

TEN out of TEN

Saturday 4 May – Sunday 16 June 2013

2013 is the tenth anniversary of The Contemporary Craft Festival, an event that has, from the start, been close both in location and ethos to the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. We have always worked together as we know that our combined presence in Bovey Tracey strengthens the position of contemporary craft locally, regionally and nationally. Both organisations have a common purpose in that we assist designers, makers and artists to show and sell their work at venues with a reputation for promoting excellence in contemporary craft.

The idea for a craft fair first came about in a Devon Guild of Craftsmen staff meeting. The then Director of Devon Guild, Alex Murdin, formed a consortium with two other Bovey Tracey based businesses and seed-funding, earmarked for rural regeneration projects, was applied for and obtained. The job description for a director of the Craft Festival was drawn up and advertised, Sarah James was appointed and the Craft Festival has continued to go from strength to strength ever since. The current Directors of the Festival are Sarah James and Devon Guild of Craftsmen.

The Contemporary Craft Festival is a non-profit making company and doesn't receive any regular funding from any government agencies. It does enjoy sponsorship from local businesses and occasionally it receives small grants from Teignbridge District Council and the Dartmoor Sustainable Trust. In the main, the Craft Festival is self-supporting and proud to be so.

The exhibitors in TEN out of TEN have all earned their place in this show through winning awards at the Craft Festival, noticeably building their careers and setting an all-round good example. However, TEN out of TEN is not just a sample of the best of the Craft Festival, it is an opportunity for each of the makers to try something new, perhaps launch a new product or show something that they wouldn't necessarily show at the Festival.

TEN out of TEN also makes for an interesting comparison with our biennial exhibition Get Fresh, a show which offers an exhibition opportunity to recent graduates and emerging makers. Get Fresh shows work made by 'new' makers still exploring their territory, materials and techniques; their work, with a few notable exceptions, is still 'in progress'. In contrast, our Ten, who are all regularly exhibiting and selling their work, have achieved technical excellence and design fluency resulting in resolved end products. Additionally, they have acquired experience in other areas important to their careers such as marketing, brand awareness, business skills and application procedures.



Photo: Nick Philbedge

Their collective 'artist statements' and CVs show a remarkable cross-section of skills, interests, commissions and awards. One of the best named awards, *Most Comfortable Chair*, was awarded to John Luff for his rocking chair, by the visiting and voting public who visited the *Celebration of Craftsmanship and Design* exhibition in Cheltenham, 2011.



Cleo Mussi's mosaics have won her a reputation for innovation and originality. She brings something new and interesting to one of the oldest and most enduring crafts; her work makes the point that technical skill alone does not make an artist or an artwork. The ideas and references which underpin her work are, as in all art forms, as important as the materials and techniques used.

Cleo's materials are all reclaimed, something that reflects her current focus on consumption and our reckless use of the world's natural resources

Adele Brereton's jewellery is made using the traditional 'hand raising' technique of silversmiths where a flat sheet is hammered into a hollow form. Influenced by her knowledge and interest in historical objects and artefacts, her work is sometimes combined with other natural materials, hand-carved wood for example, and lately she has been using found objects as well.



Helaina Sharpley's wirework is evocative and expressive. She is candid about the inspiration for her work in this exhibition – an idealised view of a Britain that no longer exists. These drawings in wire cast shadows onto their mountings thereby growing into airy, three-dimensional representations of familiar objects. Using remarkably little in the way of tools, but always starting with a drawing, Helaina uses just wire cutters and pliers to render iron binding wire, a prosaic, utilitarian material, into a thing of delicacy and charm. Possibly more exciting than any award or prize, two of Helaina's pieces were recently purchased by David Hockney, an event which must have pleased her

enormously!

Returning to the Craft Festival, we asked Sarah James, the Director, to answer some questions. Here are her answers.

What were the visitor numbers for The Contemporary Crafts Festival, 2012?

There were 8,000 visitors to the festival in 2012.

Who visits The Contemporary Craft Festival?

Visitors to the festival include all sorts of people; collectors, makers, teachers, craft enthusiasts, academics, families, students, tourists, lovers of arts, music and food. Our visitor profile includes care workers, surgeons, company executives, bus drivers, and the occasional Right Honourable. The event has wide appeal.

