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## **AN AESTHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRAFT SECTOR**

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Ian Fillis' research interests include small business marketing, the relationship between marketing, management, art and creativity, alternative research methodologies such as metaphor and biography, international and export marketing, e-business and supplier development. He has published widely in European, American and Asian journals such as the International Small Business Journal, Journal of Marketing Management, European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, Corporate Reputation Review, Journal of Enterprising Culture, Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship and the Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice. As well as contributing to a number of edited volumes, he has published two research monographs including Creative Marketing: an Extended Metaphor for Marketing in a New Age,. He has carried out a number of externally funded projects, including several concerning the economic impact of the crafts sector. He is past Executive Editor of the Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship and previous Chair of the Academy of Marketing Entrepreneurial and Small Business Marketing Special Interest Group. He has also served as Guest Editor on a number of special journal issues concerning small business and have delivered invited seminars on creativity, research methodology and small business to universities in the UK, Sweden, Finland, Australia and the USA.

## **AN AESTHETIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRAFT SECTOR**

### **Abstract**

This paper evaluates the contribution of aesthetics to our understanding of the craft sector within the creative industries. Aesthetics make a dual contribution in terms of its original interpretation as an artistic factor relating to beauty, and also can be viewed in terms of the different styles of managing shaped by the owner/manager of the craft enterprise. In addition, creativity provides the artistic enterprise with competitive advantage, resulting in innovative products. Previous research on the creative industries has tended to follow a conventional path, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data constructed from in-depth interviews and large scale surveys. This paper conceptualises the essence of the creative industries, drawing on examples from craft in order to reach an understanding of the aesthetic value and impact of the sector.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, craft, creativity, typology, entrepreneur, artist

## **Introduction**

Craft and the craft enterprise can be traced back to the Medieval period (Heslop 1997), the Italian Renaissance (Welch 1997), and the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Naylor 1971) and beyond (Harrod 1999; Valentine and Follett 2010). In the present day the craft firm is situated within the wider small and medium sized enterprise (SME) community. The nature and meaning of craft has altered during this time, from its early vernacular status to the more recent aesthetic appreciation of the craft product. This has resulted in disagreement over the definition of craft (Dormer 1997). It was not until over two hundred years ago that a system of fine arts was formulated in Britain, in which the crafts could be placed aesthetically (Kristeller 1951:510):

It is known that the very term 'aesthetics' was coined at that time...it is generally agreed that such dominating concepts of modern aesthetics as taste and sentiment, genius, originality and creative imagination did not assume their definitive modern meaning before the eighteenth century...scholars have noticed that the term 'Art' with a capital 'A' and in its modern sense, the related term 'Fine Arts' (beaux Arts) originated in all probability in the eighteenth century.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century the terms 'craft' and 'craftsman' were in popular usage, derived mainly from discussion in the visual arts at that time (Greenhalgh 1997). Its present connotation encapsulates ideas drawn from philosophy, aesthetics and technology. This contrasts to the way in which commentators viewed how art and craftwork was produced as early as the fourteenth century in Italy, an example being those involved in making frescoes being called master craftsmen. In other craft-related industries at that time such as weaving, it was the owner/entrepreneur who developed the

business, not the craftsman making the products (Antal 1948). Craft can refer to studio crafts covering everyone working with a craft medium, from producers of functional ware to abstractionist sculptors working in textiles, clay or glass, or as a process over which an individual has detailed control, shaped by in-depth craft knowledge (Dormer 1997). Metcalf (1997) distinguishes between craft as skilful labour and craft as a class of objects which must have a high degree of hand-made input, either by using the hand itself, hand tools and even hand-held power tools. Further more, the craft object does not necessarily have to be wholly produced using traditional materials, only that they have been utilised as part of the production process. Both the Scottish Arts Council and the Crafts Council of England and Wales choose to focus on contemporary craft as part of the wider visual arts and design. In contrast, the Crafts Council of Ireland embeds craft within the wider small business community. Irish craft is positioned in terms of its ability to develop commercially using its unique identity, innovation, quality and competitiveness. In recent studies, Fillis (2002; 2004) has defined craft as having a high degree of hand-made input, but not necessarily produced or designed using traditional materials. It should be produced as a one-off or as part of a small batch, the design of which may or may not be culturally embedded in the country of production, and which is sold for profit. Although not part of this study, the wider impact of craft can be seen in its relationship with tourism and the wider creative and cultural industries (Irvine and Anderson 2004; Fillis 2009). A broader interpretation of craft would also embrace amateur activity but, again, this is not the focus of this study (Brosio 1994).

