



Who's Who In Crochet

A focus of interest on those that have inspired crochet

Jean Cacicedo

Through May 17, 2020, the Philadelphia Museum of Art presents *Off the Wall: American Art to Wear*, a major exhibition that highlights a distinctive American art movement that emerged in the late 1960s and flourished during the following decades and includes the work of Jean Cacicedo. The exhibit examines a generation of pioneering artists who used body-related forms to express a personal vision and frames their work in relation to the cultural, historical and social concerns of their time.

Jean learned to crochet in the summer of 1968 and brought it back to her friends at the Pratt Institute: Janet Lipkin and Marika Contompasis. 'We all experienced crochet as a new way of expressing ourselves; but we took it in different directions,' explains Jean.



"At that time Pratt was not offering classes in fiber. The school however supported Jean's experimental approach to the new medium. 'Go ahead,' said one professor, 'but this is a professional art school, you cannot call this yarn. Sophisticate the term.' So, *yarn* became *fiber*, and in 1970, Jean received her degree.

By 1975 the art to wear movement had found its voice. The climate of the late 60s, with its emphasis on social, political, and aesthetic change, produced a generation of staunch individualists committed to pioneering new forms of self-expression. The body became a vehicle to express and animate visual imagery. Tremendous visual and technical diversity of the pieces created gave the art to wear movement its first and lasting identity.

This pioneering spirit led to an excitement about using traditional crafts to made non-traditional statements. Discarding deadlines and precedents, the first-generation artists reveled in the exploration of process. Pieces not only looked new and fresh, but they consumed unheard of quantities of creative time-days, months, even years.

Over the years this large yet commonly motivated group of artists changed in several ways. They grew older, and the world around them changed. In general, those who stayed with the movement subdivided into artist-craftsmen





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and production-craftsmen. Some dropped out completely, while others left a few dazzling, historically valuable pieces behind.

Of the two groups, the production-craftsmen is the largest. Talent has been challenged into viable small businesses with the goal of generating a steady income. The ability to reproduce is essential, and the focus is on the result not the process. In 1983, the American Craft Museum curated *Art to Wear: New Handmade Clothing*, a catalogued exhibition that cemented credibility and expanded public awareness of clothing as a viable art form. However, there still remained a strong need for continued artistic and financial recognition to provide incentives for artist-some who had already committed 15-20 years of their creative life to continue this work.



Cacicedo is one of the successful survivors! Natural dyeing and spinning of wool made her appreciate much more the material she was working with. 'It released me from its limits,' she explains. 'The only thing I haven't done with wool is shear a sheep! Driven by both process and ideas, I saw the garment as a canvas to color and a form to sculpt. The garments I fashion must go beyond what is fashionable. Art to wear transforms the body and the spirit both physically and metaphorically.' The continuous self-renewing process of problem-solving ultimately led her away from crochet. Through her admiration of Matisse's work, she realized the power of shape and unconsciously changed from crochet to applique.

In 2012, her success was lauded at Widney Moore Gallery in Portland, Oregon: *Continuity in Creativity: Four artists, Twenty-five Years*. Jean's work is included in the permanent collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts among many others. In 2015 she exhibited at *Counterculture: Fashioning Identity in the*



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Contemporary Culture at the Bellevue Museum of Art, Washington; and
Body as Agent, Richmond Art Center, California.

Images:

1-Chaps: A Cowboy Dedication: woven white wool mohair, wool jersey, Dacron, knitted, crochet, felted, hand-dyed; 1983

2-Transformation: wool yarn, suede, crocheted, knitted; 19773-BambooCoat: woven white wool mohair, wool jersey, knitted , crocheted, appliqued felted, hand-dyed, 1980.

3-Bamboo Coat: white wool mohair, wool jersey, knitted, crocheted, appliqued, felted, hand-dyed; 1980

Resources:

Bullis, Douglas. "Graceful Expanses – Jean Cacicedo. *Ornament Magazine*: Vol. 15, No. 3. 1982, pp. 51-55.

Schafler Dale, Julie. "Wearables-Developments and Trends." *Fiberarts Magazine*, January/February 1990; pp. 40-42.

Schafler Dale, Julie. *Art to Wear*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.

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