



exactly does David Clarke subvert traditional metal-smithing? Enjoyable as it is, this process of asking every exhibit the exact same question can lead to glitches. For example, the Campana Brothers' Favela chair, built up from many smaller pieces of wood, is described as subversive because it is inspired by the ad hoc architecture of Brazilian shanty towns. But isn't this subversion negated, even rendered grotesque, by the fact that the piece is made by luxury Italian design company edra? Perhaps including edra's limited edition carved marble Favela chair could more honestly have exposed the complex manipulations and commercialisation that the Campanas' original moment of subversion has been subjected to.

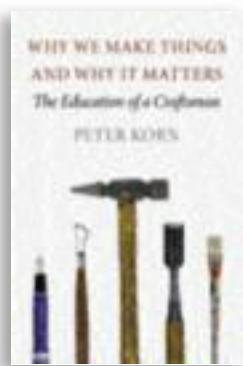
Other problem moments include a recent *haute couture* 'skirt' for men, intended to reflect a continuing taboo in the gendering of clothing. Which might work if it didn't look quite so much like a black kilt, a type of male attire that could not be more socially acceptable.

Overall, the exhibition preaches to the converted on a political level. Gender politics, prevailing concepts of beauty, globalisation and the like are well trodden and comfortable subjects for an art gallery audience. I would have liked some sense of shock to, or confrontation with, my own beliefs and prejudices: an object that genuinely works against me, rather than (for example) a 19th century table made from an elephant's foot. This popular design of that age will very likely give a modern viewer the horrors, but of course when it was made, the table merely affirmed then-current ideas of colonialism and man's dominion of nature. This went far beyond the intention of its maker, when and how does the table become subversive?

With a remit so broad and accepting, and such a long list of obvious possible exhibits, there are oddly many repetitions here: Vivienne Westwood, Barnaby Barford, Reiko Kaneko,

Terry de Havilland, the list goes on.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming feeling is one of inclusion. It is a delight to see so many things made by so many accomplished makers and designers in one space. The process of interrogation that every visitor goes through is a productive one, sharpening one's own position in response to each piece. Subversion may be a rarer beast than this exhibition would like to admit, but while you may not agree that everything here deserves to be in *Subversive Design*, it is a valuable opportunity to look and think. *Teleri Lloyd-Jones is assistant editor of Crafts magazine*



The romance and meaning of a life in craft

Why We Make Things and Why it Matters: The Education of a Craftsman by Peter Korn. Published by David R. Godine, Boston, \$24.95 hb

Reviewed by Chris Eckersley

Peter Korn's previous books have been instructional guides aimed at aspiring woodworkers, but in his latest, he looks inward, mixing autobiography with musings on the meaning of life. He describes how he moved from traditional American Ivy League beginnings to becoming founder and director of the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Maine, USA. On the way he became an expert in bespoke furniture-making. He's a survivor: having beaten Hodgkin's Disease twice, while struggling to make a financial success of his furniture workshop. He's now turned the school he created into one of the leading institutions of its type in America.

The book's title is seductive in its apparent scope, and perhaps Korn sets himself up for a fall because of this. His ideology seems simple: 'we practice contemporary craft,' he claims, 'as a process of self-transformation.'

What comes across very strongly is that Korn is a teacher who is himself self-taught. Describing his first steps as a furniture-maker in 1974 he writes: 'I was on my own, feeling my way in the dark.' Perhaps surprisingly, he didn't seem to see himself as a latter-day Roycroft, and nor is there any claim that he is continuing in the tradition of the American Craftsman Movement.

For Korn, making was a blank canvas, and he describes his discovery, in loving detail, of all the myriad decisions necessary to craft even a simple piece. Thus was the former history graduate born again, into the world of making.

The notion of craft the book proposes is essentially romantic: making-as-an-escape, making as route to the good life and well being. In a chapter on 'Heart, Head and Hand' (quoting Bernard Leach, of course), Korn describes what psychologists refer to as 'flow', meaning the complete and joyous immersion in an activity. There's nothing wrong in this, it's one of the pleasures of a creative life, but possibly it's only half the picture – as there is no real consideration here of the concept of the use value of the made object, let alone of its exchange value. 'Contemporary craft, being economically marginal, is created primarily to address the spiritual needs of its maker,' he writes (his italics). 'As a result, it often lacks utility.'

This leads on to the subject of design, which is presented rather one-dimensionally. Early on he writes: 'My goal was to become a proficient craftsman; design was a secondary consideration.' Later he meets a sculptor who advises him to consider negative space (good advice). But then a section on 'Design and Decision Making' effectively confuses design with aesthetics. To me this suggests a sense in which Korn has never fully understood design: where is David Pye's 'requirement of use', for instance, or Norman Potter's 'design is a socially negotiated discipline'? Design for Korn is about 'finding his voice', and he seems to assume that good design can be achieved through refined workmanship rather than through theory.

By the end of the book Korn has established his woodwork school in Maine, and made a success of it. In fact the running of the school has become a full-time job. It means that Peter Korn now helps others to achieve self-fulfilment-through-making – while he does the admin. Is there a contradiction in this? Possibly, and there certainly seems to be an own goal on the penultimate page, where he says: 'Let me be clear: people who are creatively engaged are not necessarily happier, more fully realised human beings than the rest of us.' So if making by hand is *not* after all the path to what used to be called 'getting your head together', why *do* we do it?

The title of this book is possibly overambitious and Korn's response only addresses part of the story. Making *does* matter, but in all sorts of ways, and this is one man's view of it. *Chris Eckersley is an artist and designer, and co-founder of the Bodging Milano project*