

***Redefining Crafts and Crafts Enterprise in the Twenty-first Century: A Theoretical Analysis***

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**Abstract**

When studying crafts as a tangible material culture associated with intangible heritage contexts, it is essential to investigate the terms *objectification*, *material culture* and *artifact*. These three terms are connected with the concepts of ‘thing’, socialization, production, biography, exchange, art, fetishism, taste, lifestyle, consumption, values, history, place and landscape(Tilley, 2010); therefore, it is very important to clarify these concepts as an introduction to a study of crafts and crafts enterprise. All the above-mentioned concepts establish a platform for the study of issues related to crafts and crafts enterprises in very changeable time. This paper will introduce relevant terminologies and provide definitions to clarify how these terms are being used in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the concepts of objectification, material culture and artifacts in general, which will form a background to exploring the field's main concepts of craft and craft enterprise in particular.

Keywords: Crafts, objectification, material culture and artifact.

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## **1- Introduction:**

To Studying Omani crafts, as a tangible material culture associated with intangible heritage contexts, it is essential to investigate several terms including objectification, material culture and artefact respectively. Because these three terms are connected with the concept of 'things', socialisation, production, biographies, exchange, art, fetishism, taste, lifestyle, consumption, values, history, place and landscapes (Tilley, 2010), it was very important to clarify these concepts in order to study 'craft' definition, and this will form a background to explore the research's main concepts of craft and Craft Enterprise in particular.

## **2- Objectification/ Material Culture/ Artefacts:**

Constructing a theory for material culture demands understanding Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (mind) theory in general and the concept of objectification in particular, because many studies, including the works of Marx (1975), Simmel (1978), Lukacs (1971) and Sartre (1969), have been constructed upon Hegel's theory (Miller.D, 1987:19). Miller (1987) believed that Hegel theory's value comes from his concentration on the dualism upon the so called 'subject-object' which had been "a pivotal problem" in Western philosophy since Greek times (p.20). Webb Keane in Handbook of Material Culture, tried to simplify the issue of subject-object, when he asserted that understanding the subject-object dilemma comes from the focusing of four relations which are: production, representation (object represent subject), development (internal development of subjectivities in relation to objects) and extension of subjects through objects (2010, pp.197-202).

Miller (1987) concluded his chapter Hegel and Objectification with three claims. First, he asserted that objectification becomes a foundation for a 'theory of culture'. Second, using the term objectification asserts the necessity for a particular kind of relationship between 'human development and external form'. Third, the term objectification asserts the process of culture because of the connection between the object and the surrounding environment (Miller.D, 1987: 33). Hence, it does not come as a surprise that objectification's values can be considered as a background for craft theory, especially when culture and the physical necessity of certain objects cannot be separated from each other.

Karl Marx argued that Hegel's thoughts and analysis about objectification were not accurate because he had contributed an abstracted metaphysics and that this did not represent the real issues of society (Miller.D, 1987: 35). The difference between Hegel and Marx's interpretation of objectification is that Marx believed in the importance of "[separating] off a notion of objectification from that of alienation" (ibid. 41). In fact, one of the most important additions by Marx to Hegel's theory is creating other terms to clarify objectification's terminologies, which are: alienation, fetishism and reification (Miller. D, 1987: 43). These three definitions are slightly different from each other, but in general all of them assert that objectification means "the act of representing an

abstraction as a physical thing” or “express (something abstract) in a concrete form” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). An important result of considering these conceptual developments, object (craft) making has been influenced by the society (environment) on one hand and it became very important that the produced object is recognised as tangible or describable visually only.

Shlomo Avineri (1968) explained Karl Marx’s perspective when he claimed that labour produced objects so the labour becomes embodied in an object. Labourers in this case will lose themselves because their product becomes an objectification of the labour (p. 102). According to Marx, man (labour) is alienated from nature, himself and humanity, and all these aspects constructed his concept of “alienation” (ibid, 105). So what are the results of this process?

