

BOOK PROPOSAL



SOCIAL ARTISANS: entrepreneurs who craft visions of our planet's future

Introduction

Despite our high profile love affair with speed and technology, we just can't shake our primal lust for objects made by hand and heart. America's economy was forged by craftsmen, and they are once again becoming the quiet celebrities behind the amplified, high-tech trend of the day. We are seduced by the slow and organic. We instinctively value the time, the skill and the inspiration craftsmen embody, and envy that elusive inner peace they alone enjoy.

"The crafting climate in America is stronger now than it ever was," says Carol Sauvion, the mastermind behind the hugely popular PBS series "Craft In America." You don't need to look far to realize how right she is. In 2010 Etsy (the world's handmade e-commerce marketplace) reported a 66% increase in traffic and a 103% increase in sales. Craft is blossoming in all echelons of American society. Social beading, knitting and scrapbooking groups are burgeoning in cafes and living rooms across the country. Craft fairs and retreats are brimming with Americans of all ages and ethnicities. Craft workshops from New York's Museum of Art and Design to LA's California Folk Art Museum are booked solid, their craft boutiques boosting bountiful sales. Crafting is hitting a national nerve, satisfying a contemporary craving for physical interaction - with people, and with hands-on creativity.

Craft refers to objects whose forms originate in function. Every function reflects its era - its memory, landscape, community, origins and process. Therefore it follows that craftsmen who create these functional objects be indigenous - their identities and cultures inextricably linked to the land on which they live and the natural resources on which they depend.

The craftsmen who first settled the western hemisphere forged a new economy, which spawned a slew of new industries: printing, papermaking, shipbuilding, metalworking. Today's post-information age craftsmen are also spawning industries which fulfill functions for our new global economy. In this age of overpopulation, alienation and climate change, craftsmen and entrepreneurs are partnering to address functions of social responsibility, civic space and environmental stewardship. Their tools? Empathy, education and global curiosity. This book introduces the new settlers, the social artisans of our Global Village, and examines how they are embracing the values of today's enlightened consumer while employing Einstein's premise: "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." The cultural innovators we introduce on these pages are forging not only a new global function for objects, they are forging a new global function for humans.

Profile #1

GoodWeave International: weaving transcendence

To keep warm through the harsh Himalayan winters ancient Nepalese nomads learned to weave dense, deep pile, brilliantly-colored rugs. As they wove, they chanted, channeling dharma – *that which upholds and supports* – into those rugs for future generations. That someday, children might wake before sunrise to weave on looms in dark, cramped, toxic sheds for 14 hours was as unfathomable for them as it is for the founders of GoodWeave.

In 1994, GoodWeave began weaving the warmth back into these lustrous rugs. An inner warmth, which a buyer experiences upon purchasing a child-labor-free rug, knowing that a child who could have been developing spinal deformity, vision impairment, respiratory tract infection or hand scarring while weaving a rug, is instead, attending school and weaving a future. GoodWeave works, through its certification program to end illegal child labor in the carpet industry and to educate children in South Asia. The organization was founded on a simple premise: if enough consumers demand certified child-labor-free rugs, manufacturers will employ only skilled, adult artisans and children will no longer be exploited. GoodWeave is channeling dharma into the global marketplace by interweaving artisan traditions of the past with social market trends of the future.

Tibetan carpets now woven in Nepal's factories are direct descendants of the pile rug weaving tradition of the Tibetan plateau. This art of weaving came to Nepal with the arrival of Tibetan Refugees in 1959 when Tibet was invaded and occupied by China.

All the elements required for creating these treasures have flourished in the Himalayas for centuries. Since ancient times Tibetan nomads, or Drogpas, have raised sheep on the Chang Thang, the high grasslands of Tibet. The Chang Thang is one of the highest inhabited places on earth, and the animals bred there have

adapted to its punishing climate. As a result, sheep from the region produce an incomparably high-tensile wool with a high lanolin content - an extremely durable and lustrous rug wool.

Himalayan shepherds and sheep farmers sometimes still bring the wool into Kathmandu by yak and mule train over passes in the far west. After many generations they, like their sheep, have adapted to high altitude living. Their lungs require less oxygen, and their blood contains high concentrations of oxygen-carrying red blood cells. They've even developed genetic resistance to malaria-spreading Himalayan mosquitoes. Like their ancestors have done for hundreds of years, men of all ages strap tall piles of sacks on their backs, and carry them to market, sometimes crossing shaky suspension bridges, or dodging loose cliff rocks. Challenges endured, they prop their backs against their walking sticks and take a breather, amidst the ethereal views of the highest peaks on Earth...

