

Sustaining Curatorial Careers Research

Contents

1. Introduction	p3
2. Research Aims	p4
3. Setting the Scene	p5
4. An Infrastructure to Flourish Within	p10
5. Professionalisation of the Independent Curatorial Sector	p13
6. New Movements in Craft Curation – Case Studies	p16
Case Study A: Norwegian Crafts – Opportunities for Independent Curators	p17
Case Study B: The Center for Craft Curatorial Fellowship	p22
Case Study C: The Cubitt Curatorial Fellowship	p27
Endnotes	p31

1. Introduction

This research project by Dr Stacey Hunter was commissioned by Craft Scotland to better understand how independent craft curators can be supported in their vital role within the craft ecosystem. It provides examples of best practice and fresh ideas that expand on the role of the craft curator and identifies UK and international models of support which have helped to create curatorial career pathways. The report also makes recommendations as to how the right conditions could be created which would ensure that independent curators in Scotland can have sustainable, valued careers.

During the research phase, 18 individuals and nine organisations from the UK, the EU and North America were interviewed along with 11 professionals from a variety of institutions or organisations in the UK and internationally, and email correspondence and discussions with a further seven. Some are independent curators; others are experienced producers or directors within the field of craft or craft-adjacent fields such as visual art or design. These interviews and discussions have helped to generate a clear picture of where gaps exist in training and professional development, what the main barriers are to achieving success, and what support organisations like Craft Scotland can potentially offer.

The research focuses on independent curators as opposed to institutional curators (for example, those who are employed by museums or private galleries) who are working in Scotland. Included within the scope are curators who are also makers, as well as those who may crossover from craft to visual art or design.

It could be said that this research is coming at a crisis point as it is more difficult to know who the new generation of curators might be, and how they will get practical experience and opportunities to support curatorial careers.

2. Research Aims

In terms of Craft Scotland's organisational aims, the central objective of the report is to contribute to, in the shorter term:

- Addressing a lack of diversity within the craft sector and providing opportunities for people who are not well-represented within craft.
- Helping curators create and sustain career paths.
- Raising the profile of Scottish craft nationally and internationally amongst curators, producers, organisations and collectors.

In the longer-term the objective is to contribute towards a sustainable infrastructure for craft in Scotland and the continued development of an informed audience.

3. Setting the Scene

Why Independent Curatorial Development Requires Targeted Support

- The biggest obstacle to creating and sustaining a career as an independent craft curator is the lack of clients commissioning in this area.
- Independent curators in Scotland are also challenged by the lack of gallery spaces, funding, and public programmes and exhibitions dedicated to craft and design.
- There is an urgent need to challenge the structures of inequality that diminish opportunities for people to enter into and sustain a career in curating.
- There is continuing ambiguity around definitions of curating within craft which reflects the multi-layered role of craft curators – as organisers or producers as well as curators.
- A gap exists for curators and makers to have a safe space to critique and explore theoretical ideas about craft and to write about work.
- There is a distinct need to provide resources and advocate for a professionalising of the curatorial field with the aim of improving working conditions for independent curators.
- Within a funding context, there is not a level playing field for curators of craft with regards to funders and how applications are assessed. Curators are expected to show an economic impact for makers – as opposed to simply artistic merit. This needs to be addressed if there is any expectation that the craft sector will be able to better support curators.

Craft Curating – an Ambiguous Ecology

An important aspect of contemporary craft-curating worthy of attention relates to the continuing ambiguity around definitions of curating. This was a topic that the majority of the participants in the research initiated during our discussions. Curators have had a variety of backgrounds and entry points into curating, and identifying independent curators of craft can also be complicated since many take on other roles – as consultants, writers, and educators – alongside their curatorial work. Therefore, it is especially important to acknowledge new forms and mediums for the curatorial. Some organisers of curated showcases might not self-identify as curators yet their role is critical to makers who depend on revenue from fairs and markets.

Barriers for Curators of Craft

There was consensus that it is challenging to attract people to a career in craft curating when there is so little currently in the way of budgets, spaces or discourse. All in all, the barriers for independent craft curators coalesced around a similar set of circumstances.

Funding, and Inconsistency and Uncertainty Around Fees and Remuneration for Work, Commissions or Tendering

Sustaining a career in craft curating is challenging. Independent curators of craft rely on small pieces of work such as delivering educational workshops and/or are employed by smaller non-profits on a part-time basis and develop their own projects independently – although importantly, often with no expectation of being financially compensated at any level that adequately reflects their efforts.

A factor to consider when examining how craft curators sustain their careers and the sorts of activities they undertake as curators, is the inconsistencies of place, finances and training available in order to maintain a steady career progression. It is fair to say the very challenging funding climate for craft and design curators is part of the reason that the pool of independent curators is so small. Increasingly only those with access to resources have the opportunity to curate.

Contemporaneously, that pool is narrowed even further by the necessity to be entrepreneurial; good at fundraising; networking and marketing; as well as au-fait with multiple technology-driven digital platforms. Self-marketing is part of this matrix too as independent curators also engage with new audiences by giving talks (often unpaid), and attending events to improve their chances of being seen by potential new clients.

“Funding is very limited to projects, so it demands a highly organised kind of approach to picking and applying for opportunities that can fill in gaps and bring it from one major project to the next.”

“I think the main barrier is the limitations of the funding. Funding doesn’t support long term opportunities.”

“Within those three strands of public sector project, institution and private. There is also the maker as the curator as well. And I think that particularly in the public sector, there’s a perception of makers being paid rates to curate things that professional curators just wouldn’t entertain.”

“The tendering process for projects when you’re freelance or self-employed is so off-putting – what it takes to do these things and you don’t always get them.”

“If the lead in time was long enough that could allow you – for example – to speak to your employers about potentially going part time in the run up to an exhibition or project. And it would mean that you could do both.”

