

CRAFTS

THE MAGAZINE FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

DREAM WEAVERS

THE WEST DEAN
TAPESTRY STUDIO STIRS

LIFE IN PLASTIC

THE WEIRD WORLD
OF ETIENNE CLÉMENT

CRAFTS vs DESIGN

WHY THE DIFFERENCE
MATTERS

SPECS SAVER

STUART HAYGARTH
TURNS LITTER
INTO LIGHTS

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THE THEATRE OF



THE SPECTACLE

OBSESSIVE AND IMAGINATIVE,
ONE-TIME ILLUSTRATOR
STUART HAYGARTH HAS TURNED
A LATE START AS A DESIGNER-
MAKER INTO THE TIMELIEST
OF ARRIVALS. GRANT GIBSON
ADJUSTS HIS BIFOCALS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANGELA CATLIN

I REMEMBER AS A STUDENT being completely addicted to a late night television show called *Go Fishing*. The concept was simple: top angler and soon-to-be cult hero John Wilson spent half an hour standing in rivers around the country attempting to catch different types of fish while explaining exactly how he was doing it. For the longest time I couldn't work out why, but I found it endlessly fascinating. Certainly I'd no intention of donning a pair of green waders and strolling into the nearest stream. To this day I have absolutely no desire to, well, go fishing. It was only later it dawned on me that there's something genuinely intriguing about watching somebody do something they're both very good at and obviously love. And oddly I'm reminded of Wilson as I stand on the draughty first floor of Glasgow's architecture and design museum, the Lighthouse, watching Stuart Haygarth put the finishing touches to a chandelier made from over a thousand pairs of old discarded spectacles.

It's just gone four o'clock and we've been here most of the day, but in a curious way the process has been mesmerising. Working with two assistants – one helping him mount the strings of glasses, the other pushing a mini-cherry picker around the small exhibition space – he goes about his business in a quietly controlled manner. There are no histrionics or hissy fits. He never barks orders, and retains his equanimity even when a young health and safety inspector appears to be taking his responsibilities a mite too seriously. Throughout there's a palpable sense of concentration. He started sometime after 10am, when an MDF block was inserted into the ceiling. A circular acrylic disc punctured by a series of hooks was attached to this from which dangle a set of three light bulbs at various heights. Then the strings of specs – that have had their arms removed and are linked together with modified paperclips – were unwrapped from their polythene and attached one by one to the hooks. They start with the longest (at 2.3 metres) in the middle, and

gradually work outwards. As each strand is removed the lenses are given a final polish with a cloth until the designer is completely happy. The finished effect, with the light reflecting and bouncing through the frames' glass, is genuinely beautiful.

Haygarth first came to widespread attention at the London edition of *Designersblock* in 2005. Over the past decade the exhibition, run by the pair of charmingly brilliant eccentrics Rory Dodd and Piers Roberts, has become something of an institution, turning the notion of the trade fair on its head by eschewing established names and venues, and instead relying on young talent and unusual, often semi-derelict, spaces. As a result it's always something of a curate's egg, but when it's good it's very, very good, and Haygarth's pair of chandeliers were excellent. Not only were they visually arresting but they also came with neatly pre-packaged narratives. So *Millennium* was made of a series of party poppers the designer had collected from the street while walking his dog on the first morning of the year 2000, while *Tide* was created from bits of flotsam and jetsam he'd picked up over several years from the Kent coastline. In effect they were one man's personal scrapbook transformed into two completely disarming pieces of sculpture.

Interesting too – for critics and journalists at least – was the fact that here was no wet-behind-the-ears graduate but a man with a hinterland. He was born in Whalley, Lancashire, the year England won the World Cup, his father a carpenter and a maker but his mother, so it seems, the one who pushed his creative side. 'I was influenced by my father,' he laughs, as we finally find time to talk in the departure lounge of Glasgow Airport, 'but if it was my father's way I'd be in the building trade.' The young Haygarth actually ended up studying graphic design at Exeter College of Art and Design before becoming a photographer and illustrator, working for the likes of Sony, Porsche, Penguin Books and the BBC. 'My illus-



