

Lost, or Found? Seeking and Preserving the Education of Artisanal Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Crafts and the artisanal arts have a complex relationship with art and art education. Nevertheless, hands-on crafts have an important and often overlooked contribution to visual art education. In addition to their value as cultural icons, the artisanal arts can contribute to cognitive development, emotional well-being, and mental health. The practice of a craft can balance some of the negative effects of 21st century screen culture. This thesis explores the following regarding crafts education: its value, its relationship to traditional art education, and its future potential. In addition to the traditional elements of literature review and research methodology, this thesis includes the design of an ambitious interactive website entitled CRAFTSPORATIONS. The CRAFTSPORATIONS website provides information about craft education, including shared resources and craft-based lesson plans, information about and links to various craft education institutions around the country, identification of crafters and advocates who are assisting in the preservation and propagation of artisanal arts, and a space for crafters and others to collaborate and share resources.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are indications that artisanal arts are disappearing. And there are questions as to the relation of artisanal arts to contemporary art and art education. Crafts and the artisanal arts have a complex relationship with art and art education. Nevertheless, hands-on-crafts make an important and often overlooked contribution to visual art education. In addition to their value as cultural icons, the artisanal arts can contribute to cognitive development, emotional well-being, and mental health. The practice of a craft can balance some of the negative effects of 21st-century screen culture. Learning craft-based skills not only enhances students' technical abilities but also promotes patience, attention to detail, and problem-solving. Craft education also connects students to cultural and historical practices, enriching their design work with a sense of tradition and innovation. This thesis explores the following regarding crafts education: its value, its relationship to traditional art education, and its future potential.

In addition to the traditional elements of literature review and research methodology, this thesis includes the design of an ambitious interactive website entitled CRAFTSPORATIONS. The CRAFTSPORATIONS website provides information about craft education by documenting what I have learned in my own schooling and explorations in the artisanal arts; sharing resources and craft-based lesson plans developed as a result of my personal research and effectively incorporated into my secondary art classroom; providing information about and links to various craft education institutions around the country; identifying inspiring crafters and advocates who are assisting in the preservation and propagation of artisanal arts; establishing a space for collaboration and shared resources to occur; and providing an overview of research to enrich and support the overall rationale for crafts education. The website is both educating and affirming. In website form, this thesis has an active, unlimited reach and scope of influence in

championing the cause for craft education. It is thesis, research, and exploration in perpetuity, and as it lives it evolves and grows and is never done—and with its existence, these arts can never again be ‘lost’.

This thesis is based on my passionate interest in the “lost” artisanal skills. It probes the arc of their history from functional origin through modern resurgence as contemporary craft practices, sought out and preserved by those dedicated to purposefully keeping the skill traditions alive. My initial research explored the perceived differences between art and craft and substantiated the existence, deficit, and impact of historical and current craft education. The overarching goal of this thesis began with the question “What is the value of craft education?” and ventured into the queries of where, how, and by whom and for whom craft is being taught. Then I commenced to discover ways to assist the advocacy and furthering of craft education. Secondary education was in mind as my thesis direction progressed to ask the refined question of “What is the value of integrating traditional, artisanal arts into a contemporary visual arts education?”

The Artisanal Arts

Artisanal arts refer to traditional crafts and skills that involve creating functional or decorative items by hand, using time-honored techniques and materials. These crafts, including woodworking, blacksmithing, pottery, papermaking, and leatherworking, emphasize craftsmanship, attention to detail, and the unique, often culturally significant qualities of handmade goods. Artisanal crafts find their roots in the everyday practices of preindustrial societies, where the crafts were essential for survival and community well-being. Such craft skills and practices were integral to village life before the Industrial Revolution, providing the necessary tools, goods, and structures that supported daily living. Blacksmiths, for instance,

forged tools, horseshoes, and weapons, thus playing a central role in both agricultural and military activities. Woodworkers created furniture, building components, and household items, with their craftsmanship being a cornerstone of functional and aesthetic design in homes and public spaces. Pottery, papermaking, and bookbinding were similarly vital, producing essential goods that sustained both the practical and cultural needs of communities. Skills were passed down through generations via apprenticeship and familial tradition, ensuring their survival and the prosperity of the communities they served (Rorabaugh, 1988).

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, however, dramatically altered the landscape of these traditional crafts. The rise of factories and mass production techniques led to the decline of artisanal craftsmanship as machines began to replace hand tools and standardized products became widely available and cheaper to produce (Mokyr & Strotz, 1998). Many of the once-essential skills necessary to produce such products by hand were rendered obsolete. Designing and making were divided as the artisan was replaced by machine (Schmiechen, 1990, p. 58). Woodworking, as one example, saw a significant decline in demand as machine-made furniture and building materials became more accessible. Similarly, the demand for handcrafted metalwork, pottery, and leather goods diminished as factory-made alternatives flooded the market. This shift marked the beginning of a period where these crafts were largely forgotten or practiced only by a few dedicated artisans.

Despite this decline, certain artisanal crafts experienced brief revivals during the early 20th century, newly embraced and utilized as art forms in the face of industrial substitution. Blacksmithing, for example, regained a place of importance during the Art Deco period of the 1920s and 1930s due to the period's demand for decorative ironwork. Art Deco emphasized geometric shapes, symmetry, and sleek designs, and able blacksmiths of the time adapted their

skills to produce intricate railings, gates, and architectural details that became hallmarks of the style (Duncan, 1988, p. 74). Later, the mid-20th century also witnessed a re-emergence of interest in woodworking as an art form, driven by a growing appreciation for craftsmanship and the unique qualities of hand-crafted furniture. According to Alexander (1994), the previous Art Deco movement inspired the blending of historical methods with contemporary aesthetics, and artisans working to preserve traditional chairmaking techniques followed suit (p. 23).

Significantly, Harrod (2018) notes that the era's renewed focus on the artisanal process led to the emergence of woodworking as a respected artistic practice, influencing both design and cultural values. Such periods of revival highlighted the enduring appeal and adaptability of traditional crafts, laying the groundwork for the broader resurgence of interest in these practices that we see today.

In recent decades, there has been a notable—and steadily increasing—revival of interest in traditional craft methods, often referred to as "lost arts," both as means of art expression and for creating functional items using age-old methods. This resurgence reflects a broader cultural movement that values the unique, handcrafted qualities of these practices, which were once at risk of being forgotten due to industrialization. The renewed interest is driven by a growing appreciation for the tactile, hands-on processes that contrast sharply with the impersonal nature of mass production. People are increasingly drawn to the authenticity and uniqueness of handcrafted goods, recognizing the skill and time invested in each piece (Dormer, 1997, p. 19). This movement has also sparked a renewed interest in preserving and revitalizing traditional techniques, ensuring that these "lost arts" continue to thrive in a contemporary context.

Personal Narrative

I have decided that I am not an “artist.” On the surface, it may appear that I fit the designation—after all, I make artistic works, I study art, and I even teach art—but though I appreciate the theories and ideas at the core of contemporary art, I have discerned that the craft of *making* bears more resounding importance to me than the endeavor of self-expression. In this light, I have concluded that I more accurately fit the concept of artisan. This is not to say that my artmaking is purely reproductive or statically formalist, but I am more excited by the tangible, tactile, active production of art as well as its problem-solving aspects than I am by theoretical contrivance or conceptualization. I am design-minded and practical. I appreciate function and form combined with clear expression, communication, and design, and I especially value precision craftsmanship.

Reflecting upon my personal art history, I find that I have always been this way. In grade school, I loved to reproduce with exactness, and prided myself on craftsmanship and realism even at a young age. As a teenager, I began to be interested in graphic design, and when it came time for college, I applied for the design program at Brigham Young University. It was in the study of illustration that I found the artistic niche for my design-leaning sensibilities: the confluence of problem-solving, design, craftsmanship, communication, and clear purpose.

Contextualizing Personal Practice

Though I began with the intention of a side career in freelance illustration, my professional artistic focus in the ensuing years has been primarily geared towards being a high school art teacher. I have made little traditional “art” of my own since college (read: categorical paintings or drawings) but have delved into numerous crafts of personal interest. These have included printmaking, knitting, bookbinding/book arts, and stained glass, to name a few, as well as an ever-present graphic design application to all visual projects and productions. For a long

time, I did not label myself as a practicing artist, as I was no longer producing the travel watercolors or oil portraits of past inclination. I eventually grew to realize that I was, in fact, constantly being creative and that I was creating—but creating for a purpose, for a function, for solving problems, and (perhaps most importantly) for the pure satisfaction of tactile engagement.

