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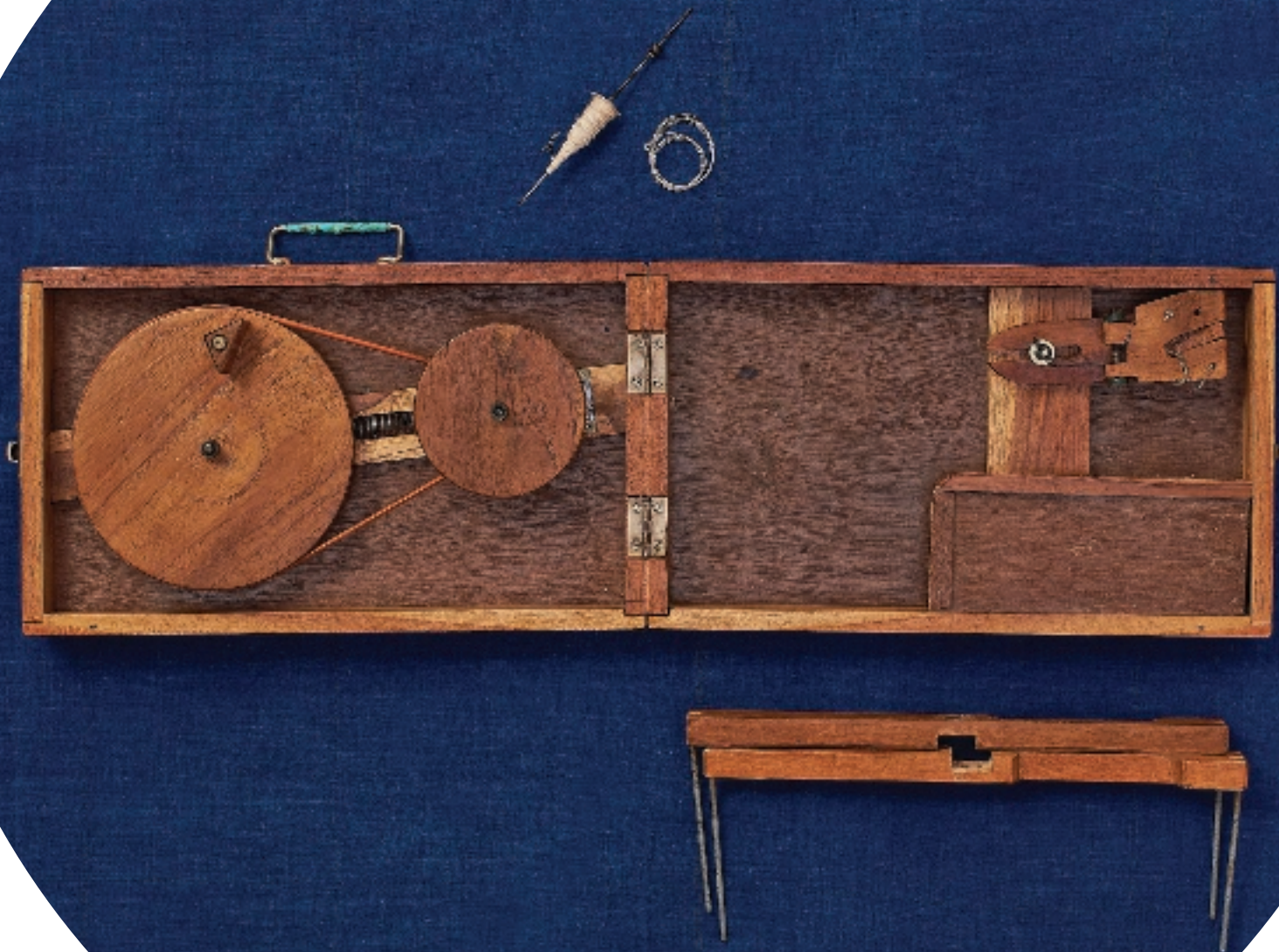


MAKE OUR STORIES PART OF YOUR STORY

CRYSTAL-GAZING

The Future is Handmade

H. Heeren eleven Cobbing



For many of us, the haptic, along with so many small pleasures, has been on hold. As we emerge from a year of touch starvation, what might be the impact on the handmade? What is next for indigenous textiles and other communities disproportionately impacted by recent events? Has what we value changed? Are we entering a new era of respect for hand-made goods? There are no certain answers, but Marcella Echavarria finds some wise voices to listen to.