The Presentation of Craft

“Craft curators try to nurture institutions to acknowledge craft and acknowledge makers and embed them in their collections and programmes and activities (as opposed to just reaching out to make things). There’s much more inherent things about craft and handiwork that can be accessed. So it’s hard to try to educate; to acknowledge all of that.”

Despite the public appetite for craft and design, there are few opportunities in Scotland to participate in public programmes or to see exhibitions on these subjects (particularly in comparison to visual art). In Scotland, galleries that formerly played a role in training up emerging curators, particularly those outside of cities in towns and rural places have closed or suffered swingeing budget cuts. Many positions which once existed, like that of the arts development officer, have disappeared. Gallery budgets have shrunk and in some cases galleries have closed or now operate in a way that is not conducive to hosting regular craft exhibitions or incubating curators.

A consequence of this is that audiences for craft and design are not as well developed as they are in places where curators are supported to strengthen contemporary craft through targeted programmes, exhibitions and events.

Developing audiences must go hand in hand with supporting and advancing the careers of curators as the latter reinforces the former.

A gap exists for curators and makers equally to have a safe space to critique and explore theoretical ideas about craft and to write about work. Curators would like to see more opportunities for professional development and an infrastructure for learning and critical discussion to flourish, which could be facilitated through events, for example the Craft Think Tank model led by the Center For Craft in the US.

Currently, emerging curators in craft tend towards being self-taught in terms of public programming and exhibition design; as opposed to visual art, where curators are more likely to be professionally trained in curatorial studies. One consequence of this may be that makers are increasingly being presented principally with opportunities only to sell, with less opportunity for critical engagement.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

“It comes down to opportunity. Who gets the opportunity and where are those opportunities in Scotland to bring work and ideas together? Have those opportunities reduced with the falling away of venues and posts, and of courses that teach craft?”

An open minded and inclusive understanding of who and what curating is; and who can ‘do’ it, is part of the process for Craft Scotland (and adjacent organisations) to incubate the needs of emerging curators and address a lack of diversity.

Partnership Working, Advocacy and Support

“It’s tough as an independent curator who works with different institutions because every institution has its own set of rules. Every institution has its own challenges. And it really is a struggle to be able to figure out where you fit in.”

From this research it is very apparent that independent curators suffer from a lack of guidance, support, and protection such as that offered to artists by organisations such as the Scottish Artists Union (SAU). And there is a distinct need to professionalise the curatorial field in relation to governing bodies and cultural institutions with the aim of improving working conditions for independent curators. Advocacy is essential on behalf of curators, in areas where curators are unsupported or could be exploited. And professional resources such as contractual templates and standardised rates of pay should be made available for curators. Independent

curators would benefit not only from an enhanced understanding of curatorial practice but also, importantly, an understanding of their position and rights as constituents within the arts and culture landscape.

4. An Infrastructure to Flourish Within

The following section proposes some of the ways in which curatorial careers can be better supported and nurtured in the future. It encompasses funding; diversifying who is supported to participate in craft curating; partnership working; and the public perception of craft.

Funding

This is required across a variety of activities from the programmatic to the developmental.

There is for example, a huge gap in Scotland in terms of bursaries for craft curators. This represents a wonderful opportunity for Craft Scotland to leverage its position of influence to encourage private trusts and foundations to consider widening the current provision which is focused on makers – to encompass the invaluable work that curators do for the craft sector.

Instant funds and microgrants providing instant access funds for amounts from £1,000 to £5,000 would enable curators to access funds quickly with minimal bureaucracy and would enable them to take advantage of opportunities presented by venues or partners or to realise a time-limited vision for a project or show.

Diversifying Curators in Craft

We urgently need models for increasing diversity in the curatorial profession and making the role of a craft curator something that people from all backgrounds, abilities, ages and identities can see themselves participating in. The research points to understanding and confronting prejudice as being the first area where work should be undertaken. The craft sector would benefit from being much more inclusive and representative of the general population. It would also benefit from learning about how to celebrate new voices by supporting them at an early stage. For people who are from underrepresented communities (including those who are from deprived backgrounds) who are interested in curatorial work there must be a strategy for supporting that financially. Additionally there should be a strategy within organisations that can ensure it can plan for, and manage a diversity strategy. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion begins with looking closely at whose voices are heard and whose are excluded. We can create alternative paths into curating

by being aware of and actively removing the homogenous frameworks that limit curators to particular modes of production or previously accepted hierarchies of access and knowledge.

Partnership Working and Brokering Opportunities

Working in cooperation with institutions is a way of harnessing structural support for curators and getting freelancers in conversation with institutions. There is enormous scope for Craft Scotland to catalyse opportunities for curators in this way. Additionally, the role that curators play as brokers can be outlined by Craft Scotland to potential funders and investors in craft.

A few of our interviewees suggested a focus on brokering opportunities and asked whether development of the craft sector could be in cooperation with institutions. If so, it should consider both structural support and getting freelancers in conversation with institutions.

A cross-cultural curatorial development programme was also posited. Across Europe, independent craft curators desired more international experiences and opportunities for collaboration, peer-to-peer learning and professional development on a small scale. International curators could be brought together to develop reciprocal relationships with centres of craft in other countries through cultural exchange programmes. Or curators in Scotland could be funded to travel internationally to learn about radically different models to curating craft which they would then bring back to Scotland.

How Craft is Perceived and Presented

Where does craft get reviewed in Scotland? Why is there so little critical discourse around craft and design? Craft Scotland could lead the way in commissioning reviews from respected writers and curators, at home and internationally.

