Focusing on contemporary woodworkers in Japan and Ireland, this thesis explores how the tree symbolises a connection to nature, tradition, and sustainability, highlighting the efforts made to preserve age old practices in a modern world that is overcome with industrialisation and consumerism.

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Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art, and Creative Technologies in candidacy for the BA (Honours) Degree in Design for Film – Model Making

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Design for Film. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Amber Ingle

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This thesis is a reflection of the endless confidence and love from my parents who have nurtured my curiosity and supported my educational pursuits from the very beginning. For their belief in my work has been crucial to my academic growth from a young age and I am deeply thankful for their constant support. My appreciation for my peers who have made the last four years a memorable experience, their motivation and wittiness during tough times is something I will forever be grateful for.

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Abstract

Focusing on contemporary woodworkers in Japan and Ireland, this thesis explores how the tree symbolises a connection to nature, tradition, and sustainability, highlighting the efforts made to preserve age old practices in a modern world that is overcome with industrialisation and consumerism. For this research paper I will investigate the philosophies of David Pye, William Morris, George Nakashima, Mihaly Csikszentsmihalyi, and more. This will be to help contextualise key concepts such as the Workmanship of Risk/Certainty, The Revival of Handicrafts, The Soul of the Tree, and Flow Theory, how these are linked in the world of craft across the world.

To explore this further I will centre the tree as both a material and a metaphor of sorts, with the aim of this study being to highlight the relevance of traditional craft in the face of industrialisation and mass production. The end goal of this thesis research is to answer why, in an age where efficiency often takes preference over preservation, that certain people choose to honour old traditions and the soul of the materials they work with.

I will use case studies and conduct interviews where possible of contemporary artisans from cultures who are both different but quite similar all the same. This will illustrate how woodworking artists can act as a bridge between the past and the future, framing and informing us of more sustainable practices and the instinctive human desire to create with intention and respect.

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Introduction

Craftsmanship is more than an act of making; it is an extension of the human spirit. Anthropologists and philosophers have long studied why humans create and how making is tied to identity, community, and the natural world. (National Geographic Society, 2023) Anthropologist Daniel Miller focuses on this topic in his research document, The Power of Making. The main subject of this paper is on the exhibit within the Victoria and Albert Museum, once the Museum of Manufactures, that Miller concludes "*this exhibition is actually itself a fine act of craftsmanship, conceptually as well as physically. It neither excludes art at one end nor industry at the other".* (Miller, Daniel, 2011) This emphasizing how the portrayal of making in any form, whether it be a work of fine art or simply being good at putting on your makeup in the morning shape's human identity within every culture and society *"All you need to do is remind yourself that producing things is one of the most effective means for the realisation of the person, for seeing one's own capacity in the evidence of the things we have ourselves created".* (Miller, Daniel, 2011) It is an anthropological act one could call it, a part of humanity's need to create, connect, and leave a mark on the world. At its core, the act of making is intrinsic to the human experience, embodying the connection between the maker and the material. This thesis will focus on the philosophies and practices of making looking specifically at woodworkers in both Japan and Ireland in the twenty-first century. It aims to investigate the mutual respect both cultures hold for the tree which will serve as a central theme in this discussion. By centring this mastery of woodcraft as a living material, visualising how it carries its very own spirit and history which is honoured by those who shape it into something new.

This thesis will begin by exploring the philosophical foundations of woodcraft, drawing on relevant literature such as David Pye's concepts on creativity and functional processes in design and workmanship, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory as a guide towards creativity and innovation, Japanese philosophies of *Monozukuri* (commitment to craftsmanship) and *Shokunin* (mastery and respect for work). It will then examine the practices of specific woodworkers in Japan and Ireland, comparing how their approaches share values of sustainability, tradition, and a respect for nature.

The conclusion will reflect on the importance of these philosophies in a twenty-first century context, where the preservation of traditions offers an influential contrast to the pressures of contemporary issues, of using natural materials and limited resources.

George Nakashima's text, *The Soul of a Tree, 1981* is a critical source for understanding the spiritual and material significance of wood as a material and in its craftsmanship. Nakashima's journey from his early exposure to Japanese woodworking techniques during his internment in an Idaho prison camp, to his philosophical exploration of Hindu spirituality in Pondicherry and his own Japanese cultural heritage, this journey shaping his unique approach to woodworking. His philosophy offers an insightful view into the spiritual connection between the maker and the material. His belief that *"The will must aspire to make as fine an object as is humanly possible"* (Nakashima, George, 1981) resonates deeply with the Japanese principle of craftsmanship, where beauty and function must exist in harmony.

Nakashima's way of working with nature centres around the properties of wood, the shape, the size, the texture, and the graining will dictate the design and its intents. Most of the time a piece of board will be left untouched in his workshop for months to years until it finds its purpose showing his reverence for wood and the emphasis on the usefulness and the 'lyric quality' by transforming the ordinary into works of art. These qualities are what Nakashima prioritizes as the base of all his designs. For Nakashima the tree is not just a resource, it is a living entity whose personality continuously shapes the final output. He sincerely describes his personal experience of *'Kodama'* (the Spirit of a tree), as *"Our deepest respect for the tree which impels us to master the art of joinery, so that we may offer the tree a second life of dignity and strength."* (Nakashima, George, 1981).

This spiritual respect mirrors the approaches of other Japanese craftsmen such as Takahiro Yoshino who also sees their craft as a means of honouring the materials they work with. Such philosophies emphasize the personal connection between maker and material, elevating the process from production to an act of preservation and reverence. This respect, reflects in every joint and grain, ensures that the resulting pieces carry the soul of the maker and the life of the tree itself.

This respect for the tree as a living body is depicted in the work of these Japanese woodworkers is also intrinsic in Irish woodworkers who practice sustainability. In a time dominated by industrialization and consumerism, these creators represent a more sustainable and moral approach to their work in an ever-changing world. By reusing and repurposing wood, they challenge the throwaway culture that defines mass production. The idea of giving a second life for the tree through craftsmanship comes from long standing tradtions and remains relevent today, this offering a contrast to contemporary concerns such as the environmental and cultural impacts of consumerism. The tree as both a material and a symbol become the thread that ties together the philosophies of these wood workers. Whether it is originating from Zen Buddhism, Western flow theory or Irish cultural heritage, the connection to nature remains essential in craftsmanship. by respecting the life of the tree and the craft traditions, these makers offer a valuable reminder of humanities place in the natural world.

