

INTERVIEW

# Hugo Byrne

**Have previous generations of makers influenced your work in unique and unexpected ways?**

Yes, though mostly through the attitude that there is no pressure or panic to find a career, and that if you keep yourself busy and interested, you will naturally end up doing whatever it is that interests you, despite maybe not knowing what that was until very recently. I ended up making knives in a fairly roundabout and unexpected way, which was definitely a result of the same sort of philosophy that my parents always went with.

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

I think it has imbued me with the knowledge and reassurance that going through life as a maker, or contributing to the world in this way, is very fun and stimulating, and - importantly - that the finished product will not always turn out exactly as how you may have imagined or intended it to. But the attitude that, as well as the result, the journey and the process is equally important, and that the failures must be celebrated with the successes as an essential part of the game.

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

To try everything out, even if it seems completely irrelevant or unimportant. The attitude that a step taken in any direction is always better than no steps at all, and the surprise that- just like for my father- a brief move out to the ends of Connemara was instrumental in redirecting my life onto a very exciting new path.

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

The resource of sharing a space with two other makers of such long standing in my family is a goldmine in terms of an attitude towards making, process, and even contacts. We are constantly helping each other solve problems, and while I can certainly say that I find their experienced influence extremely helpful, I like to imagine that they find my inexperience or different way of looking at or thinking about things useful and refreshing.

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

While there are particular skills required for my particular craft that I did not pick up from previous generations of makers in my family, growing up watching and observing these people at work and in their everyday, I learned a multitude of general practical skills that come in handy every day, be it in my craft or completely outside of it. I think they are so ingrained because of how I picked them up over my lifetime, that they would be impossible to forget, and so are retained and I hope will be passed on again through me in the future.

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

Well I suppose the tradition side of things is where we are coming from, and the innovation is where we are going to, and somewhere in between those two points is what makes it interesting and exciting. While - for instance - automation can just do the entire job for you, leaving all the craft behind, other new technologies can serve to enhance or amplify the craft within your work, and so are an innovative way to further a tradition.

In my work there are indeed design trends, but there is also a very particular set of technical requirements for my knives to adhere to if they are to function well, as intended, and the challenge of meeting these requirements in function, while also making something interesting and- hopefully - beautiful in terms of form, is invigorating.

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

I am very lucky in that not only are both of my parents craftspeople, but that they also taught in their respective fields for many years, and so are aware of the risk that a teacher can have of over-influencing a student. They are incredibly helpful and enthusiastic in terms of questions of design and process, but at the same time they are also very careful not to guide me too much, leaving me to find my own voice and creative style.

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

I think it is extremely important to pass on skills and the culture of making to the next generation. Skills of making provide you with an agency of capability that enables you to contribute physically to the world around you. It is a very affirming thing to know that something that didn't exist this morning now does exist, thanks to your making it, and knowing that you have made this positive (we hope) contribution to the world is very rewarding indeed.

