CRAFTING WELLNESS– MIND+BODY
… AT A COST.

Exhibition Dates
March 7 to April 24, 2025

Artists
Takashi Iwasaki
Sacha Kopelow
Jennine Krauchi
Alan Lacovetsky
Ingrid Lincoln

Contributors
Dr. Sari Hannila
Dr. Barry Trentham

Curated by Leona Herzog

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Gallery Hours
Wednesday to Saturday
12pm - 4pm

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Crafting Wellness
– Mind + Body
… at a cost.

Introduction & Summary

Crafting Wellness looks at the work of artists who engage in craft practises as part of their art making. Work is examined and presented in the context of its impact on the maker, which may be physical, psychological, or emotional; and how that manifests itself in their artistic expression. The exhibition examines the expected and unexpected benefits of engaging in a craft practise, as well as injuries resulting from repetitive motion, toxic materials, heavy lifting, and other realities inherent in their practises. These factors have an impact on the maker, as well as the work.

The art practices presented include multimedia fibre and embroidery, ceramics, beadwork, and glass. The exhibition celebrates craft in art making, while recognizing there is a cost. Five contemporary artists are represented: fabric artist Ingrid Lincoln, potter Alan Lacovetsky, multi-media artist Takashi Iwasaki, Métis beadwork artist Jennine Krauchi, and cast glass maker Sacha Kopelow. All have experienced the impacts of engaging with crafts from multiple perspectives.

Pieces from the MCML collection are included in the exhibition to illustrate the historical significance crafts played in leisure activities, as components of therapeutic treatments and, of course, because we want to celebrate this marvelous collection.

Viewers are encouraged to contemplate the work with a fuller awareness of the impact its creation had on the artist and understand the balance between where craft is restorative and therapeutic, and where its impacts are detrimental to wellbeing.

Spine (detail), Ingrid Lincoln, 2022
Fibre and mixed media (Cover)

Vest (detail), Jennine Krauchi
Vintage and reproduction beads on wood, cotton lining, buttons
Made by the artist for her husband Blair.

Crafting Wellness

Craft has found its way into our collective consciousness. We long for things that have been touched by the human hand, the unique, the handmade. This might be even more important now that we are inundated with mass-produced plastic, waste-filled oceans, fast fashion, overconsumption, and overwhelming environmental and political uncertainty. Rather than cheap, identical, and disposable, we want objects that have the distinctive marks of the people who made them.

Individual production has long been highly valued. Before the industrial age every part of every item, whether a piece of cloth, or a wine goblet, was made by someone, an individual. Expertise was passed from one generation to another, skills were improved upon, and new learnings were integrated and taught to the next generation of skilled craftspeople. Items were made to last for a very, very long time.

During the twentieth century Bauhaus, a revolutionary school of art, architecture and design, stablished by Walter Gropius at Weimar, Germany, in 1919, changed the way students learned and interacted with their teachers. The Bauhaus method replaced the traditional pupil-teacher relationship with the idea of a community of artists working together. Its aim was to bring art back into contact with everyday life. Bauhaus artists employed traditional materials and processes associated with craft practices, including weaving, ceramics, wood, and leather to design household items that fused form with function; notable in objects such as rugs, housewares, and furniture. Bauhaus principles still influence design and attitudes to object making today.

For many of us the connection to the craftsperson making the things we use in our daily lives is missing, and we long for it. We want to see the potter's fingermarks and the effects of the flames in the kiln, the individual and imperfect stitches in fibre pieces, a single bead that has been threaded and sewn down with intent, and the unexpected bubble in a piece of cast glass.

Untitled, Alan Lacovetsky, 2024
Stoneware
39 x 30 cm

Crafting as an art form is engaged in by artists of all ages, races, genders, abilities, and ethnicities; and craft mediums are being increasingly employed by artists as part of their artistic repertoires. Research shows that crafting, regardless of the medium, can bolster mood, reduce stress, improve mental and physical agility, and decrease cognitive decline. Craft has become part of our contemporary cultural experience in the visual arts, fashion, home decor, healthcare, and self-care. It has permeated every facet of our daily lives. It is an important transmitter of cultural heritage, contributes significantly to our economy, and is taking its place as an important medium in the production of fine art. Craft and its connection to wellness has become a vital part of current art and exhibition experiences. But that is not the entire story.

There is also a dark side. Utilizing a craft medium to create art is both therapeutic and punishing. The benefits of working in a craft-based medium are significant, but at what cost? Do we really understand its full impact? Probably not. At some point, the pendulum swings and craft practises start to have a negative impact. Repetitive motion can cause injury; the use of the body to aid in certain tasks, and the use of chemicals, can also cause harm. We have a complex relationship with craft and, as part of that relationship, *Crafting Wellness* invites you to consider the artist and what the artist has sacrificed, lost, or given up to make the object you are seeing. The exhibition also examines where that pivot point occurs, how artists deal with it, changes they need to make to accommodate their work, and how the resulting work is impacted.

Even after the damage is done, however, there is a positive role for craft to play as a source of healing. In his essay *Crafting Wellness: Yours, Mine and Ours* written to accompany this exhibition, Barry Trentham, PhD, tells us that it is not surprizing that arts and crafts have been used as healing modalities from ancient times and across cultures. He also states that “since the turn of the last century, in the UK and North America, crafts were employed in earlier forms of occupational therapy to enable participation in everyday activities (e.g., work, leisure, self-care) by stimulating cognitive, sensory-motor, and musculoskeletal body structures to activate functional abilities.”

Not only is the body engaged in craft making; the brain is also involved. “The brain serves as a manual for motor and sensory function – planning, initiating, and directing every movement that we make, and interpreting every sensation that we feel through our skin. “And” explains Dr. Sari Hannila in her accompanying essay, “within that manual, no part of the body has greater representation than the hands”.

Untitled, Alan Lacovetsky, 2023
Stoneware, Bizen fired in Japan
30.5 x 23 cm

The Artists

Each artist brings a unique voice and perspective to this dialogue.
They bring their lived experience and their thoughts for the future.

Ingrid Lincoln

Ingrid Lincoln has been making art for 25 years, following a career as a lawyer. She was busy at work six to seven days a week and wanted to do something that was enjoyable, different, and doable. Ingrid chose fibre because like many women she grew up with it; it was familiar. More importantly needlework satisfied her urge to explore texture and colour. She joined the Winnipeg Embroiderers Guild, a group established in 1973, and this was the beginning of her artist's journey. Her interest grew and she eventually earned a certificate in design and embroidery from London's prestigious City & Guilds program, followed by a BA (Hons) in stitched textiles from Middlesex University, London, UK.

