

WHAT IS

quiet defiance?

Quiet defiance chronicles the sustained forms of subtle resistance that don't exactly go unrecognized, but maybe aren't acknowledged as the powerful, effective methods of cultural change that they are. Revolutions are portrayed as noisy riots. Political identities are supposed to be stated in declarative sentences on social media. Organizers for social change are expected to work with the bullhorn as their primary tool, to paint with the palettes of crowds and campaigns. They're supposed to be tireless and loud to be 'effective'. But those who engage in acts of quiet defiance opt out of participating in the attention economy, don't follow the rituals for the cult of productivity, and reveal capitalist mythologies to be silly with their simple daily deviations. These quiet actions don't go unnoticed; they are apparent in the immediate families and friend groups and communities these reticent rebels are a part of. These writings describe the shape these ripples take. Perhaps this seditious pamphlet could be a ripple of its own.

This issue delights in the art forms that exist in protest of the patriarchy, in defiance of fast-fashion and consumerism, and are just all around beautiful and fun to create.

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quiet defiance

ISSUE 6

**THE
REVOLUTION
OF
SLOW
DELIBERATION
AND
UNPROFITABILITY**

ONE OF A KIND

LOTTA LUNDSTEDT
RAE MARIZ

3 MAR -13 MAR
To+Fr 12-19, Lö+Sö 12-16
UTOPIA, GATUPLAN



RAE
2022



ONE

IN mid-March 2020, I took the train from Stockholm to Örnköldsvik for a crafting weekend with Lotta Lundstedt in her repurposed farmhouse on The High Coast. Just the two of us. No kids or family obligations; an escape from responsibilities. We were finally going to set aside the time to do what we do best: make ambitious crafts and talk non-stop.

Lotta works as associate professor in the Department of Creative Studies at Umeå University. She leads her design students to not only construct and create in their various mediums, but to think about the role of their creation in the wider world with particular emphasis on sustainability of materials and manufacturing practices, plus encouraging them to consider the social expression inherent in clothing beyond trends in fashion. Her job also means she has access to some fancy toys. She could borrow two knitting machines from the school for our weekend and I was eager to test out some ideas and get her guidance in learning a new technique.

I'm pretty sure Lotta mentioned her idea about the two of us doing a show together quite early in the weekend. She'll probably tell you about the skeptical noises I made in response. The idea of making something with the end intent of showing it off in a particular space... it just wasn't part of my process. I didn't see the point. My motivation behind every one of my textile pieces is to see if it can be done. How could I do it? What would it look like? And often in the process, if not before I start, I figure out who it's "for" once it's finished. The joy for me is in the puzzling and creating, and the project is only complete once it's given away. The knitting or embroidery or garment itself; why should the material object be considered the only thing worthy of display? Showing something in a gallery removes all the context that makes work like this interesting to me.

So the weekend went on and I fought with the knitting machine while we chatted over cooling cups of tea. We shared stories and academic articles, discussed how to wrest back time from an ever-accelerating culture of consumption; how to create in

a way that pushes back against environmental destruction. In the background, radio news foreshadowed the shuttering of familiar economies while we were isolated near the sea. We talked about how we've side-stepped certain societal expectations in our 40+ years of navigating the world in woman-shaped bodies, and which traps we still get caught in despite knowing better. And through our conversations about work process and slow movements, I was delighted to see the ways our approaches to craft overlapped. That we both recognized the pensive and empowering process of defiantly devoting our energies to forms of art that no one gives a shit about. Lotta was making her deliberate art through an academic research lens; I had my defiant DIY, anti-consumerist ethos. Even if it at first glance, it might be hard to see the connection between our work—to put my punky riot of color beside her hues of natural-dyed experimentations—they're part of the same fabric. Is that something we could show people? All the hidden work and invisible deliberation? That in itself became the new challenge, could it be done?

We called this show One of a Kind to highlight the handmade, anti-mass produced nature of our work... and the fact that many of our projects include collections of pieces that came out of a repetitive but still irreproducible process, resulting in works that are not able to be duplicated, even by our own hands. But by the end, we hope to show that less emphasis should be put on the "One"—the quirky authentic uniqueness which is often a "selling point" in marketing the handmade—and more on the "Of a Kind". That taken together, the collections and the individual pieces that make up the collection, and the materials and care that produced the pieces... they all belong together and make surprising connections and overlaps. And to me, the most valuable thing I got out of that weekend and putting this show together is the jolt of energy to realize we're not alone in our ways of working and engaging and creating. It's a delight to have a friend who understands the history of skills and the innovation of design and the loneliness of forging one's own path. Then that thrill of feeling like you must be heading somewhere worthwhile when you meet a friend coming from a different direction but ended up together in the same place. It's nice to be reminded what it feels like to be "of a kind".