Chinar Farooqui from Injiri - a company rooted in handloom and Indian craft - believes firmly in storytelling as a way to look back to folk traditions and bring them into the present. Her garments tell stories, not only as references but as actual stories stitch by stitch, as texts of rural India.

Susan Walker, founder of the Ibu movement, working with 101 artisans in 38 countries, says 'The future of textiles will be shaped by two forces: growing technology and hand-made, artisanal craft - each rising in importance and hopefully, in balance. There is a demand for smart fabrics that will respond to sports and leisure lifestyles; and there is an equal demand for meaningful, historically grounded textiles that support people, culture, and heart. I see a future where both will thrive.'

Philip Fimmano, a textile and design expert working at Trend Union in partnership with Li Edelkoort, agrees with Walker. He says that, 'We live at a time when craftsmanship provides the antidote to our polarising digital age. The more online that life

becomes and the more we are alienated by technology, the more we will crave tactility, authenticity and the handmade. Textiles in particular are a grounding force since they embody several notions that are critical to our contemporary condition; from the regenerative farming of natural fibres that can realign us with nature, to the captivating techniques of spinning yarns and weaving cloth, both by hand and machine. We want to understand how and where things are made, somehow helping us make better sense of the tumultuous world around us.' Fimmano continues, 'Indigenous heritage and traditions have become endangered and they therefore must be honoured and protected at all costs. We will increasingly abandon western systems that are no longer viable in favour of the sustainable expertise found in distant cultures; from craft and textiles to architecture and wellness. Textiles have a conflicting past that both flourished and failed with nomadic trade, colonialism and slavery. The future will be a time for reconciliation, forging a more conscious understanding and reopening pathways to indigenous wisdom. Artisans near and far will rewrite their own histories and reconnect us to our moral instincts — revering niche quantities, natural time cycles and slower-paced production while respecting resources and humanity alike.'

Glenn Adamson, in his book, *Craft: An American History*, says that technology and industry often get much of the credit for fueling the United States development; however, the prevailing source of American identity stems from those who make objects by hand. In this new book, published in ▶



Jordana Mink-Yaun



Philip Fimmano and Li Edelkoort
photographed by Theresa Schwaninger



Ali MacGraw

Susan Hull Walker



Zara Elwood



Vera Claire



January 2021, Adamson shows how skilled labourers shaped the United States. The book explores class, race, and gender dynamics and goes as far as questioning the American dream itself by unpacking the 19th century myth of the self-made man—an artisan who purportedly used craft as a pathway to self-reliance and, ultimately, fabulous wealth. The main characters of Adamson's book are women, blue-collar workers, African Americans and Native Americans, in a long-lacking narrative that unveils the social fabric underpinning American identity.

Jordana Munk Martin is the founder of BLUE, The TATTER Textile Library, that opened its doors in 2017 in New York City. BLUE is an ever-growing home to 6,000 books, journals, exhibition catalogues, and objects that examine and celebrate the global history, traditions, makers, and beauty of textiles. 'It is my hope that the future is handmade', she affirms while mentioning her collaboration with I:|:| (designers of high-fashion khadi) last year. This was an effort to organise the global maker community to join hands with indigenous artisans in India; contributing to their livelihoods by creating a completely hand spun hand knitting yarn. This initiative merged two worlds, local makers of yarns and global knitters, around quality, purity and authentic craftsmanship.