In today's post industrialisation era, the craftsperson has to compete with both domestic and foreign competition where many products appear hand-crafted even though they are often mass produced using advanced technological processes. Recent literature suggests that the craft sector be viewed as part of the greater cultural and creative industries (DCMS 1998; DCMS 2001; Hartley 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2007). Many previous studies have underestimated the value of some creative sectors by up to forty percent and that the cumulative value of the industry is much greater than previously estimated (Pratt 2004; Roodhouse 2006; Higgs and Cunningham 2008). As well as being a source of creativity and innovation, craft also contributes to the rural economy (Fuller-Love et al. 2006). Ignoring those craft firms which have embraced mass production techniques and which therefore are no longer strictly craft based, the vast majority of craft businesses are microenterprises employing less than ten people. In fact, most of these are either single person businesses or employing one or two additional workers. According to the most recent UK Government statistics, small and medium-sized enterprises in general account for 99.9 per cent of all enterprises, with over one million businesses falling under the micro-enterprise category (<http://www.berr.gov.uk>). SMEs also account for more than half of all employment and turnover, and in areas such as Wales and Northern Ireland, they account for over 70 per cent of total employment. Recent surveys have estimated the collective economic contribution of the sector; for example £151m in Scotland (McAuley and Fillis 2002), £826 in England and Wales and £26m in Northern Ireland (McAuley and Fillis 2006).

## **Aesthetic impact on craft**

The paper turns to aesthetics and considers what can be learned from its interfaces with art, entrepreneurship and marketing. Aesthetics as a topic for study has existed for centuries, if not millennia, but it is only recently that it has become part of management discourse as a response to the inertia of the prevailing linear rational approaches of theorising which seldom reflect what happens in practice (Becker 1981; Mangham and Overington 1987; Dean et al. 1997; Guillet de Monthoux and Strati 2002; Carr and Hancock 2003). By thinking in an aesthetic sense, this can offer radical solutions to organisational problems by constructing previously unconsidered ways of knowing and seeing. However, long before today's current interest in aesthetics and the organisation, the executive processes of management were described as involving feeling, judgement, sense, proportion and balance. They were believed to be a matter of art rather than science, involving aesthetic rather than logical thinking (Barnard 1938). Aesthetics have a wide impact on our lives, from the work environment to personal consumption decisions.

This paper examines how aesthetics influence the marketing and consumption of the craft object in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The literature on aesthetics provides insight into the creative behaviour of the producer of craft and how this subsequently relates to the experiences of the consumer as a potential purchaser of the craft object. Two forms of aesthetics are identified: the aesthetically embedded aspects of the craft object which relates to the original use of the term with respect to art and beauty,

and the aesthetic form of marketing grounded in creativity, intuition and opportunity recognition adopted by the producer. This latter factor relates to the more recent adoption of aesthetics within management and organisation studies (Mahoney 2002; Strati 1996; Strati 2000). The utilisation of aesthetics in underpinning the performance of the craft sector coincides with recent debate in marketing which focuses on how to liberate the discipline from scientific assumptions and make more effective use of alternative influences such as linguistics, aesthetics and art, postmodernism and metaphor (Gagliardi 1996; Brown and Patterson 2000; Brownlie 2006; Fillis and Rentschler 2008; Fillis 2009). This rethinking can also be construed as a critical form of marketing (Catterall et al. 1999; Saren et al. 2007; Tadajewski and Brownlie 2008). An aesthetic approach has the potential to provide a critical lens with which to view and understand a wider variety of contributing phenomena.