OF A KIND



So much of the art in Lotta's pieces and garments is found in her process. This was one of the things that excited me when she brought up the idea of an exhibition, how does one show the hidden work? The careful deliberation. Those ineffable considerations. That dance through space and time in the making. The performance in her process.

The 100 weavings are shown together and are striking as a whole collection, but each individual piece was painstakingly crafted one at a time. And time was the main material she was working with for each one.

Lotta set up her project to ensure that each individual weave and all its attending materials and processes would be completed start to finish once she began. This meant she needed to make time in her day, to prioritize craft, to devote herself to this ritual of creation. She has two children in school, a husband with irregular work schedule, a cat, something like three jobs, an apartment and the aforementioned farmhouse to maintain. Making time to create is an art in itself.

MAKING TIME TO CREATE IS

It's no coincidence that the shapes resemble iPhone covers. It's a reflection on how much time is used reflexively picking one up and repetitively scrolling. Consuming fleeting digital content, at an ever-increasing pace. This was her experiment in deliberately reserving time to create tactile material objects. A conscious reprioritizing of one's time as a rejection of the attention economy. One hundred instances of creating in defiance of assembly line productivity and rejoicing in inefficiency. In the performance of daily life, this is a colorful reminder that it's within one's power to set the pace, insist on the rhythm of the dance.

AN ART IN ITSELF

Lotta selected flower petals and rusty nails, fruit skins and crushed roots and brought them to boil. She chose waste yarns and trinkets, collected while traveling or left behind when loved ones passed. Careful to only dye the amount she needed for the current weave, she added the material to the pot and left it to steep. During the time, she sawed out the shape of wood, drilled holes. Checked her brew to witness the surprise of the color the cottons and wools and linens took on. Recorded the results in her sketchbook. Mixed the paint color for the frames, allowed it to dry. Strung the nine strings. Then used the weaving techniques available to the form to see what took shape. The same repetitive process and the discovery in the variation.

Each weave is a record of her morning, or afternoon, or late night. They encapsulate small worlds of nostalgia and personal relationships, like a photograph. They are one hundred moments in time, viewed here like sediments in rock. A timeline. A story for those who've been shown how to read it.





When creative work takes the shape of a familiar garment, the modern human mind has a hard time processing it as art. Some pieces might get elevated to high fashion if the designer is able to have their work exist in exclusive arenas, but the what-you're-wearing-right-now clothes tend to be judged solely on function and how cheaply they can be made. Utilitarian commodities. Pattern-making and garment construction require high cognitive skills and creativity, yet the fashion and textile industry has consistently devalued that work with poverty wages so successfully that few people are even able to recognize the craft that goes into creating any garment, whether factory-made or stitched at home.

With *Seven Shirts*, Lotta designed and made a pattern for a simple button-down shirt. She then cut the fabric, sewed the garment, and submerged it in a natural dye solution made of onion skins. She then completed her process by wearing the shirt for seven days. Then she did it again, but this time, she needed to design a way to incorporate the waste scraps leftover from the cut fabric of the first shirt into the second, sewed that garment, and submerged it in the same onion skin dye. The color is gradually less intense with each new iteration, while the embellishments become more elaborate.

SEVEN GENERATIONS

This project isn't just a critique of the wasteful practices of current supply chains; with her process, Lotta also provides a pattern for what kinds of adjustments in thinking need to be made to reimagine manufacturing procedures. Expanding the focus of design to not only consider what's right in front of her but to also include the projects that are to come echoes the ideas of seven generation stewardship. That's the concept, originating with the Iroquois but popular in a lot of sustainable thought, that encourages the current generation to consider what effect their life and work will have on people seven generations into the future. It's fun to consider the lifecycle of these shirts, what's passed down, what changes with each iteration. Even the emphasis she places on the act of wearing her garments models behavior, that there's a reason and purpose for the thing being made, not just style.

An article of clothing is worn on average only seven times in Sweden, which is on par with the rest of the world, while ultra-fast fashion trends encourage even higher rates of consumption of low-quality goods. Thirty years ago, fashion had styles that were "in season", now clothing brands empty unsold inventory straight into the garbage every two weeks to create a demand to keep up with new disposable trends.

We're delighted to be showing our pieces in an empty boutique in a shopping mall surrounded by even more vacant stores. This is the perfect context to consider these works. The clothing industry's accelerated cycle of overproducing, exploiting both land and workers beyond capacity in the process, is demonstratively not working.

NONE OF THIS IS CUTE

Similar to Lotta's work, the body is the context that completes these projects. These pieces featured here are meant to exist on children's bodies in particular.

