

WHAT Do You Do?
[ZA]Kaj delaš!

WHAT Do You Do?

I work for myself, for others, for pleasure and for money. These are also the roots of handicrafts, which in turn influences who we are and what we are like.

Different needs create different products.

Handicrafts have been part of people's lives since time immemorial and are still present in all aspects of our lives even today. They are presented as a medium that originates from people and their needs. They can be seen as a means of survival, a need to unplug from the everyday life, a desire to continue the family tradition, a challenge in creative expression, i.e. design, as expressing oneself through contemporary art ... They are part of our identity and culture. Handicrafts and their makers nowadays primarily employ a creative process –discovering, planning and creating with their hands as well as modern technologies. Contemporary handicrafts have lost their touch of nostalgia, as an increasing number of people opt for activities that allow them to express their creativity through already known procedures and skills. This can involve quite straightforward technological procedures using natural materials or very demanding authorial works or even works of art.

The prerequisite for handicrafts is mostly the material that the makers find in their natural environment, knowing how it will respond under various conditions. This is why they can be perceived as an important part of human and town identities.

»What is being sought after in industries and products are mainly the challenges for current and future designs, especially in connection with the ever-increasing demands for a better quality of life. This is also where the handicraft heritage or its contemporary forms allow for an alternative. Heritage shows the excellent solutions and meanings, which are always connected to people and their lives. It is not about aggressive interference with space and culture, but always in every way tailored to people and their lives.« (Bogataj)*

The space for creating has forever been a part of the culture of living. Technological progress has resulted in the creating process being moved to workshops, away from the living space. Activities that are still predominantly carried out manually, however, remain in the living spaces.

After studying the handicraft-rich area, handicrafts are shown as a medium. For contemporary craftsmen they are important in terms of several different things, i.e. their financial effect for survival, in the primary sense as an escape from the daily life, in terms of design, and also as part of creativity in modern Slovenian art.

*Bogataj, Janez. 2014. »Rokodelstvo je gotovo jelstvo!«: Rokodelstvo – med kulturno dediščino in sodobnimi ustvarjalnostmi! Do kdaj še? V: Maja Korun Hočevar (ur.), Delavnica, polna nereda: Sodobni rokodelci in ustvarjalci v Ljubljani. Ljubljana: Zavod Lab laar, JSKD, 39-49.

For Money

Handicrafts have always been a means of survival and extra income. They shaped the identity and character of the people in this valley.

Craftsmen from the Ribnica Valley sold their homemade wares throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Over the five centuries, a tale emerged known today as the »Ribnica woodenware«. Originating in a cottage industry, the manufacture of wooden products has become a specialized industry. Entrepreneurial spirit in their veins contributed to the creation of many successful companies and helped people during the times of economic crisis, allowing them to quickly get back on their feet and open small handicraft workshops. Those more determined eventually began to modernise and expand their services. Ribnica has thus become a centre of a robust handicraft industry and technologically advanced companies.

They say that a person from Ribnica will never go hungry.

Potters too have always been able to adapt to the market and the needs of time. Their hand-made products are still valued and sought after. But it holds true for all the Ribnica craftsmen that they know how to sell their goods with pride and great wit.

For Success

Diligence and courage result in batches of millions

Entrepreneurial environment is not a friendly one for small craftsmen. Some of them have expanded their production and export their products via agents to Europe, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia ... However, these products end in different parts of the world without known provenance. They are often sold under a foreign brand and do not contain data on their origin or manufacturer. Manufacturers can obtain the »Ribnica Woodenware« geographical designation for their products, the first step towards the recognition and protection of their origins.

➤ In the past, the area between Turjak and Kolpa harboured a well-known and famous crafting tradition - woodenware making. The incentives provided by the authorities, natural resources and also the character of the local people are still reflected in the fact that even today, in terms of the number of all crafts, the making and sale of woodenware still comes first. Modernisation and use of technology have also contributed to this, as woodenware crafting has evolved from a cottage industry into a veritable modern and technologically-supported manufacture. An especially large number of new companies appeared in Ribnica and the surrounding area after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the collapse of local factories. Many of the former employees of the closed-down factories opted for an independent entrepreneurial path, based on the traditional crafts that their parents or grandparents practiced in the past. Most of their products are sold to long-term buyers - the Agriculture and Forestry Cooperative and, even more so, to several permanent customers/clients from abroad. Deals are often agreed by agents who talk to both the designers and the end-users, while companies play the role of manufacturers. Products are exported to Austria, Germany, the UK, Denmark, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Italy etc. This type of production and sale does achieve the desired financial effect, but ultimately the source of the products is not properly acknowledged, they are often sold under foreign brand names and without the higher added value, which they surely earned with their rich history. Due to constantly pointing out the importance of producing and selling local products of known origin, the »Ribnica Woodenware« has received a geographical designation mark, in terms of visibility, however, this did not achieve the desired effect. This was partly due to the lack of awareness among producers and customers regarding the importance of cultural heritage, which also includes handicraft products, as well as policies that do not grasp that herein lie opportunities for promoting Slovenia abroad.

In addition to large companies and sole proprietors, who are responsible for the majority of woodenware, legislation also recognises craftsmen who manufacture crafts under the status of personal supplementary work. However, due to unfavourable requirements of this status, their numbers have declined. A strong historical presence of pottery in the Ribnica area has helped to conserve this particular craft in large numbers as well. Lately, there has been a decline in activities based on manual manufacturing processes, such as side-rim making, bottom making, sieve making, woodturning, wickerwork and vessel making.

