

CHAPTER 14

The Craft Media

The *craft media* have been distinguished from the fine arts because they are used to make *functional objects*.

Functional objects are objects that are intended for everyday use, and that serve a utilitarian purpose. These objects can include container vessels, eating utensils, weapons, clothing, jewelry, textiles, etc.

The five main types of craft media are **ceramic, metal, glass, wood and fiber**.



All of these objects provide the same basic function – they are cups. They hold or contain fluid or other matter.

The visual design and treatment of these different functional objects engages us in unique ways, and suggests purposes for these objects that go beyond the functional task of holding liquid- with the exception of the plain white paper cup.



Function + Art

We all rely on functional objects to aid us in everyday tasks. Functional objects that seem commonplace today, that we may take for granted, each represent a technological innovation that allowed for greater comfort, protection, and other essential activities.

When you consider the design of a functional object, it must satisfy certain requirements for it to be functional. (For example, a cup will only work if it is able to hold liquid – it would not function properly if it was full of holes or cracks.)

Artists use the craft media to make objects that are not only useful and of great beauty, but can be appreciated as works of art.

Consistently, throughout human history, as soon as a new functional object has been developed, there is a evident desire to artistically alter or enhance the design.

The Distinction Between Craft and Art

The crafts are works of expert handiwork or craftsmanship, done by the maker's hand with extraordinary skill. Many fine artists are experts in their own fields, and use traditional craft media in their work, but many would be insulted if their work was described as "craft". *Art is made to be experienced or seen, and craft is primarily made to be used.*

Ceramics

A photograph of a ceramic kiln interior, viewed through a dark, rough-textured opening. The interior is filled with numerous ceramic objects, including bowls, vases, and plates, arranged on shelves. The entire scene is bathed in a bright, intense orange-red light, suggesting the high temperature of the firing process. The objects are silhouetted against the glowing background.

Ceramics are made from *clay*, such as porcelain, earthenware, or stoneware. Objects can be built by hand or thrown on a wheel. They are fired (baked) in a kiln (a very hot oven) to harden. Glaze is applied for color and texture. *Glaze* is made of powdered minerals suspended in water, applied after a first firing. The purpose of glaze is to seal the porous clay, protecting it from growing bacteria, as well as provide an aesthetic element.