Aesthetics, from the Greek *aisth*, concerns the knowledge yielded by the sensory organs, or the activation of the capacity to feel (Barilli 1995). One of the first mentions of aesthetics was in describing the area of philosophy relating to art and beauty in Germany in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (White 1996). Individuals and organisations perceived to be more creative than others are said to have a heightened creative aesthetic ability. Aesthetics are capable of affecting the everyday aspects of the organisation, as well as consumer behaviour (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). In addition to the design and manufacture of the craft object, these everyday aspects in the craft firm are manifested in entrepreneurial forms of marketing grounded in a particular type of knowledge and style, with links to



intuition, sensing and creativity (Bridge et al. 2003; Darling et al. 2007). The paper considers the emergence of a form of marketing grounded in a range of aesthetically based competencies shaped by the maker and consumer of craft. The entrepreneurial marketing of crafts and their resultant consumption can be viewed as an alternative aesthetic or way of seeing and behaving.

A variety of terms have been adopted to describe more creative, artistic ways of knowing, including aesthetic epistemology (Nissley 1999), aesthetic modes of learning (Reimer and Smith 1992), art as a way of knowing (Greene 1995), aesthetic experiential learning (Merritt 1995, creative learning (Vaill 1996) and developing insight using the eyes of the artist (Sumpf 2002). Aesthetics can be viewed as a form of knowledge which has its own truth, and where each context is specific. An aesthetic analysis can focus on factors such as cultural values, identity, image and style (Mangham and Overington 1987). Aesthetics as style, for example, could relate not only to the input into the design process but also to instilling and practicing a creative, entrepreneurial form of marketing based on the intuition of the craftsperson (Fillis and Rentschler 2006). As well as intuition, the aesthetic dimension comprises cognitive and emotional elements (Lyotard 1994; Kant 2003). The production, marketing and consumption of craft involves aesthetic input which focuses on factors such as experience and feeling in addition to any tangible outcomes. Having aesthetic knowledge can result in fresh insight and awareness, irrespective of whether or not we can actually express what we experience (John 2001). Viewing aesthetics from a cognitive perspective can result in the stimulation of sensing

activity which reveals certain truths about the world (Freeland 1997). It also introduces an element of pleasure seeking which helps to understand what it means to be creative. To hold a particular aesthetic refers to possessing a specific set of criteria for judgement. Aesthetics can offer radical solutions to marketing problems by constructing previously unconsidered ways of knowing and seeing which may conflict with long established perspectives:

Aesthetic forms of expression are like experiments that allow us to reconsider and challenge dominant categories and classifications. Innovative forms resist existing classifications altogether, compelling the creation of new categories, allowing new things to belong in new places (Taylor and Hansen 2005:1216).

Although there is evidence of growing interest in aesthetics as a management and marketing construct, it has a much longer history in the arts. Music, painting, poetry, dance and other pure art forms have tended to develop in a divergent fashion from other related disciplines such as crafts and the decorative arts (Townsend 1997). Historically the arts were viewed not as an individual discipline, but as a way of connecting with higher things, such as the State, religion and the Royal Court. Then, there did not appear to be any clear distinction between these arts and the crafts. It was during the Renaissance that the idea of art for art's sake philosophy developed and that artists could operate with some degree of freedom outside the restrictions of producing art and craft for the Church.

