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Designer/Makers are Key to Sustainable Development

The opportunities emerging from the practical and conceptual application of sustainable materials and eco-efficient processes, are presenting designer/makers with new problems to solve, resulting in new design possibilities. This paper explores some of these possibilities, within the context of the textile crafts producer. It is understood that with a clearer grasp of sustainability issues, craft designers and producers will be ideally placed to take a leading role in realising opportunities to create aesthetic and desirable eco-efficient and sustainably sourced objects.

Material Advances

This paper acknowledges the unprecedented advances that have been made in fibres, materials and processes, in the last decade. Previously, innovations came from advancements for military use. Medical and Cosmetics Industries are now leading that development and designers are increasingly working in collaboration with materials scientists to explore commercial applications. Particular reference is made to the design responsibility that has fallen to craft producers, including the difficulties experienced in acquiring knowledge of new and emerging materials and processes. This is recognised as an exciting and challenging time, with many new opportunities, underpinned by complex ethical considerations. Advances in polymer technology have resulted in the availability of sustainable natural fibres, from protein sources, which biodegrade naturally in time. These fibres present designers and crafts producers with exciting alternatives to synthetics, as well as possessing better environmental credentials.

Design Education

The nature of materials application is observed, and the framework for success is highlighted as a need for greater knowledge and understanding of sustainable materials and processes especially in design education. The paper argues for increased support to be offered to young designers through greater access to resources, to enable greater awareness of design responsibility and increased understanding of how to possess social conscience without compromising design objectives, when designing for a sustainable future.

Environmental Culture

The central theme explores the dual role that crafts practitioners and researchers are striving to fulfil; to extend their own exploration of materials and objects whilst remaining conscious of the new expectations of a more environmentally focused culture. Designers and crafts producers are expected to design and make with a conscience, whilst keeping in step with emerging technologies. Their ability to realise the potential application of technical advancements now requires the conviction to make ecologically sound, user friendly, aesthetic products. New values need to be placed on the resources and objects that we already possess. We need to move on from the current fears of the imminent and inevitable restrictions dictated by environmental organisations and governments. Recent discussions have identified a need to change the current cycle of use, and to achieve this we will need to bring about a paradigm shift to our social culture, recognising that designers and crafts producers are the critical mass in delivery of sustainable futures.