

Press Release

Frankfurt am Main, 27.4.2022

Craft as Myth. Between Ideal and Real Life
29 April – 11 September 2022

Press Preview: Wednesday, 27 April 2022, 11 am
Opening: Thursday, 28 April 2022, 7 pm

"Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it expresses this message." – Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

What is craft? The term "craft" usually refers to a series of learned actions and techniques, ideally carried out manually or with a manually operated tool; less commonly, machines are used. In this context, handcrafted production is based on traditional craft techniques and usually follows a fixed sequence of procedures. Craftspeople often develop individual solutions or produce a limited number of items. For this reason, "craftsmanship" is also considered a hallmark of quality. In addition, the term can refer to a profession or an economic sector. But what does craft as myth mean?

In his theories on mythology, French philosopher Roland Barthes reached the conclusion that the myth is a specific manner of signifying and thus a form of speaking. Hence it is not the object of discussion that is mythical – in this case craft – but the special form the discussion about it takes: A plethora of sometimes mutually reinforcing, sometimes contradicting attributions, emotions, interpretations, and wishful thoughts are unquestioningly ascribed to the term, thus making it a "myth."

The exhibition focuses on craft and the tension between the ideal and the real life. Like a grid, the question of myth runs through the entire exhibition. Tradition, integrity, simplicity - craftsmanship was and is often associated with such universal values. Which of these attributions are still relevant today and which are newly emerging? *Craft as Myth. Between Ideal and Real Life* questions common notions and debunks both romanticizations and ideologies, revealing the feelings and affects, ideas and desires that are transported to the individual and society in connection with handcrafted objects. In the exhibition, numerous contemporary debates and the social dimension of design are highlighted and newly inspired. A wide range of objects, films, images, photographs and artworks are included in the exhibition.

Craft as Myth is divided into six exhibition clusters: Unique/Series, Hand/Head, Local/Global, Luxury/Necessity, Mastery/Do-it-yourself, and Tradition/Progress. Here, visitors can explore the following questions, among others: Is craft always unique? Is it craft or design? How much mental work is involved in craft? Does craft create identity? Does craft create a sense of home? What makes craft a luxury? What distinguishes professionals from amateurs? How much of the new is in the old? Many questions about craft run through the exhibition, emerge in the

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interviews that the curators conducted with craftspeople from different industries and regions, and are explored in greater depth in the exhibition catalog. They are a leitmotif throughout the project and arise from the intention to find diverse answers to the question of the future of crafts.

Another element is the HandWERKRaum in the middle of the exhibition, where visitors have the opportunity to become active themselves. Six workstations invite visitors to discover and try out core craft skills by drawing, constructing, weaving, building, measuring and exploring. Ideas can be developed and shared with others on a pinboard.

The exhibition thus responds to society's increased interest in craft. On the one hand, a neoconservative awareness of quality can be identified with consumers, which goes hand in hand with the purchase of upmarket crafted goods. On the other hand, DIY movements have been linking craft to a political understanding of self-empowerment and consumer criticism since the 1970s. For 13 percent of Germans craft is the basis of their source of income. Around one third of all trainees in Germany work in the skilled trades. Statistics, however, do not include the large number of amateur crafts enthusiasts who are targeted by the advertising campaigns of various DIY chains. The interest in crafting processes and production techniques, in materials and materiality, shows the importance and appreciation of craft as an essential part of material culture, cultural identity and community. The appreciation of craftsmanship is one side of the coin; the other side reveals more problematic aspects: political instrumentalization of tradition, heritage, and ethnicity, but also the sometimes precarious living conditions of craftspeople, the low wages for training in some fields, the lack of young talent, the increased risk of accidents at work and physical injury.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalog published by Verlag für moderne Kunst. With the combined knowledge of three museums and nuanced contributions, authors from various professions examine the myth of craftsmanship in all its facets. They shed light on aspects of the craft in an informed and multi-faceted manner. The catalog is available at the museum shop at a price of 24 euros.

The exhibition was developed in cooperation with the Kunstgewerbemuseum der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden and the vorarlberg museum in Bregenz and will be on view at both locations in 2023/24. Despite their commonalities and shared roots in European cultural history, the dissimilar urban and rural locations of these institutions lead to different narrations surrounding the practice of craft. These stories are visualized and expanded by examples of global perspectives on craft.

Curators: Grit Weber (Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main), Kerstin Stöver and Ute Thomas (Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden) and Theresia Anwander (vorarlberg museum, Bregenz).

The exhibition is supported by the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain and the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung. The extensive program accompanying the exhibition

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Öffnungszeiten
Mo geschlossen, Di, Do–Fr 12–18 Uhr, Mi 12–20 Uhr, Sa–So 10-18 Uhr

Eintritt
12 Euro, ermäßigt 6 Euro
Kinder und Jugendliche unter 18 Jahren sowie Studierende der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, der Städelschule und der HfG Offenbach frei

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