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Knitting the News and other Stories

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Knitting the News and other Stories

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Knitting shapes have long been defined by the human form. By moving the context of knitting from clothing geometry to sculpture, knitting becomes a medium with a link to a rich and complex fiber tradition that has the power of history behind it.

While the structure of my work is knit, I use whatever method or tool suits the material to achieve desired effects. This includes using a knitting machine, needles or even a jig for heavier gauge wire work. Being familiar with the respective strengths of both machine hand knitting frees me to focus on form and technical excellence. Drawing on the same sculptural geometry used for clothing, I shape all my work as I knit.



Figure 1. Cotton and chenille hat, photo by Joe Ofria.

Designing and knitting sculptural hats (figure 1) in the 80's and 90's was my preparatory education while a studio fire in 1999 provided an unexpected but fruitful hiatus during which time I started to reconsider my focus. Deciding I wanted to imbue my work with more meaning, led me to explore sculptural knitting as an art medium. With rescued and dried yarn and the skeleton of a studio, it became clear after some time that I again needed to have a dedicated work space.

In my current studio work, I am often responding viscerally to the constant assault of the unsettling news that pours out of the radio and I knit to rejoin the frayed and unraveled places I see around me. A background in anthropology merged with a passion for textiles, has also informed my vision as has having consulted on (and been inspired by) knitting projects in Bolivia and Peru where the local economics are entwined with political realities. One image often suggests another and patterns express differently depending on material.

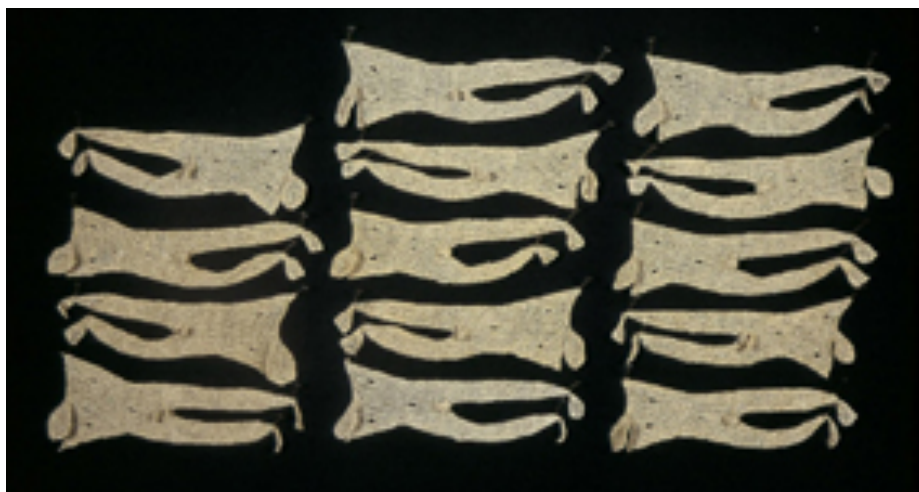


Figure 2. Cost of War, 30x62 inches, photo Joe Ofria.

To protest recent wars, I have often worked with body and flag imagery. Cost of War, (figure 2) which won the Director's Award at Fiberart International 2007, installs in a way reminiscent of a flag and thus followed Fated Glory (figure 3) in which the stripes were made of bodies. I repeated that pattern again in Truth to Power (figure 4) though in 30 gauge coated copper wire in which the embedded shaping shows more clearly.



Figure 3. Fated Glory detail, 55x46 inches photo by artist.

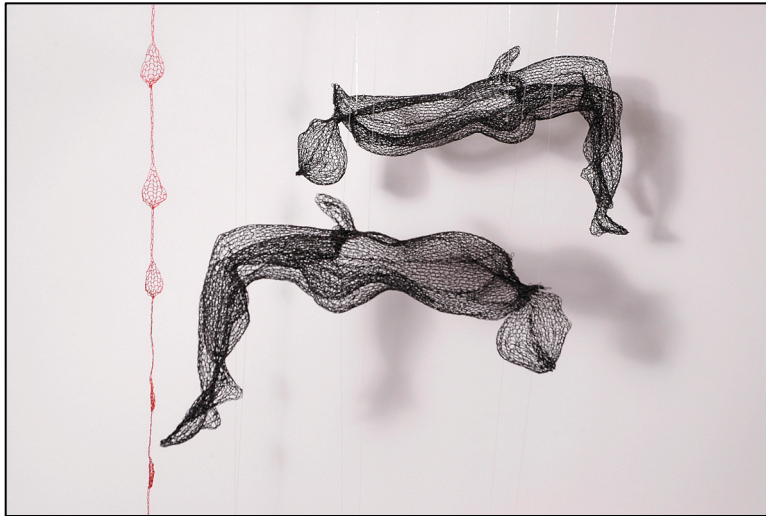


Figure 4. Truth to Power detail, ceiling height, 24w x 36d, photo by Joe Ofria.

