Plate 25: Jenny Kee
(see pages 101, 158) *Flying Oz* outfit (detail), designed by Jenny Kee in Sydney between 1984 and 1988.

Jenny Kee opened her shop Flamingo Park in Sydney in 1973. Her return to Sydney from London's Chelsea Antique Fair was prompted by the excitement of cultural change, which resulted among many artists in an overt expression of Australian identity. Kee focused on garments with well-known motifs like the Sydney Opera House, koalas, kangaroos, wattle and gumleaves. She was imaginative in her choice of manufacture, ranging from hand-knitting through local cottage industry to handprinting silk in Italy. This outfit includes *Flying Oz* printed jacquard silk (1984); and *Flying Oz 200* dress and *Kee Oz Collage* jacket, hand knitted in wool, angora, cashmere, mohair and alpaca yarns (1987/88).
Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter will review a number of themes that have been common to all the chapters in the thesis, regarding the character and effect of the crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals. It will summarise the nature of the postwar crafts revival as the contemporary crafts movement, within the context of a social history of the relationships between art, craft, design and industry. It will then look at two particular issues that provoked craftspeople to be interested in art ideals: firstly, the development of the perception of the artist as an individual; and secondly, the way our society has constructed hierarchies of value, in this case around the different practices of art and the crafts as they have been distinguished through certain media, forms and functions. Finally, it will survey some comments on the future of crafts practice.

Introduction

The contemporary crafts movement in Australia has taken several shifts in direction since its beginning in the late 1940s. Some people say it is over. Some seek to stabilise it in a position they believe remains central to shared social values. Some anticipate that a new cycle or revival will retrieve what they see as skills and values already lost. Others celebrate the great diversity of current practice.

Current crafts practice is certainly diverse. Some practitioners see their work as art and some as design, and some insist that what they do is, in fact, a craft. Some like an association with industry; some want an independent studio practice; others want to work within a community. Some see their work as part of a spiritual path to self-fulfilment and many see it as an escape from the 'rat-race'. Many see it as a small business and many others as an important part-time amateur activity. Some focus on materials and some on functions and forms, while others place greatest emphasis on their ideas. Some work with traditional tools and processes; others enthusiastically embrace current technologies as 'new tools'. Many follow most of these directions at the same time. Most people are extremely serious about what they do, however they see themselves, or describe themselves, and whatever sort of work they make.

This thesis has considered, within the broad context of crafts practice, the ideals of those people who, for various reasons, have sought for the 'crafts', an association with 'art'. I have been interested in where this ideal came from, the context in which it was followed, where it has led, and, moreover, what it might mean in the consideration of a way forward. Was the pursuit of art ideals by a significant sector of the contemporary crafts movement a rewarding course that offered liberation from traditions, or was it a trap that
served to lose the crafts some of their credibility through denying important aspects of those traditions?

Histories tend to reflect the values of dominant groups and the selective views of their historians. Those on the margins, like those in the crafts movement in relation to wider visual arts practices, have not always been in a position to articulate their differing views or experiences, however strong their following. It is really only in the last twenty years that such parallel but often ignored histories have been offered an opportunity for an equal place in the interpretation of the cultural life of 20th century Western society. In the meantime, apart from their own specialist documentation, they have had to join the mainstream practices - like art or design - or be ignored.

Despite the obvious commitment of practitioners and their supporters, the exemplary professional record of so many clearly significant craftspeople and the very successful lobby of the crafts movement for institutional support, it is nonetheless plain, through its lack of inclusion in general Australian cultural histories, in the confused public perception about crafts practice as a professional activity, through the antagonism of elements in the art world towards them, and even through the very wide range of terms that craftspeople use to describe themselves, that the crafts today do not have a single professional identity. Crafts practice is now so broadly placed across art, craft, industry and design that 'the movement' no longer has a single voice.

In reviewing the history of the contemporary crafts movement's pursuit of art ideals, some issues emerge that make it possible to reach some conclusions about the value of such a pursuit, and to consider a place for the crafts, or crafts practice, in the future.

Throughout the development of the movement, within the changing nature of post-war Australian society, there have been two main issues that have contributed to the pursuit of art ideals. The first is the increasing belief in the artist as a special individual, the ways in which that idea has been reinforced and the attraction that it holds for craftspeople. The second is the way developments in both the crafts and design have been affected by the privileged status that has been conferred on the 'fine' arts of painting and sculpture, its artists and those who acquire it.

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529 See Chapter 5 'Changing perceptions: art and cultural theory'
530 See comments in Chapter 2 about the non-inclusion of the history of the crafts movement in other Australian social and cultural histories.
531 See Chapter 4 'The Crafts Board' for findings of Crafts Enquiry 1975; and Chapter 5 'A Changing infrastructure' for similar findings after amalgamation of Visual Arts and Crafts Boards in 1987 that showed concern about this issue.
532 For example, John Olsen, in a review of Bernard Smith's 'Death of the Artist as Hero' Weekend Australian 27-28 February 1988, said 'It is a policy of our present government to encourage the craft scene as a social palliative...what must be faced is the decline of aesthetic principle; nobody seems to know what excellence is any more.'
The nature of the postwar crafts revival

This thesis has focused on the changing relationships in a triangle whose points might be the practices of art, craft and design. The perceived differences in value between art and craft have been debated for several hundred years, while the changing relationship between the crafts and industrial design and manufacture have also been reviewed since modern industrial manufacture began in the eighteenth century.533

There was once little differentiation in status between what are now distinguished as ‘art’ and ‘craft’, and in many societies today a distinction is still not made because value is applied for different reasons: the ritual or ceremonial function of an object might command greater importance than its economic prestige or the identity of its maker. However, over time, the separation of ideas from skill in the hierarchy of cultural values of Western societies has placed a greater status on the fine arts (now seen to do with ideas and intellect) over the crafts (now to do with skills and functions). Whereas ideas and skills were once closely related, they became oppositions, a distinction that is now reinforced through associations with certain media and processes and the functions that various kinds of works perform. Distinctions of cultural value now exist between practitioners who work in ‘fine arts’ and ‘crafts’ media; and separations identified by media and function now exist in ideas about theory and practice, often discussed and institutionalised as oppositions of head and hand, mind and body, skill and thought. The fact that it is often now an issue whether an object or a practice is identified as art, craft, design or industry, or that it might matter, reflects those changes.534

The contemporary crafts movement initially sought to revive and maintain the perceived ideals of aspects of what was understood as traditional crafts practice, but it did so in a new context with a new kind of practitioner and a new audience, and, as part of that revival, it developed new relationships with both contemporary design and contemporary art. It developed in the early post-war years at a time of marked social change and expectation, when crafts-based industries were declining, and when new influences in contemporary architecture, design and art arrived from overseas.535

At that time most craftspeople’s objectives were to produce simple, handmade, domestic products that reflected an attitude towards a particular way of life that valued beauty in simplicity and functional form, in a studio or small workshop environment where the maker could be independent and self-sufficient and in control of all the processes of production. In many ways these aspirations have since been identified as an anachronistic, romantic ‘re-

533See Chapter 2 ‘Introduction’
534See Chapter 5 ‘Reviewing crafts ideals’
535See Chapter 2 ‘The beginnings of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia’
invention' of tradition, but at that time - and even now - it was certainly a strong philosophy that ran counter to the perceived inhumanity of modernist design and its associated technologies, and of post-war consumerism.

