

Biographies:

Cindy Baker is an interdisciplinary and performance artist who considers her art to exist in the experience, process, dissemination and thought (of the artist, as well as of the audience.) Despite a very formal art education, she considers her non-formal training and research in gender culture, queer theory and art theory to be as important in her development as a contemporary artist. Cindy has a particular professional interest in the function of artist-run centres as a breeding ground of deviation. She perceives a need for intervention and collaboration, both within the art world and in the community at large.

Cindy Baker has been the Programme Coordinator at AKA Gallery in Saskatoon since 2000, and is deeply invested in her local communities; not only as a practicing artist, but as an employee, volunteer, board member, educator, advocate, curator and audience member. Before moving to Saskatoon she worked for Latitude 53 Society of Artists, Harcourt House Arts Centre, the Fine Arts Building Gallery, Metro Cinema Film Society, The Works International Festival of Visual Art and Sightlines International Print Symposium in Edmonton.

Kris Lindskoog is an artist who lives and works in Calgary. Although primarily a drawer, he also sculpts, knots, paints, reads and writes. In his works Kris has examined the processes of looking, searching, clues, mapping, travel and accumulation. May he find what he looks for. He will also get what he pays for.

His work, *Better Still*, was recently shown in a solo show at Harcourt House in Edmonton, and he has exhibited regionally at TRUCK, Stride, Latitude 53 and the Art Gallery of Calgary. Kris is currently involved in a new collaborative adventure with Edmonton sculptor and drawer Blair Brennan.

Mary-Anne McTrowe's creative activities have included such diverse areas as sculpture, photography, performance, mail art, video, and most recently, painting and drawing. Her practice is presently focused on the question of how things that are familiar to us can be made unfamiliar, and how a change in context can render something temporarily strange and perhaps even unrecognizable. One area of interest is in exploring similarities between the creatures accepted by historical science but long since discounted (the vegetable lamb, the barnacle goose, the basilisk), and the creatures being modified or created by contemporary science (hybrid plants and animals). McTrowe has been a founding member of two rock bands, has served on the Board of Trapdoor Artist Run Centre in Lethbridge, and is co-author of the Aut Manifesto.

Allyson Mitchell is a maximalist artist living in Toronto Canada. She creates large scale sculpture and installation with fun fur, found objects, reclaimed textile and abandoned crafts. Straddling craft and fine art traditions, Mitchell melds feminism and pop culture to critique and play with contemporary ideas

about sexuality, autobiography and the body. Recently, her work has exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art and the Textile Museum of Canada. Mitchell has also produced 22 films, published writing and music and performed extensively with the group *Pretty Porky and Pissed Off*. She is currently completing her PhD in Women's Studies at York University where she also teaches. Allyson Mitchell's work has been generously supported by the Chalmers Foundation, Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario and Toronto Arts Councils and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. She is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art.

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle

We are a loosely knit circle of revolutionaries.

We seek to revive and expand the social traditions around textiles and other hand-craft work.

We foster community and provide opportunities for dialogue across class, gender, ethnicity, age and other social boundaries.

We engage in the sharing of skills, knowledge and ideas.

We promote small-scale, local production and trade.

While our focus is on knitting, we welcome other forms of textile hand-craft such as quilting and crochet.

Some people see the word "Revolutionary" and automatically assume violence. The knitting circle is not a revolution of violence and destruction. The knitting circle is a constructive revolution - we are creating community and local independence, which, in this corporate society, is a truly revolutionary act.

Nicole Burisch is an emerging artist, writer, activist, and sometime craft theorist who currently resides in Banff, AB. A graduate of the Alberta College of Art and Design (Ceramics), Burisch has been researching and writing on the topic of craft and activism for several years, and presented on this topic at the Educating for Human Rights and Global Citizenship International Conference at the University of Alberta in 2004. She curated an exhibition of emerging Alberta ceramic artists for the Triangle Gallery in 2005 and recently had her work included in the exhibition *Popular* at the Art Gallery of Calgary.