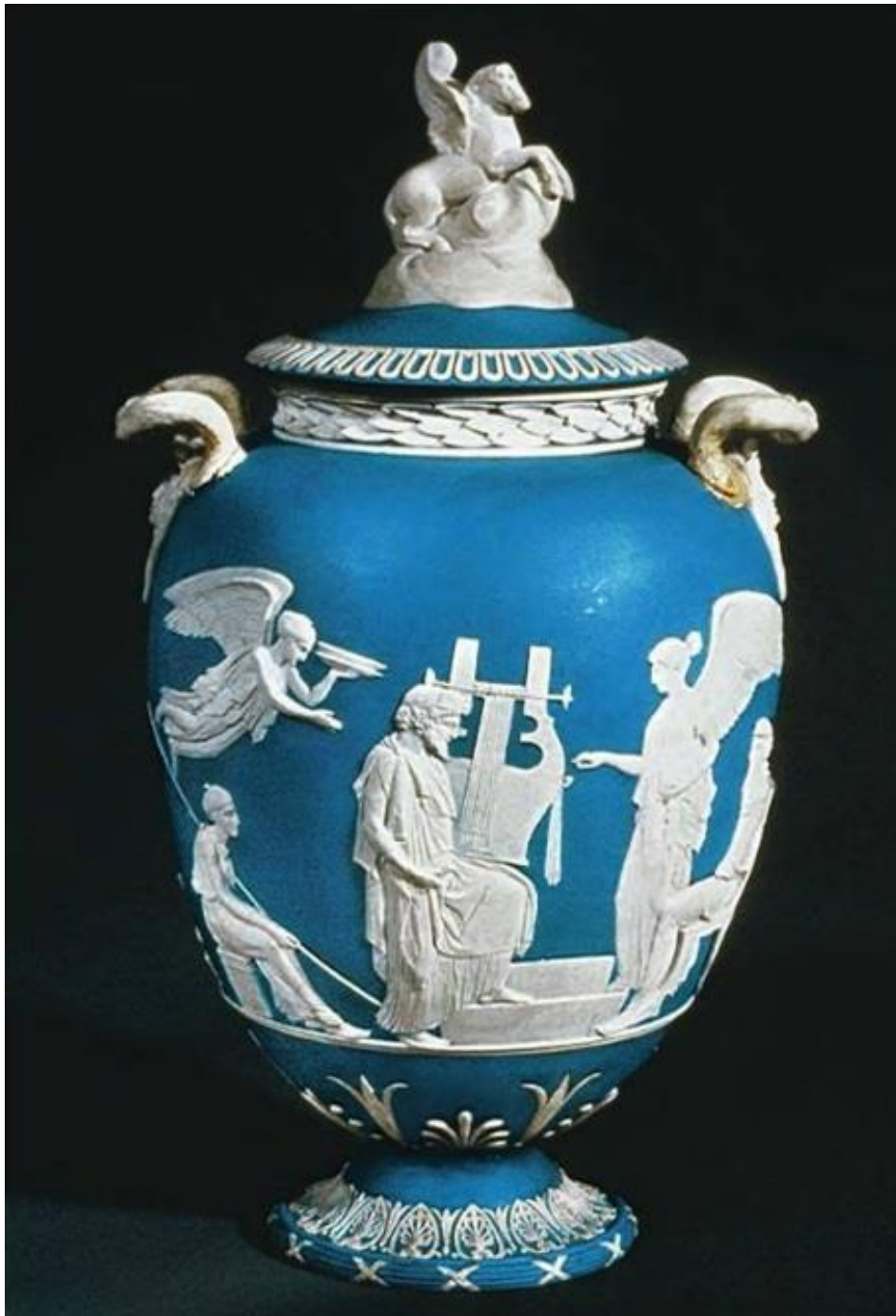
Pictured here are ceramics objects in a hot kiln.



Wedgwood *Queen's Ware* kitchenware, c. 1790 and 1850.

The distinction between the crafts and fine arts can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution. Josiah Wedgwood opened a pottery manufacturing plant, and made two types of pottery: “ornamental ware” and “useful ware”.

Wedgwood considered his ornamental ware works of art. He depended on “useful ware”, such as the sets shown above, to support his business. His line of useful ware was made by casting liquid clay, or *slip*, into a mold. This new process allowed for the mass production of reliable, quality tableware. Before this point, almost everything people used was handmade, and therefore unique.



Josiah Wedgwood, *Apotheosis of Homer* vase, 1786.

Blue jasperware, height 18 in.

This ornamental ware was decorated with low-relief Greek figures, and was inspired by a Greek vase. Wedgwood donated it immediately after completion to the British Museum.



Red-figured water jar (hydria), signed by Meidias as potter 420-400 BC .

This water jar is meticulously detailed with narrative and figurative scenes.

The scenes tell two different stories: the top band of figures shows the abduction of the daughters of Leukippos by Dioskouroi, Kastor and Polydeukes.

The bottom band depicts Herakles performing his final Labour – receiving the golden apples of Hesperides from the nymphs responsible for guarding the tree at the end of the earth.

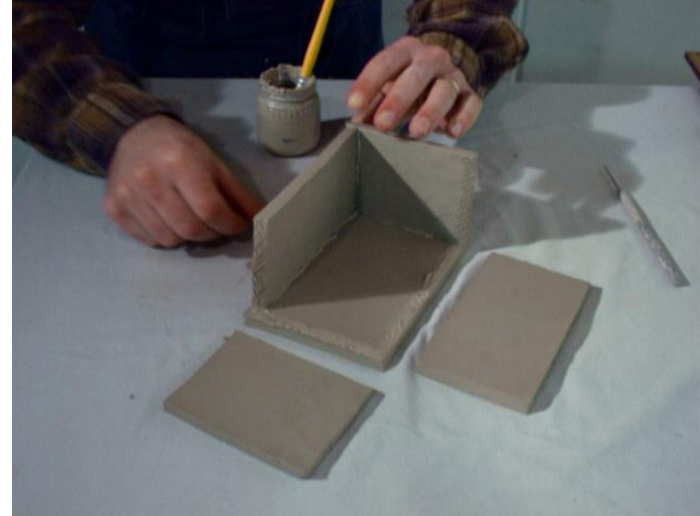
This functional object offers the owner far more than a place to put water. This object offers entertainment, and storytelling, as well as a cultural reservoir for collecting the stories of ancient Greece.

