

The Summer Show

22 July – 10 September 2017

A Hand Made Tale

What do makers do all day? This is the question we asked our Members to consider when writing their statements for *The Summer Show*. It is a topical question as we have had the TV programme *What Do Artists Do All Day* and, currently, the Radio 4 programme *Only Artists* where a pair of artists converse about their working practice, life and inspiration. In a recent episode, musician Richard Hawley explained that, once, when he was lying on the sofa, apparently doing nothing, a visitor popped in and made a comment about his idleness. The visitor was put right by Richard's wife, who said, "Don't ever confuse inactivity with idleness. He's probably writing a symphony in his head."



Image: Sam Pickard, textile designer

None of our makers have owned up to spending part of their day lying down *thinking* about making but quite a lot of tea drinking and walking, with or without a dog, goes on. About half our makers' statements refer to a walk as an important part of their day so is this significant? Walking has long been anecdotally linked to creativity, with artists and writers down the centuries claiming their best ideas came to them during a walk; in 1899 Friedrich Nietzsche¹ wrote, "All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking."

But is it true? In 2014 a graduate student at Stanford, Marily Opezzo, while walking with her professor, Daniel Schwartz, came up with the idea of testing the theory on a group of undergraduates. The students

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher, poet and cultural critic, 1844 - 1900

undertook a series of psychological tests which included tasks such as thinking of alternative uses for common objects, for example, buttons. The participants then repeated the series of tests while walking on a treadmill, at an easy, self-selected pace. The results of the tests done on the treadmill showed that most participants were able to generate about 60% more uses for an object, with ideas that were both 'novel and appropriate'. However, the practical value of the findings would be almost worthless if creativity *only* increased while someone was walking; Dr. Opezzo designed more tests to see if the effects continued post-walk and found that her volunteers had a markedly improved ability to generate creative ideas even when sitting down after walking.² It appears that walking really does make the brain livelier although the reasons are not obvious. It may be as simple as walking improves mood, which allows creativity to flower or, as Dr. Opezzo speculates, walking possibly allows the brain to bypass its own rational filters and become more adventurous.

Our Members' statements provide an insight into a maker's day; from the rather hectic balancing act of those who care for children or older people in addition to their working practice, to the measured, careful, stages of the work in a busy glass blowing studio. For many makers, the materials dictate the pace and rhythms of the work and therefore the day. As Will Shakespeare says, he has an assistant, a furnace full of molten glass and everything he makes in one day requires controlled cooling overnight; he must work within a structure and consequently requires a plan for the day. Working to order or commission also necessitates advance planning, working to deadlines and producing the work to specification.

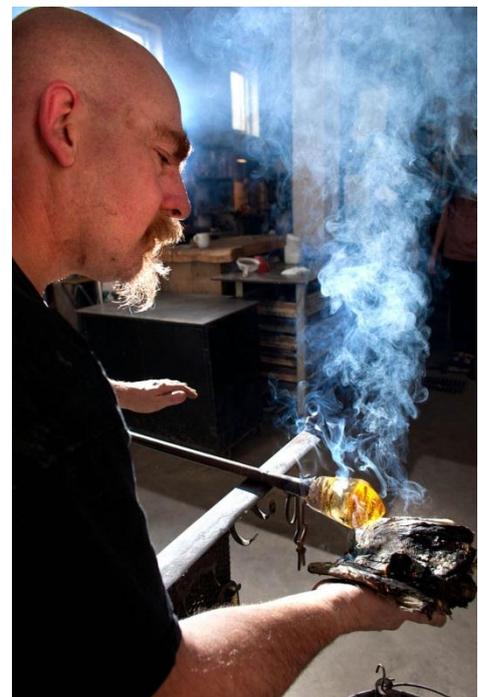


Image: Will Shakespeare, glass blower

Practice makes perfect or does it? It is generally accepted that particular skills, including craft skills, take time to acquire and the 10,000 hour 'rule' is often mentioned. It takes 10,000 hours, which equates to 20 hours a week for 10 years, of practice, training, learning, education, schooling – whatever you wish to call it – to master a discipline, skill, craft, or any other specific body of knowledge, before you can be

² Give Your Ideas Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking, 2014, Marily Opezzo and Daniel L Schwartz, Stanford University

declared 'gifted', or even simply proficient, in your chosen area. But where does this rule come from and is it true?

The original research by Anders Ericsson took apart the idea of innate 'talent' and replaced it with the concept of steady, targeted development of expertise. Of course there are many variables; who are you learning from, what are you learning and what is your starting point? The 2008 book, *Outliers*³, by Malcolm Gladwell, gave the 10,000 hour rule further exposure but also caused some controversy as he presented it as a means of achieving success in life. Gladwell defended himself by saying, "There is a lot of confusion about the 10,000 hour rule that I talk about in *Outliers*. It doesn't apply to sport, and practice isn't a sufficient condition for success. I could play chess for 100 years and never be a grandmaster. The point is simply that natural ability requires a huge investment of time in order to be made manifest."

Looking at the work in this exhibition, for example the perfect forms of Rob Sollis' *Blade Bowls*, Tim Andrews' *Round Form* or Paula Nolan's thought provoking piece *numbers*, the 10,000 hour rule is much in evidence.

While reading the Members' statements, particular phrases and lines stand out. Some are to do with the making process, tools and materials – the core of a maker's practice – while others talk about the places that inspire them, or are a part of their work.



No one is here, so I can concentrate on this place, making full use of the light and the atmosphere and the stream...

Image: Deborah Baker, photographer

... with the silk separated and evenly spaced through a raddle, the unravelling of the warps feels similar to combing long tangled hair.

... emboss Jabberwocky text into etching paper with a Victorian document press.

³ *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell, 2008

The furnace has two settings: high and low – it almost breathes in and breathes out like a dragon in the corner and its breath is hypnotic and soothing.

I am a collector of ideas, each placed carefully on the shelves of my imagination ...

We hope you enjoy *The Summer Show, 2017*. This is the only show of the year where exhibitors must be an elected Member of Devon Guild of Craftsmen. The show is selected by a panel with expertise in all the disciplines on show. This year the panel was comprised of Devon Guild Members Isabella Whitworth (Chair), Eleanor Bartleman, Sue Brown, Tim Gee, Christian O'Reilly, Veronica Polyblank, Will Shakespeare, Deborah Treliving, Jenny Wilkinson and Matthew Partington, (independent).

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Further images and information can be found on the Devon Guild website www.crafts.org.uk

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Our venue also offers the **Discover** level of **ARTS AWARD** for students and advisors

We can help run hands-on workshops in a wide range of art, craft and design subjects, delivered by skilled workshop leaders, at your community group or learning venue. These could be in printmaking, ceramics, textiles, willow, paper, recycled materials, natural materials and mosaic. See www.crafts.org.uk for more information

We encourage visits from schools, colleges and community groups. Let us know in advance and we can arrange an introductory talk & tour of a particular exhibition.

