

Threads of Communication

**Ancient crafts are reinterpreted at the
Museum of Arts and Design.**

By Daniela Morell

Crafters will rejoice in the newest exhibition *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting* at the [Museum of Arts and Design](#) (MAD) in New York City. The exhibit embraces the physicality of needle and hook crafts while investigating untraditional materials and new technological interpretations. While the basis in antiquity of these crafted forms lends an air of romance, artists are now producing bodies of work that are unique and highly conceptual.

David Revere McFadden, chief curator at MAD, searched worldwide for artists who explore craft-forms in this age of digital technology. McFadden was driven by the question, How do you define structure in a wide variety of materials? "Knitting is creating structure, one thread looped on itself, and lace is creating a structure of multiple threads that allow light to pass through them," he explains. "The ideas are very simple and out of that grew a complex sampling of what's happening out there."

In this exhibit, the words "radical" and "subversive" tend to embrace the political. Artist Cat Mazza's video project "Knitascope" uses knitting patterns to comment on sweatshop labor conditions, connecting an individual's ability to craft with an industry's subversion of the individual.



McFadden believes knitting has prospered since 9/11 "because it is such a communication based tradition. Knitting is generally done by someone for somebody; there are a lot of gifts involved with it. Knitters tend to hang together and become little communities, which is a spirit that is reflected in many of the works in this show. Dave Cole, *The Knitting Machine*, 2005 (performance at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts)

Photo: J. Carli



Henk Wolver creates a textural effects with dripped porcelain. The pieces are extremely fragile and require an extremely large kiln.

In opposition to the digital take on craft, Sabrina Gschwandtner's Wartime Knitting Circle invites visitors to pick up available yarn and create "wartime knitting projects"

Handicraft has changed in meaning and purpose over time. While industrial fabrication is now the norm, the desire for a piece of string between the fingers still has an innate appeal. McFadden sees the future of radical craft moving towards other textiles such as felt and embroidery, but for now he's trying to "make this nebulous world—where art, craft, and design intersect to the point where you can't tell them apart—accessible."

Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting is on view at the Museum of Arts and Design, 40 West 43rd St in New York City through June 17, 2007. The exhibition is accompanied by a series of public programs.