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Keynote paper

On Damage and Repair - What do I need to do to make it OK? A journey through the different OKnesses, or rather the ways that I have tried to make it OK for myself, and others.

Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, 2 March 2016

Knitting can make it OK

I learnt that knitting could make it OK when I was a child. I didn't receive this information from my mother, grandmother or any other relative or family friend who knitted. I received this information subconsciously from an animated character called Nelly, who was the co-star of the children's TV series *Noah and Nelly*. *Noah and Nelly in ... SkylArk*, to give it its full title, was a children's TV cartoon series created by Grange Calveley, and produced by Bob Godfrey's Movie Emporium. It ran on BBC1 from 1976 – 1977, when I was eleven. The five-minute cartoons depicted a world very loosely based around Noah's Ark, each episode ended in some sort of disaster with the day being saved by Noah's wife Nelly, who used her knitting skills to make objects which solved the problem in some way or other. Nelly was an ambitious knitter, knitting everything from drilling rigs to a gigantic piggy bank for all the creatures on the Skylark to hide in. She had even knitted the ark's sails, which she occasionally had to unravel when her huge yarn stash ran out.

I have knitted since I was a teenager, winning a national knitwear design and knitting competition when I was eighteen, the only thing that I have ever won. I studied knitted textiles at both undergraduate and masters level and have taught on knitted textiles programmes ever since graduating in 1989. Knitting has been a key part of my life for nearly forty years. However I was not conscious of how far it had permeated me until after my daughter was born. I suffered from post-natal depression, feeling completely alienated and alone in my new role. In desperation I turned to my knitting. Whilst working from a commercial pattern for a pair of baby's pram-trousers, or breechettes as the pattern refers to them, I felt OK, deriving a huge amount of reassurance from the movements my hands made as the work grew. This was something from the time before motherhood that could be my companion during the early, difficult days of motherhood. The familiar, to counterbalance the unfamiliar. The irony that the pattern comes from the Fairytale Double Knitting Book is not lost on me. It was no fairytale at the time but we did all live happily ever after, eventually.

Making, in particular knitting, has become my way of interpreting, communicating and coming to terms with, the world that we inhabit. It sits between me and my internal world, and the physical world around me, like some form of comfort or rather discomfort blanket.

Betsan Corkhill talks about the knitting of a throw, which soon became a comfort blanket after the death of her mother in her interview, "Knit One, Heal One" on BBC Radio 4's iPM programme last year. She says, "I truly believed that it helped me heal." Corkhill is a personal well-being coach with a background in physiotherapy. She has been researching and using knitting for its therapeutic benefits since 2005. She has been developing it as a tool to improve well-being and to manage long-term medical conditions in mainstream healthcare. Corkhill has furthered her research through a partnership with Dr. Jill Riley and the School of Healthcare Studies at Cardiff University. She founded Stitchlinks UK to promote the research, enabling anyone, and everyone, to benefit freely from its findings. The Stitchlinks website (stitchlink.com) provides free access to information, research updates, a forum and monthly newsletter. Two years ago Corkhill published *Knit for Health & Wellness: How to knit a flexible mind and more...* The book, and the Stitchlink site, contain a large number of unsolicited quotations and personal stories from knitters, alongside data taken from the Stitchlinks/Cardiff University study from 2013. The overwhelming

messages in the large number of narratives received, and in the study, which surveyed over 3,000 knitters from 31 countries, were the same, regardless of the different cultural, educational and health backgrounds knitters came from. Knitting is an accessible tool that had benefits for all aspects of our well-being; physical, emotional and social. Here are two of the many compelling quotations:

“I found that knitting helped calm my thoughts, and while I was knitting and putting stitches in order it was easier to put my own mind in order.

“Taking up knitting has stopped me sinking into the abyss.”

As Corkhill goes on to explain in her “Knit One, Heal One” radio interview, “what raises knitting apart from other creative activities is the fact that it employs both hands. It is a two-handed (or bilateral), co-ordinated pattern of movements that cross the midline of the body. This makes the brain work very hard so it has less capacity left to pay attention to issues that may be detrimental to your well-being; problems you may be mulling over, or danger signals that may be coming from your body that may eventually be outputted as pain.” There has however been one big barrier to the work that has been done regarding Therapeutic Knitting – the word 'knitting' itself. Knitting comes with so many preconceptions that Corkhill has had to adopt a “fancy, scientific name” to replace it with - bilateral, rhythmic, psychosocial intervention. In the medical world knitting was “literally too woolly” to be considered seriously. She was told, “We can’t possibly consider knitting as part of treatment.”

