



A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression

Howard Risatti

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What is craft? How is it different from fine art or design? In *A Theory of Craft*, Howard Risatti examines these issues by comparing handmade ceramics, glass, metalwork, weaving, and furniture to painting, sculpture, photography, and machine-made design from Bauhaus to the Memphis Group. He describes craft's unique qualities as functionality combined with an ability to express human values that transcend temporal, spatial, and social boundaries. Modern design today has taken over from craft the making of functional objects of daily use by employing machines to do work once done by hand. Understanding the aesthetic and social implications of this transformation forces us to see craft as well as design and fine art in a new perspective, Risatti argues. Without a way of understanding and valuing craft on its own terms, the field languishes aesthetically, being judged by fine art criteria that automatically deny art status to craft objects. Craft must articulate a role for itself in contemporary society, says Risatti; otherwise it will be absorbed by fine art or design and its singular approach to understanding the world will be lost. *A Theory of Craft* is a signal contribution to establishing a craft theory that recognizes, defines, and celebrates the unique blend of function and human aesthetic values embodied in the craft object.



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