When thinking about aesthetics and art, and its subsequent relationship with craft, there are three main connections to consider: the relation of the artist or maker to the work of art; the relation of the work of art to its audience or customer base and the way in which

an artist and an audience are mutually constitutive of each other. Several kinds of aesthetic theory within art can also be considered. Participatory aesthetics relates to beauty where the ultimate aesthetic goal is to participate in or be united with that which is beautiful. Aesthetic experience is unique and felt directly and its evidence can be found in the individual senses. This relies on concepts such as aesthetic attitude, perception and intuition. Historical and empirical aesthetic dimensions involve examining the relations produced within the art world: the artists or craftspeople, their audience and the supporting institutions. It also emphasises the importance of reception or aesthetic response over imitation or expression. Art can be viewed as a source of entertainment, a source of beauty, emotional expression and as something which brings insight and understanding (Graham 1997). Focusing on its original meaning, aesthetics is an attempt to theorise about art, to explain what it is and why it matters. Aesthetics can be viewed as an attempt to formulate a theory of art which explains its value instead of trying to define what art is or its social function. When consuming an artwork, or a craft object, people make statements about the pleasure derived from it. Aesthetic preferences are really expressions of the taste of the observer and not statements about the object. They relate to factors such as enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure and whether value is more than just amusement.

Aesthetic variation:

A craftspeople makes use of creative, artistic and unconscious processes when generating ideas which contribute to the design and production of the object. Also, craft as expertise

forms part of the platform which enables aesthetic expression (Gilmore and Warren 2007). Makers of craft exhibit a range of emotions in the design, production and marketing of their work. Fillis (2000) constructs a typology of craftspeople which illustrates how different design and business aesthetics impact on the sector. There are those who have chosen to work in craft because of the type of lifestyle involved and are unwilling to sacrifice this in order to expand their business (the lifestyler). Another type of craft owner/manager is the business-oriented entrepreneur who is willing to take risks and recognises the importance of developing a customer base (the entrepreneur). This confirms the view that the craftsperson is really a risk taking entrepreneur (Hillman-Chartrand 1988). The third type can be described as an artist/designer who is unwilling to view the craft as a product but rather as a creative object (the idealist). Their stance is uncompromising when producing the work; they do not tend to take note of customer demand but instead make art/craft which they feel has artistic integrity. In other words, they embrace an 'art for art's sake' rather than 'art for business sake' philosophy. They do take risks as far as the craft itself is concerned in order to break new ground and they can be innovative and creative in terms of design. There is a fourth type who may enter the sector much later than the other groups; they tend to have gained previous work experience in unrelated areas and have decided to make a career change (the late developer). Depending on their background, a number of key skills can be brought into the new venture but the importance of lifestyle quality appears to be significant here too. This has relevance for growth in sales, markets and numbers being employed in the business. Given these differences, it would be expected that a range of emotions are

expressed by the makers in connection with the craft itself, their customers, the role of marketing and so on. Emotion can be viewed as a form of knowing through feeling and relates to aesthetic experience, understanding and uncertainty (Townsend 1997). Emotions can be viewed as the tacit aspects of our knowledge which serve to stimulate creativity and shape aesthetic responses. They are often viewed as mental states of readiness arising from cognitive appraisal of a situation.

Emotional expression by the customer is linked to the utilitarian and hedonic benefits experienced during and after craft consumption activity. The former are functional, instrumental and practical in nature whereas the latter concern aesthetic, experiential and enjoyment related dimensions of consumption (Batra and Ahtola 1990; Westbrook and Oliver 1991). It can be expected that consumption related experiences of the craft product can result in positive, negative or a variety of emotions. When products elicit a positive emotional response, this relates to expectations being exceeded regarding specific benefit dimensions (Oliver 1997; Chitturi et al. 2008). It is believed that the nature of emotional experience varies depending on the consumption of hedonic and utilitarian benefits. Exceeding utilitarian expectations can result in satisfaction, whereas exceeding hedonic expectations can result in delight. When consumers see a product before receiving any detailed information on its attributes, its appearance may cause them to have an affect-based initial aesthetic impression which they then utilise as a form of judgement grounded in hedonic, feeling related factors such as taste and attractiveness (Adaval 2001; Yeung and Wyer 2004).

