



UOA D32

ART AND DESIGN:
HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



RESEARCHER

Juliette MacDonald

OUTPUT TITLE

Naked Craft Network

OUTPUT TYPE

Other

DATE

2014 – 2017

FIG. 1
Naked Craft exhibition, Art
Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax,
Canada. Photo courtesy of Art
Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax.



01 / STATEMENT

The Naked Craft Network (NCN) was a multi-component, international collaborative research project (2014–2017) that investigated topical issues in contemporary craft practice in Scotland and Canada.

Through an innovative combination of practice and theoretical reflection, bridging design history and theory, practice-based research and public engagement, the project brought together an international network of practice-based researchers, writers, curators and industry partners. They questioned the value of craft as a practice, an historical phenomenon and a contemporary experience.

The main outputs from the project were a cluster of interlinking research events, including residencies, workshops, a public education programme and accompanying symposia. The research was disseminated to the public through a touring exhibition of Canadian and Scottish craft that was accompanied by a catalogue with commissioned essays.

Led by craft historian and theorist Juliette MacDonald and Dr Sandra Alfoldy, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Canada, NCN was the first major craft partnership between Scotland and Canada and involved four academics, 23 professional craftspeople, five curators, and three research assistants. The Make workshop and symposia brought together individual makers from local craft communities, and researchers from academic institutions from Canada and Scotland.

20 June – 6 September 2015

Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington, Canada.

26 September – 28 November 2015

Centre Materia, Quebec City, Canada.

14 January – 10 April 2016

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Canada.

April – May 2016

Thurso Gallery and Iona Gallery, Kingussie, Scotland. Both galleries at once with one month in each, but it was counted as one exhibition venue.

June – August 2016

Barony Centre Craft Town, West Kilbride, Scotland.

October 2016 – February 2017

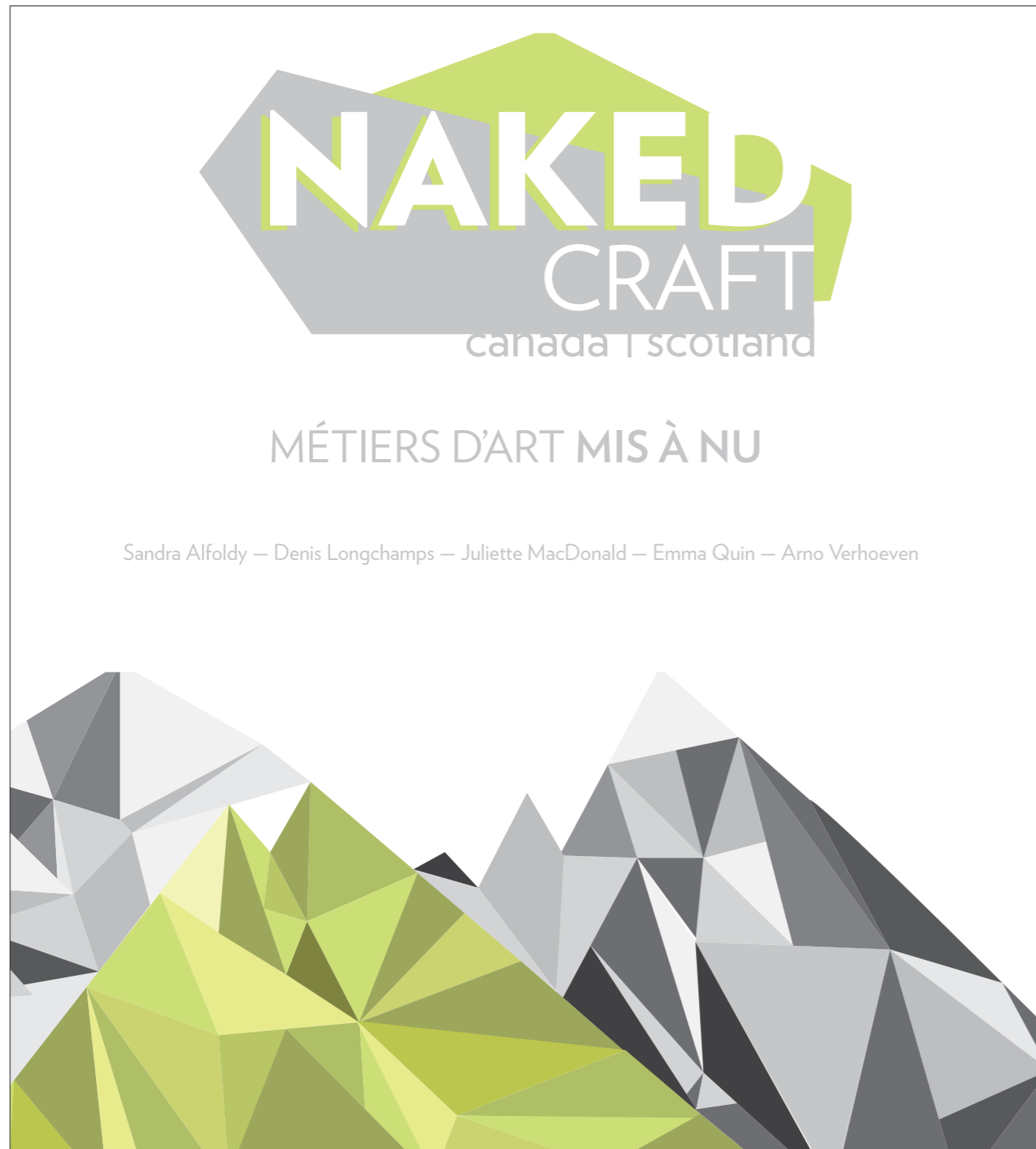
Peebles Art Gallery, Peebles, Scotland.