At the same time, the strong and influential stream of thought and practice associated with studio crafts practice ran parallel to the development of dealer galleries and the international art market, of which Australia aspired to be part. After the war, New York represented freedom and modernity, and the ideal of freedom of expression by visual artists was followed by similarly motivated craftspeople working in textiles, metal, glass and ceramics.

Studio craftspeople who started their careers in the postwar decades wanted some of the status and power they saw being accorded individual artists working in the art world. Thus, they tried to adopt or duplicate the institutions of the art world, emulate its attitudes, and gain access to the same markets.

'To put it crudely,' said John Houston:

...the Crafts movement is the Arts and Crafts movement after the architects had defected...it was their overall view of all the arts and crafts developing harmoniously within a building, within a city, within a world unified by art that lovingly bound all the others, that lent the movement its social, as well as its aesthetic conviction. Their defection made each craft autonomous: free to evolve; free to stagnate. As industrial design became the new crafts...the hybrid artist-craftspeople scattered in their separate searches for the new authority of their own traditions, their own aesthetics.

But even 'design' followed art world values. The crafts had always maintained a close connection with industry and design, but now designers themselves also aspired to be seen as individual artists, or be discussed as such. Design historian Adrian Forty argues against this ideal, especially the separation of the designer from a market:

Whatever degree of artistic imagination is lavished upon the design of objects, it is not done to give expression to the designer's creativity and imagination, but to make profits more saleable and profitable. Calling industrial design 'art'...effectively severs most of the connections between design and society. The crafts had always enjoyed an active connection with the marketplace, but this connection also changed.

Peter Dormer points out that crafts practice had been 'an act of service' up to and in the 1950s and 1960s, when the crafts were supported not by museums, but by ordinary householders, who 'wanted to add something to their homes that fed their eyes and their fingers', filling a gap left at that time by fine art. It was an aesthetic-in-opposition to both modern art and modern design. But gradually, in supplying consumers:

536For example, see T J Jackson Lears No Place of Grace (1981) cited in Chapter 2
537See Chapter 3 'The influence of art'
538John Houston Crafts Classics Since the 1940s (1988) 8
539Adrian Forty Objects of Desire (1986) 7
540Discussed in different contexts over time in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5
...‘taking their fancy’ has replaced ‘serving their needs’ or, as many craftsmen would prefer it, aesthetic value has replaced utility as their goal. What remains, however, is the question of whose taste becomes predominant - the ‘popular’ taste of the consumer or the particular...taste of the individual maker...[there shaped up]...a new, less rigorous contract of service between craftspeople and consumers. 541

To a certain extent, the pursuit of art ideals was effective through the 1960s and early 1970s, as the art world and its wider audience allowed an opportunity for, and encouraged, craftspeople to dismiss traditions in favour of individual expressive intent and the making of non-functional objects, and fine artists themselves adopted some of the formerly marginal ‘craft’ and ‘domestic’ materials and processes. Eventually, however, in abandoning late modernist formalism in the 1970s, fine artists also generally abandoned an interest in making objects, and (as the Dadaists had demonstrated earlier in the century) tended to reject that fine finish, function, enjoyment of process and an interest in materials could contribute to the content of a work. Their views were not necessarily ‘right’(they pertained to their particular time), but they were well reinforced by galleries, art schools and critics.

Like others in marginal areas of the performing arts, literature, science and sport,542 the only way craftspeople could gain recognition was through the existing channels of education, promotion and marketing that favoured art ideals. However, despite the important liberation of tradition that undoubtedly occurred for those making ‘art-craft’, craftspeople seeking wider recognition chose or had to use, and have used about them, the language and values and perceptions of the art world at that time. It was the predominant avenue available.

The result was perhaps not what was intended.543 The economic structure for the ‘quasi-art’ that developed, said Peter Dormer:

...has been provided by art school teaching, state museums...magazines, state grants, and, especially in America, the existence of rich people willing to be persuaded by dedicated dealers and gallery owners that to buy the new craft was to buy the new art. As far as the new breed of craftsperson is concerned there was a wide degree of licence to be enjoyed. As long as he or she produced work which more or less conformed to the new quasi-art establishment’s expectations of what craft as art should look like, then he or she was free to make all sorts of useless objects. [Then] something rather sad and predictable has since occurred’, he said. Those who tried to get their new ‘broken-all-the-rules-in-my-Art-Craft’ work accepted were rejected by the real

542See for example, Brian Stoddart Saturday Afternoon Fever (1986) for an account of games in relation to a history of Australian sport.
543See Chapter 5 ‘Introduction’ and ‘Reviewing crafts ideals’
art world, which 'may be unfair, and it is certainly arbitrary. But what is and what is not 'Art' is decided by the art world...'\textsuperscript{544}

Why was it possible for the art world to so convincingly call the tune?

**The artist as individual**

From the nineteenth century, crafts and design development had both been affected by an accelerating belief in the artist as a special individual and in the associated privilege or status that was conferred on the 'fine' arts of painting and sculpture, its artists and those who commissioned or purchased it.

These views were associated with the social, economic and political changes of the time, where art became a commodity for investment and symbol of status for the new middle class. Raymond Williams, in his book *Keywords*, traces the histories of words like art, culture, industry, class, democracy, society, individual, creative and genius, and shows that their current meanings emerged only as recently as the nineteenth century, a century characterised by industrialism, imperialism and colonialism - and one that brought new meanings to such terms. He points out, for example, that distinctions between the kinds and purposes of human skill in relation to art, industry and the useful arts 'can be primarily related to the changes inherent in capitalist commodity production, with its specialization and reduction of use values to exchange values'.\textsuperscript{545}

Thus, the identity of the individual, rather than the anonymous, artist helped provide status and value. The rise of the middle class in the nineteenth century, and its desire to improve itself, provoked changes in art patronage and in the art they wanted. The middle class, not just the aristocracy, was becoming rich and keen to buy material goods.

