

Craft was hard to avoid at this year's London Design Festival, 17-25 September, says *Grant Gibson*

Made in London

The observation that the design world has become increasingly fascinated by craft is hardly new, but it is sometimes worth repeating how attitudes to making have changed in recent years. Several years ago, when I told a senior figure at the London Design Festival that I was going to edit this magazine, he snorted a little haughtily and replied: 'I hate craft.' Now his event is dominated by one-off, hand-made pieces, I often wonder if he still feels the same way?

The headline news for 2016 was the launch of the London Design Biennale, held at Somerset House. It brought together 37 nations, each responding to the theme of 'Utopia by Design' – with various degrees of success. I have to confess to feeling uneasy about the entire venture. The industry was globalised many years ago – with design and manufacture often separated by continents and students travelling the world to find the best colleges. Likewise, the proliferation of media and, indeed, design festivals has turned the whole sector into a bit of a soup, making it hard to discern a product's provenance. (It also partly explains designers' renewed interest in craft.) That being the case, is it really sensible to divide design up by nation states? But whatever, the show contained a couple of genuinely strong installations from Russia, which showed an unseen archive of lost Soviet product prototypes, and Lebanon, that elected to recreate a Beirut street scene.

Elsewhere, highlights were legion. In no particular order we enjoyed: the Corinne Julius-curated stand, *Future Heritage*, at Decorex; Tord Boontje's *Electrocraft* in Shoreditch, which dovetailed rather nicely with the Crafts Council's new touring show *A Curious Turn* on the King's Road; *Makers House*, the quite stunning collaboration between Burberry and New Craftsmen in Soho; the eclectic but beautifully composed pavilion from Craft Scotland at the London Design Fair; designjunction's new venue in King's Cross; and, as ever, the excellent Mint in the Brompton Design District – it has long been our view that Lina Kanafani has the best eye for new work in London.

Across these four pages are a fistful of our festival favourites.

AUTOMATA BY FIRE THE INVENTOR PHOTO: IONA WOOLF



2. The Crafts Council launched its new touring exhibition devoted to automata at Habitat's Platform Gallery on the King's Road. *A Curious Turn* included this piece made with found objects by Fire the Inventor



1. *Future Heritage*, curated by *Crafts* contributor Corinne Julius, was the highlight of Decorex. Standout pieces were numerous – pictured here is *Herringbone Unique Vase No. 1* by Phil Cuttance, made from jesmonite



3. At design gallery Seeds, Martino Gamper invited 13 friends to make one-off ceramics – anonymous unless the buyer wished to pay double, a playful way of pondering the growing value placed on the author's touch in the field of design

4. Designersblock returned to Bargehouse at Oxo Tower. While the show wasn't huge, it still contained moments of interest, including BUGBUG cutlery by Wataru Kobayashi, designed, as the name suggests, to consume bugs

5. *The Thing with Maltasingh* at Gallery S O on Brick Lane celebrated the man that opened the street's first curry house. Devised by Danny Clarke, Carl Clerkin and Jasleen Kaur, it included this piece made by Alex Hellum and Clarke himself



6. Reiko Kaneko had work at SCP and PLINTH at the Brompton Design District. However, we found these pieces in the Elementary Store, Shoreditch. *All is Not Lost* saw the designer using the Japanese technique of kintsugi

7. Mint, the Brompton-based store, has long been a highlight of the festival, and this year was no exception. *White Canvas* focused on experimental, collectable pieces such as the Wedgwood Series by recent RCA graduate Alissa Volchkova



8. The Soho-based gallery 19 Greek Street presented the Collectors' Club – an experimental design and art show in collaboration with the bo.lee gallery. We were particularly taken by the *Tailormade Vases* by Noam Dover and Michal Cederbaum

9. Arguably the outstanding installation of the festival came from Burberry and the New Craftsmen, in Soho. *Makers House* dramatically combined clothes with on-site making, including Thomas Merrett's human form in clay



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10. We enjoyed Lukas Wegwerth's show at Gallery FUMI. His pieces combine ceramic and salt crystals to stunning effect – apparently his work is based around the notion of destruction and reformation in a single vessel



11. The Scottish showcase at the London Design Fair, organised by Craft Scotland and Emergents, was beautifully composed and had some wonderful work. One of the most eye-catching pieces came from glass artist Juli Bolaños-Durman

12. Designjunction was held in a new venue this year around the King's Cross development, and very convincing it was too. Furniture company Channels was launching a new monograph, and we also liked its Gillespie Double Rocking Chair