Anthea Black is an artist and art-writer. She has attended NSCAD, ACAD, The Banff Centre for the Arts and several conferences on contemporary art and artist-run culture. Her recent projects have been exhibited by STRUTS in Sackville, NB, projet MOBILVRE/BOOKMOBILE project, and Open Call 13 at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge, AB. She is the Chair of the Biennial Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival, and part of the programming committee for the Fairy Tales International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival

SUPER STRING would not have been possible without discussion and encouragement from Nicole Burisch and Amy Gogarty, two dedicated craft addicts. Heartfelt thanks!



Revolutionary Knitting Circle, Global Knit-in at the G8 protests in Calgary, June 2002.

SUPER STRING is curated by Anthea Black, in Stride's series of director-curated exhibitions, which offer the gallery Director an opportunity to investigate and develop a curatorial practice.

Director: Anthea Black

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SUPER STRING

Cindy Baker
Kris Lindskoog
Mary Anne McTrowe
Allyson Mitchell
The Revolutionary Knitting Circle
curated by **Anthea Black**

Exhibition: July 14 – August 13, 2006

Opening party: Friday July 14 at 8 PM

Free workshops: Tuesday July 11 at 6 PM

and Saturday August 5 at 2 PM

Craftivism discussion forum:

Saturday August 5, noon

Moderated by Nicole Burisch



the Stride Gallery

SUPER STRING taps into the collective craft unconscious — the sound of thousands of knitting needles clicking in unison — and the prolific ways in which artists and activists make crafts to connect with each other, recycle, share skills, reclaim space, and revolutionize the world.

Crafters often skirt the questions of authorship and exclusivity in art by sharing skills and patterns, accumulating, collaborating, and by actively discussing similarities to other works—made by grandmas, housewives, lovers, ancestors, and several generations of artists and activists—and this practice highlights inclusion as a key feature of the works in this exhibition. Artist and activist Nicole Burisch speaks of a democratization of craft practices has put emphasis on effecting change or addressing specific issues through crafting¹. Crafters share a lineage that wraps us up together: when we craft, we're never alone.

Something knitted yet unrecognizable started unfurling from her purse, it started as a thread, grew into an amorphous blob the size of a sweater, then bigger, bigger than a house. Before she could figure out how to stop, the neighborhood had been transformed by something truly enormous².

GET YOUR KNIT-IN

The Revolutionary Knitting Circle's (RKC) local activities are dedicated to making change through knitting as a form of peaceful protest, as a method of creating useful items outside of corporate models, initiating social dialogues about craft, and sharing skills³. Their practices of public knitting, group knit-ins and interventions at public protests don't require, or ask for, legitimacy within the art gallery system to be considered productive and politically charged acts. In fact, it is the simultaneous unruliness and gentleness of public knitting—when a large roaming group of knitters occupies a public place or place of power with a non-violent action—that creates a constructive dialogue.

The RKC's Grant Neufeld considers sharing skills and patterns designed by the RKC with other craftivists around the world as one of the movement's greatest impacts⁴. The RKC's banners, *REVOLUTION* and *PEACE KNITS* are made using a common craftivist method of collaborative group knitting, where each knitter contributes squares to be assembled together, and they have been used at 68 protests in Calgary and during the International Day to End the Occupation of Iraq. The strength of craftivism is the ability to create community and share knowledge in the most unlikely places, and textile-based craft "is among the most easily transportable, affordable, teachable and accessible forms of craft to use," perhaps explaining the proliferation of crafting clubs worldwide⁵.



Kris Lindscoog, *I want to do something nice for the planet*

Kris Lindscoog's *I want to do something nice for the planet* is a 200 foot long knotted friendship bracelet that recalls his childhood interest of crafting with embroidery thread. Youth environmentalism in the 1980s was a catalyst for optimistic social change, where expanding knowledge of geography, ecology and the fragility of the earth encouraged kids to mobilize around the grade-school craft table. As the pre-adolescent kid-crafter Kris ploughed through skeins of embroidery floss, international issues gained attention when Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior was bombed during its anti-nuclear protest against France, and kids infiltrated science class with fundraisers to sponsor endangered species, and wrote to the Federal Government about protecting dolphins from getting caught in our tuna sandwiches⁶.

