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Title: How does tactility inform a designer's understanding of hand-crafted items through their craft?

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In this extended essay, it will investigate the use of tactility within a designers practice of craft through weaving, embroidery, and printed textiles. It will explore how the use of touch through the skilful hands of three designer-makers play a huge role in how their products are made without the use of a manufacturer. It will look at how they use their sense of touch and tactility to produce products and create designs at their highest level of craft. It will examine how their crafted products can create a connection between the designer and user upon purchasing the textile piece. It will discuss how the loss of touch can create a connection to another sense like sight and speech, where you can use words to express touch. Through looking at selected articles from 'Textile: Cloth and Culture', and 'The Textile Reader', it will support my ideas on how touch and tactility are important within these designer-makers work. By looking at Louise Gardiner's commissioned work of 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love', it will discuss how she uses her craft of embroidery to create the quilt, and how she uses of her sense of touch and tactility. Also looking at Hannah Madden's 'Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade', it will discuss how uses her craft of printing and carving to create the repeated pattern design, and how she uses of her sense of touch and tactility. By briefly looking at Olla Nua's "Boreal Small Blanket", it will discuss how she has created her interwoven textile piece with the use of touch.

Handmade is the art of being able to make something by one's hand either made completely by hand or using tools like scissors, craving or hook implements that are required to be held by a maker or designer. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English handmade is defined "made by hand, not by machine, and typically therefore of superior quality" (Stevenson, 2015, p.2023), a product that is made entirely by one's skilful hand and not made by a manufacturer. There are many different types of textiles that are made by

hand which can include applique, crocheting, embroidery, quilting, and weaving, and then hand-crafted activities like woodcraft, papercraft, pottery, and jewellery. All of which are made by hand as well as tools that are used in the process. These crafted, handmade products require certain skills, knowledge, and experience within a discipline that the designer's or makers are part of such as surface pattern and textiles where they make repeated patterns and the design crafts where they can make pottery and jewellery all to their highest level of skill. These skills that they have, help them to create the handcrafted products that are unique and personal to each maker, this being passed on to the user.

Through this the users are able to see how the makers made the products with their hands such as embroidery where you can feel the thread and see where it has gone through the material, connecting this to the user from the maker through their sense of touch. The skill required by the makers to create their products shows their high level of expertise within their craft made by hand. For example, with weaves it would take skill and knowledge to be able to interweave the threads together with a loom to create a full-length piece. A craft involves the skills to be able to produce well-made items like quilts, weaves, papercraft, and pottery. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English a craft is defined "an activity involving skill in making things by hand" (Stevenson, 2015, p.1028), a job that needs the skills and experience to be able to make the product at the maker's highest level of expertise, which is also made without the use of a manufacturer and not being mass produced. While making the products makers are connecting to their craft through the use of touch, this is where they are able to feel what the object is like the tactility of the materials used in the making: the texture, smooth or rough. Through touching what designers are making, the materials or an object that has a texture sends a signal to the brain where it processes this tactile sensation and translates them into what we know as smooth, rough, silky, and other

sensations such as pain, and vibrations. By touching these materials or objects users and makers are able to determine whether we like or dislike the tactile objects, (DeLong *et al.*, 2012). With those sensations of tactility we get to know more about the materials that we are working with, where we gain more knowledge of texture and tactile objects. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English tactile is defined “of or connected with the sense of touch” (Stevenson, 2015, p.4648), being able to touch something that you are holding or making and having that relationship between the maker and the materials or tools that they are using. Tactile can also be defined “designed to be perceived by touch” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2015, p.4648), a product that is made to be touched, that a designer or maker has made for the user.

Through tactile objects we gain our own knowledge through our sense of touch, experiencing the sense of touch through our direct contact with various objects and materials. This leads on to the idea that we all perceive our senses differently, for example, with our sense of touch some people may describe an object as being smooth while others may describe it as being silky. Although this might be how people perceive these things as been differently, this could also be someone’s way of explaining the material. Our brain processes these sensations, and we perceive the textures to what we know as smooth, silky, rough, and other sensations like pain and vibrations. According to an article in the ‘Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture’ (Barnett, 2003), it explains that our senses are also different within cultures, where things like smell or taste may be more important than other senses like touch or sight. In cultures, our senses are perceived differently within our environments that we are in through sounds, tastes, spaces, and colours. Within these cultures, each of our senses can be more important than others such as smell, that can be

seen as privileged in one but in another the sense of touch can be perceived as more important than other senses. We experience the same senses but we each perceive them differently, the cultures and environments that we are born and brought up in can change the way we view things. For example, we gain our knowledge on touch and tactility through experiencing different tactile objects, where we can expand it further and understand how other people perceive things the way that some do not.

