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Craft designers reveal secrets of international success

Major conference on developing NI craft sector

Some of Northern Ireland's most talented craft designers shared the secrets of their success at a major craft conference in Lisburn today [Wednesday, 20th February].

Organised by Craft Northern Ireland, the conference is aimed at inspiring the region's craft makers to maximise the opportunities for marketing their work internationally.

Arts and Culture Minister Edwin Poots, MLA who was speaking at the conference said, ***"In the recent budget announcement I was pleased to secure £5 million over three years from 2008/2009 for the Creative Industries Seed Fund to develop business enterprise within the sector."***

"I want to see the creation of a sector which will encourage our most talented people to shine on an international stage, whilst providing them with the business acumen to also be successful entrepreneurs."

"I don't want the perceived barriers of business development to stifle the wonderful talent and imagination and that is why this fund will go some way towards encouraging the seeds of creativity to grow".

The Minister's announcement encouraged the conference to look at partnerships that can expand and add value to the region's craft sector.

"We're very excited at the prospect of being able to invest in developing the rich seam of craft talent which is now evident in Northern Ireland," says Craft Northern Ireland's Director, Joe Kelly.

"There are many craft makers who possess the design skills, yet lack the knowledge to build their product into an international success story."

"We want to build real partnerships that give those designers the entrepreneurial edge they need to succeed internationally."



One successful designer who spoke at the conference was 28-year old Rachel O' Neill from Helen's Bay, County Down.

Rachel has attracted considerable interest abroad with her range of striking and innovative home interiors and fashion items made out of Velcro.

Her unique Velcro chandeliers have already appeared at prestigious design fairs in Germany and Paris, and her work is causing a stir in the pages of Europe's top fashion and lifestyle magazines.

"There's no doubt that the concept of using a very ordinary material like Velcro to produce striking and quirky designs helps to set my work apart," says Rachel.

"But coming up with the original idea is only half the battle – you have to develop work that is memorable and appealing and which will get noticed in the international marketplace."

Craft Northern Ireland recently published the results of a major survey which showed that 80% of local craft designers want to expand their business.

The conference looked at ways of providing more support to makers and help them realise their full business potential at home and abroad.

Rosemary Kelly, Chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, who also addressed the conference, says the craft sector has the potential to make an important contribution to local economic growth:

"The Northern Ireland Executive has rightly identified innovation as a key element of a successful and creative economy," she says.

"The craft sector clearly contains a wealth of innovative talent ready to deliver creative and economic growth."

"It's vital that we look at ways of working together to develop that creativity for the benefit of Northern Ireland and its economy."

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