Inception of a Craft-Based Thesis

In the bulk of my years as an art educator, I have taught screen printing as a beginning-level art course, with an emphasis on design intention. In teaching what is an interchangeably industrial medium that involves both art and commerce, I have oft reflected on screen printing's place in the art world, and how that position has changed frequently throughout the span of its history, echoing the trajectory of numerous similarly artisanal arts. Screen printing developed first as a cultural means of expression, finding its roots in ancient Chinese art; it later became an industrial tool for printing wallpaper; it served as a reproducer of propaganda during the world wars; it evolved into an art medium in the mass-produced art of pop artists; it transitioned back to function with the popularity of graphic tees; and, today, it has garnered a renewed popularity in the art and design world as a traditional printmaking medium, simultaneously emerging as a revered return to “handmade” in a profusely digital world.

These facets of my education, personal practice, and pedagogical practice all came into play as I ruminated on the direction for my thesis. I considered my personal passion for craft and contemplated the many art forms that originated in artisanry or industry, subsequently evolved in function and purpose over the centuries, and today teeter on the fence between art and craft. The list of these artisanal arts is long and includes (but is not limited to) weaving, knitting, papermaking, bookbinding, letterpress, stained glass, iron and metalworking,

woodworking, and glassblowing—and all run the risk of becoming “lost” as the frequency of their education and/or practice diminishes.

The Value of Artisanal Art and Education

Because of my background as a craftsperson or artisan, I am interested in the practical, educational, cultural, and societal value and existence of the artisanal arts. As an art educator, I accordingly began with the question: What is the value of artisanal arts in art education? This is a very broad and perhaps impossible question, but it has served as an umbrella for my overall thesis inquiry and was the impetus for more specific questions of interest. Such questions included the following:

To what degree are these lost arts actually in danger of being lost? How and where are artisanal arts being taught now—in which cultures or regions of the world, and which educational forums or institutions therein? In public education, higher education, trade schools, community outreach, or specialty schools—or are they taught in a familial manner, passed down through generations?

Why are artisanal arts being taught or utilized—by necessity for industry, as a medium for artistic expression, as a byproduct of creative innovation, or to preserve and maintain cultural heritage or tradition?

What role does social or mass media play in the decline of artisanal arts? Is the ready accessibility of tangible tools, paired with an abundance of online educational resources and tutorials, a positive development in the preservation of these arts? Or has mass media diminished the artistry, quality, and level of skill, thus corroborating a necessity for the inclusion of artisanal arts in art education?

Iterations of Inquiry

A thesis is a living entity and naturally goes through iterations, evolving as inquiries are addressed and the pursuant findings accordingly induce a change of direction. This thesis initiated from my passionate interest in the “lost” artisanal skills and probed the arc of their history from functional origin through modern resurgence as contemporary craft practices, sought out and preserved by those dedicated to purposefully keeping the skill traditions alive. I intended to focus the broad questions of their preservation and validity within the realm and research of one or two of the arts in order to speak to the worth of artisanal craft as a whole. My initial research, as follows in Chapter 2, established the perceived differences between art and craft and substantiated the existence, deficit, and impact of historical and current craft education.

I had secondary education in mind as I refined my thesis direction to ask: “What is the value of integrating traditional, artisanal arts into a contemporary visual arts education?” I knew there was a profound purpose and importance in the inclusion of artisanal arts in art education, but I had difficulty conceiving a pathway toward establishing or defining that purpose. As I struggled to attach the question to a cohesive thesis application, time passed, technological advancements and habits changed, and with them, the fabric of the educational framework duly evolved—and a new, highly important question arose: “What is the place and purpose for traditional, artisanal craft in a digital age?” I believe that the preservation of artisanal arts and their craft is essential to our physiology— crafts are tangible arts and require different neurological synapses than digital methods and/or the screens we use every day. This focus is especially significant considering adolescents and their school experience because the reliance on screens for both entertainment and education has reached a proportion of staggering and perhaps dangerous height. In their case, advantages of technology may be substantially outweighed by negative effects.

Becoming a Student of Craft

As I have been a teacher of craft and art in secondary education for almost twenty years, I could already speak from personal experience to the practices, benefits and value of artisanal art education. To expand my experience and discover craft education outside of the secondary classroom, therefore, I twice enrolled as a student at Penland School of Craft in North Carolina. There I encountered a new world in craft education—but “new” only to me, as Penland is a longstanding institution with a broad legacy is just one part of a large and vast community of craft schools and modern artisans fiercely working to preserve the heritage of craft. In my blacksmithing and woodworking courses at Penland, I was taught historical methods by artists who had committed their livelihood to authentic, expert knowledge of the craft. As they had learned from the feet of master artisans themselves and were now passing on a portion of that knowledge to me, I was able to personally witness the pattern of apprenticeship education so inherently vital to the cause. I also met numerous artisans, experts, and advocates either instructing or participating in the other craft studios on the campus—printmaking, papermaking, glass, metalworking, bookbinding, ceramics, and photography—and learned for the first time of the prevalence of craft schools and advocacy in the eastern part of the United States.

I observed too that the students at Penland came from all walks of life. They were young and old, were from near and distant geographies, and ranged from art and craft professionals to educators to lifelong learners to casual crafters to laymen from completely opposite professions and experiences who were broaching the waters of craft for the first time. The common thread was that everyone there came for the joy of craft—for learning and making and experiencing those creative, hands-on practices in a unique and specialized setting, immersed within an inspiring and vibrant community of fellow crafters.

Art, Design, and the Function of Craft

My pedagogical experience and practice have reinforced my interest in examining art versus design as well as my proclivity towards the art of craft. The question of “What is art?” is inherently inconclusive, and comparing the value of art versus that of design has been likewise a timeless debate. While the building blocks of art and design are the same, they differ in purpose and process. Art is practiced for personal expression, fulfillment, and the evoking of ideas or feelings and is largely created by intuition. Design is pragmatic, problem-solving, and concerned with form and function and must communicate clearly to be effective. In short, art is subjective, and design is objective.

Craft and the artisanal arts fall under the umbrella of design, as a primary purpose of craft is to create an object of function. In his book *Change by Design* (2009), the industrial designer and Adobe typographer Tim Brown states, “Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people” (p. 3). The objective and function of this thesis is to explore the education of craft and potentially assist in the preservation of artisanal arts in a contemporary age. Therefore, so too should the form of the thesis be the embodiment of the function of craft—constructed and implemented as a mode of and for the education of craft, according to the needs of a contemporary people.

The Craft Website

Prior to my experience at Penland School of Craft, my ever-evolving thesis had focused on ways to advocate for and assist the furthering of craft education. I had many takeaways from my experiences in the Penland community, but what struck me perhaps most significantly was that craft education has a reach and an audience much broader than the secondary classroom—

and that my thesis research was essentially for naught if the end result thereof was just a written record on a shelf.

Thus, I determined to educate about craft education through the vehicle of a website. A well-designed website offers significant advantages for disseminating information compared to traditional theses. Unlike a thesis, which is often confined to academic libraries, a website can reach a global audience. The digital platform of a website can accommodate innumerable photos for illustration and appeal, and videos for endorsement and instruction. It provides a space for collaboration and for active links to outside resources and supplementary sites. Additionally, websites enable real-time feedback and ongoing updates, allowing for an evolving, collaborative research environment. This dynamic structure provides a more contemporary and interactive way to present research than static print formats.

My website, CRAFTSPORATIONS, utilizes all these features and benefits to effectively promote craft education—“Seeking and Preserving the Education of Artisanal Arts”—to an audience of educators, enthusiasts, and interested parties of all ages and experience. CRAFTSPORATIONS educates, affirms, and celebrates the importance of craft in both personal and educational spaces. It documents my own explorations and education in craft, identifies the institutions where craft education can be pursued, and promotes the passionate educators and artisans dedicating their lives to preserving the tradition, technique, and value of artisanal craft. On the site, one can find a number of resources promoting craft education, both practically—in the form of lesson plans and links—and theoretically, with the inclusion of all my research to date. The website also includes information and resources that are to come, as it provides a page for collaboration and community connection and an active blog for further documentation. It is a thesis project in perpetuity. Ultimately, with CRAFTSPORATIONS, I

aim to create a space that supports the joy of making, promotes craft education in schools, and ensures that the invaluable skills of artisanal craft continue to thrive for future generations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There has long been the question of “What is art?” but we are unable to answer this question definitively, as art and ideas are constantly evolving and shifting. It is further complicated by the question “Is craft art?” In my broader objective to describe the importance of craft and the artisanal arts in their own right, I will first endeavor to establish the intrinsic connection between craft and the contemporary art movement as well as present the value of its inclusion in educational institutions. I will then address the cultural significance of artisanal arts and crafts and the value of heritage craft education to support the preservation of tradition. Finally, I will examine the importance of tactile engagement in a digital age. I establish the case for craft education not only for the preservation of artisanal arts and as an outlet of hands-on creative engagement but as a medium to counteract the negative mental, emotional, social, and even physical impacts of excessive screen use.

