



Knitting XXXL

Using two John Deere excavators donated by a local construction equipment dealer, artist **David Cole** and his assistants knit a huge American flag in July 2005 with two 20-foot knitting needles made out of telephone poles with sculpted points. Cole spent days up in a cherry picker, looping the stitches and directing the movement of the needles.

After casting off, *The Knitting Machine* was ceremoniously taken down, folded, and displayed in a glass case at contemporary art museum Mass MoCa in Western Massachusetts. "I didn't see it as a performance," Cole says about his time spent knitting up in the crane. "Knitting for me is a physical meditation on the creative process ... and the final object is an artifact of [that] process."

Cole began knitting in college to help him focus during lectures. He also took a sculpture class that gave him new insight into his knitting. Since then, he's become known for his knit artworks, which turn traditional ideas of knitting upside down.

Other recent pieces include teddy bears knit from

lead, a baby blanket made from incredibly toxic porcelain fiber, and a Kevlar sweater. He's in the process of creating an installation of 25 giant teddy bears sewn from black roofing rubber, to be installed like a flotilla of buoys in a harbor. Notice a pattern? Dangerous materials mix with sweet subject matter in a dance likely to give you whiplash.

All of his work toys with the obsessive nature of craft, but his most successful pieces have many layers of meaning. While they don't yield their answers up easily, they aren't deliberately obscure either.

"I want my work to be conceptually accessible," he explains. "But if someone wants to engage critically and think about international policy and domination of space, great." And as for making a subversive gender statement? "Totally secondary. It's there, but that's not what it's about," says Cole flatly. "It's visual ballet."

—Arwen O'Reilly

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