There are some consequences for alienation’s phenomena. First, “the worker puts his life into the object”, and then he has lost himself because his life becomes to belong to the object (ibid, 103). Second, the worst thing is that “what is embodied in the product of his labour is no longer his own”, and that means he has no influence on the products he’s made (ibid). Third, he has given the object a life, but that life stands against him as an “alien” and “hostile force” as Marx expressed in his writings (ibid). Finally, the produced object by labour became his master, in other words “the worker became a slave to his object” (Avineri.S, 1968: 105). With regard to crafts as an area influenced by cultural and economic changes, Karl Marx’s interpretation of objectification as mentioned above in brief, led to arguing around issues such as: to what extent is Karl Marx’s theory applicable to ‘craftsman’ instead of the normal ‘worker’? Will all previously cited consequences happen to ‘craftsman’ when he produces his crafted object? To what extent does a craftsman become a “slave” to his object by giving his own life to his product?

In studies of crafts, Marx’s thoughts about the balance between the object (e.g. craft) and its maker (e.g. craftsman) showed that the object has more recognition than its maker and this could be because machines and mass production were the cornerstone of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, pottery production in Stoke-on Trent (UK) in the time of Wedgwood were even recognised by their makers, but after the industrial revolution the brand and factories’ names represent the identity of objects more than their own hand makers.

Objectification is a wide concept, and Christopher Tilley (2010) explained the concept and its relation with many other issues. Between these issues was “objectification and art” which is the most similar subject to crafts (p.66). Tilley used Morphy’s (1991) studies of Yolngu aboriginal paintings from Australia to clarify the concept of objectification in art (ibid). According to Tilley, in Morphy’s study “Yolngu art is and it objectifies essential features of the structure of Yolngu society and the system of restricted knowledge” (p.66). Also his study confirms that their paintings do not only represent the tribes past, but also these paintings are a ‘dimension’ of the past and activate the relation to the individual in the past (ibid).

Even the surrounding environment can be considered in defining objectification, but still

materials and tangible objects are the most important elements in considering objectification. Miller suggested that the potential medium of objectification is the concrete material objects, or in other words objectification is human labours' (including craftsmens') production of artefacts (Miller, 1987:85). This introduction aimed to lead to a shift in the debate from discussing the term 'objectification' to argue around the more specific term of 'material culture'.

Prown. J (2001) asserted that "the term material culture seems self contradictory. Material is a word we associate with base and pragmatic things; culture is a word we associate with lofty, intellectual, abstract things" (p.235). Tim Dant agreed with Prown, when he mentioned that material is everything we can touch, smell and see, but not humans or animals, and culture is "the set of common human practices that surround material objects" (Dant. T, 1999: 11). In order to link these two concepts with each other, Jules Prown (2001) in his investigation of material culture, suggested that material objects become instrumental 'primary data' to be used in cultural investigations (Prown. J, 2001: 70). In fact, as Tim Dant (1999) asserted in his book *Material Culture in the Social World*, human beings are tied to each other and to society by material culture, and that because material culture provides "a means of sharing values, activities and styles of life", he believes that all these things (material culture) are more effective in human life than languages and even direct interactions (Dant. T, 1999:2).

In the 1990s scholars started researching and investigating deeply the body of the material object, so it is not surprising that they found themselves studying 'material culture' issues because material culture and body share the same roots (Graves-Brown. P, 2000: 2). In terms of studying material culture, it is clear that there are some who support the tangible objects significance over culture and social contexts (like the aforementioned Groves-Brown), and those who believe that it is impossible to investigate or analyse objects without considering their surrounding social and cultural context.

But a study that may support partly the argument of Edwards and Hart was conducted by Joanna Sofaer (2007) in her book *Material Identities*. She gave priority to material objects over human social influence when she claimed that "without material expression, social relations have little substantive reality" (Sofaer. J, 2007: 1). Sofaer has added that the only ways to address the nature of materiality is through the ways artists and craftsmen manage materials to provoke aesthetic responses to the object. But she also considered the relationships between objects and peoples social contexts (Sofaer. J, 2007: 2).

In his book 'Art as Evidence', Jules Prown (2001) defined material culture as "study through artefacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time" (p.70). His work on material culture and its definition particularly drew attention to the importance of the "material body of artefacts" themselves (Prown. J, 2001: 70). To summarise Prown's definition of material culture, he sets out five aspects around his definition:

- Man-made objects are only evidence of human intelligence at the time of production.
- Without understanding (of culture) it will be hard to study the subject matter

- (materials).
- It is difficult to investigate material culture issues because of the “self-contradictory” concept where we associate (materials) with “pragmatic things” and (culture) with “lofty/abstract things”.
  - He asserted that “all tangible works of art are part of material culture, but not all the material of material culture is art” (Prown. J, 2001: 71).
  - He divided the material culture of art into two categories: decorative (or aesthetic) and utilitarian objects (crafts).

