Craft Has *No* Producer

Designing AI infrastructure around the human act of making

> How might AI perform the producer role for craft, reducing the costs surrounding creative work while helping makers create, share and sustain more ambitious work?

01

The role, not the machine.

WHAT THIS IS

Music has producers, film has producers and publishing has editors. A producer organises, connects and challenges, so the work gets stronger. Most independent makers have nobody in that role; they are also the marketer, administrator and project manager.

This design research project will define and test that missing role: the producer for craft.

02

Almost three years inside a grant-maker. Two makers documented.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

For almost three years I have worked inside Benefact Trust, a grant-maker supporting heritage buildings, skills and communities. From institutional strategy to makers at the bench, I have seen how funding, education, visibility and viable livelihoods depend on one another, and how easily people become lost between them.

Benefact Trust's partnership with QEST illustrates this: funding helps emerging makers deepen technical mastery and create pathways into teaching and heritage restoration.[1] In my experience, money matters, but so does knowing those pathways exist.

I have already documented two makers: Natasha Houseago, a direct carver working in green wood, and Alice Davies, who makes ceramics and kinetic sculpture. My first attempt, a website for each, taught me more than a success would have: I built on top of their work in order to showcase it. What the work needed was my own expression in response to theirs, or something made with them. This fellowship begins with that correction.

03

Each institution sees one transaction. The maker carries all of them.

THE PROBLEM

Interest in craft content has rarely been higher.[2] Craft also preserves skills needed to maintain our built environment and support viable businesses, yet 165 UK crafts are now at risk.[3]

The costs that break a maker are often transaction costs: finding opportunities, applying, negotiating, coordinating, documenting, publishing and getting paid. Each institution sees one transaction; the maker carries all of them.

This is also a creative constraint. Text-heavy applications privilege administrative fluency over material intelligence. Weak digital representation makes exceptional physical work invisible. Infrastructure intended to support creativity can narrow what gets made.

04

The cost fell. The access did not. Human judgement remains the gate.

WHY NOW

AI has sharply reduced the cost of producing and distributing sophisticated digital work, but access to that capability remains uneven across craft.[4]

A machine can carry much of the work around making, and none of the making itself.[5]

My hypothesis is that AI becomes useful within rich, maker-controlled context rather than generic prompts. A maker's materials, language, techniques and intentions can become a living context pack: a body of work that grows with every piece. Agentic coding tools can work inside it, for administration, communication and creative reflection.

AI has no persistence of purpose, vision or taste. Human judgement remains the gate. The friction and hardship of making stay with the maker, by design.

05

Three demonstrators, made with makers.

WHAT I WILL DO

I will develop three demonstrators with makers and craft organisations. Each will combine practical support with a collaborative creative output, testing whether AI saves time and whether the work becomes more distinctive, ambitious or useful. The three will be chosen for rarity, beauty and a market that still wants the work.[6]

The work will operate through three connected functions:

RELIEVE	Prototype workflows that reduce the effort of finding opportunities, preparing applications, organising knowledge, documenting work and publishing it, without removing maker approval or authorship.
DEVELOP	Create films, digital experiences and physical-digital experiments with makers, not about them. I will test AI as a reflective medium: surfacing connections, generating alternatives and recording an idea's development. The important result is also what the maker chooses to make next.
CONNECT	Map techniques, teachers, funding and opportunities across organisational boundaries. Indexing by technique rather than reputation may reveal relationships that existing directories and institutional structures miss.

Digital materiality will be one field of experimentation: how image, movement, sound, interaction and three-dimensional form can communicate the weight, surface and scale of physical work without pretending that a screen can replace holding it.

Neurodivergent practice will run through the research. People failed by classrooms are often retained by workshops, yet digital systems rarely reflect how they think. I will explore multimodal workflows responding to visual, spatial and associative thought.

06

The Craft Producer Protocol: what to automate, what to augment, what stays human.

WHAT IT WILL PRODUCE

The principal outcome will be a tested **Craft Producer Protocol**: a methodology showing what AI can automate, what it can augment and what must remain human. It will include the three demonstrators, maker-controlled context packs, reusable workflows, institutional service patterns, case studies and evaluation tools.

The research will be published as it develops, through films, interactive work and open methods. I will evaluate time saved, maker agency, creative distinctiveness, access to opportunities and evidence of new work, teaching, income or collaboration. The aim is a method that travels further than I can.

07

Film, design, build, write, code. Service design at the RCA. Almost three years at Benefact.

WHY ME

I can make and publish the work myself: film, design, build, write and code. Service design training at the Royal College of Art taught me to locate problems between people, organisations and infrastructure. Benefact taught me how institutional money moves and how applicants experience the system.

I am neurodivergent. I built software to hold the parts of work my mind drops, and my output increased several times over. Giving other people that leverage, without asking them to become technologists, is the part I care about most.

> This fellowship would let me define an emerging form of design practice: the designer as producer, system designer and workflow builder. The final measure is the work itself: more ambitious, and better made.

1 "Preserving heritage through hand embroidery," Benefact Trust, 16 April 2026.

2 Florian Gadsby, potter, roughly 3.9m followers across platforms; Charlie Gee, stonemason, over 6.5m.

3 Heritage Crafts, *Red List of Endangered Crafts*, 2025. 165 crafts at risk; 12 were added to the critically endangered category in 2025.

4 Hartmann, Exner and Domdey, "The power of generative marketing," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 2025. AI images at fractions of a cent to seven cents against roughly $100 for a commissioned one-shot.

5 Gmyrek, Berg, Kamiński et al., *Generative AI and Jobs*, International Labour Organization, 2025. Ranked from its scores for 427 occupations: graphic and multimedia designers 52nd, cabinet-makers 342nd, carpenters 375th.

6 Crafts Council, *The Market for Craft*, 2020. Under-35s rose from 17% of craft buyers in 2006 to 32% in 2020; online buyers from 3.2m in 2010 to 10.3m.