



CRAFTIVISM

The Art of Craft and Activism

Q & A with editor and craftivist BETSY GREER

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Q: You coined the term "craftivism" in 2003. Can you tell us how that came about? When did you become a craftivist?

A: A friend in my knitting circle thought up the actual word "craftivism" in the fall of 2002. I was talking about how crafts and activism were related and they said, "You could call it 'craftivism'!" And so it stuck! I Googled the term and got 2 hits, as it was used by the Church of Craft for a workshop.

Craft and activism converged for me in the fall of 2000, when I lived in New York. I had taken up knitting and one day, while watching the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade, was struck by the quiet power of some political puppets. Over the winter, I began to see how I could use my knitting to help others by donating what I was making. For awhile I just thought it was a crazy idea, but when I began to see some of my friends identify with it, I realized that being a craftivist wasn't so crazy after all, that it was a way of seeing life through a lens where your creativity can make the world a better place! It wasn't until early 2003 until I created the website *craftivism.com* and began to talk about the idea in public.

Q: Have you seen craftivism evolve in the last decade? How has the perception of craft—and who does it and why—evolved since you first became involved in the movement?

A: Yes, I have seen craftivism evolve from a single person on a mission (me!) to it being used all over the Internet and in print—and that has been such a trip! For awhile, "craftivism" was a word that I mostly heard my friends say. Now it's being used by people who have never heard of me, and that's so great. As for the perception of craft itself, it's being used more and more as a marketing tool for big companies as craft seeps more into our economic framework, i.e., it's socially acceptable to be seen knitting your own socks and be under seventy.

Q: You use needlework as a method of protest, and your research focuses on "how people have used craft as a mouthpiece." How do you use your own needlework as a "mouthpiece"? Do you ever give classes or workshops to encourage others to do the same?

A: My own work, which is primarily done in cross-stitch, is about giving the words and thoughts of others a larger platform. One of my longest-running projects is the International Anti-War Graffiti Project, which takes anti-war graffiti done by anonymous individuals from around the world and converts it into cross-stitch. In doing so, I juxtapose the feminine "soft" stitch with the masculine "hard" graffiti. By displaying this work online and in galleries, I hope to show that people around the world are united in their anti-war convictions, despite varying political views.

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My next project is a quilt about PTSD. By embroidering people's statements about the disorder (which I have) in their own handwriting, and having others embroider their own statements, I hope to encourage discussion about PTSD. By grouping together, on a quilt, statements from people with PTSD, I hope to make people with the disorder feel less alone and more empowered to heal themselves.

Q: In the last decade, the Internet and social media have dramatically changed and influenced how communities can be built and sustained. Can you share examples of how the Internet has been used to amplify a craftivist's message or work?

A: Currently, there is a project going around the Internet by craftivist Casey Jenkins (who is interviewed in *Craftivism* as part of the Craft Cartel) called *Casting Off My Womb*. For this project, for twenty-eight days, she's knitting with wool inserted into her vagina. This project has been showing up on Twitter and Facebook feeds owned by friends of mine who have never knitted in their lives. Jenkins' specific craftivist act has gone quasi-viral because of how some people still think of women's bodies.

In other cases, social media attention is contingent on whether or not a project does one of two things: makes someone think or provides something beautiful to look at. Without either of these elements, projects all too often fall by the wayside on the interwebs.

Q: There is a persistent cultural stereotype that sees craft as primarily a "woman's art" or a "woman's hobby." Because we live in a patriarchal culture, women's interests, tastes, and art are sometimes viewed as less serious or "universal" than works created by men. Who are some of the craftivists in the book who flout or challenge gendered stereotypes?

A: The personal work of Jamie Chalmers—Mr. X Stitch—who provides an essay in the book on cross-stitch, definitely defies conventional gender stereotypes. The work of the Craft Cartel dares to note that women's bodies are something not to be feared, and use Cunt Fling-Ups and other crafts to highlight this. By tackling Empty Net Syndrome, Maria Molteni and NCAA Net Works create hoops for basketball courts that are missing them, showing that courts are for the use of both boys and girls. In his book *Sew Your Own*, JP Flintoff dared to learn about making all of his clothes from scratch; in his essay in *Craftivism*, he talks about mending his clothes—and his daughter's teddy bear. I think that his essay is particularly poignant, because crafts can (and should) be done by all genders equally.

Q: Do you have advice for those who feel the call to craftivism on how to get started?

A: . First, figure out what type of creative endeavor you like the most. A lot of people say things like, "I'm not creative," but I would argue that those people just haven't tried enough things! The world of craft and creativity involves an incredibly wide swath of activities, so if you'd like to be involved with craftivism and don't know what craft skills you have, start experimenting with different types. Secondly, once you have found a craft or creative medium that speaks to both you and your hands, think about what causes and organizations you would like to tell others about. Homelessness? Lead in your local lake? The melting of the ice caps? Once you've done that, find a way to combine those two things. Perhaps it means making scarves and donating them to local homeless shelter or creating a quilt with facts about the dangers of lead or crocheting polar bears and leaving them around town imprinted with the address of a website that talks about global warming.

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Betsy Greer is available for interviews.

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