



Namolio yarn

The Crafter:

words from the craft world

Back in 2006 I sat on the steering panel for the first **Unravel** yarn festival at the South Hill Arts Centre in Bracknell. The new yarn festival was hugely successful and set a model for a fair combining exhibitions, thoughtful talks and workshops as well as that all-important ‘stash enhancement’ exercise, of course. The idea was to create a model that could be picked up by any art centre around the country, so hurrah for Farnham Maltings for doing just that.

I went along to this year’s Unravel, in February, to meet with **Betsy Greer**, so called ‘godmother of Craftivism’. We drank tea and Betsy showed me this lovely wool that she had bought from **Namolio** so I had to go and have a look and get some myself. It was Betsy that first coined the term **Craftivism** and in her talk Betsy defined it as making the world a better place through your craft. It comes in three different flavours: donation, beautification and notification. So this goes from knitting for charity, yarn bombing – like the lovely signposts here – as well as advocacy work that can be more politically motivated. This will all be in her new book *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*. The dilemma of the day however, was how much yarn Betsy could buy before her suitcase exploded. It was touch and go – in more ways than one.

Rachel Coopey of **Coop Knits** also has a book out all about socks, cunningly called *Coop Knits Socks*, but that could be a ruse to put us off the scent. Isn’t she lovely, I’m even thinking I might have to knit a pair myself. My sock knitting came to a sticky end back in the 80s when I fell asleep, knocking my bedside lamp over onto my

knitting bag with inflammatory results: one-and-half singed Fairisle socks.

Craftivism was also on the agenda in Falmouth at a craft and wellbeing symposium, **Beyond the Toolkit**, organised by Falmouth University. I was running a workshop at the same time as Sarah Corbett of **Craftivist Collective** so couldn’t do hers. Sarah encourages people to stitch messages that can be a non-confrontational way of opening a dialogue about touchy subjects. Her little stitched protest banners are quiet roars about injustice – radicalism for introverts. I got a bunch of academics to try finger-knitting, which was great fun that got us sitting together in a circle rather than in rows watching a screen.

Also there was **Betsan Corkhill** of **Stitchlinks**, who says that knitting is actively creative, something we can do rather than something that is out of our control, like traffic. Apparently the automatic and repetitive movements of knitting helps us to switch off self-monitoring so, just like that second glass of wine, it makes you talk more than you might have (so it’s not just me then). Helpfully this means that it can help in pain management and recovery from trauma.

I met **Monika Auch** at another workshop run by Mah Rana where we stitched felt needle cases. Remember doing this at primary school? Monika’s action research looks at what happens to our brains when we are making. Apparently 2014 is the **European Year of the Brain** (I know, who knew?). We all know that our chosen craft, knitting, makes us relaxed and happy (on the whole) but this is another way of looking at it, from the inside. Monika says that making is all part of our cultural identity and that it’s the new things that we try



Rachel Coopey of Coop Knits



Stitching with Betsan Corkhill, Sarah Corbett et al at Beyond the Toolkit



Monika Auch

Betsy Greer, godmother of Craftivism



ABOVE: Yarn bombed signs
RIGHT: Pigeon guarding the posts

that can help stave off dementia or depression, like learning crochet if you are a knitter. So there is no excuse for not trying something new... and making the world a better place.