April – June 2017

An Lanntair, Stornaway, Orkney, Scotland.

The legacy of the research lies in the way it has opened up channels of communication between the two communities to establish a space for reflecting upon and re-evaluating the traditional roles of craft practice for the future.

FIG. 2
Poster for NCN.



02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

The Naked Craft Network (NCN) was oriented by the following research questions.

1. What do we mean by traditional craft practice in the post-colonial age?
2. How do localised craft productions become understood within a globalized context?
3. How can localities and localised production lay claim to the authenticity of tradition within this global context?

To answer these questions, NCN took a case-study approach of two independent communities with a common heritage: Scotland and Nova Scotia, Canada (New Scotland). For both countries, craft plays an essential role in the cultural and creative industries, providing communities with important financial frameworks as well as being a catalyst for strengthening connections between creativity, place, landscape and identity.

Building on aspects of their common heritage, the research sought to investigate how the work of contemporary Scottish makers could challenge or reinforce the current perception of Scotland abroad, and how Canadian makers might move beyond certain stereotyped post-colonial histories. In understanding the histories and trajectories of these two communities, NCN established a space for broader reflections on the future of craft practice.

The NCN project resulted in an international touring exhibition curated by the team, which featured the work of ten Scottish and twelve Canadian makers.

The exhibition included a wide variety of craft practices and media comprising: textile, basketry, fibre art, metal work, mixed media, beadwork, ceramic, embroidery, jewellery, furniture and glass.

The exhibition exposed and reflected on four key challenges and concerns faced by contemporary craft practitioners in Scotland and Canada:

1. 'New positions in contemporary craft'.
2. 'Down and dirty: the politics and materials of identity'.
3. 'DIY practices in contemporary craft'.
4. 'Tooling up: new technologies and economies'.

Underpinning research for the exhibition incorporated an innovative combination of research methodologies, including creative practice, workshop activity and publication.



FIG. 3
Claudio Pino, *Tactus*, hinged ring.
925 sterling silver, copper, brass,
moonstones, rubellite. Photo
courtesy of Claudio Pino.



FIG. 4
Naked Craft Exhibition, Art
Gallery Nova Scotia, 2016.
Photo courtesy of AGNS.

FIG. 5
Kevin Andrew Morris, *Hunting for the Lost*, ceramic, 2014/15. Photo courtesy of Kevin Andrew Morris.



03 / ORIGINALITY

This was the first project of its type, ambitious in scope and original in its comparison of contemporary craft practice in Canada and Scotland and in bringing together a diverse range of makers, academics and curators from the two countries.