What are the audience like?

The audience is loyal and growing. Most visitors come every year and as it's our tenth anniversary we are hoping for 10,000 visitors. Visitors love the combination of buying hand-made objects and learning how things are made.

Critic and author Glenn Adamson wrote in Crafts, Jan/Feb 2013

'If you want to get the general public interested, find a wheelwright or a knifegrinder who stands poised at the end of the line. Like an endangered species of animal, they make great press.' He also tells us that the 2011 craft exhibition 'The Power of Making', held at the V&A, attracted 315,000 visitors – the second highest attendance figure in the museums recent history. *What, in your view, is the current attraction of craft for the public?*

The attraction to craft has grown impressively since the Festival was founded in 2003. There are lots of reasons for this. With the rise in the use of technology and a dispersed society that no longer lives down the road from parents/grandparents, craft has tapped into a yearning for a slower age, one where time was taken to sit and make. It is also a reflection of the need for authenticity in a global shopping market, where products have become homogenised, worldwide. Craft gives the consumer a real alternative and one that is steeped in a heady mix of quality, skill and originality. In more recent years, the economic downturn has erupted into a revolution of individuals making do and mending, becoming makers through choosing it as a hobby, ironically in an act of anti-consumerism. Conversely, there is a rapidly growing interest in the use of emerging technologies especially the use of 3D printing. This is very exciting area of development, which we will be discussing in the Talk Tipi at the Festival.

How has The Contemporary Craft Festival evolved over the last 10 years?

It's grown in lots of ways. It's become recognised as one of the finest craft events in the UK, which I am very grateful for. It's grown from being a selling fair to a festival of ideas and making. The increased workshops, demonstrations, children's crafts, music, food and exhibitors have all contributed to this. We have a new feature called the Talk Tipi this year and I've invited a wide variety of makers, academics and thinkers to talk on a range of subjects that affect craft. It's an exciting development for our tenth year.

Where do you see The Contemporary Craft Festival in another 10 years?

If you give me some fields to put the cars, I will fill up Mill Marsh Park with makers. The event could be four times as big as we turn away the majority of applicants. It would also be great to open the event to international makers. We currently only accept British and Irish makers as the demand is so high.

Have you seen particular exhibitors 'grow'?

It's been amazing watching some makers develop, especially brands like Margo Selby, who won Best New Business in 2006. Margo is now a big name in textiles and sells across Europe. Likewise, Poppy Treffry's business has grown impressively; she is a flourishing online retailer and also has a shop in Cornwall.

What is at the heart of your own interest in contemporary craft?

I was a maker myself. I have a degree in ceramics from Glasgow School of Art and have experienced life as a maker from in front and behind the counter. I took part in many craft fairs and trade fairs and wanted to put together an event that put the maker first. I pride myself on getting to know the exhibitors and believe the reason the event has endured is that we have put quality of making at its heart.

What do you look for in a winner?

I'm an old fashioned lover of beauty. I like an object to speak to me in the crispness of the making, the richness of the material and the character of the finished piece.

What particularly stood out about the 'Ten' that marked them out as winners?

I looked for a diverse mix in the winners that were chosen for TEN out of TEN. They needed to reflect the diversity and character of the exhibitors that we have had the honour of hosting over the years. And they needed to sit well together.

How do you select the Festival? What do you look for?

The Festival is selected by a jury which is changed every year. There is a quota for each discipline, dictated by supply and demand. Jewellery is by far the largest group and we cap this at around 50 (there are well over 100 applications in this category alone). The next largest group is ceramics, then textiles and then the groups get much smaller for wood, furniture, paper, leather, silver and so on. We look for the best in British making. It is done by looking at photos of work, so makers need to get the best photography possible. It makes or breaks an applicant's chance of selection. Applicants have several options for their stand size, starting at 1.5m and going up to 4 x 2m for larger work such as furniture.

Happily, the Craft Festival Director is optimistic about the current position of crafts. We know that many practitioners have successful businesses and people appreciate hand-made, unique work. TEN out of TEN shows us some of the best, from the natural, beautiful pieces of Lizzie Farey to the silky delights of Margo Selby's products, our exhibitors are leading the way in terms of design and execution. Devon Guild is pleased to be showing their work and confident that our visitors will enjoy it too.

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