The Stitchlink website states that bilateral, rhythmic, psychosocial intervention has the power to transform people's lives.

This is the Stitchlinks Knitting Equation, which is a summary of the numerous meditative, creative and social benefits of knitting.

The implications of the Stitchlinks/Cardiff University research are huge, even bigger than Nellie’s knitting. Not only is there the potential to improve general well-being and enhance medical treatments at low cost but it reinforces the importance of craft in schools, (which I doubt anyone in this room would question), and to the reintroduction of craft to the curriculum.

However it is the following statement that Corkhill makes in the introduction to her book that resonates the most strongly with me,

“Real strength comes from flexibility not rigidity. Knitting creates strong, resilient, flexible fabric. Therapeutic Knitting seeks to create strong, resilient, flexible minds in the process”

During the French Revolution, beheadings at the guillotine became a daily occurrence, with many people coming day after day. A group of women known as *les tricoteuses* became famous for knitting whilst they watched the beheadings. The image of *les tricoteuses* is often used to symbolize how numb the French people had become to the grisly, daily executions. But perhaps they were simply knitting their way through the horrors that they had to witness; using knitting as a distraction, a way of coping with the violence and poverty surrounding them.

This piece of work, *Basketcase*, that I completed last year and is exhibited as part of the exhibition *What do I need to do to make it OK?* is not actually about *les tricoteuses* and the beheadings at the guillotine, but the reference is serendipitous, (something that has always given me pleasure), and easy to make, particularly in the context of the subject of damage and repair.

The many roles that knitting can play in trying to make everything OK, or at the very least bearable, are beautifully conveyed in the poem, *The Knitter*, by the Scottish poet Jackie Kay. I won’t read the whole poem as I can’t do it justice but the poem opens, and ends with, the line, “I knit to keep death away”.

In the body of the poem the knitter knits for many reasons;

“I knit to hold a good yarn”,

“I knitted to keep my croft; knitted to save my life”,

“The more I could knit; the more we could eat”,

“I knitted to mend my broken heart when the sea took my man away”,

“I knitted to keep the memories at bay” and

“I knitted to begin again.”

As the poem says, “A whole life of casting on, casting off”.

The poem also contains the poignant analogy, “Time was a ball of wool”.

Perfectly OK

I am yet to produce a body of work entitled *The OK*. It sounds too comfortable, too easy, but I have undertaken a research project entitled, *The Perfect*. *The Perfect* began in 2007, but it was far from perfect and I have been trying to end it perfectly ever since.

In a statement that I wrote after completing the project I concluded,

“Perfectionism is associated with good craftsmanship, 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.”

In *The Perfect* I produced knitted multiples through the use of a Shima Seiki WholeGarment® machine (a computerised, automated, industrial V-bed flat machine, which is capable of knitting a three-dimensional seamless garment). The multiples take the form of life size, three-dimensional human bodies or skins. Through a technician, a computer programme was written that enabled the machine to knit bodies that simply dropped off the machine, finished and technically perfect. This sounds painless but it wasn't. It was very time consuming, and very expensive. It was deeply unsatisfactory on other levels too, physically unsatisfactory as there was no interaction with materials or process, no touching, and aesthetically unsatisfactory as there was too much fine, flat knitting, no stitch definition, no texture. By the end of the project I had produced a large number of these knitted skins. However I struggled to take ownership of the supposedly perfect works. I felt the need to physically interact with them, to handle them, to re-work them, to own them. This has resulted in me constantly re-visiting these knitted skins; re-working them for other projects. What do I need to do to make these works OK?

In *The Imperfect* (2009), I employed the creativity and skill of another artist to interact with the knitted skins. I gave Celia Pym, who will be speaking later, two of the technically imperfect skins, skins with holes in them. Celia darned the holes, repairing them sensitively, but obviously, not trying to mask the holes, making the work appear technically perfect, but using different coloured wool to highlight the repair. The tension between the machine knitted wool and the hand-darned areas is very pleasing. It brings the hand and machine together, making the bodies more tactile, more human. Ironically the imperfect works are the perfect works for me.