### **Aesthetic image and aura of craft**

The image of craft relates to the feelings and beliefs of the craft maker relate to the perceptions of consumers, industry bodies and the wider public (Abratt 1989; Bernstein 1992). Imagery relates to the ability to create and translate symbolic representations from a network of dominant meanings (Stern et al. 2001). Identity dimensions of craft involve aesthetic, visual components of recognisable design (Schmitt et al. 1995). Both the utilitarian and expressive individualistic aspects of cultural products identified by Lash and Urry (1994; 2002) are readily linked to the study of crafts through their vernacular past and their current position as both a functional and aesthetic object. The aesthetic symbols and meanings of craft are twofold: firstly as historically and culturally influenced designs and as contemporary objects deemed to be both craft and art (Kozinets 2002). The notion of the aura helps to tangibilise product values through the creation of a form of uniqueness (Bjorkman 2002). It suggests a particular form of aesthetic feeling and emotion as a response to creative efforts. Factors which are believed to contribute to the construction of an aura include price level, customer valuation, particular marketing strategies, the type of organisation, as well as the level of intuitive feelings and the amount of aesthetic knowledge held by the individual. The craft maker can create a particular aura associated with the object containing individualised creativity manifested in the design, feel and image of the object. It may also reflect the history and culture behind it, and whether it is authentic or not.

The impact of the Celtic Aesthetic:

The term Celtic can be defined as a branch of the Indo-European family of languages that includes Gaelic, Welsh and Breton which is still spoken in parts of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany (Collins English Dictionary 2005). Morgan (1983) discusses the rediscovery of the Celts in the Romantic period, tracing them to biblical times through to the Celtae barbarians located in Gaul through to Asia Minor. These references back to the past provide connections with nature, religion and spirituality but Celtic craft also has contemporary impact. The emergence of the modern day Celtic brand located in craft and other products and consumption experiences suggests that the brand has actually become the product itself (Salzer-Morling and Strannegard 2004). It no longer merely relates a story about the values and benefits of the product but has become an image of aesthetic expression (Schroeder 2002; 2005). The strength of branding in craft can be illustrated by considering Celtic design and the Celtic brand and whether this can be perceived as iconic (Holt 2003). Much Celtic imagery is certainly recognisable and can be positioned within the wider arena of Celtic myth. This popularity helps to explain why some makers openly exploit the connection. Brand icons help to communicate myths in tangible forms while craft can tangibilise the Celtic myth through making and marketing processes. Aesthetics enables us to relate to the sensual, experiential understanding of the brand. Celtic crafts can be deemed cultural products since their design, reputation, image and identity are culturally and historically embedded and the sector is recognised as part of the cultural and creative industries (Hutchinson 2003). Identity dimensions of Celtic craft involve aesthetic, visual components of recognisable Celtic design (Schmitt et al. 1995). As demonstrated in the next section of the paper, the Celtic aesthetic also shapes the

entrepreneurial forms of marketing practiced by Celtic makers which are grounded in creativity, intuition and opportunity recognition (Aherne 2000; Brown 2006; Fillis 2007).

### **Entrepreneurial marketing as an aesthetic style of managing in the craft sector**

Researching crafts uncovers evidence of an entrepreneurial form of marketing among some craft owner/managers. This variety of marketing does not conform to the formal modes of marketing as described in the majority of textbooks but is, instead, a self constructed intuitive orientation explained using the interface between marketing and entrepreneurship. The marketing/entrepreneurship interface paradigm can be used to understand craft firm behaviour, given that many small firms in general compete unequally in terms of business and marketing skills, available resources, creativity and identification of opportunities (Carson and Gilmore 2000). Many enterprises carry out business via highly informal, unstructured, reactive mechanisms while others develop, over time, a proactive and skilled approach where innovation and identification of opportunities result in competitive edge. The marketing/entrepreneurship interface deals with the overlap involving factors such as analytical skills, judgement, positive thinking, innovation and creativity. The issue of creativity is especially relevant here, given the specific nature of the crafts sector where innovative product design and originality in business approach are common. Links have been made between creativity and entrepreneurship for some time (Whiting 1988; Lee et al. 2004). Independence, the drive to achieve, curiosity, self-confidence and deep immersion in a task are the five main characteristics of the relatively more creative individual while self-confidence,



perseverance, high energy levels, calculated risk taking and the need to achieve are seen as the top five characteristics of the relatively more entrepreneurial individual. Other relevant factors include using one's initiative and being flexible in approaches to business development.

