(Re)Making: Craft-Design and Women’s Empowerment in the Global South

Call for Illustrated 20-minute papers.

Online seminar hosted by the School of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University.

Seminar to be held online - Wednesday March 27th 2024

Around the world, women’s craft-design groups operate quietly but effectively across many areas of making from ceramics and textiles to beadwork and basketry. Often established as co-operatives, and acting as Not-For-Profit providers for upskilling, income provision, empowerment and sustainability, women’s handicraft groups play a vital role in numerous urban communities globally. Yet women’s designer-maker groups, particularly those of low-income areas of the global South, have still to receive significant attention from design historians. We argue that this results in a dual inequality; the present limited recognition of such enterprises by the academic discipline compounding the often marginalized economic, social and visual-cultural spheres that women’s craft initiatives occupy as organisations. Seeking to redress this imbalance, we want to posit women’s craft-design as offering an alternative to western / global Northern, capitalist modes of production; remaking approaches and understandings of products as well as designed artefacts themselves.

(Re)Making. Women, Craft and Design in the Global South is proposed as a half-day virtual seminar to be convened by the School of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University with support from University of the Creative Arts and Middlesex University. In addition to suggesting a model for the reimagining ideas around craft-design the event will critique well-rehearsed conversations about
‘design’ versus ‘craft’ (typologies all too often still considered in western academia according to a hierarchal privileging of the former over the latter) in order to explore new understandings of both terms. Taking place in the month marking International Women's Day, 2024, it is planned that the event be linked with another being run earlier in the month by Middlesex University, Department of Design on International Women's Day, Friday 8th March.

We are calling for speakers whose work reflects women's craft bodies and empowerment initiatives across Africa and from India, South-East Asia and South America to talk alongside designer-makers themselves. This seminar will advocate greater recognition of the value of handcrafts in low- and middle-income urban societies and to foster new understandings of the global role of craft practices for design historians. A further aim for the seminar being to instigate a trans-national /cultural dialogue, we believe that these conversations will offer a creative means through which to address praxis and theory for both scholars and makers.

In addition to themes considered above we welcome commentary that discusses – but is not limited to – investigations of any of the following particularly in the light of women’s roles within / contributions to:

- Discourses around (trans) cultural creativity
- Craft as a carrier of authenticity and national / regional identity within the built environment
- Craft practice as preserving traditional skill whilst adopting new visual forms
- The politics of craft practice in low- and middle-income societies
- Hierarchies and gender divides
- Craft – design and regeneration of urban spaces
- The informal settlement as site for craft-design production

Abstracts of 300 words accompanied by a brief bio are sought in response to the above themes and should be emailed to h.mckay@londonmet.ac.uk.

Deadline for receipt of abstracts is 11:59PM GMT Friday 29th December 2023.

Professor Anne Massey, Canterbury School of Architecture, University for the Creative Arts
Dr Harriet McKay, Department of Design, School of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University

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[Images for University of London Metropolitan University and Design History Society]