Relationship Between Craft Arts and Contemporary Art

There has long been a border, even a gulf, between how art and craft are practiced and perceived among practitioners, art historians, and the general understanding of art. Despite how tightly the two are fundamentally and intrinsically bound, there remains a strong distinction between art and craft. The fine arts “have always had a special relationship with handwork, with artisanal activity, and therefore, with craft” (Harrod, 2018, p. 15), but craft has frequently been marginalized in cultural discourse due to its technical attributes, its dependence on tacit knowledge, and the negative connotation given to its functionality (Pöllänen, 2011). In the era of Modern Art in particular, craft has been, in my estimation, incorrectly degraded in status and often conceived as a necessary “other” that, at worst, was a persistent affront to high aesthetics. In the last century, even the traditionally fine-art act of painting has periodically been considered

to disrupt conceptual schema and thus relegated to the category of craft (Adamson, 2007; Harrod, 2018). Adamson (2007), however, countered that “for all that craft is an embarrassment for the construct of modern art, it seems the modern art world cannot do without it” (p. 163), and that the history of modern craft may well end up mirroring the history of modern art—as “a supplement to its narrative of progress and conceptual discovery” (p.14).

Craft Arts and Contemporary Art

Craft has been intermittently recognized during the last half-century in the importance of that tacit and practical knowledge which it inherently embodies. Despite discourse categorizing utilitarian craftworks as “non-art” or “not-quite-art,” those selfsame attributes of utilitarianism are the appeal for the use of craft media in conceptual subjects, and the definition of craft is currently broadening and branching further into the industrial and technological to include numerous types of making beyond the studio (Markowitz, 1994; Harrod, 2018). Craft is highly connected to contemporary art practice, as that practice is “brimming” with craft media (Bryan-Wilson, 2013) and its processes “have become escapable in the contemporary art world” (Muszek, 2011, p. 67). In contrast to contemporary society’s revering of mass production through machinery, conceptual contemporary artists are using handcrafted means—the methods and tools of craft—to recreate everyday objects in extraordinary ways and in a manner of meticulousness that asserts the continuing value of craftsmanship (Steiner, 2012). Focillon (1992) wrote that “the artist, carving wood, hammering metal, kneading clay, chiseling a block of stone, keeps alive for us man’s own dim past something without which we could not exist. Is it not admirable to find living among us in the machine age this determined survivor of the ‘hand age’?” (as cited in Auping, 2008, p. 215).

Many visual artists and designers give ceramics, knitting, glass blowing, woodcarving, embroidery, and numerous other craft-based media the designation of fine art although contemporary clay work still is not taken seriously as a standalone process, being largely associated with art therapy, utilitarian production, or art education and thus devalued by its ubiquity (Perreault, 2018). These and other artisanal crafts are often the “new” exploratory mediums chosen by contemporary artists over traditional art mediums such as paint. Contemporary art education, however, often prioritizes skills such as painting and drawing over those of artisanal craft, which limits students' exposure to diverse forms of material-based practices (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 58). Traditional skills like welding, stone carving, carpentry, and metalwork are taught but usually in the distinction of manual-labor or technical skills without addition of conceptualization or philosophy. This distinction further supports a class division between art workers and art thinkers (Fineman, 2006). Adamson (2007), however, argued that craft itself can actually be considered a way of thinking rather than simply using or making. He continued that defenders on either side of the fine art/craft divide should consider the contextual use of craft by contemporary artists to understand how craft is eligible for a conceptual thinking-about-making approach.

Distinctions Between Art, Craft, and Design

Distinctions between art and craft are often confused or even false, and crossovers occur as categories change, with “craftspeople becoming artists and artists becoming craftspeople” (Perreault, 2018). In their manifesto aptly titled *Gesamtkunsth Handwerk* (a German word describing an artwork compiling all the parts of the arts, particularly those handmade), Fritsch et al. (2011) questioned why there should be any distinctions between art and design and craft, especially as arts and crafts did not begin as separate entities. They propose instead an “art-craft-

design” pluralism (p.179). Defining “craft” might now be as difficult as answering “What is art?” as the titles of designer, craftsperson, and artisan continue to blur with the creative community of craft and its craftsmen/women diversify even more widely (Tanner, 2010). Universities and art schools in the 1990s offered an answer in the birth of “the designer-maker”; they cross-bred craft and design and created “a new hybrid title that was as ambiguous and diverse as the work (it) created” (Tanner, 2010, p.10).

Some contemporary attitudes contrast and refute an amalgamation of art-and-craft and artist-and-craftsman, but in doing so, they indirectly reinforce the value of their relationship. As set forth by Fineman (2006), artists have relied on apprentices, assistants, and artisans for centuries but in support and not entirely in place of the artist’s hand. Since the early 20th century, however, with the factory-made *objets d’art* of DuChamp and Moholy-Nagy, artists are no longer “expected” to also be skilled artisans (Fineman, 2006). Contemporary artists such as Koons, Hirst, and Murakami commission others to fabricate their concepts in entirety, shifting the divide even further to where it’s “the artist’s idea and vision that are prized, rather than the ability to master the crafts that support the work” (Fineman, 2006, p.170), and increasingly acting more as philosophers than craftsmen—but with a need for artisanal artists who can execute the craft.

The Relevance of Crafts Education within Art and Design Education

Craft should be a fundamental component of art and design education as it requires hands-on skills, critical thinking, and a deep understanding of materials and techniques. It bridges the gap between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary design, enabling students to explore the practical applications of their creativity. Learning craft-based skills not only enhances students' technical abilities but also promotes patience, attention to detail, and problem-

solving. Craft education also connects students to cultural and historical practices, enriching their design work with a sense of tradition and innovation. Integrating crafts education helps equip students with versatile skills that enhance their capacity to experiment in a range of creative applications, media, and avenues of expression.

The Need for Craft Education, Past and Present

Craft education, therefore, becomes all the more vital for the contemporary art world, though often classified as a separate field in art schools. Craft as art was given validation early on in American art education. Benjamin Franklin, a pioneer in education, advocated for the inclusion of art in curriculum because of its utilitarian value; “art, in his view, was to be used as a tool for improving the skills of the professional and the quality of the crafts necessary for life” (Eisner, 1972, p. 29). The first arts departments and schools to be developed within universities included programs in clay, textiles and woodworking (Greeley, 1992) and the industrial uses of art were the justification for including art instruction in common school curriculum (Eisner, 1972).

The German *Bauhaus* school, in turn, sought to close the divide between art and craft as a combined school and academy of art, craft, and design; its founder, Walter Gropius, famously stated: “Architects, painters, and sculptors, we must all turn to the crafts. ...There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman; the artist is a craftsman raised to a higher power” (Greeley, 1992, p. xxiii). Although Bauhaus modernism is typically known for clean geometries and universal ideas of design foundations, its early years included a marked emphasis on handicraft. In fact, one of its ideals was to unify art through craft. In the beginning, Gropius developed a craft-based curriculum that would produce artisans and designers capable of creating useful and beautiful objects appropriate to this new system of living (Winton, 2016).

When craft was cut off from the vitality of Modernism, and thus essentially excluded in the search for the “new,” it embraced its marginalized state for a time, and its focus narrowed to the old techniques and sentimental aesthetics (Clark, 2009). After 1945, however, the American craft movement “entered a period of astounding growth and aesthetic brilliance” (Clark, 2009, p. 48) following the effects of a GI bill that allowed servicemen to resume their educations. Clark (2009) addressed the resulting advancements and ramifications for craft and art education:

. . . with state help covering the costs — (it) made art education popular, and universities opened departments across the country to cater for this. Craft courses were seen as an easy ‘grade improver’, and spread rapidly. By 1975, nearly 300 institutions of higher education were offering BFAs and MFAs in the crafts. But this was a two-edged sword. On one hand crafters, securely employed, could experiment, transforming craft dramatically, expanding boundaries and allowing it to engage in debates and borrow concepts from the fine arts. On the other hand it was bound ever-closer into academia. (p. 49)

Merging Art and Craft in a Contemporary Context

Racz proposed that contemporary craft practice is “at a pivotal point, where makers are free from constraints of utility and can use its roots to conceptualize ideas” (Racz, 2009, p. 136). The identification of craft as traditional or old-fashioned, sometimes in the derogatory, should rather be viewed as a strength and perhaps craft’s most important attribute and contribution to contemporary art. Current-day artists/designers/crafters combine traditional aesthetics and practices with contemporary attitudes, intertwining handwork with technology and design, seeking after representation of traditional values and supporting original ideas with original forms (Tanner, 2010). Graduates of craft-skilled courses in both secondary and higher education

are creating outcomes that are blurring the lines of craft, design, and art, and artists with backgrounds in crafts are finding new ways of expression utilizing traditional materials and techniques (Pöllänen, 2011; Tanner, 2010) even as “the idea of craft continues to evolve, simultaneously, away from and back to craft traditions” (Buszek, 2011, p. 73).

