



The Art of Craft and Activism

edited by

BETSY GREER





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Left: Faythe Levine, *Scraps*

Right: Lauren O'Farrell, *Plucky Protest Mouse at Occupy London: A Protest Mouse is Born.*

An Excerpt from the Introduction

When I first started to write about craftivism in 2002, I explained that, “the creation of things by hand leads to a better understanding of democracy, because it reminds us that we have power.” I believed that artists needed a term for crafting that was motivated by social or political activism, and “craftivism” fit the bill. In March 2003, I bought the domain name *craftivism.com*, which allowed me to talk about craftivism to others; suddenly it was no longer just a crazy idea in my head. People I didn’t know started to write to me about how craft and activism were related in their own lives. “Craftivism” gave people a quick way to explain what they were doing, and a platform from which to create.

The very essence of craftivism lies in starting a conversation. By creating something that gets people to ask questions, we invite others to join the conversation about the social and political intent of our creations. Unlike more traditional forms of activism, which can be polarizing, there is a back-and-forth in craftivism. As craftivists, we foment dialogue and thus help make the world become a better place, albeit on a smaller scale than activists who organize mass demonstrations.

To some, our work may seem unimportant, but to me, the small scale of craftivism is vital. It turns us, as well as our work, into vessels of change. As craftivists, we are also permission-givers. By daring to make work that has a voice, we help breathe life into artistic practices that some people may think are obsolete; we show their relevancy and poignancy. We also demonstrate that the

act of “making” is important. We give other craftivists permission to make boldly, make with the greater good in mind, and make to nourish ourselves.

Over the past ten years, I have collaborated with many of the contributors to this book, and I am glad to call them my friends, peers, and colleagues. It is my hope that this anthology will give you an idea of the breadth of craftivism, and how you can use your creativity to improve your own life as well as the lives of others.





from an interview with **CRAFT CARTEL**
(Rayna Fahey and Casey Jenkins)

“Craftivism is craft that challenges, provokes, and transforms the world we live in. Craft that is political. Craft that directly confronts the violent destructive world in which we live and actively creates a new one based on love and care for our earth. Craftivism is also the conscious subversion of methods of making that have been inexorably (and often nonsensically) linked to gender, in order to expose deeper and more damaging gender assumptions.”



from an interview with **MARIA MOLteni**
of **New Craft Artists in Action**
Net Works

“Craftivism is a powerful movement, influenced by DIY and feminist activity, where the form and function of ‘street’ and ‘domestic’ tactical aesthetics collide in the handmade to express dissidence or exhibit new approaches to public art. Craftivism, flirting slyly with its seemingly non-threatening connotations, is particularly powerful because it’s often accessible and collaborative as well as positive and inclusive.”

SAYRAPHIM LOTHIAN *from her essay*
“**Guerrilla Kindness**”

“Ultimately, guerrilla kindness is about discovering that people care about one another, and that someone out there cares about you. Therefore, guerrilla kindness work is about extending your community. It’s about reaching out your hand to a stranger and using your skills to make someone’s day brighter.”

Counter-clockwise from top left: Craft Cartel, *Pussy Riot Solidarity Fence*; Craft Cartel, *Cunt Fling Up Making Session*; Craft Cartel, *Embroidery Porn*; Craft Cartel, *Casey Jenkins Demonstrating a Cunt Fling Up*; Sayraphim Lothian, *For You Stranger 11*; Maria Molteni, *Net Works with Cushing House*.





KIM WERKER *from her essay*
“Ugly on Purpose: Demystifying
the Enemy”

“I work with people to make ugly crafts on purpose in a continuing effort to challenge our definitions, perceptions, and expectations of failure. During the act of making ugly creatures, we discuss our experience of making things and explore how that experience is similar to ways we feel in the workplace, at home, and in the world around us. We listen to the ugly voice inside our minds that tells us we can’t do it, that it’s not worth trying, that nobody will care anyway—the voice of perfectionism, self-doubt, creative block, fear of failure, procrastination. And then we tell that voice to quiet down.

“Try this: Sit down with a bunch of scrap materials and stuff from your recycling bin and make an ugly creature. Not one that’s cute-ugly. One that’s ugly-ugly. For some people, it’s exceptionally difficult; for others, it’s immediately liberating and fun. I’ve never met someone who wasn’t glad they did it.

“It’s amazing how together we feel when we let our guard down and talk about the struggles we have—because everyone has creative struggles, and these kinds of struggles aren’t very dissimilar to the struggles we feel when we consider speaking up about change in any area of life, whether for ourselves or on behalf of others.”



Counter-clockwise from top left: Kim Werker, *Ugly Name Badge*; Kim Werker, *Kelly’s Creature*; Faythe Levine, *Zine*; unknown artist, *Arpillera*.

