

INTELLIGENT HANDS — WHY MAKING IS A SKILL FOR LIFE

BY JUDITH GUNN

“WHAT IF OUR CRAFTSPEOPLE WERE AS VALUED AS OUR MANAGING DIRECTORS AND CEOS?” NOW THERE’S A QUESTION. “BECAUSE IN OTHER COUNTRIES” KATY BEVAN OF QUICKTHORN BOOKS CONTINUES “THEY ARE NATIONAL TREASURES.” KATY BEVAN IS THE FOUNDER AND PUBLISHER OF QUICKTHORN BOOKS AND SHE IS ALSO THE CO-AUTHOR OF THEIR LATEST PUBLICATION INTELLIGENT HANDS WHICH FEATURES A FOREWORD WRITTEN BY OUR OWN UK NATIONAL TREASURE, JAY BLADES.

“The idea of Quickthorn as a whole is that they are books that are quick to read and that, without dumbing down, are accessible.” Quickthorn also aims to be practical, ethical and sustainable. “All my books are uncoated paper, which is why you get the matt feel. It’s quite fragile, it makes the book more vulnerable but that’s part of the look and they are printed locally.” Most books, Katy says, are printed in the Far East or elsewhere abroad, and that shiny cover, or velvet touch, is a laminate that does not biodegrade, so Quickthorn’s books aim for sustainability, including the use of local talent, such as the cover design by Chris J Bailey, with photo by Carmel King and the hands of Cleo Mussi.

Katy Bevan’s career covers crafts, creation and publishing, plus a bit of plastering. She studied Expressive Arts at what was then Brighton Polytechnic but wanted to do more hands-on creative work, hence the plastering. “I got really into plastering and I went on to be an apprentice plasterer in London, doing the decorative, fibrous stuff.” Which means the plaster features rather than a smooth wall “I still can’t plaster a wall.” Katy went on to found her own company in the eighties which offered the interior decorating of the time, including fake marbling, rag rolling and stencilling. Later on, she worked for the



great eighties knitting designer, Patricia Roberts (her of the bright colours and the bauble cardigans) but with the advent of children, Katy found she could not earn enough money from making, so she moved into writing and publishing. “I went to loads of different magazines and I ended up being the Managing Editor of the Erotic Review.” That’s etchings, Stroud! “It was part of the Erotic Print Society, so it was very literary, we didn’t have photographs.” After that, she moved on to the Ceramic Review and then books, before working at the Crafts Council for several years.

Katy is the mother of a learning disabled daughter and Camphill communities, local to Stroud, offer the provision their daughter needs, plus they wanted to grow trees. In Stroud, Katy was able to work from home, continue to write for magazines and work with Hawthorn Press until she set up her own publishing company, Quickthorn, in August 2022. Quickthorn already has a strong list of local, ethical and practical books. Intelligent Hands follows in that tradition. “Crafts such as knitting are meditative, they give you agency. We can make decisions, we can get into a certain amount of risk-taking choices about colour and texture and so on, which is really good for people and their development. But what is less well known is that it is really good for your brain – your brain tells your hands what to do but also what you do with your hands is fed straight back to your brain and so you can develop new neural pathways.”

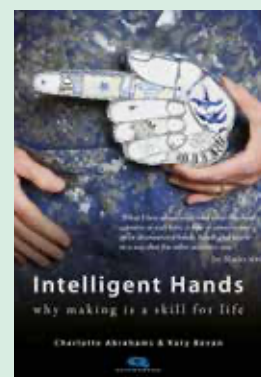
In line with the idea that Quickthorn should offer information that is both well-researched and easy to access, Intelligent Hands divides up the way it offers the academic information and the stories of the individuals who craft. For example, if you want to know about Cartesian dualism or Bauhaus, you can find out by looking at the sections devoted to the more academic explanations. Her co-writer Charlotte Abrahams has written many of the personal stories “She did a series of interviews with people who all make their living with their hands and are involved with education.” There are features on the power of stitching including an interview with Betsan Corkhill, there is papermaking apprentice Zoe Collis, there’s the graduate of PPE (George Siddons) moving from academia to carpentry, while organisations like Intoart and ActionSpace use the visual arts to work with those with learning disabilities, and there is a look at how neuroscience explores the benefits of crafting.

“There is a section on the Luddites and AI.” The Luddites of history did not have to deal with AI as we know it. “But,” Katy points out “everybody knows that they were protesting against machinery, they put a spanner in the works and all those cliches. But what they were really protesting about was how much they were going to be paid. They were not anti-progressive, they wanted progress, but they wanted their work to be valued. This is something that Heritage Crafts are doing.” Katy is a Trustee of Heritage Crafts, and they want to raise the profile of the value of crafts and crafters in this country, its history and its place in education. “We’re proposing national honours for craftspeople and we’ve had 30 to date.”

The book is a battle cry for craft education in schools. “Even if you are going to be an engineer or a surgeon or a politician, you need to learn those things with your hands, because it gives you the dexterity that builds up the connections in your brain, it’s good for your cognitive development. Doing stuff with our hands is what makes us humans unique.”

Intelligent Hands - Why Making Is A Skill For Life is out now via Quickthorn Books (quickthornbooks.com)

Katy will be discussing the book with its co-author Charlotte Abrahams as part of this year’s Stroud Book Festival (stroudbookfestival.org.uk) on Friday 10th November at Trinity Rooms – the home of much make and mend – and her books are on sale in Stroud including at the Stroud Craft show in Lansdown Gallery 2nd –5th November.



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