Ingrid was diagnosed with a rare blood condition, Polycythemia Vera, making it obvious to her that her legal career could not continue. Retirement coincided with her graduation from City & Guilds and her work as an artist began – even though it would take a further 20 years for her to acknowledge to herself that she was an artist.

Her work changed dramatically over the years. She started with original pieces utilizing traditional techniques; then switched to machine embroidery, which provided more freedom and spontaneity. A MAWA mentorship with glass artist Ione Thorkelsson convinced her that she needed to focus her work and explore ideas in more depth, rather than making pieces that were "one off". Ingrid developed an interest in the figure, and working from life, which we can see in these pieces. Her embroidered figures show us the outside of the body, as well as the inside; focusing on vertebrae, skulls, hearts, and feelings, which are represented with images such as fires and crowns.

Ingrid's current work is on linen, an ancient type of fabric long associated with the body. She adds threads of various types, other fabrics, plastics, and found objects to her multimedia work, all adding to the story the piece tells. Each figure investigates an idea, and draws attention to how our bodies work or, in some cases, do not. Her personal experiences and health related issues inform her work and ask us to consider our own bodies, and the effects of time and usage. Meanings for viewers vary with their own personal understandings and expectations of their bodies, and where they are on life's continuum. Ingrid speaks from her familiarities and knowledge. She has pain in her spine and back now, as well as her hands. Aging is hard and her body of work encourages a dialogue about health and disability. As we all engage in that discussion, it lessens stigmatization.

Hearts on Fire, Ingrid Lincoln, 2023
Fibre and mixed media
104 x 61 cm

Jennine Krauchi

"After *A Hard Birth*, I could finally call myself an artist. My work was in an art gallery."[1]

In Jennine Krauchi's world, beadwork was always around. "I can't remember not seeing it".[2] She was encouraged by her parents, her Dutch Dad and Métis Mom. "He was a cement truck driver who loved indigenous beadwork, could sew, and went to reserves to teach. He did all the sewing and Mom did all the beadwork. They worked together."[3]

Noted Métis artist Dorothy Francis taught her how to make a daisy chain, but it was not until she was in her 30s that she became more deeply involved. In the 60s, 70s, and 80s beadwork was not valued beyond the communities in which it was made, but change was underway.[4] Jennine's beading journey has been cultural, spiritual, and artistic.

In 1993 Jennine moved from Brandon to Winnipeg, selling her work and teaching beading workshops, along with Lorraine Freeman, founder of the Métis Resource Centre. Katherine Pettipas, Curator of Native Ethnology at the Manitoba Museum, was a huge influence and provided access to historical beadwork. Jennine was able to get close to the work and as she explains, the pieces were like teachers, and spending time with them was like spending time with the person who made them. Without the distraction of a glass barrier, she could see individual stitches, details of workmanship and design, bead colours, and the types of beads used. Beadworkers from the 1800s were masters of their craft, and she was learning directly from them.[5] The beads themselves also became a source of excitement: styles, shapes, age, makers, colours, and origin are all important in understanding historical pieces and recreating them.

Her beadwork continued to flourish when her mother moved into Winnipeg and they started working together, with Mom beading and Jennine sewing. Beading together strengthened their relationship and continued to be a source of connection between them until her mother's death in 2024. Together they made a jacket for former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin during his tenure, as well as replica work for museums and Parks Canada.

Eventually, however, Jennine's Mom lost feeling in her fingers and needed to look at her fingers and the needle to make sure she had the beads and thread in order before stitching. But she still did her bead work. Working at her craft continued to bring comfort to Jennine even when it was no longer possible for her mother to work with her.

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1 Jennine Krauchi in discussion with L Herzog, Oct. 24, 2024, with respect to her pieces in the exhibition *Kwaata-nihtaawakihk – A Hard Birth* at the WAG in 2022

2 Jennine Krauchi in discussion with L Herzog, Oct. 24, 2024

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

Jennine's work is astounding, as anyone who has ever tried to push a needle repeatedly through a piece of leather will instantly recognize. Her reputation as an expert beader is well known. In 2024 she was honoured by the Manitoba Arts Council with their *Award of Distinction*, and her reputation as a beader and a teacher keeps growing. She continues to explore both traditional and contemporary design concepts as she moves into a wonderfully creative part of her life.

This exhibition contains a piece I find very exciting: a contemporary work that joins together the hand, heart, and mind. It is a wonderful visual representation of who Jennine Krauchi is: a committed and generous artist who uses craft as her medium. She puts a part of herself into every piece she makes while she is mentoring, inspiring, teaching and encouraging others.

Alan Lacovetsky

"It's like doing brain surgery with oven mitts"[6]

Alan and I were discussing *Crafting Wellness – mind + body… at a cost* as he was glazing pots in his St. Andrews studio. Years of exposure to water, chemicals, and changes wrought by time necessitated the wearing of gloves as he worked to protect his skin. That change caused stress, but the only other choice was to stop working. That is not going to happen, at least not yet.

Alan is doing what he loves. He has been making pots for well over 45 years and has worked with potters all over the world. He worked with Robert Archambeau at the University of Manitoba and, like many potters who began working in the 1970s, he was influenced by potters like Shoji Hamada in Japan, and Bernard Leach in England. His work has included creating and building kilns as far away as Australia, Japan, China, Korea, Thailand and Cambodia. But there is a cost – it is very physically demanding work.

In his own studio he prefers using a non-motorized treadle wheel which makes little noise, allowing him to hear the sounds of nature outside as he works. Clay is very heavy and moving it on a wheel takes tremendous physical force, while constant production causes overuse and stress of specific muscles. Reducing production may mitigate physical stress, but having less work to market will likely cause other stresses. It is a difficult and delicate balance.

Firing the wood kiln is an experience I wish everyone could have. It is magic. The spacing of pots, type and hardness of the wood burned, draft of the kiln, barometric pressure, and cycles of smoke and oxygen all have an impact on the finished pots. The firing cycle is intense – the kiln needs to be stoked continually, roughly every five minutes over a 40-hour period. After that the kiln takes another 72 hours to cool. The magic happens when the doors are unsealed, and the potter sees the result of innumerable chemical reactions that took place over days of carefully attending the kiln.

6 Alan Lacovetsky in conversation with Leona Herzog, October 21, 2024

As you examine the pots in the exhibition, you will see these unplanned effects of the firing. They are sensual, tactile, surprising, and beautiful. You will also see the marks of the potter's hand in the shaping, carving and manipulation of the wet clay. You may also see a mark from when one pot in the kiln fell on another pot during the firing. These are happy accidents… usually.

