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### **In conversation with Deirdre Figueiredo MBE, Director of Craftspace**

*Deirdre Figueiredo MBE is Director of Craftspace, an organisation in Birmingham, UK which supports contemporary craft. For over 30 years Craftspace has been working with communities and artists to challenge and push boundaries in craft, and Deirdre has been at the forefront for most of that time. In this conversation with special issue editor Dr Karen Patel, Deirdre reflects on her career in the craft sector and her own intersectional experience, and discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement on contemporary craft. This interview took place in April 2021 on Zoom.*

**Karen:** Thanks so much for agreeing to have this conversation, Deirdre. First, could you tell me about how you started off as a craft professional, and what it was like for you at the beginning of your career in the sector?

**Deirdre:** I started my career in the broader visual arts, working as a trainee for the Arts Council<sup>i</sup>, working in exhibitions, organising and so on, so that was my cultural sector grounding. The traineeship I did with the Arts Council was a positive action scheme to try and diversify the sector at the time, so I took advantage of that. From the outset of my career, diversifying the sector was something I was thinking about, and I was really thinking about Black art in that context in the late 1980s, when I was training.

Then when I joined Craftspace, it was really because I noticed that as an organisation based in Birmingham, they were already thinking about the context of place, making in place, looking on their doorstep for acts of making and cultural expression that were created or experienced here in Birmingham or in West Midlands. But things were being created and made in the community but not finding their way to the gallery. That was partly why I applied for the role, because I knew that I could bring my own lived experience of wanting to be heard and seen and to have my views represented in the position that I would assume at Craftspace, which was the role of director. And because of my lived experience I was interested in what might not be visible, what the gaps were in cultural production. And I could ask that, from my intersectional perspective as a queer, partially deaf, East African/Asian Goan woman, because I migrated from the UK to East Africa. I felt to have all these experiences, there might be people in the community or other artists who might have similar experiences which could be explored.

**Karen:** Can you talk about some of the work or projects that you did in those first few years at Craftspace, and what you wanted to achieve with this work?

**Deirdre:** I felt very strongly from the beginning that craft has an active civic role, especially compared to most of the arts sector. Specifically in my role at Craftspace, the role of the art form was not only about individual creative expression and identity. It was also about the artists and makers, and people in my position, who have a civic role. I believed that we should insert arts organisations and craft development organisations into the civic life of where that organisation is based, and really contribute in that way, to me that was really important. Also, to place value on people's creative and cultural expression, and their identity. If you look around globally, at the nations that are confident about their identity, are the ones that probably do best at certain things. If this nation is to be confident about its identity and go out globally, feeling that we know who we are and we are confident, and inclusive in that way, I think we will naturally do better. I think that we as arts and creative

organisations have a role in promoting cohesion, and to try to change perceptions where we feel those perceptions need changing. With all that in mind, one of the first exhibitions that I proposed to curate when I assumed directorship of Craftspace was called 'A Sense of Occasion'. We were coming up to the Millennium, and I felt that it in the mainstream, things that people could buy widely weren't available to people who have more hidden or marginalised lives, such as greetings cards and so on. Some occasions that were important to us, those who were living a more intersectional life or maybe a more hidden in life in some ways, you couldn't buy things in the mainstream, to celebrate the occasions we might celebrate, like coming out. You know if you think this was at the turn of the century, in 1999, 2000. I thought we're going into a new century, surely makers have a role perhaps in producing some of these things to recognise the sorts of occasions. In those days you couldn't find a card from WHSmith<sup>ii</sup>, for a Muslim family celebrating Eid. You couldn't buy a coming out card, you couldn't buy a card for a gay couple who wanted to celebrate an anniversary of being together. Everything was either very gendered - it still is probably – or very binary. Things weren't celebrated that were more diverse.