### **The owner/manager as an artist**

Due to the combined effects of entrepreneurial marketing and artistic influences, many craft firms do not follow the rules of conventional market orientation. Instead they may be more concerned with market creation. Hirschman (1983:46) suggests that the marketing concept does not match the behaviour and philosophy of the artist as a producer because of the personal values and the social norms which impact on the artistic production process:

...artists...do not bring forth products according to...the marketing concept [which] holds that products should be created in response to the...desires/interests of their consuming public...creators of aesthetic...products frequently exhibit exactly the opposite pattern. An artist...may first create a product that flows from their own internal desires...and then present this product to consumers who choose to either accept or reject it.

Many artists create to express their subjective conceptions of beauty, emotion or some other aesthetic ideal in following their own tastes in creating what they want (Becker 1978; Holbrook 1981, Withers 1985), while others are driven by monetary or other economic rewards (Baxandall 1988; Cowan and Tabarrok 2000). Aesthetic creativity is the central influence in the process, and is expressed purely for its own sake rather than responding to customer demand (Holbrook and Zirlin 1983). Hirschman believes that, although aesthetic producers ultimately contribute value to society, the nature of what

they do and how they do it means that their actions cannot be meaningfully understood using the conventional marketing concept. Having an aesthetic rationality relates to the generation of an impression and experience which is connected to an individual's inner state:

...we could perhaps envisage the aesthetic dimension as a combination of cognitive, intuitive and emotional contributions that, taken together with the sublime, creates something going beyond the sum of the inputs involved. Taking such a view there could be suggested a particular kind of human 'rationality' associated with the aesthetic dimension...we cannot understand management...without being alert to the aesthetic dimension (Guillet de Monthoux and Sjostrand 2003).

This notion of aesthetics relates to the production of a form of management art where managers, clients and consumers are able to philosophise about products and services in a way which centres on experience and feeling rather than tangible outcomes.

Makers of craft can be thought of as artists if they perceive their work as art and it is sold in galleries or by commission. These artists perform a dual role; firstly in creating the artwork and secondly in managing and marketing their output. [Degot \(1987\)](#) views the manager as an artist, instead of someone motivated mainly by maximisation of corporate profit. Artistic action is not just the sole preserve of artists but it also impacts across all human activity. Managers have been viewed as artists who practice aesthetic forms of decision making and who utilise the framework of art as a source of managerial inspiration ([Kirkeby, 2002](#)). A managerial work of art suggests that the manager leaves a personal imprint on it, in addition to any formal techniques used. The result of artistic action must be visible and the basic creative design of the managerial work of art must be due to one individual. The rationale behind the promotion of the individual manager as

the focus is that he/she has attained the status of “artist” by moving beyond the conventional boundaries of endeavour in order to fulfil certain aspirations.

### **Celtic Aesthetic Craft Data:**

Qualitative in-depth interviews were held with thirty arts and crafts makers in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The data analysed here conveys contrasting attitudes by Celtic makers (those whose craft is directly or indirectly influenced by Celtic culture and demand) concerning aesthetics, design and marketing. Some feel that having a Celtic ethos can impede development of their work while others openly exploit the connection. It seems to depend on whether or not the maker believes in the Celtic aesthetic and subsequently having the nerve and ability to exploit this connection in the marketplace:

*“We use Celtic design in the work. It does sell a lot of things – a wee individual style of it. You can sort of look around and say ‘That’s one of Kevin’s’”. (Northern Ireland maker exploiting Celtic connection)*