Many artists (in much the same circumstances as in the 1970s) rejected what was occurring in both art and industry.\textsuperscript{546} Some of those associated with the 'design reform' of the time rejected the function of art that was to serve the fashionable tastes of the new middle classes: they chose to make 'Art' for its own sake. Others rejected an association with industry, where there had been a desire to excessively embellish products with decoration, and (following leaders like William Morris) returned to medieval ideals of crafts production, through the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century. While reflecting a desire to unite decoration with form, in harmony with nature, reformers were also reacting to the loss of hand skills through industrial production and were revaluing creative labour.

In comparing the intent behind the work of the Arts and Crafts movement in 1893 (where designers employed others to carry out the work), with the studio

\textsuperscript{544} Peter Dormer op cit (1988) 140, 141

\textsuperscript{545} Raymond Williams *Keywords* (1985) 42. See Chapter 2: 'Introduction'

\textsuperscript{546} Discussed in Chapter 2 'Introduction' and 'A precursor of ideals'.
crafts practised in England in 1953, Peter Floud observed that the main
criterion 'normally employed today in defining craftwork - namely the identity
of designer and craftsman - received little attention in 1893.' It was the
'second-generation' of educators who followed, like W. R. Lethaby, 'who
were preoccupied with the application of craft principles to the training of art­
students and education generally,' and who, '...by first stressing the didactic
and therapeutic value of craftwork - paved the way for the present-day belief
that craft products have a special value in that they express the individual
personality of the maker in a direct unmediated way that is impossible in the
case of work - even handwork - undertaken at second-hand.'

The increasing value placed by Western society on the notion of 'the
individual' and 'the authentic self' in the twentieth century, increased
following the disintegration of nineteenth century social orders that had been
defined, for example, by class and religion. The development of the ideal of
the independent individual can be followed through the fascination with
theories of the unconscious mind; the education programs that focused on the
development of the self rather than on prescriptive curricula; the pursuit of
material possessions and a 'home-of-your-own' for the nuclear family within a
society committed to personal success and national 'progress' in the 1950s; to
the extreme personal searches for emotional and spiritual meaning and 'self'
in the 1960s - summarised by Tom Wolfe as 'The Me Decade'.

All these ideas of achievement or development were associated with the
expression of individual identity, within changing notions of wider social,
national and international identities. Even in the rural communes that
developed in Australia and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s, and the
supportive, specialist societies that they formed which often included
craftspeople, Margaret Munro-Clark has observed that 'it is usually the
individual rather than the collective whose interests are paramount...Other
goals tend to be seen mainly as a means to the development and expression of
an authentic self'.

In 1995 British writer, Peter Dormer, was invited to address audiences in
Australia. A long-time observer of craftspeople and their work, he suggested
of the intelligent and yet sometimes obscure meanings of contemporary works,

547 Discussed in Chapter 2 'A precursor of ideals'. Peter Floud, 'The Crafts Then and Now',
Floud compared contemporary practice with that of 1893, the year in which the Studio was
first published.

548 See for example, Tom Wolfe 'The Me Decade' in Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and
Vine (1990) 126-7

549 Discussed in Chapter 2 'The crafts movement and social change'. Margaret Munro-Clark
'Modernity, Individualism and the impulse to Withdraw' in Communes in Rural Australia
(1986) 23
...studio craft and what we might call studio design is becoming less geared towards being a public art form and is becoming more and more a private art form based on private negotiations between an individual maker and an individual viewer or purchaser who is able to accept the private story that the maker has been exploring. In a sense contemporary applied arts is becoming like a multiplicity of private, devotional objects...in art, craft and design, unity of purpose has been replaced by an obsessive interest in the self and in the small change of personal responses to the world...

However, he warned, ‘there is a contradiction. The makers and purveyors of private devotional objects never the less want public recognition - exhibitions, catalogues, books and the general circus of public acclaim. They simply want it on their own terms.’

Thus, in such ways, we have all been encouraged throughout this century to see ourselves as independent people, seeking personal satisfaction through our work and ways of life and the personal expression of our ideas and opinions. Most of us have not shared the common social orders and common identities as our ancestors, or as many other peoples in the world today. More than at any other time, artists in the late 20th century are able to draw upon ‘traditions’ from almost everywhere in the world. This is particularly so in places like Australia that have such a history of migrations from elsewhere. All Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, have the dilemma of ‘being an individual’ by trying to define two identities: the identity of a source culture - sometimes long-detached, and the identity of living in Australia today: being ‘Australian’.

Context defines value
The ideal of a subjective, expressive individual beyond society’s and the market’s concerns is a construction of the Western world that was, and still is, supported by particular social and institutional structures. Almost everything we believe or do is the result of the way society has, over time, constructed values, conventions or ‘truths’ to suit the purpose of a particular group. Everyone working in the arts is a product of a history of attitudes about what art is or what artists are; how values are placed on works produced in different media; what values are placed on skills, processes and attitudes to materials; what language is used; and what art does, or should do.

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550 Peter Dormer ‘Novelty Value’ *Craft Victoria* Summer 1995 6. Dormer was in Australia to address the national crafts conference ‘Making Culture: Craft Communications and Progress’.
It is convention, not truth, that now defines a category of activity or product as the 'fine arts', based around certain practices like painting, sculpture (and sometimes architecture). Convention also places greater value on the fine arts than on for example, pots, jewellery, furniture, costume and textiles, which are now distinguished as the crafts, or 'craft'. But, as the 'practical distinctions [between artist, scientist, technologist, artisan, craftsman and skilled worker] are pressed, within a given mode of production,' said Raymond Williams, 'art and artist acquire ever more general (and more vague) associations, offering to express a general human (i.e. non-utilitarian) interest, even while, ironically, most works of art are effectively treated as commodities.'

Whether or not fine artists, craftspeople and designers know the history of these attitudes, or whether or not they think it is important, they are still both consciously and unconsciously a product of that conditioning.

As Michael Carter points out, in his book Framing Art, what a work means, or how it functions, is the result of several intersecting histories of attitudes. Firstly, there is the specific history of each artist, with its complexity of attitudes and prejudices, experiences and skills, class, race, gender, age, place, time, education and opportunity. Then there are the parallel experiences of the audience or client, who will have different attitudes and prejudices and experiences to bring to a meaning of what has been made.

Moreover, each work carries with it the histories of its materials, including 'art' media like paint, ink, paper, stone, bronze and video as well as 'craft' media like clay, fibre, glass, leather and metal. Huon pine means something different from bamboo; gold has a different meaning from that of uranium.