For a designer and maker understanding how a user perceives tactility through their products can give them an insight as to why they choose the items that they do and how their touch preferences has changed when they come in to contact with new tactile objects that they have not come across before. Below is one example of this, where on the front and the back of the textile piece has different textures.



Figure 1&2: Olla Nua's – 'Boreal Small Blanket' (2022)

This is a blanket, that has been hand weaved by Olla Nua called 'Boreal Small Blanket' in an aqua and forest green colourway. This is a handwoven blanket that was inspired by natural textures which combines two different types of weaves which increases the tactility of the object, users are able to feel the weaves within this blanket. While experiencing the tactility of this blanket, users are able to experience it through their sense of sight where they can see the two different interwoven fibres. While the two weaves increases the tactility of this the other side of the blankets in figure 2 shows some of the materials coming out of it, where users are able to feel the texture of it and feel how different it is to the other materials used. As explained in an article in the 'Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture' (DeLong *et al.*, 2012), tactility is experienced through touching tactile objects which can change someone's preferences of textures. Through experiencing things it can help a designer understand and think more diversely about tactile responses from the users thinking about how they use the products, why they choose the products that they do and taking this information in to consideration when making their products. By designers and makers looking closely as to how users interact with their products the makers can understand more about them starting with why they choose the products that they do and how seeing if their touch awareness has changed.

By looking at designers and makers through a selected pieces of commissioned work or products, this will examine how they work with their materials and tools to create such unique pieces that shows their skills at the highest level of their craft.

The first designer-maker is Louise Gardiner, who creates contemporary embroidered textiles pieces by drawing with a thread on a sewing machine and embellishing them with hand stitch. Through this style of craft, Louise is able to showcase her highest level of skill with her intricate handmade textile embroideries working with tools like needles, stitch, and other mediums such as applique, inks, and paints that she adds to her pieces. Louise makes embroidered textiles for both public spaces and her private clients where she can create unique pieces showing them her skill and patience, to be able to make the embroidered textiles. By looking closely at one of her commissioned works, it showcases the time and dedication she has put in to be able to create something for someone else or the brand that she has worked with.



Figure 3: Louise Gardiner's - 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love' (2015)

This is one of Louise's commissioned works called 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love', where in 2015 she was commissioned to make a quilt for Liberty London to celebrate their 140th anniversary of the brand. For Louise to complete this quilt she had to do her research to create something that would be meaningful for the brand to showcase in one of their windows, with the idea that the passing public could see it and join in with the celebration. Louise's starting point for this commission was researching historical maritime tattoos based within the Victorian era as the shop was first opened in 1875. Louise considered the Tudor exterior of the department store that was built using timbers from two different ships called 'HMS Impregnable' and 'HMS Hindustan'. This maritime heritage played a huge part in why Louise made a quilt based upon this theme, paying tribute to how long Liberty London has been around since it opened. Having gathered research to create something so meaningful for the brand, Louise has taken the time to create something significant and special, something made with skill and by hand, using her experience as a maker to create a piece that will be remembered on the next anniversaries to come. Through creating this piece, Louise is experiencing her tactility through the embroidery threads and the material she is using to make the quilt. For the maker to create a handcrafted or handmade object for the user, it takes a huge amount of time out of their days to complete the project for them where they are spending their time touching and interacting with the materials and tools, they are using to create the textile piece. In the 'Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture' (Turney, 2012), it explains that making an object takes more than just time out of their day, but it also takes planning and construction of what the makers are going to do, coming up with ideas that will mean something to the user. Through creating this piece, it shows the intended user just how much time that the maker has put in showing that they care and thought of the user in the making process. Putting time into a project shows the user just

how much consideration they have put in, making sure that it is something that they are going to cherish for a long time.

Before Louise started on the sewing process of the quilt, she began on the drawings by hand interacting with the paint and ink she uses to draw the outlines and shade some of the images in. By drawing the outlines of the images she is then able to use them for the sewing part, using her sense of touch to control the freehand sewing machine to create the movement of line within the images. Then adding colour with embroidery thread to the inside of the images, feeling and connecting to the threads and colours she is using. Below is showing the starting progress of this.