The research highlights a need for criticality and platforms for discussion, debate and speculation. Craft Scotland recognises the importance of craft research and believes the organisation has a role to play in nurturing research outside of the academy. As Namita Gupta Wiggers (the first curator in residence at Norwegian Crafts) says: *“using critical writing to carry craft into an international community is vital to develop the field.”* The research suggests that financial support should be directed towards commissioning independent curators in Scotland to write about and review work – both curatorial work (reviewing exhibitions) and the work of practitioners. This type of work has the added benefit of encouraging

people who are interested in curating to become involved without the pressure to stage an exhibition as their starting point.

The outcome of supporting and sustaining criticality is how, with funding, critical writing can become part of the work that we do in craft: supporting makers to understand how they can interpret critique and critical responses to their work and also how they might then be critical of either their own work or others. The result will be a good, solid, strong and effective craft sector that understands its own strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and is primed to grow in terms of complexity and ambition.

5. Professionalisation of the Independent Curatorial Sector

Curators told us that they would like to see more opportunities for professional development and an infrastructure for curators to flourish within. This could entail setting up an association of curators to enhance the understanding of curatorial practice in Scotland (amongst policymakers and cultural institutions) and to improve working conditions and rates of pay. The outcome would be that independent curators would gain access to guidance, support, and protection such as that offered to artists by organisations such as the Scottish Artists Union (SAU). Curators would benefit from essential advocacy – particularly in areas where curators are unsupported or exploited. Professional resources such as contractual templates and standardised rates of pay would be available for curators allowing them to assert themselves, gain confidence and feel supported to work in partnership with organisations.

Broadening Professional Opportunities Through National and International Partnerships

The research explored potential partnerships within Scotland, the UK and internationally which will broaden the professional opportunities available to curators. Craft Scotland also wants to support and promote the infrastructure for craft in Scotland and identify how this can be more connected nationally and internationally.

Potential partners proposed include:

Philadelphia's The Clay Studio; New York City Jewelry Week; The Nordic Network of Crafts Associations and Norwegian Crafts; the Centre for Craft (USA); Mount Stuart – Isle of Bute; Suttie Arts Space.

Establishing a Distinctive and Individual Voice for the Craft Curators Sector

Craft Scotland could help establish more connectivity between curators. The latter is well underway with Craft Scotland's hosting of the Craft Development Network, but in conversations with freelance curators there could clearly be value in creating a smaller more exclusive group or programmes where facilitated conversation can happen. These conversations do take place informally between independent curators, producers and advocates but formalising this is undoubtedly worthy of investigation.

Another model is the Craft Think Tank. The Center for Craft in the US provides leaders within craft an opportunity to listen and respond to the needs of the craft field through an annual symposium. Participants have included museum directors, curators, university faculty, scholars, editors, critics and artists with diverse media expertise. The Craft Think Tank has frequently resulted in recommendations for new Center for Craft Core Programmes and Projects.

Advocacy for the Curatorial Field

From discussions it is very apparent that independent curators suffer from a lack of guidance, support, and protection such as that offered to artists by organisations such as the Scottish Artists Union (SAU). One of the suggestions that came up a number of times was that Craft Scotland could advocate on behalf of curators in the same way that the SAU or a-n The Artists Information Company who act as a union for artists, curators and producers. By taking its credibility and brand as the national development agency for craft, Craft Scotland could effectively lobby and apply pressure in areas where curators are unsupported or exploited. Independent curators would benefit from not only an enhanced understanding of curatorial practice but also, importantly, an understanding of their position and rights as constituents within the arts and culture landscape.

For emerging curators with little understanding or experience of the public funding system, or the nuanced conditions of partnership working with publicly funded agencies and local government venues and projects, independent curators are vulnerable to exploitation. In this context, for example, local government projects and semi-cultural organisations. It is also worth paying attention here to the worryingly wide variances in approach within institutions in the context of partnership working.

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This research paper has provided much food for thought on the essential role of craft curators, and how opportunities can be created and sustained which will bring benefit across all parts of the sector. The recommendations address the needs identified by the sector; and fit the needs of both emerging curators and Craft Scotland's own organisational aims where possible. We hope this research will provide a basis for an ongoing strategy for curatorial support and development within and for the sector.

6. New Movements in Craft Curation – Case Studies

Craft Scotland wanted to explore how any future programmes could support curators to be more resourceful and to explore less traditional approaches to curating with the intention of building a more resilient sector. In this section are brought together alternative ideas about the role of the craft curator and a survey of a range of projects and people who are inspiring and original in their outlook. Case studies include: Norwegian Crafts (Oslo, Norway), Cubitt (London, UK) and Center for Craft (North Carolina, USA)

Models for Curatorial Support from Norway, the US and the UK

In this section we explore a variety of models for curatorial support in the form of training and development programmes or residencies. Some are craft based – others are visual art. All share the outlook that curators are an essential part of the ecosystem that supports makers and artists. Along with Craft Scotland's director Irene Kernan, we have identified organisations who offer curatorial programmes and residencies and we have interviewed staff and participants where possible to present an analysis of what the most pertinent elements could be to a future programme in Scotland. The list below is not exhaustive but our primary models are:

- Norwegian Crafts (Oslo, Norway)
- Cubitt (London, UK)
- Centre for Craft (North Carolina, US)

Case Study A:

Norwegian Crafts – Opportunities for Independent Curators

We spoke with Hege Henriksen, the director of Norwegian Crafts to explore how their support for craft curators internationally could inform a Scottish approach.

The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts ([Norske Kunsthåndverkere, NK](#)) was founded in 1975. NK is a membership organisation working to promote and support Norwegian contemporary craft artists nationally and internationally. NK has a membership of 900 professional artists and makers in Norway. They arrange exhibitions, publish a periodical, administer art grants, and aim to influence art policies.