No amount of hearty exercise or genetic evolution, however, can prepare them for the smog in the streets of Kathmandu where they must deliver. In the city the wool is carded and spun into yarn by hand to produce a distinctive, slightly irregular look. The color spectrum of the Himalayan flora - from rich reds and blues to the softer lavenders and grays - blossoms on a carpet when it is hand dyed. Plants like indigo, mulberry, saffron, turmeric, rhubarb root, walnuts, camellia tea still serve as dyes, though chemical dyes are increasingly used as well. The wool is sundried before being rolled into balls, coded for color and batch, then stored in warehouses.

Once the rug master maps out the design, the weavers can begin. When they work on their own terms, in their own company, adult weavers chat, laugh and gossip, passing the time peaceably. They sit at large looms and loop the yarn in and out of the vertical warp threads and around a horizontally placed rod. When the row is finished, a knife is drawn across the loops, freeing the rod. The loops, cut in half, form the pile. The weavers then beat each row down with wooden mallets, for a loose, blanket feel. A 9 x 12 foot rug with a density of between 60 - 144 "knots" (cut loops) per square inch takes between 5 - 12 months to weave. Then the rugs are taken off the looms and trimmed with shears for an even finish. Finally, the rugs must be washed to remove dirt and excess dye, and clipped. The entire process requires approximately 1500 hours of labor.

While modern innovations creep into the ancient process every year, some core techniques continue to thrive. Watching and hearing those rare traditional weavers can be meditative, almost hypnotic. They lash the bar with yarn and tie the first few knots. The yarn slips around the pair of warps and over the bar - hitched. Hitch-thump-pound; hitch-thump-pound; hitch-thump-pound. They scrape with every finger and joint - the tools mere extensions of their own knuckles and nails. With each row the weft is laid, the shed changed, the loops slit, and the pile clipped. The spacing of the warp, the thickness of weft, and the tightness of knot are individual trademarks of each weaver. Tactile mathematicians, these masters yield a specific ratio on every rug. They slash and hammer through the weaving cycle in unison and

chant together. Some can even weave from memory, or design on the spot. They drink tea, and tell dreams. They may even nod off for a nap, fingers embedded in the warp...

Reviving the warmth

It was a nightmarish children's book that awakened social awareness in Nina Smith, GoodWeave's executive director. "One of my early memories is reading 'The Lorax' by Dr. Seuss... I've always seen him as subversively turning people into activists and thinkers early in life."

Ms Smith launched Goodweave's US organization in 2000, and five years later had already won the prestigious Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, acknowledging her efforts to employ market strategies for social change. "An article in Vanity Fair about the tragic murder of carpet slave-turned-activist Iqbal Masih in about 1996 first made me realize that human slavery was a modern-day problem...I was shocked and wanted to do something about it." Today, the repercussions of what she has done about it run deep and wide.

"My parents gave birth to me, but GoodWeave has given me the human life," says 19-year old Hem Moktan, who was forced to work in a rug factory where he was beaten, because his family could not afford to feed him. Thanks to GoodWeave's factory certification program, Hem was rescued from a carpet factory at the age of 12. After psychological therapy he enrolled in a GoodWeave-sponsored school (which lasts through grade ten or age eighteen, whichever comes first.) Now Hem is in college studying to be a social worker.

Through the sale of seven and a half million certified carpets GoodWeave has already helped liberate three quarters of the one million South Asian children trapped in illegal rug weaving. More than 3,600 of them were provided educational opportunities. By creating both the supply and demand for child-labor-free rugs GoodWeave has catalyzed a profound shift in the marketplace, as well as a profound transformation of children's lives.

"I would start at 5 am. After a break of low quality rice and curry, I had to be back at work - until 8 o'clock pm. The only thing I looked forward to during the day was my 10 am break." Chameli, a former child weaver from Kathmandu, was rescued by a Goodweave inspector at age 8, and is now studying in a rehabilitation center where her favorite subject is English. What does she look forward to now? "Now I can train to become a teacher. I will be rich, and have my own money, so nobody will mistreat me again."

A far cry from the mud huts most Nepalese villagers are born in, GoodWeave's rehabilitation center for rescued children in Kathmandu is a bright and sunny modern building with clean bunk beds, a large playground, kitchen, three classrooms and computer lab. Finger puppets elicit squeals of delight at

GoodWeave's colorful daycare center for toddlers whose parents work in nearby certified carpet factories. At the elite Laboratory Boarding School, where GoodWeave co-funds scholarships for qualified rescued laborers, polite, articulate teenagers sing Nepali folk songs in strong, confident voices.

