



Who's Who In Crochet

A focus of interest on those that have inspired crochet

Nicki Hitz Edson

"Nikki learned to crochet 'simple stuff' from her mother in 1967; but it wasn't until she saw *Celibacy*, a crocheted hanging by Walter Nottingham in the Museum of Modern Art, that she knew 'anything' could be crocheted! In her book, *Creative Crochet* (1973), Nicki stresses the versatility of crochet and said that 'More and more people are discovering this old craft as a medium in which to express themselves. There's no need to determine exactly how a piece is going to look before you begin; it grows as you go along, adding to itself.'

After studying art and art history at the University of Colorado and photography at the Layton School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Nicki visited New York in the early Seventies and never left! Inspired by a trip to Mexico, her eyes were opened to color; she began playing with the crochet more abstractly, developing her work spontaneously in terms of technique and design, one piece taking her to the next.

Starting out by making houses that were small stuffed toys, if one got too big, Nikki cut it in half and made her first outrageous hat! Hats turned into helmets, helmets into masks, and it spiraled on and on. Her wool masks, like primitive ones, can be worn either to ward off evil spirits or can stand by themselves. While working at Studio Dell between 1970 and 1972, she met and was inspired by the same women from the Pratt Group that included Sharron Hedges. They stimulated and confirmed her direction with crochet.

Nikki's first mask, made for a Halloween party, became the first in a series of fantasy masks. Sometimes she worked spontaneously, experimenting from a purely technical point of view. Sometimes she left little to chance, conceiving a mask in detail before beginning the work. The masks were meant to be worn, coming alive with the animation of a human form. Others, like Medusa, transform the wearer.





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Nicki believes that *Medusa* (1975) may be her ultimate mask, both for content and technique. She calls it her 'divorce piece,' having used the mythological character as a channel for the anger and pain she felt during that episode in her life. 'It fascinated me to be able to sculpt and draw with a crochet hook, to be able to create those shapes. It is like nothing else when you sculpt; you are building on a mass. But this is more like building walls and then making them go in whatever direction you want.'

Staying within the medium, Nicki began to teach at the New School for Social Research and the Craft Students' League. She began knitting on a loom due to her love of machines and need to make a living. Her transition from masks to clothing was largely inspired by her friends at Studio Del. Her works of fiber art have been exhibited in such diverse venues as the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Textile Museum (Washington DC) the Museo Calouste Gulbenkian (Lisbon), Museum of Contemporary Crafts (New York), and the windows of Tiffany & Company. She has been the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant and is co-author of *Creative Crochet* with Arlene Stimmel.

Today Nicki Hitz Edson offers commissioned pet portraits from her studio in Seattle. 'People relate deeply to the animals they share their lives with, especially dogs and cats. The loyalty and love returned by their pets get expressed in their eyes.'"



Images:

Medusa: wool yarn, crocheted; 1975
Beach Kimono: wool yarn, loom-knitted; 1984.

Pet Portraits: *Sasha*: loom-knitted

References:

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<https://www.nicki-pets.com>

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