My 2013 series of works, collectively known as *Out on a Limb*, can be seen in this photograph taken at the Craft's Councils exhibition, *Collect*, at the Saatchi Gallery. In these works I have taken the knitted skins as my raw material; embroidering onto them, stuffing them and filling them with expanding builder's

foam, only to then saw them up with a bread knife and use the individual parts in separate sculptures. These works came about through the need to make *The Perfect* project OK, but also through another domestic act of repairing, albeit a very grand one; the repair and restoration of a 16th century timber-framed barn. My husband and I undertook this huge act of repair between 2008 – 2010, giving the barn a new life as our family home, studio and workshop.

This process has had a huge impact on my work, but not the impact that I imagined it would. It has seen me adopt a new, expedient approach to my making. I began making and resolving work with what was to hand. My materials were my samples and surpluses, including those knitted skins; things donated, inherited and found. I was working with what I already had instead of deciding what I wanted to make and then choosing and buying new materials. Taking this “stuff” as my starting point and holding my concepts and themes in mind, ideas about what it is to be human, loss, death, grief and mourning, I was working spontaneously with my materials. Enjoying the release from my former methods of carefully planned, designed work, I was knitting, crocheting, embroidering, sewing and even just plain pinning. I worked on the pieces until they were right, working on more than one piece at a time. At times I undid the work, at times I abandoned a piece, and started afresh. Each piece informed the next. None of the works were made in isolation. The shapes, materials, processes and colours used in one piece informed how I approached the next, and so on, until I had a full range of objects that worked together. I was collaging together building materials and textiles; whatever needed to be done to make the works work, to make the work stand up, physically and conceptually. These works challenge traditional concepts and pre-conceived ideas of what craft is, how it might be made and how it might look.

The first piece to be completed in the *Out on a Limb* series (Limb) sees an amputated arm from one of the knitted skins filled with expanding foam and then adorned. The black glass bead and lace motifs were inherited from my godmother, Pamela Darking, the single biggest influence on my creative life, highly skilled with textiles, a woman who loved to make. The necklace given to me by my mother as she deaccessions as she approaches the end of her life, a woman who loved, and still loves, to shop. I have become the member of my family who gets passed everything. The official holder of the past. I am desperate to deaccession, or just plain get rid of, myself, yet too emotionally connected to material objects to do so.

In this piece (I) I make good use of an unwanted gift, the kind of object that I hate the most. A piece of agate that has been turned into a tea-light holder, giving it a spurious function. Agate is a beautiful thing, why turn it into something hideous. I apologise if you have one of these at home. Anyway using knitted fabric plus materials inherited from my godmother and antique jewellery and coral from my mother I have constructed an all seeing eye. I have always felt a personal attachment to the symbol of the eye, my own eye-sight being poor yet my reliance upon sight for my work.

Again the symbol of the eye created using a piece of agate (i), this time an agate glass mat from my mother-in-laws jumble sale box; someone else’s unwanted gift. In this work I start to incorporate the wood that now surrounds me in my new country life. I live in a wooden building, there are huge stacks of wood on our yard and many trees growing on our farm. We even chop down the trees to produce our own wood-chips to heat our home and water. Wood is everywhere, it was inevitable that it would also end up in my work.

A pair of black sequined lungs with embroidered rib-cage surrounded by a gold, lurex crochet edging (Still Breathing). This hand work was originally done on top of one of my perfect bodies but I didn't like the way it was sitting on the surface of the body, as opposed to being within it, so I rashly and bravely cut

the lungs away. For a long time they were pinned to my studio wall before I decided to mount them on a wooden plaque like a taxidermy specimen. In the Hunterian Museum in London's Lincoln Fields they have both the human artery and vein system mounted similarly on beautiful pieces of wood. It wasn't until I was writing this paper that I realized what had inspired this solution. The mirrored pieces of maple that form the plaque also resemble a slice through the human body, a slice through the lungs themselves. Again the piece is adorned with necklaces and beads from my mother, mostly worthless in terms of monetary value, but priceless in terms of memories.

Here (*A perfectly good marriage*) the use of wood enables the works to free stand. I like the relationship between wool and wood. The words are after all just one letter apart. The soft and the hard, the undo able, unravellable with the only repairable. Both materials are natural, renewable and sustainable, materials that have been used for centuries for both practical and decorative purposes. For me one is inherently feminine, the other masculine. I am the wool, my husband the wood. The fingers on the hand are formed from flints found on our farm, the hawthorn log with the horse shoe embedded in it was a love gift that my husband brought me after a day's chain sawing on the farm. As the works title tells you, *A perfectly good marriage*.

