

Take Your Hands for a Walk

Research Methods and Communications

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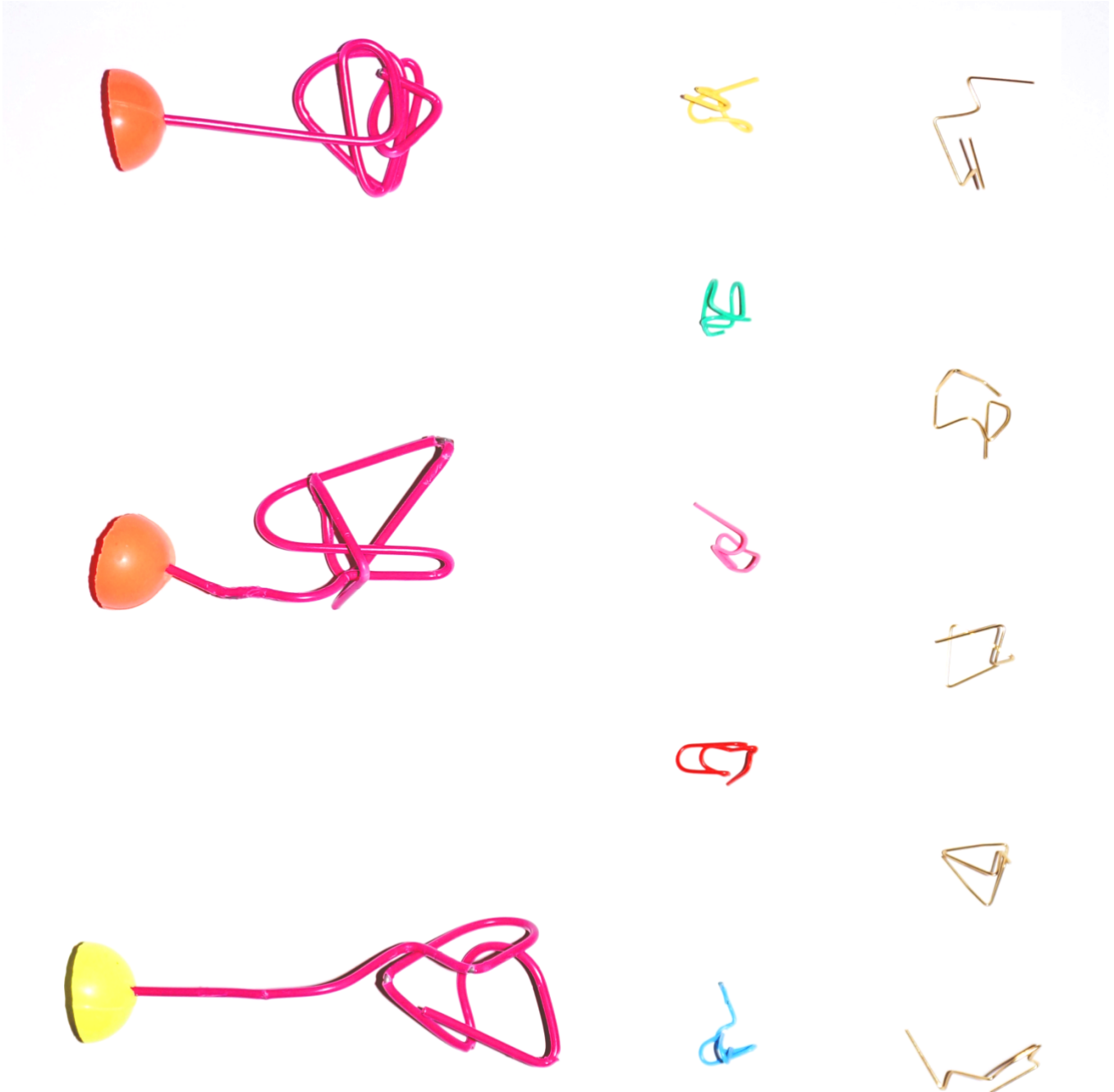


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Introduction

I want to be able to define myself properly as a Designer, currently my work has a large range of outcomes and I want to make sure that the work I create represents my style. Some of my previous work casts doubts on where I fit within art and design, through Creative Venture I want to make it clear what kind of Designer I am. By continuing to make my little objects at the start of my projects I will keep the fun playful style that I have so far developed, whilst making sure that my outcomes better reflect where I see myself in the future.

