



« Knitwork » on going, begun 1992

Knitwork

Les « cahiers » du B-312 Émergence se veulent des documents d'accompagnement d'exposition et de suivi documentaire. Ces cahiers ponctuels visent un rapprochement entre les artistes, en donnant l'opportunité à ceux et celles qui ont le projet d'écrire et d'assumer des textes critiques ou des comptes rendus d'expositions sur les artistes exposant(e)s de la galerie, de les produire et de les publier. Ces cahiers proposent donc des textes d'articles sur d'autres artistes. Ce choix n'exclut d'aucune façon les historien(ne)s ou théoricien(ne)s de l'art qui voudraient s'exprimer, il ne vise qu'à permettre une plus grande étendue de points de vue et de résonances sur l'art actuel et à stimuler les artistes à explorer d'autres champs de production.

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Knitwork is a compilation of previously worn knit garments. Germaine Koh harvests her elements, obtaining materials by: picking garments off the street, buying them for less than a dollar in thrift stores, and soliciting obsolete items when possible. Her processing is based in a conscious repetition, obsessively unraveling each arm or collar of the garment. To fashion her material Koh ties the many loose ends back together until they form a continuous strand of yarn. It is from these strands that she works, physically knitting together parts. Individual garments are interwoven into a chain of articles which constitute an ever growing afghan. This knit work is a life-work, a swarm of goods building towards a body of evidence, a document of parts that are knotted together into a whole.

Knitwork weaves a set of principles as it combines a series of knit articles. Meshed into this extensive and extending work, sweaters or mittens lose their individual ends and are woven into a new form. Similarly, women's work, minimalism, abstraction, figuration, production — in other words numerous and sometimes oppositional strategies — are intermingled and recuperated for new ends. Choosing to work with cast off articles is more than a recycling of resources. *Knitwork* is an unending process which through its conceptual interests reconfigures hand work, in the process also affecting the very process and connotations of the art object.

Producing from discarded materials positions *Knitwork* quite differently than if it had been knitted afresh. The abject knit object is unraveled, processed, and re-produced into a seemingly new form. It is the «new» built from the remnants of the old. *Knitwork* is a renovation which willingly and knowingly reveals its pre-art roots. The decision to reconfigure rather than «create» afresh supplies much of the complex nature of the work. *Knitwork* is actually not knitting; it is reknitting. It is the knitting that knits over, connecting the disparate parts of what has come before. *Knitwork* knits on top of and beyond the previous lives of its parts. This conversion does not deny but rather relies on a bleed-through of previous histories. The recoding of content coexists with the representation of original meaning.

Koh's strategy of consuming used goods allows for multiple roots. *Knitwork* is a societal crazy quilt; it gathers up the detritus of a consumer culture and reforms it for another purpose. As in the crazy quilt, the parts act as a record of their original owner. By chronicling donations, Koh allows others to inscribe themselves within her task. *Knitwork* is porous, by its very nature permitting entry into the blanket body. The piece avoids didacticism since the strictures of consistent size and rote production method are rent by the possibilities of inclusiveness. *Knitwork's* ready needles and its raw edge leave an unfinished thread trailing off, a visual equivalent to ellipses, implying further accretion and development. It is *Knitwork's* ever unfinished status that leaves open the possibility for changed production.

A life work is an activity without end. It is an endeavor where production takes precedent over product. The piece's elusiveness stretches the borders of art objects. *Knitwork* is a shape shifter, growing and changing. It disallows any fixed definition since movement is its maxim. The piece is neither painting nor sculpture. In recent incarnations it has looked like a very woolly painting fixed flat to the wall. It has hunkered in a pile on the floor and spread itself out like a road to nowhere. As it changes, *Knitwork* becomes not one work but many works. The life-work is cinematic, presenting a string of related images.

The parts of *Knitwork* are a witness to different histories that accrete on the whole as layers or strata; *Knitwork* records time. In the process of counting garments, counting rows, measuring both the size and the time it will take to reach some further hurdle, Koh has mapped out for herself a task which grows at regular intervals. She creates a version of geologic time, a kind of knit time, where the parts of individual articles are intermingled into a larger body.

Knitwork is marked by traits inherited from its garment lineage. Part of this «ancestry» is the human form. The original knit is a tracing of the body. Unwound and then mended back together the material of *Knitwork* still contains a bodily trace. The old body is evoked through photographs of garments. Koh exhibits a few small photographs of the most recent knit goods as part of her installation. These photographs appear as a kind of memento mori; they are a remembrance of the previous body. Unraveling the garment is to unravel the physical shape of the body. Through Koh's process yarn loses its function as a covering of and descriptor of flesh; instead yarn functions as the conveyor of a body of ideas. In the process of knitting over, the body is reconfigured with no image in sight. The wrapping has been unraveled and recuperated for a new body of evidence. *Knitwork* is the shape of no-body having come from the roots of potentially any-body.

Germaine Koh unwinds the previous image of the body. In her extended task she erases the stable body of the knitter as well. The form of the knitter becomes dwarfed and then finally invisible in relation to her vast performance. The afghan extends itself outward to form and reform itself into new lengths, taking alternate configurations, relating to diverse architecture. Through her extended routine the body of the knitter is subjected to an ever changing yardstick of the afghan's length and shape.

In its size alone *Knitwork* proposes an expanded place for women's production as it creates an ever expanding field of its own body. *Knitwork* gnaws at the ends of women's work, unraveling its traditional borders and parameters; it weaves a new and extended set of possibilities from the once limiting space of women's production. Through this lifework which is one work, the very scale of hand work is stretched. The artist converts knitting as she unravels current formats for the body. Koh's installation generates a convergence of human form and bodylessness. The work images a feminist answer to representation. *Knitwork* signals the reweaving of a bodily figuration into a new configuration; it is an abstract piece that works from the remains of the old body instead of abstracting it. In this mesh is a feminist refiguring of representation and a tactical method for a complex and recuperative art practice.

Michele White

A cultural critic, curator, and artist, Ms. White is currently pursuing a PhD in Art History at the City University of New York Graduate School and University Center.