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Craft offers Humanity, Accessibility, and Community to the Makerspace Setting

(Asheville, NC) – In November 2017, the Center for Craft and UNC Asheville hosted a special topic Craft Think Tank devoted to mapping and understanding the potential role and impact of craft in a makerspace setting. Facilitated by London-based cultural consultancy *From Now On* and drawing on the expertise of 15 international, national and local thought-leaders, the convened participants identified seven possible craft makerspace models and five key benefits for integrating craft into makerspaces.

Makerspaces are a relatively new phenomenon, consisting of places where people gather to share ideas, equipment and knowledge. These spaces, found in schools, libraries and the private sector, are often focused on computing and technology (including 3D printers, laser cutters, milling machines, circuit boards and more). Today there are approximately 3,000 active and planned makerspaces worldwide.

Craft, or a particular approach to making with a strong connection to materials, skills, and process, is often seen in opposition to the high-tech world of makerspaces, but the two can work together. “The Center for Craft is deeply committed to the handmade process and believes that there are appropriate and necessary areas for digital advances in the field,” says Center for Craft Executive Director Stephanie Moore. “The purpose of the 2017 Craft Think Tank was to explore questions about the impact and outcomes of introducing the handmade into the makerspace setting and conversely exploring what opportunities makerspaces provide for craft.”

Initial conversations recognized studios, workshops and classrooms as precursors to the makerspace, creating parallels of shared interest in tools and technologies, as well as an investment in the idea of innovation. The Craft Think Tank found that introducing craft into makerspaces has the potential to humanize

makerspaces, deepening makers' knowledge of materials and their applications, encouraging personal expression, lowering access barriers to making, building community, and providing a connection to local heritage and traditions.

"Craft is a powerful concept that can and should be introduced into makerspaces worldwide," said UNC Asheville Interim Chancellor Joseph Urgo. "As North Carolina's designated liberal arts university, our interdisciplinary connections merge arts and sciences, tactile learning and technological advances. Our STEAM Studio is one example of this work as a space for creative collaboration and opportunity."

Ultimately, five key benefits of introducing craft into the makerspace setting were identified:

- Leveraging new knowledge for business and academic research
- Bridging craft and startup cultures
- Accelerating interdisciplinary exchange
- Improving gender diversity
- Powering new and effective types of problem solving

The convening was partially funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation entitled "University of North Carolina Asheville: Leading the Public Arts and Humanities in the City of Asheville." Further details and findings are published in the report "14th Annual Craft Think Tank: Craft Makerspaces" and may be downloaded at: craftcreativitydesign.org.

A History in the Making

The Center for Craft and UNC Asheville have a deep history, dating back to the Center's founding as a public service center of the University of North Carolina system in 1996. Since then, the two have partnered in various ways, most recently through the Entrepreneur's Workshop, an all-in-one ecosystem to bring together business resources and training programs to support makers and students in the region of western North Carolina. The recent launch of UNC Asheville's new and innovative makerspace, STEAM Studio, set the stage for developing content. STEAM Studio brings together makers, engineers, artists, and entrepreneurs to work side-by-side in a state of the art facility. The universities' interest in and commitment to cross-disciplinary approaches provided the entre for a Craft Think Tank.

The two institutions will be prototyping a craft makerspace during the upcoming Carolina Lane Creative Intervention, May 5, 2018 from 3-9 p.m. in downtown Asheville, NC.

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About the Center for Craft

Founded in 1996, the Center for Craft is a national 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the field of craft through fostering new ideas, funding craft scholarship, and backing the next generation of makers, curators and critics. The Center has developed a strong national reputation as a significant resource for artists, museums, academic researchers, university students and arts organizations. Each year, the Center administers over a quarter million dollars in grants to those working in the craft field. www.craftcreativitydesign.org

About the Craft Think Tank

Since 2002, the Center for Craft has hosted an annual Craft Think Tank to identify and prioritize initiatives that advance the field of craft. These discussions have resulted in groundbreaking publications and programs that have become milestones in the development of the field of craft, including *The Journal of Modern Craft* (2008- present) and *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (2010). Other formative programs include the Craft Research Fund (2002-present), the largest funding source for craft research in the United States, and the development of the first masters-level program in craft studies at Warren Wilson College (forthcoming 2017). Annual Craft Think Tank reports may be downloaded from: www.craftcreativitydesign.org

About UNC Asheville

UNC Asheville is the designated liberal arts institution for the UNC system and one of the nation's top 10 public liberal arts universities. Enrolling 3,800 students and offering more than 30 undergraduate majors and a Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences degree, UNC Asheville encourages students to take part in a nationally acclaimed undergraduate research program and participate in interdisciplinary learning. From internships and hands-on projects, to study abroad and community engagement, students experience an education that extends beyond campus into the vibrant City of Asheville, the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains and the world. www.unca.edu.

About STEAM Studio

UNC Asheville's STEAM Studio (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) is an educational space located at the River Arts Makers Place (RAMP) that engages the next generation of makers, engineers, artists and entrepreneurs, who work side-by-side with faculty and staff experts experienced in all facets of the creative process. STEAM Studio brings together innovation, design, and fabrication with equipment for 3-D modeling, as well as water jet, laser, and plasma cutters. www.steamstudio.unca.edu