



Arts

REVIEW

Knitting the fabric of life - not always in free-form

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It's time to scrap stale notions of lace as dainty, feminine and demurely virginal. And knitting is no diversion for fluffy old ladies. "Subversive Knitting and Radical Lace" at the Museum of Art and Design gives these pastimes the stature of guerrilla crafts.

The show features teddy bears stitched out of lead "yarn," sweaters crocheted from newspaper scraps and a passel of reimagined and reinvented traditional handicrafts. Artists have made exciting works that stubbornly refuse classification, busting through the old wall separating art and craft.

Barbara Zucker takes on lace's associations with old age in a piece called "Lillian's Face Flowing." Zucker translated the patterns of a friend's facial wrinkles into a monumental agglomeration of rubber that cascades off the wall. Her goal was to redeem the aging process; to take the weathered skin of an older woman and redefine it as a thing of beauty. The process, she writes, is "like pulling the skin away from the face and throwing age on the floor."

"Filigree Car Bombing" is as ambiguous as it is explosively political. Its creator, Cal Lane, carved intricate patterns out of wrecked, rusted automobiles using an

oxyacetylene torch. The result fuses the muscular, macho car-parts aesthetic of John Chamberlain with the feminine delicacy of lace. Lane also uses the powdered slag produced by the process to trace diaphanous shapes on the floor, adapting her grandmother's technique of sifting sugar through a doily onto cupcakes.

Light flows through and around Lane's installation, and shadows cast wispy patterns upon patterns. The layering offers a visual analogy to the pileup of paradoxes and associations. It's a work of graceful violence, of delicacy and muscle, of darkness and transparency. It recycles the refuse of industry as an homage to old-fashioned, domestic handicrafts.

Some of the work here is explicitly subversive. Consider Freddie Robins' giant gray knitted man with the words "Craft Kills" emblazoned on his chest. Knitting needles pierce the body at odd angles, jutting like spikes. "It's a real play on how people see art and textiles, and particularly knitting, as a very passive activity," the artist says in the catalog. "Ironically, shortly after I made that piece, knitting needles were banned on aircraft."

The works in this show make a strong case for the poetic power of knitting. Each evokes a history of female laborers working late into the night. Each reflects and requires enormous skill, without fetishizing the effort that went into it. The artists who produced these trceries of glass, porcelain and dollar bills all have so much more to express than their own astounding techniques.