The Inaugural Necklace (figure 5) was knit in an exuberant response to the change of administration in 2008 with hope for an end to the war as well as a fundamental change in the country's domestic agenda. Though serious, it provided much humor in a quest to see how many degrees of separation I was from the First Lady as I wanted to offer it to her to wear it to the Inaugural ball. The Massachusetts Cultural Council even posted a request for help on its website but in the end I was unable to present it to her.

Other recent work responds to the pressing issues of climate change. Sea Change (figure 6) anticipates the changing weather patterns as an unresponsive political climate fails to take action. Others in this series speak to specific examples of catastrophic climate conditions as in Uprooted (figure 7), a response to the 2010 crisis in Haiti followed by Troubled Waters which poured out after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. (figure 8.)



Figure 5. Inaugural Necklace & bracelet photo by artist.

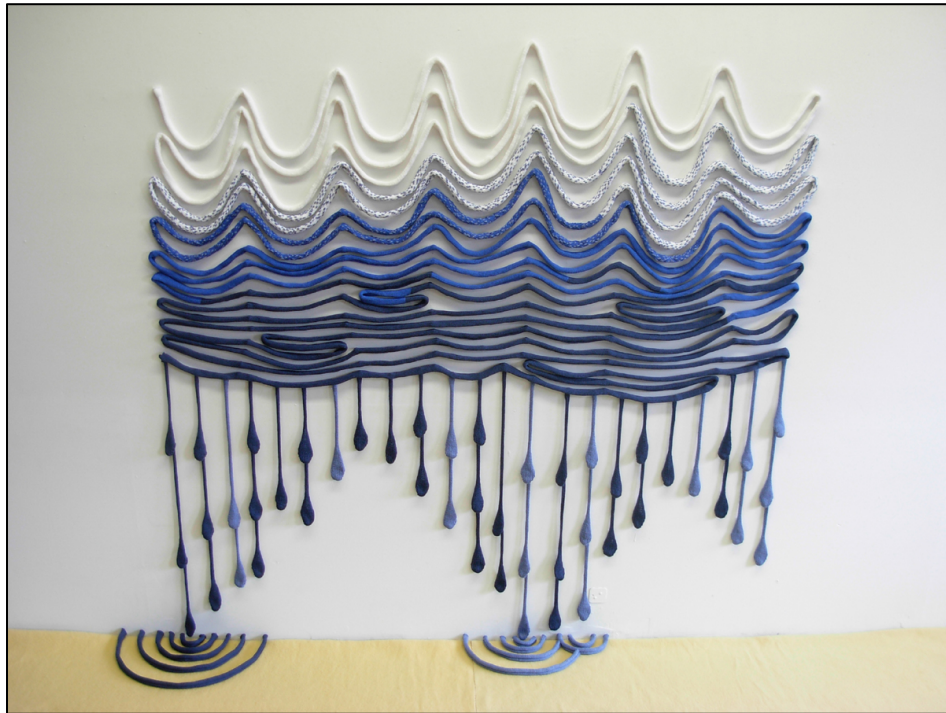
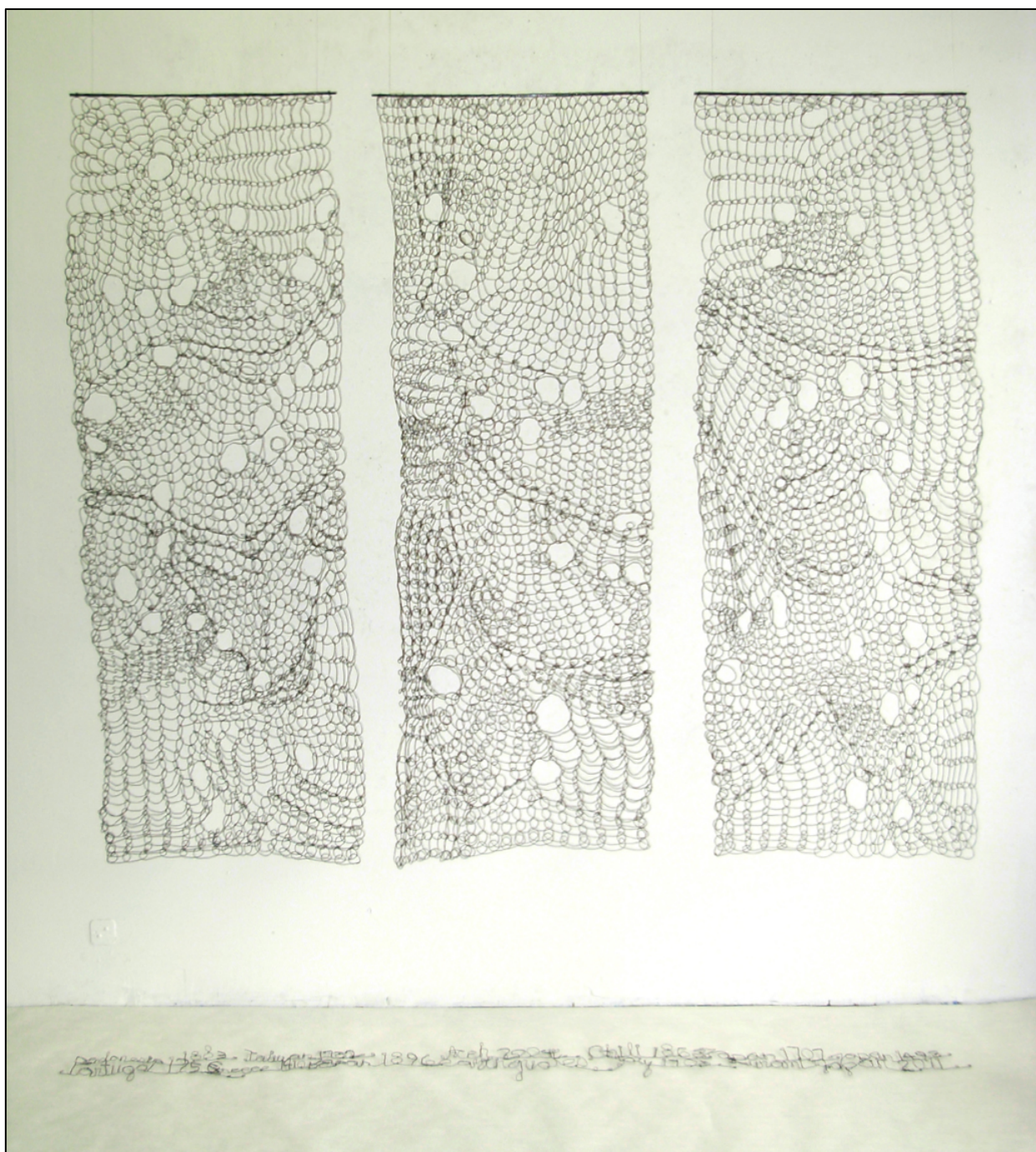