Chapter One – The Philosophy of Craftsmanship

The focus of this chapter is on the philosophy of craftsmanship and the relationship between workmanship of risk and of certainty. Risk will be focused on traditional handcraft where good judgement and effort can lead to innovation, whereas Certainty will lean towards the development of mass production where efficiency is prioritized over quality. David Pye discusses the philosophy of workmanship involving creative and functional processes and how this uncertainty in design can lead to innovation, "The Nature of Art and Workmanship" (Pye, David, 1968) A key topic in this discussion is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow which describes the engaged mental state that furthers creative development. This concept of flow was first outlined in academic articles and studies he conducted in the 1970s but gained more attention forty-two years ago after the publishing of his 1975 book "Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play" (Sami, Abuhamdeh, 2020). The connection of flow will be discussed through the Japanese philosophies of *Monozukuri* and *Shokunin,* which express the importance of commitment and connection to one's work. These concepts focus on enhancing both the mindset and technical skills for mastery in craftsmanship, including spiritual ideas derived from Zen Buddhism.

The Workmanship of Risk vs Certainty

Craftsmanship refers to the skill and quality involved in the thousands of hours spent learning a craft. It emphasizes the level of mastery and attention to detail depicting the artisan's deep knowledge of traditional methods, materials and techniques and the pride taken in producing high-quality and often unique works. To explore the world of craftsmanship through Japanese and Irish societies in the twenty first century, we first must look at the concepts surrounding the psychological state in which the maker is left deeply engrossed in the action. David Pye, author of "The Nature of Art and Workmanship" (1968) challenges ideas regarding the role of craftsmanship in design. His ideas are notable through his criticism of the separation of art and function in industrial design laying the foundation of understanding that workmanship is an essential part of creativity, and the practical processes involved. Workmanship of Risk refers to the type of expertise where the quality is determined by the judgement, care and dexterity of the maker which leaves a level of uncertainty about the results.

Workmanship of certainty is a process where the outcome is almost guaranteed due to the process being more controlled and mechanised leaving less chance for the risk of failure. Visualizing this portrays how risk leads to individual creative expression contributing to the uniqueness of each crafted item while certainty gives out precise and repeatable results as is seen through factories' mass production of products.

Workmanship as a necessary part of creativity and the practical processes involved in craft is part of Pye's belief that creativity and human skill are essential to a meaningful design, especially in a world dominated by machines and standardization therefore emphasizing the value of handmade versus mass-produced goods. He explains that a good design comes from the balance of form, function and the process of making and should be purely aesthetic or driven only by the purpose of its performance. *"Design is an art, not simply a problem-solving activity"* (Pye, David 2007).

This statement indicates Pye's views on design as work that considers the look of the things we use; he talks about the appreciation of beauty within design and the uplifting effects this conveys by enriching the visual quality of our surroundings which is the outer expression.

Highlighting the importance of materials and tools in shaping how an object is made brings attention to the tactile and experimental aspects of craftsmanship. His theories have left long-lasting impressions within the various fields of design on the practitioners and students wanting to integrate craftsmanship and human creativity into the modern design process. Although the effect of certainty in making can limit creative expansion it offers control, which can be a useful aid to think about during the development of experimentation and error that can further a design significantly.

Flow Theory for Creative Breakthrough

Flow Theory, a term first introduced by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is recognised across a variety of professions as the author of 'Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention' (1996). I will refer to his theory as a tool aiding my research.

It consists of nine flow factors that when put in action is a psychological state of being fully immersed with an intense focus on the task at hand, allowing the craftsman to forget themselves and focus entirely on their work. He describes this as, *"A state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter, the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it"* (Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly 1990). This frame of mind occurs through a combination of balance between the challenge of a task and the skills available leading to a person's deep engagement and enjoyment. He talks about flow as being a critical concept for creative breakthrough explaining these complex ideas clearly making them relatable for both professionals and those looking to enhance their problem-solving abilities or even to find more joy in everyday activities. When applying this to craftsmanship, especially in the context of workmanship of risk as defined by David Pye (1968) it sheds light on how artisans experience flow in the development of their craft.

The uncertainty in workmanship of risk enhances the challenge which is a key element of flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow occurs when a task is just challenging enough to push an individual's skills without overwhelming them. For a craftsperson, this balance is crucial as too much difficulty can create anxiety, whilst too little can lead to boredom. Another essential factor is the clear sense of intentions and the immediate feedback from the material itself, as the artist works towards achieving a finished piece. His feedback comes from how the material responds to the risks and adjustments made during the process which highlights a sense of control over the project. The mastery of tools and materials creates confidence resulting in the flow of ideas, essential for mastering a craft and thriving through the experience of workmanship.

Japanese philosophy of craftsmanship

Zen Buddhism's focus on mindfulness, simplicity and the pursuit of wisdom through everyday activities, has deeply influenced Japanese craftsmanship for centuries. This way of being is seen in the concepts of *Monozukuri* (the art of making things) and *Shokunin* (the spirit of the craftsman). These ideas show a deep respect not only for technical skill but also for the connection between the maker, the material and the process. These disciplines are observed in Japanese craftsmanship which is known for its precision, care and integration of philosophy into physical creation.

Monozukuri: The Art of Making

This term came to be of importance in the late 1990's. it was used by the Japanese government to re-establish the manufacturing process in the ever-changing global economy. *Mono* refers to things and *Zukuri* means to create. It is this attitude to production that emphasizes pride, skill, and dedication with an aim toward innovation and perfection, a mindset that many Japanese firms have turned to. (Kittaka, Louise George, 2024). However, the traditional handmade object involves a comprehensive philosophy that integrates both the practical and spiritual aspects of craftsmanship. By highlighting the importance of the process, it suggests that in order to create something of quality, it requires technical mastery and a sense of duty to society and nature.

Monozukuri is not just about the product but about the process itself which involves more than just physical labour. It calls for a mental and spiritual connection encouraging an awareness of the materials and a recognition that nature has provided us with these resources. This awareness creates a sense of humility and respect, guiding the maker to treat their resources with care, minimalizing waste and to ensure that every step is undertaken with intention and mindfulness. This philosophy incorporates elements of Zen Buddhism such as *Zazen* (seated meditation) and *Kinhin (*walking meditation), where being attentive in the present moment is key (Fuyu, Martin, 2023). In the same way each mark of a tool and every decision made during the creative process is treated with full attention and respect, making the act of making itself a meaningful and intentional journey.