My daughter was 8 when she asked me about an election poster she saw that read THE CLIMATE CAN'T WAIT. So I told her what it meant. I told her what I've known since I was about her age: how greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and misuse of land and water has consequences, and that we're seeing the fallout of those practices now like scientists said we would for over 20 years. I could also tell her things that I didn't know then. That 100 companies in the world are responsible for producing 78% of greenhouse gasses, and that calculating individual carbon footprint was dreamed up by big oil companies to shift the blame from industrial producers onto individual consumers. She was in second grade but she got it right away. (Even though I had to first explain to her what a percent was!) I joined her in the youth-led climate marches in 2019, along with all those kids shouting slogans and pleading for adults to do something they've failed to do for 20+ years. Listen. The kids' mass mobilizations were impressive, but I didn't get any warm, fuzzy feelings from seeing a new generation get involved in climate issues. It wasn't cute. This isn't something that should've been left to our kids.



I always thought T-shirts featuring political slogans were silly. But I wondered if climate messages would resonate differently if encountered on the bodies of actual children. Adults are responsible for choosing what we dress babies in and “put on them” and not making any real assurances that there'll be a livable climate as they grow is quite a burden we put on kids' shoulders. (In Swedish the word “bära” means both “to wear” and “to carry” like a burden.) I did some research looking for shirts produced in a way that didn't exploit people or resources in the various steps of the manufacturing cycle. Didn't find anything. Considered screen-printing second hand t-shirts (still might). But then I figured it would be “easier” to just knit something myself.



The best way to curb carbon emissions is to stop extracting and manufacturing fossil fuels to begin with. Keep it in the ground is one of the catchier chants kids were singing in 2019 climate marches, and it was fun to see my illustration of a disgruntled-looking badger take shape on the shirt front (using intarsia instead of stranded colorwork). This was the text and image I'd spent the whole craft weekend trying to make work with the knitting machine, but the stupid loom couldn't do what I could with my hands! Handknitting still undefeated.

The sleeves were worked flat (and given a ribbed inseam to stretch with growing child) and the patterned stripes are meant to resemble sediment layers of earth; the brown kept underground so the brightly colored land could grow with clean air and water. I was inspired by the Danish hönsestrik technique, which was influenced by the radical social and political movements in the 70s and featured handknit protest patterns in clashing colors. It appealed to me aesthetically, and made sense with its political beginnings, but I regret choosing the technique. I think stranded knitting is sooooo booooooring. I'd much rather play with stitch textures rather than colorwork. But I had an idea! And so I had to see it through.

KEEP IT IN THE GROUND

The finished sweater was gifted to Ella Mae (2yo) of Baltimore, Maryland. Thanks to Jeffery Lash for photograph.

