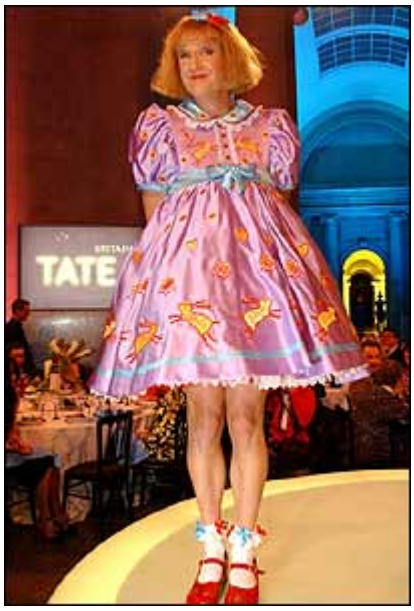
CRAFT IS COOL … AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL



Guardian UK – Observer article on craft as art

Grayson Perry – A Tradition of Bitterness, 2002

“What folk culture goes on in these Barratt homes: deceit, divorce and suicide in Merrie England …”

These days craft is cool. After all it was a potter, Grayson Perry, who won the Turner Prize in December. It is also rocketing in value. Perry’s pots go for over £25,000 each, while tableware by Carol McNicholl and Edmund de Waal, arguably the biggest stars in the world of studio ceramics, fetch four-figure sums.

Craft is the new collectable. It is a rebellion against

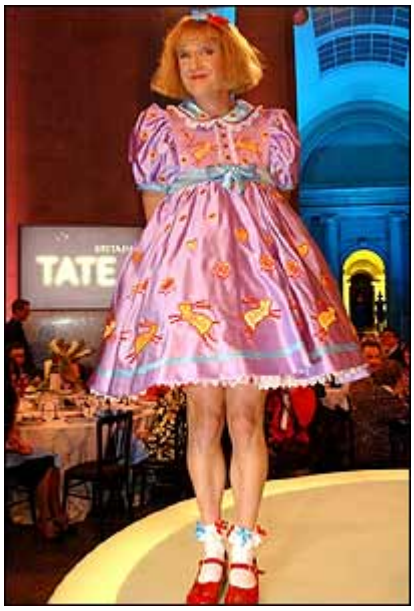
the high street, where everything looks the same. If you walk into London galleries such as Flow in Notting Hill or Contemporary Applied Arts on Charlotte Street, you'll see actors, film directors and advertising gurus buying one-off furniture, lighting and textiles. Ditto celebrity stylists. After all, if you're dressing an actress for a premiere, the way to ensure no one wears the same jewellery is to buy a one-off piece. It also marks individuality of character (did anyone else notice Emma Thompson wearing earrings by jeweller Jane Adam throughout Love, Actually?).

Craft – the new medium of *aura* – the new genuine artifact.

Liz Hoggard talks the usual about the skill and comfortable easiness of craft, its handmade intimacy. But, as she finds people saying, there is now a twenty year old body of 'craftwork' coming from those who think like artists.

According to Mark Prest, head of crafts at the City Gallery, Leicester, 'It's very important that Grayson Perry won the Turner because he's introduced an accessible object – a pot – to explore issues through. His work is so popular because people find it an easy medium to read.' He adds: 'We live in fairly minimalist interiors. Less is more. So the few objects that you have make a personal statement. Pots are back and so are pattern and decoration.'

So is the term ‘craft’ helpful? ‘The word “craftsperson” does have a demeaning sound to it,’ says Prest. ‘I usually use the term “artist”. If you look at the ceramics of Grayson Perry and Richard Slee, or Freddie Robins, who makes mutant knitwear, they are using processes to explore current issues such as material culture and socio-economics. Their work has a subversive, darker side.’



The old élitist boundaries are coming down. Is Thomas Heatherwick who designed a blue, glass ‘carpet’ for a public square in Newcastle an artist, craftsperson, architect or designer? Does it even matter? Visual artists have been appropriating craft skills for years. Tracey Emin makes embroidered banners while Michael Raedecker creates delicately beautiful landscapes on

canvas using paint and embroidery.

This is all supposed to be in contrast to left-brain conceptual art – conceptualism out and the skill of the lacemaker in.

Maybe so. But what I see in common is a growing fascination with the archaeology of the social fabric – Tracy Emin's bed, Marc Quinn's head modelled in his own blood, Damien Hirst's pickled carcasses, and yes Grayson Perry's pots – what it is to hold a pot, the corporeality of self, its investment in everyday mundane materiality, on show in a gallery space that confirms its aura.

