

## **Crafting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century UK Artisan-Silversmith.**

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My PhD thesis 'Crafting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century UK Artisan-Silversmith' makes a contribution to our understanding of how UK artisan-silversmiths develop and become commercially and personally successful. The research identifies the role of skills education for craft, the very personal motivations of success and the differences between enterprise and entrepreneurship. The analysis allows for the proposition of the elements of a Silversmith Development Framework delivered through a proposed Artisan-Silversmith Development Council(ASDC).

The research suggests the need for a different approach to training, business and enterprise teaching for use by artisan-silversmiths and stakeholder institutions interested in developing this vibrant industry through a 'learning by doing' approach.

When the industry is well presented, such as when artisan-silversmiths exhibit at Goldsmiths' Fair, it thrives. Recent evidence suggests, however, that not only is the number of good quality craft fairs declining, but so is the number of galleries stocking and exhibiting contemporary silverware. Perversely, the rich heritage of British silversmithing acts as a brake on the contemporary silversmiths' market, with television programmes, such as the Antiques Roadshow constantly reminding the public of 17th, 18th and 19th century designs, which have little relevance to modern living. Currently there is no counterweight to this in the mass media and there is little comprehension of the effort of manufacture, process of purchasing, and commissioning of contemporary silverware. There is also an indifference to the craft of modern silversmithing and to those craftsmen and women producing individual silverware designs in the face of seemingly related globalised manufacturing industries in which almost any object can be mass-produced and purchased at very low prices when compared to craft production. There are, however, strong signs of interest in the highest luxury goods markets for bespoke objects such as those seen in the 2018 Venice *Homo Faber* sales exhibition and similar exhibitions in London such as *Collect* and *Masterpiece*.

Contemporary UK silversmiths offer a unique range of products, with a rich cultural heritage. They are also a rarefied group of people unusual in today's commercial world, often motivated less by profit than by the accrual of design, cultural and craft skills. These bespoke designers can be traced back through many distinct design movements such as Arts & Crafts and Bauhaus but are now offering their own individual designs. However, unlike these earlier aesthetic movements, there is still no unique voice or signature style of post-modern British contemporary silversmithing, with each maker's work being individualistic in both technique and design. This is a laudable trait in itself, but is perhaps counterproductive in marketing terms for an industry that lacks a modern British design icon: Denmark, by way of contrast, has the Georg Jensen organisation as their champion of contemporary silverware.