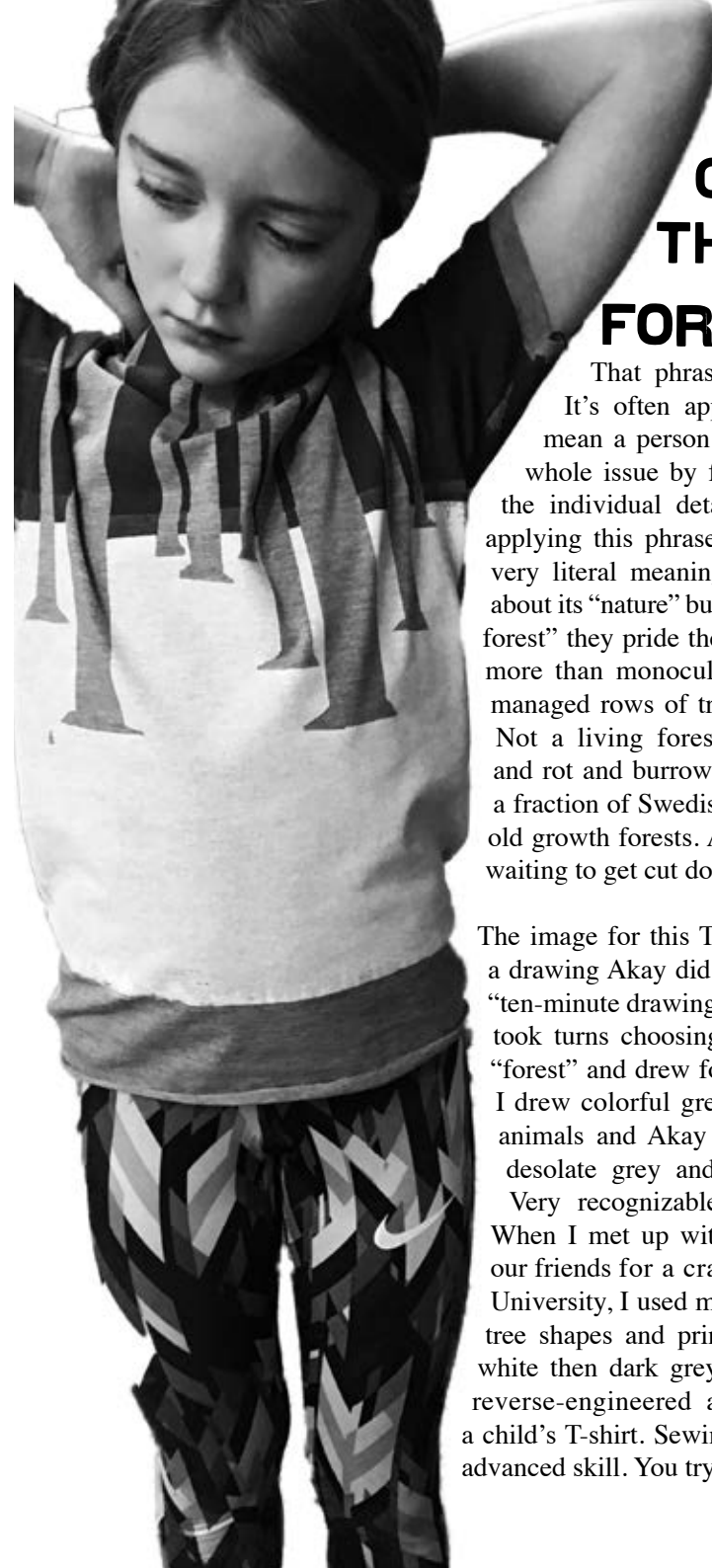


ONLY 4% OF ALL MAMMALS ON EARTH ARE WILD

Humans (36 percent) and their livestock (60 percent) make up the rest. This is a devastating statistic. Made even more perverse since children's clothing so often features images of cute wild animals. This overrepresentation of animal likenesses on consumer goods, especially for kids, misrepresents the reality of a world where urban and agricultural practices displace other land mammals. Our imaginations aren't the habitats they're meant to live in.

I knitted this piece in the round, but unlike traditional hönsestrik—where the idea is to be free and mix and match and knit what strikes you in the moment—I had meticulously planned out the patterns... aesthetic considerations oftentimes threatening to take precedence over the fit of the sweater. But that also seems to fit the theme; we're not taking actual children into account, are we? How they'll move through a world devoid of biodiversity. As long as it looks nice. It took so long to knit that I was afraid the number would be down to 3% by the time I was done. That's a joke. Gallows humor.

This piece is still waiting for the child it "fits".



CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

That phrase always intrigued me.

It's often applied in the abstract to mean a person was losing sight of the whole issue by focusing too intently on the individual details. Heartbreaking that applying this phrase to actual forests has a very literal meaning. Sweden often boasts about its "nature" but the 70% of "skogsmark/forest" they pride themselves on are nothing more than monoculture timber plantations, managed rows of trees for easy harvesting. Not a living forest ecosystem of mosses and rot and burrowing small animals. Only a fraction of Swedish forests are biodiverse, old growth forests. All the rest are just trees waiting to get cut down.

The image for this T-shirt was adapted from a drawing Akay did when he and I played a "ten-minute drawing game" with our kid: we took turns choosing a theme—in this case "forest" and drew for 10 minutes. Raya and I drew colorful greenspaces crowded with animals and Akay had this intriguing and desolate grey and graphic interpretation.

Very recognizable as a Swedish forest. When I met up with Lotta and a group of our friends for a crafting evening at Umeå University, I used masking tape to block out tree shapes and printed with open screens, white then dark grey on grey tricot. Then I reverse-engineered and poorly constructed a child's T-shirt. Sewing a simple T-shirt is an advanced skill. You try it.

Maybe it sounds like I'm advocating for factory girls to be paid the same salary as overhyped tech bros, but what I truly want is for human lives and work to not be subjected to capitalist value judgements at all and for families' basic necessities like food, shelter, water to not be seized by state and corporate entities who regard commons as commodities available only to those who can pay the ransom. (But until then, pay the girls more than tech bros if you want. I won't be mad.)

I hesitate to even critique capitalism because that analysis gives the system more power than it inherently has. Talking about it as if it were a real, immutable thing. Capitalism is just an economic system that people participate in; it doesn't exist if people don't participate. It's not a force of nature or an inevitable way of life. Problem is, it's no longer just "an economic system", it has become accepted as The Economy; and somewhere along its colonial past, it's taken on a role as a cultural ideology with its attendant myths. "This system is logical and efficient" when it's demonstratively wasteful. "It's robust!" when the frantic, accelerating scrabbling is a clear sign of its fragility and poor health. I'm less interested in radical discussions on "dismantling capitalism". Nuts and bolts are already flying off the machine, its coughing and grabbing its chest. Done for. I'm more interested in finding ways to weave shelters and safety nets, protect our families from the falling debris.

NOT THAT COMPLICATED

Part of that work is acknowledging cultures and systems which are already in place. Ways of living and relating that existed before capitalism, and kept on right alongside, even while being actively subjugated by it. I'm talking about gift economies that function independently of capitalism, but which capitalism relies upon to work. I don't mean monetary charitable donations; it's about attending to another's needs in a reciprocal rather than transactional way. Parenting children. The labors of love and passion projects. It's the quiet work of being a friend others can count on which builds communities and social cohesion.