The need to make is a desire I have always had and is something I would like to understand more fully so that I can use it to my advantage. I have learnt that I need to make in order to inspire myself but I do not really understand why making then spurs my creativity. I want to ensure this way of working is sustainable for the future, therefore I need to understand exactly why making as a starting point fuels my creativity. I can then refine my practice so that it can sustain me for future projects.

Currently my work has two pathways, the work I make for myself and the work I make for others. Within Creative Venture I intend to merge these two areas together to guarantee making is at the forefront of all my design work. As a Designer the narrative my work has is very important to me, I want to make work that is large scale for both interior and exteriors using a range of materials. By expanding my current material knowledge I will combine printed techniques with digital laser engraving to create layers of imagery. I envisage my work being installed in commercial interior settings, hotels or large office buildings.

Hands

At the start of a project I find it hard to focus, making keeps my hands and my mind occupied. I start each project by making a family of objects from every day materials. I take my finds, straws, tooth picks, rubber bands and other everyday items and my hands take a walk, they do not think, they feel, they bend and bind, break and mend, they turn useful into useless. I use the ritual of turning the everyday normal into something that could become whatever your imagination makes of it. From my need to make comes a new object, the paperclip could become a chair, or a spaceship or just a tangle of wire. You could fly off to another world, or just bend it until it breaks. The point is you do not know where your hands will take you.

The old saying 'the devil finds work for idle hands' resonates with me, I find that I am at my happiest when occupied and making. The saying has a slightly different meaning that you are more likely to get into trouble if you are bored, but the idea of keeping your hands busy also keeping you out of harm's way is something that fascinates me. The hand in this saying has all the power much like in my work. My hands are my power, they are what allows me to create and they are what push my work.

It could be said that my hands are not powerful, they are something that I use to create with, they do not have power but are directed to make at my will. 'The hand is an extension of myself, my tool. In reality, tools are a point of contact between the world and myself, but this fact is involved in the common view that tools are a means of carrying out ideas' Adamson (2010:549). The idea that hands are more of a tool that we use at our will, which the brain completely controls is something I struggle with. When I create I let my hands do what they want with different textured materials, I try not to think and just do. The lack of planning then allows the make to become a ritual of creativity. For me, my hands in this instance have their own will, they do not follow my direction but create their own work.

In contrast Lee Ufan writes 'The hand is extremely important to the brain, but at times betrays it. That is because the hand is part of the body. Like the eyes, mouth, feet, ears, buttocks, the brain itself and internal organs, it is an organ of the body. Because the hand is an organ connected to the other parts of the body, it can see and feel and think.' Adamson (2010:548/9). This extract from Ufan's essay looks more at the hand having its own will. In the text they talk of the hand 'betraying' the brain, which gives the impression that the hand should always follow the direction of the brain but that sometimes it does not. The hand is part of the body it has its own senses but ultimately answers to the brain. Within my work I use this 'betrayal' to my advantage, I allow my hands to just create without refinement. Refinement is for later in the design process, my makes allow me to distract my brain from wanting perfection, as you cannot perfect something that you have not planned.

The work I create embodies the idea of making with my hands but my final outcomes tend to use a series of technology driven process. The contrast between the start of my projects, the analogue approach taken to making my objects and the digital way in which I design is something I would like to continue exploring. My makes are a distraction for me to a certain extent however I also have a connection to them, they become something precious to me. With my makes it is easy to see how the hand plays a role in the creativity, however with the digital design work it is harder to see the direct connection between making by hand and designing.

The use of hands in the digital age is also something that Darian Leader talks about and how the uses for our hands may have changed but the need to keep the hand busy has not. ‘... that we employ our hands is changing, the fact that we have to keep our hands busy is nothing new.’ Leader (2016:3).

Within my work I want to use ‘the need to keep ours hands busy’ to my advantage. Making is a distraction as much as a solution, as much as it inspires me it also distracts my mind and allows me to free up the design process. By using the subconscious I am able to create without pressure, fulfilling my creative need to allow me to design digitally.

