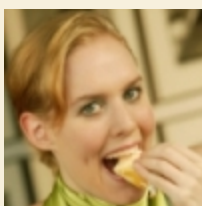


INTERNATIONAL FIBER COLLABORATIVE

2007-2008

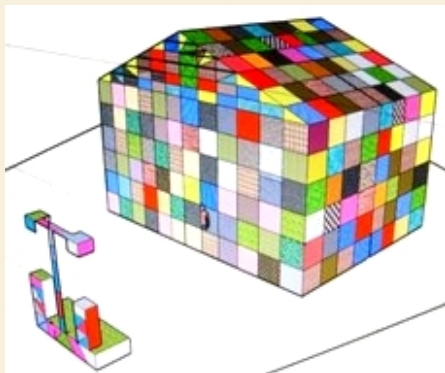
Green Options Interview

The Green Options Interview with: Jennifer Marsh of the International Fiber Collaborative



By VictoriaE Aug 20, 2007

There is no doubt that the creative community has begun playing a pivotal roll in expressing the concerns of our changing environment, as well as inspiring change. Jennifer Marsh, a visual artist studying at Syracuse University, took her concern for the world's dependence on foreign oil to the next level by starting the International Fiber Collaborative in May of 2007.



The goal of the International Fiber

Collaborative is to provide an opportunity for people who enjoy working with crafts, whether professional artists, hobbyists, or students, to come together from all over the world to express their concerns about their countries' extreme dependency on oil for energy. Those who participate will crochet, knit, stitch, patch, or collage 3-foot square fiber panels that will express each participants concern about this topic. By designing and creating a panel and participating in this project you are, in the larger picture, expressing your concern about this important subject to the rest of the world. Once all 800 panels are received, they will be sewn together to completely cover an abandoned gas station in central New York State. I recently spoke with Jennifer Marsh about the history behind this project, how to participate (even if you aren't particularly craft-tastic), the reaction from the creative community, and much more.

Green Options: How did the idea for the International Fiber Collaborative begin?

Jennifer Marsh: I am a third year Master of Fine Art student at Syracuse University; my focus of study is sculpture. The idea for the International Fiber Collaborative has gradually come about over the course of my first two years in graduate school. When I started at graduate school, I mostly stayed locked away in my studio with the door shut, as most artists do. Gradually, I became frustrated at the lack of impact or contributive spirit that my studio practice evolved into. I wanted to have a more active and productive role in the community. I felt passionate towards creating dialog with others from all walks of life. The result in doing so, proved a thousand times more productive and engaging than my previous studio practice.

So I founded and directed a high school initiative for Syracuse City High School art students: workshops that allowed students to visit the Syracuse University Sculpture Facilities and create sand molds for molten aluminum metal to be poured into them. At the end of each workshop, the students were able to take home their own aluminum sculptures. I direct five workshops a year, with summer kids of all ages getting involved. The eye-opening effect that this had on the students proved to be much more successful than I had anticipated. I enjoyed working actively within the art community at SU, but now I wanted to reach out, to experience lives that are vastly different than mine.

This past June, I volunteered as an English teacher in Northern India for five weeks. During my time spent in India, I realized that life was about the relationships we make and the experiences we share with one another, and less about making artwork for myself. Around this time, I had been working on an idea to crochet a cozy for a barn out in the country, with a herd of matching sheep. This is following a project I had recently finished that involved crocheting a cover for my lawnmower. Still the idea for the barn was interesting, because it started involving a community; however, I still felt that the time disconnected from people crocheting the cover with some hired help would be a contradiction to the recent developments in my desired studio practice.

Then on one day I was driving in the town of DeWitt in Syracuse, New York, just leaving a gas station, when I drove right passed an abandoned gas station. Instantly, I thought that if I covered this building, the idea could be directly connected to countries over dependency on oil for energy. Simultaneously, I was cleaning, spinning, and crocheting wool to create sheep cozies, which I am still working on. However, I ditched the barn idea to pursue the gas station project. And this is when I realized that this project could very well be a collaborative involving people of all different ages, genders, religions, and nationalities. The potential for dialog to

generate between artists and the community at large, this is my motivator. This collaborative brings together people whom are passionate about art and the political well being of there country.