Alan Lacovetsky is influenced by Japanese methods and esthetics, including Bizen ware. Bizen is characterized by its rustic look and texture achieved through unglazed high temperature firing. Pots are often a reddish-brown in color after firing, and may contain traces of molten ash resembling glaze, along with other markings resulting from the wood-burning kiln. Fine examples of this work are seen in *Crafting Wellness;* you can easily recognize the work.

As Alan and I chatted in his studio, I saw dust particles in the air, hovering in the sunlight. It reminded me of how casual most older potters were in their youth: working in small spaces, poor ventilation, no masks, firing gas kilns indoors… Much has been done to improve health and safety for ceramic artists, but it is still a practise fraught with opportunities to injure oneself. Think about that as you admire how beautiful an object made of clay can be.

Takashi Iwasaki

Takashi Iwasaki came to Canada from Japan for two reasons: to attend art school and to learn English. Both objectives have been met, culminating in 2024 with an MFA from the University of Manitoba. He is a practicing artist working in a variety of mediums including acrylic, collage, wood, music, embroidery and, more recently, clay.

As he states in his MFA thesis *In the Pursuit of Pleasure of the Mind in My Art Practice,*"My life's journey is defined by the pursuit of pleasure while maintaining a sense of responsibility for my actions. Artmaking serves as a primary method for deriving pleasure, fulfilling my desire to express thoughts and convert them into tangible forms."[7]

The malleability of clay provides an ideal conduit to achieve this desire. Clay in its raw stage is soft, sensual, and pliable; and it is almost impossible to make a piece by hand without leaving evidence of the maker. There will inevitably be bumps and fingerprints in objects that are not made by machine. His fine-particle clay body consists of a high level of kaolin with the addition of ball clay, giving it a tinge of gray. This smooth clay is the ideal medium for these pieces as its surface can accommodate his bright colours and high gloss finish. Additions of other materials such as lustres, metallics, and fur pompoms add to the feeling of whimsey in his world of quirky shapes. Like much of Takashi's work in other mediums, these pieces are joyous, exuberant and buoyant.

7 Iwasaki, Takashi, *In the Pursuit of Pleasure of the Mind in My Art Practice*, MFA Thesis, p. 4

This exhibition focuses on Takashi's ceramic pieces, but he is perhaps most renowned for his embroidered canvases, which are inhabited by mostly friendly and always colourful amoebic forms. The works take many hours to complete and are immaculately executed in the finest imaginable detail, not unlike the beadwork of Jennine Krauchi. He often works well into the night while his children are asleep. His embroideries take advantage of the full range of possibilities made available by his threads. Each canvas is a world of his own making, whether a recording of his daily life, a conjuring of his imaginary worlds, or landscapes made visible only through his needle and thread.

Takashi works in numerous materials and is interested in collaborations. Collaborators might include experts in metal work, or fabricators who can help with creating clay pieces more quickly and easily. For a craftsperson, this approach can have benefits. It is difficult to become an expert in all types of making, and working in collaborations allows the artist side of the craftsperson to flourish. By working with collaborators who have unique expertise, the artist can extend his or her own abilities, and ownership of art becomes democratized by making it available to more people. I look forward to seeing how this approach provides greater latitude for Takashi.

Sacha Kopelow

Sacha Kopelow grew up in rural Manitoba, spent a career in social justice and environmentalism, and earned a BFA from NSCAD University. Sacha's studio technique has been shaped through mentorship with renowned glass artist Ione Thorkelsson; and her practise consists primarily of cast glass sculpting, metalsmithing, and oil glaze painting, with forays into lighting and installation.

Sacha's work is deeply reflective and illustrative of her life journey. The small objects draw us in, but do not fully tell us their stories. They make us wonder. The glass is translucent, not transparent, and as light passes through we experience glimpses, but the story is uncertain and inconclusive.

Her tiny palm-sized glass figures encourage us to come closer and enchant us with their ethereal beauty and luminosity. They invite us into their private worlds where they relax, stretch or move in their personal space. Glass is heavy and the tiny figures belie both their physical and emotional weight.

The two larger figures are again very personal, telling stories that are only partially visible. The gem-like lustre of the glass is alluring, and we lean in for a clearer view, but the material keeps parts of the story hidden. Both pieces represent personal wellness issues at different stages of the artist's life.

Here again, the weight of the pieces is deceptive. This matters to Sacha as a working artist dealing with the impacts of a disability. Glass is heavy and sometimes help is needed to move work and materials. That need creates an extra step in the fabrication process, adding a sense of vulnerability to both the work and the artist.

Lean in for a closer look and immerse yourself in this intimate and beautiful story of vulnerability


Our Phn
"Out of
SCHOOL

Manitoba Crafts Museum & Library

Several items representing the healing power of crafts, from the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library, are included in this exhibition.

Three of the items relate directly to therapy provided at Deer Lodge Hospital, in Winnipeg, to soldiers returning from war. Both the rabbit doll and the black leather bag with floral engraving were made by Newell Kenneth Sutherland who served with the Royal Canadian Navy from 1943 to 1945 during the Second World War and received therapy upon his return. These items were donated by his daughter, and I expect that the stuffed toy, with its sweet human-like face, was much loved.

The woven scarf was made by another resident at Deer Lodge in the mid-1970's. The weaver was dissatisfied with his work, because the design was not perfect, and gave it to his Occupational Therapist at the time, Christel (Herzog) Harrison. This handmade item, however, is cherished precisely because it is personal and irregular.

In the years after the Second World War crafting was an important part of rehabilitation programs for returning soldiers, some of them staying in the hospital for several years. The program was available to any soldier, from any army, and any country, who had served. This included my own grandfather, Alexander Schmidt, who had been part of the Russian army in WW1, The Great War.

Crafts were also an aspect of patient care in Tuberculosis Hospitals. The exhibition includes a small shell brooch, made by Beulah (Louch) Simpson in Toronto while she was recovering. She later moved to Manitoba, where she made a few more. Her vials of small shells are on display as well, ready for more craft making. I encourage you to read Barry Trentham's essay which is part of this exhibition to learn more about the role crafts played in hospital settings.