NK operates three companies: Norwegian Crafts and the galleries Format (Oslo) and KRAFT (Bergen). NK's first gallery space – Gallery Format – was established in the early 1990s in Oslo with another additional gallery opening in Bergen called KRAFT. In 2011/12 the organisation organised the two galleries into separate entities with their own separate board and finances. At the same time, they established Norwegian Crafts and gave them an international mandate. Henriksen explains that this was “[...] a very clever move because now we have four institutions that work for craft with different mandates, with different boards, with different activities and also different economies.”

Norwegian Crafts has its own curator who creates exhibitions, which Henriksen acknowledges is important for their programme. She notes that Norwegian Crafts does not itself operate or own a gallery; rather it is only an office and therefore like Craft Scotland, it does not have its own space to offer curators *“But the Gallery Format is our sister organisation. And I think that’s been part of this success.”* Henriksen also identified that the many government-supported smaller exhibition spaces across Norway that were established by both craft and fine art organisations gives curators the opportunity to work within craft. She explains that while Norwegian museums of course have their own curators, they also invite external curators into their institutions.

She sees the potential for improvements with respect to getting more curators working within craft and says that it’s something Norwegian Crafts are working towards. Additionally, she describes projects which engage independent curators through open calls. For example, they are part of a Nordic collaboration called the [Nordic Network of Crafts Associations \(NNCA\)](#), which in early 2020 appointed freelance curator Randi Grov Berger (of Norway) who created [Earth, Wind, Fire, Water – Nordic Contemporary Arts](#), in collaboration with Galleri F 15 in Moss,

Norway. The curator brought together 17 artists and artist groups from the Nordic countries who use their craft, tools and deep material knowledge to address environmental issues. As well as the exhibition there was a theory programme and a publication. The exhibition is scheduled to tour to Sweden in February 2021. This example demonstrates the role that Norwegian Crafts (even as an office) can play in providing opportunities for independent curators. As Henriksen notes, *“that’s something very important because then you actually get attention [...] and this way you can recruit some curators who maybe haven’t specialised in craft yet but would like to.”*

Norwegian Crafts’ Curator in Residence Programme

Norwegian Crafts’ curator in residence programme is funded by the Arts Council Norway’s *Gjesteoppholdsstøtte* for arenaer scheme (Guests Residency for arena). Henriksen explains that she has managed to get funding three times for three different curators. It’s the aim of this scheme for organisations and institutions to invite curators to work with the organisation on a particular project or topic. The central aim is to bring curators into the organisation who have a different set of competencies; that rather than mirroring the organisation, they bring new knowledge and new perspectives into future projects.

The programme began in 2017 with Namita Gupta Wiggers¹ whose residency we expand on below. Subsequently, it has also welcomed two further curatorial residents. Architect and artist Joar Nango (2019) was invited to participate with the aim of connecting Norwegian Crafts with Sámi communities on the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish side of Sámi and to develop strategies concerning Sámi and indigenous art and culture, in particular the concept of *duodji*. Zoe Black, Community Development Curator at Objectspace in New Zealand (2020–2021) was invited with the aim of furthering dialogue about Indigenous craft practices and contemporary craft from both Aotearoa New Zealand and Norway with one of the intended key outcomes being an enriched understanding of working with diverse communities.

The inaugural curator, Namita Gupta Wiggers spent a month in Norway in the autumn of 2017, acting as consultant to both Norwegian Crafts and Galleri Format Oslo on forthcoming programmes and strategies. Wiggers came from the US in 2017 to, as Henriksen explains *“help us with our strategy for theory development”*. She describes how Wiggers helped the organisation to pose and answer important questions:

“Where are we going to go? [...] she sparked this long term commitment to looking into who’s around the table when the decisions are made; who is shown; who is not shown; what is included and what is not in terms of ‘what is craft’ in our projects and in terms of our perspectives.”

Henriksen notes that in the context of our conversation [about how her experiences might inform Craft Scotland's approach] that in a way, the Norwegian Craft programme is *"more for us as opposed to the curator"*. She clarifies that the programme also creates a schedule for their guests to meet with other institutions and artists and have the opportunity to evolve as curators. While in Norway, Wiggers acquainted herself with the Norwegian contemporary craft scene by conducting studio visits to craft artists in Oslo, Tromsø and Trondheim, hosting professional workshops with curators and critics, and by moderating and hosting the international seminar *Crafting Utopia and Dystopia: Future of Crafts in Museums*. But Henriksen reflects that *"it's maybe different to a guest curator programme that we could have had actually when I think about it. For local curators to work with us, in a different way where they produce or curate a project."*

With Joar Nango's residency Henriksen explains that her organisation worked on building their own competence on Sámi craft, *"with this programme, a lot of it has been about restructuring our strategies and ambitions. So it's less about making a programme for the curator."* In other words, the impetus for the residency programme is not to support curators per se but Henriksen clarifies that this is partly linked to the particular mandates of funding streams saying:

"in a dream situation, it would be great to have some kind of programme where we could mentor. A programme for curators."

Norwegian Crafts say it would be difficult to follow up their residencies with a set of exhibitions due to issues around funding and so the focus has always been more towards seminars and talks and knowledge sharing.

Usefully this sets the scene for us to reflect on which aspects of a curatorial support programme might be prioritised in future planning. Part of the foundation for Craft Scotland to consider how to better support curators could in fact be to get to know curators from other places and to ask them to contemplate the craft landscape in Scotland, make suggestions, pose questions and ultimately broaden the organisation's outlook culturally. On the other hand, there is an argument for consideration to be given to what in the shorter term is mutually useful to both makers and Craft Scotland as well as to independent curators in Scotland.

As an alternative to the 'outside' curators model outlined above; some first steps might be to strengthen the sector with a residency programme that bears some similarities to Norwegian Crafts' activities with their sister organisation Gallery Format. For example, Craft Scotland's location within the Edinburgh Printmakers building with its large gallery space could potentially be a suitable place for a long term partnership. Similarly, Craft Scotland might consider building on its relationship with the Dovecot which describes itself as a centre for contemporary

art, craft and design as well as other venues with gallery space and craft or craft-adjacent programmes such as (in Edinburgh) Custom Lane; The City Art Centre; Talbot Rice and some of the smaller independent galleries.