PROCESS AND PROTECTION

Kris' epic process of making the friendship bracelet long enough to encircle the earth's equator bears a striking similarity to other works of ever-expanding textiles that show no sign of letting up, particularly Germaine Koh's *Knitwork*, a gigantic scarf that she has knitted since 1992. Accumulative artworks are most successful when they start to appear impossible to the viewer, when the work that always needs doing blurs the line between a comforting pastime and an interminable task⁷.

Mary Anne McTrowe's cozies are like sweaters for objects. Her impulse to crochet does not stop at the teapot; it voraciously consumes all objects in its path on a freshly laid-out kitchen table setting, a bowl of fruit, and local buildings. When applied to a familiar domestic object, the cozies gently abstract the original forms, and create tension between usefulness and obliteration. In recent collages, Mary Anne creates mock-ups of cozies for Lethbridge architectural landmarks. When the modest act of crochet is imagined as a large public intervention to cover entire buildings in her community, she employs craft to draw attention towards the preservation of buildings and resist the gentrification of her neighborhoods.

If clothing mediates the vulnerabilities of the body⁸, then Cindy Baker's series of cheeky handmade underpants are less about covering actual bodies and more suggestive of possible bodies and their personas, inhibitions, limitations and pleasures. When her collection of panties is on exhibition in a gallery space where looking and contemplation are encouraged,



Mary Anne McTrowe, *Cozy (fake fruit)*

they give permission to imagine different bodies and space to consider "desire, gender, social constructs of body image and what kinds of desire are socially acceptable."⁹ Many of Cindy's performance artworks have put her body, and the bodies of the audience, on the frontlines of this dialogue. Panties are barely protective against the "simultaneous invisibility and hyper surveillance"¹⁰ of women's bodies, especially fat bodies, but by using clothing to imply bodies without actually putting them on display, she avoids spectacle and uses absence as a way to approach and protect the politicized body.

I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me... things that had power over me. It was a battle I intended to win¹¹.



Cindy Baker, *Swedish panties*

PLEASURE

The spectrum of fantasies and narratives made visible by the various pairs of handmade panties is a homo-social space like that of a women's quilting bee or sewing circle. Queer spaces are typically more inclusive of deviant bodies, and here it is as if we are overhearing a racy conversation between the women who are making the panties. The resulting panoply of intimate options—an ice-cream shop with unending buckets of sweetly hued flavors to dip into, or a make-up counter stacked with intriguing jars of potent pigments to slather on one's face—is a safe space in which to project queered desires. It also reveals a pleasure in making.

Crafters, like queers, and more recently, fat activists, are experts at constructing beauty out of cultural scraps. Allyson Mitchell's *Deep Lez* work recycles her materials from seemingly bottomless thrift-store bins of fun fur, abandoned toys, hokey afghans and bolts of tweedy fabric, and presses them into double-duty as they carry meaning from their past uses and are reconfigured into sassy politically charged artworks.

Allyson is also a founder of the radical fat-activist group "Pretty, Porky and Pissed Off," and works in many media, in addition to textiles, that that are used with equal zeal by artists and activists: zines, stickers, videos and performances. Using excessive,



Allyson Mitchell, *Miss Piggy*

patterned, heavily textured objects, the Deep Lez aesthetic makes parallels between "rescuing lesbian and radical feminism from being forgotten and discarded,"¹² and resisting the slick commoditization of craft. By situating craft at the intersection of her practice as an artist, activist, and academic, Allyson constructs objects that bridge a variety of perspectives and are inclusive of mixed-up meanings.