Figure 4&5: Louise Gardiner's - 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love -Making process (2015)

This is one of Louise's biggest embroidered pieces that she has made, that would have been time consuming having to draw out the motifs then using the sewing machine to draw the

images on to the linen ground. With this linen ground, she can feel the textures to it, and the lines of the embroidery that she adds to it, the batting within this quilt would have created a soft feel to it. To draw these designs she used a combination of mediums such as applique, paint, ink which in figure 4 you can see where her drawn motifs are ready to be put on to the fabric to create a multi layered textured piece. This multi layered piece, creates different textures within the quilt, there would be areas on it where it is soft as there is not any stitched elements to it. Then the stitched elements creates a harder texture to it, where you can feel the thread going into the fabric. In figure 5, she has started to sew part of the design on to the fabric using her drawings as a base.

In this quilt, it features a lighthouse in the centre with the colours of red and white as the main one's being used where it is coming over the sea with a rope surrounding it. Underneath the lighthouse it includes a ships wheel with roses going around the edges of it where two women sailors are steering it on both sides. At the very top of the quilt it has 'Liberty' stitched on, inside of a scroll with nautical creatures at the sides such as mermaids and other creatures like fish coming out of the sea next to the lighthouse. This quilt also features other motifs such as swallows and the union jack which represents that the brand started in Britain.

The two images below shows the process of the domestic sewing machine, where the images have been sewn on to the linen fabric. In figure 5, it shows the needle of the machine going into the fabric, when sewing this together Louise would have been able to feel the needle going in and having the control of embroidering it together. This close up of the quilt shows the detail that Louise has made with the thread, working with a freehand

sewing machine has allowed her to add in the detail within the waves in figure 6 and to embellish on the sailor in figure 7.



Figure 6&7: Louise Gardiner's - 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love' – Making Process (2015)

As Louise was making the quilt, she would have been able to feel the materials such as the linen and the added materials she has used for the inside of the images. Through this she would have been able to feel the different textures within them which creates the added layers as well as the batting inside of the quilt, making it a tactile object. This creates the connection between the maker and the object that is being made as Louise is able to feel what she is making through her processes of drawing and embroidery. Using her sense of touch to feel the motifs on the quilt. When piecing the whole quilt together at the end Hannah would be feeling the different materials she used and the embroidery thread, feeling the thickness and the thin lines she has created with the needle on the sewing machine.

Having done this quilt as a commission for Liberty London that would be featured in one of their windows as a display, the people passing by would not be able to feel what the quilt is like with the embroidery and textures on it. As they would not know what it feels like they would have to imagine what it feels like through the sense of sight where they would be able to pick up on the colours, shapes, and the detail that the freehand sewing machine has created. Where they can connect to the piece through sight. As the people passing cannot touch the quilt, one way that they can connect to it is through words as a substitute for not touching it. Using words as a substitute for expressing how something feels, for example when going to an exhibition you are not allowed to touch the pieces so the writing at the side is a way that visitors are able to understand what the tactile object feels like. As a way to understand the tactility of the materials is through the use of words or text as when you visit an exhibition no one is allowed to touch the textile pieces, although to understand the tactility of the material you need to be able to feel them. Those words then become a way to express how those textiles pieces feel so that the viewers can understand what they truly feel like (Hemmings, 2012, p.9). For the makers expressing what the tactile object feels like is important to the viewers so that they can get a feel for how you made the piece. When they cannot physically feel the texture of the object, they have to use their sight to understand how it feels and through the use of imagery. For example, looking at the images used in figure 3, 4, 5 and 6 it shows the making process behind the completed quilt, where people are able to understand how they did it making them feel part of it.

On the window display at the top left corner it tells the viewers that it was done by Louise Gardiner, it reads as to why she made this commissioned quilt for Liberty London. Although

it does not include how it was made so that people can get an idea of how it feels, this is where their sense of sight would come in and through this, they can imagine how it would feel by taking time to look at it. Those words then become the language of making and seeing through the words written by the maker, the words written usually include what materials have been used and why they have made the textile piece. This then gives the viewers an understanding of what the maker has made by the use of their sight creating ideas as to how it has been made (Hemmings, 2012, p.10) By looking at the textile piece and reading what is written about the piece gives viewers an insight to what the maker has done and how it could feel. The words written becomes the viewers way of interacting with the piece, a language of making and seeing. For the displayed quilt people passing are able to read and see what has been made to understand the tactility and texture of it.