In this article by Ruismaki the use of the hand to understand the digital age is explored. ‘Hand skills make the abstract modern life more concrete, they offer a possibility to use imagination and develop own talents by creating new artefacts by hands.’ Ruismaki (2006:111). The idea that making by hand can make sense of our modern world is something I can see within my own practice. Using the hands to clarify the world around us is something that we have always done, be it by keeping busy or as is suggested here by using that time we spend making to understand what is going on around us. Within my practice I seem to do a bit of both, as much as I am distracting myself so that I keep from over analysing, I am also creating a connection between myself and my digital work. By creating objects I have a connection to, I also have a physical connection within my non-physical designs.

Linda Barry in this passage from Kleon’s book focusses more on our dependence on digital and how we need to remember to work in an analogue way. ‘My favourite cartoonist, Lynda Barry, has this saying “in the digital age, don’t forget to use your digits!” Your hands are the original digital devices, use them.’ Kleon (2012:53) Here the importance of using your hands is highlighted, Kleon uses the message to mean that the work you create with your hands can be more exciting and unique than what is created on a computer. Through my practice using both digital and traditional techniques together pushes my designs.

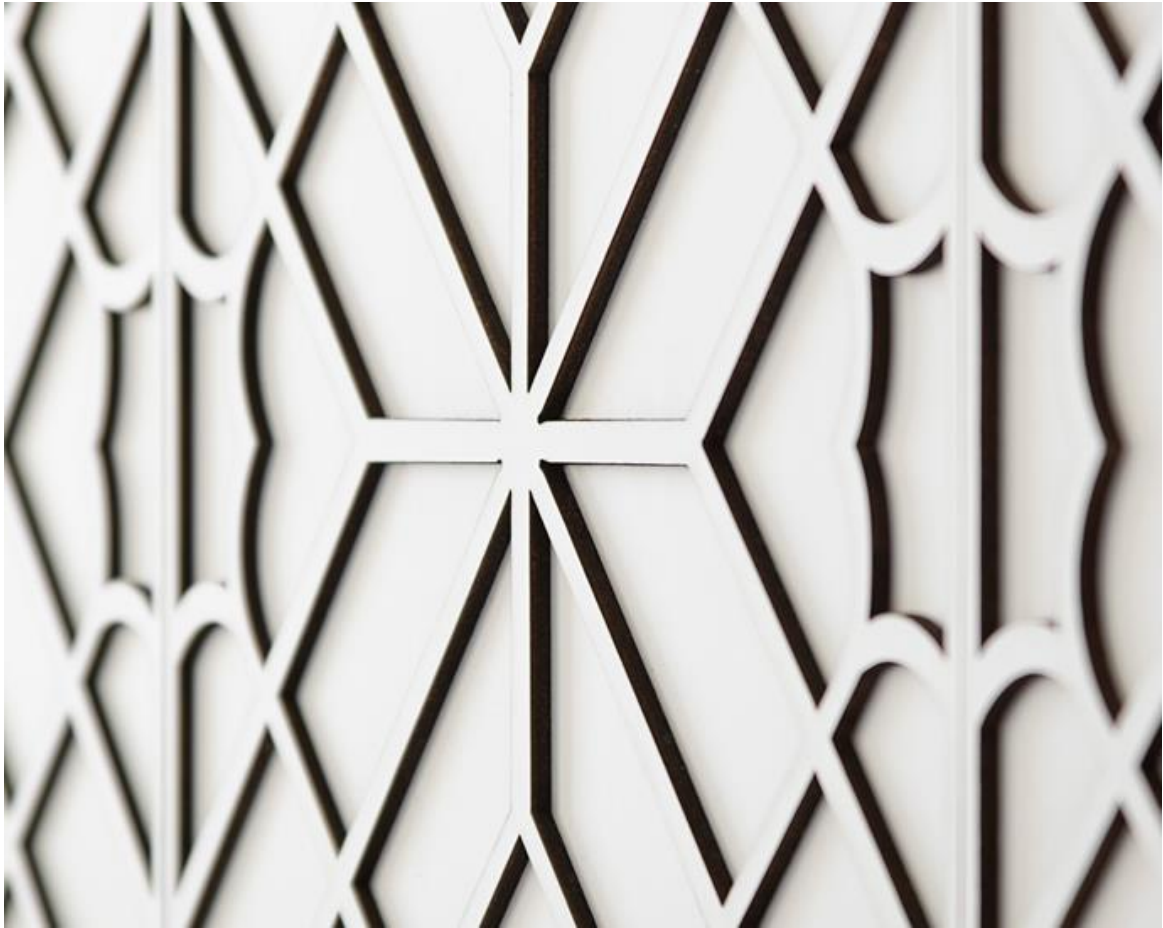


Figure 1. Genevieve Bennett *Maze Laser Cut Leather* (2015)



Figure 2. Four-by-Two Design *NatWest Interiors* (2017)

The use of digital techniques is seen widely in design, over the last ten to fifteen years digital technology has become a skill all emerging designers must have. Designers like Genevieve Bennett use laser cutting to create wall coverings and panels, she uses intricate cut designs in leather to create her pieces (figure 1). The use of the technology is no longer new it is the norm, however the imagery used within laser cut panels is all very similar. Simple geometrics and flower shapes are used because the more complex the pattern the harder the file is to create and the longer it takes to cut. Similarly you have work from interior design companies like Four-by-Two Design that use simple repeats in hard materials to create interior panels. As much as this work is in a similar area of design to my own work it does not innovate the use of imagery within laser cut design.