Prown (2001) also defined material culture as “the manifestations of culture through material productions” (p.220). This definition intends to give privilege to culture over object, where objects exist only to manifest the community culture. So rather than what Marx mentioned about the object (e.g. craft) and its maker (e.g. craftsman), the culture of the society became the cornerstone in this area of production and this represented the trinity of object, maker and the environment (culture).

Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007) asked “what would an artefact-oriented anthropology look like if it were not about material culture?”. In reality, the claims have driven us to associate material cultures as a general term with “artefact” as a more specific direct term. The term ‘artefact’ comes from the Latin ‘root’, and it connects a couple of words: art, ars or artis (means skills), and fact, factum (means act) (Prown. J, 2001: 220). In his book *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, Graves-Brown pointed out that from the end of the Second World War to the 1960s the study of artefacts has been taken up by different disciplines such as history, anthropology, and art and design (2000,p. 2).

To start with the artefact concept, the body came from the notion that “the first human artefact is the human body itself” (Graves-Brown.P, 2000, p. 2). So, human feelings about their existent bodies have priority, to be observed and studied even without considering their surrounding environment and culture. Central to Prown’s argument is the purpose of artefacts to be used mostly in cultural history and cultural anthropology studies (Prown. J, 2001, p.70).

Holbraad and Wastell’s perspective about the similarity between terms of material culture and artefacts has some supporters. For instance, Susan Pearce (1992, p.4), when she investigated the term material culture, concluded her debate confirming that “while another term commonly used for material objects is artefact” (Barringer. T & Flynn. T, 1998, p. 6). Also, Prown (2001) believes that “objects made or modified by humans are clumped together under the term artefact”. From this claim, it is possible to consider that Prown has made a direct connection between the concept of ‘material culture’ and the concept of ‘artefact’. Also, his claim about skills draws attention to the concept of crafts where many scholars make a strong connection between skills and crafts. To define the term artefact it is very important to believe that the artefact “exists as a physically concrete form independent of any individual’s mental image of it” (Miller, 1987, p. 99). But Miller’s best interpretation came from his conviction that artefacts are a bridge between mental and physical worlds and between consciousness and the unconsciousness

(ibid, p. 99). In fact, this provided a reason to connect the investigation of Omani craftsmen pottery and other crafts with intellectual, social and cultural aspects in the analysis stage of the research.

Tim Dant (1999) defined artefacts as things made by humans and he distinguished these things from natural forms (stones, mountains etc), but Dant later confirmed that this distinction starts to be break down because some cultures used natural things as objects in their daily life. But in contrast to Dant's categorising, Daniel Miller excluded any natural objects and considers that artefacts are only "the products of human labour" (Miller, 1987, p. 112). But in his series of articles 'Crisis of Art History', Irving Lavin (1996) argued that the terms of 'art' and 'artefact' are very similar and there is no difference between them. Lavin's work drew attention to the assumption that any man-made object is a work of art including the most functional and the lowliest objects (Prown.J, 2001: 221). For instance, Edwards and Hart (2004) pointed out that photographs we collect are made, used, kept and stored, so they are materials and objects representing time and space (p. 2). Their appreciation of photography makes photographs equal with tangible artefacts and crafts themselves. And this could be an example of what Irving Lavin called the "lowliest objects".

Peter Gay (1976) distinguished three factors that influence artefacts. First, crafts made by craftsmen in apprenticeships to reflect traditions. This factor can be explained by presenting Thomas Green's (1997) definition of the word 'tradition' when he mentioned that 'tradition' is a ritual, belief or "object" passed down within a society. This is of importance for this research concerned as it is in studying the challenges facing Omani crafts regarding identity, which can not be pursued without investigating issues such as the land, gender and peoples ethnic groups, all these issues have direct relations with the "anthropological" area of study; an area of study defined by Pascal Boyer (1990) as the "study of tradition in traditional societies" (p.7). To conclude this factor, first, because crafts reflect traditions, and traditions are a central issue in studying the aforementioned anthropological issues, the relations between crafts, anthropology and traditions in this research seemed to be directly connected with each other. Second, culture reflects "attitudes, customs, or beliefs" (Gay. P, 1976); and all people and craftspeople have specific's beliefs and customs. Finally, private practice (individual person) to reflect the person who made the object gave more recognition to the craftspersons status (Gay. P, 1976).