This last piece (*Hacked*) uses a stool produced by IKEA and designed by Carmel McElroy, who I taught when she was studying at the Royal College of Art. I am very drawn to the idea of hacking, changing and subverting something that already exists. IKEA even have a section of their website dedicated to their hacked products. Mostly these are functional products hacked to give a different functional object but I have taken this stool, hacked it and denied it its function. I arrived at this work through complete serendipity. I had filled a perfect head with expanding foam and once dry simply placed it on the stool as somewhere to put it in a studio already littered with knitted body parts. It was the perfect solution. The hand growing from its head is one of my daughters gloves that she has grown out of physically but obviously not emotionally as since seeing the finished work she has asked for it back. She is not interested in deaccessioning, she is a hoarder.

This work (*Basketcase*), shown earlier, came after the initial *Out on a Limb* series. Again it was a serendipitous meeting between a knitted head filled with expanding foam and an object that I had lying around. I had been given a basket of flowers as a gift but when the flowers died I was left with the basket. I could have just chucked it in the skip, I don't like it and have no use for it, but I was very aware that somewhere in the world someone had made that basket using their hands and great skill. I couldn't make it. The head was one that was sawn off a complete skin that had been unsuccessfully filled with expanding foam. It's a horrible material that I don't advise anyone to use. The head sat perfectly within the handle of the basket so I devised a way to suspend it there using a very simple crochet technique and lurex yarn that I had inherited from my godmother many, many years earlier. I also crocheted a lace edge onto the base of the basket in honour of all those lace doilies that had been crocheted over the years that sit underneath ornaments, bowls and baskets around the world. All that work, and all that skill put into objects that predominantly provoke derision and accusations of poor taste. *Basketcase* is a derogatory name for a person or thing regarded as useless, or unable to cope.

My 2014 series entitled *Collection of Knitted Folk Objects* was made in response to the *Yan Tan Tethera* project, curated by David Littler in partnership with the English Folk Dance and Song Society. The project explored and celebrated the connections between the making of textiles and song, and resulted in numerous public events and an exhibition of research, artefacts and new works. I relied heavily upon the knitted skins for this project, again cutting them up and stuffing them, and combining them with a range of walking sticks to produce objects that looked like they would have a role in folk dance.

Collection of Knitted Folk Objects - Walkin-Stick also makes use of a piece of expanding foam that was removed from one of the filled body parts. You can see the evidence of it having been stuck to the knitted wool from the darker orange area that looks like a flocked surface.

Making it OK for others, making it OK for myself

I am a practical person with good sewing, as well as knitting, skills, always repairing clothes and furnishings to make them good and to extend their life. I am constantly patching my daughter and husband's clothes when they are upset at having torn or worn holes in them. I never seem to tear or wear holes in mine. I have sewn patches onto the arms of chair covers that have worn through and made tin badges to pin over the arm of our sofa that the cats have shredded. It sure stops the cats from continuing to scratch as well as covering the damage. I have knitted pipe cosies to cover the point where the ventilation pipe doesn't meet the wooden ceiling at the right angle and used part of my knitting needle collection to fill holes in our concrete floor so that we no longer stumble into them.

I have a never-ending queue of hard objects that need gluing back together again to stop the tears from flowing, and now that the amazing Jane ni Dhulchaointigh has invented *Sugru*, the incredible self-setting rubber, I even have to repair cables. I am constantly trying to make the object OK again, which in turn will make the situation OK, no more disappointment, sadness, tears or tears. I have often wondered where this innate desire to repair comes from. The thing that I keep returning to is Janie, Janie was my beloved childhood doll and transitional object, made for me by my aunt but most importantly repaired many times by my beloved godmother, the person who introduced me to the creative and practical possibilities of textiles. Over the years of my childhood Janie was more than repaired, she was re-built. All that exists of the original doll is her hand embroidered eyes and mouth. Before I was able to use knitting as a way to make it OK I used Janie to make it OK, particularly her hair, which, and I admit this is disgusting, I used to stick up my nose. It was very comforting but consequently Janie also required many hair transplants. Janie's hair is wool. Wool always makes it OK for me.