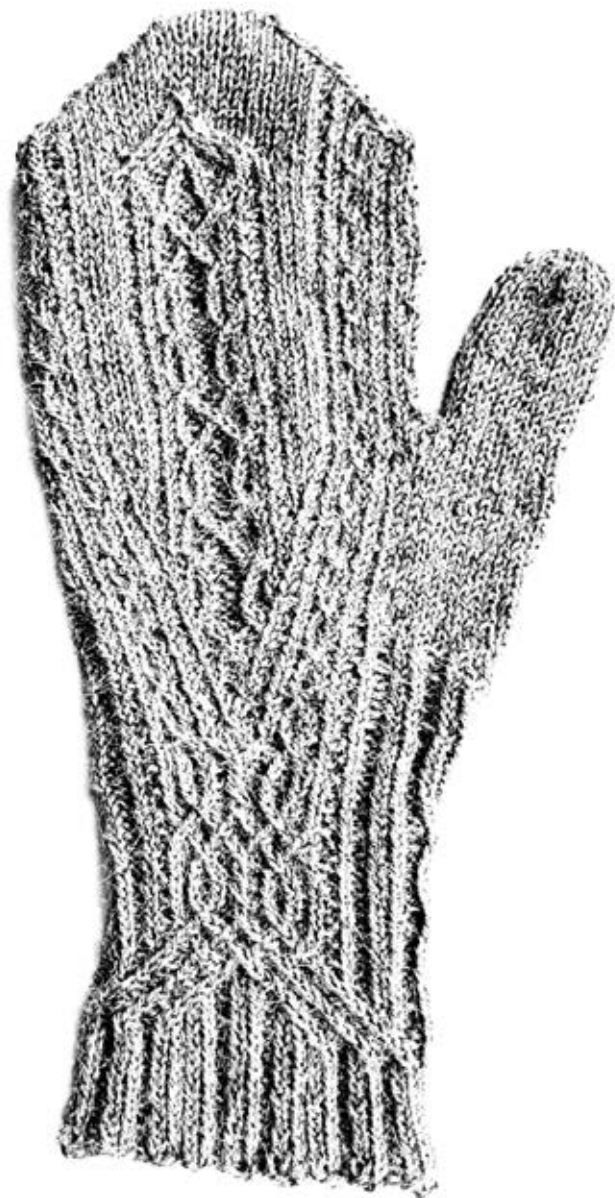
There's a superstition knitters have, based on overwhelming anecdotal evidence, that if you hand-knit a sweater for your significant other, then your relationship will end either before you finish or soon after you give it to them. Most explanations for this "curse" say the act of giving a sweater (which represents an incredible amount of care and commitment and time devoted to someone) exposes something already present in the relationship dynamics. That hefty show of affection reveals an unbalance, tips the scales. A catalyst, not a cause. I like that this phenomenon seems to prove that there is "something" intangible but powerful in the handmade which economic valuations have no idea how to calculate, but just because we don't have a word for it, doesn't mean it's something that can be ignored. Often times the person receiving such a gift was unable to recognize the importance of what was given, and things unravel from there.



quiet defiance



**PROCESS IS
IMPORTANT
BUT IT'S
NOT PRETTY**



Another scenario could be that the knitter, in the process of creating this extravagant thing, realizes that the person they're intending to give the sweater to is incapable of appreciating all the ineffable stuff that goes into a project like that. Maybe the knitter questions the relationship and reevaluates their expectations of another person.

That's what happened with the mittens pictured here. I didn't have to break up with anybody, but my sorta sister-in-law asked me if I could knit her a pair of mittens like I had for my daughter and myself. I was delighted by the prospect! I knew right away that stranded colorwork didn't fit her style, tried to think of what would suit her. I selected a beautiful understated color and decided to try an elegant and intricate twisted knit stitch cable technique.

A TRUE GIFT

I found an incredible pattern which included a note from the designer Julia Mueller: "As my dayjob doesn't leave me enough time to come up with something new, I chose to close my business & put everything I designed so far online for free. Have fun with it. BUT: There will be no email support when you have problems/questions, as I won't be around anymore. Bye! Julia" I'm still haunted by that note. It's evidence of what we lose when certain abilities are consistently undervalued. Maybe it does require a certain level of skill in a field to truly recognize a master, but reading the knitting pattern is how I imagine composers read sheet music and hear the melody in their heads. She had such talent and clever details! I really felt the loss, this person I've never met, of the patterns she wouldn't write because we participate in an economic system that automatically disregards the things it doesn't know how to value.

So I was knitting, just delighting in the process of watching this thing take shape with this ghost's whispered instruction. I was three-fourths of the way done with the first mitten when my guy said, "Why are you making those for her? You know she doesn't take care of her things. She's going to lose them in two weeks." I stopped knitting. He was right. I hated when he was right. This particular person didn't have the capacity to understand the gift I would be giving her. She would see a pair of mittens; something she owns, not something given to her. And I couldn't even be disappointed in her when she eventually, inevitably carelessly misplaced them. She was just the kind of person who hadn't learned to appreciate a gift created especially for her.