Shokunin: The Spirit of the Craftsman

The term is directly translated as artisan or craftsperson, but it carries with it a fundamental cultural meaning. The Shokunin is not only a skilled worker, but someone who has a deep commitment to their craft, as it is more than just a job, but a way of life. The concept implies a dedication to mastery of maintaining the highest standard through consistent self-improvement. It is about character and spirit as much as it is about technical ability where a person sees their work as an extension of themselves reflecting their personal principles and values. It can be better understood through the lens of S*hokunin Kishitsu* (the artisan's morality), which prioritizes diligence, discipline, and dedication to perfection. (Matsuyama, Sachiko, 2018)

This aspect of the craftsman's spirit is seen in the film '*Jiro Dreams of Sushi'* it is not really about sushi but how to become a master. Jiro Ono is a sushi chef who is constantly motivated and inspired as he is never fully satisfied with his work and always looking to improve. In the first moments of the film he says, *"Once you decide on your occupation...you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That is the secret of success...and is the key to being regarded honourably."(Ono, Jiro, 2011).*

Zen Buddhism's influence on Shokunin is clear in this constant pursuit of success, the practice of maintaining *Shoshin* (the beginners mind) means to approach each moment or task with an openness and curiosity regardless of how experienced they may be. To never become complacent in their work while relentlessly striving to improve and perfect skills reflects the Zen emphasis on continuous practice as a path to spiritual and personal growth. The significance of Shokunin relationship between the individual and the community works in harmony with the Zen belief that the self is not an isolated entity but as interconnected to all living things. It is a sense of responsibility to society, by utilising their craft to enrich the lives of others and not just for personal gain.

The Relationship between the workmanship of risk, flow theory and the Japanese philosophies of *Monozukuri* and *Shokunin* reveals that craftsmanship is both an art and a philosophy. The workmanship of risk by David Pye, contrasts with the certainty of mass production by valuing creativity, engagement, and the acceptance of unpredictable outcomes. Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory supports this, showing how engaging and skilful challenges lead to moments of creative breakthroughs when the artisans are properly invested in their work. *Monozukuri* and *Shokunin* reflect both the technical and spiritual sides of craftsmanship. They emphazise patience, mastery and a deep respect for materials, values that remain central to Japanese craft traditions. Together these concepts depict craftsmanship not just as a skill but as an intentional, mindful journey, where risk and mastery nurture the development of meaningful and unique creations.

Chapter Two – Japanese Craftsmanship

This chapter aims to explore the world of Japanese handiwork with a focus on woodworking in various technical processes and outcomes. This will be done to show how flow is evidently present in Japanese woodworking techniques and how it takes shape in the physical working process. Two well-known practices used by Japanese woodworking artists are *Sashimono* and *Kumiko*. Both these techniques represent a well-earned respect for craftsmanship, tradition, and aesthetics, offering a window into Japan's long-standing approach to artisanal mastery.

By examining two contemporary artists, one dedicated to the practice of *Sashimono* and the other of *Kumiko*, this analysis will explore the technical processes and philosophical foundations present in each craft. *Sashimono* is a technique of wood joinery without the use of nails used mainly in furniture making and other items, showing the maker's ability to balance utility and beauty in each work produced. *Kumiko* is the assembly of small cut pieces into delicate wooden lattices also without nails demonstrating the level of precision and patience involved in the making process.

Through the artist's work, we will see how Japanese woodworking nurtures a unique state of flow or *Mushin,* where skill and mindfulness blend seamlessly. Examining these techniques side by side, offers a broader perspective on the principles of *Monozukuri* and *Shokunin,* depicting how both reflect cultural values of simplicity, precision, and sustainability. This is seen by drawing on the Zen-inspired philosophies embedded in Japanese craftsmanship that demonstrate the deep respect for materials, methods, and meditative qualities of traditional making.

Sashimono (Joinery)

Figure 1: Takahiro Yoshino in his forest

Takahiro Yoshino born in 1958, is renowned for his mastery of *Sashimono* joinery and is a representative for the Mt. Fuji Wood Culture Society which aids in the preservation of the natural environment. This practice involves assembling wooden pieces without the use of nails, relying on complex joinery that highlights precision, harmony, and respect for the natural properties of wood.

He has been woodworking for over 40 years and in 2015 bought a neglected forest to grow diverse hardwood species. There he also set up his workshop to share the culture of wood and pass the knowledge and skills of Japanese woodworking, using the timber from his forest and traditional techniques. He built this as a space where people from around the world can gather to share skills, knowledge, and cultural aspects from their perspective as a craftsperson. This was due to his belief that the connection between the person and the forest has become distant and felt it was his duty as a maker to become a "bridge between consumer and forest," a concept rooted in Buddhist beliefs of the harmony between humans and nature. For Yoshino, the Japanese philosophy of *Monozukuri* discussed earlier is about dedication to every step in his work, from choosing the right type of wood to refining details and maintaining accuracy. His commitment to craftsmanship embodies this spirit ensuring that each piece serves not only a functional purpose but exists as a testimony to his expertise and consideration. This can be seen in the natural qualities of the wood which he celebrates rather than concealing, enhancing the charm of the untreated material which deepens in beauty as they age.

Another philosophy present in his work is *Shokunin* also known as the craftsman's spirit which can be transcribed as the sense of duty to one's craft. Takahiro's approach to this is not just about preserving a historical technique but to pass down his values and respect for handcraft to future generations.

His workshop holds a variety of classes from woodworking and furniture making from beginner to advanced, experiences for children to enjoy nature and experience the value of handcraft and workshops on green woodworking and sustainable forest management. In a time dominated by mass production, his work serves as a reminder of the importance of craftsmanship and the human touch. His moral belief in this philosophy is clear in his delicate attention to detail and high standards that are consistent in each project.

Mottainai is a concept within Japanese culture that expresses regret over wastefulness and the need to maximise resources. Yoshino honours each piece of wood he uses which can be visualised in his construction of the Chair Laboratory in his studios at the foot of Mt. Fuji. It was made from the wood of a one-hundred-year-old Japanese house that had been dismantled and moved to his forest of Lake Kawaguchi, reflecting his deep respect for the material and environment. In such a fast-paced world his work embraces the simplicity of creation through one's own hands, creating furniture that fits within the harsh contemporary standards of society while keeping the pieces both timeless and functional.

Figure 2: Inside workshop

Zen Chair Process

Takahiro Yoshino's chairmaking creates harmony between the woods, the body, and the soul. He believes that the chair should feel and accommodate the person's shape and will benefit them physically and mentally with the deep comfort and healing of a custom-fitted chair. Author Robin Wood had the pleasure of meeting this incredible artisan while his friend was getting a tailored chair. Yoshino told them that the 'Zen' of sitting has been studied for centuries in Japan and the correct posture is sitting crossed legged on the floor. Chairs were a Western novelty and sitting in a chair had become the norm in the last sixty years or so for the general population, so they did not have a history of chairmaking to draw from. This benefitted them as they gained the opportunity for a refreshing view of how seating could be transformed.