The history of a work also includes the circumstances of its production and the functions that it has variously performed: a table has a different functional history from that of a chair; a wedding ring from a manacle. Finally, every object changes its meaning through the changing public and domestic contexts in which it is placed. These histories bring unconscious perceptions of meaning with them about those kinds of objects and materials. One cannot use these media, or attempt to challenge or subvert them without acknowledging their wider cultural associations (see for example, Robert Baines's table in

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553 Raymond Williams op cit (1985) 42
554 Michael Carter Framing Art (1990), see Introduction
555 For example, Brian O'Doherty discusses the ways in which art galleries take work from the contexts of their production and ascribe new meanings for them by the way they are exhibited inside the 'white cube' of a neutral gallery space. Brian O'Doherty, Within the White Cube (1976). Michael Carter also talks about the imposed narratives in some galleries, where we are forced by the geography of the place to follow a sequence of events that has been decided for us. Michael Carter op cit (1990) 171-76. See also papers in Peter Vergo (ed) The New Museology (1989) such as Charles Saumarez Smith 'Museums, Artefacts, Meanings'.
Furthermore, what can be read as subversive in one decade can become a cliché in the next.

In other words, while the practices of art, craft, design and industry overlap, each area has generally had different purposes, audiences, markets, languages, histories and production processes. Most craftspeople know the traditional uses, beliefs and rituals associated with the forms or images they use, and they generally understand not just the technology of what they are doing but also the ways in which these technologies and functions have changed society along the way.

But it is now clear, borne out by the conclusions of education, funding, exhibition and publication programs discussed in this thesis, that if craftspeople combine areas of practice they have to understand how each area works and what it means. As Czechoslovakian glass artist Dana Zámecniková insists, 'if you want to make glass sculpture, you must study glass and sculpture'. Craft work must then be considered also in terms of that area - whether painting, sculpture or industry - at that time.

So, society shapes values and meanings. However, artists are also able to choose different ways in which to operate within a society, and to decide what sort of relationship they want to have, as individuals, with audiences and markets. At various times artists have reacted against the demands of society: in both the late nineteenth century and in the 1970s, for example, they sought to remove their work from being an artworld investment commodity. In the 1970s many artists ceased making objects at all, in favour of ideas and events. By the late 1980s some audiences were reacting against artworks that were now so obscure in their symbolic meanings that they felt they could no longer approach them. Many visual artists themselves were questioning whether they wanted to continue to work in a way that they saw was unconnected with society and that was dependent on literary measures of meaning and value. Others, especially those in the crafts and design, were questioning their dependence on the dominance of visual arts values, and were seeking a return to the values of different ways of working - that might include a different relationship with audiences.

Who is artwork for, and how is value and meaning gained from it? Is art for self or society, or can it be for both? And whether for self or society - whether an artist feels totally fulfilled through their personal self-expression, or whether a particular audience fully identifies with the meaning of the work - it does not necessarily follow that that the work will be successful, or significant.

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Plate 27: after page 219. Furthermore, what can be read as subversive in one decade can become a cliché in the next.

556 For an extended discussion see Grace Cochrane, 'Function?' in Ausglass post-conference edition 1991
557 Dana Zámecniková, in Ausglass post-conference edition 1991 6,7
The broader context of the time does seem to determine that 'art' is what a society says it is, or at least, in most cases, what the current informed and articulate part of that society says it is. And where then, in the end, do the crafts belong?

A new pursuit?
What is crafts practice today, and what does 'craft' mean? In asking the same question of 'design', Adrian Forty suggests that it really means two things at the same time: the way things look (I like the design), combined with the preparation of instructions for manufacture (I am working on a design for something). And so it might be for 'craft': this word is most commonly used as a description for a category of objects that are made from 'non-art' materials, a distinction now made through the separate identification of painting and sculpture as 'fine art'. It is in this usage of 'craft as category' that the word causes so many problems, and is often now replaced by other terms like 'contemporary applied art', 'art and design', and even the earlier term, 'decorative art'. Given that institutional structures, like universities, art schools and museums, have long been set up to support a classification by medium and end-function into art, craft and design, it seems unlikely that this usage will change significantly, except towards 'neutral' terms like 'artwork' or simply, 'work' or 'practice'.

However, I would argue that 'craft' really means a particular way of making things - an attitude to production. Craftspeople centuries ago did not 'make craft' - they applied it: they applied their craft (their skills, knowledge and imagination) to the making of vessels, ornaments, furniture, lengths of cloth - and paintings. But they approached their work in a certain way: their materials, processes, skills and markets were important to them, and they made their work by hand. Craftspeople have always enjoyed a close public and domestic acceptance of their products and attitudes towards making them, through our familiarity with the forms, materials and functions of what they make. It is a social affinity, certainly traditional and now often romantic. Our society still finds it important.

'When crafts organisations say they want to promote craft', observed Peter Timms in 1996, 'they no doubt think they mean the act of making things as much as the things made, but the syntax certainly suggests otherwise.' The increasing use of the word 'craft' as a noun rather than a verb, does 'reflect quite a fundamental change in the way we think about what the activity of

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558 Adrian Forty op cit (1986) 6-7
craft represents and why we think it is important (or not important as the case may be). For quite often the way we use language reflects more about our attitudes than what we believe we are saying. The rapid loss of the verb ‘to craft’ is, he said, ‘an impoverishment of the language...it no doubt suits the purposes of certain managerial and organisational structures to convince us that craft is not a process but a product, which can be used as a means of exchange’.  

Although the accessibility of both making and using has sometimes worked against crafts practice in earning if a perception of providing community therapy and therefore mediocrity, there is, in fact, a very clear public perception about what is really meant. Reviewers of films, novels and plays are among many who consistently use the term as one of value. Their understanding, and our understanding in this context, is that something that is crafted is made with care and attention and with a thorough understanding of materials, skills and processes and towards an imaginative end. In early 1997, for example, a newspaper headline reporting on a proposed scene cut to Baz Luhrmann’s acclaimed film Romeo and Juliet used the term with confidence: ‘Baz takes Bob to task over censoring his craft’ - not, as it could well have been, his ‘art’ or his ‘creation’.  

It is not surprising to check the Oxford dictionary and find, for ‘craft’, an association with terms like strength, force, intellectual power, dexterity, ingenuity and ability in planning and constructing (as well as magic, guile and cunning). A craft attitude is recognised in a very positive sense by the broadest population, which is why it is applied to everything from making bread to writing poetry, producing films - and making paintings. Pursuing an idea, through an affinity for materials and an enjoyment in, and commitment to, understanding the necessary skills and processes associated with them, remains the core of crafts practice.

