



◀ Dan Gottlieb

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—DAN GOTTLIEB, PHOTOGRAPHER

personal toll. Four years ago, he suffered a heart attack. At 54, he underwent emergency surgery. “It was a near-death experience,” he says. “And part of my healing process was to re-acquaint myself with the digital camera, so that it’s an extension of my body.”

Once he’d recovered and the wing was complete, Gottlieb took off in 2010 for three weeks in Istanbul, alone with his camera. He began to internalize his experiences. When he got back to the states, he photographed the Chicago Marathon.

His images are hauntingly potent, long-exposure works of lavish color and studied movement. Holding his lens open for one to three-and-a-half seconds, he moves his body before his subject. “It’s kind of a choreographed thing—my movements have to be in synch with the space,” he says. “It’s like what an architect does vertically or horizontally with a space. The camera is my proxy eye.”

Each image—an attempt by an artist to arrest and capture time itself—is printed on fine linen with pigmented dyes. Typically, he’ll add six or so layers of acrylic paint atop. Gottlieb lives one of the rarest and most balanced lives I’ve ever encountered: He’s an artist who works on a very large public scale, but who engages us in a very personal world.

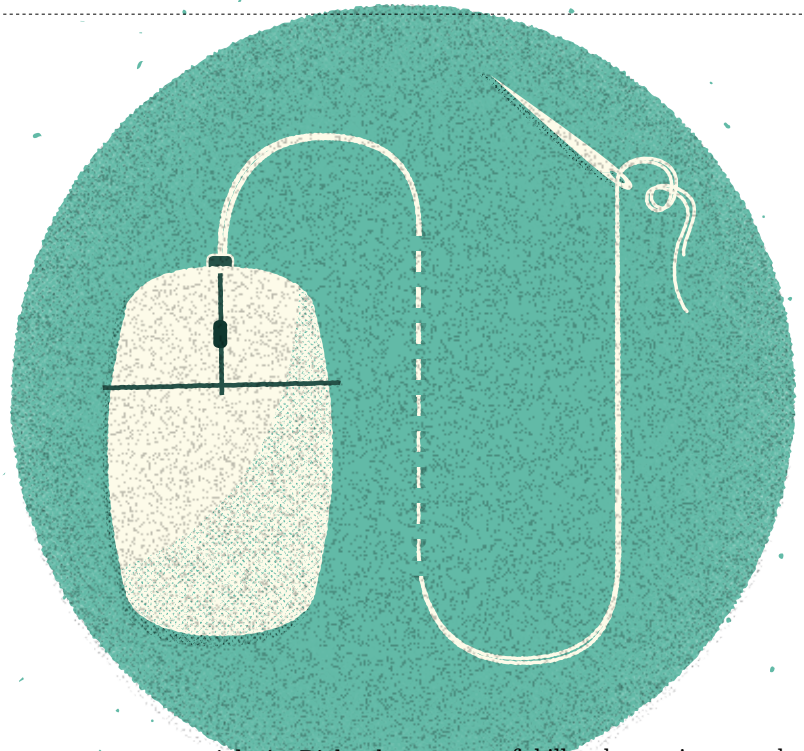
“It’s work that another set of eyes could not be involved in,” Gottlieb says. ❧

IMAGE, STYLE, DESIGN

BY STEVEN FISCHER
ILLUSTRATION BY ZACH GRAHAM

The Question of Handcraft

Is design still a craft if it's done with the click of a mouse?



Sociologist Richard Sennett says that a craft is about “doing something well for its own sake, with an emphasis on skills and commitment to the craft.” That means that attention must be paid to even the tiniest details of a well-crafted product. Every stitch, every button, everything must be top notch to truly be considered a craft.

High-end brands like Hermès tout the heritage of its handcrafted items, having honed the hand detailing on its leather goods for hundreds of years. Consumers lucky enough to afford a \$9,000-plus Hermès Birkin bag will wait years to receive it and will pay the price premium for it because they know the quality of the handcrafted product will be worth the wait.

In today’s digital world, there are entirely new skill sets and goods that have emerged. Graphic design, illustration, and typography are all highly specialized fields that require an enormous

amount of skill and commitment to be well-executed. But are these practices still considered a craft if they are done with the click of a mouse?

Yes, because it still requires a skilled craftsman to bring it to life. Ask someone other than a trained design professional to create a wayfinding system for a museum, or to develop a custom typeface for a company or product. Even if you give an untrained person the tools necessary to complete the job, they will ultimately fail. Because just like the artisans at Hermès, design professionals are trained in their craft and use the proper tools and skill set necessary to implement the design process *for* their craft.

A handcrafted bag and a specially commissioned font aren’t that different: each expresses our unique sense of personal style and communicates to others how we wish to be perceived. Both are crafted through skill and long-term commitment to good design.

And that is truly craftsmanship. ❧