

Foreword

This volume represents the ideas and explorations of the 8th gathering Making Futures™ conference on the relationship between craft, sustainability and new technologies, convened by the University since 2009. Bringing together a host of international artists, designers, scholars and cultural leaders, it aims to lead a critical conversation on both traditional and innovative materially-led creative practice. The 2024 conference brought together approximately 98 speakers from around the world, including those from Australia, Portugal, Peru, France, Japan, India, Columbia, Canada, Sweden and the United States, as well as participants and speakers from across the United Kingdom. This demonstrates the collective passion for craft and the importance of sharing knowledge and understanding of the material world through creative practice and practice-led research.

Making Futures™ has been an early pioneer in recognising the link between small-scale artisanal and place-based craft production and the need to find a more equitable and environmentally responsible way of living with each other and our planet.¹ Previous iterations of the conference have focused on identifying the ways in which new distributive manufacturing protocols and networked technologies provide an opportunity for localised skills and indigenous knowledge to be shared more broadly, and identified a then emergent axis between vernacular, regional creative practices and sustainability—our now common awareness of the urgency around changing our contemporary habits of consumption and accumulation. The international aspect of Making Futures is an important part of its knowledge sharing, and many previous conferences made vital links between the global north, western and European nations, the global south, Southeast Asia, Asia and many other regions. As this axis of knowledge has become more refined over the last few years through networked-based cultural forms such as distributed design, community craft cooperatives, the platform economy, citizen science, green craft toolkits and the internet of things, among others, Making Futures has provided a space for speculation and debate on the impact of these practices on the meaning of what we make. It has challenged the notion of globalisation as the inevitable arc of economic and cultural development, and has provided alternative narratives for how our vast information infrastructure might equally extend our imagination for how this connected world can foster a greater sense of local collective purpose.

¹ 'This is an ongoing programme that aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and sector-wide understanding of the contemporary crafts in relation to environmental and social equity issues, and especially in the way that these factors impart new ideological purpose to the idea of craft.', M. Ferris, Introduction to the first Making Futures conference 2009.