

I Love Me Some Good Arts and Crafts

Art is everywhere from the hand blown wine glass bought for a mother's birthday, to the paintings on sale for thousands of dollars, to the wooden spoon carved by a child with a knife. Often times, there's more to it than what meets the eye. Art is rich with history and meaning. Yes, history. The Arts and Crafts movement, from the 1830's to the 1920's, founded philosophies which are still used today, in America, by craftsmen, artisans, and viewers alike.

The Arts and Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts movement was almost an uprising against the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution pushed machinery and the way of work where small tasks were divided among individuals to create a project. The Revolution was met with excitement because it held possibility and opportunity because tasks were completed faster. However, it was dangerous for the workers, boring, and the products produced were of mediocre quality. The A&C movement believed in a different style and method. Everyone involved thought that one project should be done by one person. For example, a man named John Ruskin tried to help return England's style to a more natural and simple style. Ruskin's philosophies, as well as some other men's, founded the British Arts style. This style was clean, compared to the cluttered, wealth showing style of the Victorian Era.

Arts and Crafts Philosophy

The philosophy of the British Arts and Crafts Movement was founded on the idea that your work should be your own. Their ideals were that you should enjoy making and seeing your work, it should be well-designed, simple, and with a sense of place. All or most artisans worked with this philosophy. An artisan is anyone who makes things that are useable and aesthetically pleasing. Artisans often have the need to make things; they are always learning, exploring, manipulating materials, and inventing, using anything as inspiration or a canvas. Their work should induce pride and happiness.

Arts and Crafts in America and Modern Times

America took this philosophy from Europe and combined with their own styles, as to be independent. They used technology alongside the honest ideals of Europe, which ensured their success. Art was also produced by machines; it was the meaning behind the product that mattered rather than how it was made. Even after the movement ended, these values and ideals still stayed strong. Though the movement wore off and the Art houses updated, artisans and craftsmen, even today, still reap the benefits of the movement. Technology and art mostly exist in harmony now and the clean, simple manner of artwork is still around and many homes are adorned with art made using this methodology. Today, the combined styles are still used everywhere.

Artisans and Craftsmen of the San Juan Islands

Many craftsmen and artisans are users of these philosophies, including an oboe maker. Sand Dalton of the San Juans starts with European boxwood and within 12 weeks, using a dedicated process, he has a simple, elegant, old-fashioned oboe. He says his craft "feeds his soul." Another craftsmen of the San Juans is Steven Brower, a boat builder. Brower is fascinated by boats because they are beautiful, self-contained, and functional. Craig Withrow, a blacksmith of the San Juans, loves to work with his hands creatively. He doesn't mind being called an artist, though traditionally blacksmithing is making tools and other things that wouldn't be qualified as art by the normal person, because it is "art expressed through craft."

The Arts and Crafts philosophies from the movement have shaped Arts and Crafts today. Even people who do not call themselves artists, often use the philosophies. Cleanliness, simplicity, and honesty are important ideals and the products produced with these ideals in mind are all classified as art. Everyone who connects with art, whether craftsmen, artisans, or viewers, is using the philosophies from the Arts and Crafts Movement from a hundred years ago.