The process begins with the assessment of the client's posture, lifestyle and personal preference which is essential as it allows him to create a chair that complements the individual's personality and environment. They are sat in a 'dummy chair' which is a fitting device to aid the maker in the measurements as they sit and read, watch TV etc, anything that requires sitting for an extended period of time. When the design is planned, a wood type is carefully selected based on its natural grain, hue, and texture. Yoshino's joinery work is reflective of the *Sashimono* technique. Using complex nail-free joints, he achieves a balance between the structural reliability and beauty as each joint is crafted to remain invisible letting the wood appear uninterrupted, gracefully flowing in its shape and form. Lastly, he finishes the chair with natural oils to protect the wood and enhance its natural beauty emphasizing the grain and texture. The chair is based on an understanding of both Zen and chiropractic theories which he teaches his clients throughout the three-four hour long fitting session. His personalised designs are both comfortable and soulful through a design that incorporates client individuality, traditional craftsmanship and the charm of natural material.

As depicted in Fig. 7 each chair is entirely unique, from its grain and curves, to its precise height are all tailored to the individual for whom it was designed. Takahiro emphasizes the importance of a custom fit, as even a two-millimetre difference in seat height can cause discomfort by applying pressure to the backs of the knees, disrupting proper posture.

He carefully adjusts the angle of the pelvis to ensure that the head and shoulders sit on top of the pelvis correctly while maintaining the natural curve of the backbone, to prevent unnecessary muscle strain when sitting upright. These precise measurements are designed to allow the body to fully relax. In this state of deep physical comfort, the mind can focus on being present, entering the healing of Zen. Takahiro describes this as '*KI*', (meaning air) is one the three elements that make up our body. *KI* is a form of energy that flows through every living being, connecting the mind to the body in a harmonious balance.

Figure 3: Zen Chairs

Figure 4: Joint for armchair

Figure 5: Yoshino's other works

Kumiko (Latticework)

Figure 6: Masato Kinoshita in his workshop

Masato Kinoshita is a talented Japanese craftsman who was born into a wood fitting artisan family in Okawa City, Fukuoka, 1964. This led to him training as an apprentice at a fitting shop in Kanuma City, Tochigi. There he found his passion for Kumiko when he saw a product come into the shop whilst working on other items. According to Kinoshita, *"When I first saw Kumiko in real life for the first time, I got goosebumps. I was so shocked that I had wondered who had made this and wondered if God had made it."* (Kinoshita, Masato, 2015).

Kinoshita discusses how this type of design is decreasing in popularity within modern interior design, and he worked towards a goal that could intertwine both the original forms into modern homes in a stylish way. For what is an incredibly complex work of craftsmanship, it doesn't fit within the minimalist home which is increasing in popularity today, so Kinoshita has found a way to keep this beauty relevant in today's interior design preferences.

When beginning a new job, Kinoshita starts by analysing the house itself and speaking with the owners, creating an idea of their design preferences. He notes that in order to stay relevant in modern times, he must adapt his work to the contemporary home. As houses have been changing since ancient times, he believes the items crafted for them must also evolve to match the shape and function of the house.

Kinoshita is admired for blending traditional techniques with clever designs while remaining committed to the philosophies of Japanese craftsmanship. His work symbolizes the concept of *Monozukuri* which involves a dedication to quality, precision, and continuous self-improvement.

For *Kumiko* artisans, this concept regards more than just the functional or visual aspects of creating a piece, it is a spiritual practice that honours the wood and respects the natural properties it presents. In this artist's case, it is an indication of the high standards he holds himself to and his commitment to honouring the *Kumiko* tradition. In keeping it alive through his work it reflects his belief that craftsmanship is an ongoing journey of progress and self-discipline that requires humility and much patience.

This craft is an expression of *Mushin,* 'the mind without mind' which is the Zen concept that is often referred to as 'flow' in the West. This mental state of total absorption in the task at hand is seen when the Kumiko artist is fully immersed tending carefully to every cut and joint. For Masato, this process of making is a meditative experience that allows him to lose himself in the rhythm of crafting. This state of flow is crucial because any change in his concentration can lead to errors in the intricate designs, where even a millimetre off could disrupt the pattern. The geometric patterns in Kumiko latticework can be seen as a physical illustration of Zen Buddhist Philosophy, reflecting the harmony, balance and mindfulness we can through with Kinoshita's artworks. The repetition and precision of these designs reflect Zen meditative practices such as *Mushin,* which help guide the artisan into a state of flow as their craft becomes an immersive, almost spiritual experience. The rhythmic structure of Kumiko holds a soulful connection between the maker and the material, showing how this process is both a meditative journey as well as a technical learning experience.