This collaboration was built on a case study approach, investigating craft communities with a common heritage to better understand shared concerns around tradition, heritage and the relation between the local and the global, and the role of craft in contemporary contexts.

The exhibition and symposia enabled a wide sector of the Scottish and Canadian craft communities and general public to discuss and engage with the themes identified by *Naked Craft*. The project provided a unique opportunity for audiences to access contemporary work by some of Canada's leading craftspeople and to view Scottish craft framed within a new context and expanded audiences' experiences of experimental and conceptual craft work.

The project was innovative in the range of research methodologies it employed: creative practice, publication and curation. The workshops provided early, mid-career and senior makers from Scotland and Canada with opportunities to work in experimental and interdisciplinary ways in the Make/Work sessions and symposia where makers, writers, industry partners and curators discussed and produced work addressing the themes which resonated within their own practice.

The project provided an exemplary model for further innovative projects and partnerships around contemporary craft. Projects that have responded to and developed ideas raised by NCN include *Citizens of Craft*, a project initiated by Ontario Craft in 2016 to grow audiences for craft in Canada, and *Shift: Old Stories, New Narratives: Sustainability, Identity and Collaboration* (1–4 July 2020), a series of symposia and workshops exploring issues around craft and sustainability.

FIG. 6
Naked Craft exhibition opening
 Centre Materia, Quebec City, 2015.
 Photo Juliette MacDonald.



FIG. 7
Naked Craft exhibition flyer for
 Quebec exhibition and
 symposium.

The Naked Craft Network is an international project bringing together the best of contemporary Canadian and Scottish crafts. This research project will strip ideas of craft back down to four themes that bridge the past and the present, traditional and changing ideas: New Positions, Down and Dirty, Politics and Materials, Do-it-Yourself (DIY), and Tooling Up: New Technologies and Economies. These themes are explored in the Naked Craft touring exhibition where makers from Canada and Scotland celebrate their shared sense of northern resilience as both countries rest to the north of a southern powerhouse. The symposium brings together makers, researchers, and the general public to discuss these issues and the future of craft.

Centre Materia, Quebec: September 26 - November 28, 2015
 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax: January 14 - April 10, 2016



FIG. 8
 Extract from *Studio, Craft and
 Design in Canada*, Spring/Summer
 2015, p18-19.



FIG. 9
Naked Craft studio space in
 a *Make/Workshop*. Photo
 Juliette MacDonald.



FIG. 10
 A participant working in the
 foundry at the *Naked Craft Make/
 Work Sculpture Workshop*,
 Lumsden. Photo Juliette
 MacDonald.



04 / RIGOUR

Naked Craft Network (NCN) project was conceived and initiated by MacDonald and Alföldy as craft historians and theorists with shared interests in the practices and processes of contemporary craft, craft history, heritage and identity, and contemporary meanings of craft within both global and local contexts.

The project began with an AHRC Networking Grant with Juliette MacDonald as PI. This income was used to produce a *Make/Workshop* for artists from Canada and Scotland. Further funding from Creative Scotland and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) enabled the production of a touring exhibition and associated workshops and symposia. Together these elements facilitated a questioning through making and discussion of value of craft and the relevance of its history in contemporary contexts.

Two collaborative five-day residential workshops (titled *Make/Workshops*) centred around the re-evaluation of the function of craft, through the production and generation of craft artefacts.

The first workshop was held at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, Lumsden, Scotland (2015), and a second took place at the Art Gallery of Burlington, Ontario (2016), to coincide with the opening of the *Naked Craft* exhibition at that venue. Ten makers (five from Scotland and five from Canada) were competitively selected by MacDonald and the international curatorial team, through an open call.

The selected participants represented a wide range of experience, materials and approaches, and the venues were equipped with a range of workspaces, including kilns and foundry equipment, supported by on-site technicians. Led by experienced makers Jessamy Kelly (Scottish glass artist) in Lumsden and Aaron Nelson (Canadian ceramicist) in Burlington, both workshops introduced the participants to skills new to them. Embroiderer Jen Deschenses, for example, worked in the brass foundry at Lumsden and produced new work as a result.