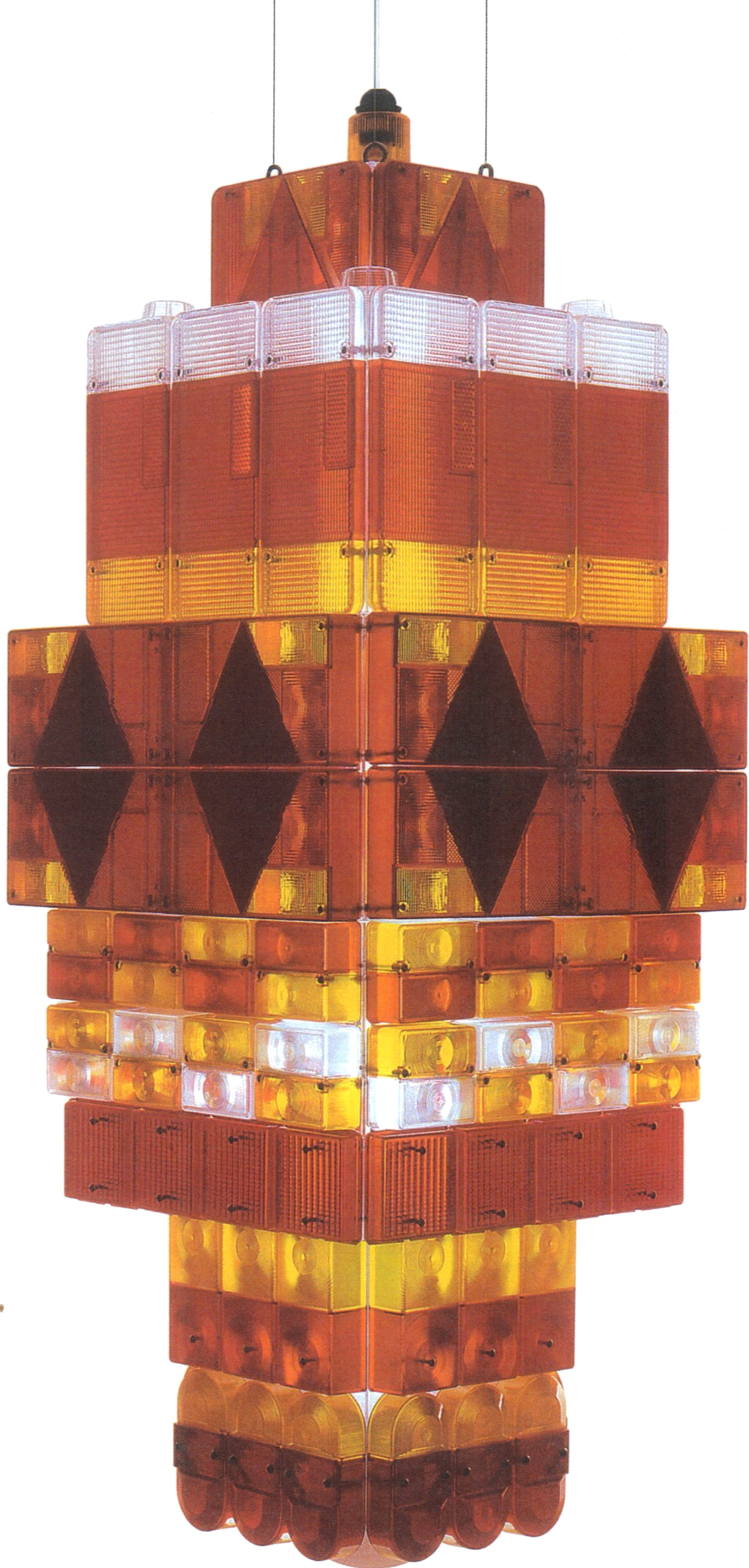
PREVIOUS SPREAD
Stuart Haygarth with
'Spectacle', 2006
THIS PAGE Haygarth
assembling 'Spectacle'
in the Lighthouse
OPPOSITE PAGE
'Spectacle', acrylic
platform, plastic
framed spectacles,
1m diam. at top,
height 2.3m, 2006











tration was very much Joseph Cornell-type constructions. So I was constantly sourcing objects,' he explains. However, with the onset of the digital revolution, he found his work gently drifting out of style. 'I'd been doing illustration for 15 years and had a very good career. I enjoyed it up until a few years ago. Then it just started getting a bit repetitive. I felt like I was stagnating – it wasn't giving me the creative buzz that I once knew. And also illustration had changed. My work was very kind of slow and methodical, with high production costs. You know, it was finding stuff and then photographing it on a large format camera. So, yeah, the whole illustration market changed and I just thought that my style of work was getting a bit archaic now. It was time to move on.'

