



See page 10 for more information about summer arts workshops at The TM.



SPOTLIGHT

From left to right: A wealth of supplies and online resources such as the blogs pictured here and Etsy.com have helped instigate DIY's return; D.C. based artist Kristina Bilonick, who is teaching a silk-screening workshop at The TM in June, in her studio. With the demand for handmade goods growing, artists like Kristina often participate in markets and fairs. Photos courtesy of the artist.

Do-it-Yourself: Design by the People

Designer Lucienne Day, together with other post-war innovators, designed affordable and beautiful textiles 'for the people'—an ideal essential to the modernist makeover of design practice.

Today, 'design by the people'—DIY (do it yourself) is gaining popularity. In tandem with the growing interest in buying locally and responsibly, people are embracing the chance to make things for themselves. The DIY movement values the handmade over the mass-produced and spans the spectrum from assembling furniture (think IKEA) to creating goods from scratch. Motivations range from the financial, to the philosophical, to the purely creative. If you haven't "DIY'd," chances are you've bought a handmade good, perhaps at one of the many alternative craft fairs across the country or on Etsy.com, one of the internet's largest marketplaces for individually crafted goods.

The underlying principle of DIY—finding value in creating with your own hands—has been embedded in our design aesthetic since the 19th century when the Arts and Crafts movement, inspired by Englishman William Morris, idealized the practice of hand craft in preference to increasingly mechanized industry. Designer and design historian Paul Atkinson argues in his 2006 paper "Do it Yourself: Democracy and Design" that DIY became widely popular after WWII. Atkinson claims the increase in home ownership and the availability of domestic tools encouraged people to take on their own projects. He further suggests that "the war provided men and women with technical skills, confidence and a predisposition toward using their own resourcefulness to realize their dreams of

domestic living."

In the following decades, DIY was taken up as a lifestyle choice intrinsic to '60s and '70s "back to the earth" counterculture. Making your own clothes or dishware set you apart from mainstream consumer society. In a 1971 *New York Times* article which reads as if it were written yesterday, Marilyn Bender notes that "By a combination of depressing factors such as recession, inflation, the alienation of youth and consumer resistance to fashion, the urge to be creative has caused a boomlet." Books on craft and take-home kits (for everything from pillows to hot-pants) were bestsellers in the '70s.

Hot-pants kits aside, today's DIY crafters share similar attitudes. Marci Rae McDade, editor of *Fiberarts* magazine and a practicing artist, notes that today's makers, like those in the '70s, emphasize experimentation, creativity and are similarly "hyper-aware" of the environment. "There is a whole group of people today who are interested in being creative, eco-friendly and who want to add their sense of style and individuality to every aspect of their lives," McDade explained. "There is a strong interest in the Bauhaus [an experimental German art school which flourished between the wars]; the idea of aesthetics playing a role in every aspect of our life, from the spoons we eat our cereal with, to the beds you put your children to sleep in, to the skirt you make to wear to work."

What distinguishes today's DIY? Many voices give credit to the internet for allowing the craft community to widen and connect with a receptive audience; design blogs ("Crafster," "Threadbanger," "Design for Mankind" and "Poppytalk" to name a

few) and retailer Etsy.com are immensely successful. Faythe Levine, co-author of *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft and Design* (2008) emphasized in an interview with *Dwell Magazine* last year that "the internet...has played a huge roll in the resurgence of handmade and DIY culture." Essential to DIY is its wide-open door; all efforts to create count. This engaging spirit has in turn energized the worlds of studio craft and fine art.

Contemporary textile arts have benefited from DIY's latest incarnation. Artists are interested in exploring how domestic crafts such as knitting can be a vehicle for their message, adapting and using recycled materials has grown popular, and objects created with techniques like embroidery and patchwork now hang comfortably on the gallery wall. As McDade astutely articulated, "fiber has become part of the broader context of the art world and part of this growth is its accessibility—it often has emotional content both imbued by the makers and experienced by the viewers." While someone may not connect with an abstract oil painting, they may engage with a work incorporating familiar textile techniques they even may have tried themselves.

The quiet, simple satisfaction of making something with your hands ensures that DIY will continue to evolve with each generation. For those who seek a new project, The TM is offering summer art workshops in silk-screening, digital textile design and silk painting – certain to equip you with the skills to create a unique object for your life.

Katy Clune