A knowledge and ideas sharing session with Norwegian Crafts could be beneficial for both organisations to help discuss strategies for improving brokerage between craft agencies and national institutions on behalf of curators.

Critical Writing

The framework that Norwegian Crafts uses to support curators is underpinned by their focus on critical writing; an aspect of the curatorial landscape sorely lacking in Scotland. Here, critical writing rarely leaves the academy in any meaningful way and both curators and makers are largely isolated from contemporary discussion around craft theory. This is certainly an area that Craft Scotland could incorporate into future plans and it fits well with the learning we have absorbed from speaking with SCAN (Scottish Contemporary Art Network). As Namita Wiggers reflects in her interview with Benjamin Lignel (2018), critical writing is not only crucial to Norwegian Crafts' goals – it is a programme strategy.

“Part of their mission is to connect Norwegian artists and craftspeople to international contexts – and they do it well through writing as well as various art fairs and symposia. I noticed a growth in writing online and in publications from Norwegian Crafts over the past few years. It is what enticed me to participate in the residency. Using critical writing to carry craft into an international community is vital to develop a field, and Norwegian Crafts offers a strong model for using the internet, print, and programming to do this.”

Helen Voce, an independent producer based in Glasgow posed the following question during our discussion.

“How do you sustain criticality so that it becomes a good, solid, strong and effective part of our craft sector? One of the things that’s come up for us is critical writing. How can we grow and make sure that critical writing is part of the work that we do in craft as well? Because there’s quite a lack of that. A lot of it’s coming from academia. I have concerns about academia, things staying in circuits and vacuums that they can’t escape from and where they’re not accessible. I say this with a view to actually supporting makers to understand how they can interpret critique and critical responses to their work and also how they might then be critical of either their own work or others.”

At Norwegian Crafts this type of collaboration takes place online, in texts and during seminars and workshops. The outcome is twofold: a self-published book series called [*Documents on Contemporary Crafts*](#) that offers critical reflections on contemporary crafts; and the creation of an international platform that encourages

practitioners and curators in Norway to participate in a stimulating critical discourse within the field of crafts. With titles like *Crafting Exhibitions*, *Material Perceptions* and *On Collecting*, this rich resource is very appealing to curators. And the organisation develops the field in terms of critical thinking, it is keen to emphasise that more recently, it is looking closely at whose voices are heard and who's are excluded. "What perspectives are included in these discussions?" Henriksen asks.

"At Norwegian Crafts we have been meeting up and building our network and then inviting this network to Norway so that they can meet both institutions (including our sister organisation) including our artists. And again, they invite our artists abroad or perhaps find a collaborator here so it's a kind of circle. And then maybe we support a project again through the grant support scheme. So that's a really good model and shows how everything we do is connected. In Norwegian arts abroad, we have a tagline for this, which is to say, we provide Competence, Network and Financing."

Collaborating to Create Opportunities for Curators

Norwegian Crafts works with partners abroad to create opportunities for artists [and curators]. A recent exhibition in Paris, *Crafting Europe* – part of the World Crafts Council Europe's exposition at the Grand Palais in Paris (May 2019) featured three well-established artists. "We managed to connect them with museums in Norway in order that this show could travel back to Norway, so we were then a connecting link between the three institutions." She sees this as an important part of their programme. Another example of how Norwegian Crafts supports curators is through a support scheme for galleries to participate abroad at fairs.

Case Study B:

The Center for Craft Curatorial Fellowship

The Center For Craft is a non-profit organisation based in North Carolina. Founded in 1996, the Center for Craft is the leading organisation in the United States identifying and convening craft makers, curators, and researchers, and matching them with resources, tools, and networks to support and advance their careers. As a national 501c3 nonprofit organisation dedicated to advancing the field of craft, the Center administers more than \$300,000 annually in grants to those working in the craft field. It also advances the understanding of craft by encouraging and supporting research, critical dialogue, and professional development in the United States. Its organisational vision is to support “a thriving national craft field built on a deep understanding of the history of craft, lively critical discourse, thoughtful making, and a strong next generation.” Amongst its [values](#) Critical Thinking, Best Practice and Emerging Voices are the most pertinent to our survey of models of best practice in curatorial support.

Critical Thinking

We encourage and stimulate inquiry and dialogue. This allows the craft field space to dance with a concept – to clarify, examine, and document a complexity that allows for growth and deeper understanding. We work to address the scarcity of intellectual engagement with craft in higher education and museums by supporting research and scholarship.

Best Practice

Our work is concentrated on the most creative and original artists and ambitious research in order to fortify the field with rigorous standards of making and intellectual inquiry.

Emerging Voices

The future of the craft field is in the hands of the next generation. We support the ideas, voices, and the professional development of emerging craft makers, curators, scholars, and critics.

The Center for Craft is proactively growing the field of craft by supporting and expanding curatorial work in two key ways. Through its Curatorial Fellowship and its Craft Research Fund Exhibition Grant. The Curatorial Fellowship is a year-long programme created to give emerging craft curators a platform to explore and test new ideas about craft. Since 2010, the Center for Craft has supported the careers of emerging curators with an interest in contemporary craft through its Windgate Museum Internship Program.

In 2016, the Center for Craft announced the inaugural Curatorial Fellowship to expand its support for emerging curators beyond the scope of the Windgate Museum Internship Program. Three Curatorial Fellows are selected annually to fully develop and mount their proposed exhibition in the Center for Craft's own gallery, located in Asheville, North Carolina. The Curatorial Fellows work with the Center for Craft staff to produce the exhibition, develop didactic / informational material and an exhibition catalogue, and to deliver a curatorial talk.