Much of my work is inspired by the work of other designers that do not use digital techniques but create objects similar to my makes. Aimee Bolu specialises in taking found objects and making them into sculptures. Bolu calls herself an arranger, most of her work looks like they should be functional lifestyle pieces instead of art pieces. 'Then comes the act of making: repetitive processes of drawing, mould-making, slip casting, turning, finishing.' (Backlit.org.uk, 2017) The way that Bolu's work is written about turns making into a process that includes drawing. The way of working is very traditional in the sense that it all starts with drawing, however the outcome is contemporary and uses a range of more complex making methods than my work. My practice contrasts with this thinking that making involves drawing, my makes are not predetermined by drawing like Bolu's work. The lack of complexity to my work means it does not need the planning of Bolu's work.

As a designer I am also inspired by artists, the objects that artists create help influence my work more than work created by other designers. Anne Gibbs uses found materials with bone china casts to make her work. She wants to create tactile pieces that are highly considered and questions how we consume art. The surfaces that Gibbs finds are what leads her to choose her materials. Gibbs work is mainly comprised of neutral colours therefore making the work all about the textures of the objects she creates.

Gibbs uses the way she divides up her studio to separate her making from her drawing "I have different working stations, each one set for different activities; these are sewing, drawing and working with clay." Roberts (2015:112) Gibbs then uses the separate working areas to isolate her making from her drawing. By setting out one part of her studio for one activity she makes sure that she separates her way of thinking for each process. Gibbs may not intend to segregate her working practice but by having separate spaces she makes each step a stage in the process.



Figure 3. Aimee Bollu *Beauty in Space* (2017)



Figure 4. Anne Gibbs *Crossing Boundaries* (2017)

Both Bollu and Gibbs have one thing in common, they consider their makes before they create them. The objects they create are their final outcome therefore they need a level of refinement that my objects do not have. As a designer my objects are more of a means to an end, as exciting and inspiring as I find my objects, I do not fine tune them to be something that could be put into a gallery space. They are a tool in my practice, they are the still life for me to draw, and they are the distraction to keep my hands busy before I carry on with the real work of designing.

Part of the distraction of my makes is being able to play, my hands become more than a tool, they have their own mind, and for me my hands mind is much more exciting than my brain. The hand has an element of fun and child's play to the way that it makes 'stuff that's just play. That's the good stuff. That's when the magic happens' Kleon (2012:65) As much as my making allows me to form a bond with my work it also stops me being too over analytical in the first instance and encourages creativity. Kleon sums up in his book *Steal like an Artist* how sometimes the best work comes when you play.