A large sampler on handwoven linen made by Mrs. P.A. Talbot, a Crafts Guild of Manitoba member, shows scenes set in southern Manitoba beautifully embroidered by Mary Gemmel. Ms. Gemmell was a public health nurse throughout Manitoba from 1921 to 1948 and her needle and thread describe the tools of her profession, along with images from life in different parts of the province. She depicted the flora and fauna, town life, schools, and farms. Because she drove throughout the province, she included a line drawing, in thread, of her delicately gloved hands on the steering wheel of her vehicle. This drawing is key to her story but remains discreet in comparison to other vividly illustrated views.

The pieces in the collection are relatable to us today. It may be nostalgia for another time, or admiration for a craft process well executed, or the knowledge that a little handmade bunny with an adorable face was loved by a child long ago in exactly the same way it would be in our own families today.

Sampler – untitled, detail, Mary Gemmell, mid 20th century
Linen and cotton, Collection of MCML

Going Forward

We all know that participating in the arts, whether as a maker or as a viewer, has an impact. The most important thing that you can take away from this exhibit is to remember that each craft item you touch, own, use, or admire, includes a part of its maker. The object has been thought about. Individual decisions were made about process, colour, form, and so much more. It was the craft artist's joy to make it, and the craft artist has put a bit of themselves into each piece. The work embodies the artist.

Acknowledgments

Every exhibition has a reason to exist, and the reasons are as varied as the artists, galleries, and curators who are involved. This exhibition grew out of a conversation that MCML Curator Andrea Reichert had with craft artists who noticed that their bodies were impacted by the work they did. That conversation grew over the span of a few years into *Crafting Wellnes – mind + body… at a cost.* Thank you Andrea for your vision and perseverance.

I would like to thank the artists: Takashi Iwasaki, Sacha Kopelow, Jennine Krauchi, Alan Lacovetsky, and Ingrid Lincoln. Each person I approached with this idea saw its merit and agreed to be part of it without hesitation. Thank you for your kindness, your generosity in sharing your thoughts and insights with me, and your patience when we encountered delays. You invited me into your homes and studios in a spirit of trust. You may have noticed that I refer to you by your first names in my writing, which is usually not done when writing about an artist's work, but to do otherwise would belie the closeness I feel to all of you. This has become a very personal experience for me, and I count you as friends.

Two wonderful health and science professionals provided insight and greatly broadened my approach to this exhibition. Barry Trentham, PhD, and Dr. Sari Hannila contributed essays that connected the work of the artists well beyond the world of art, and made a connection to minds, bodies and communities further afield.

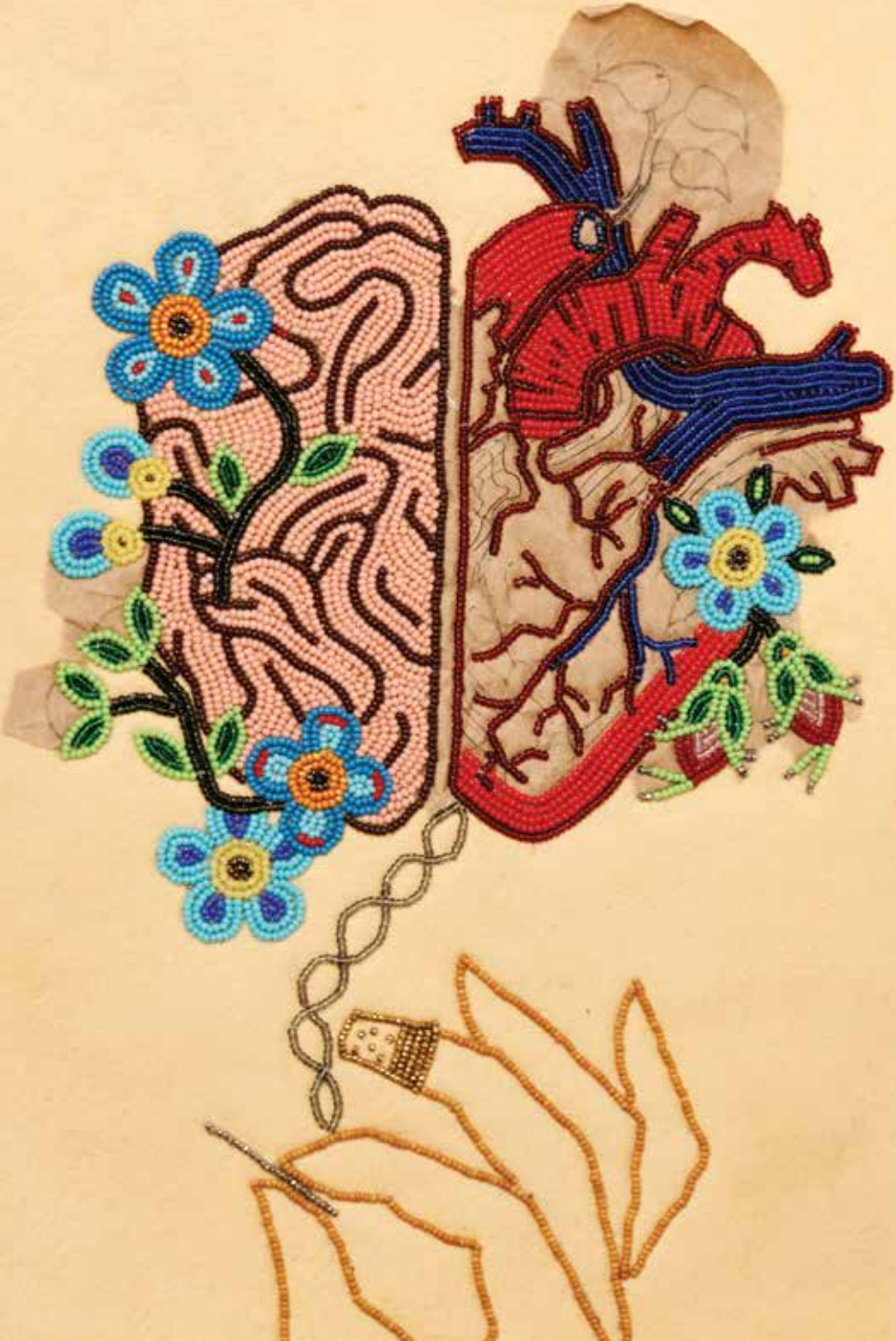
Thank you Leif Norman for your wonderful photographs, and Diane Blahey and staff at Tom Powell Design who took my work and made it look great!

And importantly, a special thank you to our funders, The Winnipeg Foundation, and the Winnipeg Arts Council (WAC). Without that support we would not be here today.

Thank you as well to everyone who visits the show.
I hope you take away something special.