The separation of ‘imagination’ and ‘ideas’ in the making of a work, from attitudes about skills and materials in the processes of its production, occurred when artists wanted to isolate themselves from what they saw as the crassness of the middle-class marketplace, and identify themselves as creative individuals. But I believe there cannot be exclusive oppositions between imagination or skills, intellectual or practical, personal or social. Each aspect is, to a greater or lesser extent, present in all creative cultural activities. Skills, processes and understanding of materials have never been enough on their own. But nor have ideas and imagination without practical resolution - or a marketplace, for that matter. In this sense, as Janet Wolff observes, the art/craft debate is less a comparative aesthetic or technological issue (which is

560 Peter Timms, ‘Col Levy’s Crafting’ Object 1/96 4  
561 Candida Baker, discussing NSW Premier, Bob Carr’s suggestion that this version of Shakespeare’s play be included in the school curriculum, with the exception of a drug scene. Sydney Morning Herald 1 February 1997 4
Chapter 6: Conclusions

the way it has been treated) than a sociological one, which might address why there is a debate at all.\textsuperscript{562}

In considering rapid technological change, population growth and the dwindling of natural resources, today’s philosophers and commentators are signalling the need for a renewed ecological and social consciousness, and one wonders where craftspeople and other artists belong in this kind of world. There have been a number of suggestions for a valid way forward for the crafts that are neither purely conservative in tradition nor uncritically dependent on other practices.

At the Ausglass conference in Sydney in January 1997, two people from outside the art world spoke about the role of art in today’s society. Robin Williams, presenter of the ABC Science Show, and Eva Cox, a sociologist who gave the 1995 Boyer lectures, both independently discussed art as a \textit{social activity} that was at its core, to do with both identity and communication.\textsuperscript{563} Robin Williams talked about the development of language and art as the primary means of communication that reinforces bonds between people, so they can explain things to themselves and one another.

Eva Cox, whose ideal is for a ‘civil society’ that is not driven by economic rationalism, reminded us we are social beings, and that connections and communications - through arguing, sharing, dissenting and collaborating - are more important than competition. She argued for the concept of a public culture, a shared public sphere, in which the arts are a way of seeing and sharing: a way of combining what an individual might want to do, with what society can provide and what one can also give. Both, from their very experienced and informed and different starting points, seem to be calling for a return to more of a shared social order, in which the crafts, because of their social role, play a part.

Their views are not completely new. They echo, for example, those of Kenneth Coutts-Smith, twenty years earlier, who asked in 1976:

\begin{quote}
Are we on the threshold of an art which celebrates humanity in the form of living, breathing, feeling social relationships, rather than an art that proposes an abstract, invisible realm of ideas, haunted by incomplete men and women in isolation?\textsuperscript{564}
\end{quote}

Tim Jacobs similarly forecast in 1989 that:

\begin{quote}
It’s quite conceivable that, in the future, in this society at least, the notion of craft will have shifted from being a thing, to being a value system, a way of behaving, an approach to problem solving. If it clarifies its meaning on that
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{562}Janet Wolff, paper to Crafts Council conference \textit{The Social Context of the Crafts} Sydney 1988

\textsuperscript{563}Robin Williams and Eva Cox, keynote addresses to Ausglass conference, Sydney College of the Arts, January 1997. \textit{Ausglass conference report} 1997

abstract level, then the values that in the sixties were being manifested in the objects that people made, can become the values that inform actions generally.\textsuperscript{565}

Even if the crafts (along with the other disappearing skills associated with, for example, technologies like photography, pressing vinyl records and typesetting) have become 'an endangered species', it may well be that we need to preserve them for the same reasons as we try to protect endangered plant and animal species and the world's diminishing natural resources. Like Elaine Heumann Gurian's idea of museums as 'savings banks of the soul,'\textsuperscript{566} the crafts provide one measure of important physical and symbolic connections between skills, tools, materials, forms and functions.

Design writer John Thackara had queried in 1984 from an economic point of view, if in fact, crafts skills were really outdated in a modern industrial society: 'Australian industry cannot compete on price; volume production is not its strength. But the \textit{reinsertion of crafts skills} could add value and perceived quality to industrial products such as furniture and building products.'\textsuperscript{567} Jenny Zimmer agreed, considering in 1990 both the efforts of small industries who wanted original crafts-based prototypes, and those of architects and planners who wanted the collaborative input of artists and craftspeople in the 're-scaling' of buildings and public places, as legitimate and uncompromised ways forward for the crafts.\textsuperscript{568}

Certainly, as larger crafts-based industries declined, and new technologies became more accessible, the practice of small crafts-based, custom-made, design-and-contract businesses increasingly seemed for many an appropriate and successful 'way to go'. Historian Humphrey McQueen was reported in 1992 as saying:

\begin{quote}
New production methods can be expected to lead to diversified market strategies where customisation is no longer too expensive and becomes the norm rather than the exception; ...it is possible to consider global niche markets which are not mass markets [and which, as well, are not necessarily luxury markets].\textsuperscript{569}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{565}Tim Jacobs in 'Craft in Transit: the Next Decade', in Noris Ioannou, \textit{The Culture Brokers: Towards a Redefinition of Australian Contemporary Craft} (1989) 67

\textsuperscript{566}Elaine Heumann Gurian 'A Savings Bank for the Soul' keynote address Museums Australia Conference \textit{Power & Empowerment} Sydney 1996.


\textsuperscript{568}Discussed in Chapter 6 'Reviewing crafts ideals'. Jenny Zimmer 'Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater' \textit{The Sydney Review} October 1990 10-11

\textsuperscript{569}Peter Timms discussing Humphrey McQueen's conference paper to the \textit{Craft Australia} 1992 conference in Perth, in 'Finding a Niche for Industry within Craft' \textit{Art Monthly Australia} October (1992) 8
He suggested that 'to survive, craftspeople will have to seek a succession of marketing niches. To flourish, [they] will need to re-establish a place at the centre of production'.

Towards these ends, the flexibility and personal control offered by some of the new technologies available was compatible with the maintenance of crafts skills and attitudes. In 1994, discussing William Morris’s nineteenth century ideals of working in ‘harmony with nature’ and his examination of the nature of work within industrialisation, Peter Timms noted that:

What Morris could not have anticipated...was the advent of what we now refer to as the new technologies which, ironically perhaps, have made possible his vision for small-scale manufacture, individualised working environments, decentralisation, dispersal, the unification of process and product, craft-based industry and the elimination of the division of labour. The microchip has made these things economically viable again. Morris’s utopian dream begins to look quite practical.

In 1995 John Thackara looked at these changes in the economy and technology alongside the rapid increases in world population and pointed out that without a reassessment of how we use our natural resources we would have none left by the year 2040. He suggested that craftspeople, being those ‘who understand matter very deeply become very valuable in this exercise. Because it is only when understand matter very deeply that you can actually, most efficiently inform and promulgate the production, distribution and recycling systems which guarantee that matter does not get destroyed.