It kind of shook me honestly. Realizing that someone I cared about didn't have the capacity to... not even reciprocate, there's nothing transactional about giving... just being able to appreciate this element of living and moving in the world that is so much a part of being. I didn't really know what to do, should I unravel it? But then I looked at what I had in my hands, thought of the people I have in my life. Who did I know that had the emotional capacity to appreciate everything that went into a gift like this? Johanna Hallin! I hope her fingers are as warm as my soul when I realized I had an obvious answer. A friendship that is a true gift.

I made each of these hats with a particular child in mind. The first one was for my daughter, the purple owl. She wore it daily since she was four, save for a brief time when we couldn't find it after she came home from an outing with grandpa. We shrugged and figured it was gone for good. (But it turned up later stuffed safely inside of the sleeve of her jacket). I don't care if the hats and mittens I give to kids get lost (the second ever hat I made for Elvira is not pictured here, a blue bunny that escaped to the wild before I thought to document them) as long as they get used. They're made to be worn. But even if they're not? Doesn't matter! The hats aren't precious, the people I give them to are.

KIDS GET IT

I jokingly call this project my most subversive work. How could a collection of brightly colored abstractions of animal faces undermine power structures, you might ask? Some of them have pompoms? I know. But I believe the act of giving a kid something made specially for them models a radical kind of relationship. And I have anecdotal evidence that suggests these kids do understand the value of what they've been given. The mom of the two little boys who got the sloth hats and accompanying mittens says they've lost every pair of gloves they've ever owned, but always know where their sloth hands are. After I showed my best friend and her two sons the woodland bandit collection, she said her eldest confided in her that his feelings were kind of hurt: "She just gives them away to random kids," he told her. "I thought we were close?" We are close! I didn't know her boys would want one! Eason was thirteen at the time, so I'd assumed he'd aged out of wanting dorky handmade things from his auntie. I'm still so impressed that he picked up on that relationship element of the project, but not surprised, he's always been extremely perceptive. Knowing this and him, I made sure to make him my most elaborate and technically difficult hat to date. I KNEW he would appreciate it. I'd happened to be working on my orange fox hat while visiting him and he perched over my shoulder asking technical questions, dazzled by the coding language of the cable pattern. It was so rewarding to work on that raccoon hat for just him, even though I kept fucking it up and having to start over. I'd already made 15 of these hats, wasn't I supposed to be a pro by now?

I always think the hat I'm presently working on will be my last, but inevitably I'll get a new idea of a technique I haven't tried, or start to wonder how to capture a particular animal's characteristics in alpaca wool. Or more often, I'll think of a kid I want to make one for. The "last" hat I made was for one of my summer children. Heidi's twelve. I knew her favorite animal was an otter, and when I found this delightful sea green color (which I don't automatically associate with her... she's bright yellow) I felt like it was the perfect color for her. When I was getting ready to give it to her, she came over to show me a knee-length hooded cape she'd sewn for herself. We saw the otter hat I'd made for her was the exact same shade of pale green that she'd chosen for herself. We both might've gotten a little teary.





Part of our “One of a Kind” joke is that I’m incapable of making two identical pieces. It’s kept me safe from crafting spaces that subtly encourage creators to get really good at one thing if they want to monetize their hobbies or whatever. But I rejoice in all the ways I remain unprofitable! The motivation for me to make something is to see what it’ll look like. To test my ability to extract the gossamer imaginings out from my branching neurons and recreate the vision in alpaca wool. Once that mystery is solved, why would I want to knit a second mitten, sock, anything ever again? So the challenge for me in these projects that require “two of a kind” has been to knit the companion that’s different enough to be interesting, but still relates enough to the first so it’s clear that the two unidentical mittens “belong” together.

DIFFERENT ENOUGH

These two pairs of mittens were inspired by favorite books. All the Birds in the Sky by Charlie Jane Anders featured one character who represented the science-fictional pew! pew! innovator who built rockets and 2-second time machines and A.I. in the closet of his childhood bedroom. The other main character was a witch with natural magic who could talk to birds, astrally project herself after consuming too many chili peppers and was given an unsolvable riddle about a tree. In the same way that the story showed how these two “science vs magic” viewpoints share the common thread of the truly fantastical, I played with various pairings of the color palette and geometric vs organic patterns to show how these two “diametrically opposed” approaches to the world aren’t so different after all!

