





# THE craft

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6	Craft Encounters: Literary Highlights on Craft and Culture	DEBORAH K. ULTAN BOUDEWYNS
9	(Ad)dressing the Body	LESLIE VAN DUZER (ARCH 1281, SPRING 2010)
12	Discussing Craft [Interview]	BLAINE BROWNELL / BENJAMIN IBARRA SEVILLA / MARC SWACKHAMER / STEVEN GROOTAERT
17	When Craft Gets Sloppy	GLENN ADAMSON
20	The Space Between	TIA SALMELA KEOBOUNPHENG
24	The (Risky) Craft of Digital Making	BRANKO KOLAREVIC
34	(Ad)dressing the Body Interlude	
38	Design, Build, Ride	BOB BROWN
40	The Paradox in the Crafted Object	VINCENT JAMES / JENNIFER YOOS
50	Hands, Surfaces, and the Art of Making	JAMES BOYD BRENT
56	(Ad)dressing the Body Interlude	
60	The Imperfect	FREDDIE ROBINS
62	Good Objects Make Themselves	MARK COLLINS (PROXY)
68	The Solar D Chair	JUSTIN KINDELSPIRE / NATE TICKNER
70	(Ad)dressing the Body Interlude	
72	The Young Vernacular	ALBIO NASCIMENTO
78	Trees	RICHARD REAMES
80	Challenging a Disposable Culture: the Architecture of Next-Life e-waste application	GREG SCHWARTZ / IAN SCHNACK
82	Wave Pavilion	PARKE MACDOWELL / DIANA TOMOVA
86	The Craft of Building Language	THOMAS FISHER
88	THERE Craft Contributor Location Map	
89	Craft a THERE Nani Bird	
91	Next, craft a THERE Paper Airplane	
93	THERE Issue 7 Call for Submissions	
94	Your contribution to THERE Issue 6	

# The Imperfect

FREDDIE ROBINS

“I’m not perfect, but who cares?”

WELL I DO.

I enjoy imperfection in you and yours but not in me and mine. I am very attracted to the imperfections, failings, and roughness of the material world. I enjoy the evidence of human hands, the inevitable wear and repair of objects. I love the obviously hand-made. But I suffer from being a perfectionist.

My recent series of work, *The Perfect*,<sup>1</sup> deals with the constant drive for perfection. It is made using seamless knitting technology, a technology that was developed to achieve perfection. Technology developed for mass production to make garment multiples that are exactly the same as each other: garments that do not require any hand finishing, garments whose manufacture does not produce any waste, garments whose production does not require the human touch. Garments that are, in fact, perfect.

*The Perfect* takes the form of life-size, three-dimensional, human bodies produced on a Shima Seiki WholeGarment machine (a computerised, automated, industrial V-bed flat machine, which is capable of knitting a three-dimensional seamless garment).<sup>2</sup> Through a technician, a computer program was written that enabled the machine to knit bodies that simply dropped off the machine, finished and technically perfect. I preferred the initial samples, the test pieces, the ones that went wrong. Ironically the technically imperfect works were the perfect works for me.

Perfectionism is associated with both technology and good craftsmanship. Perfectionism is also seen as something to aspire to. I aim for perfection in all aspects of my

life, my work and myself. It can be very debilitating and exhausting and it is of course, unachievable and more importantly undesirable.

Despite the fact that a computer shop replaced my favourite London wool shop, Creativity Yarns, I love computers, in particular I love the Internet and the Internet loves knitting. Type “knitting” into the search engine Google and it brings up over 17 million sites for you to peruse. There are also over 2 million knitting blogs to read and contribute to. I use the internet almost daily as a research tool, often typing in combinations of subjects that interest me such as “knitting and murder.”<sup>3</sup> However, the first use of computer technology within my practise, beyond the very idiosyncratic computerised domestic knitting machinery<sup>4</sup> that I use and continuously forget how to use, was ten years ago. In 1999 I was commissioned to make a digital artwork for Iniva’s<sup>5</sup> x-space virtual gallery. I proposed an interactive website that looked at the similarities between knitting and the internet. In my proposal I wrote,

“There are many similarities between knitting and the internet. They are both physically solitary processes. Both are making sense of, translating and communicating information. Computer programs consist of long sequences of instructions that individually are very simple; so does knitting. Both can produce extremely complicated results.

*Tactility is inseparable from textiles, craft and the applied arts.*

Computers and knitting patterns use grids, with coloured squares to relay visual information. With both mediums it is easy to 'undo' or 'unravel' your work. However knitting is an 'everyday skill' of the past with social and cultural associations whereas computers and the internet are an 'everyday skill' of the future which cross social, cultural and geographical boundaries."

I entitled my site Bugbear.<sup>6</sup> With a huge amount of technical support I built the site and a bugbear it became.<sup>7</sup> The theory may have been good but the practice wasn't. Hour after hour spent staring at the continuously flat, rectangular screen not to mention my static physical state, save a few taps on the keyboard and a quick scroll of the mouse. I hated building the site. It was deeply frustrating and most of all the process completely lacked tactility.

My awareness of textiles came, like most peoples, through a tactile experience. This experience was "Janie," a rag doll made for me by my Aunt. Janie's orange wool hair was a great source of comfort, a true tactile satisfaction, I would tickle my nose with it. To tell the absolute truth I would stick it up my nose. Her hair would gradually wear out and my Godmother would give her a new lot, always wool, always orange. Ever since then I have had a love of wool, and of orange hair. Tactility is inseparable from textiles, craft and the applied arts. The material passes through the artists' hands as it is transformed into an object for use, admiration or communication and contemplation. My work is no exception to this. The feel of the wool and the motions that my hands make during the construction of my work are very important. I enjoy those sensations as much as I enjoy the visual sensation of colour, form, and a concept realised. Technology may be capable of producing perfect works but it isn't always the perfect process. I am glad to have it at my finger tips, another possibility to employ in the creation of new works but just for the moment I am returning to wool and needles.

THERE

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FREDDIE ROBINS *has built up an extensive and innovative body of figurative works and has exhibited extensively within the UK and abroad. Her work is held in both private and public collections including the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Crafts Council. She is represented in London by Contemporary Applied Arts. [www.freddierobins.com](http://www.freddierobins.com).*



*I enjoy imperfection in  
you and yours but not  
in me and mine.*

1. "The Perfect – Knitted Sculpture for Public Exhibition" was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Royal College of Art (RCA) Development Fund. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk> <http://rca.ac.uk>. For more information see [http://www.freddierobins.com/research\\_index.htm](http://www.freddierobins.com/research_index.htm)
2. <http://www.shimaseiki.com>
3. See Knitted Homes of Crime 2002 [http://www.freddierobins.com/work\\_index.htm#](http://www.freddierobins.com/work_index.htm#)
4. Brother Electronic Knitting Machine KH950i. Brother no longer manufacture knitting machines.
5. Iniva (Institute of International Visual Art) is a leading UK contemporary visual arts organization, which creates exhibitions, publications, multimedia, education and research projects. <http://www.iniva.org>
6. <http://www.iniva.org/xspaceprojects/robins>
7. bugbear |'bæg,bə(ə)r| noun a cause of obsessive fear, irritation, or loathing.