



# INTERNATIONAL FIBER COLLABORATIVE

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### Blanket Statement

*Su grad student stitches together community art installation.*

By Jenna Hanchard + Illustration by Nicole Troillet

There's an abandoned gas station that sits on the corner of East Colvin Street and Nottingham Road in DeWitt, just outside Syracuse. The station is an eyesore, but the presence of the old pumps is a reminiscent of big Buicks, reasonable prices, and friendly gas station attendents (unless you live in New Jersey, that is.)

This now decrepit gas station is about to get a makeover by way of the International Fiver Collaborative - the brainchild of Jennifer Marsh, a third year graduate student of fine arts at Syracuse University.

Marsh plans to sew together 8-- three-foot square fiber panels crocheted by people from the Syracuse community and beyond. Once she crochets the panels together, Marsh will use them to cover the gas station - picture an entire building engulfed by a giant, colorful tea cozy.

Marsh said thee panels wil represent people's feelings about thier representative countries' use of oil for energy, as well as connect art with a larger community. " I wanted to create a dialog."

And Marsh has certainly struck up a conversation. She has sent hundereds of email to individuals and fiber and sculture guild groups about her project. She has managed to take it beyond its Central New York roots and has traveled across the country, setting up exhibitions about the International Fiber Collaborative at craft shows in California and New York City. She also has tentative plans to create a similar installation at a gas station in West Virginia and as far away as Australia.

Now the challenge for Marsh is collecting the panels for the project. With only three recieved so far, she is a far cry from reaching her projected goal of 800 panels. " It's a hard thing with art to

connect with the general public," she said. "Sometimes I feel like I only get 10 percent of what I put out there."

That' is not to say she hasn't sparked the interest of some potential patchworkers. Carol Lovell, a 73-year-old Syracuse native, has already made one square and plans to donate more. "I had some yarn around to I said 'yeah, what the heck, Lovell said. The first panel took her 8 to 10 hours to make and she plans to make more during the holidays. " The first one I had was all one color. i just sent it to Jennifer in a hurry to encourage her," she said.

Karen Morano, a self-proclaimed homemaker and activist from Chittenango NY is also making squares and donating yard for the project.

"Five or six of my friends called me after reading about it in the Post-Standard saying, "i thought you'd be really interested in this!" Morano said.

All the way from Caracas, Venezuela, Elena Tariffi, a professional fiber artist and fiber art teacher, wrote on an email, " I am planning to make a few blocks myself. I am also encouraging other fiber artists locally and my students to contribute." Marsh said one of the biggest goals of the International Fiber Collaborative is for the participants to feel like they have put themselves in the project.

" The potential and importance of Jennifer's project is that it moves art beyond the gallery setting to become a public practice,": said Samuel Van Aken, an associate professor in the sculpture department at SU and Marsh's graduate thesis advisor.

As much as Marsh seeks to bridge the spatial and ideological gaps between the artist and the public, she also hopes to make a political statmentabout the uses and abuses of oil for energy. Lovell thinks this project is a good start.

"Even though we're not physically changing the oil industry, we're making an attempt to do something rather than sitting around the kitchen table talking about it." Lovell said.

With the United states currently consuming more oil than any other country, there is alot to talk about. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, in 2006 the United States was the number one consumer and net importer of oil in the world.

Tariffi thinks Marsh's installation will help shed light on it's interlaced political message. ' Fiber art can access different visual, tactile, and emotional areas, not only for the artist but mainly for the spectator," Tariffi wrote. "I am absolutly sure that this installation will touch the crucial issue of oil dependency and oil damage in a very significant way."