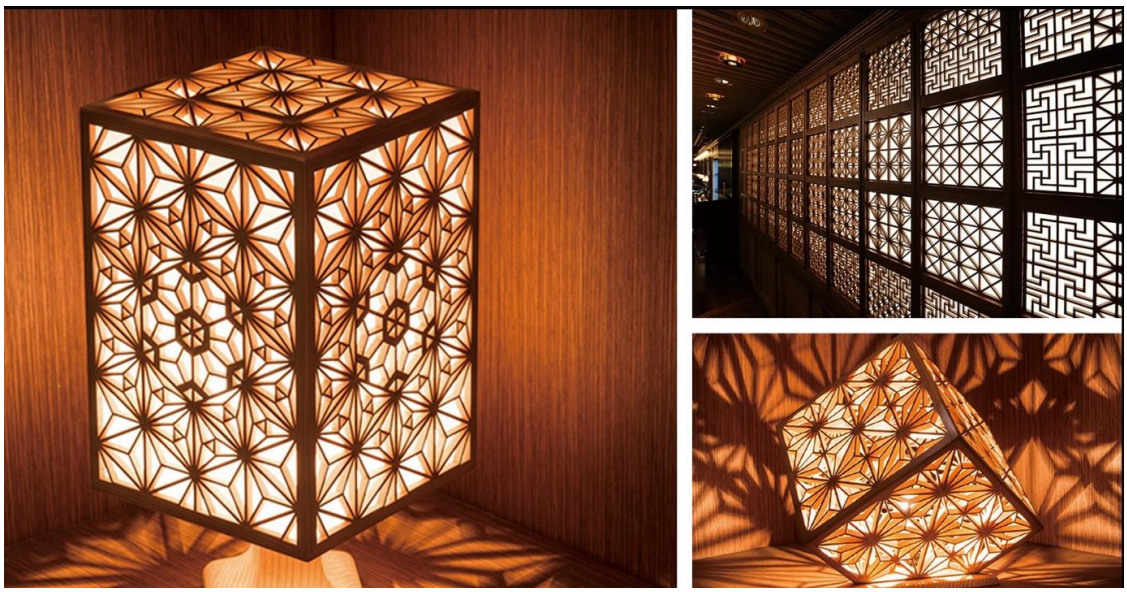

Figure 7: Kinoshita's modern Kumiko works

Latticework Process

Understanding the process of Kumiko makes clear the deep connection between craftsmanship and flow, where the state of complete absorption in a task is evident. The precision and patience required in the assembly of measured pieces of wood without the use of nails demands the makers complete attention, reflecting the meditative qualities of traditional making. The origins of Kumiko latticework can be traced back to the Asuka Era (600-700AD) where it was commonly used in architectural elements such as doors, windows, *shoji* screens, and other architectural elements of traditional buildings. Over time, it became particularly popular with tea ceremony master's for their ceremonial rooms. While there are many Kumiko patterns and designs, some almost forgotten and others still widely used today, the process remains very much the same except for the technological advancements of the tools used.

Important to the Kumiko making journey is the specific choice of wood chosen as different wood possess unique textures, grains and workability. Two examples of wood are the *Hinoki* (Japanese cypress) which is known for its durability and aroma and the *Sugi* (Japanese cedar) that is used for its lightweight properties. (Smith, Daigo, 2020). This choice is essential for the initial design as the maker communicates the consumers' needs through this decision, whether it is purely aesthetic, for strength or even budget it is the first of many factors to consider.

The concept of flow applies not only to the craftsperson, but to the final owner of the piece. The way a handcrafted object integrates into a home or space carries with it the maker's mark. Their skill, patience and time that went into crafting this object can influence the atmosphere of a space, if appreciated. The way it interacts with light, touch and its general daily use contributes to the sense of harmony in the home, almost grounding the owner in their environment. This aligns with Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory, where immersion and focus create a deeper connection to an experience. Just as the maker achieves mastery through dedicated engagement, the very presence of a thoughtfully crafted object can enhance the flow of the home, evoking a feeling of peace and balance.

If a person is unacquainted with this process, then the first thing that they will need to prepare is a Jig, which will be key to assisting the artist as a guide for precise cuts. Firstly, a design will be drawn up with desired dimensions which will determine the placement of the adjustable feature such as the fence (aligns and holds wood in place) and stop (controls the depth of cuts). Then onto preparing the jig base, marking the length and width before cutting this with a saw. On a separate wood face, a channel is marked for the fence and stop, and each part is cut. The last part before assembly is to carve out a channel by marking a guide on the fence and using a router plane to create tow guides on each side for smooth and consistent cuts. Once finished apply wood oil or paint.

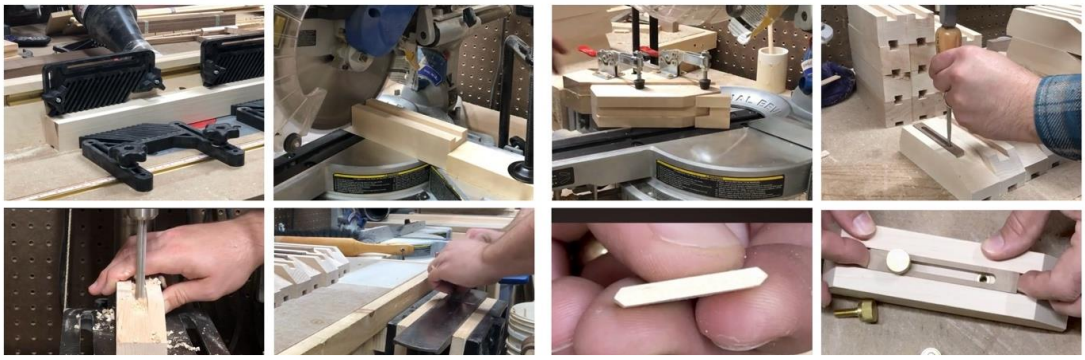

Figure 8: Making of a Kumiko jig

This part of the Kumiko making journey is crucial as one mistake can lead to misalignment within your finished piece therefore it will not uphold itself as each piece cut is meant to fit snuggly to enhance the strength of the piece.

When this careful, rhythmic process is completed, the making can begin. Each design is chosen not only for aesthetic purposes but also for variations of strength which will determine what type of wood is used. Originally Japanese cedarwood was used in the practice and is known for its durability but not everyone has access to this so other hardwood species have become popular, such as maple, beech, oak, Baltic birch plywood or high-density fibreboard (HDF). Once chosen the wood is cut down into thin strips with a *Kanna* (hand plane) ensuring an even thickness that is easy to work with. The next step is constructing a basic frame and grid which will act as the foundation of the design. After measuring the frame accurately, small groves are then cut into the strips allowing them to interlock arranging a framework that will hold everything together.

The next step is the trickier area, cutting and shaping the Kumiko pieces, each with precise angles and bevels specifically formed to make complex geometric shapes.

The more common pattern included hexagons, diamonds, and stars but an advanced artist such as Masato Kinoshita created elaborate designs with floral or abstract elements in his modern creations. They are then carefully trimmed to fit with *nomi* (chisels) *nokogiri* (saws) and planes with cuts as small as one to two millimetres. Assembling these intricate patterns is done with a wooden mallet and even some tweezers gently tapping the pieces into place. The last step is to sand any rough edges or imperfections and then apply a treatment to the wood such as a light oil to help enhance its natural wood and grain. The *Kumiko* process is a very meticulous practice with each step requiring immense concentration and skill. Seen within the work of Kinoshita, one can see how *Kumiko* artisans embody the delicate beauty of Japanese craftsmanship through careful preparation and thoughtful assembly.