In the exhibition we tried to create an environment that showcased some imagined ways of celebrating more contemporary occasions, for those of us who were more marginalised. For example, we had some handmade costumes from Pride. We had ceramicist Lubna Chowdhary make a really beautiful sculptural piece to break fasting during Ramadan, so it had little niches in it and you could put your dates and nuts in there, and it was something to enable a ritual for Ramadan and to celebrate Eid. There wasn't anything like that available in the marketplace if you wanted to buy it.

One of the star objects was Grayson Perry's coming out dress. So he made this dress to mark the coming out of his alter ego Claire. Because up until then, he wasn't really out beyond his family and very immediate friends. To make the dress he collaborated with an embroidery company in Nottingham, and then he wore it, and he created this coming out ceremony and we filmed it and we added to the exhibition. it was a real moment for this

artist, celebrating his own coming out party. I think that kind of sums up the approach really, and Grayson Perry's dress was collected into a permanent collection at Nottingham's Castle Museum where it still is, and it forms a key part of the display. All those objects have an authenticity about them that's really powerful, and that can carry a visible powerful story to the general public, which I think is really important.

**Karen:** You mentioned there about the civic role of craft and visual art, in terms of place and identity. Could you say a bit more about Craftspace and its role within Birmingham UK, and Birmingham's own identity as a city?

**Deirdre:** Birmingham is a very culturally diverse city, both in terms of race, and it's also Europe's youngest city. It's also always been a city that people have migrated to because they are welcomed and embraced, particularly people who were outside of the mainstream. For example the Quakers were able to come here because they couldn't set up their places of worship in other parts of the UK, so they came to Birmingham and they were welcomed. Similarly, people who fell outside of the craft guilds, who didn't want to be constrained by the guilds, came and set up trade here, that's why it's called 'city of a thousand trades'. I suppose that free flow of people coming to find new entrepreneurial ways of working, I think it's characterised the city. At Craftspace I think we try to work in that spirit really, of embracing and creating an environment where change can happen, where you have the ingredients there for people to create the environment in which they can express themselves, without judgement. I suppose we try to create a platform for people to express themselves at their own pace, from their own point of view.

We aren't too precious about the pathways either, we work across a range of pathways, so yes we do work with professional makers and people who have achieved a certain level of professionalism in their practice as an artist or maker, or somebody who is making to sell. Those are the people who have been through a period of research and development and developing their practice. They are dedicated to that and have reached a certain level of

professionalism, and that is their career choice. Then we also recognise that people have different pathways to get to that point. And not everybody wants to get to that point. So we deliberately merge our engagement programmes and artistic programmes so that people can have a starting point, and they're starting from what might be a workshop at a community centre, where they want to spend some time exploring their creativity. Their end goal is not the same as a professional maker. If somebody does want to progress from one pathway to another, then we do a range of activities to support that too.

I'm also interested in the idea of craft as a community asset. We're very interested in the social good that craft can do, and craft which is embedded in a place and a community, and it might be that the way craft is experienced by that community is not necessarily a consumer or capitalist driven thing. It's about joining together to take part in something and to use craft for health and wellbeing, I suppose, and you might sell a little bit along the way as well, but that might not be your main goal. For example, Shelanu is a women's craft collective that we support with four migrant refugee women in Birmingham. When we began that project, we were working with an organisation called the Community Integration Partnership, which is supporting refugee women into further skills development and learning, and integration and cohesion. We offered a creative outlet into that, and we had been taking part in year-long projects. When we came to the end of that, I thought well, some women have worked with us for a full year, and I could see that they have great potential and were very creative. And they can't just be continually recipients of art activity, although it was benefiting them, they wouldn't be able to progress.

We thought, what if we tried to activate them as creative producers in their own right, but also on their own terms? And so we developed an idea of a craft social enterprise model, because a lot of women weren't allowed to work with the migrant status they have, but they could find self-worth. They could still value their time spent making jewellery which is what we focused on in the end, it still has a monetary value so they could make a piece of jewellery and sell it on behalf of the collective for £70. And that would all go back into the

collective to keep it running. The social purpose of the enterprise was the wellbeing of the women, the coming together of a group, and that mutual peer support they can give each other.

