

# Knitting is Punk!

You have noticed them haven't you? Just when you least expect it they keep popping up. The Knitters! Why knit?

## KNITTING FOR THE BRAIN

Knitting as an activity trains your motor skills and uses both sides of the brain simultaneously. Recent neurological research tends to confirm that mobility and dexterity in the fine motor muscles, especially in the hand, may stimulate cellular development in the brain, and so strengthen the physical foundation of thinking. So knitting not only results in mittens and hats, it actually builds neural pathways, and knitting enhances your ability to concentrate. Knitting has turned out to be very helpful for people suffering from brain strokes, and is by health workers often introduced as a significant part of the recovery process.

## KNITTING FOR HEALTH

Studies have shown that doing something repetitive while undergoing a trauma helps you recover from the event much more quickly and easily. Most people find knitting relaxing and therapeutic. It has also been shown to lower blood pressure. If you know that you'll be facing a stressful situation, try taking your knitting along. There's a lot of meditation in knitting. Some will attribute this to the repetitive action of knitting and counting stitches. I also believe that knitting is meditative because it goes slowly.

## ENVIRONMENT

Knitting is, for many, about choosing a more eco-friendly focus. The yarn industry seems to be far ahead when it comes to environmental friendly thinking. A whole new range of fibres is being developed on the grounds of a more wholesome plant and food production. Milk fibre, soy, bamboo, corn, and sugar cane are all examples of new and exciting fibres that now can be made into the most wonderful of garments. You will also find organic sheep wool, Alpaca wool, goat wool and Llama wool amongst others, all products from farms where the livestock is managed on organic principles.

## KNITTING FOR FAIRNESS

Many of the poor areas of the world have rich ancient traditions when it comes to handling fibres. The Peruvian shepherds have kept their Alpacas for generations, the Chilean artisans have perfected their spinning and dyeing handcrafts for decades upon decades, the Asian tradition of silk production and weaving the finest of fabrics goes far back in time. These traditions and skills are finally being recognised in the rest of the world. Independent small-scale companies are being established, training and education is given, financial independence is obtained. As with all fair trade, ethical yarn production is about dignity and appreciation of skills and knowledge.

If you want to spread some comfy love, knitting is the way to do it. It can be as basic as knitting and giving a warm scarf to a guy living on the street or leaving a blanket to cover the lady that comes to sleep in the entry to the station. But also major organisations and hospitals will appreciate anything you are willing to contribute. There are a lot of voluntary knitters providing hats and soft clothing for vulnerable premature babies, and chemo caps designed to look good when losing your hair due to cancer treatment. Find the cause you want to support, make contact with an organisation working with this, and ask what they need or if they have any requirements for objects made for them.

## KNITTING AS ACTIVISM

Last year's summer showed that the Guerilla knitters had encountered N16. Quite a few trees in Clissold Park were covered in new bright coloured stockings. You might have noticed the knitted phonebox near Big Ben, or did you hear about the crochet covered Charging Bull statue in New York? In Norway we have an expression that goes 'a loved child bears many names' so does dressing different objects in public space using knitting and crocheting: Guerilla knitting, Yarnstorming, Yarnbombing and Knitting Grafitti are some groups. Some emphasize Guerilla knitting as a means to feminize the growing world of street art. Others emphasise Guerilla knitting as a way of claiming public space back to the public, protesting against the commercializing of our common urban environments through visual pollution caused by massive advertising campaigns. Some will claim that it is there just to put a smile on people's faces.

## KNITTING FOR FASHION

There is no way around it, knitting is trendy. I thought it was quite funny last year when Dolce & Gabbana launched their winter collection based on old traditional Norwegian knitwear patterns. Many acknowledged fashion designers publish pattern collections, as well as the very talented, creative and independent designers' patterns.

## KNITTING IS PUNK!

Knitting celebrates individuality. Knitting is punk! Knitting is hard-core DIY. Every hand knitted garment is unique. No two items can ever be the same, reflecting the individuality of the knitter. Knitting is freedom of expression and style; it is an act of pure creativity. Knitting is an amazing way to make a truly anarchistic statement, and make some great clothing that reflects an independent spirit.

## KNITTING IS SOCIAL

Knitting is available to everyone at anytime. There isn't a stitch or technique that isn't covered by tutorials online, and the massive web community of knitters is there to guide you, answer questions and offer help. But the social knitting communities do not only exist in the cyber world. No, they are expanding their activities into the real world. Here in Stoke Newington I know about several groups that meet up on a regular basis. The most prominent is Stoke Knittington that meets up once a month in the Jolly Butchers.

So there you have it, reasons to knit. Knitting can be all things to all people. It's just a matter of getting started!

*May Linn 'Maya' is a Norwegian rock n' roll documentary filmmaker turned Stokey wool lady. She runs Stokey's only knitting specialist shop, Knit with Attitude, on the corner of Stoke Newington High Street and Northwood Road.*