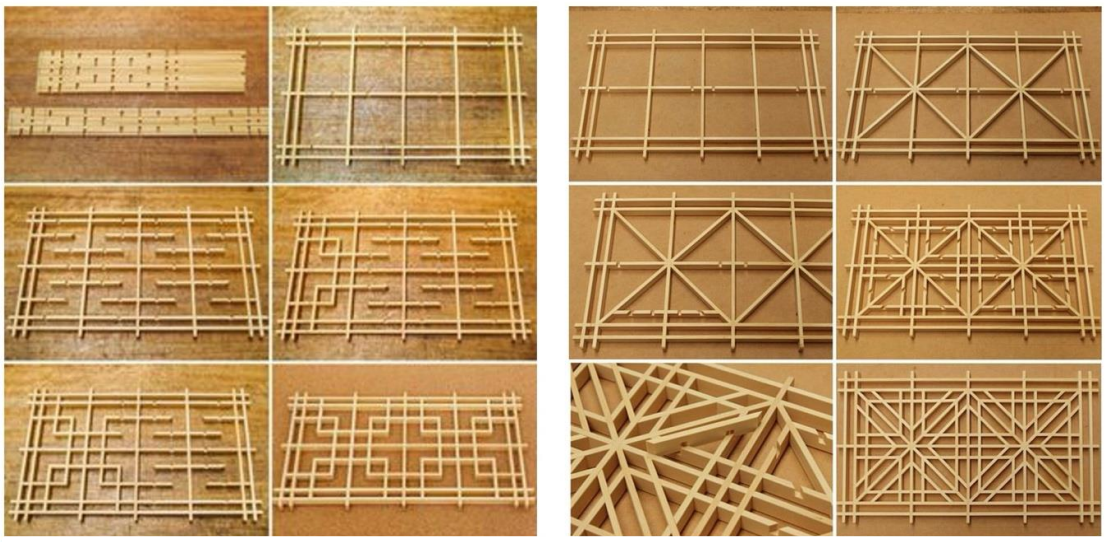

Figure 9: Examples of Kumiko making process

Both Yoshino and Kinoshita depict Japanese craftsmanship by connecting traditional techniques with deep philosophical values. Through unique approaches, each artist celebrates the genuine gracefulness of natural materials and marries them with modern design. Embracing imperfection and dedicating themselves to purposeful creation, their works resonate with Japan's timeless respect for nature and artisanal heritage. Together they display a shared commitment to preserving tradition while infusing it with the contemporary, expressing their culture's enduring spirit of craftsmanship.

Chapter Three – Irish Craftsmanship

For Irish craftsman, woodworking has long been more than just a trade, it is a tradition that has been passed down through generations and is deeply rooted in the nation's history and heritage. This chapter will focus on how its distinct qualities have been preserved, reinterpreted, and celebrated in a contemporary setting.

I will focus on two woodworking artists whose work demonstrates the connection between modern innovation and traditional craft to offer insight into how Irish cultural identity and traditional craftsmanship is expressed through a connection with nature, the material of the wood itself, design, and technique. Building on the previous chapter's exploration of Japanese craftsmanship, this section aims to focus on contemporary Irish craftsmen working with wood whilst focusing on the similarities and connections between the two traditions, emphasizing shared values such as particular attention to detail, respect for materials and a deep commitment to cultural heritage.

In a sense this addresses local traditions in contemporary contexts. By comparing these perspectives, this chapter highlights the significance of handcrafted goods as a form of cultural storytelling, encouraging a renewed appreciation for woodworking practices that embody the artistry and individuality required to produce handmade items over the uniformity of mass-produced furniture.

Stickman Furniture

Figure 10: James Carroll in his workshop

James Carroll, also known as stickman, is a contemporary Irish woodworker who creates the well needed bridge between tradition, experimentation, and sustainability. Based in the Wicklow mountains, Carroll draws inspiration from the natural world surrounding him, particularly the local woodland which serves as both a material source and influence on his work. With over thirty years of experience, his work includes furniture, sculpture, traditional timber framing (TTF) and up cycled creations. This demonstrating a diverse journey to where he currently works and when asked how did he end up in this industry working with wood, he says: *"multifarious twists and turns and after decades it feels like I'm just getting going…it's important to experiment to find out what works for you, I always seem to gravitate towards trees and wood, it has some push back, I feel more at ease working with it. Clay is a bit soft; it can be anything; glass and stone are a bit hard." (Carroll, James, 2024).*

Heavily involved in forestry, Carroll brings character to his work while teaching woodworking workshops. These classes provide a connection to trees and the environment, promoting a closed loop cycle of resources that is central to his craft. At the heart of Carroll's practice is the moral belief of sustainability and regeneration. He uses small-diameter hardwood, overlooked tree species and discarded materials, turning them into quirky functional and sculptural pieces.

This approach reflects the resourcefulness seen in the Irish arts and crafts movement, which encouraged the revival of traditional methods and use of regional materials.

Process

Carroll's engagement with the lifecycle of his materials, including the milling of his own timber, supports these ideas while making his work as part of the discussion on circular economy and waste reduction with DCCI's 'made local, made to last' campaign mentioning his work on the webpage. His use of green woodworking (unseasoned/dried) which is the practice of sustainable woodland management by cutting back trees to allow them to survive many time the regular life span, reduces the energy used during the harvesting, transportation, and processing of coppiced woodland. This process involves using freshly felled timber which is then preserved in water to maintain the moisture content. This is important as the shrinkage of the wood later helps with structure due to the joints tightening and this is sometimes cultivated more by over drying a half a joint which allows both parts to exchange moisture coming to a balance with the surrounding environment. This is enhanced further by the techniques for shaping which requires the grain to be followed which produces softer surfaces yet increased strength as the woods linear lines remain intact.

Figure 11: Shuggyban stool

One of his most notable works, the *shuggyban* stool, illustrates his ability to merge the cultural aspects of both Irish craft traditions alongside international techniques. The experimental product is crafted from local sweet chestnut wood and a Japanese inspired process known as *shou sugi ban* (wood charring for preservation). This process creates an alligator like skin texture on the top of the stool which he then treated with an epoxy resin to solidify and stabilize the surface. Such an effect of using flames is a balanced method of preservation as it draws any natural oils to the surface helping to protect it from the elements.

These processes reflect upon his appreciation for Japanese craft culture but also ties back into traditional Irish woodworking where durable functional objects were crafted with ingenuity and care. The exploration of charred wood and epoxy resin incorporates the ancient and modern, which depicts craftsmanship as both an evolving and deeply rooted practice

This discussion between Irish and Japanese craft traditions builds on the exploration of Japanese craftsmanship in the previous chapter. Just as Japanese artisans value the imperfections and natural character of their materials like Carroll's work celebrates these quirks and the natural forms of the timber through the use of the disregarded. His preference for hand tools and greenwood further resembles Japanese respect for tactile engagement and traditional methods. In addition, both approaches prioritize material resilience and cultural storytelling, demonstrating how craft acts as a universal medium for preserving heritage and addressing contemporary issues. When asked his opinion on mass produced furniture and if this affects him directly his answer reflected both aspects of the workmanship and of risk and certainty, "*For sure both have value. They are often quite different things serving different needs. Even if ostensibly the same object is being made. Often there is plenty of skill and craft in mass production and a handmade object is not inherently 'better.' However handmade is top of the pops." (Carroll, James, 2024)*

Carroll's philosophy, balancing functionality with creativity is seen through his playful and minimalistic designs which portray a visual of Csikszentmihalyi's flow factors as it is a part of the process that sometimes happens but more often when working with hand tools and greenwood. His self-described, "mad trad" style combines a mix of humorous expression and modern experimentation, showing both the simplicity of rural Irish life and the boldness of avant-garde studio furniture. This creative variety of furniture pictured below is viewable through his online shop, Stickman.ie. This demonstrates how Carroll has skillfully incorporated modern design needs including vastly different approaches to his own designs, to keep his craft alive while making use of unwanted materials.