To conclude this part, all previously mentioned arguments around the term 'objectification' contributed in investigating the term 'craft' through its real connection to culture, where the previous arguments around 'objectification' (especially the additions of Miller) asserted that it is hard to separate concrete objects from their surrounding social and cultural contexts. Rather than giving a tangible object priority over its surrounding cultural and social contexts (intangible cultural heritage) as discussions of objectification have previously shown, material culture gave priority to the society and humans in particular over the materiality of object. Previous discussions of material culture showed that it connected humans to each other and to the society, and helped to share values, activities, lifestyle, ideas and attitudes. Also studying material culture as a

concept contributed in thinking around consumerism and collecting traditions, and became evidence of human intelligence. Finally, studying the concepts around the 'artefact' the previous debates established that this formed an introduction to investigating crafts as will be developed later. Also, researching artefacts featured 'human made objects' and that gives this concept a more special position in this research, where as "objectification" and "material culture" were wider in scope than only covering man-made items. Furthermore, studying the concepts of artefacts, as shown previously, confirmed real associations between the concepts and the area of art and crafts, so it was important to establish this framework before moving on to investigate the concept of craft in the next part (Figure 1).

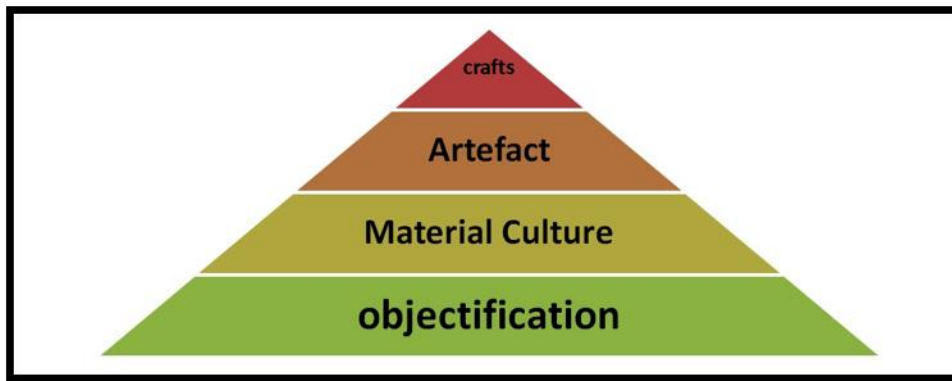


Figure (1): terms' pyramid (study's areas from general to specific)

### **3 – The Definition of Craft:**

Defining craft required investigating its related values, characteristics and perspectives. 'Physiological necessity' is supposed to be the first explanation for the existence of crafts because humans have created crafts basically to fulfil the human body's "physiological needs" (Risatti. H, 2007, p.55). This fact has led us to understand that when people make crafts, their purpose goes beyond culture, so that culture comes in second place (ibid, 56). To complete his argument, Risatti (2007) noted that the process of making crafts seems to be confrontational with nature (e.g. potters make containers to keep liquids where human hands cannot hold water) (ibid, 56). Bruce Metcalf (1997), when investigating comparisons between art and craft, drew attention to six important points:

- Crafts have limitations in terms of retaining as "physical objects", but art is more flexible to dissolve its identities (p.69).
- Craft's first priority is "materials and object hood", but in art the first priority is addressing ideas (p.71), and that could lead to the craftsman becoming like a machine where imitating objects becomes the only required skill.
- Using traditional materials, traditional techniques, traditional tools are all very important in crafts and ignoring that will categorise crafted objects outside of the craft discipline (p.71).
- Recently, to be a craftsman has become a "personal decision", but in the past it was inherited (sons followed their fathers), and this notion gives art another

privilege over craft because art was and still is a “personal decision”. The status of comparing craft with art (especially fine art) forms a wider debate among crafts/art/design scholars. Rose Slivka, in her article ‘The New Ceramic Presence’ in 1961, for example, has argued that the painter-potter stays in the middle between craftsmen and artist, especially when he creates his pots for non-functional purposes (Risatti. H, 2007, p.1). Janet Koplos has pointed out that through criticism, it is possible to recognise the differences between art and crafts, where crafts critics seem to be non-theoretical, and in contrast he believed that the art critic is more theoretical and intellectual than the craft critic (Risatti. H, 2007, p.2).

