



PHOTOGRAPHY: GERARDO JACONELLI, NICK ROCHOVSKI (RIGHT)



Hands on

Contemporary craftswomen combine modern, sophisticated elements of art and design with a timeless human touch

WORDS FIONA MCCARTHY



PHOTOGRAPHY: MAUREEN McEVANS (HOLLIE BOWDEN)

Previous page from left:
Shiro Muchiri; Muchiri's
SoShiro gallery
in Marylebone

Clockwise from above:
Shoreditch-based interior
designer and gallery
owner Hollie Bowden;
Flow gallery in Notting
Hill; Yvonna Demczynska,
the founder of Flow

Until recently, craft has often been considered by the art world as an inferior little sister – but today, there are galleries popping up all over the city and shopping portals launching online. Many are overseen by female curators and buyers, dedicated to championing contemporary design as well as age-old artisanry. “Craft has become the most accessible and open of all artforms, from those who make it to those who present it,” says Isobel Denis, director of Collect, the leading international fair for contemporary craft and design.

Marking its 19th year working in collaboration with the Crafts Council, Collect presented a dynamic and daring show of over 400 artist-makers at Somerset House in March 2023, to great attendance, sales and global acclaim. “Craft’s three-dimensional qualities – its texture, materiality, scale and beauty – encourage us to look closer, to experience it and want to learn more,” Denis says.

“Having something special and handmade feels like such a luxury,” says interior designer Hollie Bowden, whose gallery, filled with one-off objects and unusual finds, opened last summer next door to her Shoreditch design studio. “A beautifully crafted piece resonates with the embodied knowledge, talent, practice and love of materials the maker has channelled into it. That is what makes craft timeless.”

Bowden has a magpie eye for contrasting the pared-back with the unexpected. Craft, after all, “falls under a very broad umbrella,” she says. “It could include a carved spoon from a hipster maker on Hackney Road, or an incredible sculpted screen found at Gallery Fumi. The gallery has given me the opportunity to bring these two strands together, introducing what I’m interested in to a wider audience.”

At Yvonna Demczynska’s Flow gallery in Notting Hill, the look and feel of the works by makers including potters, glassblowers, basket weavers and paper artists echoes the organic, ethereal aesthetic of the space. Craft’s visceral tactility holds the most appeal for Demczynska. “A handmade object enriches our daily lives with beauty,” she says. “There is joy in feeling connected to the maker of an object such as a favourite mug, when you hold it in your hands.”

Anna Zaoui and Isabelle Dubern-Malleveys established Invisible Collection, online initially, after spotting a niche for pieces by architects and designers such as Pierre Yovanovitch, Studio KO and Charles Zana that would otherwise only be available if they were designing your home. Invisible Collection’s recently opened Marylebone



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across France, Italy, Portugal and Brazil. “The more personal and unique a piece is, the more special it feels,” notes Dubern-Malleveys.

As the worlds of art, craft and design continue to converge, internationally renowned gallerist Sarah Myerscough took over the reins of The New Craftsmen late last year, in partnership with former product director Kathy Lacour.

“Crafted art and design brings something so relevant and essential to our lives today; a connection to nature, our history and our humanity, forged through relationships with objects that have been made slowly and well, with respect and longevity,” Myerscough says. Alongside her own gallery’s roster of sculptural craft artists, who include Nic Webb, Max Bainbridge (one half of Forest+Found), Marcin Rusak, Marc Fish and legendary furniture maker John Makepeace, Myerscough hopes to bring new horizons to The New Craftsmen.

With such “a distinctive voice in the high-end interiors world,” says Lacour, the pair want to concentrate on key makers such

townhouse proves the perfect space for showcasing the many traditional skills Zaoui and Dubern-Malleveys want to promote and preserve, from marquetry and stonemasonry to tapestry and rug weaving. Pieces by hot young design stars such as Chloé Nègre, Pierre Augustin Rose and Cristina Celestino sit alongside re-editions of pieces by photographer-turned-Hollywood-decorator Willy Rizzo and Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer by Etel. All are customisable by ateliers Invisible Collection works with



PHOTOGRAPHY: BEN ANDERS

as textile and embroidery artist Aimee Betts, furniture maker Gareth Neal and ceramicist Rich Miller. “Craft needs to be championed, and heritage needs to be considered as much as innovation,” says Myerscough. “I see my legacy as encouraging new collectors, supporting younger artist-artisans and uplifting craft education.”

