

Words **Heather MacLeod**  
 Photographs **Robert Perry**

# Making a living

Traditional crafts are enjoying a renaissance, with Scottish makers producing inspiring examples of practical art

**B**ACK in the 1960s, when craft was a by-word for cool, government agencies such as the now-defunct Highlands & Islands Development Board did much to attract makers to the area, and before long, even the tiniest hamlet had its own craft shop.

While many of these studios and workshops are still thriving, for a decade or so crafts seemed to slip off the style radar. Recent times have seen a huge demand for well-designed handmade pieces, with a new wave of makers, both urban and rural, setting up studios, micro-businesses and pop-up exhibitions.

Explains Emma Walker of craftsotland ([www.craftscotland.org](http://www.craftscotland.org)), "Craft is one of the most inspiring and urgent of art forms, with makers across Scotland using techniques that are hundreds of years old, alongside techniques that they have invented themselves."

"As the first audience development agency for craft, it is craftsotland's role to promote Scottish craft across the UK and internationally. With more than 1,400 makers and 250 galleries and shops represented on our website, we can help people to find a craft event in their local area or pick out a maker for a commission piece."

Up until 28 June, as part of the Meet Your Maker campaign led by craftsotland, visitors to exhibitions at Timespan ([www.timespan.org.uk](http://www.timespan.org.uk)) in the east Sutherland village of Helmsdale will get a behind-the-scenes peek into the workshops of some of the best emerging and existing craft makers in Scotland. Joan Baxter, Leah Black, Jilli Blackwood, Frances Priest and Laura West are presenting work in weaving, jewellery, textiles, ceramics, and bookbinding.

In Glasgow's Merchant City, WASPS Artist Studios have re-developed The Briggait ([www.briggait.org](http://www.briggait.org)) a former Victorian fishmarket, into studios for more than 50 artists and designers. The building will officially launch with Open Studios over the weekend of 24 July.

Contemporary jeweller Alison Macleod ([www.alisonmacleod.com](http://www.alisonmacleod.com)) an Edinburgh College of Art graduate whose work can be seen as far afield as Australia, Japan and South Korea, has a studio in The Briggait. Alison's designs are based on her photographs and abstract drawings of junk shops and flea markets.

"I love to imagine the stories connected to each discarded artefact," says Alison, "and by using a wide range of materials, techniques and imagery, I can reflect the eclectic nature of the subject matter in a quirky way."



Zoom out

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Ceramicist and jeweller Gillian Barclay and her daughter Lauren in their shop, Pillarbox Red, in Bearsden Glasgow

Also in Glasgow, look out for pop-up exhibitions/sales by The Gin Palace, a forward-thinking design collective which showcases the work of talented, cutting-edge designers from or with a connection to Scotland ([www.theginpalacecollective.co.uk](http://www.theginpalacecollective.co.uk)).

Someone with both an artist's and business perspective is ceramicist and jeweller Gillian Barclay who runs the Bearsden gift shop Pillarbox Red ([www.pillarbox-red.co.uk](http://www.pillarbox-red.co.uk)) with daughter Lauren. As well as showcasing the work of other makers, Gillian will shortly embark on designing and manufacturing a range of ceramics and jewellery in her own workshop. "In the current economic climate, we have found that our customers have an even more discerning attitude to shopping and are looking for items where quality of design and materials are paramount," says Gillian.

"Our customers are delighted to hear if a piece is made locally, and are especially interested in the story connected to the piece, the background of the maker and the processes involved in the making of it."

Particularly popular is handmade wrought iron work from the blacksmiths at Belltrees Forge ([www.belltrees.co.uk](http://www.belltrees.co.uk)), whose ranges of lighting, accessories and furniture are hand crafted in a traditional forge using skills handed down through the generations.

At her studio in Alloa, glassblower Elin Isaksson, has taken a traditional skill and fused it with modernity, to create work that brings architectural glass together →

Zoom out



← with blown sculptural lighting. She works with three glassmaking techniques, glassblowing, hot casting and kiln casting, to produce handcrafted sculptural lighting and architectural glass ([www.elinisaksson.com](http://www.elinisaksson.com)).

For Tom Butcher, who graduated from Brighton University in 2000 with a degree in 3D Craft, making a living as a potter was a distant dream when he was teaching in East London. As viewers of *Location, Location, Location* will know, in 2004, Tom made the huge

lifestyle decision of moving to Arrochar with his wife Fiona, to set up Mansefield Studios where he produces his Loch Long stoneware range.