There are so many positive outcomes and benefits for the community that go beyond just selling something. I think that's the approach, having craft as a community asset, where you use the skills within people and their own lived experience as the asset. And actually, as a society we can go far if we use that asset in a positive and productive way. And that means so much for a healthy city.

**Karen:** I'm glad you mentioned Shelanu and those alternative pathways to craft which are so important, especially when we're thinking and talking about how we can make craft more diverse and welcoming and inclusive for all. I wondered, what was it like for you as your career at Craftspace progressed? And specifically your own intersectional experience as you mentioned earlier?

**Deirdre:** On the one hand, there are countless moments at sector meetings and networking meetings or conferences, where I was the only person of colour in the whole room, and that was so noticeable. And in leadership meetings or round tables, again I would be the only person of colour in the room. And I think at times I felt a bit daunted, because then you don't feel like you have any peers or allies. In particular, people you can look to and share experiences. It's a bit daunting then to stand up and be the person in the room chatting about something or asking for something. So that's challenging, and it can feel a bit difficult to try and progress conversations you might have.

On the other hand in my own work I retreated back to Birmingham, in the work at Craftspace, going out and about and seeing all this fantastic craft and a diversity of craft expression at the grassroots and community level and people who were practicing, I would say more in these other realms. So, it was strange because it was almost like there were two

worlds, and those two worlds never met. In one world, it's a very diverse range of cultural expressions going on, it's really buoyant and people don't worry too much about definitions, they just get on with whatever they're doing and enjoy it. And then another world that doesn't change very much, and it isn't very diverse. So it's a bit strange looking back on it.

**Karen:** It's interesting you mentioned those two different worlds and how they rarely collide, and I suppose the question is how much has it really changed? The Crafts Council's<sup>iii</sup> most recent report, the *Market for Craft* report (Crafts Council, 2020), suggests that in 15 years there has been no change in the representation of professional makers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of professional makers from ethnically diverse backgrounds has actually remained static at 4-6% in all that time. Why do you think this is?

**Deirdre:** Craft is a small sector in one sense, certainly the subsidised, funded part of the sector is tiny. And I think you'd be right in saying that it's largely dominated by white people. But it's very small. Then there's another part of the sector that is commercial and has its own imperatives, there's those people that run commercial galleries and commercial craft fairs, and the commercial side of craft is quite big. There's no stick or carrot for them, they are their own business people, they have their own imperatives, and if they don't feel that diversity is something that they value - if they're not bothered about where their revenue streams are coming from, then it's not a priority for them.

I was absolutely astounded when we used to go to the quilt show at the Birmingham NEC<sup>iv</sup> in the nineties. I was walking around that with my colleagues, this show is just outside the city of Birmingham, and I would walk around and I couldn't see a single Asian face. The audience was totally white and we thought, how bizarre, because we had just come from doing a big South Asian textile project in Birmingham. We had over 20 women working with us, and we knew for a fact that textiles are really popular in that demographic. And yet, here we were at a commercial quilt art fair, and just no diverse audience at all. It was really busy, so in that instance it's either to do with, the language or the marketing, just a disconnect

between how you connect with people who would actually be interested in what there is on display. But then again, a lot of the quilt groups were very white, so that is what they will display. It's really strange.

I think this when I go around degree shows. You see consistently that somewhere like the Birmingham City University textile course, which is not really an artistic course, it's an industry course. So you see on that industry led course that it's very diverse, quite a lot of South Asian students, and there are usually a couple of Black students on those courses, and they do really well at getting people jobs in industry. I know that a diverse range of people are going into industry from that course, for example. So I think where there are industry courses, people can make a good living in the industry, which is sort of on the edge of the fashion industry. So they're not working as an individual craft artist or designer maker.

There are many factors at play here, because it's not simply an issue of race. I think there are socio-economic factors too. Because to make it as an individual design maker, whatever race you are, it's a challenge. Generally you are lucky if you have a partner who's working, or a family that can support you whilst you earn not very much to start with, then you could keep practising, but that's a real challenge.