*“Selling something to the Americans, if you put a shamrock on it or a Celtic pattern they think it’s great. And it doesn’t matter if it’s from Ireland, England, Scotland or Wales, they love it.” (Republic of Ireland exporter).*

*“I quite like those kind of games if you like, where you can hide your ethnic background. But I would be hiding it rather than exploiting it up front. I don’t find that up front business very interesting. I think it leads to divide rather than harmony.” (English maker intent on hiding their identity)*

*“I don’t like to get bogged down in that avenue because that can be restricting. That holds down the talent, the potential for ideas coming from within the person. A lot of people would say that’s a load of rubbish – do the Celtic thing and make millions...I don’t know if they do or not.” (Northern Irish maker refusing to exploit Celtic connection)*

Aesthetics, Design and Marketing of Craft

The belief that the craft is produced for its own sake, without any market influence, is held by a number of makers. They tend to view themselves more as artists or designers rather than craftspeople. This type of maker does not feel comfortable with the word 'product' and tends, instead, to believe in making objects which he/she has feelings for. By following their own creative instincts and by not responding to market demand they have confidence that they will not lose touch with the product through their refusal to compromise their aesthetic position:

*"I wouldn't really call it a product because people usually associate that with a function. It would be one-off pieces, one-off works. I try not to use the word."*  
(Scottish maker now based in Dublin).

The adoption of an artistic approach to making is connected to the value placed on the work by the maker who has not followed consumer demand:

*"If your work is of any value at all, it is unlikely to be driven by the market."*  
(English maker).

There are uncertainties associated with this approach, with many prepared to take risks with the product, while others combine both product and market risks. If the aesthetic competencies of the maker are strong enough, then it may be possible to dismiss market based consumer demand and produce what the maker wants through the entrepreneurial creation of demand.

#### Aesthetic Craft Attributes

Many makers believe that they can offer a unique product and therefore promote their work as an individualised object. This also depends on the nature of the object and the

degree of originality of the design. Also, operating a small arts and crafts business with low production rates can be a distinct advantage over larger organisations where large size often equates with lower aesthetic quality through use of mass production techniques. The Celtic dimension can assist in the marketing of the object. Even non Celtic makers, either by accident, or through deliberate courses of action, utilise the mistaken belief by some consumers that their work is Celtic in order to sell the product. Conversely, some Irish makers have incorporated a more subtle Celtic element into the design by:

*“get(ing) the Irish idea across without the leprechauns, without all the tourism, without the Walt Disney”.*

Other makers incorporate a more personal creative approach, shaped by factors such as exposure to other design and aesthetic influences when travelling overseas. They achieve success by focusing on softer, qualitative dimensions such as networking, word of mouth marketing, building and sustaining relationships and opportunity recognition, in combination with the importance of the reputation of the maker:

*“...And it’s really just building up the value of your name. Sometimes it’s not just a piece of work they buy, it’s because it’s by so and so.”* (Republic of Ireland maker).

Reputation refers both to creative design ability and to the success achieved through entrepreneurial marketing efforts. These factors will tend to result in a degree of success for the maker and heightened aesthetic appreciation by the buyer. There may also be a common ‘language’ between makers from different countries, suggesting an aesthetically based cross-cultural creative link. This would mean that creative behaviour is not learned but is part of a set of inherent aesthetic characteristics found in all makers.

