

Handmade: Today

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If I told you something was handmade why would you believe me?

The contemporary dictionary definition of 'handmade' is much the same as it was at its origin in the 17th century. But is 'handmade' merely a word: an arrangement of letters and sounds to which a clear definition can be assigned to aid common understanding? Or has 'handmade' become a concept: an idea of which the understanding is subjective, and open to evolution?

In the 21st century handmade has joined with Vintage, Organic, Indie and 'Slow' as mediators of the ever-advancing technologies that we simultaneously embrace. An authentic lifestyle is sought through lives imbued with human creativity and endeavor: of others if not our own. Is handmade a path to authenticity?

What does handmade look like? How important is the hand in handmade? Or is the *human* in handmade most significant?

I make simple, white porcelain cups. I make lots of them. Because of this I have experimented with different production methods. But I wonder whether my hand remains evident, or if it is lost in the processes that produce multiples.

I've chosen to use these white cups in this project because they are so strongly associated with my practice and because their simplicity provides no distraction from their form. As someone once observed this is "nowhere to hide" work, where the absence of embellishment and decoration makes individual nuances boldly evident.

Having spent the year conducting my research through the learning and making of various crafts I formed a determination to personally make every component of the work I have presented. My hand is present in the making of every form. But is it evident?

Though I commenced my research expecting that new technologies would lead me to new outcomes I was eventually compelled to adopt a hybrid of traditional embroidery techniques as a means of expression. This is back to basics craft, just the materials and a needle and, of course, my hands and a long history of tradition entwined.

The challenge with this work has been to represent handmade in a form which would not be didactic or prescriptive, but which would promote the viewers' questioning of their own understanding of handmade. Textual language is useful, but alone seems an inadequate method of representation for something whose qualities are as much sensed as they are tangible. Yet, for the very first time, text has appeared in my work and titles have become important, for visual representations can be too descriptive.

I've borrowed from Joseph Kosuth and Sesame Street and from a guy called Mikhail Epstein (who added the word 'headmade' to the Urban Dictionary), and from who ever it was that first wrote a 'You can't buy happiness....' quote. And I've had a go at inventing my own definition, a sort of evolution of handmade, for which 'heartmade' may or may not prove to be the best descriptor with time. Time is after all an antagonist of understanding with this topic.

At the end of this year of research I have upon the walls a set of questions. I began with questions and I've finish with a new set of questions: questions in the form of art that aims to problematize the contemporary understanding of handmade.