Teachers of craft-based curricula are seeing the future of craft in their students’ work as it appears to be moving away from the margins and “toward the center of contemporary-art discourse” (Buszek, 2011), but there is still a divide, which conflict is ironically owed partially to art education. Though postmodern views continue to challenge hierarchal views of “high” and “low” art, Pöllänen (2011) suggested that within school systems, the separationist and technical aspect of craft education serves to create a divide as well as suppress personal expression. The contemporary art movement of Afrofuturism supports craft in its use of traditional and indigenous methods to retell the past in an illustration of the future, but Afrofuturism also recognizes that, in most American art classrooms, craft has a disparaged position; so, in order for such cultural art-making methods to not be marginalized, “art curriculum cannot be led by Western ideals that continue to dichotomize ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’” (Boyd Acuff, 2020, p. 19). To truly merge art and craft, craft should be recognized and practiced as an independent mode of self-expression beyond the trappings of mere utilitarianism, and to do this, art education and craft education must be combined (Pöllänen, 2011).

Cross-Cultural Education Using Traditional or Heritage-Based Artisanal Arts and Crafts

“We are living in an age of complexity, where globalization and interdisciplinarity permeate the cultural condition” (Greenhalgh, 2002, as cited in Racz, 2009). In many societies, traditional crafts play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, embodying the techniques and values passed down through generations. As Dormer (1997) points out, crafts are more than

functional skills—they encapsulate the beliefs, customs, and identity of a community, which makes their survival essential to maintaining cultural continuity (p. 24). The continuation of these crafts is crucial to ensuring that cultural practices are not lost amid modernization. Craft education plays a key role in the preservation effort, enabling the transmission of artisanal skills and knowledge to emerging generations. By embedding craft education in academic and community programs, societies can safeguard tradition while fostering innovation, opening new avenues for creative expression and ensuring that cultural heritage remains a living, evolving force (Adamson, 2013, p. 160).

The American-Japanese Cold War Cultural Exchange

An example of the value of heritage-based crafts is found in the cultural exchange that took place between America and Japan during the 1950s Cold War. Advocated by John D. Rockefeller III, and intending to produce mutual feelings of sympathy and appreciation for culture, the project included exhibitions of traditional Japanese crafts. Such exhibitions not only gave Americans the opportunity to appreciate the crafts, but their resulting outward expressions of appreciation for Japan's pre-modern culture, in turn, fostered a transformation of Japan's perception of tradition (Kida, 2012). What had hitherto been a reluctance on the part of craftspeople to participate in "traditional" crafts because they considered the crafts old-fashioned evolved alongside Japan's desire to reunite its society to its pre-war strength of community in the aftermath of defeat; the people's new effort centered on the word tradition, and craftspeople in turn saw a renewed interest in the production of traditional crafts as well as an identification of self as "carriers of traditional Japanese culture" (Kida, 2012, p. 393).

Protecting and Preserving Heritage Through Craft Education

The American-Japanese cultural exchange serves to introduce the importance of protecting heritage through craft education. As an artisan is a craftsman skilled in a manual trade and as crafts are the medium of utilitarian art, then artisanal arts are the crafts of the artisan. According to Adamson (2010), craft can be defined as “an application of skill and material-based knowledge to relatively small-scale production” (p. 2), thereby allowing a wide range of cultural, artisanal activities to be included under the umbrella of craft from all corners of the globe and especially from beyond the typical arts-and-crafts designations of Western pedagogy. Craft is almost always a triangulation between maker, material, and tool, which tool can even be the maker’s hand (Adamson, 2010). As it was also in early Medieval periods, almost all production of trades and personal goods was individualistic and completed by hand labor alone (Morris, 2010). The Industrial Age replaced hand with machine and individuality with mass-production, and many artisanal skills were diminished but not lost; metalworkers, for example, were still needed to craft and fashion the machines that had replaced their trade, and the modern industrial artisan was born alongside a shift from artisan-as-tradesman to artisan-as-artist (Adamson, 2010). There are other reasons for the temporary disappearance of heritage craft, for not every culture was affected outright by the advent of machine. The colonization of the Hawaiian islands in the mid-1800s, for example, introduced cotton fabric alongside Christian standards of modesty, and the traditional kapa bark cloth of Hawaiian culture was virtually extinct by 1890 (Francis, 1997). Those handmade goods that survived the 20th century are rapidly disappearing “from even the most backward of civilized countries” today, however (Morris, 2010, p.147), and there is a general regret for the absence of the goods and their individualistic nature. Craft is persistent, however, and modern craft is wide-ranging and thriving, occupying multiple

constructs to serve multiple purposes within modern economies (Adamson, 2010)—one construct being a revitalization of the traditions and skills associated with its artisanal roots.

Examples of Heritage Craft Inclusion in Art Curricula

Education and awareness are key in the preservation of cultural artisanal arts and are brought about through apprenticeship, informal transfer of familial knowledge, and formal pedagogy. There are numerous examples of countries who now recognize and emphasize the importance and effectiveness of maintaining their own national, cultural heritage through regional craft inclusion in art curricula. In Hawaii, where state and cultural organizations have proclaimed their commitment to the regeneration of the kapa craft, workshops are taught in school as part of the Hawaiian studies program (Francis, 1997). Art educators in Kuwait proposed a plan to change the national art curriculum to balance traditional, indigenous arts and values with current theory and practice (Anderson & Al-Muhanna, 1994). And education-based research in Finland shows that engaging with traditional crafts promotes a strong connection to culture as well as space for self-expression, which makes the case for connecting craft and cultural within a broader conceptualization of art education (Kokko & Dillon, 2016).

Cross-Cultural Education

While the greatest implication of retaining national heritage lies in the education of the traditional crafts in the region from whence it originates, there is additional value in cross-cultural exposure. International borders may be figuratively crossed in a dual partnership of exchange, as in the Japan-USA cultural exchange project of the Cold War; they may be literally reached via an immersive apprenticeship in the native region of the craft; or they may be experienced through multicultural art and awareness within the art classroom.

By engaging in art projects with an emphasis on the craft media of a region, students can be introduced to the concept of cultural continuity as well as the concept of change, both of which already occur cross-culturally (Spruill-Fleming, 1990). For example, the African/African-American aesthetic and artistic continuity can be appreciated through the use of cultural-specific artisanal craft media such as carving, metalworking, jewelry, clay modeling, instrument building, and even quilting. Beyond perpetuation and preservation of craft tradition, however, are the society-conscious considerations that are created as societal and historical connections are revealed. African metalsmithing, for example, has a long and widespread tradition throughout the continent, and the skills that the slave artisans brought to America are revealed in the ironwork craft of the South (Spruill-Fleming, 1990). Furthermore, many African crafts—including iron-working, which was labeled as utilitarian by Western society—held additional importance to the African community for those in roles of religious significance (Hâmpaté Bâ, 2010).

A final example of valuable methods for cross-cultural engagement is seen in Shafer's study of art education in Egypt (2013), wherein students were primarily introduced to Western philosophies and practices over those of the African continent and Egypt in particular. Shafer found that when students engaged in certain Western methods, the "conceptual complexities intensified" (p. 46) and the exposure provided supplemental grounds for creative expression as students were able to thrive in artistic traditions that were not their own (Shafer, 2013). Thus, the study of heritage as exemplified by craft offers multiple avenues of cultural appreciation, and delving into practices of common ancestry or cross-cultural application can create artworks that serve as visual bridges of understanding (Spruill-Fleming, 1990).

Modern-Day Revival of Traditional Artisanal Arts

In recent decades, there has been a notable—and steadily increasing—revival of interest in traditional craft methods, often referred to as "lost arts," as both a means of art expression and to create functional items using age-old methods. This resurgence reflects a broader cultural movement that values the unique, handcrafted qualities of these practices, which were once at risk of being forgotten due to industrialization. The renewed interest is driven by a growing appreciation for the tactile, hands-on processes that contrast sharply with the impersonal nature of mass production. People are increasingly drawn to the authenticity and uniqueness of handcrafted goods, recognizing the skill and time invested in each piece (Dormer, 1997, p. 19). This movement has also sparked a renewed interest in preserving and revitalizing traditional techniques, ensuring that these "lost arts" continue to thrive in a contemporary context.

An example of this is found in Jennie Alexander, a key figure in the woodworking revival who played a pivotal role in revitalizing and championing 18th-century chairmaking processes during the late 20th century. Her book, *Make a Chair from a Tree* (1994), exemplifies how traditional woodworking techniques can be adapted to and appreciated in a modern context. Alexander's contributions have inspired a new generation of woodworkers who seek to blend historical methods with contemporary sensibilities, creating a bridge between past and present (Alexander, 1994, p. 23).

Such blending of old and new techniques has not only revitalized traditional crafts like woodworking and blacksmithing but has also spawned new avenues for creative expression in various forms of craftsmanship and artmaking (McCreight, 2004, p. 92). In the contemporary art world, there has been a growing trend of utilizing craft media as a form of artistic expression. Craft has frequently been granted a negative connotation in the art world, often deemed a lesser means of expression compared to fine arts, largely because of its association with functionality

and domesticity rather than intellectual or aesthetic value (Adamson, 2007, p. 3). This hierarchy between art and craft has been challenged in recent years, however, as scholars and artists alike argue for the recognition of craft's complexity and cultural significance (Risatti, 2007, p. 8).

