

Problem Statement

Who experiences the problem?

Craftspeople of colour living and working in the UK, at all stages of their working life, from young adults, graduates, and early career makers, to established practitioners.

Describe the problem

Like all craftspeople, our target beneficiaries are trying to make a sustainable career in an industry that's highly competitive. They want to build their network, access support and be treated as individuals with specialist expertise. They're often working alone or in very small teams, having to design and produce work but also manage all other aspects of their business from finance and administration, through to supply chain, sales, and marketing. Unlike their white counterparts, craftspeople of colour face additional challenges and barriers that impede their chances of success, regardless of the quality of their work.

In many black and minority ethnic households in the UK, craft is not viewed as a serious or viable profession for young people to pursue, which negatively impacts the numbers of young people going on to study design or craft in higher education. Class and economic background also have some bearing on who is able to pursue a career in craft. Those that do will often experience racism and microaggressions in craft spaces for the first time. The negative effects of this are further impacted by college and university curricula that teach a white, Eurocentric canon of design and craft. Craft traditions that sit outside this framework are largely neglected and non-representative teaching staff are ill-equipped to support students who want to explore alternative traditions.

For early career and established craftspeople of colour, experiences of racism, othering and microaggressions are widespread. Many have felt their work was devalued because of their ethnicity, gender and/or class, or them being expected to make 'ethnic' crafts. In craft spaces, people of colour are overwhelmingly in the minority which leads to feelings of isolation and their work being unfairly under-acknowledged by majority-white audiences, buyers and decision-makers such as judging panels. Such experiences have a significant impact on the confidence of many craftspeople and can lead to increased insecurity and fragility within their business.

Where does the problem present itself?

Incidents of racism, microaggressions, othering, and unconscious bias are experienced in 'craft spaces' throughout the life and career of a craftsperson of colour, from their first interest in art and design at school, through to establishing and growing a sustainable business in the craft.

The problems often present themselves at:

- Schools, colleges and universities on craft and art/design courses.
- Craft fairs and markets - fellow stallholders, customers, organisers and decision-makers.
- Craft social gatherings and networking events - other craftspeople at these events.
- Online marketing platforms and publications, and social media - from anyone in the online space, usually craftspeople, people from craft organisations.
- Craft studios and maker spaces - fellow studio holders, management, customers at open studios.
- Craft support organisations - in the demographics of their staff, at board level, the promotional material, aesthetics and language they use, how they select people for opportunities.
- Suppliers and craft shops

Why is the problem worth solving?

The issues described must be addressed to question what the craft sector is, what it represents, and who it includes. There's an urgent need to transform the UK craft sector into a rich, contemporary, thriving industry that's truly representative of the diversity of the UK. We must act so that harm being caused to craftspeople of colour is not normalised and to ensure it's called out. We aim to make craft in the UK a safe space, with equality of opportunity for all.