Leona M Herzog, Curator

A Being of Tutti Frutti, Takashi Iwasaki, 2024
Ceramic and fibre
32 x 31 x 17 cm



The Manual: Dialogues Between the Hands and the Brain

Dr. Sari Hannila

An artist's hands are their most indispensable tool. When we hear terms such as "handcrafted", "handmade", and "handwrought", we immediately associate them with quality, tradition, skill, and an intimacy with materials that can only result from human touch. Similarly, the word "manual" can refer to either a descriptive term for working with one's hands, or a guidebook that provides instructions for performing a task. These two definitions complement each other beautifully when we consider the role of the brain in creative work. The brain serves as a manual for motor and sensory function – planning, initiating, and directing every movement that we make, and interpreting every sensation that we feel through our skin. And within that manual, no part of the body has greater representation than the hands.

When neuroscientists examine the brain, we often refer to its "topography", and this geographical description is very fitting, as its outer surface covered with physical features reminiscent of hills and valleys, which are called gyri (singular:gyrus) and sulci (singular:sulcus), respectively. Valleys often serve as natural borders, and sulci serve the same purpose in the brain – dividing it into distinct functional regions not unlike countries on a map. These regions are called lobes, and in the very middle of the brain, there is an appropriately named central sulcus that separates the frontal and parietal lobes. On either side of this border lie two gyri:the precentral gyrus and postcentral gyrus (Figure 1). While they are located right next to each other, their functions could not be more different, with the precentral gyrus controlling voluntary movement and the postcentral gyrus serving as the site where sensations are perceived. Within these gyri, the human body is mapped out in its entirety, and this map is typically represented in a caricature-like diagram called a homunculus, from the Latin for "little person" (Figure 2).

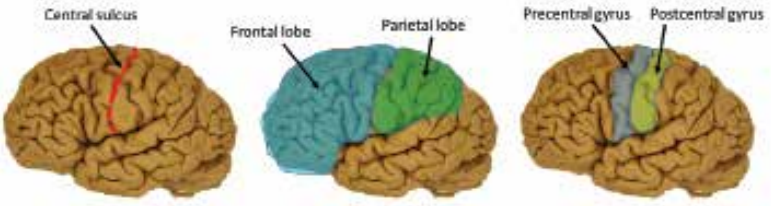


Figure 1:Locations of the frontal and parietal lobes, and precentral and postcentral gyri in the human brain.

Mind, Heart & Hand, Jennine Krauchi, 2025
Vintage and reproduction beads, thread, needle, on home-tanned hide
Work in progress. To see the finished piece visit the online MCML Crafting Wellness exhibition catalogue.

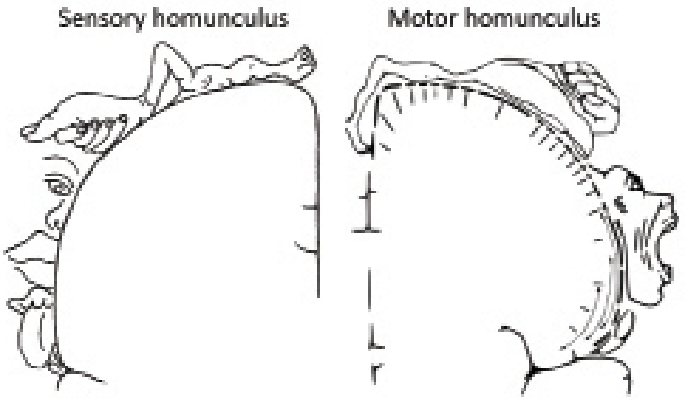


Figure 2:The sensory and motor homunculus. Attributions: Btarski at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>, via Wikimedia Commons; mailto:ralf@ark.in-berlin.de, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

The exaggerated features of the homunculus are not a fanciful creation, but rather, a scientifically-derived depiction of the amount of brain tissue devoted to a particular part of the body. The over-representation of the hands in the motor homunculus reflects the dexterity and fine motor control that characterize the human hand, and this is precisely what allows artists to perform the intricate movements that are essential for creating detail and nuance. The hand also features prominently in the sensory homunculus, and in this case, its disproportionate size denotes the hand's exquisite sensitivity to subtle changes in texture and temperature. The high degree of functionality that our hands possess is what enables us to interact with our surroundings in meaningful and enriching ways, and it is the very foundation of fine craft.

Motor Function: The Benefits of Going Through the Motions

A needle pierces rhythmically through hide, carrying beads and thread behind it. In and out. Up and down. Over and over. Hands slide along a spinning mass of clay, each movement measured and precise. Press just hard enough. Not too much. Not too little. A brush is gripped and dipped into paint. A broad stroke here. A small dot there. Blend the colours together.

Any visual artist will tell you that repeating actions like the ones described above has helped them to hone their skills, and that achieving mastery of their craft requires many years of dedication and practice. An accomplished artisan can make the difficult appear effortless, and this is not just a perception – it is well-established that the repetition inherent in artistic practice has a profound impact on motor learning and the structure of the brain. When a movement is made, neurons in the precentral gyrus that correspond to the appropriate region of the body are activated, sending signals to the spinal cord, which in turn stimulates contraction of the muscles. For intricate learned movements involving the hands, such as playing a musical instrument or tatting lace,

this process is more complex and it extends all the way to the cellular level. The neurons that carry motor signals communicate with each other through chemical connections called synapses, which are formed by processes called axons and dendrites. As a movement is learned and repeated, dendrites grow small, mushroom-like projections called spines, which allow new synapses to be formed (Figure 3). This strengthens the connections between neurons, forming a functional circuit, and allowing the brain to construct a program specifically designed for executing that particular movement. These motor programs are stored in a region of the brain called the supplementary motor cortex, which is found just in front of the precentral gyrus. Over time, motor programs are refined to the point where activation of the supplementary motor cortex leads to execution of movements without the need for conscious effort. This is the scientific basis for what is called kinesthetic learning, or more commonly, “muscle memory”. It is therefore not hyperbole to say that there are “beading neurons” or “knitting circuits” within the brain of an artist. Practice does indeed make perfect.