Today, artists of all disciplines are increasingly exploring the potential of artisanal craft media and techniques—including fabric arts, metalwork, and textiles—to convey complex ideas and emotions that go beyond the functional objects the materials customarily create. As noted by Harrod (2018), this movement challenges the conventional boundaries between art and craft, allowing for the creation of works that are both visually striking and conceptually rich. The renaissance of these crafts has led to a vibrant and dynamic intersection of tradition and innovation, where the artistry of handcraft is celebrated for both its functional and expressive possibilities.

Benefits of Craft-Making

Whether for artistic expression or simply for the sake of making, however, learning and practicing traditional artisanal crafts in the contemporary era offers numerous benefits for both individuals and society. Craft-making provides a meaningful counterbalance to the fast-paced, often superficial interactions that characterize contemporary digital culture. In his book *Making is Connecting*, Gauntlett (2018) emphasizes that the slow, deliberate process of crafting allows individuals to reconnect with the material world and cultivate patience, focus, and perseverance. These qualities are becoming all the rarer in an era where instant gratification is the norm. By engaging in crafts, individuals can experience a prolonged sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that may be otherwise lacking in more transient or momentary digital activities.

Heritage and Sustainability

Additionally, in a global society at risk of losing the intricacies of geographical culture, heritage is often best represented through regional craft tradition. Apace with retaining culture through craft, crafts rooted in cultural representation can hold significant value in a contemporary society increasingly concerned with sustainability. These handcrafts are often eco-friendly as they rely on local materials, low-energy processes, and minimal waste. When modern circumstances create scant quantities of traditional materials, an excess of environmentally undesirable materials such as plastic may be repurposed to create functional pieces preserving cultural practice (Inocian et al., 2019). An artisanal economy, encompassing small-scale craft producers and independent artisans, offers a viable alternative to mass production, providing consumers with unique, high-quality goods often made with sustainability in mind. By supporting local economies and fostering entrepreneurship, craft production also delivers significant economic benefits (McHattie et al., 2019). In an age where ethical production is paramount, traditional crafts align with modern values while preserving time-honored skills, ensuring their continued relevance.

The Cause for Formal Craft Education

To ensure that traditional, artisanal crafts do not once again become "lost," it is crucial to establish and maintain various avenues of formal craft education. Educational institutions at all levels, from primary schools to universities, should incorporate craft training into their curricula to encourage an appreciation for these skills from a young age. As Olafsson and Thorsteinsson (2012) emphasize, formal education in craft not only preserves these practices but also provides students with a holistic learning experience that balances theoretical knowledge with practical application. By integrating craft education into standard curricula, students can develop a deep understanding of the cultural, historical, and technical aspects of these artisanal practices.

Craft education is a particularly vital component of secondary school art programs, providing students with opportunities to develop hands-on skills that complement their digital and academic learning. Martin Butler (2019), in his article “Craft Skills in the Digital Age,” argues that incorporating craft into the curriculum allows students to gain a deeper understanding of materials and processes, which enhances their creativity and problem-solving abilities (p. 125). Engaging directly with physical materials helps students develop a sense of craftsmanship, where the focus on detail and quality becomes a key part of their artistic education.

Furthermore, Butler (2019) highlights the importance of craft education in fostering skills such as fine motor coordination, patience, and perseverance—skills that are increasingly undervalued in a world dominated by quick digital interactions (p. 129). By integrating craft into secondary school art education, educators can offer students a more holistic learning experience that balances the advantages of digital technology with the irreplaceable benefits of manual, tactile engagement. This approach not only prepares students for diverse creative careers but also instills in them a lasting appreciation for the value of craftsmanship in the modern world.

The Mentor-Apprentice Model

Moreover, specialized craft schools and apprenticeship programs are essential for the preservation and advancement of these time-honored skills. Institutions dedicated to the education of craft not only preserve the technical proficiency required for traditional crafts but also foster a deep respect for the cultural heritage associated with these practices. Craft schools and apprentice programs offer intensive, hands-on training under the guidance of experienced artisans, ensuring that traditional techniques are passed down to future generations. The apprenticeship model has long been a cornerstone of craft education, allowing for the transmission of specialized skills and tacit knowledge that are often difficult to convey through

textbooks alone (Frayling, 2011, p. 54). In the postmodern landscape of art education, however, the traditional mentor-master and apprentice-student dynamic has been largely replaced by approaches that prioritize individual voice. Gude (2004) purports that modern educational frameworks assert freedom of personal expression rather than following the structured, hierarchical models inherent in traditional apprenticeship, contending the latter to be potentially limiting or outdated (p. 9). While the shift to freeform expression has broadened opportunities for creative exploration, some critics suggest that in the abandonment of the apprenticeship model, the need and value of mastering technique and discipline through direct mentorship is overlooked. Collins, et al. (1991) suggest that, rather than being restrictive or oppressive, apprenticeship provides an essential pathway for transmitting the complex techniques and skills that are challenging to master in open-ended or independent learning environments. A balanced approach that integrates personal artistic exploration with the discipline and technical mastery provided by apprenticeship could better equip students with a comprehensive skill set, an integration which honors traditional craftsmanship while fostering creative innovation.

Tactile Engagement in a Digital Age

In a world that increasingly prioritizes digital interactions, there is a growing recognition of the need to maintain and cultivate tactile experiences. One of the most significant advantages of engaging in craft is the development of fine motor skills and tactile intelligence, which are often neglected in this digital age. As Richard Sennett (2008) discusses in *The Craftsman*, the act of crafting with one's hands engages both the mind and body in a way that upholds a deep understanding of materials and techniques. This embodied knowledge is crucial not only for mastering a particular craft but also for enhancing cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, attention to detail, and spatial awareness. Sennett is not alone in arguing that these skills are

transferable to other areas of life, making the practice of craft-making a valuable educational tool in today's technology-driven world. Groth (2016) suggests that tactile engagement with materials nurtures a more holistic form of creativity, one that digital technologies often lack. By using their hands to manipulate materials, individuals working with craft develop a deeper understanding of their environment and enhance their problem-solving abilities, promoting embodied cognition and offering a meaningful counterbalance to the virtual experiences that dominate modern life.

Craft as a Tool for Well-Being

Tactile engagement is essential for both cognitive development and emotional well-being (Groth, 2016; Treadaway, 2009). Craft activities contribute to emotional well-being by allowing individuals to express themselves in a physical and tangible way. Treadaway (2009) found that the process of creating with one's hands provides a calming effect by helping to regulate emotions and reduce stress. Søyland (2021) found that tactile interactions with materials in craft activities promote mindfulness and stress relief, which makes craftwork a valuable tool for mental well-being. The slow, deliberate nature of craft-making offers a respite from the fast pace of modern life, contrasting sharply with the overstimulation oft experienced in digital environments, where constant attention and immediate responses are compelled. Hands-on crafts additionally inspire a slower, more reflective form of creativity, aiding participants to focus, immerse themselves in the process, and achieve a sense of calm through creative expression.

The role of craft in promoting mental health has been highlighted not only by scholars but also by practitioners and public figures. Sutton Foster, in her book *Hooked: How Crafting Saved My Life* (2021), emphasizes the profound therapeutic effects that were attained by engaging in crafts. Foster's personal experiences reflect a broader recognition that crafting can serve as a powerful tool for managing stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges. Her narrative

underscores how the focus and mindfulness required in crafting contribute to mental well-being, which aligns with scholarly research on the mental health benefits of tactile, creative activities. This shared understanding of craft's value in maintaining mental health demonstrates its relevance in contemporary life, where stress and digital overload are common issues.

Craft-making fulfills the need for tangible, physical creativity enforced by the prevalently rapid and often impersonal nature of digital interactions. With the integration of crafts into daily life, individuals may yet achieve a balance between screen-based activities and hands-on, sensory-rich experiences.

The Rise of Screens and the Effect on Teens

The surge in screen time among teenagers is sparking significant concerns over its negative impacts on teens' mental and physical health. Excessive screen use not only disrupts sleep, leading to decreased cognitive function and higher fatigue levels (Hale & Guan, 2015, p. 130) but also exacerbates mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, particularly in adolescents (Twenge & Campbell, 2018, p. 7). Teenagers who spend considerable time on screens are less likely to engage in physical activity, increasing the risk of obesity and other associated health problems (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 92). Furthermore, the pervasive use of screens can hinder social development in adolescents by reducing face-to-face interactions, thereby limiting opportunities to build critical interpersonal skills and meaningful relationships (Uhls et al., 2014, p. 386).

The cognitive and emotional strain caused by overexposure to screens underscores an urgent need to incorporate nondigital activities into daily routines. As reliance on digital devices grows, it becomes imperative to balance screen time with physical and social activities that foster overall well-being. Encouraging involvement in non-digital pursuits can mitigate some of the

adverse effects associated with screen overuse and support healthier, more rounded development in adolescents.