Furthermore, in terms of discussing the argument of the relation between crafts’ physical existence and social conventions, Risatti added another distinction between crafts and art (Risatti, 2007: 78). He claimed that in the case of craft it is very important to separate social context (around craft object) from physical context (ibid, 86). In contrast, it is not possible to activate this separation in the case of the fine art’s, where it is very important to connect social and physical contexts together (ibid, 86). Howard Risatti’s classification of craft and fine art through his diagrams is shown in figures (2) and (3). In figure (2), Risatti classified man-made things according to their purposes, and that led him to divide things into two groups: applied physical function and visual communicative function. Under the group of applied physical function, Risatti further divided things in two parts: functional means ends (e.g. tools, machines), and functional ends (e.g. containers, covers). And under the group of visual communicative function, he divided things again in two parts: conceptual ends (e.g. painting, sculpture) and practical (e.g. commercial art). Furthermore, between these groups, there is another distinction named adornment and decoration. According to this figure, it seemed that crafts, among man-made things are located in the group of applied physical function in both parts; functional means ends (crafted tools) and functional ends (pottery containers) . But crafts can also be found in the part on adornment and decoration (jewellery). In fact, this diagram’s contribution regarding defining crafts status was very wide, where the Risatti figure (3) provided a clearer taxonomy for the concept of craft.



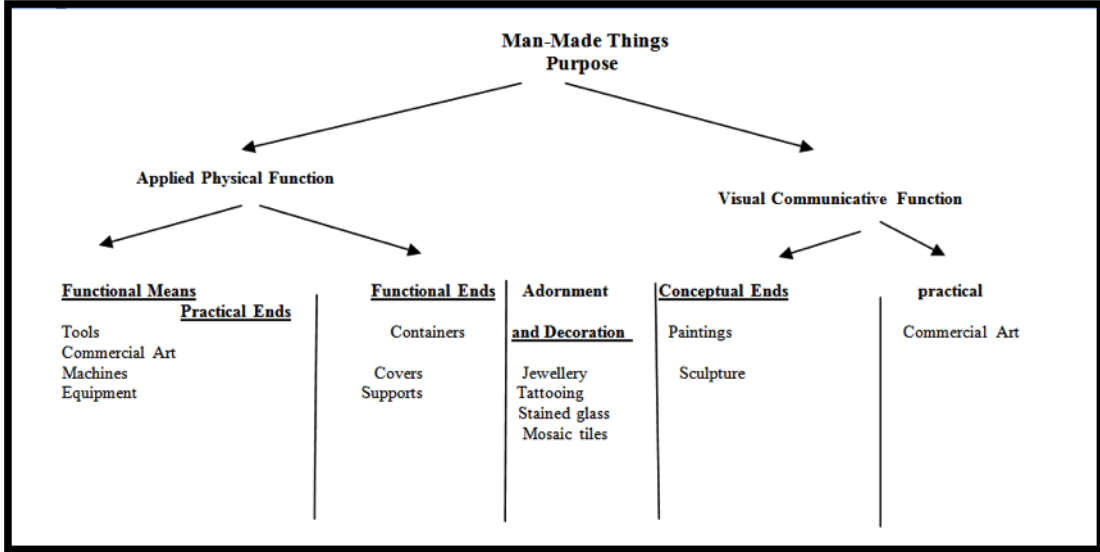


Figure (2): diagram of man-made things according to Howard Risatti #1.

The diagram in figure (3) gave craft two purposes. The first purpose is that crafts is to be considered as utilitarian hand made things. The second purpose is that crafts are considered as fine hand made things. Even though this diagram gave crafts a better place among man-made things, there are some weaknesses regarding this taxonomy. First, this diagram excluded crafts that were made by machines, and he categorised them as utilitarian designed and fine designed things. Second, Risatti, did not provide a clear distinction between design and craft, not only in the diagram, but also in this part of his book.

