Emerging Technology and Contemporary Art: What is 21st century Craft?
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College Art Association Annual Conference NYC
Wednesday, February 15, 2017, 10:30am – 12:00pm

Session abstract:
How do we define 21st century craft, and what do we mean by ‘craft’? In the dictionary, craft is “a special skill, art or dexterity.” It’s tradition and innovation and how one transforms an idea into material form and the intuitive skill of working with that material to transform it. This occurs in one’s studio with available tools, which change with innovation, such as the intertwining of advanced digital processes with traditional hand craftsmanship. One can see this at Haystack Mountain School of Craft with MIT’s Center for Bits and Atoms and their joint fab lab digital fabrication facility that augments studio practices, with interdisciplinary work at both the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and UCSD in art, science and engineering, in the material ecology of designers at MIT, in ceramics with digitally controlled kilns and traditionally constructed ones, and in the making of physical study models during the architectural design process. The studio is a place of curiosity and invention. It is the place where one experiments with a process, makes discoveries, and tests new ideas, tools and techniques, whether by hand, digital fabrication or a combination of both, to foster a dialogue about the creative process, technology, ingenuity, the work of the hand, and the physical embodiment of ideas with materials and space. Yet is it still the hand that assembles the final work, even if components are generated digitally, or not? Does the work have traces of the production process with a tactile experience that creates intimacy on a detail level if made virtually, digitally or manually? In this session, we give those who are pushing the boundaries with current technology within their own studio practice and educational settings the opportunity to present their work and ideas.

Session Chairs:
Michelle LaFoe, AIA, Artist and Architect, Principal, OFFICE 52 Architecture
Isaac Campbell, AIA, Principal, OFFICE 52 Architecture

In 2010 LaFoe and Campbell founded OFFICE 52 Architecture, a progressive Portland-based studio practice. They have been invited to speak nationally about their creative design process in which they interweave advanced digital fabrication technology with contemporary craft techniques, such as printmaking on monolithic glass, in their design work and exploration of space and materials. Last year at CAA in D.C., they talked about the inherently transformative nature of dichroic glass and ceramic glass frit combined with innovative glass fabrication techniques that incorporated approaches from studio art, science and architecture as a means to push the conceptual limits of glass as a material such as in their recently completed design for Scott Hall, the new Nano-Bio-Energy Technologies building at Carnegie Mellon University.

Speaker Details:
Alison Howell is currently a KTP Associate at the University of the West of England at the Centre for Fine Print Research, where she manages an applied research project between the University and Burgess and Leigh Ltd. in the UK. Alison’s background is in ceramic design, having studied for her Master’s degree in Stoke-on-Trent in the UK. Since graduating, she has also worked in ceramics community engagement, studio manufacture, design and currently lectures in 3D Design at Staffordshire University. Her talk is entitled: Evidence of Mind: Is the perception of intent what defines and binds the ever-changing spectrum of craft?

David Costanza is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is currently a Visiting Technology Fellow in the Department of Architecture at Rice University, where he teaches design studios, building technology, and a seminar on parametric modeling and digital manufacturing. His work focuses on the dialog between the computational tools used to design, the digital tools used in the manufacturing, and the emergence of advanced building materials. With his current work, David explores the craft of the mold for surface composite structures, for which he poses the use of inflatables as an alternative to traditional molds of milled foam or aluminum. His presentation is entitled: Rigid Textiles: Examining the Reciprocal Relationship between Composite Surface Morphologies and Methods of Production.

Mike Andrews is a Chicago-based artist whose tapestries, sculptures, and animations taunt the categories of textile, video, and object. His hybrid approach to making is fueled by the desires/anxieties of a technology-rich culture. In the spirit of imagination central to a weaver’s methodology, Andrews is investigating the borders of the textile medium through several strategies from 3D animation and collage to industrial weaving. Selected exhibitions include an upcoming solo at Volume Gallery, Chicago and a group exhibition at the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, Grand Rapids, MI. He was invited as a resident artist at Weaving Think Tank, a workshop at A-Z West, and was a visiting artist at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. He is on the faculty in the Department of Fiber and Material Studies at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His presentation is entitled: Material Simulations.

Ingrid Murphy is a practicing artist and educator who works with interactive technologies and is currently an esteemed National Teaching Fellow at the Cardiff School of Art & Design at Cardiff Metropolitan University in the UK. She also leads the University’s FabCre8 Research Group, which is the applied research arm of FABLab Cardiff, a group that focuses on transdisciplinary applications of digital fabrication processes. Ingrid previously ran the renowned ceramics department at Cardiff, and later at Cardiff MET led the development of innovative curriculum that blended both the digital and the traditional. Her presentation is entitled: Beyond Facture.