If you're ethnically diverse, where you're facing different sorts of prejudices, on top of what is quite a difficult profession to make a success of, you're doubly hampered. Then also if you're socio-economically working class, or you come from an area that's deprived, or coming from a family that hasn't supported that kind of entry into a more creative role, I think those things are all factors. If you have the sort of family that takes a view on what sort of profession you should go into, then you know if they have a particular view around what kind of salary you can be expecting to earn, what kind of status you have in society, and so on. All of those things are bound up in why perhaps we don't have a certain range of diverse people in the sector. Would you agree?

**Karen:** Yes, what you've just said described is very similar to what has been found in other research on the wider creative industries, a lot of which is in this journal. Also, I think at the



end there you raised an important point about the perception of craft as a potential career, and how it seems like, you're not going to learn a lot of money, you're not going to have a stable profession, as it were, so as you say it's quite a combination of different factors at play here.

**Deirdre:** I mean the other factor is that as you grow up, and you're thinking about your career and you go about looking into it, if you don't see people like you, if you don't have role models, what is there to aspire to? And how are you going to be inspired? I was fortunate that my dad's an architect and my mother was an artist, so I was already immersed in the arts and culture world, and also through my Arts Council traineeship being located specifically as a positive action. With it being framed in that way, it meant I was much more exposed to Black art and role models. I trained under Nima Poovaya Smith, who was one of the first South Asian curators in the museum world back in the 1980s, and she was really pioneering, so I trained under a fantastic role model. Then just as I was starting my job as a cultural diversity officer in Leicester, this was before Craftspace, I was liaising with Shireen Akbar and she was a tour de force of a woman working at the V&A Museum in London<sup>y</sup>. She was one of the first South Asian people to have quite a senior role in the education department at the V&A, and she took no prisoners, she really changed the culture there. She started bringing South Asian women into the museum in flocks, and we created some really interesting projects together.

Role models and seeing people like you is important. As a gay woman, I was hiding my sexuality as I grew up and I wasn't out for many years, so I was living a hidden double life, for a lot of my life. It was really important to see people like you on TV, in books, you have to see yourself represented. Otherwise, there's just no encouragement or motivation.

**Karen:** I agree, representation is so important too. In the past year we've obviously had the COVID-19 pandemic which we'll come back to shortly, but first I wanted to talk about the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, and the conversations that were had in 2020 and that have continued since, and the attempts to increase that representation and diversity. What

have you made of the craft sector's response to Black Lives Matter and issues of racism in the past year? Do you think anything has changed? Do you think things will change?

**Deirdre:** I think what I perceive and what I feel, now that we're in 2021 looking back on 2020, is that it took a major rupture to jolt people into taking a step back, and realise a few truths. And some of those truths were just so visible for everyone to see in a very visceral way that you didn't have to write about because they were just so obvious. George Floyd's murder was so visceral, so evidenced and there for everybody to see. You couldn't walk away from that, seeing that video and then thinking anything different, it was such a stark rupture. Then it gave people permission to be outspoken, and for collective truth telling. So if like me you've spent 20 years being the only person of colour in meetings of leaders or whatever, you felt a bit more courage to speak up and to feel like you were in a collective moment of reckoning. And also the labour that goes into being there, the emotional labour that goes into having to represent and be the face of something, those kinds of pressures became talked about more and understood.

Then similarly the inequalities shown up by COVID-19, the people who've been affected by it most who were in poorer communities. Also, where ethnic minority workers were on the frontline largely in the NHS, or cleaners or the bus drivers - and people were dying. And you could see the disparity in housing and all of these things, it was the inequalities that were really exposed. Those inequalities have always been there, but nobody really talked about them or tried to do anything about them. So I think all of those things coming together in 2020 made such a big rupture in people's lives, and I think as a result you can see some shift and some real realisations about what it is like to be in someone else's shoes.