More specifically we could look at object play and how that can be used to inspire. 'Object play – for adults as well as children – engages the heart as well as the mind; it is a source of inner vitality' Turkle (2007:306). Turkle talks about how 'object play' can be used and compares it to how children play. When I create my objects at the beginning of a project I am allowing myself to have a bit of fun, to let my imagination run away with itself. Before now I have wondered why I need to make, Turkle sums this up for me, 'engages the heart' my little objects that I create allow me to grow attached to my subject matter.

My objects have a purpose; to connect my digital work to me through creating a narrative from my objects that can be carried through to my drawings and digital designs. I create a physical bond with my objects, which I then draw and manipulate digitally. Making allows me to keep some analogue play within my mainly digital practice. I use the bending, folding, and wrapping to play creating connection between the physical paperclip and the digital design, this is why I make.

Creative Venture

Does Craft Have a Place in My Work?

When starting my research I wanted to look at work that was similar to mine and look at how other practitioners approach making. I found that the term most widely used for this kind of work is 'craft' which intrigued me as I do not see myself as a Craft Designer. Craft for me is an old fashioned hobby rather than an area of art and design, this led me to question where I see myself and how I would describe myself for Creative Venture.

The word 'craft' is something that makes one think of the William Morris era of handicraft. With the counter culture of the industrial revolution, craft was all about going back to the handmade. Comparisons could be drawn with the modern day use of craft within certain subcultures. For example the Hipster subculture is all about the authentic and crafting using ones hands to create something that is unique. I guess William Morris with his love of the handmade was a hipster of his day striving to create something that went against the mass produced market of his era.

Craft seems to be all about the authentic or going against the mass produced establishment of the modern age. My making is a purely selfish act, I like to make, I find it helps my creativity, I make for the sake of it not to show the world that only I could do this. In reality anyone given the right tools and materials could create work that looks very similar if not identical to my own. That would not be mass production, it would not use machinery to make a perfect copy of what I make, someone else could easily bend, tie and wrap in the same way as me.

If I'm not a Craft Designer what am I? What do I do that is so interesting? What makes me different? And what am I trying to say?

As much as making is an integral part of my work, it is not where I refine my work. Through designing I refine my making to create large scale interior feature walls. The act of making becomes a problem solving technique for my practice. When given a live brief I am given a starting point, areas to research, where to go to find inspiration, whereas with my own practice I am at a loss for this starting point. Making is my comfort zone, where I go to escape the world and to regroup, I am able to connect with my creations therefore allowing me to have passion for what I make. Only having myself to please makes it harder to know when you are doing something purposeful as you do not have an outside source judging you. When completing live briefs no real connection is needed, you are fulfilling a criteria set by someone else.

Currently I have two lines of work, one which is motivated by a brief from an outside source and one that is self-motivated. Through my Creative Venture I want to make my work more cohesive so that I do not have this divide in my work, to make sure that I am a designer that designs for myself as much as others. To find a way of pitching my own briefs to myself that have as much impact as those pitched to me by outside sources.

Until recently my self-driven work has led to art outcomes rather than design outcomes, through Creative Venture I want to make sure my outcomes are design based. My random little objects have a narrative for me and are my starting point, but are open to any interpretation from those around me I am trying to say “don’t overlook the everyday, the mundane is what makes life interesting!” To me this is not a craft message, it’s a plead to not just look at what you are told to, but to look past what is around you, to look every day, everywhere and at everything! Look in new ways, look past the preconceived, to create excitement in the boring and to be a Designer is to do these things. Through Creative Venture I will push my makes to use different starting points, collecting materials from new areas, pushing my makes so that they continue to be inspiring.

You could then argue that designing is a craft, that the act of forcing a change of perspective, that making the everyday exciting is ‘an activity involving skill in making things by hand.’ Hanks (1982:260) and that my way of designing by using objects that I am fulfilling the ‘by hand’ part of this definition. However I do not want to be pigeon holed into this definition because of the starting point of my designs. Therefore I need to make sure my design work is ‘Design’.

Through Creative Venture I will create design work, which uses my initial start for creativity to make legitimate design outcomes that could be seen in a hotel lobby or a corporate reception. I want to explore further my object making through using new materials whilst designing large scale interior and exterior outcomes for commercial and industrial spaces.

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