CONTEMPORARY ART, CRAFT, & DESIGN HISTORY/ THEORY

Craft is conceived as a process, a way of doing things (an approach, an attitude, a habit of action), not as a fixed classification of objects, institutions, or people. The book is divided into 5 chapters: Supplemental, Materials, Skilled, Pastoral, and Amateur. Each chapter begins with history and theory, then compares and contrasts work coming from within various craft traditions, mainstream contemporary art, architecture, and intersections between disciplines.


Good overview essay about a history of collaborative practices in contemporary art, citing major theorists, practitioners, intents, debates and critiques.

"The desire to move viewers out of the role of passive observers and into the role of producers is one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century art. This tendency can be found in practices and projects ranging from El Lissitzky's exhibition designs to Allan Kaprow's happenings, from minimalist objects to installation art. More recently, this kind of participatory art has gone so far as to encourage and produce new social relationships. Guy Debord's celebrated argument that capitalism fragments the social bond has become the premise for much relational art seeking to challenge and provide alternatives to the discontents of contemporary life. This publication collects texts that place this artistic development in historical and theoretical context. Participation begins with writings that provide a theoretical framework for relational art, with essays by Umberto Eco, Bertolt Brecht, Roland Barthes, Peter Burger, Jen-Luc Nancy, Edoaud Glissant, and Felix Guattari, as well as the first translation into English of Jacques Rancière's influential "Problems and Transformations in Critical Art." The book also includes central writings by such artists as Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, Joseph Beuys, Augusto Boal, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Rirkrit Tiravanija. And it features recent critical and curatorial debates, with discussions by Lars Bang Larsen, Nicolas Bourriaud, Hal Foster, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist."


Chicago-based writer/critic Polly Ullrich gave a paper, entitled "Functional World," at a recent (2008) clay conference. Ullrich says, "While we often think of objects as inert or dense--even inscrutable--we must also consider what the literary critic Bill Brown has called the "transparency" of things. Those of us in functional ceramics know that there is no such thing as a "dumb object." Brown suggests that it is important to ask how to think about things beyond their mere formal qualities—he says we should delve into their social meanings, their connection to history, movement, culture, relationships, physical sensation. We need to ask, how do we use objects to "make" meanings, how do we use them to "remake" ourselves?" (Brown pp. 7, 4.)


During the late 1960s and early 1970s, in response to the political turbulence generated by the Vietnam War, an important group of American artists and critics sought to expand the definition of creative labor by identifying themselves as "art workers." In the first book to examine this movement, Julia Bryan-Wilson shows how a polemical redefinition of artistic labor played a central role in minimalism, process art, feminist criticism, and conceptualism. In her close examination of four seminal figures of the period—American artists Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Hans Haacke, and art critic Lucy Lippard—Bryan-Wilson frames an engrossing new argument around the double entendre that "art works." She traces the divergent ways in which these four artists and writers rallied around the "art worker" identity, including participating in the Art Workers' Coalition—a short-lived organization founded in 1969 to protest the war and agitate for artists' rights—and the New York Art Strike. By connecting social art history and theories of labor, this book illuminates the artworks and protest actions that were central to this pivotal era in both American art and politics.


"Some of the most innovative art of the past decade has been created far outside conventional galleries and museums. In a parking garage in Oakland, California; on a pleasure boat on the Lake of Zurich in Switzerland; at a public market in Chiang Mai, Thailand—artists operating at the intersection of art and cultural activism have been developing new forms of collaboration with diverse audiences and communities. Their projects have addressed such issues as political conflict in Northern Ireland, gang violence on Chicago's West Side, and the problems of sex workers in Switzerland. Provocative, accessible, and engaging, this book, one of the first full-length studies on the topic, situates these socially conscious projects historically, relates them to key issues in contemporary art and art theory, and offers a unique critical framework for understanding them. Grant Kester discusses a disparate network of artists and collectives—including The Art of Change, Helen and Newton Harrison, Littoral, Suzanne Lacy, Stephen Willats, and WochenKlausur—united by a desire to create new forms of understanding through creative dialogue that crosses boundaries of race, religion, and culture. Kester traces the origins of these works in the conceptual art and feminist performance art of the 1960s and 1970s and draws from the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, Jürgen Habermas, and others as he explores the ways in which these artists corroborate and challenge many of the key principles of avant-garde art and art theory."


"Anthology of essays and artists' projects that explore the ubiquity of cloth in everyday life and the effect of globalization on art and labor. The contributors explore, from historical and personal perspectives, such subjects as the charged history of offshore garment workers; the different systems of production and consumption in factories, homes, studios, and exhibitions; the revelation of class, gender, and sexuality through cloth, costume, and textile images; textile production as commemorative acts in South Africa, the United States, and India; transnationalism, cultural hybridity, and race in the work of individual artists; lost histories of garment production and embroidery; the physical act of art-making as labor; and the value of handmade and "technologically improved" objects. Essays by: Ingrid Bachman, Carol Becker, Andries Botha, Lou Cabeen, Helen Cho, Alison Ferris, Nancy Gildart, bell hooks, Alan Howard, Mary Jane Jacob, Janis Jeffries, Neil MacInnis, Margo Mensing, Kevin Murray, Sadie Plant, Maureen Sherlock, Viji Srinivasan, Skye Morrison, Lalita Tuabji and Dorothy Caldwell. Artist projects and portfolios by: Susie Brandt, Nick Cave, Park Chambers, Lisa Clark, Lia Cook, Ann Hamilton, Kimsooja, Barbara Layne and Sue Rowley, Lara Lepionka, Merrill Mason, Darrel Morris, Pepón Osorio, J. Morgan Puett and Iain Kerr, Karen Reimer, Yinka Shonibare, SubRosa, Christine Tarkowski, and Anne Wilson."