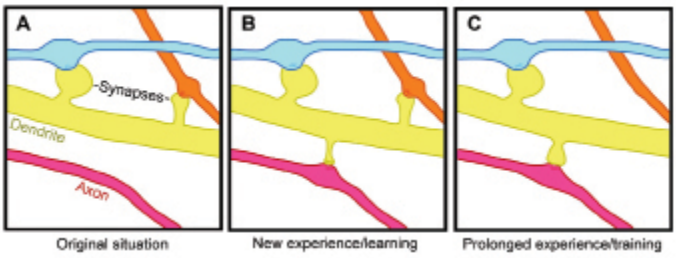


Figure 3:The formation of dendritic spines and synapses.
Modified from: Mrazadazdazz, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Sensory Function:
The Fine Line Between Pleasure and Pain

Silk is embroidered onto linen. Their textures transition from smooth to coarse. A needle slips unexpectedly, piercing skin and drawing blood. Clay is molded into forms, cool and wet to the touch. The heat of the kiln intensifies as wood is added. A rogue ember singes a finger. Bars of steel are carried to the forge. Hands feel the weight and muscles tense in response. Vibrations ripple through the skin as metal strikes metal, sending a shock through the body.

The phrase “Do not touch” is posted in every museum and gallery in the world, and this immediately creates physical and psychological distance between the artwork and the viewer. Our relationship with craft pieces, however, is notably different, and often intensely personal. With its focus on functional objects and use of familiar materials, both maker and user are drawn to the tactile nature of craft, and our hands therefore serve as one of the primary means of interacting with these works. Embedded in our skin are a variety of specialized receptors that detect all manner of sensations (Figure 4). Onion-like structures called Pacinian corpuscles are activated by the vibrations of the potter’s wheel. Ruffini endings, Meissner’s corpuscles, and Merkel’s discs

respond to the stretch and pressure exerted on the skin as we run our fingers over beadwork or twist strands of silver into jewelry. Pain and temperature are carried by shared receptors called free nerve endings that are reminiscent of a bare electrical wire, allowing us to immediately sense the threshold that separates pleasant warmth from burning heat.

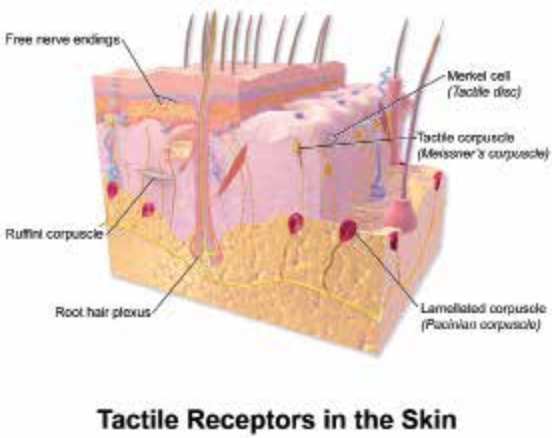


Figure 4:Sensory receptors in the skin. Attribution:BruceBlaus. Blausen.com staff (2014). “Medical gallery of Blausen Medical 2014”. WikiJournal of Medicine 1 (2). DOI:10.15347/wjm/2014.010. ISSN 2002-4436., CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

The palms and fingers are densely innervated with these receptors, which allows us to gather vast amounts of information through the sense of touch. When the receptors are activated, sensations are transmitted to the postcentral gyrus of the brain, where they are perceived at a conscious level. As depicted in the homunculus, the detailed representation of the hand in the postcentral gyrus enables us to place these sensations with remarkable precision. As anyone who has had a paper cut can attest, we immediately know the location of even the smallest nick in the skin of our hands. The remainder of the parietal lobe will then take this sensory information and place it in a broader context, connecting it to past experiences and feelings both positive and negative. It also facilitates a unique function called stereognosis, which is the ability to recognize objects simply by touch. It enables us to find our keys in the bottom of a crowded purse, and more importantly, helps individuals with a visual impairment to identify different denominations of coins. For artists, the sensitivity of the skin converges with memory and stereognosis in the making process. As a piece is fashioned and completed, makers can feel minute variations and imperfections on its surface – a bubble of glaze on a newly-fired pot, the contrast of warp and weft in a woven textile – and draw on their experience to either make corrections or come to the satisfying conclusion that it feels just right. In many ways, the hands of the artist see more than the eyes ever could.

Girl in Swim Cap, Sacha Kopelow, 2024
Cast glass

Crafting Wellness: Yours, Mine and Ours

by Barry Trentham PhD

A Pre-Crafted Recollection

My first job as a young, naïve, and inexperienced occupational therapist was in a forensic psychiatric unit located within an acute care hospital. Along with a recreation therapist part of my role was the coordinating of patient activities in the craft and woodwork workshop. While we were led to believe our observations of patient functioning and behaviour was informative of treatment approaches and outcomes, I later saw the unstated, but primary, role was all about keeping patients diverted and 'busy'- we placated. Was that it? Or did it offer a needed space to transcend the anxieties of an uncertain future or to focus outside of one's internal conflicts? Was it an exercise in the power to create, to express one's humanness? Did it build connections with others, did it heal, did it craft wellness?

Introduction

It is perhaps not surprizing that arts and crafts have been used as healing modalities from ancient times and across cultures,[1] but with varying degrees of formalized or "evidenced-based" practice approaches. Since the turn of the last century, in the UK and North America, crafts were employed in earlier forms of occupational therapy to enable participation in everyday activities (e.g., work, leisure, self-care) by stimulating cognitive, sensory-motor, and musculoskeletal body structures to activate functional abilities. Later, recreation therapists expanded the use of crafts in their arsenal of restorative tools. In the 1970s foundational concepts of art therapy included reference to the benefits of craft work, though distinguished its therapeutic uses from fine arts applications.

Overshadowed by its application for individuals in medicalized health care settings, craftwork was also used to promote the health and functioning of communities.[2-3] By revisiting historical illustrations of craft applications and their power to promote the health and well-being of groups, neighbourhoods and communities, new questions are raised about their application to today's social challenges. To start this questioning process, an unpacking of the colonial shapers of current views on crafts and wellness is needed.

Purchasing wellness?

Distinct from health, the term wellness conveys a message of positive well-being devoid of the medical or illness associations of what it means to be *healthy*. If asked, *"Are you healthy?",* one may assume that it is a concern for the absence of disease or illness that is behind the inquirer's question. If asked, *"Are you well?"* responses more likely refer to a subjective sense of being well, of feeling positive in mind, body, and spirit.

Seated Girl, Sacha Kopelow, 2025
Cast glass, flocking, wood

Wellness is a shared aspiration well noted by commercial profiteers promoting the notion that one can purchase wellness. As a multimillion-dollar enterprise, the wellness industry taps into every possible sense of human imperfection, insecurity, illness, or short-coming. From facial creams, weight loss and fitness programs to potions and lotions or all sorts, the wellness industry claims to bring a sense of fulfillment and life satisfaction. Wellness is subsequently viewed as an individual's moral responsibility and serves to reproduce colonial, Western, and neoliberal individualism[4] at the expense of collective responsibility for the well-being of communities and citizens.