The workshop enabled knowledge exchange that led to new insights regarding cultural transmissions through colonial trade routes, and Scotland's influence on Canadian craft through luminaries such as Glasgow School-trained Grace Wilson Melvin (Head of Design at the Vancouver School of Art from 1927–1952) and the continuing impact of Cape Breton's Gaelic College of Arts and Crafts (established in 1938).



FIG. 11
Juliette MacDonald speaking about *Naked Craft* at the Canadian Craft Federation. Photo Laura Hamilton.



FIG. 12
Flyer for symposium at Centre Materia, Quebec City, 2015.

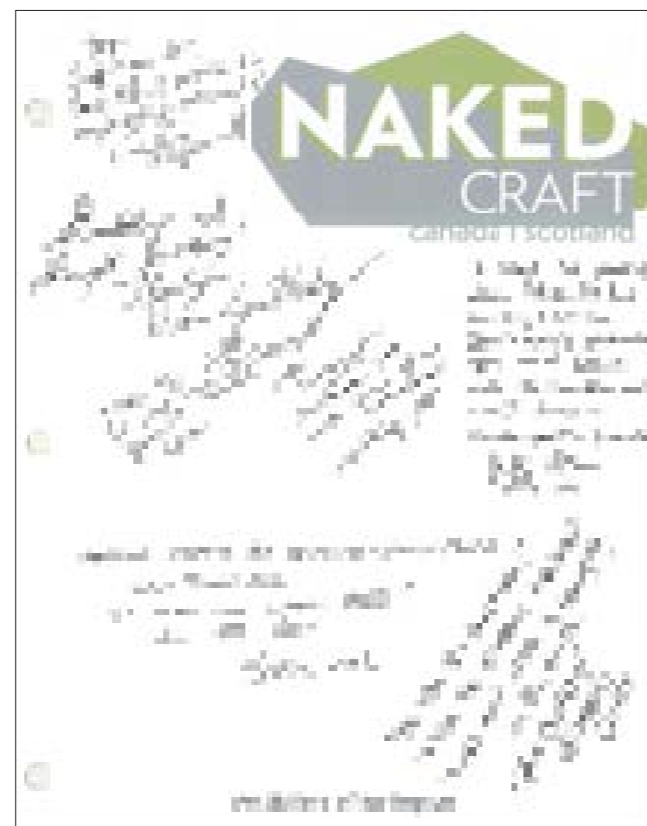


FIG. 13
Extract from the *Naked Craft* exhibition guest book.

The craftspeople who participated in the workshops found that this collaboration helped them, to extend their own practice.

‘I felt very free to ‘fail’, to make a lot of work that I wouldn’t keep, to make without deadline or expectation. The workshop was full of opportunities, and its inspired and generous approach allowed me to just play. When the workshop was over, I kept working, and made quite a few pieces that were totally new in form and approach, thanks to the workshop.’

Anonymous workshop participant

‘The experience was a special opportunity to ask myself ‘what if’ with a clear mind and be open to push my own boundaries and experiment... the exchange between countries was fascinating as many similarities were discovered, and a wealth of knowledge in our differences.’

*Susan Collett,
Canadian printmaker and sculptor,
Participant in workshop*

Symposia

The workshop in Lumsden culminated in a symposium titled *Belonging and Identity in a Globalised Context*. This framed the research underpinning the workshops within critical and historical contexts. A series of further symposia, organised by MacDonald, were held at Barony Centre Craft Town, West Kilbride, October 2016, Edinburgh College of Art, November 2016 and An Lanntair Stornaway, May 2017.

Further workshops were held in in Canada, Burlington June 2016, and Centre Materia in Quebec, September 2016 (as a part of the Canadian Craft Federation annual conference).

Speakers included participants from the *Make/Workshops* and exhibition, and the NCN team.

The symposia were attended by an audience of experts, general public, and representatives from the creative industries, funding councils and members of professional guilds.

MacDonald presented papers at each of the Scottish events: *Belonging and Identity in a Globalised Context*, October 2015, *Locating North*, October 2016, *Re-evaluating the Impact of Tradition on Contemporary Practice*, November 2016 and *Naked Craft, Stripped Bare* (with Alföldy, Quin, Longchamps and Verhoeven), May 2017.