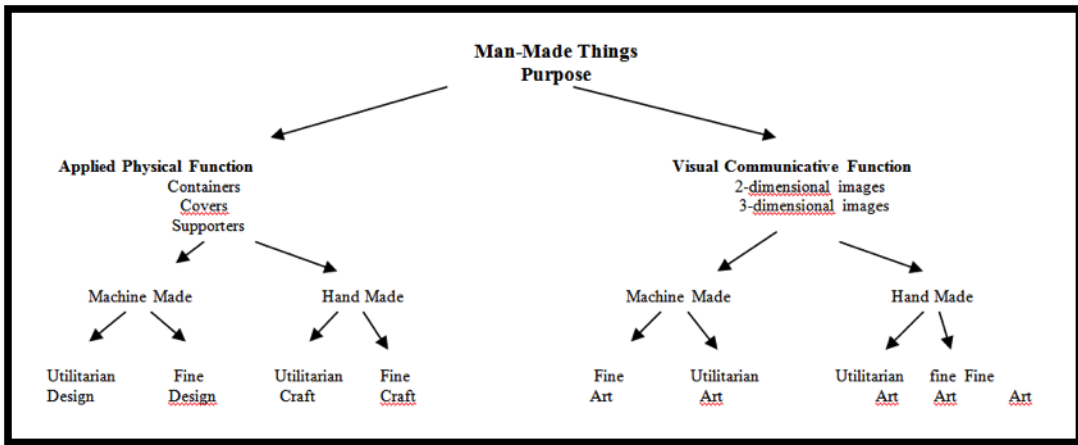


Figure (3): diagram of man-made things according to Howard Risatti #2

Between all the previously mentioned investigations of the term craft, it is possible to recognise two directions regarding craft definition:

### **3-1 First Definition ( Extremely Modern View):**

Craft has a wide definition, so it includes different aspects (traditional crafts and abstract modern art). In addition, it does not always aim to produce utilitarian and functional objects. Also, it can go some way to merge fine art and traditional crafts together, so the concept (studio crafts) appears to collapse the complete separation between them. Within this definition, it is not necessary to create full-handmade objects to be considered as craft. Moreover, modern materials, tools and equipment become alternatives for traditional material (plastic, rubber, fibreglass). Likewise, under this definition 'car' and 'aircraft' for example will be considered as crafted objects, so craft production will include everything made skillfully. Crafts produced according to this definition will be less connected with lofty concepts (contexts) such as social, cultural and heritage expressions. Finally, the term 'craftsman' will be less recognisable as a result of merging between terms of 'craftsman', 'artist' and 'designer'. The values of craft within this definition comes from critics who assess craft work according to their contemporary aesthetic theories.

### **3-2 Second Definition (Extremely Traditional View):**

In this case the definition of craft is very 'direct' and 'narrow', so it is only applicable in describing traditional crafts. Also this definition is made to fulfil human functional and utilitarian needs, whereas aesthetic aspects come as a secondary demand. In fact, this definition is made to be isolated partly from fine art and design subjects and only focuses on the traditional handicraft area. Crafts within this definition are supposed to be full-handmade objects or partly made with machine assistance (e.g. potters wheel, silversmiths kiln etc). Moreover, materials and tools used in this category must be traditional and local as much as craftsmen can provide them, but if this is not possible, he can use modern materials and tools but as little as possible. Traditional designs and forms are required within this category and making any development in the craft object designs and features are supposed to appear on the object form/surface without affecting the original design. In addition, analysing objects within this category requires the study of all its surrounding contexts of culture, social and heritage expressions, which can affect the final analysis results; in other words it is hard to ignore cultural and social aspects in the analysis. The use of the word craftsman within this definition will be recognisable easily, so craftsmen will have good self-esteem among artists and other creative groups. Under this definition, values are in the object as long as the material continues to be useful, and also because of using valuable materials in the crafts' making such as gold and silver. In other words, value here is represented by tangible things like a craft's form and function on one hand, and intangible heritage associated expressions on the other.