Curatorial Fellowship Recipients in 2020 included Kayleigh Perkov who curated [*The Computer Pays Its Debt: Women, Textiles, and Technology, 1965-1985*](#); Angelik Vizcarrondo-Laboy who curated [*Sleight of Hand*](#), and Lauren Kalman & Matt Lambert who co-curated [*Desire Paths*](#). The Center for Craft have toured Fellows exhibitions in the past, but told us this is usually decided on a case by case basis. The [exhibition programme](#) is incredibly varied and in 2020 curatorial themes emerged that touched on a mix of craft practices, histories and theoretical constructs for example; The historical precedence of digital tools in craft practice extending to the 1960s; Sculptures in clay by contemporary artists that echo themes and aesthetics of 1960s–70s Funk ceramics; And architectural theory and queer curatorial strategies being utilised to explore the desires of the body in relationship to nature, tech, self, and society. Importantly, bolstered by the institution's impressive national and international standing – the Curatorial Fellowship attracts very high quality candidates. Most are independent curators, others are from scholarly or more academic backgrounds. The main outcomes and benefits for curators *and* makers are:

- An increase in opportunities from improved visibility and networking opportunities (particularly for emerging curators and makers)
- Financially supporting the careers of emerging curators
- Recognising and affirming emerging talent

Professional Development

Marilyn Zapf is director of programs and curator at the Center for Craft and generously shared information with us about the Curatorial Fellowship. She described how curatorial opportunities are similarly “*very limited*” in the US. And how in some ways the vision for the programme emerged from Zapf's own experience (she was awarded an MA from the Royal College/V&A History of Design Programme) which had included numerous internships, but only a fragmented experience of the curatorial process.

“Additionally, in large museums the exhibition making is so siloed into different departments, that you never really learn about registration, installation, content, and marketing all in one – so this program seeks to give a full start to finish experience.”

Zapf outlined how curators are remunerated: each receives an honorarium for their work and although they have not estimated the actual hours worked, resources she has seen would suggest that a guest curators fee should be around 25% of the exhibition budget². Curators are also given an approximately \$10,000 exhibition budget to cover shipping and exhibition design (such as custom plinths) a sum that Zapf identifies as *“a shoestring budget to work within and often poses the greatest challenges for the curators”*. The Center also covers postcard and catalogue production, installation, media and marketing, professional photography of the exhibition, up to 20 labels, wall text, or vinyl didactics. Curators have access to a set of plinths and technology such as iPads and projectors at no cost. Zapf also reserves contingency funds to cover the unforeseeable (for example when return shipping prices increase unexpectedly). The organisation also pays to bring the curators to the Center twice – once for a site visit and once for the opening of the show and (pre-covid) opening programs. In total, to deliver three Curatorial Fellowships the budget is just under \$90,000 (not including overhead or staffing and some marketing costs – this amount refers to direct programme costs). The programme is aimed at emerging curators, so most won't hold positions where they would be eligible for sabbatical. The Center for Craft itself does not define emerging, but rather asks that *“the applicant identifies themselves as emerging.”* Zapf explains:

“When actually selecting curators we do consider creating a rounded cohort – so artists as curators, museum professionals, academics, etc. Most of them fit in the work on the weekends or in addition to FT jobs or school. [...] It's a reciprocal relationship with the curators – the biggest gain being staying in touch with emerging trends and artists, energy, and good questions that new curators bring. It also can be more work for us to work with emerging curators because we are also developing professionalism and best practice at the same time as they are implementing it; but we see that as part of our mission and the goal of the program.”

To give a sense of the timeline and turnover of the Center For Craft's exhibitions, the 2020 exhibition programme applications for Fellowships opened in November 2018 with a deadline of February 2019. Applicants were notified by April 2019 and participated in a site visit during the Summer/Autumn of 2019 with the first exhibition opening in spring 2020. The second exhibition was scheduled in the summer of 2020 and the third in the autumn of 2020 before the pandemic required the Center for Craft to close the galleries and shift the exhibition schedule.

Center for Craft Gallery

The size of the gallery is 2000 sq ft (185 sq m) and contains plinths, a limited number of vitrines, and technology for curators to use. The Center has fine arts insurance and procedures for loan agreements and condition reporting. These elements are taught to participating curators, but ultimately the Center for Craft staff execute them to meet their own internal liability needs. A team of contract art handlers and exhibition builders are called on as needed. A contract graphic designer is on hand and the Center leads most of the asset design and marketing for the fellows *“particularly because we market the Fellowship as a series – so there is a general look and feel that is driven by the organization”* explains Zapf. In terms of exhibition design, graphics are a case by case situation, as some shows have greater graphic needs than others however each curatorial fellow reviews and approves all the assets pertaining to their exhibition. *“My dream as this program evolves would be to develop some curriculum that we work through with the curators as a cohort, so that we could have some more abstract conversations about label writing and object interpretation before writing labels for shows for example.”* We asked Zapf for her opinion on the possibility of partnering with institutions or galleries if Craft Scotland were to institute a similar programme and she advised that she believes that it would be possible and this is something she has also explored for the Center. She identified that a key asset could be if partner venues had a collection that Fellows could draw from to create their exhibitions (The Center is a non-collecting entity) as Zapf assesses that this element does add more work and coordination for the person overseeing the Curatorial Fellowship program.

Craft Scotland could consider funding visits to places like North Lands Creative, Gracefield or Timespan so that independent curators have the opportunity to build relationships with places and venues that have interesting collections. This would also help to build connectivity between curators working in Scotland. We know that there is also a desire from arts organisations like Deveron Projects (Huntly) to attract craft based curators and projects to their regions.