Craftwork: Artwork by another name?

Old English and Old High German uses of the terms, *craeft, creft,* and *chraft* referred to notions of mental power, physical strength, skill, talent, art, or dexterity. Later craft came to refer to a trade, handicraft, or employment, requiring a particular level of expertise. Middle English usages of the term maintained a conveyed sense of power and might.[5] Today uses of *craft* can still refer to skills or techniques, but also to the product of a creative or artistic pursuit. Crafting is about the process of making crafts and a craft person, crafter, or craft worker, is someone who does crafts for the purpose of leisure time, productive engagement, or for earning a living.

The distinction made between arts and crafts - these terms often used in tandem - is a relatively recent development and thought by some scholars[1] as an imposed Western and hierarchical frame to distinguish between Western (aka male) notions of the fine arts and the everyday creations of colonized peoples (aka primitive art); often historically viewed as "women's work" and of less commercial value (e.g., needle work).

According to art therapist, Lauren Leone, early founders of art therapy were firm in their efforts to maintain the distinction between the use of the fine arts (e.g., painting, sculpting) in therapy practice and the use of crafts in occupational therapy. Leone points out that art therapists were encouraged to maintain separate physical spaces in institutions for art therapy and occupational therapy thereby reproducing colonial and hierarchical distinctions between art and craft. The arts were viewed as a higher medium from which to elicit deep reflection, insight, and/or the realization of unconscious motivations or self-expression. Leone, in attempts to remedy this colonial overlay, called on art therapists to break away from this distinction to engage the healing power of craftwork to engage an individual's sensory, cognitive, or physical pathways, as well as, importantly for this discussion, to consider their use in community building and social activism.

Collaborative craftwork as a response to historical social ills

The latter half of the 19th century saw the growing influence of the Arts and Crafts movement led by social reformers including William Moris (1834-1986) and John Ruskin (1819-1900). The movement was a response to rapid industrialization and the alienation of workers who found little meaning in long hours spent in piecemeal factory labour that separated the final product from the maker. Factory work also meant long hours away from family and community. Social reformers sought greater artist and *craft* worker control

and engagement in the creation of functional and decorative arts to bring beauty back into domestic and public spaces. As per earlier definitions of craft as referring to power, I re-frame these efforts to take control of the creative process as an exercise in collective power.

The mental hygiene movement of the early 20th century[1] noted the deleterious impact of idleness within the asylum walls on patient mental well-being and advocated for the provision of cognitively stimulating activities, including artistic pursuits. Indeed, engagement in stimulating, productive and meaningful occupations came to be identified as key to the promotion of mental well-being for all. Mental hygiene prescriptions were later critiqued based on class-based assumptions as to what constituted "appropriate" therapeutic activities. These critiques along with the arrival of psychotropic medications may have led to the subsequent downgrading of the perceived value of occupational treatments and consequently to the eventual demise of the mental hygiene movement. The basic principles of the mental hygiene movement, however, in its appreciation for the mental health benefits of productive, structured, and stimulating activity remained, and remains, relevant for mental health practice.

Social and mental health practitioners shared common cause with the Arts and Crafts reformers and found a ready source of collective power in the form of first-wave feminism. Founding female members of occupational therapy (e.g., Eleanor Clarke Slagle) along with those of the emerging social work profession (e.g., Jane Addams) worked alongside each other in the establishment of settlement houses and would have been immersed in first-wave feminist discourse.

From its beginnings, occupational therapy employed craftwork as a way for marginalized communities (e.g., the unemployed, new immigrants, returning veterans, Indigenous people),[3,6] to develop useful and employable skills, while in the process, establishing community connections. The first settlement houses offered a venue for this work. For example, Hull House in Chicago,[7] Toynbee Hall in the UK,[8] and the University Settlement House in Toronto[9] are some of the earliest examples of how craftwork was used within a community development enterprise and under the coordination of founding members of both the social work and occupational therapy professions.[7]

Can crafts be harmful for collective well-being?

As with the wellness industry crafting has become a very lucrative business. Note for example the proliferation of craft stores across the country (e.g., Michaels). Perhaps I am not alone when shuddering at the sight of shelves full of environmentally, unsustainable coloured plastic materials that crowd the interiors of major craft stores. Apart from these environmental concerns, I question what other issues might be raised when the wellness and craft industries find common cause in possibilities for profitable pursuits?

As with potential harms associated with individual craftwork (e.g., musculoskeletal and neurological strain, impact of toxic chemicals) craftwork to support the collective good may also bring with it potential threats to collective well-being.

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1 The mental hygiene movement was a further development from the earlier asylum-based reforms of the mid -19th century *moral treatment era. The moral treatment era reconsidered* mentally ill people as moral agents with emotions and cognitive capacities.

Concerns about an observed overemphasis on the *product* (with the sale of crafts supporting institutional budgets) over the benefits of the therapeutic *process* of craft making in psychiatric facilities were conveyed in early occupational therapy journals. See, for example, discussions by McGhie and Myers as early as 1933.[10] While crafting may well support wellness, depending on *how* the process is applied, it can be detrimental to the well-being of communities. It is no secret that historically marginalized and vulnerable groups can be, and have been, taken advantage of for their noted craft skills. Appropriated art forms can make for lucrative returns raising the ongoing question for Canadians: In our socially diverse and inequitable social context, who should practice what sort of crafts, and who should profit from the work of more vulnerable communities?

Context matters

Apart from craftwork itself the context in which crafts are employed for wellness ideals must also be considered. For example, Canadians are now just beginning to come to terms with a history of cultural genocide perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, most tragically operationalized through the residential school system. Less known by many perhaps is a history of forced relocation of Indigenous peoples to tuberculosis (TB) sanitoria referred to as “Indian Hospitals”. Introduced by settlers, and exasperated by repressive colonial practices, highly communicable TB spread quickly and led to many deaths particularly in Indigenous communities. Inuit communities in remote regions without access to treatment centres were particularly at risk. These “Indian Hospitals” which operated up until the 1970s have been likened to Indigenous residential schools in their regimented routines, reported use of experimental medical treatments, and the reported existence of unmarked graves on hospital sites.[11] For further information on TB “Indian Hospitals” in Manitoba refer to the Manitoba Indigenous Tuberculosis History Project.