Craft as a Counterbalance

Engaging in hands-on crafts and arts is a powerful way to counterbalance the negative effects of screens. Research supports the idea that engagement plays an essential role in mitigating the ramifications of screen overuse and promoting overall cognitive development. Haidt (2024) argues that hands-on creative activities foster deeper cognitive engagement as they offer a necessary break from digital media, which can overwhelm the brain. Hands-on activities may also enhance teenagers' ability to focus and solve problems by favoring active learning, rather than passive digital consumption. These creative activities not only boost critical thinking and creativity—skills often underutilized in digital spaces—but they also encourage teens to engage with the real world in meaningful ways, fostering attention to detail that screens cannot replicate. Craft-based learning invites engagement with physical materials, helping teens build patience, perseverance, and the fine motor skills that are also often neglected in digital interactions.

Additionally, engaging in tactile art and craft has important emotional benefits for teens. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in anxiety and other mental health issues among adolescents, with studies indicating a marked increase in symptoms related to stress, depression, and anxiety disorders. According to Twenge et al. (2019), this trend has been linked to various factors, including increased screen time, social media use, and academic pressures, all of which have contributed to the overall decline in teen mental health (p. 1128). Haidt (2024) claims that the smartphone in particular has altered childhood from a play-based to phone-based experience that may lead to negative impacts on mental health and social development. Haidt (2024) further

highlights that the overstimulation of constant digital engagement leaves teens in a perpetual state of heightened anxiety, which makes it difficult for them to unwind. Kafai and Peppler (2011) emphasize that artmaking, in contrast, provides teenagers with an effective outlet for stress and anxiety as art channels the expression of emotions in ways that digital interactions do not. These activities create opportunities for teenagers to relax, explore their creativity, and take a break from the overstimulation of constant digital engagement. Moreover, the sense of accomplishment gained from creating tangible works assists in the improvement of self-esteem. Therefore, integrating more hands-on craft experiences into adolescent routines can be deemed as crucial to counteracting the adverse effects of increased screen usage and to foster personal, cognitive, and emotional welfare (Kafai & Peppler, 2011).

Digital Platforms for Non-Digital Craft Engagement

The importance of tactile craft engagement extends beyond individual well-being to social connection. In digital craft communities, creators share knowledge and collaborate on projects, blending physical and digital spaces. Gauntlett (2018) notes that these communities encourage both online interaction and offline creation, stimulating social bonds that are strengthened by the shared experience of crafting. Such interactions enable individuals to connect meaningfully with others while preserving the tactile and sensory aspects of craft.

The effective education of non-digital craft skills must ultimately embrace modern technologies and methodologies to make traditional practices, which are often geographically narrow, conversely widely accessible and globally relevant. Online platforms, digital tutorials, and virtual workshops can play a significant role in reaching a broader audience and encouraging the global exchange of ideas and techniques. As Adamson (2013) argues, blending traditional craftsmanship with modern educational tools can help bridge the gap between past and present,

ensuring that these practices continue to evolve and thrive in the 21st century (p. 105). By investing in diverse educational avenues, society can ensure that traditional crafts remain a vital and vibrant part of our cultural landscape.

A Website as a Vehicle for Craft Education

One such vehicle for the widespread dissemination of craft education is an active website. A website, as a conduit of information, offers significant advantages over a written, published document, particularly in terms of accessibility and engagement. Unlike a traditional thesis, which often remains confined to academic libraries and may only be accessed by a limited audience, a well-designed website can reach a global audience and provide interactive experiences that enhance user engagement. Digital platforms allow for the integration of multimedia elements such as videos, infographics, and interactive tools, which can make complex information more digestible and engaging (Krauss, 2012). This approach not only broadens the impact of the research but also provides a dynamic way to present findings, as it can be continually updated and refined and thus offer a more versatile and user-friendly dissemination method as compared to static print formats.

Websites enable real-time feedback and iterative improvements, which are not possible with traditional printed theses. As highlighted by Egid et al. (2023) digital platforms facilitate ongoing dialogue between researchers and users, allowing for immediate responses to questions or comments and the ability to incorporate feedback into the project. This iterative process not only enhances the quality of the research output but also foments a more collaborative research environment. In contrast, traditional theses often become static records that, once published, may not evolve or reflect new insights. Thus, the dynamic nature of websites provides a more contemporary and interactive approach to research dissemination and engagement.

The CRAFTSPORATIONS Website

The website I have created exists to defend the significant value of craft education—and, because of that value, this website also exists to make craft education available for all ages and interested parties. Craft education—and its allure—has a reach and an audience much broader than the secondary classroom. This website is about creating a community for people who find joy in craft, whether they be educators, participants, lifelong learners, or people finding a craft for the first time. The name of the website is CRAFTSPORATIONS, and its mission, as the tagline states, is “seeking and preserving the education of artisanal arts.”

CRAFTSPORATIONS is committed to educating about, affirming, and celebrating the importance of craft in both personal and educational spaces. In this space, I explore what is being taught in the realm of craft, identify where and by whom the teaching is being passed on, and promote the passionate educators and artisans dedicating their lives to preserving the tradition, technique, and value of artisanal craft. Ultimately, I aim to foster a community that supports the joy of making crafts, promotes craft education in schools, and ensures that these invaluable skills continue to thrive for generations to come.

The CRAFTSPORATIONS website educates about craft education through documenting and passing down what I have learned in my own schooling and explorations in the artisanal arts; sharing resources and craft-based lesson plans I developed as a result and effectively incorporated into my secondary art classroom; providing information about and links to various craft education institutions around the country; identifying inspiring crafters and advocates who are assisting in the preservation and propagation of artisanal arts; establishing a space for collaboration and shared resources to occur; and, of course, including my findings from my thesis research to enrich and support the overall cause. CRAFTSPORATIONS is both

educating and affirming. Through the instrument of this website, I have created an active, unlimited reach and scope of influence in an effort to champion the cause of craft education. It is thesis, research, and exploration in perpetuity, and as it lives, it evolves and grows and is never concluded—and with its existence, these arts can never again become “lost.”

Chapter 3: Methodology

This is not a research-focused thesis—rather, it is a response to the need for an interactive process to communicate with educators the value of craft education. However, this project did involve a considerable amount of historical research into craft and craft education, hence the methodologies connected to historical research are relevant.

Historical Research

History enables us to understand and appreciate the past, view our current society through the lens of perspective, and project a knowledgeable glimpse of future potential (McDowell, 2002). Historical research is “the systematic definition, collection, evaluation, synthesis and interpretation of data related to past events” (Buffington & McKay, 2013, p. 39, as cited in Thurber, 2004), consisting not just in the collection of facts but in the discovery of the correlation between those facts and any interpretations previously established by historians (McDowell, 2002). As acknowledged by McDowell (2002), historians use a systematic approach of examination to discover the content and context of past events in an attempt to separate fiction and myth from reality, a significant effort because history is the source influencing many of our beliefs, customs and practices. Though historical problems may be approached numerous times and from different angles in attempts at conclusive solutions, exact history may never be assuredly and irrefutably known. The attempt of separating myth from reality, however, is essential for our advancement; the future is partially conditioned by the past, and as Herbert Butterfield once stated, “a people that lived without any knowledge of its past—without any serious attempt to organise its memory—would hardly be calculated to make much progress in its civilization” (Butterfield, 1969, as cited in McDowell, 2002, p. 5).

Historiography, as explained by McDowell (2002), designates the writing of history, but historical research discovers evidence and then analyzes it. Historians are not expected to merely describe how things were but to reveal relationships and interpret significance—regardless of the availability or amount of credible evidence—in an art of reconstruction that requires both critical and imaginative skills. In short, the purpose of historical research is to “make sense of a series of events in a specified timeframe, establish their authenticity, understand the connection between them, and interpret their wider significance” (p. 14).

My thesis study includes historical research, not only as it involves historical matters in its preface—the evolution of artisanal arts from the 1500s to present day—but in that I endeavor to trace the roots of a number of those arts to discover trends, and “a primary aim of historical research is to look for connections between events so that a meaningful pattern or structure can be discerned” (McDowell, 2002, p. 78). I seek to find meaning within those patterns in my attempt to give validity to the preservations of artisanal arts as well as strive to discover the humanity and contemporary cultural significance of their continuation. Historical research, in its examination of past events, can contribute immensely to the knowledge about people and cultures of today.

Additionally, Stankiewicz (2004) pointed out that historical research is not only recommended as an appropriate methodology when one is asking questions about past events, ideas, and people in earlier forms of art education but that the research itself is an art, as the author inevitably creates narratives when re-creating the past from both facts and interpretations thereof. A competent historical researcher must have many qualities, including curiosity; initiative, motivation and commitment; imagination and insight; and creativity and original thought (MacDowell, 2002) and the goal is to make the findings—the re-creation—meaningful

for a contemporary audience. I am by nature a storyteller, and the focus of my thesis is to present the story of the almost-lost artisanal arts so as to ascertain the affordance and importance of continuing that story through the preservation of those arts.