There still needs to be some action that goes beyond talking, but I have seen now that Crafts Magazine for example, is completely different to how it was two years ago. I've noticed in all of the mainstream press in our sector there is much more diversity, and I'm welcoming those stories and seeing diversity in the pictures and the words. I think some organisations are still struggling to come to terms with what their actions should be. I think it is changing now, but it

took a major rupture to get that change. It's definitely been a catalyst for change so let's hope some good comes out of what was a very difficult year.

**Karen:** Let's hope so, let's hope that that momentum carries on and there will be more role models in the future as well, for people coming through.

**Deirdre:** Well one of the things for example is a project called Women's Maker Movement<sup>vi</sup>, which is a community focused project about gently trying to encourage women to think about social enterprise, or craft as a potential enterprise for them. It is largely targeted at women who are currently not economically active because they're mainly caring for families or in a caring role. But it gives them a little bit of an insight, where Shelanu teaches them and takes them through a 12 week jewellery making workshop, and then they have some business training. We have the Institute for Social Enterprise coming in to give them a flavour of what social enterprise means and what a small business could look like. You could start at your kitchen table, that could just be for you and your community, you don't have to aspire to become the next Topshop. Things can start small and you can actually just sell to friends and family, and that's the starting point.

It's also something for you that nurtures you, your identity and your soul, and it's good for your health and wellbeing too. As part of that, there is the formal bit of training where they come in and do workshops, but we also wanted to introduce them to women entrepreneurs, but in a relatable way. Rather than getting somebody to come and do a show and tell, who is 20 years on in their business and they've made a huge success of it, we chose to get local women who are maybe a year into their social enterprise, so they're on a journey, but they haven't resolved everything. And we felt that was more relatable for the women, you know, from their starting point of where they were at. So the speakers were all women of colour, and were relatively new in their social enterprise but had got far enough that it was viable and set up. And a lot of the speakers were mothers, looking after families, so they had a lot of the same issues that participants might have, because they had overcome those or they had found ways to integrate their ambitions with caring for family. It just makes it so much

more relatable because you can see yourself making that journey. I think that's something we need to think about in the sector as well, having relatable role models. Not just role models that are high fliers that happened to come from rich middle-class families, where it was expected that they would go to university and they would have a certain social status, and they could immediately have their products marketed to buyers. That isn't the journey for most people.

**Karen:** Women's Maker Movement is such a good example of those alternative pathways to craft that Craftspace helps to foster, and bringing through and having those relatable role models. Also because, as you know I went to a few of their sessions, and just seeing the positive effects of craft on the participants, for the sociality, and their self-confidence, I saw that unfold myself. It just shows the power of craft and how powerful these alternative approaches can be for helping people to realise that craft is for them, regardless of where they are and where they're from.

**Deirdre:** Yes, and as I mentioned before we're really interested in what forms of production are not being seen or valued, but have a really important part to play in the whole ecology. So we must think of the sector as an ecology, and all the different parts of the ecology play an important role for different people at different times. People will have different goals and want to practice it in different ways, and all of those are valid ways.

At Craftspace, we had an exhibition called 'Radical Craft: Alternative Ways of Making', which was about highlighting makers who weren't formally trained. A lot of them who we selected were working under an umbrella of a support group in one way or another, so examples would be Action Space in London or Benchmarks in Manchester. And these are organisations that have developed a fantastic ethos around supporting learning disabled people, who come to that project to be supported as an artist because they have talent and an aptitude for being creative, and who have got a very specific vision of the world, or want to express themselves in particular ways. I think that's really fascinating because it gives us

such richness and depth in creative practice that is just so revealing and intuitive. We had over 30 artists in the exhibition, and that is another group of people who are making in a very materials-led process or experiential process, and they're not really interested in engaging with the art market, they're just making because they need to make. That's really valid. There can be a market for that work, brokered through support organisations. I feel that that side of the craft sector is really important and we have a lot to learn and share. I think that sharing the artists' work from those organisations is wonderful, and I really admire what they're doing. And if we're thinking about leadership, we can look to those organisations and their fantastic alternative ways of leading and working, and I think it's a really rich area to explore.