The trend towards 'authentic-seeking' (the search for real experiences rather than 'products' which are manufactured, and the growing desire to find experiences and products that are original) has been backed by sales figures. The handmade is no longer a peripheral or isolated area of specialist interest: it is

now firmly established in the mainstream. When combined with the impacts of digital storytelling and e-commerce, these factors have had a clear effect on the market for the handmade.

Manpreet Kaira from the Art of Citizenry, a firm specialising in social impact consulting, raises important questions for the future of the handmade. 'The foundation of many fair trade, social enterprises, and conscious businesses is based on the existence of inequities - that's why their work is important, but also calls for critical conversations. Previously colonised countries are still struggling to rebuild as a result of years of extraction, which continues to manifest today in the form of capitalism.'

On a similar note, renowned Mexican design curator Ana Elena Mallet, raises the issue of misunderstanding cultural appropriation: 'Faced with the supposed decolonial discourses, arising from the hegemonic countries that are nothing more than new colonial discourses, there is an enormous risk of misinformation and stigmatisation of traditional artisanal production. This could easily lead to a cessation of the consumption of these products before the fears of these new ghosts of "cultural appropriation", extractivism and "whitewashing", bringing devastating consequences to the livelihood of many artisanal communities. Today more than ever. Informed, justified and contextual reflection is needed to evaluate, defend, consume and preserve traditional textiles.'

Zara Elwood from Las Niña's Textiles has dedicated the past 24 years to travelling to indigenous ▶



Blue: The Tater Textile Library



11.11.11 eleven eleven Clothing

communities in Latin America and offering one-of-a-kind textiles finds to her global audience. She is not optimistic about the future of the handmade. 'I believe the public is deciding though the usual ways by being told untruths and not caring enough to see they are being green-washed. Why would they pay \$400 for a piece created by an artisan when they can purchase a copy by a well-known brand who has mass produced something just like it?... People must truly care to know how a textile is produced, by whom, where or beyond that to know why it is no longer being produced because the elders cannot see anymore and the younger generations were not motivated to learn.' Though customers perceive handmade products to be imbued with love, the power of international luxury brands makes the competition tough.

An example of one of the traps of misinformation comes from global brands gaining seals of approval by promoting 'recycled' huipils as a 'sustainable' practice of using Guatemalan indigenous textiles. In fact, the so called recycled huipils are the last pieces of personal clothing that many Mayan women living in poverty are forced to sell to cover their basic needs. Middle men go door to door offering elders \$4 for their own valuable personal pieces that are then sold by weight and green washed as 'recycled'. Sadly, the women have little option but to replace their traditional huipils with commercial clothing usually purchased in the pacas or dumps of second-hand clothing coming from the US.

In 2015 Vera Claire founded Cosa Buena in Oaxaca, Mexico. This is a social enterprise with the aim of empowering local indigenous communities to

preserve their storied artistic traditions. Claire suggests that in order to consider the future of handmade textiles we have to look at the present. 'In Oaxaca, there are still many communities preserving their hand-weaving techniques even after centuries of industrialised textile production. However, it would be remiss of me to say that they aren't in danger of disappearing. Globalisation, modernisation, coupled with a long history of discrimination are just a few factors that influence the disappearance of traditional textiles in Mexico. Neglect from local government and lack of opportunities has forced many people in indigenous communities in Mexico to migrate, leaving behind their ancestral knowledge, weaving practices, and the social identity of their traditional textiles. This long history of marginalisation plays a key role in the desire of younger generations to not identify as indigenous. Younger generations tend to relate more to modernism, and may not be interested in maintaining their textile tradition...Traditional textiles must be valued and understood as expressions of cultural identity: from the gathering of materials, the weaving and dyeing processes, to the symbolism of their designs and uses.'

Kavita Parmar founded the IOU Project to be a digital platform offering traceability for textiles, from artisans to consumers. Parmar sees this as fundamental to encouraging the consumer to discover who made their clothes. A dedicated craft revivalist, she affirms that the handmade will retain importance, even with the advent of exciting new technologies.*** **Marcella Echavarría Selvedge Hybrid World Fair 1-4 September 2021**
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