



significant motivation behind the rise of 'art for the masses'. Picasso's contribution to the Modern Master Prints range produced by Fuller Fabrics in America was predicated on the price of the fabrics, which were roller-printed and therefore inexpensive. Sadly, other price points can't be deduced: the labels made no distinction between the hand- and machine-screened (and cheaper) textiles.

Upstairs, the section on the ICA's seminal 1953 exhibition *Painting into Textiles* was cruelly cramped. Nevertheless, there was a generous run of more Picassos and a lively selection of illustrator-designed textiles, including those by Andy Warhol and Saul Steinberg. Zandra Rhodes rightly has a good showing, representing as she does the moment when, in the mid-60s, everything changed. Artist-designed textiles continued to be produced, but many factors – the greater confidence of consumers, the rise of 'art to wear', the demise of traditional easel painting and rise of installation art – meant the battle to integrate art into everyday lives (and textiles into art) had been won. See the adjacent companion display on Sarah Campbell's paintings and finished products if in any doubt. *Mary Schoeser is an independent curator, archivist and writer*

Britton's trip through the history of craft

Seeing Things: Collected Writing on Art, Craft and Design

By Alison Britton, published by Occasional Papers, £20

Reviewed by Tanya Harrod

Alison Britton is a potter of distinction who also writes, and her perceptions are informed by her creativity. In her appropriately titled *Seeing Things* she offers a history of the studio crafts over the last three decades that manages to be both personal and scholarly.

It is welcome because Britton is documenting an area in danger of neglect. We can no longer talk confidently of a 'craft world' as we could from the 1920s until the 90s. The descriptor 'craftsman' or 'craftsperson' or 'maker' is not one with which young art students currently identify – although hands-on making activities have never

been more fashionable. *Seeing Things* is an important work of recuperation in a world of truncated attention spans and short memories.

Britton has selected the best of her catalogue essays, exhibition pamphlets, reviews of exhibitions and of books, together with some pithy book prefaces and snippets of correspondence and interviews. The first piece appeared back in 1982; the last was written in 2012. The assembled writings are, Britton points out, 'both immediate and distant; the coal-face and the bird's eye view'. Which is one way of saying that *Seeing Things* is much more than a series of reprints arranged under three decades. Each of the 50 chosen pieces of writing is given a brief positioning introduction. Each decade concludes with new writing in the form of a reflective, illuminating postscript.

The collection opens with one of Britton's most incisive essays, her contribution to the catalogue of the remarkable Crafts Council show *The Maker's Eye* of 1982. Fourteen distinguished craftsmen and women of all ages – Enid Marx and Michael Cardew were both in their eighties, Connie Stevenson just 27 – were invited to curate a selection of objects which offered a personal vision of the field. Britton's contribution to the catalogue was a compressed *tour de force* that summed up the concerns of her generation – then mostly in their early thirties.

She advanced a craft project that created objects with 'a double presence', being both prose and poetry, at once functional and commentating on function, informed by early 20th century art and by innovative literature, delivering 'two-faced objects' which were 'giving more than was demanded of them'. Her essay *Sèvres with Krazy Kat* follows. Written in 1983, it reflects on her contemporaries and their sources of inspiration. It is an important postmodern document, showing how craft as much as architecture led the way in a rejection of the certainties of modernism.

These two essays are complemented by monographic studies that take the reader to the heart of the confident world of 80s making. They were mostly written to accompany exhibitions at the British Crafts Centre, in 1987 strategically renamed Contemporary Applied Arts. Poetic evaluations of figures as diverse as Stephanie Bergman, a 'painter with a sewing machine', the furniture-designer Floris van den Broecke, the metalsmith Michael Rowe and the worker in wood Jim Partridge bring the reader face to face with the heft and feel of some

Above: from a series of four screen-printed Rayon head-squares, Marcel Vertès for Wesley Simpson Custom Fabrics Inc., c. 1944
Opposite page top: silk square, Sonia Delaunay, produced in a limited edition by Liberty of London, 1969
Opposite page bottom: hand block-printed cotton, c. 1933

remarkable 'things', and an intimacy with the conceptual field of their makers.

During the 90s, covered in the second section of *Seeing Things*, anxieties surface in several essays – 'crafts are an extra', the word 'smacks of frumpiness and a retreat from the modern world' and is regarded as 'middle class and middle ground'. The apologies are not necessary. It is as if Britton feels burdened with the whole heterogeneous history of studio craft from the 20s onwards, with the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century hovering in the background as a further ideological reproach. Her deep knowledge of craft's trajectory suggests the burdens as well as the pleasures of historical understanding.