"It feels like the recent economic climate has gone hand in hand with a resurgence of interest in craft," points out Tom, "products made with a bit of soul."

"I love designing and making," says Tom, "and there is nothing more satisfying than opening a kiln of still-warm pots. "Everyone said I'd never make a liv-

**From left: Elin Isaksson's glass pendant light; an Alison Macleod necklace; Frances Priest's work**

ing of being a potter. Looks like I'm going to prove them all wrong. ([www.tombutcherceramics.co.uk](http://www.tombutcherceramics.co.uk)).

In Stirlingshire, Jane Lyndsey is another maker who took the courageous step of giving up her job as curator of British art for the Huntarian Art Gallery to run Snapdragon ([www.snapdragongarden.co.uk](http://www.snapdragongarden.co.uk)), a flowers and crafts business. "I have seen orders for my embroidered badges, mirrors and notebooks increase amazingly this year," says Jane. "I think that people want to support UK-based makers and to give items which are unique, and made with love and care."

Angela Pointon took up ceramics while working and travelling in Singapore in the early 1990s. On her return to Scotland, Angela secured a place on the BA Ceramics course at the Glasgow School of Art. Now Angela has her own ceramics design studio, Studio 37, in Ruthven Lane, Glasgow, along with fellow graduate, Laura Masson. Both share a mutual love of good design and the creative process, ([www.studioat37.com](http://www.studioat37.com)).

Another design duo based in a courtyard studio, this time in Glasgow's Hidden Lane, is Finch & Fouracre ([www.finchandfouracre.co.uk](http://www.finchandfouracre.co.uk)) who take commissions for architectural models, as well as designing and making model kits of traditional tenements for the retail market.

As well as a diverse range of commissions, Beth Fouracre and Frankie Finch are currently involved in an exhibition at the Red Door Gallery in Edinburgh, called Half Way Home, which involves artists customising one of their tenement model kits.

Says craftsScotland's Emma Walker: "Ultimately it is our ambition for the public to be as passionate and proud of the Scottish craft tradition as we are, and to invest in its future." ✦

*Until the end of June the first national Craft Festival Scotland is promoting the best of Scottish craft-based events. For events visit: <http://craftscotland.org/News/Craft-Festival-Scotland--a-flavour-of-Scotland.htm>*

## Meet the makers

### Joan Baxter

[www.joanbaxter.com](http://www.joanbaxter.com)

Joan has been weaving tapestries since 1973, first as an art student in Scotland and Poland, then as a professional weaver in the UK and Australia. Based in Brora, Sutherland, Joan makes work of all sizes to commission, for corporate clients and private homes. She also runs workshops from her studio.

### Leah Black

[www.brazenstudios.co.uk](http://www.brazenstudios.co.uk)

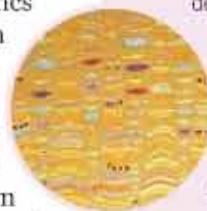
Leah is a concept-led jeweller based in Glasgow, currently working from Brazen Studios as artist in residence. In 2008 she graduated with first-class honours from the Glasgow School of Art where she won various awards and commissions, including The Young Designer Silversmith in 2007. Leah's work is informed and influenced by old-fashioned ideals and objects, which she interprets in a modern way.



### Jilli Blackwood

[www.jilliblackwood.com](http://www.jilliblackwood.com)

Jilli Blackwood, originator of the Slash and Show style, is an internationally known textile designer and artist. Her fibre work is wide ranging, from clothing and accessories through to bespoke home furnishings to fine-art wall hangings. She is renowned for her embroidery techniques and for combining different fabrics to create a three-dimensional surface. All fabrics are hand dyed.



### Frances Priest

[www.francespriest.co.uk](http://www.francespriest.co.uk)

Based in Edinburgh's Leith, Frances graduated from Edinburgh College of Art in 1999 with a first-class honours degree and postgraduate diploma in ceramics. Since then her work has been shown across the UK and internationally, and is included in UK collections such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and the National Museum of Scotland.

### Laura West

[www.laurawest.com](http://www.laurawest.com)

Laura is a classically trained bookbinder specialising in traditional and contemporary hand-sewn books. Born in Tea Neck, New Jersey, USA, in 1951 Laura emigrated to England in 1982 and then to Scotland in 1999 where in Portree she established The Isle of Skye Bindery. From the bindery she works to archival standards using archival or acid-free papers, board and leather, binding books to last a lifetime. She also holds workshops in bookbinding.