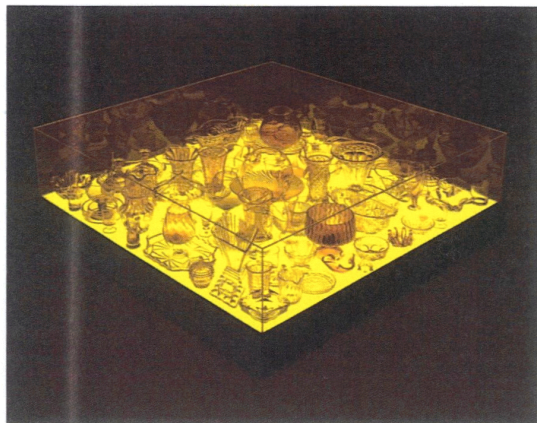
If he was out of vogue as an illustrator, he's currently a white-hot designer-maker. At the London Design Festival last year he had a slightly slicker version of the original *Millennium* in *Trash Luxe* at Liberty, and across town at South Kensington's Gallery Libby Sellers he installed a new piece made from car tail-light cases. Certainly you can't knock his timing. His limited-edition chandeliers – the Glasgow piece is one of only 10 that will be made – slot neatly into the market's recent interest in design/art crossover. Produced a decade earlier and he may well have struggled. So does he, I wonder, feel as if he's in fashion now? 'Well it seems that way,' he shrugs artlessly, 'It's the only way I know to make. I don't come from a product design background so I know nothing about manufacturing or anything like that. After I decided to make a change in my career I started experimenting in the studio with some things I'd collected. I'd collated sketchbooks with all the ideas I wanted to do and started making them.' That said, he's canny enough to have worked where his work would best sit. 'Because my partner's an artist I know how difficult it is getting on that ladder to be in the art world. I was almost 40 when I started and couldn't go through all

that. It's so difficult to get your foot in the door and, coming from a graphic design background, I thought I'd try it in design. It's more accessible and that's why I chose *Designersblock*.'

Ultimately though what makes Haygarth's work stand out is its obsessional nature. As the world woke up to its collective hangover on 1 January 2000, he was collecting party poppers off the pavement – with no real sense of what he was actually going to do with them, let's not forget. Likewise while living for a brief period in Berlin, he found himself driving his camper van 10 hours to the Dutch coastline to search for suitable rubbish. 'Because German beaches are too clean,' he explains drolly. 'The more I went down the more patterns would emerge. You find the same kind of things, repetitive things – like orange fisherman's gloves or metal lids from jam jars... Normally I find objects or material that I want to work with. I might start collecting things very slowly and then over time, when I think I've got an idea that I really want to work with, I collect more and more and more until I have enough material to make what I want to make. I don't have an idea and then find the object.' Everything he collects is assiduously catalogued and stored in boxes in his East London studio – leading one magazine to ponder if he might have a touch of OCD. 'Yeah I am a bit obsessive,' is his response. 'I'm not compulsive though. I'm obsessed with work. I love my work and I've always enjoyed the stuff that I do...' He trails off for a moment, before adding: 'I think about it all the time but I think most creative people do.' But what about the way everything is apparently so neatly stored? 'Studio space in London is so expensive I have to be organised or else I couldn't work there', he counters. 'I wouldn't have enough space to make anything.'

He's now found a modicum of fame, so one fancies his task is to avoid falling into cliché and being pigeonholed, either as a wacky chandelier-maker or as a sustainable designer. 'I've kind of been branded this green posterboy, but I just get my inspiration from materials that people have discarded really,' he protests. 'I find it interesting... discovering what people don't want anymore and then making something else from that. I'm not manufacturing something with big industrial processes that create global warming, but I'm not an eco-warrior.' Next up is a window display for a Covent Garden restaurant and a sculptural installation at Selfridges. And then, who knows? 'If I get an idea for a mass-produced object then I'll do it but until then I won't,' he explains reasonably enough. 'I'm quite happy doing the editions – it feels comfortable for me.' While the established names – Zaha Hadid, Ross Lovegrove and Marc Newson – have fetched huge prices by trading on their own brand and experimenting (usually pointlessly) with exotic materials, Haygarth has taken a very different route, relying on a combination of story-telling and pure aesthetic beauty to create a sense of wonder and value. At a time when western economies are blighted by over-consumption this strikes me as something worth applauding. ■

For stockists, see *Crafts Guide*. www.stuarthaygarth.com



PREVIOUS SPREAD: glassware, fluorescent
LEFT 'Tide' tubing, average height
chandelier, found 45 cm, 2006
plastic, monofilament
line, MDF, diam.
1.5 m, 2005
PREVIOUS SPREAD: 1,000 exploded
RIGHT 'Optical', party poppers,
prescription 80cm diam., 2004
spectacles, OPPOSITE PAGE
monofilament 'Tail Light', launched
line, sprayed MDF at Gallery Libby
platform, 1.5m Sellers, vehicle
diam., 2007 light lenses,
ABOVE 'Aladdin', acrylic boxes, 52cm
Sprayed MDF wide, 1.5 m tall, 2007
lightbox, glass
vitrine, coloured

