

Reviewed by K. L. Bevan

The Knitting and Stitching Show Alexandra Palace

A firm fixture on the autumn calendar for UK crafters, the *Knitting and Stitching Show* at London's Alexandra Palace was humming October 11–14, 2012. What raises these shows above the average is the high level of exhibited work from individual makers and curated group shows, opportunities for students to exhibit, as well as all the commercial sellers and indepen-

confections to add to a textile sweet shop. The aim was to pass on the enthusiasm from one knitter to another—one of the things these consumer shows do really well.

The main event, *Color Improvisations* curated by American textile artist Nancy Crow, was a color sensation that demanded close inspection. The work of 26 artists in this “international invitational” show riffed on the subject of color. On a smaller scale was the intimate hand-detailed work of UK artist Fleur Oakes (trading as The Glass Pingle) with her exquisite stump work specimens exhibited under glass domes.



The *Tales of the Unfinishable Project* pavilion at the 2012 *Knitting and Stitching Show* in London; www.theunfinishable.com. Photo: Twistedthread.

dent spinners. Space is given over to promote art projects that might not get such a large audience otherwise. Regular attendance figures for the “Ally Pally show” approached the 50,000 mark. Visitors were keen to replenish their stashes and commune with like-minded stitchers.

One such exhibit was *Tales of the Unfinishable*, where visitors were lured inside a cozy pavilion to see donated projects that decorate with good intentions—curtains of half-made quilts evoking guilty secrets. Listening to the sounds of hundreds of makers is a cautionary tale and something we can all identify with. Also in the Palm Court entrance was a new venture from the UK Crafts Council's Craft Club, *Make me Sweet*, where knitters were encouraged to stitch

My first visit is always to Habu Textiles from New York where I was able to show off my latest knit with their silk gimp thread. Enroute, I was entranced by the one-man band that is Mr. Lucet (aka Ziggy Rytka) tirelessly demonstrating the delights of braiding with a *lucet*, a simple 2-fingered tool perfect for those who have difficulty with the basics of knitting.

Promoting recent books with exhibits was Mr. X Stitch (aka Jamie Chalmers), the UK champion of the alternative embroiderer. Chalmers's *PUSH Stitchery* (Lark Books, 2011) is a well-illustrated and timely look at artists working off canvas, as it were. Diem Chau's delicate stitched porcelain pieces were as delightful as Erin Endicott's *Healing Sutras* were disturbing.



ABOVE: SARAH GREAVES *Blue Door* Detail, found door, embroidery silks, hand embroidery, 2008. Featured in the *Mr. X Stitch Presents* exhibition at the 2012 *Knitting and Stitching Show*, London.

Photo: Dylan Chubb.

TOP LEFT: SUZANNE BUCHMANN *Crusade #27* 100% cottons, hand dyeing, machine piecing and quilting, 84" x 82", 2008–2009.

© Suzanne Buchmann. Featured in *Color Improvisations* at the 2012 *Knitting and Stitching Show*, London. Photo: Kuhnle + Knödler Fotodesign, Radolfzell.



ABOVE: JAMIE CHALMERS (AKA MR. X STITCH) pushing alternative stitchery with his curated selection of contemporary fiber and mixed-media art. Photo: Twistedthread.

TOP RIGHT: *The Knitted Textile Awards* included the work of CECILIA AJAYI and KATIE NOAKES at the 2012 *Knitting and Stitching Show*, London. Photo: Twistedthread.

Endicott's diminutive vintage garments manifest red blooms like bloodstains from psychological wounds, making the unseen quite real and visceral. Also making the invisible tangible is the work of Sarah Greaves, who practices "stitch graffiti" on solid objects—fruit, furniture, you name it. Here she had embroidered a net-curtained suburban door with thoughts that seemed to seep through the wood. Showing his own work here in a predominantly female domain, Chalmers created a strong platform to promote emerging artists in this exciting field.

Alice Kettle and Jane McKeating's book *Hand Stitch, Perspectives* (2011, Bloomsbury Academic) was also launched here with an exhibition of work by the staff and students of Manchester Metropolitan University's vibrant textiles department.

Organized by the UK Handknitting Association, a selection of work was shown from graduate courses around the UK as the *Knitted*

Textiles Awards. Of a consistently high standard, this presentation was a great way to spotlight some up-and-coming talent. School parties were kept busy by the team of Barley Massey's Fabrications at the Upcycling Academy, mending and exchanging old clothes for new. This was a great way for fashion-conscious young people to learn about the choices they can make about being conscientious consumers.

A measure of the success for the *Knitting and Stitching Show* is the number of other exhibitions that have grown up in its wake. This huge show is sadly the last to be curated by the gregarious Andrew Salmon and his team at Creative Exhibitions. It remains to be seen if new organizers Upper Street Events can keep at the front of the curve. www.twistedthread.com

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