TO STILL

I’m still really proud of these intricately patterned convertible gloves and the sophisticated shades I’d found of the classic Hogwarts house colors. Our whole family has been big Harry Potter fans and could easily imagine a witch or wizard wearing these down drafty stone passageways of a School of Magic. My daughter wore these for many falls and winters and has worn them out! They’re frayed in some places, a lot of places actually, but I chose not to repair them for the show. I like that it shows the change and breakdown over time. Kind of mirrors how certain elements in the books themselves don’t really hold up over time and scrutiny. You can still love the parts you love in a work, acknowledge the places things fall apart, and that you might grow out of things. I knitted these before JK Rowling started making unhinged public statements to harm trans communities, and I’m uneasy about the inadvertent pairing of a work influenced by her storybook world with one celebrating a story created by a trans woman. Why’d you have to make it weird, Joanne?

BELONG TOGETHER

Maybe it’s part of the forever project of trying to make sense of things in this world. Put two things together to not only make connections, but also draw distinctions. But some things are just not complicated. Intolerance can not be tolerated. Not OK.



Lotta's Forever Sweater project perfectly embodies the endless, regenerative source of creativity I often experience while knitting. In this performance piece, Lotta designed and knitted a top-down, yoke-style, seamless sweater, and as soon as she was finished, she put it on and immediately began using the yarn from the bottom edge of the completed sweater to start again. She knits the same top-down, yoke-style, seamless sweater again while the yarn unspools around her body, undoing the material she'd recently shaped. Despite following the same pattern and recreating the same stitches, the new sweater is not identical to its predecessor. The colors shift unpredictably, showing that delightful variation through repetition that characterizes much of Lotta's work. By the time she can be found working this piece in the exhibition space, she'll be on the third or fourth generation.

One of the things I admire most about this project is that it shifts the focus from making "something" to the simply making. That the emphasis is on the process and act of doing over the end result. The cyclical aspect of the project also dramatizes something I've often experienced in the process of knitting, that the actual act of creative work inspires more ideas to try. Different knitting techniques allow for different mental states of engagement. Some stages of a project require focus and calculation, or just boring counting. Some sections just keep your fingers busy so your mind can wander. The monotony can be meditative. Each stitch of one two-dimensional string being fashioned into a three-dimensional fabric encourages that feeling of one thing leading to another endlessly.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The experience of knitting also allows for a different relationship to unraveling. Non-knitters might be confused about the point of putting in the time and work to make a thing if you're going to immediately undo it. But unraveling is often a part of the process, and it's never an easy part. First, you have to realize you made a mistake. Devastating. Then you have to locate where things went wrong. Next, and this is the hard part for me, you have to decide if it's a mistake you can live with, or if just continuing on like "I'm sure it'll be fine" will doom the project completely and you were better off going back when you had the chance. I think this altered relationship to "failures" has made it easier for me to reimagine possibilities for systems and structural change. We have to learn to let go of what's not working, slow down and reassess, back that shit up a few rows and try again.

IS NEVER-ENDING

I can write analogies about knitting like it's my job (I am a writer, so writing analogies is technically my job) but I've learned a lot about living and problem-solving through crafting and creating. It's why I appreciate the philosophical aspects of Lotta's work, or perk up whenever a writer I respect also weaves the connections. There's so much to learn in the process. Never-ending.





SOME THINGS I THINK ABOUT

I wonder who was the first person to pick up two sticks and knot twine this way and that? How did they teach their friends? With each new stitch pattern I learn, I think of the first person to slip this stitch, pass over that one, then repeat for this many rows. All that invention creates a fabric through time stitch by stitch.

I think about time. A lot.

WHILE KNITTING

I remember visiting kt joy in San Francisco and watching her wind a skein of army green yarn into a ball, telling me she likes to do this part deliberately, infusing each stretch of yarn with love as she winds.

I work through story details on the projects I'm writing. Untangling plots, or complicating them more. I think about how revising writing is much easier than fixing a mistake in knitting. I learn to unravel and start again.

I wonder if we'd be able to take care of an alpaca for the summer. A "farm" near our summer cabin keeps alpacas, and camels, and Angora goats. It was a kind of business idea to keep a semi-exotic animal park in the rural spaces of northern Sweden. If we could borrow one, would it be happy eating grass on the banks of the river? Or are they flock animals and we'd need at least two?

I think about how the soldiers of the Inca empire wore armor made out of alpaca wool. They'd walk off the battlefield with arrows sticking out of them like porcupine quills, untouched. The Spanish desired the effective alpaca armor more than their own steel.

I constantly mourn how many techniques and knowledge has been lost to colonialism. If "slow" is a process of wresting some of it back.

I marvel at how the Inca had that form of writing that was a series of knots. That people could read the knots, but that ability is lost to time.

I'm thinking about time again. How little we know.

I think of the tricoteuses. The women of the French revolution who sat knitting in the front rows of public executions. The first to gather and demand bread for their families, hailed as sisters of the revolution, then quickly maligned as heartless and morbid hags in historical accounts. I wonder if they were as blood-thirsty as history made them out to be. Because I know who writes historical accounts: men who have some weird ideas about women.

