

INTERVIEW

# Álla Sinkevich

## **Have generations of makers influenced your work in unique or unexpected ways?**

My personal exploration and understanding of materials are deeply rooted in my family upbringing. My childhood memories of spending summer months at the family farm in northern Ukraine, growing own produce and making crafts, has largely shaped the way I explore new materials and design my work. I moved to Ireland to study design abroad and pursue a career in fashion over six years ago. I had the privilege of studying fashion design at The National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and exploring my identity through making away from my homeland. During my time in NCAD, I came to the realisation that my cultural heritage can and must be applied in unexpected ways. Skills and aesthetics that I possess and took for granted for a long time appear as fresh and unique in a new cultural surrounding, this makes my heritage so unique in the new contemporary context.

## **How does this influence manifest in your work?**

I truly appreciate handmade objects, textiles and artefacts that possess individual qualities and meanings alongside its' utilitarian purposes. Essentially everything I engage with in everyday life was deigned or handcrafted: handmade furniture and carved wooden kitchen utensils, ceramics, embroidered towels and bed linen. I choose to surround myself with handcrafted objects whenever possible and make most of my clothes myself or alter preowned garments. Appreciation and joy of small everyday things has an impact on the quality of my life and help me to feel grounded.

## **What is the most important thing you have learned from previous generations of makers within your family?**

The most important thing that I have learnt from the previous generations of makers within my family is a deep respect for natural material, design for purpose and resourcefulness. I have learned that limitations are good for creativity, and less is always more. Although it was not called design in that specific context, growing up I was always surrounded by handmade tools and objects that existed only because of pure necessity and need. I still apply this rule to my everyday life and hope to pass it on.

## **Describe the relationship between generations of makers in your family.**

Unfortunately, I have very little family left alive which is what makes inherited handcrafted objects so significant to me. These treasured objects bear meaning, signify the connection between previous generations and illustrate irreversible changes and the passing of time itself.

## **Can you trace the evolution of your inherited skills?**

I can definitely trace the evolution of my craft skills back to my childhood and family experience. Certain handmade objects trigger the whole design process. This was the case with the felt boots, a present from my sister, or the hand-embroidered towel which my grandmother passed on to me.

These objects became the starting point for my degree collection. Some wooden household tools (purely utilitarian objects usually made by the male family members) I treat as sculptural objects that can be dissected, analysed and reinterpreted. In my work, I retain the inherited skills and knowledge of the natural materials in a contemporary context combining them with new materials and technology.

## **How do you balance respect for tradition with innovation, against current design trends or the need to respond to the demands of the marketplace?**

In my practice, I always search for new materials and original ways of applying underappreciated traditional craft techniques and prefer making things the traditional way from start to finish. This is my solution to the problem of fast-paced living and ever-changing demand.

Personally, I do not follow or create trends. I believe that handcrafted things are meant to last and should be passed on from one person to another whether in one family or to someone else who can appreciate the history of the unique objects, crafted with a human touch and lots of love.

## **Have you found your own voice, or do you feel that being part of a family tradition can restrict your creativity and/or originality?**

Craft making in my family was mainly seen as a means of creating useful things for our own use or for ornamental purposes, not for trading or self-expression in a broad sense. I am the only person in the family who decided to pursue a career in design, and this is my original voice. My practice falls in between art and fashion design and I express myself through making. I feel deeply grateful and understood when I connect with my customers or curious people and other designers.

## **How important is it to pass on your skills and culture of making to the next generation or to ensure a sense of continuity?**

I think it is extremely important to share and pass on craft-making skills to the next generation. We live in the age of advanced technology and are constantly surrounded by soulless mass-produced goods, so we absolutely must connect with nature and the environment, and practising craft is hugely important in this. Although it is not easy but possible to 'infect' people with a passion for making and shaping their surroundings. I recently moved to Copenhagen to study the Masters Programme at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. I made this choice because Denmark has a strong making tradition and is well known for sustainable design. I am really looking forward to learning new skills, exploring my own potential further and pass on my skills to the best of my ability.