Ceramics Techniques

Slab Construction: clay is rolled out flat, like a pie crust, and shaped by hand.

Coiling: clay is rolled out in long, ropelike strands that are coiled on top of one another. The coils are built up in a continuous spiral.

Wheel: Egyptian potters first used the wheel around 4000 BCE. A flat disk spins quickly, allowing the potter to form a symmetrical shape, with more speed and control than hand-built techniques.

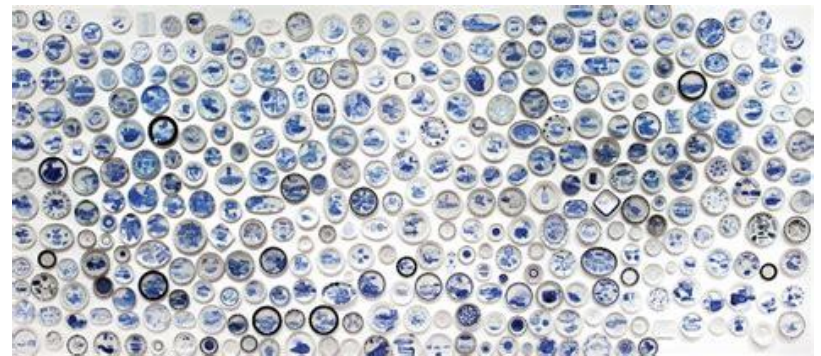


Ceramics in Art

This ongoing work by artist **Julie Green**, titled *The Last Supper*, began in 2000. In this installation, she has transformed the traditional role of ceramics into a political statement.

Each plate depicts the last meal of a death-row inmate. She wanted to draw attention to the number of Americans executed each year, and to the humanity of each individual.

The blue and white color scheme refers to traditional Chinese porcelain, as well as the color of the Virgin Mary- and by extension, the mothers of all of the subjects.



Fiber

A close-up photograph of a person's hands working on a wooden weaving loom. The loom is made of light-colored wood and has a complex system of threads. The person's left hand is positioned near the top of the loom, while their right hand holds a wooden shuttle with a spool of purple and white yarn. The shuttle is being moved through the threads. The background is dark, making the loom and the person's hands stand out.

Fiber arts are traditionally used to fill three-dimensional space, like a carpet filling a room, or clothing draping over the body.

Fiber is an extremely textural medium. It is commonly used in sculpture for this reason.

Natural and synthetic materials such as yarn, fabric, and wool may be spun, woven, dyed, knit, embroidered, or stitched. A weaving loom is shown here.

Weaving

All fiber arts trace their history back to weaving, a technique that interlaces horizontal and vertical threads.

The vertical threads are called the **warp**, and are held tight on a loom or frame.

The horizontal threads are called the **weft**, and are woven over and under the warp.

A **tapestry** is a weaving in which the warp and weft yarns are manipulated by the weaver to create an intricate design.



Kiki Smith, Guide, 2012, Jacquard tapestry, approximately 9 ft 11 in by 6 ft 4 ½ in



Traditional African Weaving

Africa has a rich history of textiles. The earliest surviving sub-Saharan textiles date as far back as the ninth century BC, and come from the Igbo Ukwu site in Nigeria. Many of the ancient weaving techniques, patterns and styles are still used today, and remain an important part of African culture. Abstract symbols are often used in designs, such as the baskets shown above.

Embroidery

Embroidery is a traditional fiber art in which the design is made by needlework.