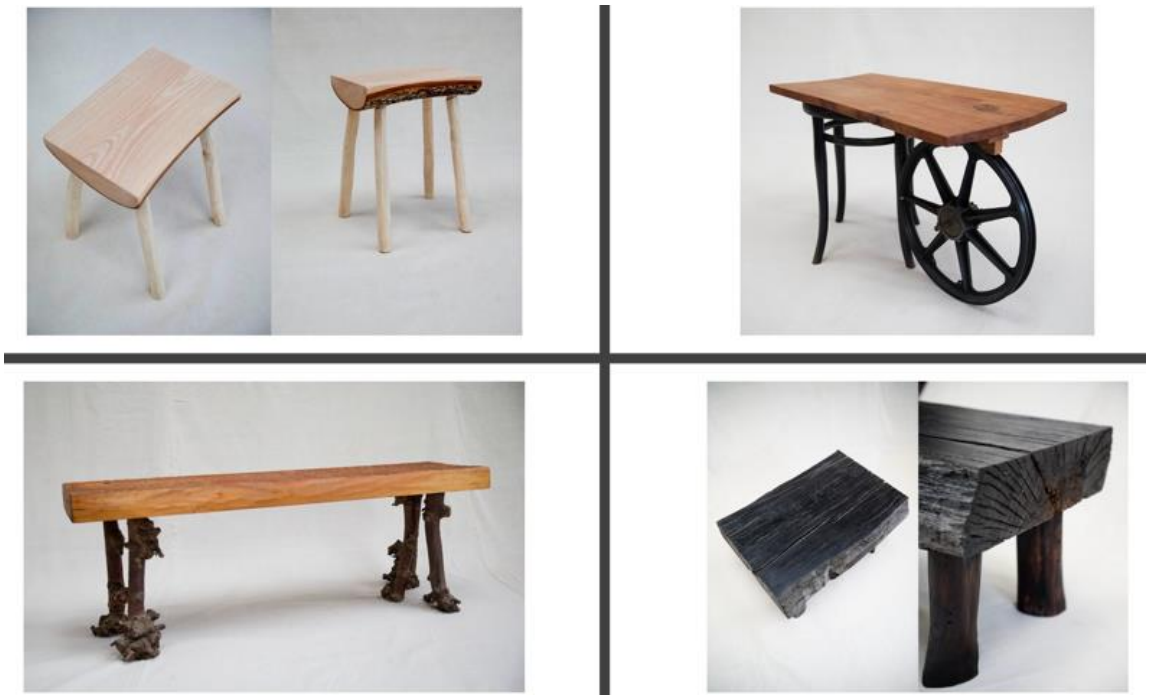

Figure 12: Top left-medium Rare Stool, top right-Duchamp Table, bottom left-Poplar Opinion, bottom right-Bog Oak Table

In the Fig 12. above top left we can see the 'Medium Rare Stool' which has a smooth finish to the seat with raw elements like the untouched bark on the underside. The bottom left is the 'Poplar Opinion' seated bench which uses both apple and poplar which is widespread yet rarely used. The top right is the 'Duchamp Table' which is inspired by Marcel Duchamp who made his first piece the 'Bicycle Wheel' in 1913. His opinion that art can be anything if you decide it is, *"I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in the fireplace"*. On the bottom right is the 'Bog Oak table' that is milled from an oak trunk he found in Westmeath in the nineties which was left suspended in a pre-petrified state of decomposition before the turf cutters hit it. This is strengthened underneath with steel and rests upon macrocarpa legs, its medullary rays left visible on top. His work reflects that of Nakashima where the natural properties of the wood are appreciated within the design rather than altering or concealing them. By highlighting these qualities, he enhances the playful expression of his work, making it stand out amongst many others.

Oak Stave Trestle

Oak barrel staves, bog oak wedges

Ex Jameson whiskey oak barrel staves and bog oak wedges. This trestle was made from the staves of oak casks. It was in collaboration Irish distillers in Middleton for the launch of Jameson Black Barrel Whiskey.

Here's a short video about the process...

Video: https://youtu.be/eFJ3ldZTgcw

Figure 13: Oak Stave Trestle

Figure 14: Top Left-Giraffe stool, bottom left-jolly yew, middle-rung out stool, right-carbon log

Walsh Woodturning

Figure 15: Kathleen Walsh in her workshop

Kathleen Walsh, an award-winning artist known for her beautifully crafted wood-turned resin pieces was brought up in rural Wexford, raised in a family with a strong passion for woodworking. This engagement sparked an early interest in wood crafts, which she later honed through training, focusing on both the materials and their materiality. This fascination with woodworking only developed when she found an old replica belonging to her father in his workshop, the lathe, and throughout the summer Walsh put all her time and effort into perfecting this craft of woodturning. Now Walsh spends her time teaching the students of IADT as a model making and design technician. "*The way of remembering through things is an intelligent material practice, not in an analytical sense but rather an intuitive drive that speaks to the most fundamental psychological needs of human beings.*" (Adamson, Glenn, 2018). This fresh viewpoint in Walsh's journey has fostered an enthusiasm for new and innovative processes and materials. This change of scenery has allowed her work to develop, combining her knowledge of the traditional craft she was brought up with and the modern techniques and skills she gained along the way. This combination of the new and the old is what strives to keep the craft alive, bringing it into people's lives in a fashionable way while still keeping its authentic roots.

The personal connection to the material instigates a desire to tell a story through the art of making. This 'inherent beauty' born from the interaction of synthetic and natural element which is prominent within her work is what inspired Walsh to create these decorative pieces. Working directly with your hands can be quite meditative, especially when creating something of your own design. For this artist working with wood and resin combined is particularly rewarding, derived from her passion for craftsmanship and creativity.

