

## Get Fresh

Showcasing the work of emerging designer-makers from the South West

Saturday 17 January - Sunday 8 March 2015

*Get Fresh* is a biennial exhibition with the specific remit to show work by new or 'emerging' makers from the South West<sup>1</sup>. Devon Guild of Craftsmen is committed to giving promising new designer-makers an opportunity to show their work at the start of what we hope will be productive careers as contemporary craft practitioners. *Get Fresh* aims to celebrate the commitment and diversity of new or 'emerging' makers whilst providing support and encouragement and, most importantly, an early audience for their work.

Although the selection procedure is open to 'self-taught' or those that have come through an apprentice route, all sixteen of our 2015 exhibitors have attended higher education institutions in the UK which deliver degrees or diplomas in art, craft and design subjects so it is interesting to look at the recent publication from the Crafts Council, *An Education Manifesto for Craft and Making*. This publication lets us know that in the last five years participation in craft-related GCSEs fell by 25% and the number of higher education craft courses fell by 46%. This comes at a time when elsewhere around the globe investment in creative education and making is rising.

Craft currently generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy<sup>2</sup> and over 150,000 people across the UK deploy craft skills within a number of industries including fashion, film, medicine and engineering. Craft makers can, quite literally, create their own employment so it is disturbing to see that mainstream education policy is influencing subject choices and emphasis away from art, craft and design related subjects. Our new Education Secretary recently advised teenagers to 'steer away from the arts and humanities and opt for science or maths subjects if they want to access the widest range of jobs' even though there is good evidence<sup>3</sup> to show that young people who study arts subjects *as well* as science and maths 'have higher employability and are more likely to maintain employment than those that did not study arts subjects'.

Devon Guild of Craftsmen is a partner in the Crafts Council's Education Manifesto<sup>4</sup> and therefore subscribes to the five calls for change which makes up the action plan. These are,

- Put craft and making at the heart of education
- Build more routes into craft careers
- Bring craft enterprise into education
- Invest in skills throughout careers
- Promote world-class higher education and research in craft

At the time of writing this, Falmouth University has announced the closure of its Contemporary Crafts BA course as it 'cannot maintain the course's space needs and intensely process-led curriculum without significant cross-subsidy from other subject areas'. It adds that the university is 'investing in new areas of study, introducing new courses including Digital Games and Business Entrepreneurship'. Of course, now that higher education has become significantly more market-driven, it would be foolish to think that degree courses are not going to evolve and respond to new demands, particularly to the rise of digital innovation, but the demise of courses which explore knowledge of materials, craft process and technique is a serious loss not just to contemporary crafts but to other professions and industries that rely on practical designing and making skills.

<sup>1</sup> Devon, Dorset, Cornwall, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Bristol and Bath

<sup>2</sup> An Education Manifesto for Crafts and Making, Crafts Council 2014

<sup>3</sup> *Arts and Employability, Executive summary* (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department, 2006)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/education-manifesto/>

Additionally, the higher education situation mirrors the long decline of craft and design facilities in schools, where workshops, tools and materials are also deemed too expensive and 'resource-heavy' to maintain. It should be argued that, if we want to encourage practical children who understand how to use tools and materials, we need to teach these skills from a young age.



So how is the above relevant to *Get Fresh*? Well, here are sixteen fresh artists/designers/makers from the South West who were selected by John Grayson<sup>5</sup> from a large number of applications of a high standard. They are at the beginning of their careers but it can confidently be said that they have already amassed a variety of skills and knowledge; they are all practical problem solvers and they all understand something about materials, form, function and aesthetics. Some are already achieving press interest in their work so let's start with Jenny Ayrton (image left: *Playground*) maker of sculptural glass pieces which have evolved from her facility with 'drawing' in wire and then learning, at Plymouth College of Art, how to cast glass using plaster moulds. Jenny is already considering how to scale up her evocative work with a view to public

commissions and, in an article about her in *Craft & Design Magazine*<sup>6</sup>, she shows evidence of a wise head as she is quoted as saying, 'I'm slowly learning that marketing isn't a dirty word... it's a vital part of any business.'