To maintain the radical potential of craft practices inside and outside of the gallery, artists and activists alike must maintain the connectivity between spaces, bodies, size, and craft. Methods such as public knitting, accumulative projects, installations, and intervention are intelligent adaptations of crafting practices that have become tools for reclaiming space and redistributing power.

(Endnotes)

1 Burisch, Nicole, written correspondence, June 2006.

2 based on Mary Shannon Will's anecdote about meeting Kiki Smith and her knitting, and Janice Black Stewart's anecdote about a children's book, *Something Truly Enormous*, in which the protagonist of the story knits so avidly that her project takes over the town. June 2006.

3 Burisch, Nicole "Reevaluating the links Between Craft and Social Activism" paper presented at Utopian Impulses, and Grant Neufeld, *About the Revolutionary Knitting Circle* <http://knitting.activist.ca/> June 2006.

4 Neufeld, Grant. Personal interview and *The Revolutionary Knitting Circle Manifesto*, <http://knitting.activist.ca/manifesto.html>

5 *Craftivism and The Revolutionary Knitting Circle* from Wikipedia the free encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craftivism> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Knitting_Circle June 2006.

6 International craftivists also emphasize collaboration to raise awareness of social and political issues, such as the Cast-Off Knitters, who assembled a blanket of pink squares to completely cover a combat tank used in World War II to protest Denmark's involvement in Iraq, and Knitters Without Borders, who raise funds for Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders.

Burisch, Nicole, written correspondence, "Stitch n' Bitch groups worldwide" <http://www.stitchnbitch.org/snb-groups.htm> and "Yarn Harlot: TSF FAQ" by Stephanie Pearl McPhee, <http://www.yarnharlot.ca/blog/tsffaqa.html> and "Cast Off Knitting Club" <http://www.castoff.info/meetings.asp> June 2006.

7 Dolphin deaths dropped a whopping 97 percent after dolphin-safe labels started appearing on tuna cans in 1990. But now the fishing industry with the support of the Bush Administration is trying to weaken the definition of the dolphin-safe label on tuna cans and pouches despite broad bipartisan public support for the program. "Greenpeace: 30 years of raising hell to save the planet," <http://archive.greenpeace.org/30th/> and "The Green: an environmental newsletter by and for youth," May 2004, Issue 16. http://www.earthteam.net/green_news/issues/0504.htm June 2006.

8 Several artists have used their work to investigate accumulation and the politics of work, and labour and community: Mary Scott's *In you more you than me Mary*, *In you more me than me Mary* holds words in a tight circuitous retelling through materials, even after the purchase of *Knitwork* by the AGO, Germaine Koh returns regularly to pick up where she left off knitting, Sandi Plotnikoff's *Sockjams* become more like threatening Boa Constrictors with every added sock, Luanne Martineau's *Accumulation Sculptures* settle into slumped lumps that are alternately inviting and repulsive, Anu Guha-Thakurta's sets of long scarves and mittens for holding hands, and Janice Morton's gigantic *Cozy* to cover a house!

"Germaine Koh," <http://www.germainekoh.com/knitwork.html> and "The Belkin Satellite — Future exhibitions — Material Obsessions," text by Julie Bevan <http://www.belkin-gallery.ubc.ca/satellite/exhibitions/future.html> June 2006.

9 Amy Gogarty, "Knitopia, or, Mixed Breeds and Crossed Practices in Luanne Martineau's *Lubberland II*," in *Lubberland II*, (Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery, Medicine Hat: 2002).

10 Allyson Mitchell, text for *Fashion Plate* performance by Cindy Baker (with assistance from Megan Mormon) on "Fashion Plate — Idea - FADO Performance Inc." <http://www.performanceart.ca/idea/baker/essay.html> This text is a brilliant analysis of body politics and the use of collaborative craft as a performative strategy in Cindy's *Fashion Plate* performance. June 2006.

11 Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, (Vintage, London: 1990) p. 124.

12 Allyson Mitchell in an interview by Chelsea Litchman *Deeply Lez* <http://www.allysonmitchell.com/action/deeplez.cfm> June 2006.