

Knitwear – Social Couture

Knitting may have stepped out of retirement homes and onto the catwalks of Paris, but it's not all about glamour – stitchers around the world are using the craft to send a message.

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You know it's big when all the celebrities are doing it. Sarah Jessica Parker, Julia Roberts and Cameron Diaz have one thing in common and it isn't their shoe size – it's knitting! They all love to curl up with a set of needles and a ball of yarn and stitch to their heart's content ... or at least until somebody yells 'action'. But don't be fooled into thinking it's just the women of Hollywood who are jumping on this bandwagon, a number of leading men – Russell Crowe amongst them – have also been seen doing a bit of knit one, purl one between takes. There is even a series of books called *Hollywood Knits* in which some of Tinsletown's biggest names offer their favourite designs.

It's not only the rich and famous who are perpetuating this craze, the hype and excitement surrounding the comeback of knitting has led to it being labelled 'the new yoga'. As one British newspaper put it "all the hip young things are doing it". No longer seen as a boring domestic craft, knitting has



been given a contemporary makeover and now appeals to people of all ages. Once upon a time it conjured up images of baby booties and scarves, but it has evolved to incorporate a great deal more, it's now considered by some as a form of art. A recent exhibition titled *Knit 2 Together* was a snapshot of

modern knitting that aimed to prove that there's good deal more to it than just sticks and string.

Stitching has always been a social affair and the latest bunch of knitting enthusiasts is capitalising on this.

A new phrase 'Guerilla Knitting' was even coined for the practice of taking every opportunity to knit in public, often in large organised groups. Such groups have been causing quite a stir, especially on the London tube network, and their purpose is not to be disruptive but to gather for an enjoyable time. That's not to say it doesn't get a bit political – crowds of knitters have been known to come together under slogans such as 'Drop Stitches Not Bombs' in an attempt to conduct a peaceful protest.

Believe it or not, knitting has become a radical activity. Sure it might not be in the same league as street riots or hunger strikes, but stitchers everywhere are using their skills to make a difference. *Cast Off* is a club notorious for its alternative perspective on the traditional craft, members are asked

to participate in projects such as covering a combat tank with a pink blanket. The website invited people from all over the world to contribute by knitting single squares that would later be sewn together to form the giant blanket at a public exhibition to protest against the war in Iraq.

Many political knitters see the craft as a way to rebel against popular materialism and artist Shane Waltner has explained why. "By knitting you are resisting capitalism and consumerism", he said. "You are not responding to the fashion industry, you are making your own decisions." Others have taken up their knitting needles to show their disapproval of the sweatshop industry that takes advantage of workers in developing countries.

The boundaries of knitting are being pushed and stretched in all directions, and people everywhere are tapping in to its creative potential with some interesting results.



A new book titled *Stitch 'n Bitch* is full of sassy patterns for modern knitters, there is even a Wonder

Woman wool bikini – whoever thought knitting could be sexy? It's being taken to a new level of experimentation by Susie McMurray who has created a series of 3-D hangings. Now I know you're thinking that's really different but wait until you hear the rest – the pieces are French-knitted from human hair!

Knitting has been given a 21st-century facelift and its shift into the new millennium has won it a fresh generation of fans. It's no longer seen as a dull pastime for retirees; needles can be heard clicking almost everywhere – from the bright lights of Los Angeles to peace rallies in Denmark. But that's not to say that its origins have been forgotten. Despite it being paraded on the pages of glossy magazines and heralded as a contemporary avenue for cultural revolution, many knitters are still drawn in by its fundamental principles of social interaction and the notion of creating memories.