She breaks free with her introduction to the marvellous show *The Raw and the Cooked* that she curated with Martina Margetts in 1993, and with the thoughtful speech made in 1997 as a tribute to the critic Peter Dormer, who had died the previous year. Other highlights include insights into the work of the textile artist Rushton Aust, the light sculptor Thomas Eisl, the collagist Tony Hayward, the wood-turner Maria van Kesteren and the potters Angus Suttie, Lawson Oyekan and Bodil Manz. Britton writes with confident suavity about them all, carrying the ancient literary form of *ekphrasis* forward into present times. *Seeing Things* is illustrated, beautifully, but Britton's visualisation of objects in words reveals more than any photographic image.

Seeing Things draws to a close in the 2000s, and once again Britton offers perceptive accounts of fellow makers, mainly ceramists, in essays on Phil Eglin, Andrew Lord, Nao Matsunaga, Lucie Rie, Takeshi Yasuda and Betty Woodman. In her postscript to the first 12 years of the new century she notes the 'expanded field' of craft and observes that this was not an area about which she was often asked to write. And it is true that there is nothing about the impact of digital technologies, nor very much on the turn to craft in the design and art world. In terms of fashionable theory, Britton's interests lie with the fast-expanding literature on the everyday. Her elegiac final section takes us into Britton's own quotidian life, in effect charting a struggle between theory and practice.

In one essay she describes selecting 100 objects from her home to show alongside new work for the 2012 exhibition *Life and Still Life*, 'letting the everyday shape thought'. In another essay for the 2011 Norwegian show *Ting Tang Trash: Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics* she reflects first on the autobiographical nature of the bricolage activities of two



Below: *Derwent - Gorsey Bank*, Neil Woodall

of her contemporaries, Carol McNicoll and Richard Slee, and ends by thinking of her own everyday, walking the dog, picking up shards of blue and white china in the woods, and of her collection of factory-made crockery bought in junk shops – plates and tea cups chosen because they were left semi-decorated, rejects of the industrial process.

The final part of *Seeing Things*, in effect, metaphorically charts the fragmentation of the craft world, the entity that we encountered at the start of the book. The conclusion of her Norwegian essay offers an elegant oblique summary of the impact of these shifts on her own practice:

'I find no way to *make* with my pile of cobalt-printed shards, though perhaps some echoes of the "unfinished" begin to appear in my own work. I don't want to make or reuse tableware, but am drawn into its realm of thought, its human connection, its ordinariness, its verticality and horizontality, its offer of containment, for the dry, the wet or just air.' (*For your own copy of 'Seeing Things' at a discount price, see Readers Page on p.94*) *Tanya Harrod is a design historian*



Plenty of print can't mask a lack of process

Printing Sheffield

Millennium Gallery, Museums Sheffield, S1
25 January – 15 June 2014

Reviewed by Helen Cresswell

Entering the Craft & Design space at Museums Sheffield, one immediately spies a flock of birds wheeling around the back walls; Samantha Groom's blue linocuts feel fresh from the printing press, soaring overhead the equally energetic exhibits. The recent works of over 30 talented artists are assembled here, showcasing an array of techniques in a mix of media. The exhibition blurb promises a dynamic and diverse display of the contemporary printing scene happening now in Sheffield, and the work on show certainly feels 'alive and kicking'.

We are told the city has been nurturing an artisanal regeneration; this active community of printmakers is the result of various supportive structures, namely studios and workshops, which have equipped artists old and new with the space and tools needed to practise their talents. Spaces like this one are also providing fresh prospects for displaying and selling their efforts. Sheffield has clearly inspired its residents; works reflect upon their local roots and their environments, both man-made and natural. Artists' work is arranged sympathetically by mood and colour, and subjects are roughly grouped together.

It feels as though there's something here for everyone, all tastes catered to, and perhaps that is deliberate – because the main aim of this show is to persuade the visitor to purchase this work, thereby supporting and investing in this local industry. The display of these images follows the traditional art gallery format, its glazed frames and plinths keeping the work clean, polished and ready packaged. This is a shame, especially when so many of the pieces possess pleasingly tactile properties, which are always harder to appreciate behind glass. A prime example would be the concertina'd books of Pat Hodson, which beg to be unfolded, their layers examined.

The work evidently demonstrates the quality of this exciting art scene, but I would have liked to have felt its energy