Design historian Tony Fry also argued for the crafts as ‘applied ecology’, understood in terms of ‘quality (as opposed to quantity)...and as an organic means to conserve, store and transmit human-centred knowledges essential for survival.’ He advocated drafting ‘craft out of the gallery, museum and academy and into the mess of everyday life, with all its uncertainties, not least the threatening contemporary ecological crisis’.

Pursuing the continuing question of arts ideals, in relation to these views, Anne Brennan concluded in 1989 that she had had problems with some crafts practice and the language used about it, because she thought a lot of it was founded on misunderstandings of what has happened in the visual arts. She nevertheless believed:

...that we had a lot to learn from the visual arts, [but] that we had to be a little more informed and selective about how we did it...Perhaps the crafts need to undergo a kind of consciousness raising in the same way that women did in the

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570Humphrey McQueen, cited in Peter Timms ibid (1992) 8
571Peter Timms ‘The future re-naturing of work’ Object 3 1994 8-9
572John Thackara ‘Mental and Material in the Information Age’ National Craft Conference report Craft Australia 1995
573Tony Fry ‘Re-inventing Craft for Re-creation’ in Bob Thompson (ed) Forces of Language: an anthology of critical writing about objects, makers, users and society (1992) 80-81
Donald Brook, by 1992 a long-time commentator on visual art and crafts relationships, had reversed the issue and was saying:

I see craft as occupying the entire range of the spectrum, and I see...the visual arts as constituting just one small segment of the spectrum. In a way my objective is the same as the objective of craftworkers has been for a long time, that is, to assimilate art and craft together. But I think craftspeople have been accepting rather uncritically the view that art is different and that it’s superior, and they are trying to promote, to elevate the status of craft to what’s perceived as a status of art. If one can get crafts accepted as arts, then one has done something for them in terms of glorifying them. I think the motive to assimilate the two together is correct, but the direction of thrust has been mistaken and one shouldn’t have been thinking of elevating the crafts, but instead, of demystifying art.575

In England, in 1989, historian and Royal College lecturer Christopher Frayling summarised the recent path of the contemporary crafts, and identified some ‘essential characteristics’ at each stage. From ‘The Country Pavilion of 1951’ and ‘The Craftsman’s Art of 1973’, he forecast the ‘Fin de Siècle Crafts of 1995’. Here, after suggesting a number of changes of attitude and practice towards new technologies, past ideals, and changing marketplaces, he concluded that: ‘Crafts will continue to provide a challenge - not from the perspective of the avant-garde, but from the perspectives of good practice, integrity of intention and domestic utility’. 576

In 1996 Australian jeweller and metalworker Susan Cohn confirmed, for her, the need to maintain distinctions between craft, design and art (see Plate 26: following page):

My tradition is craft and I work at it at various levels - from the art gallery scenario to private clients to designing for Alessi. Once you call it something else, you can’t refer to that tradition. I don’t just design. I do make on all those levels of craft. That, to me, is what informs the work. There’s been a problem in craft because craftspeople themselves have become inhibited by their own perceptions - they’ve seen it as second rate and want to be first rate. They have then struggled with other names. In doing that they give up the one special

574 Anne Brennan in ‘Decoding Craft: Criticism, Theory and the Search for Models’ in Noris Ioannou op cit (1989) 51-52
575 Donald Brook in ‘Decoding Craft: Criticism, Theory and the Search for Models’ in in Noris Ioannou The CultureBrokers: Towards a Redefinition of Australian Contemporary Craft (1989) 52,53
576 Christopher Frayling ‘Tomorrow’s World’, in ‘Comment’ Crafts Jan/Feb 1989 17-18. Frayling suggested to his readers that by 1995 the crafts would have come to realise that the role of the avant-garde had been to seek out territory that the army itself would one day occupy.
Plate 26: Susan Cohn
(see page 216) Cohn cave, bowl made of two sheets of pierced stainless steel, anodised, with stainless steel rim (and packaging), designed by Susan Cohn and made by Alessi, Italy, 1992. (diam. 50cm)

Susan Cohn (b. 1952) set up Workshop 3000 in central Melbourne in 1981. She designs and makes jewellery and metalwork, mostly in aluminium with anodised decoration, while taking on trainees and contributing to wider crafts administration and education. In 1992 she was commissioned to design a bowl for the Italian manufacturer, Alessi. But she still calls herself a craftsperson. 'My tradition is craft and I work at it at various levels - from the art gallery scenario to private clients to designing for Alessi. Once you call it something else, you can't refer to that tradition. I don't just design. I do make on all those levels of craft. That, to me, is what informs the work.'

Susan Cohn in 'Craft Back From No Man's Land' Smarts 6 June 1996 13
thing that they do have - that they can make things that can have an impact on everyday life.\textsuperscript{577}

In fact, Rose Slivka's assertions of 1959 still read convincingly in our contemporary context. The crafts revival was 'not a nostalgic return to the handmade object on a wide functioning scale,' she had argued:

We are as we must be, irretrievably an industrial society, [in which] the crafts have realised their own distinct...place, ...not in conflict with it, not absorbed into it - but existing within the larger structure, true to their own identity and to their own continuity [and where] we are creating new values in an entirely new situation... Maintenance of control over product from impetus of idea to completion is a reaffirmation of humanistic relationships - a relationship and responsibility to the object with which [the maker] invests his personality, and a relationship and responsibility to the person who uses it.\textsuperscript{578}

However, during the nearly 40 years since that time, I believe that the pursuit of art ideals, which Slivka also encouraged, contributed to undermining the relationships she identified.

Conclusion
It should not really matter from which position people start or what they are called: the placing of cultural value should accommodate a number of purposes and practices to do with creative activity.

It should be possible, in the broader cultural sphere, for attitudes associated with crafts practice and what the crafts movement has meant, to be considered alongside other cultural practices of the period, because it appears that crafts values, which people persist in clinging to in recognisable cycles at similar moments in time,\textsuperscript{579} do contribute considerably to our practical and expressive and symbolic understanding of ourselves.

If, as Adrian Forty points out, 'history...is concerned with the exploration of change',\textsuperscript{580} it could be argued that the long and rich histories associated with crafts practice - of wearing, decorating, furnishing, ornamenting, performing ritual, containing, covering and so on - need to be discussed more fully outside its own infrastructure along with other cultural histories, such as those of art and design, in order to contribute to a fuller story of our time.

Inside the crafts infrastructure, a broader field for interpretation would widen understanding and value beyond 'art' parameters. Analysis of functions, processes and meanings of objects through their relationships to social,

\textsuperscript{577}Susan Cohn in 'Craft Back From No Man's Land' interview Smarts 6 June 1996 13
\textsuperscript{578} Rose Slivka Craft Horizons, Mar/Apr 1959. See Chapter 3 ‘The World Crafts Council’
\textsuperscript{580} Adrian Forty op cit (1986) 7
cultural, economic and political history, and through approaches of philosophy, psychology, sociology, archaeology or anthropology can all contribute as much to this field as a connection with the fine arts.