Ethnography and Crafts Education

My research into present-day artisanal art reality includes the study of crafts associated with specific cultures. Consequently, the methodology of ethnography is relevant to this background research and the future development of the website project. Ethnography differs from other forms of research not just in its predominantly qualitative methodology but in its guiding principles of commitment to and extended engagement with communities and peoples in a naturalistic setting (Schensul et al., 2013). Ethnographic research developed out of anthropological methodology and involves the investigation of the cultural systems of a particular culture or peoples in all their interpersonal, human, and societal complexities (Koroscik & Kowalchul, 1997, as cited in Buffington & McKay, 2013, p.38; Shagrir, 2017). Born of an ongoing commitment to understanding the social worlds and everyday lives of other people(s), with the central focus being that of improving the lives of a community as the researcher attempts to look through its eyes to collaboratively learn of its needs, ethnography is profoundly ethical in its endeavors (Atkinson, 2015; Schensul & LeCompte, 2016). Ethnographic research is a participatory process; in order to understand the daily life of a culture under investigation, the researcher must spend a considerable amount of time in its natural environment, employing various methods of observation and interaction for data collection (Atkinson, 2015; Shagrir, 2017). In short, ethnography is participatory and collaborative; it is community or site-based; it is directional (designed to lead towards social change); and it requires interaction between its research and practice (Schensul & LeCompte, 2016).

Ethnographic research is not conducted with a single method; it embodies a “collection of possible methods, used singly or in combination” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 25), but as the core of ethnography is some form of participation within the culture being studied, and observation is elemental, then “fieldwork”—the traditional designation for the contemporary term of “participant-observation”—is at its heart of the ethnographic tradition (Atkinson, 2015). Fieldwork relies on observation and requires multiple skills and the use of varied technologies (Atkinson, 2015). It is as pragmatic as it is participatory and must allow for flexibility; in accordance with its qualitative nature, ethnographic research is nonlinear, and initial observations will lead to new possibilities, data, and alternative paths (Atkinson, 2015). This characteristic of ethnographic research is particularly applicable to my course of study, as the particular focus of two to four specific artisanal arts will be chosen mid-research, based on findings and feasibility, and I therefore anticipate a change in the overarching questions that the study presently poses—and, rather than imposing opportunities for change, in the ethnographic approach, strategies “emerge from the setting”(Schensul & LeCompte, 2016, p. 46). The field researcher must demonstrate flexibility in observational and analysis methods as well, playing the roles of witness, interpreter, listener, and autobiographer in the endeavor to be an internal, intimate partner in the lives of the participants while at the same time remaining just detached enough so as to not influence the participants’ behavior (Shagrir, 2017). The immersion within culture is necessary for analysis of the data collected, as ethnography uses both etic and emic approaches for deduction, and the researcher will clarify and interpret from both an insider’s and outsider’s perspectives (Schensul & LeCompte, 2016; Shagrir, 2017).

Ethnography is particularly appropriate for my review of crafts heritage as it produces a distinctive way of knowing that aligns it with the visual arts and other sensitivities of

contemporary culture (Atkinson, 2015). My research is art-education based, and ethnography and art education in particular tend to go hand-in-hand as the style of ethnographic research resonates with teachers of art on numerous levels. Art educators are increasingly adopting methods attained from anthropology for endeavors both in and out of the classroom to develop methods of research attentive to the concern of, and collaboration with, individuals being studied (Hickman, 2008). In a paper first published in 1991, Descombe (2008) regarded the art teacher's preference for ethnographic research as owing to a stylistic matching of predispositions but also suggested that art training emphasizes feelings of emotion and interpretation which are counterintuitive to positivistic styles of research. The art teacher's tendencies manifest an affinity with ethnography in natural opposition to statistical and quantitative research analysis, and in accordance with ethnography's acts of observation, art shares the view that "perceiving the world is a creative activity rather than just a matter of simply receiving information" (Descombe, 2008, p. 30)—and the role of the researcher "as the creator of findings rather than the reporter of findings" (Descombe, 2008, p. 30) is an additional attractor. Descombe further proposed that anthropological elements of ethnography are inherently appealing to the art teacher, whose oft-marginalized position within educational institutions offers experience and familiarity with viewing from "the outside," adding an instant rapport with the observational perspectives of fieldwork (Denscombe, 2008). I intend to rely heavily on fieldwork in my investigation of the prevalence and current educational practices of artisanal arts, both within the United States, and in site-specific countries abroad.

Ethnographic Research Problems and Emerging Views

Ethnographic research has traditionally been associated with colonization or a colonial view of the world, largely because from the 1800s through as recent as the mid-1900s,

ethnography was the research method of anthropologists and other early ethnographers (Caputo, 2000; LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). All research has an element of power to it, but ethnographic research in particular lends itself to positions of dominion and subordination as one studies a group designated as “other”, and thus puts the subject of observation on a different and interpretively lesser plane (Taylor, 2002). As purported by LeCompte & Schensul (2015), in these colonial environments, the “natives” were merely documented and not involved participants in the research/their voices were not included, and the ethnographers were able to write “pretty much with impunity . . . since their results were considered to be ‘objective’ facts” (p. 4). In this way, ethnographic portrayals were often entirely subjective reactions in the egregious one-sidedness of their descriptions (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). Researchers were not questioned, readers did not doubt nor have the resources to critique or challenge such “facts,” and, as a result, what was portrayed by the researchers was considered to be true—to the extent that any deviation by the culture itself from what was represented in the researcher’s narrative, was identified as a loss of traditional culture (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015).

Social and cultural anthropology remain virtually synonymous with contemporary ethnography, though the strategies of research have become widespread across various disciplines and the definitions of culture have evolved along with appropriate viewpoints and practice of ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2015; Staikidis, 2014). In the late 20th century, contemporary scholars began to challenge the notion that one could speak “*for*, or *about*, or *in the voice of*” those studied, and especially not with certitude (Said, 1978, 1989, 1994; Spivak, 1998, as cited by LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). A shift has since occurred wherein the researcher’s fieldwork is increasingly immersive and involved, with the participant playing a more active role than simply a passive object of observation as they become a literal part of the

conversation about the problem and have a voice in assessment of strategies (Schensul & LeCompte, 2016). In the latter 20th century, DiLeonardo (1988) stated that there is a “power dynamic that inherently exists between ethnographer and subject,” and in 2001, Sullivan further noted that:

the tendency to try to reside on either side of the objective-subjective divide is to adopt an overly simplistic stance... in methodological terms this means there is a need to consider the observer and the observed as legitimate sources of knowledge. (as cited in Staikidis, 2014, p. 68)

Such increased engagement, however, presents a dichotomy of practice and ethics. There has always been a question of necessary distance; early ethnographers avoided intimate involvement partially on the basis of not wanting to contaminate “natural” behavior, and as an engaged approach became more acknowledged and accepted, there remained the concern that such intimacy would “alter . . . behavior, skew research results, and generate charges of researcher subjectivity” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). Taylor (2002) pointed out that the participant-observation techniques developed by early 20th-century anthropologists are highly suited to in-depth, immersive fieldwork; but though intimate relationships are required to gain trust and association of participants for accurate levels of data, such intimacy violates boundaries of positivist ethnography (Bourgois, 2002).

Anthropologists and critical theorists alike concur, alleging that positivistic neutrality is almost impossible to achieve or maintain, for when associated levels of social distance are regarded, the researcher is unable to “develop the rapport necessary for good ethnographic understanding and data collection” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015, p. 24).

Contributing to this divide are other necessary, intentional, and/or coincidental contemporary departures from intensive observation-participation. As emphasized frequently by LeCompte & Schensul (2015), “ethnology is a peculiarly human endeavor” (p. 113). Atkinson (2015) argued that in the process of ethnographic research becoming widespread, the heart of the practice has unfortunately become diluted (p. 12). In fear of undue displays of power and/or because of a lack of commitment to geographical engagement, much ethnographic work is being undertaken primarily with interviews and without immersion in fieldwork, thereby losing the core and driving force of the embodiment of ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2015). The definition of communities for study has been broadened to include local communities and even simply institutions of learning (Schensul & LeCompte, 2016). Conversely, with the “deconstruction of a ‘place-focused concept of culture’” (Hastrup and Olwig, 1997, as cited in Amit, 2000, p. 13), the shift away from locale as boundaries of culture has caused ethnographic fields to be redefined to include those of migrant and transnational communities (Amit, 2000). As terrains shift, traditional ethnographic study is advantageously evolving too, with researchers finding the process of constructing the field to involve paths unforeseen and unplanned at the outset and instead following leads from field to field (Strauss, 2000).