What do I need to do to make it OK? What a great exhibition title. I feel that it completely let's me off the hook. The work doesn't have to be perfect, doesn't have to be resolved, doesn't even have to be good. It just has to be OK. I have a dislike of mediocrity and would hate to be accused of making mediocre work, better to make plain bad work, but somehow under this umbrella of OKness that Liz Cooper, the curator, holds safely over me I can accept it. I have two works in the exhibition, *Basketcase*, and, *I'm so bloody sad*, but will be adding a new commissioned work when the exhibition tours to a larger venue.

I'm so bloody sad, is a work that I have been trying to resolve since 2007. It never felt right to me. Although I planned the piece I struggled to accept it aesthetically. Conceptually it felt too big a departure from work pre-dating it. I simply couldn't come to terms with it until this exhibition title enabled me to re-assess it. I didn't have to do anything to make it OK apart from wait.

In her review of the exhibition for the November/December 2015 issue of *Crafts* magazine Jessica Hemmings uses the term, "disarmingly confessional" in relation to the work, it is not intended to be disarming, although I do like that word. It is just a plain statement of fact. I can often find myself just so bloody sad. Don't we all suffer from huge doses of sadness every now and then? When I was typing this I accidentally typed sad mess, which also seems appropriate. In this work the head of the figure falls heavily forward, weighted down by the knitting needles protruding from it's crown. The elongated arms are trailing behind. Where the fingers should be are more needles. There are no facial features and the body is a simple rectangular block. The colour of the wool used is mundane and ugly compared to the

usual strong, attractive palette that I employ. There is no sister piece entitled *I'm so bloody happy*, perhaps there should be but I have always found happiness such a banal emotion. Clinique, the American cosmetics company produce a fragrance called *Happy*. I love the smell of it but couldn't bear to wear it because of its name. I once had a student come to intern with me. Every morning she would greet me with the same question, "Are you happy?" Even if I was this question was enough to wipe every smile from my face for the rest of the morning.

I like to flatter myself with this quotation from *Garden of Eden* by Ernest Hemmingway, "Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know".

A quotation that is closer to my feelings is found in Haruki Murakami's 2002 novel, "*Kafka on the Shore*", "That's how stories happen — with a turning point, an unexpected twist. There's only one kind of happiness, but misfortune comes in all shapes and sizes."

In Hemmings review she goes on to say that the work "refuses to suggest recovery. Not mending, not repairing and not saying that things can ever be made good again". That's right, somethings can't be made OK.

My newly commissioned, yet to be completed, work is entitled, *Someone Else's Dream*. Like my series entitled *Knitted Homes of Crime*, the work takes a genre of hand knitting and subverts it. *Knitted Homes of Crime* subverted the knitted tea cosy that so often comes in the form of a country cottage. In my work the knitted tea cosy houses are true representations of homes of female killers or the houses where they committed their crimes. In my new series, *Someone Else's Dream*, I make use of the hand-knitted novelty sweaters, or picture knits as I always called them, that were so popular when I was a teenager in the early 1980's.

As is evidenced by this knitting pattern book published in 1985, *KnitWits*, co-authored by the designer George Hostler and celebrity Gyles Brandreth, novelty knits grew to great popularity through their association with the TV stars of the time. This book has designs modelled by eleven celebrities including Joanna Lumley and Christopher Biggins. Noel Edmunds and Russell Grant were also synonymous with the novelty sweater. But the most famous wearer of this type of knitwear must be Diana, Princess of Wales.

Diana wore her black sheep sweater in 1983. Diana as the ultimate subversive or novelty knitwear as a prophetic object?

The original machine-knitted wool sweater was designed by Sally Muir & Joanna Osborne in 1979, a pattern for the sweater was published in *Woman* magazine in 1984 and a sheep sweater is now in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum. I also have to mention that David Bowie bought a version of this sweater in another colourway. Whether he bought it for himself or as a gift is unknown but my fantasy is that he bought it for himself and one day a photograph of him wearing it will emerge.

Diana and Charles were even given hand knitted novelty sweaters in 1981 as wedding presents from the daughter of the New South Wales Premier, Neville Wran, who presented the couple with a pair of koala and kangaroo motif jumpers designed by Australian designer, Jenny Kee. Diana started wearing hers when she was pregnant a year later.