Having looked at Louise Gardiner's commissioned quilt, this next section will be looking at another designer-maker who creates all of her textile pieces by hand just using a different way to make her products.

The second designer-maker is Hannah Madden, who is a pattern maker that specialises in making repeated patterns with block printed and screen-printed designs by hand for interior products. These interior home accessories include lampshades, cushions, lanterns, paper goods, oven mitts and more. Each of the designs on the products are all handmade starting from the drawings to hand carving the motifs so that they can be block printed on to different materials, showing her love and skill of drawing, carving, and printing in her craft. Having been living in the Welsh marches has inspired Hannah to create her beautiful intricate, handcrafted designs of flora and fauna that is surrounding her. Through this she is

able to create her own natural and water-based inks to create her colourful nature inspired designs that she can print on to the cotton that she works with (We Are Makers, 2020, p. 164-167).



Figure 8: Hannah Madden's - Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade and Cushion (2022)

This is one of Hannah's hand block printed designs called 'Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade', that she has taken inspiration from her surroundings living in the Welsh marches to create the beautiful intricate repeated design. This one was based on the eye catching Scabiosa flower seed heads that has been designed, carved, and printed by hand that gives users a unique handcrafted product where they are able to keep in their homes and cherish for as long as it lasts. Next to the lampshade is a cushion that has also been hand block printed in pale blue colourway using the repeated design as the lampshade. As

Hannah is making everything by hand, she is connecting with her sense of touch through drawing her designs and then carving them into the blocks. This allows her to feel the pattern she is making on to the block by using the carving tool and taking away parts of it that is not part of the design. This gives the block a texture which becomes noticeable on the fabric after she has printed it, where it adds more texture to the background on the design. Texture is important to design as it relates to all fabrics and materials that designers use, texture is then perceived through our senses such as touch. We can experience our sense of touch or tactility through products that have textures to them or a surface that has some tactile parts to it, we experience these textures through our sensations by touching or wearing them (DeLong *et al.*, 2012). Creating or having a texture within design is important as it helps a maker or user understand and experience the textures through touching tactile objects. We can also experience these with our sense of sight as by looking at a material we can see how the fabric has been made. For example, with the natural cotton that Hannah works with, when looking at that fabric you can see that the fibres have been woven together to make the material. Below in figure 9, you can see the woven elements within the fabric that adds textures to the background of this design as well as the added lines that has been printed from the block.



Figure 9: Hannah Madden's 'Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade' (2022)

When touching this product, the users would be able to feel the textures of the woven fabric and the pigment paint which creates another layer on top. This suggests that texture is an important aspect to design as explained in an article in the *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, “texture is an important characteristic in many of the material of design. Texture is revealed through touch” (Hemmings, 2012, p.39), the only way to understand texture is through our sense of touch. By this we are able to understand the different textures and get to know more about the materials that designers are working with.

For Hannah to create her finished printed products, she firstly starts with her hand drawings of flora and fauna where she is able to map out the composition of them that she draws on to paper and tracing paper, so she is able to draw them on to her pieces of block. Once having put the drawn designs on the blocks, she starts to carve out the designs and print

them on the fabric to create her colourful designs with the paints that she makes from her natural and water-based inks. This is another way where Hannah is connecting to her sense of touch and tactility by making her paints and inks out of plants from around her surrounding of the Welsh marches. One of the colour paints that she has made and mixed is used within this piece shown in the figures below, the colour being is a light ochre.



Figure 10&11: Hannah Madden's – 'Scabiosa Block Print Lampshade' – Making Process
(2022)

Through printing her designs by hand, she is using her sense of touch and tactility by holding the block that she is using to print, by doing this she is able to feel what the block is like connecting to her materials. When using the blocks with her hands, Hannah is putting pressure on to them so that the image comes out on the cotton material she is using. Whereas, if she uses an ink roller, she can put more pressure on the blocks which might make the image come out more fully bringing out the colourful intricate designs. By doing

this she can feel the print being printed on to the fabric and is becoming aware of the tactile elements of the blocks. This is where the makers can start to understand tactility more, as in an article in 'Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture', it says "designers and artists who are tactilely aware may experience the world more fully, and with some thoughtful design that optimizes tactility and texture" (DeLong *et al.*, 2007), when designers start to interact with tactile objects or materials, they can experience the world differently to other people who are not yet aware of their tactility and sense of touch.

