

Ceramics in Scotland – Mapping Current Activity and Sustaining Future Making Tuesday 15 July, 2008

This paper presents the minutes of ‘Ceramics in Scotland - Mapping Current Activity and Sustaining Future Making’: a discussion which took place during a one-day event to mark the culmination of Frances Priest’s three-month Scottish Crafts residency at Cove Park.

Following a studio presentation of new work developed by Frances during her residency, discussion was focussed on two key areas: mapping current activity in Scotland; and a consideration of the ways in which making can be sustained and developed in this country. This discussion is timely: the closure of dedicated BA (Hons.) ceramics courses throughout Scotland highlights the importance of safeguarding the future development of ceramics and finding new ways of supporting and promoting makers. The event brought together a number of key makers and professionals from throughout Scotland and the UK and we hope, by presenting these minutes, to expand this network and to initiate new partnerships and forums.

We would like to thank all those who participated in the event and made such valuable contributions. In particular, we would like to thank Amanda Game for directing the discussion on the day. This event was conceived by Frances Priest and we would like to thank Frances for her support and commitment to the project.

Alexia Holt, Director, Cove Park



Image: courtesy of Ruth Clark, 2008

Discussion

Chair:

Amanda Game, Director, IC: Innovative Craft

Attending:

James Donald (maker), Alun Graves (curator, ceramics and glass collection, Victoria and Albert Museum), Ellie Herring (writer), Alexia Holt (Director, Cove Park), Christina Jansen (Director, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh), Will Marshall (maker), Craig Mitchell (maker), Jenny Pope (maker), Frances Priest (ceramicist), Tina Rose (Acting Project Manager and Editor, Craft Scotland), Hazel Townsend (Crafts Officer, Scottish Arts Council), Andrea Walsh (maker), Rose Watban (Curator of Applied Art and Design, National Museum of Scotland), Katy West (maker), Dawn Youll (maker),

1. Current Activity

Positive activity in Scotland

- A good number of high quality practitioners relative to the size of Scotland were identified as working in or holding strong links to the country. Noted examples include: Stephen Bird, Ken Eastman, Tony Franks, Craig Mitchell, Frances Priest, Lara Scobie, Sarah-Jane Selwood, Fiona Thomson, Andrea Walsh, Simon Ward, Katy West and Dawn Youll.
- Examples of self-initiated projects that provide studio space, exhibition opportunities and participation in an arts community include: Fireworks, Glasgow, and the Adam Pottery, Edinburgh. Brazen Studios in Glasgow were also identified as a good model, creating an exhibition and studio space for artists and providing an essential training ground for makers.
- Examples of organisations supporting young makers and facilitating the production of new work include: Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Scottish Sculpture Workshop and WASPS who are in the early stages of creating a ceramics studio in Kirkcudbright.
- Some demand from industry for the expertise of artists and designers was identified. Examples included Ken Eastman and visual artists Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan and Kate Davis.
- There is a growing recognition of the need for the expertise of creative practitioners in schools due to the shift in education to a thematic curriculum and a re-focusing on the role of the arts in education. Teachers lack the confidence and skills base to facilitate ceramic projects within the classroom but often there are dormant kilns and other equipment in schools that could be put back into use.
- A great number of museums with historic and contemporary collections, including: Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museum; the Burrell Collection, Glasgow; Kirkcaldy Museum and Art Gallery; McManus Galleries and Museum, Dundee; and the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh
- Opportunities for exhibiting and selling work through private galleries and shops include: 12 Degrees, Edinburgh; the Adam Pottery, Edinburgh; Broughton Gallery, by Biggar; Concrete Wardrobe, Edinburgh; Designs Gallery, Castle Douglas; Fireworks Studio, Glasgow; the Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh; Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow; The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh; Studio One Furniture, Edinburgh.
- Opportunities for exhibiting work in public spaces include: An Tobar, Tobermory; Collins Gallery, Glasgow; Dick Institute, Kilmarnock; Dundee Contemporary Arts;

Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop; Fife Contemporary Art and Craft, St. Andrews; Hill House, Helensburgh; The Lighthouse, Glasgow; National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh.

- A good individual and collective web presence with an international reach. Examples include: Craftscotland, designED and the Scottish Arts Council (SAC).
- The importance of the role of private collectors and the development of this market by private galleries at both an international and local level. Christina Jansen noted that this market is continuing to grow year on year, suggesting a continued and increasing interest in the field.

Negative aspects of activity in Scotland

- Makers feel isolated without networks to other makers throughout Scotland.
- The closure of college courses leaves Scotland without a hub of activity and the resources this provides. It is no longer possible to study BA (Hons) in ceramics within Scotland. There is a 3d course, where you can specialise in ceramics at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen. This impacts on the facilities available to makers and a difficulty in maintaining skills.
- Makers are not visible enough.
- A lack of venues to show young makers and innovative, experimental craft. Makers can feel like they are working on the periphery of a largely fine art scene that can make public and artist-run exhibition spaces seem inaccessible.
- Poor studio provision both in terms of quantity and quality.

To summarise: for the scale of the country there is a strong base of activity, though it was recognised that the quality of that activity is varied. There is less ceramic studio provision in comparison to other areas of craft activity (individual studios are more prevalent). This may be a consequence of SAC funding that is targeted toward helping individuals with setting up studios. There is no structure to support the establishment of group studios, despite the fact that the high costs of equipment and the need for flexible, large working spaces lends itself to shared facilities.

Why Scotland?