The Center’s Craft Research Fund Exhibition Grant awards curators up to \$15,000 to support exhibition research that encourages, expands, and supports scholarly craft research. The Craft Research Fund Exhibition Grant is one of four categories that make up the Craft Research Fund, a programme dedicated to supporting scholarly craft research in the United States. Since 2005 the Center annually grants \$95,000 to academic researchers, independent scholars, curators, and graduate students writing, revising, and reclaiming the history of craft.

In 2019, the Center added an additional \$40,000 Artist Fellowship category to support the creation of new research and knowledge through craft practice. The priorities are to encourage innovative research on critical issues in craft theory and history; expand and investigate neglected questions on craft history and criticism; and to support new cross-disciplinary approaches to scholarship in craft. The [recipients of the 2021 Craft Research Fund grants](#) are a mix of ten organisations, curators, scholars, and graduate students who will collectively receive a total of \$96,291.50. Of this year's recipients 3 out of 22 Exhibition Grant proposals were awarded (in 2020, 4 out of 9 Exhibition Grant proposals were awarded).

Critical Writing and Research

Recognising the importance of craft research the Center provides financial support to graduate students, scholars, and faculty in an effort to expand research and publications within the United States. Broadly the stated goal is to create a supportive climate within academia for future artists, curators, and faculty to study craft history, theory, and criticism. The Center for Craft is one of the only organisations in the US functioning as a catalyst of scholarly research in craft.

Inspired by the Center for Craft's 2002 Craft Think Tank, [The Journal of Modern Craft](#) is the first peer-reviewed academic journal to provide an interdisciplinary and international forum in its subject area. It addresses all forms of making that "self-consciously set themselves apart from mass production—whether in the making of designed objects, artworks, buildings, or other artefacts." It covers all aspects of craft as it exists within the condition of modernity (conceived as roughly from the mid-19th century to the present day), without geographical or disciplinary boundary. Its editors welcome articles that analyse the relevance of craft to architecture, design, contemporary art, and other fields, as well as the central disciplines of craft. *The Journal of Modern Craft* was launched in March 2008 and is published by Taylor & Francis three times a year³.

Case Study C:

The Cubitt Curatorial Fellowship

[The Cubitt Curatorial Fellowship](#) is a unique opportunity for research and curatorial experimentation in the field of visual arts. It is based on an 18-month residency and is the only such scheme in the UK and one of very few in the world. This includes an initial 3-month research and fundraising period, followed by 15 months of programming. It gives curators at key moments in their careers opportunities to curate within one of the UK's most established artist-run spaces. The Fellowship is an ambitious platform that welcomes experimentation, critical discourse and comment, while offering full creative independence. Since its inception in 2000, it has pioneered an individual, new model and developed into a major platform for curatorial development. This Fellowship has launched the careers for some of the most significant curators across the UK and the rest of Europe, many of whom now direct some of the most compelling exhibition spaces internationally.

The Cubitt residency is widely recognised as a significant stepping stone professionally for curators. Although London is a very different context to Scotland, there are aspects of the Cubitt residency that we can learn from in terms of designing programmes and structures for curatorial support. Participants typically have around a year to build a programme and build their network and visibility as a curator. For some curators, Cubitt offers the possibility to move from working within an organisation to leading their own programme.

We interviewed Helen Nisbet, a London-based curator originally from Shetland, who undertook a residency with Cubitt from 2017 to 2018 which she described as “*life-changing*”⁴. The Fellowship has traditionally not been given to emerging curators, but to curators (or writers, or educators) who have already developed a reputation but have not had the combination of opportunity, freedom, and trust, to run their own curatorial programme. The organisation enjoys a well-earned credibility in the art world. It is artist led – a studio complex founded by artists – the gallery programme is an offshoot of this and has produced some of the UK's (and internationally) most critically acclaimed curators, so, as Nisbet says “*people really pay attention to what is happening there*”.

She describes her residency in the following way:

“The openings feel like exciting events that bring together the art world in a way that few other small galleries manage to do. So this reputation, coupled with the absolute freedom the curator enjoys creates an electric mix. You can do entirely what you like as long as you can fundraise for it and it is physically possible. This is like working in another era (and maybe it's changing now, even at Cubitt)”

where things were chaotic and possible – and it all comes from giving a curator freedom, time and space. For me, as someone from a more working class background, I had never had an opportunity like this before and it really helped me build confidence and find my curatorial voice.”

“Well established artists were willing to do shows with me because of the reputation of the gallery and its artist led reputation. And when I exhibited artists at a much earlier point in their career, doing their first solo show, these were also taken seriously and reviewed for major arts publications. This proximity to artists or makers, in an ongoing dialogue made Cubitt feel like it was at the heart of something. And we all knew that the work that came out of this time would be seen and reviewed and discussed, so it wasn’t just happening in a vacuum.”

Nisbet credits Cubitts reputation for assisting her in securing good speakers for her public programme noting that higher profile speakers would generally take a lower fee than they would for other such events. Additionally, the Fellow’s proximity and interaction with artists in nearby studios was reported as being hugely important, with artists resident in Cubitt’s studios helping out with upcoming exhibitions i.e.: painting the gallery, offering advice, and sitting on the board. Her fellowship included an initial three month research and fundraising period, followed by 15 months of programming. She describes this research period as being vital. *“It was the first time I’d had proper research time written into a job. All curatorial positions should have this”*. Her position was paid for during the 18 months residency⁵. The exhibition budget was modest however Nisbet enjoyed this challenge. Although there was a pot of money for her to work with when she started, as the primary fundraiser for her programme she believes that the challenge of managing her own budget and ultimately being responsible for making it all happen was crucial *“[...] perhaps with too much support some of the richness of the experience is eroded. It encourages you to be brave, cheeky, get to know people, and think of creative ways to raise money.”*