At Abask, the newly launched online destination for curated, collectible and unique objects, there is also a pressing desire to preserve craftsmanship honed over centuries so that it remains vital and inspiring for generations to come. “We want to shine a light on unique local crafts, which we travel the world to find,” says buying director Bryony Sheridan. “We love knowing why someone has made something in a particular way, such as the sixth-generation Jarosinski & Vaugoin Viennese silversmiths still producing everything by hand, or the amazing Italian collective Taf Firenze, hand embroidering irreverent little motifs from dogs to nude ladies onto cocktail napkins.”

Delicate rainbow-striped glassware pieces made by French glassmaker Pierrot Dorémus using 16th-century Murano filigrana techniques to fuse multicoloured glass rods into twists and waves are “conversation starters,” says Sheridan.

From left: Laura Fulmine of The House by M.A.H gallery in east London, surrounded by her carefully curated pieces; striped glassware by Pierrot Dorémus draws on 16th-century Venetian techniques; the internationally renowned gallerist Sarah Myerscough encourages new collectors and supports younger crafters

Designer and creative director Shiro Muchiri established SoShiro gallery in Marylebone in 2021, focusing on the work and stories of emerging artists and creative voices from different parts of the world. “When you go to art fairs and exhibitions, you see a finished work pristinely hung or presented but it’s very difficult to understand who is behind that work,” she says. “Artists and makers want their work to be used and to enhance your life. Bringing that functionality into craft and art is very healing. We are human so we like to engage with things that make us smile.”

While online sales of art and craft grew exponentially during the pandemic, for

Laura Fulmine, founder of The House by M.A.H gallery in the East End, a physical space has been essential for showing pieces such as Charles-Antoine Chappuis’s squiggly woven vases, Jo Waller’s bulbous stoneware vessels and Augustus Stickland’s fallen timber plinths. “Being able to see and interact with pieces helps you to connect with them,” says Fulmine. “It’s very important for me as a curator to set the scene and take visitors on a journey; whether they buy something is almost irrelevant if the experience is memorable.”

Natalie Melton is the acting executive director of the Crafts Council, which recently reopened its own gallery in a



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAN FONTANELLI (SARAH MYERSCOUGH)

Grade-II listed chapel on Pentonville Road near Angel, with British furniture maker Sebastian Cox designing and making all the library shelving, study furniture, architraving and reception desk.

“Seeing big public institutions embrace craft practice, like the Chilean artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña’s textile installation hanging from the Turbine Hall’s rafters at Tate Modern or the Hayward Gallery’s recent ‘Strange Clay’ exhibition is exciting because it introduces craft to a new audience,” says Melton. “New innovations, tools and techniques have encouraged makers to be inherently curious about how they can push their materials, so I’m always excited to see

makers thinking about how they might reshape or represent something that has its roots in traditional skills and practice but feels relevant for a modern audience. That’s when the magic happens.”

Nowhere does the beauty of craft resonate better than in functional, everyday items for the home. Such pieces are at the heart of designer-retailers such as Lulu Lytle’s Soane, where every piece is made by a British craftsman, and Cox London, where sculptor maker founders Chris and Nicola Cox have gathered together myriad skilled artisans, from metal workers to bronze casters, at their workshop in Tottenham. The April opening of the Carpenters



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Workshop Gallery’s latest outpost within the refurbished cultural, dining and music space Ladbroke Hall reinforces the growing importance of a world where art, design and craft can combine.

“Craft relies on community, teaching and a human interaction with the making process,” says Ambra Medda, co-founder with Veronica Sommaruga of AMO, a new venture devoted to experimental design and the handmade. AMO launched during this year’s Salone del Mobile in Milan with a collection of woven textiles made in collaboration with the Albers Foundation and a paint-dripped stool by Marco Campardo. “It engages the continuation of century-spanning techniques and ideas, as well as the opportunity to play and experiment with mediums in a spontaneous and adaptable way,” explains Medda, who is no stranger to the high-design art world, having co-founded Design Miami in 2005, and then worked as global creative director of the 20/21 Design department at Christie’s.

Ultimately, Fulmine wants people to invest in craft as an act of love rather than a financial investment. Bowden agrees. “It’s so important to be led by what resonates with you personally. There are no rules, except that it should bring you pleasure.”