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'Workmanship of Certainty'

"Workmanship of risk (WoR) means that at any time, the workman is liable to ruin the job. It is in opposition to the workmanship of certainty (WoC), in which the quality of the result is predetermined and beyond the control of the operative found in its pure state in full automation."  
David Pye, 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' 1968

In 1996 I used a CNC to make one of my final degree show pieces. After 20 years of using and researching digital craftsmanship I wish to challenge David Pye and his implied preference for the 'workmanship of certainty' I would like to argue, from both an experiential and theoretical position, that 'full automation' will always present an element of uncertainty, no matter what techniques or technology are employed.

Within my paper I hope to consider and question this, looking at the role of certainty and uncertainty particularly with reference to my past digital work and 2 new projects.

In late 2006 I designed the Anne Table showing it in early 2007 and later that year, I designed the George Chest of Drawers. These pieces were celebrated within the industry: because of the digital manufacturing methods used, yet I would argue that these pieces were positioned between digital manufacture, design and hand craftsmanship. Indeed, the results demonstrated the limitations of digital fabrication at this time, when digital manufacture was still very much in its infancy, and highlighted the simplicity of contemporary design.

Ten years on the original 'George' is still referenced in publications, flown round the world and discussed as an example of digital manufacturing. Where, then, is digital fabrication positioned for 2018? It is widely accepted that digital fabrication can be considered as craftsmanship and digital technologies have advanced greatly. Rapid prototyping has become commonplace, and the creative freedom digital technologies offer is far greater, So what should define a piece of digital craftsmanship in 2018?

In January 2016 I started a new body of digital enquiry focussing on the idea of 'certainty' and another around 'uncertainty' in January 2017.

'Certainty' explores CNC fabrication and the possibility of 'the new Baroque', using perfection at the core of my thought process. The planned output is a re-creation of a Georgian chest of draws, which has involved a year of development and four months of making. 'Certainty' celebrates digital fabrication in 2017 yet equally highlights the role and importance of uncertainty, even within full automation.

I would argue that without understanding certainty you can't define uncertainty, which prompted another creative enquiry with 'uncertainty' at the core of it being. The resulting pieces utilized robotic arms in their manufacture, yet the nature of the 'green wood' material used introduced the unknown. As the robot cuts into green timber the objects dry, finding their natural state, emphasising and cultivating the unknown alongside the certain.

Can this body of work go some way in redefining a new definition for modern craftsmanship?