Alongside the issue of how something is identified as a practice, is the issue of how well it is judged to succeed - how 'good' or 'bad' it might be - an issue that will be different across time, from country to country and within the historical and theoretical expectations of the area of practice itself. '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,' argued Adrian Forty, pointing out that we don't have to accept all points of view, but instead be able to talk about areas of disagreement.\(^{581}\)

That point applies not only to critics, curators and historians, but to makers as well. If one thinks one is making 'art' primarily for oneself, it cannot be expected that all will agree about its meaning or its value - that is not its primary purpose, though it is rewarding when it occurs. Those making and developing designs for useful or decorative objects, or art works for an identified art world, are more likely to bear a market in mind, and the market will then determine value. Both positions are equally valid; one is not more important than the other. But, as Suzanne Frantz insists, one thing is not automatically the other, although sometimes they overlap.\(^{582}\) Art does not always come with an appreciative market, and that might not necessarily mean that the market is misinformed, but that the maker might be.

The pursuit of art ideals in the crafts must be critically considered alongside not only current art values, but also those of design, architecture, industry and a changing society - as well as the traditions and changing ideals of the crafts themselves. I believe that many contemporary crafts practitioners need to assess whose values and ideals they are really pursuing and to what end, and how much they may have lost by ignoring or denying important aspects of the traditions and material culture histories of their practice.

Great works - whether paintings, pots, figures or furniture - are usually made by imaginative and expressive people who have a wide and very informed knowledge of their materials, skills and tools and the functional and symbolic histories of the forms they are working with, that they can call on perhaps unconsciously and intuitively. While passionate about their work, these people are usually also working self-critically - and confidently - within a very informed, if inexplicable, understanding of their field and of contemporary society. What they make will still be recognised as great, important or significant works - with or without the label of 'art'.

\(^{581}\) Adrian Forty 'Debate' *Journal of Design History* 6:2 1993 131. See also Peter Timms, on *Arts Today* ABC radio with Julie Copeland 30 Nov 1996 (see Chapter 5 'Reviewing crafts ideals')

\(^{582}\) Refer to Suzanne Frantz, Chapter 1, for her view on this issue
I believe that the pursuit of art ideals has been both truth, because it was extremely liberating in the challenges it offered about new ways of thinking about the crafts, and a trap, because art ideals have been so limiting in their denial of, and dominance over, other values.

The success of any work depends on the critical understanding each craftsperson has about their relationship to all the areas they are working in and on the way that they resolve that understanding, for themselves and for others, in their work.
Plate 27: Robert Baines
(see page 210) *The Entropy of Red* - *Table*, sterling silver, gilt and lacquer, made in Melbourne in 1995. (53 x 28 x 28cm)

Robert Baines (b.1949) is both a jeweller and metalsmith, and is internationally regarded for his scientific and art historical research into ancient goldsmithing techniques, which shows that stylistic features are often determined by technical opportunities and constraints.

*The Entropy of Red* suite comprises a table, a trumpet and a crown, each formed through intricate metalsmithing constructions that provide, in the end, the form of the item without its functionality. Each work includes an element of red, providing an ancient association with love and sacrifice. In *Table*, the red is in the form of a fallen lacquer petal. These works are not only magnificent for their astonishing construction, but are also challenging for the way we must read what we know of these particular forms, through the surprise of his use of this particular process to make them. In direct contrast to the modernist aesthetic of 'form following function', Baines explores an aesthetic consciously based on decoration and technical processes.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Select bibliography
Appendix 2: Scope of research, contents pages:
   *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a history*
Appendix 3: List of journals
Appendix 4: List of Photographs
Appendix 1: Select Bibliography

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Appendix 2: Scope of research, contents pages:
*The Crafts Movement in Australia: a history*
This project was assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government’s arts funding and advisory body.

It is seven years since the Crafts Board made the decision to commission a comprehensive chronological record of the events, influences and development of the contemporary crafts movement in Australia from 1945 to 1988. In that time the crafts have seen extraordinary development and changes in philosophy, practice and cultural influence. Craftspeople now frequently work closely with architects and interior designers; some work with industry; others take part in major art exhibitions.

The Visual Arts/Craft Board wishes to thank Grace Cochrane for her painstaking and scrupulous research. She was clearly given a monumental task, as at the start of the project, there were few published studies of Australian Craft practice, even after almost fifty years of development.

As this is one of the first histories of a contemporary crafts movement anywhere in the world, and because it has been done so well, the book should become a most important reference work not only for Australian crafts but also for contemporary crafts internationally.

We also believe that this history will be invaluable for scholars and for a wide range of visual arts practitioners. The skills, attitudes and achievements chronicled here are of such importance that they must be seen as an essential part of the body of knowledge upon which all of us working in the visual arts and crafts should regularly draw.

The Crafts Council of Australia, The Australia Council, the steering committee, and Grace in particular are to be congratulated for the foresight and unwavering perseverance that have brought this book into being.
CHAPTER 1 2
ESTABLISHING AN ATTITUDE: BEFORE 1914
AUSTRALIANS, WHO WERE WE? 4
ART, CRAFT AND INDUSTRY 7
PUTTING IT IN PLACE: ESTABLISHING THE INSTITUTIONS 13
FINDING AN ALTERNATIVE: THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA 15
Tasmania 17
New South Wales 19
Victoria 21
Queensland 22
South Australia 24
Western Australia 25

CHAPTER 2 .26
MAKING IT MODERN: BETWEEN THE WARS
RECOVERY AND DEPRESSION 28
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERNISM 30
Art Nouveau to Art Deco 30
A new world for old 31
The Bauhaus 31
Scandinavia, Britain, the United States 32
MODERNISM IN AUSTRALIA 34
THE CRAFTS: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL 38
Education 39
Giving and selling 42
THE PRACTITIONERS 43
Clay 44
Fibre 49
Metal 51
Glass 53
Wood and design 54

CHAPTER 3 56
BEGINNING AGAIN: 1940-1963
RECONSTRUCTION AND REASSESSMENT 58
CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND THE ARTS IN AUSTRALIA 60
DEVELOPMENTS OVERSEAS IN ART, CRAFT AND DESIGN 62
THE CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN AUSTRALIA 64
Clay 66
Fibre 67
Metal 67
Glass 68
Wood and design 68
CRAFTS COMMUNITIES 69
Murrumbeena: the Boyds 69
Etham: Montsalvat 70
Warrandyte: Potters Cottage 71
Mittagong: Sturt 72
ORGANISATIONS 75
Cultural activities in wartime 76
Red Cross handicrafts 76
Arts and crafts societies 77
Handweavers and spinners guilds 78
Potters societies 79
Embroiderers guilds 81
Design societies 82
Arts councils 83
GALLERIES AND SHOPS 83
EXHIBITIONS 86
EDUCATION 90