- The vibrant visual art scene, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, makes Scotland an exciting place to be. Dawn Youll and Katy West chose to move back to Glasgow following MA courses in England partly because of this. There is a sense of things being possible. Dawn Youll recently showed with Washington Garcia, Glasgow, suggesting visual art spaces/organisations are open to presenting work from across fields.
- Financially it is more realistic to develop a practice here as a young artist and to have a relatively high standard of living
- Why do established makers move to Scotland? The physical place/space and the people all contribute to making Scotland a desirable location for established makers to move to. In a small community of makers there is perhaps a greater opportunity to fund individuals that would be unsupported in London, where the competition for funds is so high.

International Activity

- Examples of international residency opportunities/workshop space for makers:

Cove Park, Argyll, Scotland
www.covepark.org

European Ceramic Work Centre,
Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands
www.ekwc.nl

A.I.R Vallauris, Vallauris, France
www.air-vallauris.com

John Michael Kohler Arts Centre,
Wisconsin, USA
www.jmkac.org

Northlands Glass, Lybster,
Scotland
www.northlandsglass.com

Gladstone Pottery Museum,
Stoke-on-Trent, England
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/museumandgalleries/makingmove/sgladstone.htm

Watershed Centre for the Ceramic
Arts, Maine, USA
www.watershedceramics.org

Archie Bray Foundation, Montana
USA
www.archiebray.org

The Banff Centre, Banff, Canada
www.banffcentre.ca

Jingdezhen PWS Experimental
Factory, Jingdezhen, China
www.potteryworkshop.org

Fu Ping Pottery Art Village,
Shaanxi, China
www.flicam.com

Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park,
Shigaraki, Japan
www.sccp.main.jp

The International Ceramic Studio,
Kecskemét
www.icshu.org

Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, England
www.vam.ac.uk/school_stdnts/education_centre/residency_programme/index.htm

All of these organisations are considered to have a positive impact on the locations they are based in terms of the wider understanding, appreciation and support of ceramic activity.

- Ceramic Biennales are considered to be problematic, acting more like a competition than a well curated, interesting exhibition opportunity. They are useful in presenting work to the ceramic community but have limited reach beyond the field.

2. Sustaining Future Making

- Ceramic workshop spaces in colleges need to be kept open in order for vital skills development to continue, to build experience and transferable skills. This looks likely in Glasgow in the short term.
- There needs to be a centre for ceramics in Scotland if the activity is to be sustained in any meaningful way. This would provide a hub of activity, giving a focus to makers and generating international networks. EKWC in Hertogenbosch is an excellent example of how this can work.
- There needs to be improved self-promotion by makers, but galleries also have to develop closer relationships with the makers they represent.
- There needs to be different structures for showing craft in a more experimental/expanded way that is not just about objects on plinths or objects as commodities. Makers should have the confidence to create their own opportunities,

presenting new work outwith the traditional structures, tapping into existing visual arts spaces but also creating new spaces.

- Examples amongst the group of individual/home-grown activity included Katy West who is currently curating two projects at the Mackintosh Gallery, Glasgow School of Art, and the Lighthouse. These were initiated in Scotland after finishing her MA in London. Frances Priest works on projects with different groups around Edinburgh, expanding her activities beyond the studio to explore the possibilities for a socially engaged, participatory approach to areas of her practice.
- Museums can offer different ways to view craft and engage with the presentation of contemporary work alongside their historic collections. A good example of this is 'Craft Rocks' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where making was put side by side with the collections for a one-off event. These activities can help to develop new audiences, create interesting ways of interpreting historical collections, challenge perceived notions of the reach and context of craft and develop the relationship between artist, object and viewer.
- Financial support for artists also need to be offered in the form of exhibition fees to relieve the pressure of funding activity through sales, creating a space for new ideas, innovation and experimentation.
- Funding for makers is important but the SAC recognises the need to fund curators as well as practitioners. A pilot stream of funding has been initiated, and there is an opportunity for a change in thinking about how exhibitions of craft work can be curated and presented.
- It is important that the SAC's Crafts Department remains distinct from its Visual Arts Department, with a direct funding stream, which enables support for individual makers involved in innovative projects.
- The development of private investment will help sustain making. Individuals want to invest back into Scotland and this support can in turn help to attract public funds.
- The private gallery sector has and continues to be crucial, not only in developing markets for the sale of work but as spaces for presenting innovative and exciting contemporary work. The creative ambition, ability to take risks, personal investment and wealth of knowledge inherent within the private gallery sector is not always recognised. Stronger links between public and private need to be forged.
- Dissemination of information through a wide range of sources needs to be developed. Critical writing, exhibitions, web sites, seminars, group discussions, talks and events all create connections and build a sense of community: a crafts scene. Current examples of organisations pursuing this include:

Craftscotland. Predominantly web-based resource but with an expanding exhibition profile through events such as Collect and Homes & Interiors Scotland
www.craftscotland.org

IC: Innovative Crafts. A new organisation dedicated to linking up, supporting and creating new opportunities for high quality craft activity in Scotland and internationally. Currently based at the new Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.
www.innovativecraft.co.uk

Cove Park. In addition to its growing crafts residency programme, Cove Park facilitates events such as this to encourage discussion, collaboration and cross pollination between art forms.
www.covepark.org

- The Glasgow/Edinburgh wall has to come down for sustainable/connected practice within such a small country. The lack of links between the two cities is unproductive and divisive.

Conclusion

It was agreed that maintaining open discussion between makers, galleries, residency organisations and funders throughout Scotland is key. With this in mind, the minutes from this discussion will be circulated to promote ongoing dialogue and maintain contact. It was hoped the individuals taking part today will keep in touch and that this network can be extended in the future. Cove Park aims to develop a dedicated residency programme to support ceramicists in Scotland and throughout the UK and it is hoped this opportunity will provide a valuable focus for future activity.

