Contemporary Craft Arts: From Identity Crisis to Conceptual Revival (With an Emphasis on Howard Becker's Sociology of Art and Craft Theory)

Majid Ziaee, Akram Mohammadizadeh and Raheleh Fadavi

Craft arts (handicrafts), which historically represented a synthesis of skill, aesthetics, and social function, faced an existential crisis and a limitation of utility upon encountering the Industrial Revolution. This article, adopting an analytical-comparative approach, traces the evolution of craft arts from early responses (such as the Arts and Crafts Movement) to its contemporary formulations (Craft Studio and Craftivism). Utilizing Howard Becker's sociological framework (particularly the concepts of "craft" and its transition into "art") as well as theoretical approaches in contemporary craft studies (such as material agency, embodied skill, and social activism), this article examines the semi-independent and interstitial identity of craft arts within the contemporary art landscape. Finally, by applying these theoretical foundations to the state of craft arts in Iran- especially ceramics- it demonstrates how this field, while maintaining its connection to tradition, has on one hand entered the realm of visual/conceptual arts, and on the other hand, by preserving its material and process-driven nature, has become a tool for critical expression and social action (craftivism).

Keywords: Craft Arts, Handicrafts, Contemporary Craft, Howard Becker, Sociology of Art, Contemporary Ceramics.