the new contexts of social and cultural change, the practices, histories and values of the crafts themselves remained worthy of specific attention, alongside their connections with art and design. The final chapter will enlarge on this conclusion.

527 Patsy Hely ‘Moving Objects’ Masters thesis 1995 10
528 Patsy Hely Flying Arts Gazette October 1995 8