

Presentation:

Representing Craftspeople and Analysing Embodied Knowledge

Over the past two decades, anthropological fieldwork has taken me to West Africa, Arabia and East London. My studies with craftspeople have consisted chiefly of training and working alongside masons and carpenters in order to better understand local apprenticeship regimes, social politics, and embodied ways of learning and knowing. Still photography remains an important tool for documenting and representing craftspeople, but video is becoming increasingly central to my work. In 2012 I commenced two new projects that employ video and digital technologies, but in different ways and for different purposes. A discussion of these will be the focus of my presentation. The first project involves the filming and production of four short “talking-head” documentary films about Malian mud-brick masons for a gallery exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. The second is an in-depth study of embodied learning among a cohort of novice fine-woodwork trainees at London’s Building Crafts College. Video data from the college was used for analysing “problem-solving” strategies that are communicated and negotiated between woodworkers; and for examining the enskilment and embodied learning progress of four trainees during their first year of training.