Cubitt describes how its Fellowship offers not only artistic freedom, but allows the curator to practice all aspects of exhibition making, from fundraising to actual delivery, albeit within the collaborative and hands-on approach of Cubitt as an artist-led cooperative. It is the responsibility of Fellows to decide on their own priorities and needs and to go on to secure and source these; for example, if a Fellow wishes to work with a graphic designer or a specialist technician. Nisbet says: *“I worked with the same graphic designer throughout and this relationship became very important to the programme – it gave a visual unity across all the exhibitions and events and working on the Cubitt programme gave the designer exposure within the art world too, I feel really proud of the ‘design’ of the programme in this way. I worked with the same technicians across the 18 months, and this support and collaboration was vital.”*

Cubitt's current Fellows are [Languid Hands](#): Rabz Lansiquot and Imani Robinson. Their exhibition programme for Cubitt comprises five major new commissions of UK-based Black artists of Caribbean descent: R.I.P. Germain, Shenece Oretha, Ajamu X, Camara Taylor and Zinzi Minott. The programme *No Real Closure* is a platform for experimentation and development of black artistic practice across exhibitions, moving image, text, performance and public programming. The Fellow's describe their programme as follows:

“Absent is the disproportionate emphasis on surface-level survey style programmes and representational focus: when we gather, we do so to manifest collaboration, exchange, dialogue, relationships – a sum greater than its individual parts.”
and *“In a world of pandemics and insurrections, No Real Closure speaks to the persistent and ever present wounds of anti-blackness that are always already open. There is no closure to our ongoing work of dismantling the violent structures within which we cannot breathe. There is no closure to our collective resilience, nor to our communal grieving. No Real Closure is both acknowledgement and refusal, at once commitment and surrender.”*

As part of *No Real Closure*, Languid Hands have established Curatorial Tactics (supported by [Art Fund](#)), a UK network for Black curators, practitioners and artists interested in curation. This network will come together in a series of public and private gatherings to develop and practice a collective curatorial ethics of care in defense of Black life, both in and outside of the arts. Areas of interest will include: moving beyond representation towards liberatory approaches and methodologies; formulating and practicing sustainable ways of working together; resisting competition; mutual aid and sharing resources; and political actions that seek to untether the arts from the carceral system and the prison industrial complex. The duo have also produced the Languid Hands' notes on care and curation⁶.

If Craft Scotland were to create a similar project for curators of craft, there are interesting aspects around their organisational role that have emerged from various discussions with independent curators and producers. These adhere to, on the one hand, leveraging the organisation's reputation for the benefit of curators and on the other, standing back and demonstrating trust by giving curators creative control and freedom. In the example given with Cubitt, the institution was pivotal because of the quality of ideas and the breadth of scope that came out of previous programmes.

It is worth considering how any curatorial residency might liaise with well-established hubs for craft, design and art whether they be formally instituted and funded organisations like WASPS (nationwide); North Lands Creative (Caithness) and The Whisky Bond (Glasgow) or more informally/independently organised spaces like Grey Wolf Studios of David Dale Gallery (both Glasgow)

and Custom Lane (Edinburgh). It is worth noting that the Mapping Creative Hubs Scotland report commissioned by the British Council found that of the sectors using Creative Hubs craft was listed as 65% and design 63% (p16)⁷.

Endnotes

- 1 Director of the Master of Arts in Critical and Historical Craft Studies at Warren Wilson College and the Director and Co-Founder of Critical Craft Forum, an online and onsite platform for community driven dialogue and discourse about craft.
- 2 The resource referenced for this figure is https://visualarts.net.au/media/uploads/files/Curatorial_Toolkit.pdf (If co-curating the honorarium is split between the curators).
- 3 The journal is edited by Glenn Adamson (Senior Scholar, Yale University), Elissa Auther (Windgate Research Curator, Museum of Art and Design and Bard Graduate Center, New York), Edward S. Cooke Jr. (Yale University), Tanya Harrod (Independent Scholar, London), Stephen Knott (Kingston University) and Jenni Sorkin (University of California, Santa Barbara). Kimberley Chandler (Independent Scholar, London) and Kayleigh Perkov (University of California, Irvine) are the exhibition review editors, and Livia Rezende (University of New South Wales, Australia) and Sequoia Miller (Gardiner Museum, Canada) are the book review editors.
- 4 Helen Nisbet's exhibition programme included: the public programme Houses are really Bodies; Mark Leckey: Affect Bridge Age Regression; The Landscape – Josephine Callaghan, Sarah Cameron; Helen Cammock: Shouting in Whispers; Flo Brooks: Is Now a Good Time?; the public programme The Driver's Seat; Hardeep Pandhal: Liar Hydrant; Landed: Denielle Dean, Janine Oleson.
- 5 The salary for the 2020/21 Cubitt Fellowship was advertised online at £25,000 pro-rata for 3.5 days/week
- 6 <https://www.cubittartists.org.uk/languid-hands-on-curation-care-during-this-moment>
- 7 <https://creativeconomy.britishcouncil.org/resources/mapping-creative-hubs-scotland/>

Craft Scotland is the national development agency for craft. We put makers at the heart of all we do, championing diverse and high-quality contemporary craft. We help people learn about, appreciate and buy craft, promoting the contribution of craft to Scotland's cultural, economic and social well-being.

Through our exhibitions and events programmes, digital platforms and strategic partnerships, we provide leadership for the sector. We create opportunities for makers to develop their creative and business practice, and to exhibit and sell work in Scotland and beyond.

Scotland has a proud history of making and its skilled makers have a well-deserved international reputation. Makers are using traditional and cutting-edge techniques across a wide range of practices including; ceramics, glass, metalwork, textiles, basketry, furniture and jewellery. Their creativity supports Scotland's economy and its international reputation for innovation and entrepreneurship.

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