



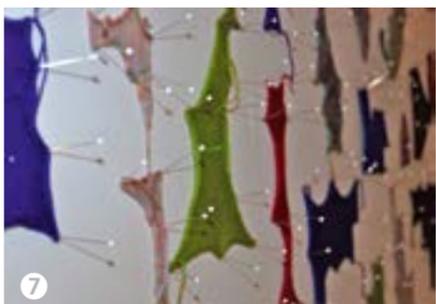
1 'The Perfect' is one of Freddie's eerie machine-knitted pieces
 2 'Headlong' from the *Cosy* exhibition
 3 'Anyway' is an architectural piece of seamless knitting
 4 'Craft Kills', a self-portrait inspired by Saint Sebastian



'Odd Sweaters' make for strangely uncomfortable viewing



A house from the 2002 Knitted Homes of Crime exhibition



6 'Pocky' from *Collection of Knitted Folk Objects*
 7 A hand-knit piece 8 'How to Make a Piece of Work when you are Too Tired to Make Decisions'



This piece is entitled 'The Saddest Sight of All'

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MEET THE ARTISTS

Freddie Robins

To Freddie Robins, knitting is a 'discomfort blanket' that helps her explore complex emotions, as Katy Bevan explains



ON A VISIT back to my hometown in 2002, I stumbled upon an exhibition called *Cosy* in the local art gallery, The Minories, Colchester. *Cosy* it wasn't – jumpers with four arms or total head coverings were suspended from the ceiling; names like 'Noway', 'Fourway', 'Armed' and 'Headlong' suggested strange-shaped bodies. In the corner a knitted figure was impaled painfully with knitting needles, across the chest, the slogan 'Craft Kills': a martyr to knitting.

It was revolutionary: it made me think, it was in an art gallery, and it was knitting. The name of the artist was Freddie Robins, and I was determined to find out more about this woman who could express complex emotions and concepts just by looping wool together.

From a collection inspired by female killers, 'Knitted Homes of Crime', to 'Bad Mother', a truncated arm dripping with inappropriateness, Freddie's work is concerned with internalised problems: crime, death, misery and emotional damage. These are things not normally associated with the gentle art of knitting: societal norms are turned on their head and given some tricky intarsia to do.

"Knitting is my way of interpreting, communicating and coming to terms with the world that I inhabit," says Freddie. "It sits between me and my internal world, and the physical world around me, like some form of knitted comfort, or rather discomfort blanket."

We finally met when we co-curated an exhibition *Knit 2 Together: Concepts in Knitting* for the Crafts Council in 2005. Even the simplest of projects involves making many small decisions and that includes curating a large show. In response Freddie made her piece 'How to Make a Piece of Work when you are Too Tired to Make Decisions' (2004) using the rolling of dice at each change of direction or colour, leaving a large part of the final outcome to chance.

'Feel the Fear and Make it Anyway' takes the form of a roadside grave marker, a life-like knitted tree wrapping complete with bark, knots and cellophane-wrapped flowers tied to the trunk; it acknowledges the danger of making work that may provoke a strong reaction in others. Many people are frozen into inaction by the fear of how their work will turn out – whether it's any good, and what others might think. Wary of making mistakes, the risks become increasingly scary. Freddie's project entitled *The Perfect* explores the travails of a perfectionist creating new work. The result is

a number of seamless bodies, or skins, manufactured on a new Shima Seiki WholeGarment knitting machine at the University of Manchester, the only one available in the country at the time. The resulting figures came out perfectly, but lacked the messy humanity to make them seem 'right'. The 2013 exhibition *Out on a Limb* found some of these skins re-imagined as body parts, dismembered, filled, and embellished with found objects that have personal resonance.

Jump neatly on to 2016 the exhibition *What do I need to do to make it OK?*, curated by Liz Cooper, where Freddie has made another figure, weighed down by the huge number of knitting needles that sprout from its hands, head hanging low in defeat. 'I'm so Bloody Sad' describes the internal struggle of striving for perfection that is doomed to fail.

Freddie says she knits to keep life at bay, taking life one stitch at a time. "Time is a ball of wool," she says, paraphrasing the Scottish poet laureate Jackie Kay from her poem *The Knitter*. "Jackie knitted to keep death away; I knit to begin again."

Currently senior tutor and reader in textiles at the Royal College of Art, Freddie commutes between London and her home and studio in Essex. New work explores local tales of witchcraft, her move to the countryside, and whether the romantic idyll is anything more than propaganda – so be prepared to have your preconceptions about novelty landscape jumpers exploded. ☺

FREDDIE'S WORK EXPLORES CRIME, DEATH, MISERY AND EMOTIONAL DAMAGE

www.freddieRobins.com www.thecrafterm.com

'What do I need to do to make it OK?' Exhibition tour dates

Forty Hall, Enfield, London
 25 August – 20 November 2016
www.fortyhallestate.co.uk

The National Centre for Craft & Design, Sleaford, Lincolnshire
 8 March – 14 May 2017
www.nationalcraftanddesign.org.uk

Rugby Art Gallery & Museum, Rugby, Warwickshire
 9 September 2017 – 13 January 2018
www.ragm.org.uk

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