

KNITTING NATION MANIFESTO

By Liz Collins

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KNITTING NATION is an exploratory and multi-faceted art project, inaugurated in 2005 by Liz Collins, and combines performance, site specific installation, collaboration, and clothing and textile design and manufacturing, using manually-operated knitting machines. The project is a commentary on how humans interact with machines, global trade, fashion and iconography, and a celebration of machine knitting as a creative medium.

KNITTING NATION lays bare the process of machine knitting in order to demonstrate the complex and fascinating nature of this medium, which is one representation of many human-dependent and physically demanding textile and garment making processes and traditions.

KNITTING NATION performs the act of knitting in solidarity with all those who work their bodies with machines to clothe and make fabric for the masses. As we pass carriages on knitting machines back and forth, and as the yardage comes off the needles, we tap in to the hum of machines and the aching backs and necks of workers whose survival depends on high volume production orders from designers, manufacturers, and retailers around the world. At any given time, somewhere on this planet, there are factories full of people making clothing and fabric for strangers who are very far away and who will purchase these goods for what the makers earn in a month or more of hard, non-stop, and low wage labor.

KNITTING NATION is obsessed with the dance that humans and machines do together while making things: the repetitive, trance-inducing movements, the sounds of metal against metal driven by human hands, and the symbiotic relationship that must be established between maker and means for the highest productivity with the lowest rate of injury. This project calls attention to the human who is present in the "machine-made" process and encourages its audience to consider the indirect connection between humans through the interaction with a material or object produced by one and used by another.

KNITTING NATION is committed to exploring, deconstructing, and reconstructing important cultural symbols and artifacts that manifest in textile forms, such as sweaters, blankets, and

flags. The project selects and examines these symbols in a time and site specific manner, from responding to an artist's call to arms as an opportunity to create a new version of the American flag during a time of war, to reinventing the rainbow flag during the month of "gay pride".

KNITTING NATION is overwhelmed by the ongoing, extreme excess of material goods that flood the global consumer marketplace thriving on newness, rife with disposable non- solutions. KN aims to integrate waste and surplus into its projects and to find ways to call attention to the problem.

KNITTING NATION likes to play games with color, chance, and form, asking groups of creative people to act intuitively within a larger framework, thereby encouraging individual creative input into collectively made pieces. In each phase of the project, the piece manifests in a different form, with the site of the performance and installation informing the final design of the piece and how it occupies that space.

KNITTING NATION is driven by one individual, with "NATION" functioning as an imagined ideal. Like Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation*¹, **KNITTING NATION** claims nationhood loosely, as a group of people of diverse backgrounds joined together for a mutual purpose. Membership is informal and shifting. Most members of the KN army possess a required level of skill in machine knitting and/or hand sewing. The very act of signing up for and participating in a **KNITTING NATION** event makes one a lifetime member of it.

KNITTING NATION strives to be a public art event.

KNITTING NATION is open and filled with possibilities, imagining all types of configurations for future events, and interested in furthering the collaborative aspect of the project. While certain aspects of this project remain fixed, others will change in each phase.

For more info see www.lizcollins.com or contact liz@lizcollins.com

¹ From the back cover of Janet Jackson's hit 1989 album *Rhythm Nation 1814*: "We are a nation with no geographic boundaries, bound together through our beliefs. We are like-minded individuals, sharing a common vision, pushing toward a world rid of color-lines...Music, Poetry, Dance, Unity".