The table (2) below summarises these two definitions and their distinctive features:

<b>First definition of Craft</b>		<b>Second definition of Craft</b>
Wide definition (includes both abstract art and traditional crafts)	<b>In contrast</b>	Direct and narrow definition (only traditional crafts)
Aesthetic aspects come before utilitarian and functional demands.		Utilitarian and functional demands come before aesthetic aspects.
Merge between art and traditional craft areas of studies (Studio craft, studio potter etc)		Fine art seems to be isolated partly from crafts, so crafts become as an independent discipline.
Crafts within this definition do not need to be full handmade objects		Fully handmade object with some machine assistance.
Use of modern tools and materials happened widely in this category		Only uses traditional materials and tools, and only uses modern materials in necessary cases.
Includes everything made skilfully (cars and airplanes included)		Concentrates on traditional crafts and slightly developed crafts.
Less related to culture, social and heritage		Cannot analyse without considering culture, social and heritage aspects.
The title “craftsmen” is less recognisable within this definition because of merging between this term and the term “artist”		The term “craftsman” continues to be fully recognisable and distinguished from artists and designers groups.
Critics give value to craft work according to their contemporary times aesthetic theories.		Values are in the object as long as the material continues to be useful, and also because of using valuable material (gold, silver) to make the objects.

Table (2): summarizes craft’s two definitions and their distinctive features.

#### **4 - Craft Enterprise:**

The problem in examining the definition of Craft Enterprise is that equivalents of this term appear in some fundamental studies with different expressions, such as those in the period of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris named his enterprise as 'Morris & Co.' and sometimes 'Decorative Arts Firm'. More recently, in Ian Fillis's (1999) study, for example, he used the term Craft Firm, and in Yarrri Kamara's (2003) study he used the terms of Creative Enterprise and Cultural Enterprise. But the most recognizable shared ground between all the studies is that all contributors when defining Craft Enterprise distinguish two roles for this type of enterprise: cultural heritage values (craft, creative, cultural etc) and making incomes or profitable values (firm, enterprise, entrepreneur, company etc).

While a variety of definitions of the term Craft Enterprise have been suggested, it is significant to evaluate these definitions as exposed in worldwide literature. According to contributions from many authors (e.g. Bayer et al, 1938; Naylor, 1971;Coopers & Lybrand, 1994; Leeke, 1994; Greenhalgh, 1997; Welch, 1997; Metcalf ,1997; Dormer ,1997; Fillis, 1999; Demircan, 2005 etc), within the last two centuries (mostly from the Art and Craft Movement to date) the concept of Craft Enterprise witnessed many changes and developments. To summarise these contributions, it is recognisable that across the identified period, researchers, stakeholders, and craftspeople defined Craft Enterprise according to two main factors. First, some contributors defined it according to the factor of 'size of firm and its contribution to economy' such as the European Commission when they attempted to define Craft and Micro-Enterprises (2010). No doubt that this vision is important to this research especially in the section on crafts' marketing and consumption, but this alone is not enough because this perspective to define Craft Enterprise ignores the cultural intangible heritage expressions, which are associated with traditional tangible crafts assets. Second, contributors who defined Craft Enterprise according to 'crafts cultural and traditional values and characteristics' and this group usually related to the fields of 'art and design', 'social sciences', 'anthropology', 'cultural enterprises', and 'creative industries' (e.g. Naylor, 1971; Metcalf ,1997; Dormer ,1997; Kamara,2003 etc). This perspective to define Craft Enterprise, in fact, became extremely important to this research's direction in general and to the PACI crafts enterprises structures in particular.

For both aforementioned suggested factors 'size of firm and its contribution to economy' and 'crafts cultural and traditional values and characteristics', the UNESCO (represented in WIPO) defined Craft Enterprise in their published guide 'Marketing Crafts and Visual Arts: The Role of Intellectual Property' through Craft Enterprise's characteristics in 2003. In fact, the WIPO did not provide a specific 'statement' to define craft enterprise, but the organization preferred to define it through a list of characteristics (WIPO, 2003, p.6). In reality, the part of the guide dedicated to 'defining crafts enterprises', UNESCO and WIPO concentrated on the craftspersons qualities more than on 'craft enterprise' characteristics in that part. Kamara (2003) in his work 'Keys to Successful Cultural Enterprise Development in Developing Countries', summarised the UNESCO and WIPO perspectives in defining Crafts Enterprises (part of cultural enterprises) in three quotations:

- He identified the importance of individual skills (artistic and technical aspects) in craft enterprise.
- He identified the importance of intangible cultural heritage (cultural and identity aspects) in crafts enterprises.
- He identified the importance of marketing and making incomes (marketing and consumption aspects) in crafts enterprises.

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