

AUSTRALIA

Makers, Manufacturers & Designers

Dr Jesse Adams Stein, Senior Lecturer and Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award Fellow at University of Technology Sydney's School of Design, reports on *Makers, Manufacturers & Designers: Connecting Histories*' (2021-2023), to be included in the National Library of Australia's (NLA) oral history and folklore collection.

'The concept for *Makers, Manufacturers & Designers* grew from an awareness that existing histories of twentieth century Australian design and manufacturing are often told very separately, and fail to account for the ways in which design, local manufacturing and technical education were – until very recently – tightly interconnected sectors.

'It makes more sense if we put a human lens on this theme. In the late 1970s, the teenager Mike Buick undertook an apprenticeship in shipbuilding, then trained as an engineering draughtsperson. He worked at a petrol pump manufacturer, before gradually shifting his career and disposition towards photography and assemblage art, as well as working as an arts technician. Buick's memories of technical draughting reveal the ways in which the engineers and designers had a close working relationship with 'shop floor' manufacturing tradespeople, where face-to-face communication and local suburban networks were crucial to producing a quality result. Buick's assemblage artwork is inflected by his industrial past.

'This is but one example, but it reveals how, when you talk through an individual's life story, fascinating connections emerge between design, manufacturing and technical education. It demonstrates the cultural richness that can be forged when there is a healthy local manufacturing sector, and when trade skills are treated as socially and educationally valuable. In the present context, Australian manufacturing is in long-term decline, and technical education is suffering from decades of underfunding. This is why I wanted to draw attention to the broad social value of local production (beyond just a job-creating sector), and also demonstrate how trades-based education has a cultural significance that transcends immediate vocational application.

'The interviews commenced in November 2021. My co-interviewer Dr Nikki Henningham is undertaking interviews in the Australian states of Victoria and South Australia, while I am focused on the state of New South Wales. The interviewees include Australian manufacturing tradespeople, craftspeople, design educators, artists and manufacturing small-business owners – all with connections to industrial craft and creative practice. For example have interviewed weavers, engineering patternmakers, textiles patternmakers, furniture-makers, moulders, industrial model-makers, wallpaper colourists, etc. I have attempted to recruit a roughly equal number of men and women – this has been a particular focus, given the traditional gender skew of manufacturing histories towards men.

'This project is ongoing, with the aim to reach around sixteen interviews. The interviews follow the National Library of Australia's protocol for 'whole of life' audio interviews, resulting in total durations ranging from two to six hours long. The interviews are summarised (using time-encoded summaries, for use as an online finding aid), as well as transcribed in full. In time, many of the interviews will also be available as digital audio through the National Library of Australia's online catalogue (subject to participant permission).

'Makers, Manufacturers & Designers is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award (2021) and supported by the University of Technology Sydney's Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building.'

Further information: <https://connectinghistories.design/oral-histories>

See also Jesse Adams Stein's recent book, *[Industrial Craft in Australia: Oral Histories of Creativity & Survival](#)* (Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Oral History Series 2021).

Photo: Australia 01

Caption: Portrait of the artist Mike Buick (2022)

Credit/Caption: Dr Jesse Adams Stein