As with all these things, wearable knitted pictures eventually fell from fashion's dizzy heights but unlike other genres they have never regained serious appreciation. However I do feel that if an image of David Bowie in his sheep sweater became available it may have a hope.

During my research I found the following terms used in reference to novelty knitwear -

“nasty knitwear”,

“nightmare knitwear”,

“knitted monstrosity”,

“having one's stomach turned by this season's wacko woollens “,

“a trend sure to repulse those antique enough to remember the crass pullover's Eighties heyday” and

“it is time to be afraid: very afraid.”

This is the kind of language and turn of phrase usually associated with exceptionally sadistic crime. All this bile in just one article, and just about a knitted picture in the form of a jumper!

In Joanne Turney's, *The Culture of Knitting*, she talks about the ultimately damaging effect that the strong association between the celebrity and novelty knitwear has had on knitting:

“The novelty of the novelty sweater wore off and to a certain extent backfired, rendering the wearer rather awkward and out of place, trying too hard to promote himself as ‘fun’. Similarly, the relationship between the novelty sweater and its ‘as seen on TV’ persona quickly became associated with the anodyne and boring, removed from the realms of good taste and fashion, and as such symbolized an out-of-step and out-of-time mediocrity”.

We're back to that awful mediocrity again. In the conclusion to her book Turney goes on to state:

“Scarred by a history of novelty jumpers, innovation in knit has seemingly been overlooked, and knitting has become the butt of jokes. Knitting, the (knitwear) designers believed, had been seen as fun, frivolous and something to be laughed at, when actually it was big business, and as well as being a wardrobe staple it was highly innovative, experimental and fashion-led.”

Wow those novelty knits sure were powerful. The novelty sweater is now back big-time and accepted but firmly placed outside of fashion, knowingly placed within an ironic, bad taste category and only at Christmas. The novelty Christmas jumper is available everywhere during the festive season and has become associated with charitable activities. Last Christmas ITV's Text Santa campaign had the strap line – 'Do your bit in a Christmas Knit'. This appeal raised £11 million pounds through people paying to wear their Christmas novelty knits. Retailers also contributed with Primark donating £1.50 from each Christmas Jumper sold, raising £1 million. That's over 666,000 Christmas jumpers sold by Primark alone! Novelty Knitwear is big business.

However I always was, and still remain, a big fan of these sweaters. The knitwear design competition that I won when I was eighteen was in fact for a mohair novelty sweater.

Prior to this I had knitted a very complicated Patricia Roberts novelty sweater called *Tarzan*, again in the popular yarn of the time, mohair. The sweater features a monkey eating a banana with a 3-dimensional banana skin. I was about 17 when I knitted this, saving up for the yarn from my weekend job. Having held onto this sweater for nearly twenty years in a moment of uncharacteristic rashness I threw it out. I have been trying to track it down on ebay ever since.

[As a little aside if anyone has this jumper and no longer wants it I am very happy to relieve you of it. In fact I am happy to take ownership of anyone's surplus-to-requirement picture knit sweaters.]

It was when I started to use ebay to hunt down my Patricia Roberts sweater that I became aware of the number of novelty sweaters out there. There are several terms that you can put in front of the words 'hand knitted jumper' to search for these items on ebay - "novelty", "ugly" and even "geek". I became fascinated by the number of what I called "countryside sweaters", hand knitted jumpers that portrayed idyllic rural landscapes; farmhouses with animals, villages complete with churches, pretty streams, rolling hills, blue skies and fluffy white clouds. I would often find the patterns for the self same jumpers for sale too.

Here are a couple of my ebay purchases and the patterns that were used to make them. I enjoy seeing how different to the pattern a finished knitted sweater might be. I didn't realise that I had the pattern for the first sweater until I put this paper together, the actual jumper is so big, it is more like a dress.

The difference between the photo of the jumper on the pattern and the actual item is usually through the use of a different yarn to the one given in the pattern resulting in a different tension and the picture on the jumper becoming distorted. The jumpers are usually under £20.00.

This one is described as "ugly and amazing"

So much time has been invested in the knitting of these items. I would also add skill but sometimes they are knitted so badly I can't understand how someone got to the end of the jumper, their technique is so poor. What makes me saddest of all about these no longer desired jumpers is the yarn they are often knitted in. Maybe that is why they became undesirable. Mostly they are in cheap, synthetic yarn. So much time invested in such poor materials giving a disappointing outcome. Time is cheap but materials aren't.