From the early 18th century on, Chamba, India was known as a center of the art of embroidery, especially for its *rumals*. Rumals were embroidered muslin textiles used as wrappings for gifts.

The rumal shown here was designed for a wedding gift. It depicts images of the wedding surrounded by a floral border. The design is *double-darned*, and appears on both sides of the cloth.



Fibers in Art

During the late 1960s and the 1970s Faith Ringgold played an instrumental role in the organization of protests and actions against museums that had neglected the work of women and people of color. Her paintings from this period are overtly political, and present an angry, critical reappraisal of the American dream glimpsed through the filter of race and gender relations. Ringgold's medium is the **story quilt**—a traditional American craft associated with women's communal work that also has roots in African culture. She originally collaborated on the quilt motif with her mother, a dressmaker and fashion designer in Harlem. That Ringgold's great-great-grandmother was a Southern slave who made quilts for plantation owners suggests a further, perhaps deeper, connection between her art and her family history. One of Ringgold's early efforts, dating from 1982, tells the tale of the stereotyped Aunt Jemima through painted images, sewn fabric, and handwritten texts. The naive, folk-art quality of the quilts is part of Ringgold's scheme to emphasize narrative over style, to convey information rather than to dazzle with elaborate technique.



Tar Beach (Part I from the Woman on a Bridge series), 1988, Acrylic on canvas, bordered with printed, painted, quilted, and pieced cloth, 74 5/8 x 68 1/2 inches

Metal

Metal is the most durable of the craft media. It has been used for centuries to make vessels for eating and drinking, tools for agriculture and building, and weapons for war.





Tutankhamun Hunting Ostriches from His Chariot, base of the king's ostrich-feather fan.
1335–1327 BCE.

Beaten gold. 4 × 7-1/4 in.

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. [Fig. 14-33]

History

Gold is the easiest metal to work with, because it is relatively soft. It is also associated with royalty. In ancient Egyptian culture, it was associated with the sun god, Re, and the king, who was considered the son of Re. Gold is permanent- it doesn't corrode or tarnish- and was associated with *ka*, or eternal life, similar to the soul.

Besides casting processes, metal can be **embossed**, or hammered from the front side. Another technique, repoussé, is hammered from the reverse side. The work shown here is an example of the repoussé technique.

Metal in Art

Urban Light (2008) is a large-scale assemblage sculpture by Chris Burden located at the Wilshire Boulevard entrance to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The 2008 installation consists of restored street lamps from the 1920s and 1930s. Most of them once lit the streets of Southern California.



Burden stated that "Urban Light" is exactly about human relationships to the places we've built for ourselves: the posts "represent human scale," unlike the super-tall streetlamps we have today, and they're "more ornate than they need to be," small sculptures that dotted the streets as, well, advertisements for real estate developments.

Glass

Glass has been used since ancient times and was made by forming the hot liquid glass (mostly silica) mixed with soda ash on a core or by casting it in a mold. The glass blowing technique was invented in the late 1st century BCE. Glass blowing was a major industry in the Roman world. Glassblowers dip the end of a pipe into molten glass and blow through the pipe to produce a bubble, and shape it while it is still hot.