CHAPTER 4 94
ORGANISING FOR CHANGE: 1964-1972
A CHANGING AUSTRALIA 96
INTERNATIONALISM AND THE ARTS IN AUSTRALIA 98
RESPONIS IN THE CRAFTS 100
Crafts practice overseas 100
The language of the crafts 104
CHAPTER 5 144

THE PRACTITIONERS: 1940-1972

Clay
Victoria 146
New South Wales 153
Queensland 159
South Australia 161
Tasmania 164
Western Australia 165
Australian Capital Territory 168

Fibre
Weaving and spinning 168
Embroidery 173
Textile design 174

Metal
Victoria 180
New South Wales 182
Western Australia 185
Queensland 185
South Australia 186

Glass 187

Wood and Design 190

Paper 193

CHAPTER 6 194
THE HEADY YEARS: 1973-1979
CHAPTER 8

SERIOUS INTENT: 1980-1992

Recession and Reaction 306
The Arts in Australia 307
Entering the postmodern 307
The Artist as Worker 309
Redefining the Crafts 313
The crafts and cultural theory 315
A new professionalism 317
Specialisation 321
Technology 322
Aboriginal Crafts and the Contemporary Crafts Movement 326
Ways and Means 331
Education 331
Galleries, shops and marketing 336
Awards and commissions 340
New Parliament House 344

CHAPTER 9

CRAFTS PRACTICE IN THE 1980s

Clay 350
Fibre 358
Metal 371
Glass 383
Wood and Design 391
Leather 402
Paper 406

CONCLUSION 408

REFERENCES AND ENDNOTES 414

PHOTOGRAPHIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 425

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 426

INDEX 434
Appendix 3: List of journals

Addit
Adelaide Review
Age newspaper
Age Literary Review
American Craft
Architecture Australia
Architecture in Australia
Art and Australia
Art Monthly Australia
Art Network
Artforce
Artlink
Arts National
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Ausglass
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Sydney Review
Territory Craft
Textile Fibre Forum
TRAIN newsletter
West Australian newspaper
West
Words on Paper
*Also specialist group newsletters, minutes, files
*Also exhibition catalogues
Appendix 4: List of photographs and credits

Plate 1: Stephen Bowers
(before contents page; text page 196)
_Cockylorum 1, 2, 3_, detail of porcelain plate decorated with painted, splashed and airbrushed underglaze slips under a clear glaze, made in Adelaide in 1991. (12 x 62cm) Collection: University of New South Wales. Photo: Michel Kluvanek.

Plate 2: Catherine Truman
(before page 1; text page 183)
_Piecemeal_, boat carved in English lime wood, with hanko ink and paint; fish pieces carved in mother-of-pearl, with ink, made in Adelaide in 1992. (boat 20 x 6 x 3: fish pieces 3 x 3 x 1.5cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Grant Hancock.

Plate 3: Gerry Wedd
(before page 11; see text page 183)

Plate 4: Marea Gazzard and Mona Hessing: _Clay + Fibre 1973_
(after page 18; see text page 18)
In this exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Marea Gazzard (b1928) exhibited large handbuilt vessel forms with Mona Hessing’s (b.1933) woven hangings. Photo: Don Gazzard.

Plate 5: Valerie Kirk
(before page 33; see text pages 153-4)

Plate 6: Annan Fabrics 1941-1954
(after page 60; text page 60)
(Alexandra) Nance Mackenzie (b1912, left) and Anne Outlaw (1891-1991) screenprint fabrics in their studio in Mosman, Sydney in the 1940s. Photo: Max Dupain.

Plate 7: Peter Rushforth
(after page 62; text page 62)

Plate 8: Harold Hughan
(after page 73; text page 73)
This photograph was taken for Hughan’s first retrospective exhibition of 440 pots at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1969. Catalogue Kenneth Hood _H. R. Hughan Retrospective Exhibition_, undated. Photographer unidentified.

Plate 9: Mark Thompson
(before page 76; text page 99)
_Buy Australian Maid_, high fired clay with enamels and lustres, porcelain flowers, sterling silver wires and kangaroo, braid and velvet, handbuilt in Adelaide in 1977. (h. 65cm) Photo: John Delacour.
Plate 10: Ben Edols and Kathy Elliott
(after page 86; text page 86)

Plate 11: Grant and Mary Featherston
(after page 98; text page 98)
Catalogue cover, Grant and Mary Featherston Furniture City 11-23 August 1975.

Plate 12: Ewa Pachucka
(before page 108; text page 134)
Detail of installation Arcadia: Landscape and bodies, crocheted figure in polypropylene and hemp over polyester foam padding, made in Hobart in 1975-77. (Total installation size 244 x 396cm). Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: courtesy Crafts Australia.

Plate 13: Peter Travis
(after page 120; text page 120)
Peter Travis tests a kite in Wentworth Park, Sydney, before his exhibition at David Jones Gallery in 1973. Photo: courtesy of Peter Travis.

Plate 14: Emily Kame Kngwarreye
(after page 134; text page 134)

Plate 15: Klaus Moje
(before page 145; text page 187)

Plate 16: Brian Hirst
(after page 170; text page 170)

Plate 17: Liz Williamson
(after page 182; text 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) Photos: courtesy artist.

Plate 18: Carlier Makigawa
(after page 183; text page 184)
Brooch, 925 sterling silver and monel, made in Melbourne in 1991. (5 x 13cm approx.) Photo: Kate Gollings.

Plate 19: Marc Newson
(after page 184; text page 184)
Plate 20: Yvonne Koolmatrie
(after page 188; text 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 88 cm.) Collection Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 21: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott
(after page 195; text page 196)

Plate 22: Stephen Bowers
(after page 196; text page 196)

Plate 23: Rod Bamford
(after page 197; text 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 63 cm) Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photo: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Plate 24: Rod Bamford
(after page 198; text page 198)
*Insensible 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 1.1 m). Photo: Rod Bamford.

Plate 25: Jenny Kee
(before page 201; text pages 101, 158)

Plate 26: Susan Cohn
(after page 216; text pages 184, 216)

Plate 27: Robert Baines
(before appendices; text page 210)
*The Entropy of Red - Table*, made of sterling silver, gilt and lacquer in Melbourne in 1995. (53 x 28 x 28 cm) Photo: Gary Sommerfield.