

Make it Slow

An Art Unpacked touring exhibition

curated by Grace Whowell

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What is 'Slow'?

"The Slow philosophy is not about doing everything at a snail's pace. It's about seeking to do everything at the right speed."

In Praise of Slow, Carl Honoré

In simple terms, the Slow Movement promotes a cultural shift towards slowing down certain aspects of our lives so that we can reconnect with the essential things: food, our families and friends, our locality and community, the things we make and use.

What are 'slow' crafts?

One could argue that all crafts are, by their nature, slow; traditionally hand-made, by individuals or small workshops, using materials and techniques that are labour intensive and skill based. Of course we know that today this isn't true for all crafts and many makers are now at the forefront of their field using new design tools, manufacturing processes and communication systems that enable them to design, make and sell work in ways unimaginable even 20 years ago.

However, 'slow' processes are vital to most makers and their practice. Slow is not always about making things slowly, or how long it takes to make an object. Rather it can be a deliberate consideration of how something is made; thinking, researching, drawing, experimenting, discovering new ways to use materials. There is time taken in the making, the creation of a single object or indeed of a lifetime's work – a slow process of evolution. The end result, be it a ceramic jug, a necklace or a sculpture, is an alternative to a quickly made, mass produced object, an investment by the maker and the eventual owner of the work. Sustainability of materials, either locally or ethically sourced, is increasingly important to the modern craftsperson and a significant tenet of the Slow Movement. A connection with a place or community can also be important; the locality of a maker can have a significance impact on their work, both in what they make and how they make it.



Images top: Sharon Adams bottom: Aimee Betts

The craft makers in this exhibition are not part of a Slow group or organisation; they might not have before now even considered their work to be particularly 'slow' and they may work in different ways at different times to achieve their aims. They have been chosen to exhibit together because, through their work, they consciously demonstrate some of these intrinsic values of Slow.

Sharon Adams is fascinated by tools and the connection that we humans have with making. She makes functionless utensils inspired by the kind of mysterious, defunct objects found in museum collections. "Making is in our nature, but increasingly 'work' is accomplished by clicking buttons, and 'making' is something we watch others master on reality TV. As individuals continue to consume more than they produce, we are collectively forgetting skills that once sustained everyday life. Handcrafted, the tools embody at least some of the skills they seek to uphold."

Aimee Betts is a contemporary embroiderer who embraces the traditional and the new in her work. She creates adornments using fast digital processes combined with slow traditional hand embroidery techniques. Her work is heavily embellished to create rich and intensely decorated artefacts that reference historical garments. Betts has also collaborated with fashion houses such as Daks, creating hand embroidered designs for their S/S2013 collection. She aims to bring the traditions of embroidery to the forefront of contemporary design practice.

Fenella Elms is a ceramics artist working in porcelain slip. Her 'Flow' pieces are made from hundreds of individually made porcelain 'beads' that are intuitively placed on a large porcelain sheet and then fired into position. Each piece is carefully positioned, creating a cohesive body that seems to move and shift with the light.



Images left: Fenella Elms right: Sharon Adams

Lizzie Farey is a sculptor who uses traditional basketry techniques as a starting point for her work. “I have a fascination with living things and natural form. For me, willow has become a medium for an interaction with nature that is deeply personal. Using willow, birch, heather, bog myrtle and many other locally grown woods, my work ranges from traditional to organic sculptural forms.”

Chris Keenan had a career as a professional actor, before serving an apprenticeship to Edmund de Waal and setting up his own studio in 1998. He works in porcelain with a simple palette of tenmoku and celadon glazes. Familiar forms of bowls, cups, jars and vases are constantly revisited and refined, paired with new glaze effects to create fresh combinations. His work is domestic in scale and purpose, inviting us to delight in the simple acts of drinking and eating.

Misun Won creates intricate silver jewellery that is painstakingly hand-pierced and manipulated. Influenced by Korean patchwork techniques, she makes rhythmical structures and patterns from one sheet of silver, creating complex forms on their own or in combination with other materials such as colour thread and silk cord.



Images l-r, top: Lizzie Farey, middle: Misun Won, Chris Keenan bottom: Chris Keenan, Misun Won

More on the Slow Movement

The Slow Food movement, founded by Carlo Petrini, emerged in the 1980's as a reaction to fast food culture and in 1999, Geir Berthelsen founded the World Institute of Slowness. But it was Carl Honoré's 2004 best seller, *In Praise of Slow* that captured the imagination of the public, challenging the 'cult of speed' and investigating formal and informal models of Slowness. He is now a recognised exponent of Slow, talking and writing widely on the subject. In the past few years, the notion of Slow has been applied to many strands of our lives, including design, travel, business and parenting. There is also an international network of accredited slow towns, or Cittaslow, including UK towns such as Diss and Perth.

However, there is no one single organisation that controls the Slow Movement; it is individuals and small groups who promote and apply the ideas of Slow to their own lives or interests spreading the word through websites, blogs and events (see links for a selection).

Useful links:

Artists:

<http://sharonadams.co.uk/>

<http://www.aimeebetts.com/>

<http://www.fenellaelms.com/>

<http://www.lizziefarey.co.uk/>

<http://www.chriskeenan.co.uk/>

<http://www.misunwonjewellery.com/>

General

<http://www.slowart.co.uk/>

<http://www.carlhonore.com/books/in-praise-of-slowness/>

<http://www.theworldinstituteofslowness.com/>

<http://www.slowfood.org.uk/>

<http://www.cittaslow.org.uk/>

<http://www.craftspace.co.uk/page.asp?fn=2&id=57>

<http://makingaslowrevolution.wordpress.com/>

<http://tweave.co.uk/>

<http://thetextileblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/slow-design-slow-craft.html>

http://www.slowlab.net/slow_design.html