Such facilities have provided a virtual reincarnation for these children of poverty. Narayan, a former weaver, puts it this way: "Like the history of human civilization, they think of their time as child laborers as the dark age of their life. Now they understand the power of confidence and dignity, and know they deserve these things."

Manju Karki was hospitalized in Nepal after permanently injuring her leg in a weaving shed, but that didn't stop her from traveling to Italy and marching with hundreds of activists at Children's World Congress on Child Labor. Manju says she wants to follow in the footsteps of GoodWeave and "Global March Against Child Labor" founder Kailash Satyarthi, who said, in an ABC News interview: "The problem of child labor ...is your problem."

How did this problem evolve? How have children become slaves? "These days the weather is getting much hotter, and the rains don't fall when they are supposed to!" says Ram Bahadur, a 59-year-old Himalayan rice farmer who lives in a mud hut settlement which has sustained her ancestors for generations. Though the Nepalese economy remains about 90% agriculturally-based, drastically changing weather patterns have sabotaged the livelihood of many family farmers.

When rainfall decreases farmers can't grow enough rice to feed their families, so they slide into debt, which gradually forces them to sell off ancestral landholdings. When there is nothing left to give, they pay off debt by offering their children to the "thekedar" (debt broker) for carpet factory labor. As they frantically compete to feed the burgeoning appetite of Western consumers for low-priced high quality carpets, Kathmandu factory owners decrease wages and increase hours - until what was once a meditative tradition of weaving carpets and social bonds, devolves into an institution of bondage.

In Buddha's footsteps

It was on the playground that the founder of GoodWeave claims to have discovered his life's path. On his first day of school in Madhya Pradesh, India Kailash Satyarthi noticed a six-year-old cobbler boy who, under his father's supervision, was soliciting shoe shine customers. Perplexed, young Kailash asked his teachers why the boy wasn't entering the classroom. The answer: "Poor children work" did not satisfy him. Finally he worked up the nerve to ask the boys' father. "My father started working as a child, and so did I. Now, it's the turn of my son." In his young mind, Satyarthi could not reconcile with such inequity. The more he studied, the more he took to heart Buddha's wisdom: "There is no wealth like knowledge, and no poverty like ignorance." Satyarthi was convinced that child labor perpetuates global

poverty, and, at the age of 26, gave up a promising career as an electrical engineer to work towards eradicating child servitude – not through charity, but through education empowerment.

As the Chairman of the South Asian Coalition on Children in Servitude in the 1980s Satyarathi led the global war against child labor. Then, in the 1990s, he created an incentive for manufacturers to stop exploiting children in GoodWeave (then RugMark) - a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, businesses, government entities and multilateral groups like UNICEF.

Satyarathi is also the architect of the largest civil society network for exploited children, the “Global March Against Child Labor”, active in over 140 countries. A tireless activist and analytical thinker, Satyarathi likes to point out that it will cost \$16 billion per year to achieve his goal of universal primary education by 2015 – that’s 2% of what it cost to bail out four US and UK banks.

Despite the lagging follow-through of G8 donors, Satyarathi is forging ahead by relaunching the “Education for All High Level Group” to leverage support from the global community in 2011. When he was presented the “Defender of Democracy Award” from the “Parliamentarians for Global Action” Satyarathi declared that it belongs to the “Children’s National Parliament”, for it is the children, in their Child Friendly Village who strategize and work, hands on, to improve their own lives.

Such moving stories resonate with today’s socially concerned consumers, now estimated at 65 million Americans. In the past three years alone, sales of GoodWeave rugs have increased by nearly 100 percent, with estimated retail sales of \$35 million via GoodWeave’s North American network of nearly 80 licensed importers and 1,000 retailers. Goodweave’s market share continues to grow thanks to the increasing number of socially responsible consumers, estimated at 68 million, or 23 percent of the adult U.S. population.

GoodWeave certification adds a valuable distinction during pricing discussions. A 2005

Harvard University study with a major New York City retailer showed increased sales volume for independently certified products made with good labor standards. The study also found that people paid up to 20 percent more for comparable products that were certified. Ninety percent of Americans would consider switching to another brand if they were to discover a company employed negative practices. Thanks to GoodWeave, it is actually becoming trendy to run a fair and safe carpet weaving operation in South Asia.

If it takes a million knots to weave a finely crafted rug, may there be a million sweet dreams for its weaver. May the Buddhist dharma of ancient artisans be a million times multiplied in the hands of GoodWeave rug buyers. For, as Buddha said: “Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.”