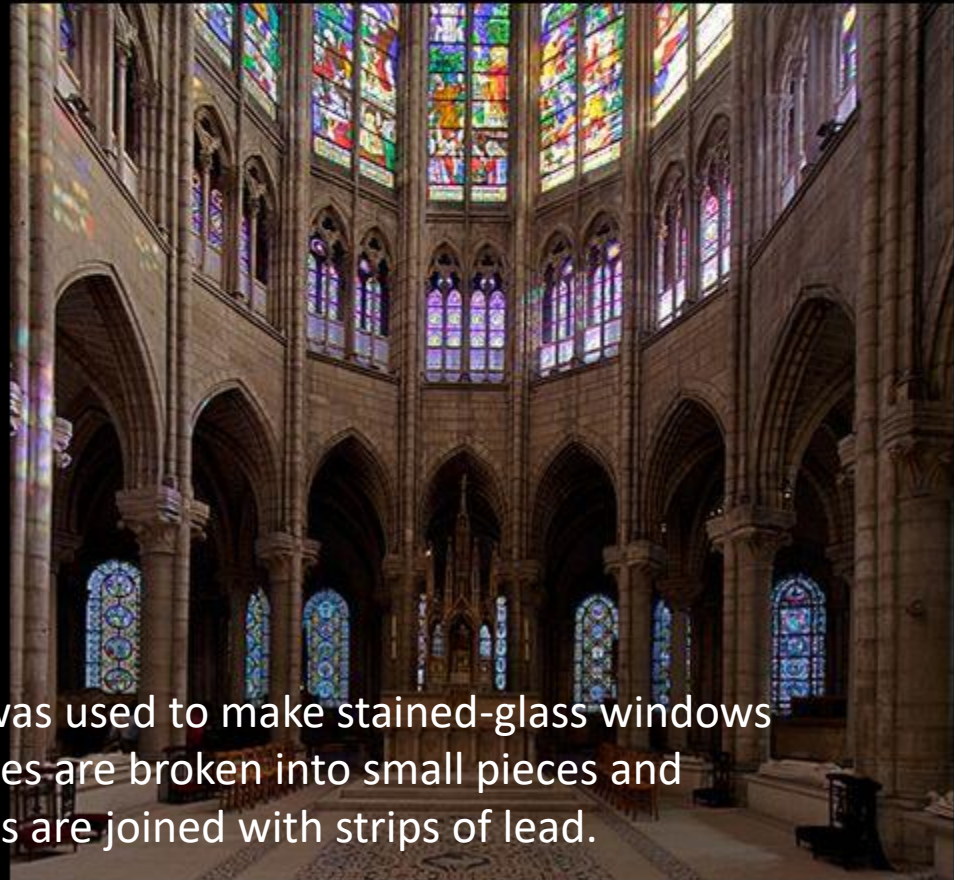
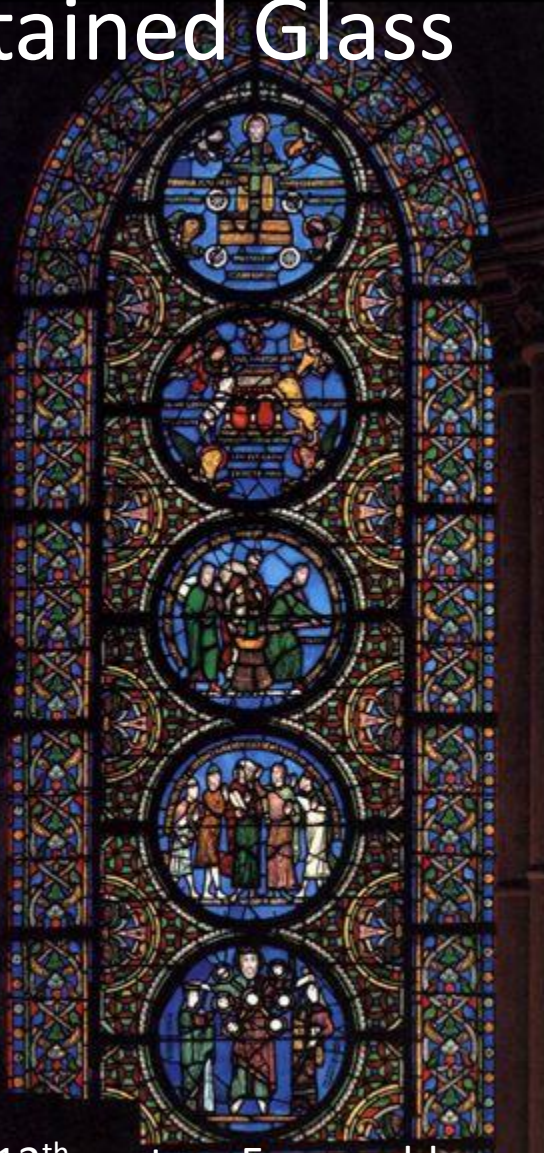


Stained Glass

Moses window, Abbey Church of Saint-Denis, Saint-Denis, France. 1140–44.