GO: What sort of message do you hope to send with this project?

JM: My idea in this project is not to preach about our countries over-dependency on oil, but, however, to propose questions to the participants and the viewers about energy and methods to obtain it, and our reliance on massive industries such as oil. I do not want to corner myself in too much with the specifics; I want the viewers and participants to construct passionate opinions derived from personal experience. Everyday, I add in comments from the community to the website, and it is exciting to watch it grow.

GO: Do you believe that the creative community (especially the "crafty" sector) can have a true impact on our environmental problems?

JM: I think it will be interesting to see all the different materials used by the participants to create these panels. For instance, most synthetic yarn materials are made with oil, and I find that interesting. If people choose to use these store-bought yarns, it might first look like a contradiction. However, it is a good example as to how far oil's impact has gone. Even the materials that we choose to use in questioning oil's impact are made with oil. I personally find this contradiction powerful. Not every person can afford the natural wool materials, which can get quite expensive. However, others may wish to clean and spin there own wool, or recycle old scrap cloths and stitch them together.

GO: Once the instillation is through, you plan to sell the individual panels to raise money for the [Afghans for Afghans](#) non-profit. Why this organization in particular?

JM: The potential for this collaborative is exciting. If enough panels are collected, then once this installation comes to a close, I can take the panels across the country (world) to cover larger abandoned gas stations, covering more ground and involving more people and places. An artist in Australia has already indicated her desire for the installation to travel to her country. But for this to happen, there have to be enough participants. At some point, I plan on selling either the panels – installation, and/or donating my research so that I might be able to give a contribution directly to a charity. I was hoping to stay in the fiber field, since the majority of participants are fiber artists whom also work for fiber charities. This is a matter in just letting time work itself out, and seeing what my options are down the road, and listening to

suggestions.

GO: You will be at the **Knit & Crochet Show** in Oakland on September 27th-30th.

What can visitors hope to learn about the project at the event?

JM: I am very excited to have a booth at the Knit and Crochet show in Oakland, CA. I will have all the information on how to participate, as well as the demonstration panels that were made to kick off this project. I will have sign-up sheets for people to receive monthly newsletters, as well as magnets, brochures, and printed images of the abandoned gas station (as attached) and gas station sketch (as attached). I will mainly be there to listen to people's responses and opinions towards this project and it's topic. My motivation will be to get people involved so to push the dialog and community spirit further.

GO: How can readers (even the non-creative inclined) get involved in this exciting installation?

JM: There are many ways for people to participate. If someone would like to participate, but rather not create a panel, I could always use donations of yarn to help participants crochet covers for the gas station pumps. Whatever yarn is not used will be donated to a charity. Also, I could use hands installing the panels in April, which basically would involve stitching panels together, and hanging out with great people from all over. Another area that I could use help with is promoting this project. Simple by sharing this project with friends and family is an easy way to participate, as well as sharing this project with any press that might be interested. This can take a volunteer little time, while making a big difference. So far, people are participating from China, Australia, Canada, and USA. People are getting excited and we are just getting started. The due date for panels is mid-March, with the installation happening in mid-April.

GO: Do you have any other nifty, secret projects in the works that you could hint at?

JM: Currently, I am working on 2-3 sheep cozies. They are crocheted stripes with black and white wool. The wool originally came from these sheep. The cozy is form-fitting, covering his whole body, legs, midsection, head, ears, tail, etc., leaving openings for the necessary parts. Around the sheep's main, I have crocheted black and white flower pedal type shapes completely covering the cozy from the front legs to the sheep's nose. Have you ever tried to fit a cozy on a moving sheep? This is the trick. You must find a sheep that was hand raised; occasionally you can find a couple on a farm. They are typically used for petting zoos and/or nativity scenes. However,

you have to talk to the sheep for a while before they become comfortable with you. That is what the farmer said, and gave me a sheep talk 101 class when I went to go take measurements of the sheep. I will have the sheep on display with their cozies on in September or October at Syracuse University. I will have built a nice white picket fenced in area for the sheep to spend a couple days. The enclosure will containing food, dirt, hay, and water.

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