Activities such as sewing, crocheting, knitting and spinning, which have for a very long time accompanied humankind and were in the past used more as a supplementary source of income, are making a comeback among the young as a response to unfavourable employment market conditions. This is how success stories begin, also with the use of new, modern materials and technologies.

For the Challenge

Something old and something new ...

New generations want to move away from tradition, but they do not always break ties. They add freshness and boldness to create new stories.

Designers with ideas for new products look for craftsmen. Clicking with, trusting and sharing the same mindset are the prerequisites for successful cooperation. While designing the exhibited products, designers had to think about who will produce them and how, who will buy them and what will they be used for. Such a process creates products with a name, an origin and a story.

➤ Handicraft products often serve as an inspiration for designers to come up with new stories through modern design approaches and technologies. They are a tribute to the past and the future at the same time – understanding and respecting the past allows a product to be successfully positioned in the future. Handicrafts inspire and give meaning and context to the products of today.

Modern consumers primarily buy stories, the atmosphere and the experience of using a product. Cooperation between designers and craftsmen abounds in our region, because the heritage of woodenware making presents an interesting challenge for contemporary designers. Cooperation is usually instigated by designers with an idea, who are in search of a suitable craftsman. The designers must often adapt their ideas to the material and the capability of the tools used by the craftsmen. Design is a complex process which seeks to answer the questions of how will a product be designed, who will design it, who will be using it, why are new designs made, how long will the development take, where will the designing take place ... The design process also involves thinking about the promotion, sale and the creation of brands, the presence of which nowadays means a huge advantage over the no-name products without visual identity.

An increasing number of initiatives for cooperation and knowledge exchange between craftsmen and designers have been recorded. These initiatives involve bringing the traditional crafts back to life, educating the designers and craftsmen about tangible and intangible heritage and creating original and sustainable modern designs. All this stems from the awareness of the importance of traditional crafts in creating and maintaining identity. A strong integration of crafts in the local environment provides a way to maintain this identity and distinctiveness in the age of globalization. Meanwhile, the use of local materials supports sustainable approaches.

The aim of such initiatives is to promote cooperation between craftsmen and designers, and thus preserve and upgrade the local handicraft traditions and strengthen the values, characteristics and history of these handicrafts, which are an essential part of every culture. The aim is also to encourage craftsmen to insist that the origin of the product is not lost when the product is sold.

For Oneself

... and for others a little bit as well

Hand work and the use of natural materials are written in our genetic memory. Creativity is born in contact with this memory.

Looking for balance in modern life, we seek contact with nature, so we pick up clay, wood, wicker, straw, wool... We make products for ourselves or as gifts for those near and dear, and find pleasure, pride and joy in them. We do not need the recognition of others. Still though ... what do you think of them?

➤ Handicrafts are characterised by repetitive processes, movements and a great deal of creativity, since the same procedures can lead to an infinite number of differing final products. Motives to start creating arise from various causes. Often present in modern times, these include the desire to escape from the toil of everyday life, a stressful job, the daily rush. Handicrafts offer a way out and bring a connection to nature, since many materials for handicraft activities can be found there or come from agriculture (animal husbandry, farming). Such materials include clay, various types of wood, osiers, hazel rods, straw, wool, flax and the like.

The recurring hand movements allow thoughts to attune to the crafting process and follow it step by step.

... /insert the needle/turn the bobbin/use a hammer/interlace the wicker/knead the clay/ ...

While crafting an object that grows before our very eyes, we feel pleasure, pride, self-affirmation, and at the same time create useful products that can be used at home or handed out as gifts. Such activities can outgrow their original purpose and become a means for survival.

To Tell You Something

The sky is the limit for contemporary artists. Some rely on tradition and cultural heritage when searching for ways to express themselves.

There is hardly a material or technology that has never been used in art. The exhibiting contemporary artists used handicraft techniques as a medium to create artwork that mirrors what agitates and excites us in the modern world. How do you see their messages?

➤ Primal craft procedures and handicrafts are often part of creating in contemporary art. They have actually increased in frequency as industrial materials made their way into fine arts and there are virtually no materials or technologies that modern artists have never used in their works. Contemporary artists often rely on tradition and cultural heritage to create their responses to cultural, social and political concepts. Handicrafts have become their medium of choice in projects that derive from the questioning of social issues and reveal a wider range of ideological social views.

The exhibition showcases some contemporary artists who use hand-crafting techniques as a medium to express their ideas or criticism of contemporary society, culture.

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English translation: Mateja Žuraj

References: Bogataj, Janez. 2014. »Rokodelstvo je gotovo jelstvo!«: Rokodelstvo – med kulturno dediščino in sodobnimi ustvarjalnostmi! Do kdaj še? V: Maja Korun Hočevar (ur.), Delavnica, polna nereda: Sodobni rokodelci in ustvarjalci v Ljubljani. Ljubljana: Zavod Lab laar, JSKD, 39–49.

Ribnica, June 2019

The publication was created as part of the project titled Interactive Tourism for All, which is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

 PROGRAM
RAZVOJA
PODEŽELJA



Evropski kmetijski sklad za razvoj podeželja: Evropa investira v podeželje



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