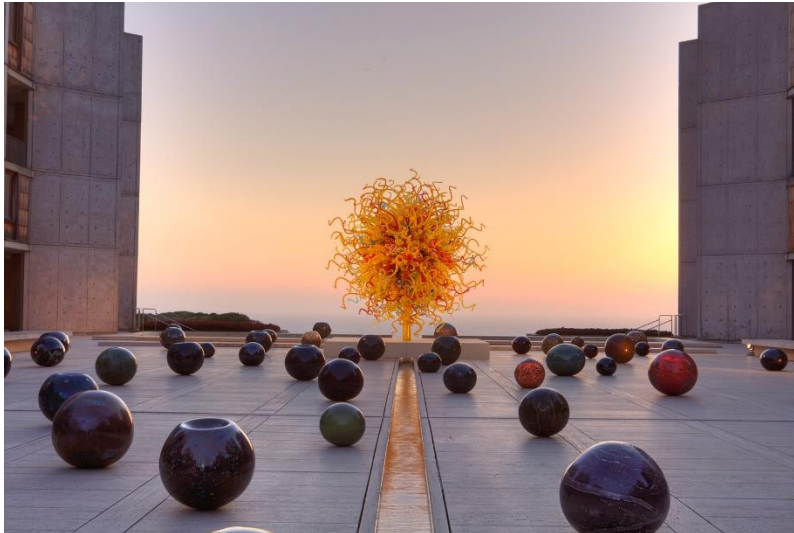
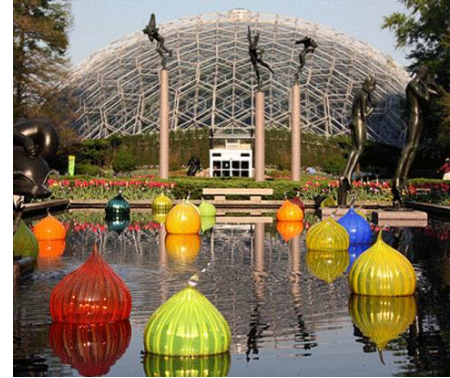
The emergence of light and color reflected through the enormous stained glass windows transforms the interior of this cathedral into a transcendental religious experience.

In 12th century Europe, blown glass was used to make stained-glass windows that decorated cathedrals. Glass pieces are broken into small pieces and assembled over a drawing. Fragments are joined with strips of lead.



Glass in Art

Dale Chihuly is an American glass sculptor who has always been interested in architecture and the way form interacts with light and space. His installations are created in dialogue with the spaces in which they are sited, interacting harmoniously with interior and exterior spaces and often creating emotional experiences. He is renowned for his ambitious architectural installations, inside and out, in historic cities, museums and botanical gardens around the world.



Wood



Wood is easy to carve, and widely available. Because it is an organic material, and extremely fragile, few wood artifacts survive from ancient cultures.

It is the preferred material for making furniture, and a piece of furniture can be transformed into a work of art in the hands of an accomplished artisan.

Cedar wood, native to the Northwest American coast, is a favorite of Native American artists in that region. It is resistant to insects, almost impermeable to weather, and has a protective, aromatic odor.

Chests such as this Heiltsuk example were designed to contain family heirlooms and clan regalia, only opened on ceremonial occasions.



Heiltsuk, *Bent Corner Chest (Kook)*, ca. 1860. Yellow and red cedar, and paint, 21 ¼" by 35 ¾" by 20 ½"

Wood in Art

CLARK DERBES salvages large hardwood trunks from arborists in the area surrounding his Vermont studio and carves these trunks with a chainsaw, honing them into raw shapes and meticulously painting them with a variety of complex visual systems, patterns and patina processes to make dimensional sculpture in a variety of sizes. He uses new distributions of light and color to playfully shift space and undermine habitual viewing systems, asking viewers to question their perceptions.

Willa,
carved & polychromed silver
maple, 2014, 8" x 12.5" x 7"



Untitled,
13" by 10" by
14"