As Hannah makes her own paints, she is able to make custom paints and inks for the user making and gifting them something unique for their home that no one else has. This creates the connection between the maker and the user as the maker is creating a design and can make a custom colour so that the buyers can have something meaningful within their homes, this also suggests that the buyers do not know what the outcome of this colour will be. Through making something by hand it requires many hours spent creating an item to give to the user, this creates a relationship between the maker and the user. The consumption of time taken to create the textile piece means that the maker literally touch's the pieces having to protect and nurture it before giving it to the user, this can be a form of gift giving (Turney, 2012). While the maker is creating the piece, they are becoming connected to the user as they are spending their time creating something unique for them. For Hannah's products, through the use of being able to choose your own custom colours, it could be seen as a form of gift giving as you wouldn't be seeing the colour that she has made for you until you get the product delivered. She also does gift giving products where you are able to buy something for someone else that you can choose the colour and design you want on many different interior homeware products.

Through Hannah's craft of screen printing, and block printing she is able to connect to her sense of touch and tactility by touching the materials that she works with such as the cotton fabric, the inks and paints that are all plant based. She is connecting to the tools that she uses such as the carving implements for the block prints, this is where she has the control to make all the cut outs in the blocks to create the beautiful intricate colourful nature inspired designs. With making everything by hand, Hannah is experiencing tactility within the traditional craft processes that she uses to create her interior home accessories.

Throughout this essay, it has explained the meaning of handmade and crafted, something that has been made by one's hand exploring this by looking closely at three designer-makers that all make their products by hand without any use of a manufacturer and not having their products mass produced. By looking at Olla Nua's 'Boreal Small Blanket', Louise Gardiner's 'The Liberty Lighthouse of Love', and Hannah Madden's 'Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade', it has looked at how they all use hand crafted methods and techniques differently through the use of hand weaving materials together to create a blanket, stitching a quilt together with embroidered motifs, and a blocked printed design that was all produced by hand.

Having looked at all of this process to create the hand-crafted products, the sense of touch has become an important part to their making as they are connecting to their work through the tactility of materials and tools that they use. The sense of touch is not only important to their craft, but it is also something that is important throughout all hand-crafted designs as they do not involve the use of any manufacturer. Touch is something that we all connect to within our everyday lives but in the sense of design, designers and makers become more aware of their sense of touch and tactility by experiencing different textures, materials, and objects. When people cannot use their sense of touch, there is another sense that we can

use to imagine how something would feel to experience this is through our sense of sight where we are able to see the textures and materials used within design. As maker and designers are able to connect to their textile pieces through the making process, the users are also able to connect to pieces through the use of experiencing the feel of the materials, the tactility of them. This is where users can start to understand why makers make the things that they do.

Figures

Figure 1. Nua, O. (2022) *Boreal Small Blanket*

Available at: <https://ollanua.com/shop/boreal-small-blanket-aqua-amp-forest-green>

Accessed at: 13th December 2022

Figure 2. Nua, O. (2022) *Boreal Small Blanket*

Available at: <https://ollanua.com/shop/boreal-small-blanket-aqua-amp-forest-green>

Accessed at: 13th December 2022

Figure 3: Gardiner, L. (2015) *The Liberty Lighthouse of Love*

Available at: <https://www.lougardiner.co.uk/commissions/liberty-lighthouse.php>

Accessed at: 8th December 2022

Figure 4: Gardiner, L. (2015) *The Liberty Lighthouse of Love*

Available at: <https://www.lougardiner.co.uk/commissions/liberty-lighthouse.php>

Accessed at: 8th December 2022

Figure 5: Gardiner, L. (2015) *The Liberty Lighthouse of Love*

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Accessed at: 8th December 2022

Figure 6: Gardiner, L. (2015) *The Liberty Lighthouse of Love*

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Accessed at: 8th December 2022

Figure 7: Gardiner, L. (2015) *The Liberty Lighthouse of Love*

Available at: <https://www.lougardiner.co.uk/commissions/liberty-lighthouse.php>

Accessed at: 8th December 2022

Figure 8: Madden, H. (2022) *Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade*

Available at: <https://www.hannahmaddendesign.com/shop/p/scabiosa-block-printed-lampshade-1>

Accessed at: 9th December 2022

Figure 9: Madden, H. (2022) *Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade*

Available at: <https://www.hannahmaddendesign.com/shop/p/scabiosa-block-printed-lampshade-1>

Accessed at: 9th December 2022

Figure 10: Madden, H. (2022) *Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade*

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Figure 11: Madden, H. (2022) *Scabiosa Block Printed Lampshade*

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