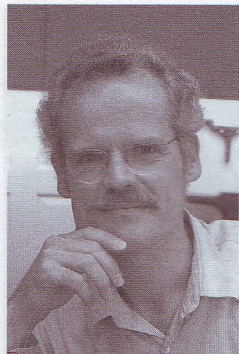


CRAFT vs. DESIGN, OR IS IT?

The Common Ground

Chapter 1



Wesley Harris

When I think about art and craft and design, I automatically think of the common ground. Artists, craftspeople, and designers all express human feelings through a particular medium. That medium might be pencil and paper, paint, marble, metal, or one or more of many other materials. But, in each case, the medium serves as a vehicle through which human feelings may be expressed. Taken in that light, as creative people we really do the same thing.

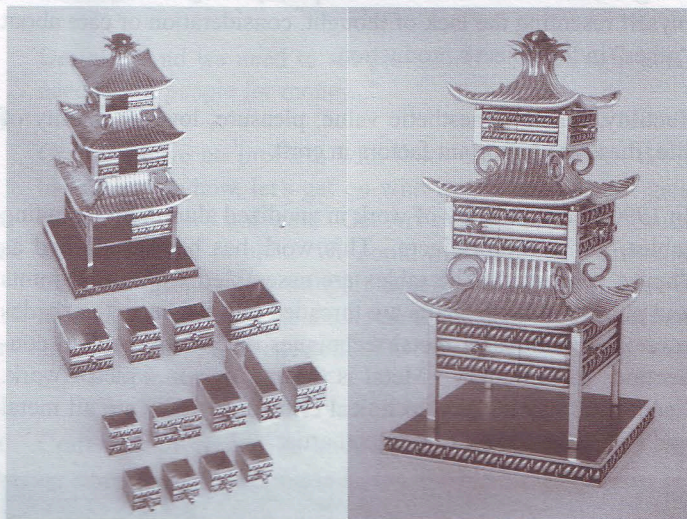
When I think about design, I think of it in terms of how we use expressive elements such as line, contour, form, space, colour, light, texture, pattern, and their combinations. For artists, craftspeople, and designers alike, these are our raw materials. The way we manipulate an expressive element, such as line, can move a wide range of feelings in the viewer. For example, designs composed primarily of horizontal and vertical lines tend to feel stable, strong, secure, or even static, whereas those with diagonal lines feel more dynamic. Angular or disjunct treatment of line can seem uncomfortable, reckless, angry, or chaotic, while smooth flowing lines feel calm and are easily followed by the eye.

As an artist/craftsperson, I am also a designer. Aesthetic decisions that I make by manipulating expressive elements while creating tangible objects are exactly the kind of judgments that I make when refining an original concept on paper. My answer to the question of "craft vs. design, or is it?" is simply "No. We are not at odds. We speak the same language. Indeed, we are often one and the same person".

Then I think about art vs. craft. The public over the years has correctly perceived differences between art and craft. Art was seen to be more about experimentation and pushing limits, while crafts were rooted in tradition and more technique oriented. Art was seen to be non-functional, whereas crafts were typically utilitarian. Art was seen to be about one-of-a-kind originals, while the craft industry tended to encourage production. Historically, fine art has been strictly defined as painting, sculpture, and architecture. Over the past few decades, however, fine craft has worked its way into the public's consciousness. Certainly, when people regard a Bill Reid box or a golden cup by Lois Betteridge, they do so with awe and respect. I think they feel technical excellence as part of the expressive whole. I think they find the fusion of

form and function very refreshing. Today, fine craft and fine art appear to be on equal footing.

I sense that the public is receptive. They seem willing to regard well-designed, well-made fine craft as art. I myself am stopped in my tracks by the sheer beauty of some contemporary works of fine craft. The best examples draw me back repeatedly and I see more each time. I feel an inherent logic in their design, a substance, something more than the sum of the parts. The perfect fusion of form and function in itself is synergistic. Often a viewer falls in love with a piece and cannot describe why. They just feel moved. The art expresses something to them and they are enriched.



In closing, I would like to share with you a work-of-art piece that I completed in 1990. It is a miniature chest of drawers in the form of a three-tiered Chinese pagoda. Emeralds, sapphires, and rubies in the drawer handles colour-code in which tier each drawer belongs. The base is ebony, and the faceted gem on top is a pagoda-cut peridot. The piece is fabricated entirely in sterling silver and much of the pattern work is constructed strand by strand out of round wire. It was commissioned by a gentleman who had grown up in China. Several years ago he bequeathed the piece to me. I have displayed it often as I sell at the craft fairs and the public's reaction is interesting. People do speak of it as art. But often they quietly look at the pagoda for a while and just smile.

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