

Crafts Council / Education

Craft Journey

Sophie Huckfield / Multidisciplinary
Artist and Engineer



Sophie Huckfield. All photos courtesy of the artist.

What I do

I am a multidisciplinary artist and engineer based between Grand Union in Birmingham and London, working at the intersection of art, craft and engineering. I employ traditional and experimental modes of production to create sculpture, writings and functional objects, which playfully explores our relationship to materials and objects, specifically tools, machines and technologies. I collaborate across disciplines, with a range of organisations and individuals both nationally and internationally, from school children to academics.

Alongside my art practice, I have also worked and interned in a variety of different industries over the past 8 years, from animation to engineering. My making background has been useful as the skills and knowledge I have developed are transferable to a range of different making industries and professions.

Why craft?

From an early age I always knew that I wanted to pursue the arts and crafts. Throughout school I was always intrigued and creatively curious to learn about different materials and making processes.

What I studied at school

I was fortunate enough to attend a Technology school so I was exposed to different making processes throughout this time. At GCSE it was compulsory to take a making-based subject, so I chose Resistant Materials, which taught me different 3D processes and materials. I also took Art and Design, History, Religious Studies, English Literature, English Language, Double Science and Maths. I then continued onto my A Levels, taking Art, History and Sociology. I also did a part time AS level at a local college in Dark Room/SLR Photography. Alongside my studies I was always proactive in seeking opportunities to develop my skills, and I was able to take up weekly Life Drawing Classes after school at a local community centre. When I was 15 I also sought out a local master woodcarver based in Tamworth and spent the next 2 years visiting him once a week to learn sculptural wood carving. The skills and knowledge he taught me enabled me to see a future career in the making industries.



Precious Waste, Sophie Huckfield.

What I studied after school

In 2009 I made the decision to take a Foundation Course in Art and Design. This was a fantastic year and I was able to try a variety of different creative disciplines from textiles to fine art. I decided to specialise in 3D Design and Crafts/Fine Art. I would highly recommend a Foundation Course, as it gives you opportunity to try a range of creative disciplines.

The course enabled me to be accepted onto the leading BA (Hons) Model Making Course at Arts University Bournemouth. This is a fantastic course, teaching making and materials knowledge whilst giving students the opportunity to work in a variety of making industries from architectural model making to the film industry. Throughout university and over the holidays I interned and took on different live projects in order to gain a breadth of experience. I was able to work in animation, architecture and the film industry. I was invited to take on a live project for The National Film and Television School in 2011, which involved making one of the main character puppets for a stop motion short film 'Head Over Heels', which was



Commodities 4, Sophie Huckfield.

nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Animation in 2013. Making the most of the opportunities available to you is vital and I would recommend getting in touch with different companies to see if you can have the opportunity for a paid internship.

Following a year in industry I realised that I wanted to hone and develop my skills in precision making. The University of Birmingham advertised a post for an Engineering Traineeship within the school of Physics and astronomy. This four year 'on the job' training course enabled me to learn and begin to master a variety of precision making techniques, working with conventional machines such as lathes, mills, fabrication and welding. Alongside working with cutting-edge technologies, I was able to gain a HNC in Mechanical Engineering and a Welding and Fabrication qualification. Traineeships are hosted at a variety of companies and universities such as Birmingham, University College London and Sheffield. I would highly recommend it as an alternative route to a university degree, you can get paid to receive expert skills and knowledge.

My career path

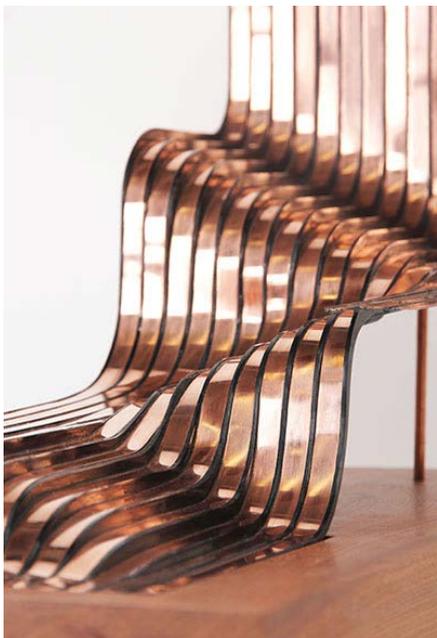
Throughout my studies and traineeship, I also maintained a freelance creative practice as an artist. I kept a studio where I freely experimented with sculptural processes and built up a portfolio which incorporated my background as a maker and engineer and applied them to my fine art practice.

I currently do a range of work as an artist taking on residencies in different organisations, exhibiting and expanding my creative practice.

I took a total of 5 years out from full time education and I know this benefited me greatly. In 2018 I was accepted onto Material Futures Masters course at Central St Martins, and happily received a full scholarship to attend.

There is no right or wrong way. I think a willingness to learn new things and hone current skills will always be important. I don't think it is essential to be in formal education to be a successful craftsperson and there are alternative routes such as apprenticeships and traineeships where you get paid to learn the skills which still remain essential. I have a diverse practice which spans ceramics, film, performance and engineering.

I balance two careers, one as a craftsperson/maker, working to a brief from a client at a company or organisation and one as a conceptual artist. Working full time in the making industries over the past 5 years has enabled me to hone my making skill set but to also experiment with it. I wanted to ensure that I can have something to fall back on which marries my two careers together, one as an independant maker and one as a maker in industry. My career is still developing and there is a lot I want to explore and achieve!



Longchamp store stairs model, Sophie Huckfield.

Important decisions

Taking five years out of full time education was the best thing for me. A Masters Degree is a huge financial commitment and it was important for me to work at being an artist and craftsman first to see if I could cope with the lifestyle of being a creative, which is very difficult. It gave time to think about why I wanted to further my practice and also have a clear idea of what kind of maker I am outside of a formal education context. I worked hard to develop my practice, including continuing to develop my creative skills, such as taking on a weekly glass blowing course. I was also selected for various residencies. I try to read extensively to conceptually underpin my creative practice and where I sit as a maker. A big breakthrough in my practice was deciding to make my own opportunities, rather than wait for them to come to me. I made the most of working at The University of Birmingham, collaborating with people on campus to develop creative projects for which I was able to get funding for. It enabled me to manage and write my own briefs and work collaboratively, providing opportunities for myself and other creatives. I think seeing where potential opportunities lie and making the most out of the opportunities you are given is essential.

When I decided to take the leap to apply for a Masters Degree, I extensively researched a range of courses nationally and internationally. I think it's important to go to see graduate shows and open days and to speak to students who have studied on the course. I looked up what they wanted from students and ensured that the work I included in my portfolio reflected that. I applied early and ensured that any scholarship applications were well researched and written. Be prepared, you will feel all the more confident for it.

My advice to you

Be open minded. My acceptance onto my Masters was also due to my passion and enthusiasm for what I do, so don't follow trends, follow your gut. Approach this as a lifetime's work. A creative career is highly rewarding but it is also about motivation, hard work and long hours. Don't be afraid to ask for help and listen when advice is given. Look after and be kind to yourself, your health and wellbeing comes first. This is a marathon, not a sprint!

I think, the best thing I've learnt is to get used to and learn from rejection. Rejection is the biggest asset you can turn in your favour. I have been rejected, a lot. Always ask for feedback from failed applications. Ask your peer group for honest critical feedback, their support has let my practice develop in leaps and bounds. Rejection is part of the package of being a creative but it's also the thing you can learn the most from.

Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:
www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**