



Making It Handmade:

Anna Brownfield's DIY documentary on Melbourne's craft scene.

by Megan Spencer (c) 2010

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Anna Brownfield is always making something. If she's not whipping up a batch of biscuits, you'll find her sewing an outfit or knitting furiously on four needles while engaging in noisy conversation down the pub.

She's also a filmmaker with several projects on the go at any one time.

Her latest is 'Making It Handmade'. It combines Anna's passion for craft with her talent for DIY filmmaking. As you might expect from a passionate crafter, it's also a labour of love.

"It was very different for me" she says of making the film. "I usually make drama or narrative-based films and this is my first documentary." Unable to secure funding or get a local broadcaster on board she picked up a camera and became her own one-person crew. "I thought, 'why not in the spirit of the craft movement?' Why not make it DIY?"

As a result 'Making It Handmade' is a fascinating, intimate look at the rise of Melbourne's indie craft movement, and how it is part of what has become a significant global phenomenon engaging (mainly) women from all walks of life.

"Men were few and far between" laughs Anna, "although the ones I did find usually came from Steiner education – that's a whole other documentary in itself!"

Anna spoke to a range of Melbourne crafters. They gave candid interviews about the value of craft, environmental sustainability and contemporary craft culture. Speakers include Gemma Jones, founder of Kaotic Kraft Kuties; Pip Lincolne, author, blog-writer and owner of

successful craft store 'Meet Me At Mike's' (she also runs Brown Owls craft circle); "craftivist" Rayna Fahey, 'spokesperson' for Melbourne Revolutionary Craft Circle, (they leave giant cross-stitched political messages in highly public spaces), and compadre Casey Jenkins from the equally political, burlesque-inspired Trashbag Rehab, part of the Melbourne Craft Cartel.

Providing 'special comments' is American 'craft-umentarian' Faythe Levine, director of indie craft doc 'Handmade Nation'. After hearing about Faythe's film, luck smiled upon Anna. Faythe was invited to Australia to screen her film at the annual Stitches & Craft Show. As a fever pitch enveloped Faythe's visit, Anna managed to steal her away for what proves one of the most interesting and articulate interviews in the film.

Making her own documentary, Anna was amazed to discover just how supportive the craft community is. "No-one ever said 'no' to me," she says of requesting to film inside the groups. "Everyone said yes. All they wanted was to be involved – but that's how the craft scene works. And you find that online too – you put a question on one of the blogs asking how to make something and so many people come out of the woodwork to help you achieve your crafty goals... People want you to succeed."

While 'Making It Handmade' is unashamedly a Melbourne film, it also reflects what's going on elsewhere in the world.

"Craft is universal; it's about skill-sharing and it shows that we haven't lost touch with our female ancestry."



[Photo:](#) Margaret Burin - ABC Local Radio Ballarat

While interest in craft continues to grow Anna is cautious about where craft is headed. "Since I began the documentary, craft [and the 'hand-made aesthetic'] has been absorbed into the mainstream. Which I have no problem with; I just hope it's not a passing trend, that in five years people don't just move on from it." She suspects it will remain a force to be reckoned with however, "as we continue to move away from mass-produced goods and towards environmental sustainability."

Having had her own 'crafty awakening' early in a family that encouraged creativity with a kitchen cupboard "filled with materials we could make things from", Anna has also become somewhat of a craft advocate, inspired by the 'craftivists' she met during the making of 'Making It Handmade'.

It was summed up for Anna by Gemma Jones early in the piece. She said, "craft's not about skill, it's about *spirit*." Think we've just found the quote for the movie poster...

'Making It Handmade' premiered at the 2010 Melbourne International Film Festival.