She describes this distinctive pride in transforming raw materials into something meaningful and aesthetic, whether it is a functional object or simply just a work of art. A sense of accomplishment is achieved from the tactile processes involved in shaping the timber, the accuracy needed for working with resin and the excitement for the awaited completed design. "*I find the interplay between natural wood and synthetic resin can create stunning contrasts, merging organic forms with modern design elements…It's also rewarding to see others connect with your creations, appreciating the craftsmanship and the story behind them." (Walsh, Kathleen, 2024)*

This meditative process guides the artisan into the mental state of calmness and focus on the task at hand, creating a sense of flow. Each of the various steps involved like the turning, sanding, or resin pouring, deepens the connection to the process making time pass by without notice. In order to quiet any distraction and the self-conscious, Walsh pays great attention and presence to every phase. During this time, the balance between challenge and skills highlights the importance pf the process, creating a powerful sense of mastery over the craft alongside the joy found in experimentation. Kathleen describes this sense of flow as intuitive and fulfilling, *"as if the materials themselves are guiding the outcome."*

Woodturning Process

Figure 16: Turned wood and resin pieces

This way of woodturning that Walsh uses is known as the twice turned method which requires several steps in transforming a raw piece of wood into the finished piece. These extra steps allow for greater control over the final outcome as it makes any later adjustments possible such as changes in the woods dimension and characteristics during the long drying process. Gathering her material from storm fallen trees where possible, the first phase of the process is known as rough turning. The wood has been chopped to size and is then mounted on a lathe which will spin the wood rapidly.

This is when tools such as gouges and chisels will be utilized to shape the wood in a basic form, removing excess waste and creating the general shape of the envisioned final form. The drying process takes place after the rough turning where it is left to dry and settle but depending on the type of tree used and its moisture content this process can take between several weeks to months.

The aesthetic beauty of this decorative item is down to Walsh's careful choice of resin colour which she picks to help enhance the natural characteristics of the wood. After the wood has been stabilizing for quite a time, the colours are matched and each layer are cast upon the walls one layer at a time. Once each layer has set to a solid structure, the final turning takes place. This is what will bring out the finer details and create the smoother finishes. Walsh describes the woodturning process as a highly skillful, final attention to detail and a lot of patience required in order to reach the desired outcome, especially when using the twice turned method while incorporating resin.

Figure 17: Turning Process

Having had a close relationship with this particular material and craftsmanship from an early age leaves a personal impression on the workmanship of risk, where it brings to life the unique and irreplaceable value of a handcrafted item in contrast to a mass produced one. *"Each piece is a chance to push boundaries, solve challenges, and create something truly unique, which keeps the work engaging and inspiring"* (Walsh, Kathleen, 2024) These items are an embodiment of the time, skill and personal touch of the maker, often reflecting a level of care and attention that the machine cannot replicate.

In identifying two contemporary wood craftspeople working in Ireland today, both Carrol's and Walsh's work are a testament to the connection between the object and its owner, emphasizing the effort and originality behind each piece. This mirrors the philosophies of Japanese artisans, where the principles of Monozukuri, Shokunin and flow are rooted in their respective crafts. The influence of minds such as David Pye and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi further reinforces the idea that true mastery is achieved through constant pursuit of personal development in their craftsmanship. By creating a thoughtful and unique art piece or item of furniture, it challenges the fleeting nature of mass-produced goods, which, while both efficient and affordable, often lacks the soul and authenticity of its handmade counterparts. The longevity and emotional essence attached to handcrafted objects serves as a counterpoint to disposable consumer culture, supporting the persisting value of traditional craftsmanship in a fast-paced world.

Conclusion

This brings us to the broader discussion surrounding the tension between handcrafted and industrially manufactured objects, a topic that both William Morris and David Pye have addressed in their writings. In *The Revival of Handicraft,* Morris's condemnation of modern capitalism and distinct recollections of authentic craftsmanship has been an influential discussion continuing to this day. His work critiques the industrial system for alienating individual creativity from the production process: *"Almost all goods are made apart from the life of those who use them; we are not responsible for them, our will has no part in their production, except so far as we form part of the market on which they can be forced for the profit of the capitalist whose money is employed in producing them" (Morris, William, 1888, Craft Reader).* His words illuminate the main issue at hand, the disconnection between the maker, the object and the consumer. This is seen within industrial manufacturing where profit, uniformity and efficiency are often prioritized over creativity and individuality.

Similar to this is Pye's concept discussed in Chapter One on the workmanship of risk versus the workmanship of certainty. Within this text, he questions if there is a necessity for the productive part of the workmanship of risk to continue doing highly regulated work when the workmanship of certainty is capable of higher regulation than has ever been seen before. *"It should continue simply because the workmanship of risk in its highly regulated forms can produce a range of specific aesthetic qualities which the workmanship of certainty, always ruled by price, will never achieve" (Pye, David, 1968, Craft Reader).* While that produced by the workmanship of certainty is often efficient and affordable, it takes away from the emotional and artistic union achieved through that made by risk. Objects crafted for our materialistic needs are something the world could get along very well without by living a simpler life, but that does not mean they are completely useless even if at first look it is deemed so. The aesthetic beauty of the world around us as seen in furniture, architecture and so on is not necessarily needed, if it looked plain, it would not disturb the prime function it was designed to serve yet it was something many craftspeople were compelled to make visually rich.

The relationship between man and material stresses the enduring value of craftsmanship in a world increasingly dominated by consumerism. It calls into question the long-term cost on our society of prioritizing affordability and indeed 'trends' that will die out and become replaced with the new over an authentic well-crafted item with part of humanity imparted onto that which will last a lifetime. By sustaining the memories of the past through handicrafts we can preserve the vital connection to creativity and methods of work that no machine could ever replace as; *"It is only in a society of equals which can choose the life it will live, which can choose to forgo gross luxury and base utilitarianism in return for the unwearying pleasure of tasting the fullness of life" (Morris William, 1888, Craft Reader).*

In conclusion, the tension between handcrafted and industrially manufactured objects is not simply a question of aesthetics or functionality but a broader view of society's values and priorities. Through maintaining the memories of the past through traditional craftsmanship, we preserve not only methods of making but some valuable ways of life that connects us to nature, history, and to one another. In this busy world we are constantly faced with obstacles such as the environmental crisis, consumerism and many more, yet, the human touch reminds us of the lasting value of creative work rich with personality and soul that fast-paced work often leaves behind. Through educating ourselves we can grow closer to nature and see its true potential which has been overshadowed by widespread technologies and overused by greed, leading us to make better decisions for not just our future but the generations that will follow. Craftsmanship in this sense, becomes more than an act of making, it becomes an act of remembering, preserving, and reconnecting with what means to be human.

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