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Small Scale Crafting Communities and Collectives: Examining the Practice of Sustainable and Ethical Production and Consumption in Radical Crafting Groups in Regional Setting

A case study: The Make Space Collective.

Crafts have shifted through incarnations over generations; influenced by social and cultural trends, as well as responding to external world factors such as economic restrictions and shortages of both labour and materials. As the world faces issues of sustainability of economies, environment and communities, the practice of craft is again responding: reshaping and redefining itself. Atkinson points to the burgeoning 'impoverished middle class' in post-war Britain as a powerful social factor in the re-making of DIY and craft practices away from the social stigma of poverty towards a "make do and mend" philosophy of economy of which to be proud rather than ashamed. This paper seeks to examine the influence of the current public dialogue on issues of sustainability and environmental concerns on the crafts practitioners. How do they think of craft and sustainability? Does the inclusion of "green" practices, techniques and source of materials give artefacts extra "green-cred"? And how much does that influence craft practitioners in the way they practice and market their crafts? This paper will focus on the Make Space collective of craftswomen practicing in Newcastle, Australia. Gillian Harris creates whimsical art and craft objects, especially children's toys from refuse and natural resources. Suzie Bailey "upcycles" fabric sourced from second-hand and thrift stores into new, useable products including clothing, bags and blankets. Artist Sarah Johnston re-imagines household clutter and disused items into objects of beauty. Edwina Richards designs and creates a range of crafts, including children's clothing as well as hand made buttons and greeting cards. Jackie Smallcombe began making jewellery with found objects including sand worn glass, beach pebbles and other objects found in seaside settings and now creates more "fine" jewellery.

The Make Space Collective operates out of a reclaimed store front under a scheme which locates and brings together artisans, craftspeople and other projects with owners of long-term unoccupied commercial spaces. The sourcing of materials, the practice of the craft as well as the method of marketing and distribution are concerned with issues of sustainability and reclamation of the old - resources, methodology, spaces - with an eye to the future.