Amidst troubling patient accounts of life within the sanitoriums [12] [13-15] were those that described the freedom, pleasure and intercultural connections experienced in the hospitals’ handicraft workshops. Prior to effective medications, the treatment for TB stressed a focus on nutrition and rest, but with allowances for increasing time spent (as one’s health improved) on graded levels of craftwork.

In narrative interview accounts, occupational therapists saw it as their job to nurture social relationships among patients and to maintain patient cultural connections in the process of craft making.[16] Patients were encouraged to use traditional materials and techniques in the production of crafts of their choosing. As outlined in their 1993 booklet, *Soapstone and seed beads: arts and crafts at the Charles Camsell Hospital, a tuberculosis sanitorium,* Staples and colleagues report that the profits from craft sales were returned to patients with a portion of the funds going to the cost of materials. These handicraft programs were viewed as offering a space for Indigenous peoples from numerous distinct First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to engage in craftwork and to learn various techniques from each other.

Full disclosure - my settler and occupational therapist identity lenses have undoubtedly shaped my reading of the limited documentation on the therapy programs at the TB hospitals. Further, I cannot claim to have completed a full and comprehensive scoping review of existing literature. With these limitations in mind, I cannot comment on the extent to which therapy staff involved in the

handicraft programs were aware of reported uses of experimental medical treatments on Indigenous patients. Neither did I encounter any reports of whether-or-not (if aware of medical abuses) staff resisted or spoke out against oppressive practices. The question remains, however, was craftwork simply used to placate patients within an institutional context that, for many, was experienced as violently oppressive or did it offer a necessary space for respite, for renewed expression of one's creative power and one's humanness?

Taking up crafting for current and pressing social challenges

Though now retired and in my senior years, as an occupational therapy student in the early 1980s, I was also schooled in the therapeutic use of crafts including weaving, pottery, and metal work to enable individuals' return to, or entry into, activities of everyday living. We were taught how to break down each crafting project into its physical, affective, sensory-motor, and cognitive demands in a process referred to as activity analysis. Though practiced by the profession's founders, craftwork's social applications were seldom, if at all, discussed.

Though exceptions remain within mental health and pediatric settings (see for example the work of Isabel Fryzberg [17] and Frances Reynolds),[15,18,19] the application of arts and crafts by therapists to promote "occupational outcomes" for both individuals and groups (e.g., return to work, school or play, increasing social connections) has largely been replaced, at least in North American contexts, by other "enabling" modalities and strategies. Craftwork's power to "heal" mental, physical, or spiritual maladies and to build community has been taken up by other health professionals and charitable organizations. For example, note the concept of *Craft Care Specialists* promoted by the American *Help Heal Veterans* charity.[20] Also, Lauren Leone,[2] Kirsty Robertson and Lisa Vinebaum[21] provide examples of art therapists who use crafts as art forms for the purpose of community building and social activism. Public libraires and museums increasingly offer creative social spaces for many communities including new immigrants and others from marginalized or disconnected communities. For example, the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library where this event is being held, holds regular crafting workshops and lectures to engage the public. The Winnipeg Public Library supports craft gatherings for youth, families and adults where participants can learn and work together on a variety of crafts as diverse as knitting, quilting and lantern making. Personally, I have invited friends to join me at the Textile Museum of Canada's, *Queer Crafting Socials;* facilitated social events that bring disconnected strangers together to work on shared or individual textile crafts.

The growth of similar collaborative crafting initiatives speaks to a pressing social need. Social research scholars have observed the extent to which the proliferation of internet technologies and polarizing social media has led to a marked decline in community-based participation (e.g., organized religion, community voluntarism) alongside increased levels of solitary engagement in work and leisure activities.[22,23] As with the Industrial Revolution of the late 1800s meaningful and in-person social connections have been increasingly disabled. We are in danger of becoming socially alienated from each other. Becoming more recognized as a powerful tool to help remedy increasing levels of social isolation, craftwork's power to build community, to maintain connections within and across communities, to celebrate traditions, and to provide a venue for social activism, can't be underestimated.

Post-Crafted Recollection

Since 1985, I have had on my writing desk a small soapstone seal carving made in that craft workshop on the forensic psychiatry unit where I first started my career. It has travelled with me from Calgary to Montreal and is now settled in Toronto. It was a gift from a young, often frightened and confused looking Inuit patient. He would have been around my age then, in his early twenties. I recall his broad smile as he proudly offered the gift to me just prior to his departure from the unit. The name “Johnny” is etched on the bottom of the piece along with a barely discernible number, a status number perhaps?

Prior to the writing of this essay, I never asked myself why I have kept this small soapstone seal carving front and centre on my desk and just above my writing gaze. Its tail fin is missing, and its nose has been re-attached after an incident years ago - the glue trails having yellowed. To hold this central space for what has now been 40 years must speak to latent meanings that I have not yet acknowledged. Perhaps this crafted work of art represents a bridge between two peoples and two persons who are far apart in power, privilege, and geography. Maybe it represents how the crafting experience can transcend suffering, a brief reprieve from internal and external struggles? The memory of this gift-giving act of something simple, yet beautiful, does bring to mind a cherished and shared experience of delight, of gratitude, of affection, between two young men both acting out-of-character in what is expected of a therapy performance.

Artist: Johnny

Acknowledgements

Few crafted projects are fully solo pursuits, and this crafted essay is no exception. I am so very grateful for Leona Herzog’s invitation to participate in this Crafting Wellness exhibit and for her encouragement to write freely and creatively. I thank my engaged grammarian partner, Lambert Boenders, who takes much pleasure in ridding my writing of all glaring, grammatical errors. I thank Professor Emeritus, Dr. Judith Friedland who, years ago, sparked my interest in the historical crafting beginnings of the occupational therapy profession and whose research I draw on significantly. Thank-you to aspiring art therapist, art educator and dear friend, Moira Hille, who in earlier conversations, directed me to critical literature on the history of art therapy. I’m very grateful for conversations had with my friend, Dr. Garry Gottfriedson, writer, educator and a TB hospital and residential school survivor who generously guided my efforts at accountability. And finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Johnny, whose where abouts I do not know, but whose soapstone crafted work of art continues to inspire and remind me that a generous and creative spirit can bridge broken relationships.

To learn more about the author and for additional sources of information, visit the online MCML *Crafting Wellness* exhibition catalogue.

A Being of Tutti Frutti, Takashi Iwasaki, 2024
Ceramic
20 x 17 x 18 cm (Back Cover)

Wall Pocket, Jennine Krauchi,
Vintage and reproduction beads, fabric

All photos: Leif Norman

Read artists statements
and see their work

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