Figure 6. Sea Change, 68hx66wx10d inches, photo by artist.



Figure 7. Uprooted, 44h x 22w, photo by artist.



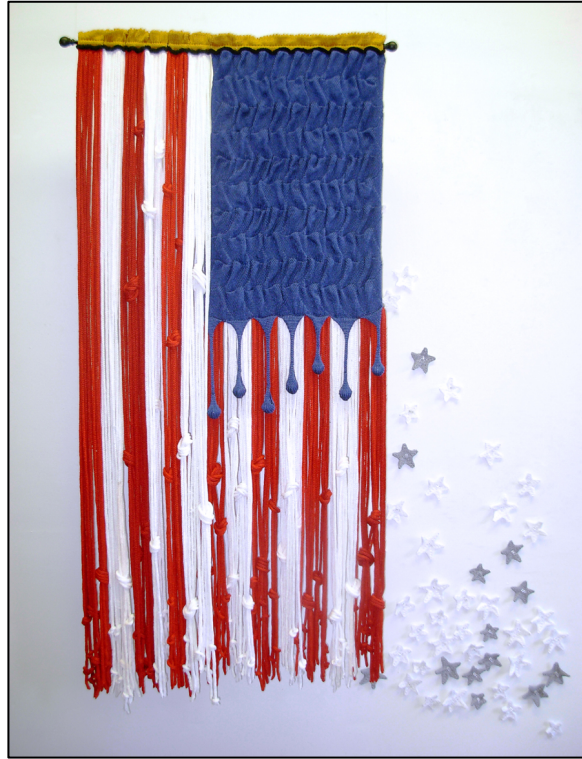


Figure 9. A House Divided, 64 x 54 inches photo by artist.

Knit in summer of 2011, A House Divided (figure 9) speaks to the continuing national political logjam. The image was subsequently printed as a postcard and sent to the president, presidential candidates and all members of Congress as a protest of current partisan politics under the project title, Lobby Congress with Art. As a hopeful reminder that textiles in many forms continue to be a vehicle for political action, the message on the back of the postcard reads:

*We the People
Respectfully demand that
You Stop
tying the Country up in knots
and attend to knitting together
a national fabric of Domestic Tranquility
for a more Perfect Union.*

Knit in summer of 2011, A House Divided, postcard

All politics is local.

Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, Jr.
Former Speaker of the US House

Knit it like you mean it.

Adrienne Sloane
Knitter Activist