Chloe O'Brien's jewellery mixes tradition and innovation with a light touch. Using traditional silversmithing skills mixed with etching and considered use of old, handwritten postcards, her work appears both contemporary *and* nostalgic (image right: *Fine Weather for Tennis*). How can the near demise of handwriting and quaint postcard-speak have happened so quickly? But it has and, as with all change, something remains to be reconsidered, reworked and re-presented. Chloe is also the winner of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen's Visual Arts Prize, 2014.



Beatrix Baker, alumna of the previously mentioned Contemporary Crafts BA at Falmouth, uses the maritime industry of Cornwall as a major reference for her pieces (image right: *Spool Ship*). Using steam bent oak and ash in combination with found objects, her sculptural pieces evoke the buoyant curves of boats, their strength but also their fragility.



The hand-woven fabric on Angie Parker's salvaged and then upholstered pieces (image left) utilise traditional patterns in combination with a distinctly untraditional palette. After a career in costume for theatre and television, Angie launched her own vibrant work via an Open Studios event and then benefitted from advice and mentoring from The Crafts Council's Hothouse<sup>7</sup> programme. Further encouraged by a positive response to her contemporary colour palette in combination with traditional weaving techniques, Angie is now working on a new range of handwoven rugs, two of which are on show in the exhibition.



<sup>5</sup> Contemporary Craft Lecturer at Hereford College of Art

<sup>6</sup> Issue 237/Jan-Feb 2015

<sup>7</sup> Hothouse – a free programme of professional support for selected craft makers

A *phobia* is an aversion to something whereas a *philia* is an attraction. Helen Muir's delicately cut paper constructions (image right: *Biophilia Series*) express her own interest in flora and fauna, and the importance of the human attraction to nature. The *biophilia hypothesis* proposes that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems, it means 'love of life or living systems' and, as Helen suggests, is a good explanation for why we humans surround ourselves with images of the natural world.



Melanie Kew's vibrant ceramics (image left) pose quite a contrast to biophilia. Citing urbanism and architecture as interests that impact on her work, Melanie's stackable cylinders have an engineered quality but also show their considered individuality through layers of colour, texture, print and drawing. The maker's confidence and experimental interest in her forms and their surfaces results in a very fresh approach with the medium of clay.

The above-mentioned makers represent about one third of our *Get Fresh* exhibitors and hopefully give a window into the wider exhibition. The range of work on show is diverse and inventive, but all of it, whether traditionally based or contemporary and conceptual, employs a variety of skills, tools and technology, materials and material knowledge. Whether our *Get Fresh* exhibitors become full-time, self-employed designers, artists and makers or follow a mixed career, their knowledge and experience will grow and hopefully all will find ways to enable them to continue making their own work and also pass on their skills. Some are already running workshops and art clubs for children so the *next* generation of makers are already on their way and even if there is currently a lack of creative making opportunities in our schools we can hope that this will change with the good efforts of the Crafts Council, arts charities and fresh, motivated makers.

Further images and information on *Get Fresh* exhibitors' work can be found on the Devon Guild social media pages and website:

[www.crafts.org.uk](http://www.crafts.org.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Devon-Guild-of-Craftsmen/65969175737>

<https://twitter.com/devonguild> / @devonguild [www.pinterest.com/devonguild/boards/](http://www.pinterest.com/devonguild/boards/)



The Guild has been awarded a *Learning Outside the Classroom* badge, which provides quality assurance for organisations who work in partnership with schools and youth groups. This means we provide an environment of Learning and Safety and are a trusted centre for education providers to use in curriculum teaching.



Our organisation offers children and young people ways to work towards their Arts Award. They can attend a workshop, an artist's talk or demo / review and record exhibitions, performances or festival events / use our archives and knowledge about craftmakers and their careers / find a basis for skill-sharing and project-leadership.

If you are running Arts Week activities for your school or college, please get in touch with us to arrange a group visit. (Our exhibition take-down: 6-17 July 2015). Call 01626 832223 to chat to our Education Officer.

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