

I O'mora

77

23 SEP 2004

Aultgowrie
Salen
Isle of Mull
PA72 6JF

The Chairman
Cultural Commission
Broughton High School
Carrington Road
Edinburgh. EH4 1EG

15 Sept 04

Dear Mr Boyle

I have received your letter dated August 2004. My first thought (and I am still inclined to think it) was that someone had made a mistake. I could not see why being a humble hobby woodturner with outlets in local craft shops but certainly no organisation should make me a colleague of the Cultural Commission.

My second reaction was one of scepticism. This was by coincidence born out within a few days when I read a review of a book called *The Play Ethic* by Pat Kane which the reviewer concluded by saying ".....he's right on one thing - efforts by committee to create or stimulate culture never work".

However, you have obliged me to respond and despite this negative start I wish you success. I stick to my own territory, of course, in my reply and am all too aware that I am unlikely to contribute anything that your high-powered members will not have thought of for themselves.

Beginning with education and taking your next 4 headings in a lump: I believe that the seeds should be sown early even if they lie dormant. That is that instruction in the use of *hand* tools should be available to young pupils. My father gave me a real tool chest when I was 8 or 9. I opened the tin of glue with a chisel and was firmly reprimanded.

From here on I cannot see how a thriving countryside scene can be imposed. It would have to grow, maybe slowly, paying its way with one thing leading to another. I took up turning 20 odd years ago when more and more people were doing the same thing in their garages and sheds. You only needed 2 days instruction and the rest was practice. Instant results - a popular concept these days. It was boom time. Shows, demonstrations, books, videos and CDs proliferated and the professionals seemed to be making more money providing them than just turning.

In the end the inevitable and healthy glut settled things down. You have got to be pretty good to earn a living at it nowadays. I couldn't. Tropical hardwoods helped mediocre craftsmen to sell their stuff in the early days but there has been a proper reaction against raiding threatened forests and native timbers do not have the same appeal. Design and skill and finish have to do the eye-catching.

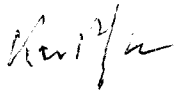
So how to produce these desirable practitioners in significant numbers? I think one way could be alongside the furniture industry. It would be a matter of starting a movement. We all know how Chippendale, Adam, Hepplewhite, Macintosh and their ilk influenced a whole industry, how their designs took off. Modern furniture either harks back to them or adheres to the stark lines of Ikea or Habitat. How about a modern more decorative style relying to some extent on hand carved or turned embellishment? All you need are a few inspired designers! And why should machines have it all their own way?

Surely nothing worth having in the culture world is achieved without practice. The work force so engaged would be being paid to practice and would provide the material out of which a significant number of outstanding craftsmen could be expected to emerge.

As to your final heading, I have no idea how I would formulate the rights of the Scottish citizen in relation to woodwork or conceive a scheme of entitlements but I will just put in a word for galleries – not private commercial ones in which you feel expected to buy something but where local craftsmen can exhibit and local people can inspect. Never mind if the latter do not turn up in large numbers; so much the better in fact. Crowds in the Tate or National Gallery can take the pleasure from a visit. Such small galleries widely available would serve the rights of the populace in one aspect atleast.

I hope these reactionary observations have some relevance to your inquiries. You did ask!

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ken Madge'.

Ken Madge.