The arts and crafts maker creates a particular aura associated with the object which is manifested in its design, feel and image (Bjorkman 2002). It may also reflect the history and cultural influences behind it, and whether or not it is authentic. A maker, for example, may promote the product as Celtic in that it incorporates an element of Celtic design and exudes a Celtic aura, but the maker may or may not come from a Celtic background. The makers of arts and crafts objects discussed here produce work which can be termed Celtic in that they are located in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and certain regions of England. Those working as a Celtic maker can be viewed as part of the wider Celtic cultural arena where producers intuitively sense how to overcome a range of internal and external constraints to growth, while also turning these barriers into opportunities. They are often exposed to risk due to their geographical isolation and the need to create more widespread demand for the product due to limitations in local market growth. There is also something specific about the mindset of the maker which relates to the lack of fear of networking and the ability to engage in relationship building. Some makers deliberately incorporate Celtic design into their work, relying on the symbolism and associated meaning to sell the product to culturally close markets. There may be a degree of exploitation among the more entrepreneurially inclined producers who freely admit that shamrock imagery sells well in the USA and that they have no qualms about compromising their artistic ideals. Others refuse to capitalise on this phenomenon, preferring instead to concentrate on design influences experienced while travelling, or via freer flowing subconscious-level creative inputs.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE:**

This paper has interrogated the arts, marketing, entrepreneurship and aesthetics literatures in order to help construct an alternative understanding of how the arts and craft firm carries out its marketing activities. In order to help construct this understanding, the dual nature of the artist and manager in charge of the enterprise was evaluated. The paper also considered the identity of the maker along a continuum, with the artist and entrepreneur at the two extremes. Each type of arts and crafts maker as owner/manager exhibits a specific aesthetic style of marketing management. Different aesthetic forms of decision making have been identified, grounded in part by philosophical differences with respect to creating and following customer demand. Some makers create under the conditions of beauty or other aesthetic ideal while others create under conditions of market forces and demand. These aesthetic differences also relate to how we see, act and think in a more general sense. Each type of arts and crafts maker expresses contrasting emotions when making and marketing their products and these differences are also apparent in terms of the degree of engagement with the customer. The entrepreneurial maker, for example, will be much more engaged with the customer than those following an idealistic stance.

It is also clear that there are variations being expressed in the value of embracing market orientation within this particular sector, with many makers actively pursuing an alternative aesthetic response which is more fitting to their own individual needs and lifestyle. This has resulted in differences emerging in how makers judge opportunities for

their business; in other words several particular aesthetic responses to opportunity recognition have been identified in the sector. These range from hard, tactical decision making to softer artistic thinking. The range of aesthetic responses stretch from a specific form of prelinguistic communication as exhibited in the particular arts and crafts object through to sensing and feeling forms of marketing management. In addition, it seems appropriate that the aesthetic forms exhibited by the makers should be seen as particular types of experience which are manifested as both a competency and as tacit sensory knowledge. The different states of emotion located within each maker typology stimulates alternative forms of creativity and influences the aesthetic responses of the maker. The personal values of the maker, together with social norms, also influence the process of artistic creation

Aesthetic producers in general need to be understood using alternatives to the usual normative marketing paradigm, if we are to make sense of how marketing is carried out in the wider creative industries and the SME community in general. Understanding the position of craft and its inherent aesthetic constructs within the wider creative industries can lead to heightened realisation of the potential contribution to wealth creation in both monetary and social terms (Howkins 2001; Florida 2002; Cox 2005). The creative industries have been viewed as a strategic asset within today's post-industrial economy which helps shape competitive advantage. This creativity is largely driven by creative individuals who are able to exploit their intellectual and business talents. Aesthetics consists of cognitive, intuitive and emotional dimensions and so creative people are



perhaps best placed to experience and understand its impact. By extension, arts and crafts makers are also best placed in terms of how their products convey feelings. The alternative aesthetic of entrepreneurial marketing has also been explored in order to appreciate how these businesses develop over time. So, understanding the motivations of the owner/manager and competencies such as creativity, networking, word of mouth marketing, relationship building and opportunity recognition are central to understanding this process. A specific example of the Celtic brand was evaluated as an image of aesthetic expression. The associated aesthetic aura helps to tangibilise product values through design philosophy, cultural image and embeddedness issues. Future research might examine how the issues discussed in this paper contribute in a wider sense to how thinking artistically about marketing managers might open up our marketing discourses by drawing on much wider literatures in order to inform debate. It should also encourage small business researchers to think more critically about alternative ways of understanding contemporary smaller firm behaviour.

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