

Artisanal Deskilling, Labor, and Gender

Open Sessions SHOT 2018

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I am interested in organizing a session at SHOT for 2018 looking at changes in the acquisition of artisanal skills and the use of technology for non-professional users. While the story of the deskilling labor is best known for men on the factory floor, my paper looks at home sewing as one of 20th Century American women's most common encounters with artisanal labor and technology. This work, including the drafting of patterns from body measurements, underwent a drastic decline in required artisanal knowledge and technical skills as seen in major home economics school textbooks from 1930s through 1960s and in ephemeral publications from the commercial sewing pattern companies. This research raises important questions regarding the meaning of women's deskilling and whether domestic work's meaning as political oppression or artisanal opportunity necessarily varies by historical era.