**Karen:** A lot of the work and exhibitions you've talked about obviously took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, when people could meet face to face and there were no restrictions on social distancing and so on. How have Craftspace been faring during the pandemic and how have you adapted your projects?

**Deirdre:** I think like everybody else, when we couldn't do face to face work we had to work fast to upskill ourselves digitally and do our best to reconfigure our work. So, we had two projects that should have been physical that we had to reconfigure to be digital. One was a residency in Balsall Heath in Birmingham in relation to our 'We are Commoners' exhibition, thinking about commons craft as knowledge that is shared by everyone. And you can't pay to running stitch or anything like that, for example, it's available to anyone, any culture. Craft is a fantastic form of commons and we wanted to do a project with artist Alinah Azadeh, to explore communing and commons in Balsall Heath, Birmingham. We wanted to look at what forms of commoning were happening, and given the diverse range of people who lived there it would have been interesting to explore. But we had to abandon the face to face work and that became a digital resource, but actually the digital resource has been really interesting.

Alinah created a series of five videos of makes, and they were based on the emotional commons, and she responded specifically to COVID. This was back in May or June 2020, around the time when we were in that first lockdown in England. People had to do drawings thinking about how you make and how it can play a role in keeping people well and connected. From that Alinah made a resource around different themes. One was everyday courage medals, because everybody was kind of a hero at the time to keep going. So thinking of courage as not just a big thing that only some people will have, but something that's in everyone. Then there was care, so it was about self-care, about connecting with others, even if it was something you put in your window in the front of your house and you went to put it in a park, but something that you made to connect with others. Then there was loss, so obviously a lot of people were experiencing loss and there's a lot of emotions that go with loss and its wider sense - loss of freedom, loss of life, different forms of loss. And then there was repair, so, what do we need to do to heal, to repair and craft. The piece was around visible mending, so we all have scars and actually, rather than hiding the scar, embellish it and treat it as part of your lived experience, embrace it and move on. It showed that making it visible doesn't make you a lesser person, it makes you a stronger person.

It's a wonderful resource, and Alinah has a wonderful way of talking to people and inviting people to tell their story. We've almost been retrofitting the project, so we released the resource and people were using it, and then we went back to some of the groups that we would have worked with and did Zoom workshops with them. We've worked with the Salvation Army, with survivors of trafficking, for example, we made courage medals with them. We've worked with South Asian women's groups in Birmingham. So we're now going to turn that virtual resource into a physical resource, making loans boxes that would be available through a library of things at the Share Shack in Balsall Heath, to create a physically located library of things and a craft workshop next to it. And our aim is to make each of the themes into a little box which you can loan out through the library of things.

So it's a really fascinating way to work, and it's at the same time we realised that there was digital exclusion. There were a lot of people who couldn't access a tablet or phone for example. So we made PDF printouts for those who couldn't watch the videos. We also created a few hundred craft kits that were delivered to food banks so they could be distributed there. So we distributed those kits by post, or socially distanced in person physically, two feet back so that was a different way of working.

We also had a project called Making for Change, which was about craft and social action, or 'Craftivism'. That was a physical exhibition which became a digital exhibition, and we had two young people come in and curate that, albeit remotely. They created the 'Making for Change Expo' digitally and that became a resource. I think there are lots of positives in having that disruption and having to work and think in a different way. It has changed the way we work and I think we'll come back to a sort of hybrid way of working. It is like a mass experiment, of everybody having to learn some digital skills, using an online platform to connect with other people and run meetings or workshops or attend things. If you tried to promote that idea two years ago, people in the community and community organisers that we've worked with would have just said, 'no our community don't work like that, they want you to come in and sit around the table' and that has benefits as well. But now because of this mass experimentation, then I think it makes things more possible to do things in a hybrid way because people have had to upskill digitally.

