

**Andrea Peach**

## **Contemporary Craft and Cultural Sustainability - A Case Study of the Scottish Craft Centre (1970-1990)**

1970-1990 was a period of renaissance for the crafts in the UK and North America. The creation of national organisations and infrastructures to support craft, and define its identity, played a crucial role. It is often assumed that Scottish craft history followed a trajectory similar to that of the rest of Britain during this time. My research challenges this interpretation, positing that because Scotland had its own funding bodies for the crafts, it had different financial and ideological outcomes. Whereas England and Wales witnessed the promotion of the craftsperson as 'artist', Scottish funding agencies encouraged Scottish craft as small business activity. Scottish agencies aspired not only to create a craft industry that would be commercially and culturally sustainable, but also to maintain standards of quality, innovation and cultural integrity.

This paper will provide a case study of how national organisations can act as cultural intermediaries in the commodification of craft objects, by shaping their identity and ideology, and consider how craft objects acquire new meanings when commodified. It will draw upon primary research from the Scottish Craft Centre (1949-90) archive. Established in 1949 to preserve, develop and promote studio craft in Scotland, the Scottish Craft Centre (SCC) was the only Scottish enterprise to receive annual support from the government in the 1970s. Based in Edinburgh, the SCC operated as a locus for craft practitioners and consumers. Its remit was to provide a showcase for the best of Scottish craft and to stimulate quality craftsmanship nationally. The SCC organised exhibitions throughout Scotland, and promoted and maintained standards of both traditional and contemporary Scottish craft. Its archive provides a unique record of craft activity and cultural values in Scotland at the end of the twentieth century.

The paper will argue that a clear thread of influence can be drawn between craft cultural policy and craft practice in Scotland during the period of 1970-1990. It will substantiate how Scottish cultural agencies played a defining role in promoting craft as a small business activity, and attempted to market Scottish craft as a culturally sustainable product. As a case study, the research will provide insight into how cultural policy and strategy can determine the course of craft production and consumption, and will consider whether lessons can be applied to contemporary practice and policy.

**Format:** Historical and theoretical paper

**Indicative Conference Themes:** This paper could fit under either of the following themes:

- Critical Perspectives on Craft, Industry and Consumerism
- Local-global Translations and Dialogues