One thing I've been wrestling with during this whole process of putting on a show and writing these backstory texts to help someone understand what we've been working on is... are we inadvertently contradicting something important to the work by moving projects out of the habitats they already thrive in and into a gallery context? Is there a downside to making the "hidden work" visible? Does that act inadvertently send the message that visibility is something to strive for? I don't want to say that.

Neither Lotta nor I show our work on social media—except for one of Lotta's projects where she used Instagram as the medium for documenting her challenge to herself to wear every item of clothing in her closet, no matter how weird or uncomfortable, before she could rewear something. That particular project was commenting on how Instagram is typically used to show off outfits and how ultra-fast fashion has fueled social anxiety about not repeating their looks.

Personally, I can't get past my distrust for social media platforms to post and participate like "normal" people; I never think, "I'm going to like this tweet so that other people know I like this thing." I think, "I refuse to press that button because I don't want Twitter analytics to know that I like something so that marketers can more effectively target me." Which is cute of me to think I have that power, those platforms probably already measure the speed of the scroll, so it doesn't matter whether I click or not. But I still don't want to willingly participate in the attention economy, which includes more than just the currency of "likes"; engagement is also a tacit agreement that content should be made to be visually consumed, and that there's more intrinsic value in something shared many times than content that connects one person to another.

I'm not sure if showing the documented images of the knit hats as a collection cheapens the gifts I gave. Is it no longer "for" who got them if I show it to everyone/anyone? Gift economies are just as dynamic and unpredictable as any economic system. I had to stop making hats for kids who happened to go to my daughter's school because it inadvertently became a "status" thing and kids in her class who I didn't know kept asking me to make them one. I didn't want to be "exclusive" but it's also too much work to give away to just anyone. And that led to the danger that Eason expressed, that it risks becoming a sign of which kids I like most, which, yikes, that's not how I want anyone to interpret what I'm doing. Because it's not true, there are some kids I love as family who haven't gotten hats (Carla and Eskil, I'm looking at you. Torun and Manne...) I know so many more cool kids than I could ever make hats for. That's a sign of my wealth!

And if you think I'm making things more complicated than they need to be, have you seen my work? Complicated as hell.

I'm proud of my work and ridiculously impressed with Lotta's art, if that wasn't clear by now, but I'm also a little sensitive to... mmm, the assumption? maybe... that for our work to be understood and seen, it needs to exist in a public space often hostile to women's forms of creative expression. It's expected to be presented as part of an exhibition to be considered "art", that work should take on a particular form to be effective protest. I don't want our choice to present our works in an exhibition space or a zine to be misinterpreted to mean we think those are more appropriate places to experience the projects than on a loved one's body.

I've done a lot of writing to contextualize art created for one particular space (public urban environments) so it could be understood in another space (private gallery and museum spaces) because there is always something lost in translation. This is probably in part why I bristled to see that wave of "yarn-bombing"—the practice of covering urban structures in colorful acrylic wool or whatnot—take up cultural space as a subversive use of craft techniques. I get that it was supposed to bring a traditionally female craft into a public space using the creative expression of male-dominated graffiti culture, but I resent the idea that the craft has to exist in a space outside the home to be given credit. In the same way I often feel that graffiti loses its meaningful context when placed in a gallery, I felt that wrapping a flat-knitted, garter-stitched piece of fabric around a light pole and "seaming" it up with cable ties just like loses everything that makes knitting an art and science and skill. A light pole should be knitted in the round, right? That was kind of a joke, but I really do have a strong conviction that it's the construction technique that makes sense for the project at hand. Would I feel differently about yarn bombing if someone physically stood there encasing an urban object, stitch by stitch? Maybe! I don't know, I might.

My point is, "the home" is a powerful space from which to work for political change. Ursula K LeGuin wrote that children learn how to be people in the home; and they learn how to be boys or girls or whatever culturally prescribed roles outside of it. This quiet work is denigrated and devalued, sometimes even by well-meaning feminists, but I say there is a lot of good, subversive work to be done inside the home. That work isn't any less strenuous or intense as work done out there in the public eye. But it's valuable, and it could be fun if you do it right. Children are watching us model behavior, learning ways to relate to time and their place in the world, or in a family. They see whether we consume or create. Whether we pay attention to the noise. Cool, tricky work that will have an outsized effect on the culture if we consider fostering generations over generating clicks. Maybe I'm wrong. But you can't tell me that thousands of women wearing cringey pink pussy hats is more dangerous than neighborhood kids watching me sit at home and quietly knit a guillotine. (Calm down, it's just a swatch)

THANKS

Rae thanks Akay for printing and production help & for biking around doing out-in-the-world stuff so she can sit in her corner weaving words with her spindle-fingers & Raya for being a model and inspiration; Your mom wants to be as cool and compassionate as you are when she grows up.

Lotta thanks Lasse for his photo skills & thanks him and the rest of her family, Torun & Manne, for their love and support even when they don't always understand what she's doing.

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