Issues of ethics, both formal and informal, have long been problematic with ethnographic research design, perhaps more so than in any other field or method of research (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). In the past, researchers’ only ethical responsibility was to produce high-quality findings that would be credible to their professional peers; unethical research was simply that which was “poorly conducted or falsified” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015, p. 17). In the 20th century, this began to shift, and the current ethics influencing ethnographic conduct in research are numerous, ranging from informal to formal, with valid portrayal of culture and protection of

human participants being of paramount importance (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). In broader elucidation, contemporary informal ethical concerns deal with boundaries of acceptable behavior in human interaction; appropriate field identities and balancing of roles; and relationships both within the research field and with professional counterparts (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015). Formal and semiformal concerns include confidentiality; compensation; concerns of danger to persons, even in benign studies; the protection and rights of those of vulnerable populations, including children under the age of 18; and even who has “the right to tell the story of, portray, or otherwise to ‘represent’ a given people’s culture” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2015, p. 31). Traditional ethnographies of the first part of the 20th century established realities shaped by one-sided perspectives; with the advent of a bilateral view, ethnographic storytelling additionally becomes storytelling about each other, wherein the researcher must understand that we are “subjective agents—not only participant-observers, but observers of our own participation and subjectivity” (Lassiter, 1998, as cited in Staikidis, 2014).

Ethics of subjectivity are a pervasive issue of ethnographic research in its near-impossibility of producing completely unbiased claims of “knowledge.” A critical ethnographer must accept that he or she originates from a standpoint of place, race, gender, and class and that conclusive research standpoints will largely be subjective rather than objective (Foley & Valenzuela, 2008). This seemingly negative aspect, however, can also be considered a positive force as it encourages the use of multiple, diverse and modern epistemologies of fieldwork; examples suggested by Foley & Valenzuela (2008) include “introspection, memory work, autobiography, and even dreams” (p. 287) to gather knowledge and construct narratives.

Despite the numerous ethical considerations which ethnographic methods demand, however, Atkinson (2015) contended that, “with a very small number of egregious exceptions, *ethnography is among the most ethical forms of research*” (p. 172), and expounded:

The conduct of ethnographic research has been predicated on a set of commitments and values that arguably render it much more sensitive to the interests of ‘participants’, and make the personal values of the researcher(s) more central than most other forms of research. Ethnographic research calls for a greater personal commitment to the field and its members than virtually any other mode of research. Ethnographers spend months and years of their lives working with social actors as they go about their own daily lives. The commitment of ethnographers to engage with forms of social life is one that goes beyond virtually any other research strategy. (Atkinson, 2015, p. 183)

Advantages of Qualitative Research and Why It Is Appropriate for My Study

Though ethnography may employ quantitative research methods, it is primarily associated with qualitative research, and the two designations are often used synonymously (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Taylor, 2002).

In qualitative research, process is key. On basis of causation and in the attempt to establish causal explanations, the questions of a quantitative approach aim to ascertain *what* the affect of [x] is on [y], whereas the strength of a qualitative stance is that it questions what the *process* is that connects [x] and [y] and how [x] may have played a role in [y], thus placing more importance on discovering the process that leads to outcomes than to the outcomes themselves (Maxwell, 2005). It is no wonder, then, that a distinct and advantageous characteristic of qualitative research is that the act of the research is an ongoing process in and of itself, both in design and application.

When outlining research to be conducted by quantitative methods, the design thereof is often laid out in a plan that is sequential in steps, beginning with the formulation of the problem and proceeding in a specified order to a conclusion or conclusive theory (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research, however, does not set out with a specific end or aim in mind, with a goal to prove or disprove a set hypothesis; rather, it is an inductive approach, wherein the theory evolves through the course of study as time is spent with specific subjects and evidence is collected and connected (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Maxwell 2005). As illustrated by Bogdan & Bilken (2007), the qualitative researcher is not working on a puzzle whose picture is not evident, but whose picture takes shape as parts are gathered, examined, and constructed—for the researcher “does not assume that enough is known to recognize important concerns before undertaking the research” (pp. 6–7). Qualitative researchers do embark on their study with some questions in mind, founded on goals plus personal experience and prior knowledge. These initial questions will serve to guide the direction of their research and frame methods to be used, but the researcher often does not develop the culminating, focused questions of the study until they are further along in the interactive process of collection and analysis (Maxwell, 2005). One of the most difficult parts of establishing a study of research may be the designation or determination of the all-important thesis question(s). As properly focused questions within the qualitative approach are the result of a non-linear, interactive, and inductive design rather than the starting point for the research (Maxwell, 2005), a strong advantage to this methodology is that the questions may be discovered, changed, and re-formulated throughout the process.

Equally advantageous is that the process itself is not regimented from the outset. Inasmuch as the questions and focus will change, the design of the research study must also be an ongoing process of modification with its non-linear interaction between various and changing

components. Maxwell (2005) presented an interactive model for mapping research design wherein the components framing the research questions are: 1) the *goals* of the researcher; 2) the *conceptual framework* or personal experiences/background knowledge/prior research already in place; 3) the planned *methods* of data collection and relationships with subjects; and 4) the projected threats to the *validity* of the conclusions or results. There are additional factors that affect the design/plan of study, such as resources, skills, and ethical considerations, but all components are designed to be flexible. A key proponent of this model is that the goals can be flexible, and they may shift and change. For my thesis, the area of study at the outset is broad and my questions may change; focus will be developed as I collect data regarding the prevalence and active education of artisanal arts. If my pre-perceived methods cannot provide the data that I need, I can change my questions or methods accordingly (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007).

In line with the open, evolving questions of a qualitative research methodology is another advantage: the use of open-ended questions as methods for research. An example of this is found in education research, where quantitative standardized questions are not as effective for analysis by educational practitioners. Bolster in 1983 (as cited by Maxwell, 2005) maintained that a reason educational research has not had significant impact on educational practice is because quantitative questions and methods are not in tune with the everyday experiences of a teacher. He argued that the realities of the classroom are better understood via a qualitative approach, wherein the vast “perspectives of teachers and the understandings of particular settings” (p. 24) have more potential for information.

A third advantage of qualitative research is the scope of methods by which data is gathered, broad both in variety and in the non-restrictive borders of acceptability as well as in the personal/naturalistic characteristics of fieldwork. Data gathered via qualitative methods is

descriptive rather than statistical. Maxwell (2005) asserted that the data is not restricted to specified “methods” and that it may include virtually anything seen or heard “or . . . otherwise communicated while conducting the study” (p. 79). Bogdan & Bilken (2007) likewise stated that the nature of descriptive data is in direct opposition to the numerical constructs by which quantitative research is bound, taking “the form of words and pictures rather than numbers” (p. 5) and which can include “interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official records” (p. 5). They continued that the qualitative researcher must look at every detail, with the assumption that “nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5).

In broad terms, qualitative research gathers data by observing what others do and say in order to better understand human behavior and human experience. This is done in an attempt to comprehend how others make meaning and to be able to describe that meaning (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007), but it is the personal manner in which it is observed which is key to its interpretation. Empirical observation methods are a conduit to familiarity and understanding in the hands-on nature of experience. Empirical observations are made on location, or “in the field”; fieldwork is the manner/place in which most qualitative researchers conduct their studies and observations, as data collected therein is supplemented by understanding gleaned from physically being on-site (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Through these observations, the researcher attempts to capture how people define their worlds and construct their realities, producing through perspective a qualitative account of those definitions (Taylor et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers are apt to collect data through in-depth and sustained contact with the subjects of observation within the normal settings of the subjects (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007), then seek to

interpret that data in utilization or consideration of metaphor, symbolism, descriptions, characteristics, and other nonquantitative measures. Subsequently, a qualitative approach to a problem may place more emphasis on the individual's personal experiences with the research and those under study (Habib, Pathik, & Maryam, 2014).

Bogdan & Bilken (2007) suggested that fieldwork, as so termed by anthropologists, may more correctly be called "naturalistic" when conducted per qualitative methods for educational research, as the researcher "frequents places where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur" (p. 3). Being on location and conducting naturalistic inquiry is a primary focus and perceived approach of my own research methodology. Place-based field inquiry can help me to, as described by Bogdan & Bilken (2007), "join the subject's world" in their natural settings (p. 82) and the researcher's distance from their personal natural setting can provide "space for them to think deeply, look at their informants critically but openly," etc. (p. 83). Inasmuch as I aim to conduct fieldwork in investigation of ethnographic nature, qualitative methodology is both appropriate for my study and holds personal interest for me. I thrive on interpersonal relationships and associations, and in qualitative studies, as termed by Maxwell (2005), "the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done" (p. 83). Maxwell (2005) continued that such relationships have effects on both participants in the study and on the researcher, and those relationships can even affect (encourage or hinder) further study, as gaining a relationship with participants and their surroundings may lead the researcher to discover new avenues of investigation or be the instigator towards a dead-end. On the advantageous side, developing relationships within fieldwork may also assist the development and evolution of my thesis focus, in and through the act of data collection.

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