FIG. 14
Jen Deschenes, *Sixareen*, for *Naked Craft* exhibition, addressing the theme of narratives of identity and cultural flows, incorporating her new skills learned in the brass foundry at the *Naked Craft Make/Workshop*. Photo Juliette MacDonald.



FIG. 15
Claudio Pino's ring collection, 2014/15, with Susan Collette's *Ceramic Maze Rocco*, 2014, in the background. Photo Juliette MacDonald.

FIG. 16
Naked Craft exhibition, Art Gallery,
 Nova Scotia, 2016. Photo courtesy
 of AGNS.



FIG. 17
Naked Craft exhibition, Burlington
 Art Gallery, Canada, 2016. Photo
 Juliette MacDonald.

05 / SIGNIFICANCE

The project was disseminated through its multiple national and international presentations and reached wide audiences through its inclusion in major events such as the Canadian Craft Federation's (CCF) annual symposium, which was specifically scheduled to coincide with the NCN exhibition in Quebec.

The multi-component nature of the project meant that it reached a wide audience of experts, general public, along with representatives from the creative industries, funding councils and members of professional guilds. Primary audiences for the seven iterations of the exhibition were in excess of 31,000. The symposia was attended by over 1,000 people in total.

The exhibition provided a unique opportunity for audiences to experience contemporary work by some of Canada's leading craftspeople and to view Scottish craft framed within a new global context. The exhibition was one of the largest initiatives for Canadian Craft in 2015. In Scotland, the exhibition toured venues across a broad geographical spread, enabling access for audiences living outside the Scottish central cultural belt.

The exhibition toured the following venues:

20 June – 6 September 2015
 Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington, Canada.

26 September – 28 November 2015
 Centre Materia, Quebec City, Canada.

14 January – 10 April 2016
 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Canada.

April – May 2016
 Thurso Gallery and Iona Gallery, Kingussie,
 Scotland.

June – August 2016
 Barony Centre Craft Town, West Kilbride,
 Scotland.

October 2016 – February 2017
 Peebles Art Gallery, Peebles, Scotland.

April – June 2017
 An Lanntair Stornaway, Orkney, Scotland.



FIG. 19
Teresa Burrows *She's Come Undon,*
Our Lady of the Trapline, 2014–15.
Photo Juliette MacDonald.

FIG. 18
Sarah Alford, detail *Lectures*
on Art Botany, hot glue gun,
2014–15. Photo Juliette
MacDonald.



FIG. 20
Extract from the *Naked*
Craft catalogue.

An 87-page catalogue, edited by MacDonald and Alford, *Naked Craft Canada/Scotland* (*Métiers d'art mis à nu*), was published to accompany the exhibition. It featured a chapter by MacDonald – ‘Down and Dirty: The Politics of Material’ – about objects that manifest a personal or communal attachment with place, while expressing a sense of loss or displacement (ISBN 978-1-927642-36-5).

The NCN was funded in the UK by the AHRC (£45,000) and Creative Scotland (£32,000), and in Canada by SSHRC (\$68,000).

NCN was nominated for a Canadian Museum Association award for outstanding achievement in the Research category for: ‘research activities carried out in museums or applied to museum practice that contribute to the development of new knowledge and understanding’.

As a result of the NCN project, MacDonald became a Research Fellow at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design’s Craft Institute (2019).

NCN challenged the way individual professional makers, amateur groups and policy-makers think about craft. Emma Quin, CEO of Ontario Crafts Council, noted that ‘there are very few opportunities for a Canadian dialogue to focus on what craft is, and *Naked Craft* has provided this opportunity for one of the first times. By looking further afield to Scotland it has made it easier to internally reflect on Canadian approaches and it has brought opportunities for people to come together and reflect and discuss what craft and place means’.

The NCN catalogue was included in the theory section of Canadian Craft bibliography (see Appendix, page 25).

Data from NCN has been used by MacDonald in a chapter ‘Hunting for Lost Crafts: The Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Scottish Craft’ in *Intersecting Discourses: Inflecting Craft and Heritage*, Eds Elaine Cheasley-Patterson, Susan Surrette, Bloomsbury Press (Spring 2021).