"After WWII, the basis of the Unites States economy shifted from manufacturing to service, transforming traditional definitions of labor. As the conditions of labor changed for the vast majority of the American populace, so too did it change for artists. Many artists (like their working and professional counterparts) no longer felt compelled to offer a discrete object produced by hand. Rather, they explore ways of producing art that were analogous to other forms of labor. Art could thus be made with unskilled manual labor, with highly regimented managerial labor, or with labor that resonated with ideas borrowed from the service economy. While art was being created by the same mechanisms that governed other forms of labor, it did not look like work (or art, even), much like sitting at a desk might not look like work to someone laboring on a factory assembly line. In recent years, there has been a return of artistic strategies of the 1960's. This renewed interest in the avant-garde's challenges to traditional definitions of art during the 1960's..." --Helen Molesworth, p. 18


"Defining craftsmanship far more broadly than 'skilled manual labor,' Richard Sennett maintains that the computer programmer, the doctor, the artist, and even the parent and citizen engage in a craftsman's work. Craftsmanship names the basic human impulse to do a job well for its own sake, says the author, and good craftsmanship involves developing skills and focusing on the work rather than ourselves. In this thought-provoking book, one of our most distinguished public intellectuals explores the work of craftsmen past and present, identifies deep connections between material consciousness and ethical values, and challenges received ideas about what constitutes good work in today's world."


TEXTILE HISTORY & PRACTICE


"Weaving centers led the Appalachian Craft Revival at the beginning of the twentieth century. Soon after settlement workers came to the mountains to start schools, they expanded their focus by promoting weaving as a way for women to help their family's financial situation. Women wove thousands of guest towels, baby blankets, and place mats that found a ready market in the women's network of religious denominations, arts organizations, and civic clubs. Although the sales appeal often emphasized helping women with very few resources, the centers frugally covered their own expenses without charity, paying the weavers a prevailing wage. In Weavers of the Southern Highlands, Phyllis Alvic details how the Fireside Industries of Berea College in Kentucky began with women weaving to supply their children's school expenses and later developed student labor programs, where hundreds of students covered their tuition by weaving. Arrowcraft, associated with Pi Beta Phi School at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and the Penland Weavers and Potters, begun at the Appalachian School at Penland, North Carolina, followed the Berea model. Women wove at home with patterns and materials supplied by the center, returning their finished products to the coordinating organization to be marketed. Dozens of similar weaving centers dotted mountain ridges."


"Americans have been shocked by media reports of the dismal working conditions in factories that make clothing for U.S. companies. But while well intentioned, many of these reports about child labor and sweatshop practices rely on stereotypes of how Third World factories operate, ignoring the complex economic dynamics driving the global apparel industry. To dispel these misunderstandings, Jane L. Collins visited two very different apparel firms and their factories in the United States and Mexico. Moving from corporate headquarters to factory floors, her study traces the diverse ties that link First and Third World workers and managers, producers and consumers. Collins examines how the transnational economics of the apparel industry allow firms to relocate or subcontract their work anywhere in the world, making it much harder for garment workers in the United States or any other country to demand fair pay and humane working conditions. Putting a human face on globalization, Threads shows not only how international trade affects local communities but also how workers can organize in this new environment to more effectively demand better treatment from their distant corporate employers."


"This book examines the relocation and eventual demise of the Dwight Manufacturing Company as an early step in the process of textile industry globalization' (p. 2). Beth English's goal is to illuminate current capital mobility by studying the movement of capital within the United States. Many of today's globalization issues would be familiar to those involved in the movement of northern textile firms to the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Seeking cheap labor, unregulated labor markets, and higher profits, Dwight Manufacturing of Chicopee, Massachusetts, opened an Alabama plant in 1896.” -- The Journal of American History, Vol 94, No. 2, September 2007


Looks at hand weaving in North America, the Middle East, West Africa, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, Guatemala and Peru, and describes the fibers used, methods of spinning and dyeing, types of looms, and weaving techniques.