HEATHER STRYCHARZ *from her essay*

“Sewing Voices: The *Arpilleras* and the Women of the Adithi Collective”

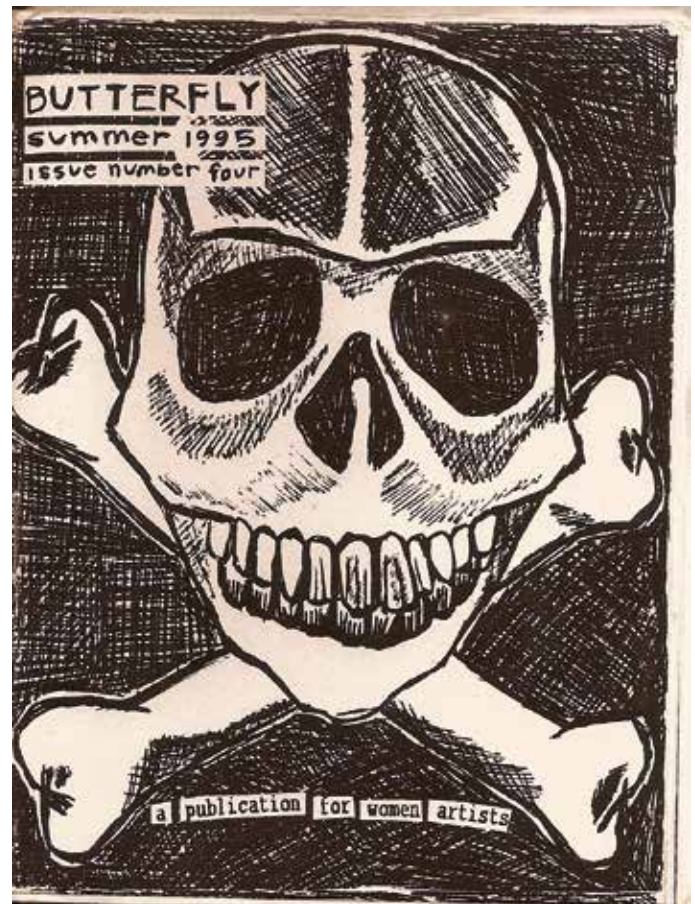
“*Arpillera* is the Spanish word for ‘burlap’ and the name of the colorful embroidered tapestries that are a traditional form of art in South America. Before the Pinochet government, *arpilleras* sold to tourists included images of pleasant pastoral scenes depicting rural Chilean life. After Pinochet came to power, *arpilleras* became documents of the human rights abuses and hardships Chileans faced during his regime.

“At first glance, these *arpilleras* look like bright and colorful folk art. Further inspection reveals the presence of graves, chains, blindfolds, and bloodshed. One doesn’t have to be fluent in Spanish to make out the words ‘torture,’ ‘disappeared,’ and ‘exile’ stitched into the bright squares of fabric.”

FAYTHE LEVINE *from her essay*

“Craft: Embracing Empowerment and Equality”

“My personal relationship with craft is a direct lifeline to my connection with the punk community. Through punk I was shown that I could begin to make an alternate history from the one I was presented with in school and society. I saw examples of people making real changes in their communities through direct action and education. Punk was a permission-giver and, in turn, craft became my vessel. Punk allowed me to connect with others and formulate how I wanted my future to look through creating approachable artwork, blogging, making my work understandable through personal stories, starting my own gallery, becoming an independent researcher, and making documentary films.”



CRAFTIVISM

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Craftivism is a worldwide movement that operates at the intersection where craft and activism meet; *Craftivism* the book is full of inspiration for crafters who want to create works that add to the greater good. Full of interviews and profiles with crafters who are changing the world with their art, and through examples that range from community embroidery projects, stitching in prisons, revolutionary ceramics, AIDS activism, yarn bombing, and crafts that facilitate personal growth, *Craftivism* provides imaginative examples of how crafters can be creative and altruistic at the same time.

Artists profiled in the book are from the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Asia, and their crafts include knitting, crocheting, sewing, textiles, pottery, and ceramics. There's the Brooklyn writer who creates large-scale site-specific knitted installations; the British woman who runs sewing and quilting workshops for community building and therapy; the Indonesian book maker and organizer of a DIY craft center; and the Chilean arpilleristas and the women of India's Adithi Collective. A wonderful sense of optimism and possibility pervades the book: the inspiring notion that being crafty can really make the world a better place.

BETSY GREER is a writer, a maker, and a researcher, and the author of *Knitting for Good!: A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change Stitch by Stitch*. She runs the blog www.craftivism.com and believes that creativity and positive activism can save not only the soul, but also the world. Betsy lives in Arlington, VA and can be found on Twitter at @craftivista.