Someone Else's Dream refers to the idealised view many people have of living in the countryside. When I was living in London I meet so many people who wanted to leave. The great white flight for cheaper housing, a garden, to have a dog or more children, supposedly better schooling, less crime and greater personal safety. A move to the countryside was their dream, a dream which, although I do live in the countryside, I did not share. In *Someone Else's Dream* I have swiss darned, an embroidery stitch that mimicks the knitted stitch, on top of the countryside scenes on these jumpers, changing the idyllic picturesque scenes to the scenes of misery that can, and do, happen in the countryside.

Some of the scenes that I have embroidered are from personal experience, some from news stories, all have happened in the countryside. I have embroidered a car crash, a figure hanged from a tree, a house fire, a body drowned in a river, fly-tipping and a crime investigation scene complete with white tent, police DO NOT CROSS tape, police van, car and helicopter.

I have two more scenes that I would like to create when the appropriate jumper become available; a stolen car, joy ridden and dumped in a field, (like ours was) and the flood.

The use of distressing or violent imagery when presented through a domestic, seemingly passive and benign object such as a hand knitted jumper subverts our expectations of both the object and the medium employed in it's production. Making the imagery initially less painful to see but ultimately much more disturbing. In this respect I have been moved and captivated by the war rugs, which started

appearing in the first half of the 1980's in war-torn, Soviet occupied Afghanistan, at exactly the same time that novelty knitted sweaters started appearing in the UK at the beginning of Thatcherism. A ridiculous parallel but I'll make it anyway.

The rug and textile art gallerist and dealer, Thomas Wild, recalls his first encounter with these 'war rugs' in the late 1980's whilst visiting Peshawar, the city at the foot of the Khyber Pass on the border to Afghanistan.

"For me, rugs were like a romantic island where families cosily got together, slept, ate, or played; they were where families held meetings and relaxed at the end of the day. The rugs themselves usually depicted similar or identical motifs such as plants, flowers, animals, stars, or tribe-specific symbols. It thus came as a great shock when I visited Afghan dealers and discovered, for the first time, rugs in which – upon closer inspection – pomegranates had been replaced by hand grenades and flowers had been turned into airplanes, Kalashnikovs or tanks. The destructive living conditions that had resulted from Soviet occupation had directly found their way into the weavers' canon of designs. Rugs, which in Oriental culture epitomise comfort and warmth, had become a vehicle for revolt and protest. It was the silent outcry of a helpless and traumatised population."

Although the experience of war served as the impetus for the development of these rugs they soon began to have a commercial focus. To this day many families still earn their living from the production of them, as do refugee communities in Pakistan and elsewhere. Some of the popular small format designs such as the Kalashnikov have even gone into serial production. Today the rugs have become souvenirs for the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) troops and travellers. The early rugs from the 1980's and 90's are now coveted collectors items that are quite difficult to find. The motifs incorporated into the war rugs have continued to evolve, influenced by press photos in newspapers and magazines, posters and leaflets. A newer, and apparently highly marketable design that has appeared is the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York.

In 2003, a *New York Times* reporter visited carpet dealer, Kevin Sudeith's stand at a flea market in the East Village where he was selling a 9/11 carpet for \$150. Some market visitors were more offended than others but one local expressed his confusion at the message the carpet was sending. "I can't tell if these rugs are celebrating the attacks or mourning them." Another shopper said that he saw a sympathetic message in the rugs, but he added that "these rugs are made in the same place the terrorists were trained." Another shopper, a firefighter who had been at the World Trade Centre on September 11th and lost 100's of colleagues was disgusted. "I don't care who made them or where they're from. This shouldn't be allowed. I believe in freedom of expression, but there's such a thing as self-censorship. Think of the Holocaust. Are you going to make a rug of people being thrown into ovens?"

In his book on War Rugs, *The Nightmare of Modernism*, Enrico Mascelloni refers to the 'war rugs' as "One of the most perturbing Modern Novelties of the late twentieth century,"

I don't know if *Someone Else's Dream* is OK yet. It isn't completed. I don't usually like showing, or talking about, work before it is completed, but as the Brazilian writer and journalist, Fernando Sabino, said

"In the end, everything will be ok. If it's not ok, it's not yet the end".