



Duration

Track 1: 00:18:44 / Track 2: 00:30:26

Reference

OH14.1 / OH14.2

Subjects

Furniture Making / Pop Culture / Design / Commercialisation of Craft

Recording date

27 August 2015

Recording location

London

Interviewee

Baier, Fred (FB – speaker, male)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the innovative furniture maker and sculptor Fred Baier (b. 1949) recalls his experiences as a new maker in the 1970s. Influenced by his time working in industry as a barrel and wooden wheel maker, Baier discusses how his objects of the 1970s were about 'industrial imagery' and 'dying trades' replaced by new technologies. He says that his furniture pieces have always been about 'making statements' rather than form following function, an approach that he feels was more accepted in the US during the period. Baier humorously describes his involvement with the Crafts Council, including his exhibitions, commissions by Victor Margrie, receiving a bursary and being on the Grants Committee. This interview also highlights how 'craft' became a 'dirty word', with Baier playfully talking about makers' attempts to disassociate themselves from the word following the commercialisation of craft.

Recording

Track 1

01:04 FB discusses his first break and his early involvement with the Crafts Council (CC), *The Artist Craftsman* exhibition, which was held at the RCA.

05:09 FB talks about how Victor Margrie, the secretary of what was then the Crafts Advisory Committee, commissioned him to design a chair.



07:41 FB refers to his chairs and tables of the 70s: **'All those objects were about industrial imagery, and they were sort of about the dying trades that were disappearing in the bigger part of industry, being replaced by new technologies and things.'**

10:01 GL asks why FB thinks there was an interest in craft at the time. FB refers to Biba and the fashion industry, which **'had commercialised the sort of hippy and post-hippy market'**. He mentions that he made pieces of furniture for Biba. He says that his pieces were all about 'pop and imagery' as opposed to the rigidity of other wooden furniture.

12:24 GL asks what drew FB to furniture making. FB recalls that there was a furniture maker who lived on his street in Hull when he young. He mentions that his grandfather had left him tools to use, and that he did woodwork at school.

13:44 FB suggests that making is 'in his blood'. His grandmother was a collectible art nouveau potter and his great-grandfather worked in repoussé and created gates for a pub in Liverpool called the Philharmonic.

Track 2

00:45 FB mentions his bursary from the CC and how he used it to start up his first 'proper' workshop.

03:25 FB describes how the V&A commissioned a clock from him that was exhibited in the foyer for the 1977 Jubilee.

07:26 FB talks about how 'craft' became a 'dirty word' because **'every village had a craft shop selling, you know, cheese boards with mice burnt into the corner of them and funky string things that held pots for spider plants and kaftans, and half imported crafts from India and half these bad, cheesy things you still see now at craft fairs in tents, in country homes and stuff [...] and that's when it got its bad name because you're not allowed to be associated with that.'**

08:13 FB continues: **'The word [craft] was terribly badly devalued [...] and we wanted to make sure that everybody knew [puts on a comic voice] "it wasn't just the craft of it, it was the intellectual property that was important" [...] so craft got lost in a bad way over that issue [...] which is a pity really [pauses before laughing], and then everybody adjusted their manifestos to make sure they didn't use the word "craft".'**



11:51 FB states that the market was much better in America. He felt that his work was about making statements rather than form following function, and highlights that this was more welcome in the US.

17:41 FB refers back to the CC and the gallery at Waterloo Place (a 'lovely gallery').

18:50 GL asks when the CC bought from FB. FB talks about his pieces, including how *Megatron - Whatnot - Etagère (1985; W64)* featured in a show in Vienna.

24:47 FB mentions that he was on the CC Grants Committee for a few years.

26:45 FB and GL discuss the pressure to intellectualise craft in the 70s.