JULIETTE MACDONALD

Down and Dirty: politics of material

All too often the xenophobic divisions that separate the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’ are in the headlines. The ‘dirty work of boundary maintenance’² and the normalisation of exclusionary tactics take centre stage. This *Down and Dirty: politics of material* strand of the *Naked Craft* exhibition seeks to question the meaning of belonging and sense of place from a materials and making perspective. This is not in order to reinforce division but rather to reflect on how and why we engage with a particular place, and what means we might use to communicate and articulate the internal, personal, and subjective view of somewhere we have always called home, or chosen to call home. In this exhibition we focus on Scotland and Canada, which although many miles apart are nonetheless northern neighbours sharing historical, social, and material connections, this questioning can be even more nuanced. Comparison between techniques and works within this exhibition are rewarding, and sometimes perhaps even disconcerting, when we think of the deep sense of connection to tradition and authenticity often implicitly (and not always correctly) associated with a craft and its associated skills, processes and practices.

Un sujet osé : la politique des matériaux

Les divisions xénophobes qui séparent le monde entre les « eux » et les « nous » font souvent les grands titres des journaux. Le « sale boulot du maintien des frontières »² et la normalisation des tactiques d'exclusion sont à la une. Ce thème de *Métiers d'art mis à nu* sur la politique des matériaux entend s'interroger, d'un point de vue matériel et créatif, sur le sens d'appartenance et la signification du lieu. Le but n'est pas d'insister sur les divisions mais de s'arrêter sur le comment et pourquoi nous nous investissons dans un lieu donné, et par quels moyens nous pourrions exprimer ce sentiment intérieur, personnel et subjectif associé à l'endroit que nous appelons, ou avons choisi d'appeler, chez-soi. Cette exposition, centrée sur l'Écosse et le Canada qui, malgré la distance qui les sépare, sont néanmoins des voisins nordiques partageant des liens historiques, sociaux et matériels, est une bonne occasion de raffiner ces questions. Les comparaisons entre les multiples techniques et créations de cette exposition sont gratifiantes, et même parfois déconcertantes, lorsque nous prenons en compte le sentiment profond de connexion avec la tradition et l'authenticité souvent implicitement (mais pas toujo-

FIG. 21
Caroline Dear, *Shawl*, 2014.
Photo Juliette MacDonald.



FIG. 22
Joanne B Kaar *Combed Soft Rush Socks*, 2014–15. Photo Joanne B Kaar.



FIG. 23
Amanda McCavour, *Boxes*, water soluble thread. Photo Juliette MacDonald.



06 / APPENDIX

Naked Craft Network website

<https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/research/naked-craft-network>

Naked Craft Network exhibition catalogue

Alfoldy, S. and Longchamps, D. 201 *Naked craft: Canada-Scotland = Les mtiers d'art mis nu: Canada-Scotland*. Burlington, ON: Art Gallery of Burlington. 978-1-927643-36-5

Online

The NCN catalogue was included in the theory section of Canadian Craft bibliography:

<https://canadiancraftsfederation.ca/theory/>

Press and Media

The project received press and media coverage from a range of local, national and International sources including broadsheets, craft specialist publications, TV and radio, including:

- The Island Review
- Studio Magazine
- The Chronicle Herald
- Atlantic News (TV Canada)
- Broadcasting Scotland (Digital TV channel UK)
- Le Soleil
- Quebec Scope Magazine
- CKRL Quebec (Radio)

Studio Magazine Spring/Summer 2015, p18

'A significant event in the Craft Year calendar is taking place in June, in Burlington, Ontario: the Naked Craft Network's second workshop and the opening of its first exhibition, at the Burlington Art Gallery. The Naked Craft Network is an ongoing collaboration between Canadian and Scottish craftspeople, scholars and craft professionals, exploring the nuances of craft practice in the two countries.'

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Press Release

'Halifax, Nova Scotia, January 16, 2016

In viewing the range of bold, intricate and awe-inspiring works of various media, visitors will leave with a better understanding of continuity and change within the discipline. With this increased awareness of contemporary craft and its value, comes the potential of increased sales, consumption, recognition and promotion for both makers and their objects.'



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