**Karen:** The 'mass experiment' is a good way to put how we've all been pushed into this way of working. I know that recently you've been focusing a bit more on care - the concept of care and particularly the work of the Care Collective. What led you to thinking about care and how will it inform what you do in the future?

**Deirdre:** I think the *Care Manifesto* by the Care Collective (Chatzidakis et al, 2020) really resonates strongly with Craftspace's values and our ethos. It inspired the 'We are Commoners' exhibition that we have at the moment, where although the commons seems

like a utopian ideal, there is the hope that we can embrace a more commons-based way of thinking and doing, creating a world together where we reimagine a public life that is better, more inclusive, more caring, and that isn't so concerned with monetary value. So that prosperity is about health and wellbeing, it's not just about pounds in your pocket. Money might be the outcome of a different type of prosperity where you feel well and connected and like you belong, and you feel like you are in a cooperative society living a collective life.

So when we think about care we're not thinking about gendered care but actually care for everyone. Because a lot of the time women adopt caring roles even when they don't want to so it becomes very gendered. But I think caring in a wider sense where the consequences of your personal and collective actions result in a better world where there is care for the environment, as well as caring for resources, and care can extend to healing actions. And care can extend to looking after and stewarding shared resources, so caring for places. I suppose it can manifest itself in different ways.

The craft that we're interested in has a social purpose. If you feel pride, dignity and agency and feel that your skills are allowing you to be productive and purposeful, resourceful, these are all the things that craft is good at, for instilling those kind of values. It means if you are in a good place, then you can care for something or someone else. And I think at Craftspace, when we do our projects and develop good relationships with people, that's about instilling some kind of attitude of care being careful, rather than careless. A careful, thoughtful way of working means you have greater depth in what you achieve and you have better relationships with people. For example, care in the way that you contract artists and that you care for their needs, making their employment fair, equitable and manageable. The care that you show to your staff, the care that you show to participants and audiences, being cognizant of their needs and what they will get out of it. I think it's how we've always worked, but we didn't frame it as care, but that has come to the fore recently.



**Karen:** I think what you've just described there is potentially instructive for how other craft and creative organisations could work, to foster a more caring and inclusive future. Speaking of which, what do you think needs to be done to help the craft sector recover post-pandemic, and where do you think the future of craft lies?

**Deirdre:** I suppose it just follows on from the idea of care, so I think taking more collective actions that are then greater than any one organisation is really the key to keeping the sector thriving and sustainable. I think some of the things you and I have done together, you know, with the sorts of kinships that have been formed recently through your events for example. Throughout the last two years I've reconnected with groups of artists and curators and makers again, and I think that's formed a really interesting sense of kinship that I've never felt before in the sector. So I thank and acknowledge you for doing that. And I'm really excited by that feeling, a re-ignited sense of purpose around having a more cohesive and inclusive sector. I feel quite liberated by some of what happened in 2020 in terms of the outspoken nature of the protests, and I think those are positive things to try and move forward with. But while I think Craftspace can be doing things in Birmingham and doing them well for a particular community of interest, I think acting together collectively, whether it's around climate change or whether it's around inclusion, I think the way forward is to not to just do things in silos, but actually to try and work together, more strategically.

**Karen:** Thank you so much Deirdre.

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<sup>i</sup> The Arts Council is a UK government-funded body dedicated to promoting the performing, visual and literary arts.

<sup>ii</sup> WHSmith is a high profile retailer selling stationery, books, greeting cards and refreshments.

<sup>iii</sup> The Crafts Council is the national development agency for contemporary craft in the UK.

<sup>iv</sup> National Exhibition Centre

<sup>v</sup> The Victoria and Albert Museum (abbreviated as the V&A) is the world's largest museum of applied arts, decorative arts, and design.

<sup>vi</sup> Women's Maker Movement was a two-year programme of craft and enterprise activities involving women facing economic and social challenges. For more information visit the Craftspace website at <https://craftspace.co.uk/womens-maker-movement/>