

Craft and me

I grew up on a farm, where questions of shape and line mostly referred to the conformation of bullocks and breeding ewes. My forebears were expert judges of stock, but the gene bypassed me. I left the land, became a teacher, spent twelve frustrated years in the classroom.

On a Saturday afternoon in 1992 my life changed utterly. I happened upon a wood event in a sports hall, where I wandered cheerfully through earnest exhibits of forestry and fencing and boat-building. And then, at the back of the hall, wow! A group of men, unlikely alchemists, engrossed and hunched over their spinning machines, long ribbons of shavings flying from gouges and chisels, bowls and vessels and chalices and finials emerging from ugly lumps of wood, rough forms to delicate finishes, a mesmerising drama of transmutation. Such ecstasy! It was a toddler's first circus, a teenager's first kiss. In that damascene moment I became a woodturner ...

And gradually, through woodturning I discovered craft, and through craft my understanding of the world has been enriched. My view of craft is unashamedly romantic, perhaps because I came to it so late.

I have learned how craft awakens and vitalises our sensual apprehension: a table's fragrance of wood and oil, a pendant's gleam and shimmer, the smooth caress of a handle or the resistant texture of a weaving, the singing ping of glass. Making involves curiosity, problem-solving, visualisation, planning, invention, patience, optimism, mastery of technique, knowledge of materials. It requires and creates social ability – the communication and sharing of skills, the love of giving.

A good craftsperson should be aspirational and ambitious, striving for technical perfection and excellence of design. The best craft objects are soaringly spiritual: how could anybody not be moved by, say, the Brighter boat or a Sara Flynn bowl?

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