"The Devil's Cloth begins with a medieval scandal. When the first Carmelites arrived in France from the Holy Land, the religious order required its members to wear striped habits, prompting turmoil and denunciations in the West that lasted fifty years until the order was forced to accept a quiet, solid color. The medieval eye found any surface in which a background could not be distinguished from a foreground disturbing. Thus striped clothing was relegated to those on the margins or outside the social order -- jugglers and prostitutes, for example -- and in medieval paintings the devil himself is often depicted wearing stripes. The West has long continued to dress its slaves and servants, its crew members and convicts in stripes. But in the last two centuries, stripes have also taken on new, positive meanings, connoting freedom, youth, playfulness, and pleasure. Witness the revolutionary stripes on the French and United States flags. In a wide-ranging discussion that touches on zebras, gangsters, awnings, and pajamas, augmented by illustrative plates, the author shows us how stripes have become chic, and even, in the case of bankers' pinstripes, a symbol of taste and status. Michel Pastoureau's lively study of stripes offers a unique and engaging perspective on the evolution of fashion, taste, and visual codes in Western culture.”


Paintings of mid-19th century flax spinning and weaving.


"Yarn is the basic unit of textile construction and every fabric, except felt, is made with it. The properties of yarn -- its ply, tensile strength, weight, elasticity, and resistance to heat, water, and shrinkage -- are what give each yarn its unique characteristics. By manipulating these properties, an astonishing array of fabric types can be produced, creating any number of textures and appearances. // By focusing on these varieties, Penny Walsh is able to closely examine the composition and construction of different yarns and explore their many uses. She examines the techniques of spinning and the mechanisms used to create yarn. Color illustrations accompany the text, demonstrating the appearances of different yarns. There is also practical instruction on making your own threads and yarns. *The Yarn Book* is written for the serious student and the professional textile artist, and will be useful for spinners and weavers. It is a complete guide to understanding, designing, and using yarn."

GLASS


Excellent technical reference.

SELECTED WEB SITES

http://craftrevival.wcu.edu
This website tells the story of the historic Craft Revival and its impact on western North Carolina.

http://craftresearch.blogspot.com/
The blog form[s] the thread which runs through a research project exploring ideas of slowness within craft.

http://www.digitalthreads.ca/
"Digital Threads is an interactive web environment that highlights new digital artworks by Canadian artists Jennifer Angus, Joanna Berzowska, Kai Chan, Ruth Scheuing and Samuel Thomas. Internationally known for innovative work that challenges the boundaries of conventional textile arts, these five artists define new territory on the World Wide Web with dynamic projects that link to 50 exhibitions from the Textile Museum of Canada."

http://www.weavearealpeace.org/ WARP (Weave a Real Peace)
"Weave a Real Peace (WARP) serves as a catalyst for improving the quality of life of textile artisans in communities-in-need. We provide information and networking opportunities to individuals and organizations who value the social, cultural, historic, and artistic importance of textiles around the world."

http://www.churchofcraft.org
Church of Craft. The mission: "The Church of Craft aims to create an environment where any and all acts of making have value to our humanness. When we find moments of creation in our everyday activities, we also find simple satisfaction. The power of creating gives us the confidence to live our lives with all the love we can. By promoting creativity, we offer access to a non-denominational spiritual practice that is self-determined and proactive. // The Church of Craft maintains no dogma or doctrine beyond what every member believes for themselves."

http://www.textilemuseum.ca/
"The Textile Museum of Canada is one of eight museums of its kind and the only museum in Canada solely dedicated to the collection, exhibition and documentation of textiles from around the world. Visitors to the galleries can experience the traditions, skills and creative processes that make textile arts so engaging. The collection of more than 12,000 pieces represents over 200 countries and regions.....The Museum explores the continuum of textile work from antiquity to the present through all its activities including exhibitions, collections, education programs, research and documentation."

http://www.performingcraft.com/home/
"Gestures of Resistance, a creative/critical undertaking by Shannon Stratton and Judith Leemann, posits craft as methodology, extending its province to a range of performances that embody care through deliberate movements and canny gestures. / With particular interest in the relationship of slowness and agency, we delineate and then proceed to interrogate a species of action in which self-conscious crafting, contextual mischief-making, and cultural re-scripting play themselves out."

http://craftunbound.net/
*Craft Unbound* profiles artists and activities that use the language of craft to reflect on the world. This site arises out of a publication *Craft Unbound: Make the Common Precious*, which also formed the basis of an exhibition that toured to Santiago, Chile. You can read the introduction here: http://craftvic.asn.au/exhibit/2005/commonpr/introduction.htm

*Craft Unbound* continues the exploration of new developments in contemporary craft, particularly related to the movement of ‘poor craft’. ‘Poor craft’ is used here as a term to describe the creative strategy of using materials that have little or no value. It is a style that has been important in recent Australian contemporary craft, but resonates also with practices elsewhere, particularly in the South.
Barbara Layne is the Director of Studio subTela at the Hexagram Institute where she works with a team of graduate students from Visual Arts and Engineering at Concordia University (Montreal, Canada) and a variety of international collaborators. The Studio is focused on the development of intelligent cloth structures for the creation of artistic, performative and functional textiles. Natural materials are woven in alongside microcomputers and sensors to create surfaces that are receptive and responsive to external stimuli. Controllable arrays of Light Emitting Diodes present changing patterns and texts through the structure of cloth. Wireless transmission systems have also been developed to support real time communication. In both wearable systems and site related installations, textiles are used to address the social dynamic of fabric and human interaction.