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Knitting Close to the Edge

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Abstract

This visual essay focuses on hand knitting, environment and activism through examples from *The Knitting Map* (2005) in Cork, Ireland, Romy Owens' *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* (2015) in Tulsa, Oklahoma and *The Tempestry Project's National Parks Project* (2016), across the US. The essay re-imagines the knotting of knitting as political dissent through a focus on edges and edginess. Such edges relate to these works in multiple ways - through the materiality of knitting as object (material edges), processual and contextual quality (edginess) as well as their engagement with communities, urban / rural environments and climate. Playfulness and joy as methodology attend this essay through documentation, critical strategy and performative writing.

Keywords: knitting activism; knitting performance; knitting community; knitting landscape; knitting & climate; knitting & feminism

JOOLS GILSON
Jools Gilson is a Professor of Creative Practice at University College Cork, Ireland.
jgilson@ucc.ie

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Knitting Close to the Edge

This visual essay focuses on knitting, environment, and activism through examples from *The Knitting Map* (Gilson and Povall 2005) in Cork, Ireland, Romy Owens' *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* (Owens 2016) in Tulsa, Oklahoma and *The National Parks Tempestry Project* (Zambello, Connelly, and McNeill 2016), across the United States. In particular, my thinking pools around re-imagining the knotting of knitting as political dissent through a focus on edges and edginess. Such edges relate to these works in multiple ways, in particular their engagement with communities, urban/rural environments, and climate.

All the works analyzed here involve hand knitting which is made by working an edge, by knotting a new one from the one present in our hands. Two of them also involve sewing edges of completed pieces of knitting together. I linger critically on the materiality of knitting as object (material edges) as well as processual and contextual quality (edginess). Working with communities in the tired territory of the art/craft debate is ghosted by this binary as inescapable residue. This (false) edge attends these works as they resist and trouble such dualistic thinking in ways which demand a new theory for how knitting as political strategy engages with the world. One such resistant troubling is the use of playfulness and joy as methodology, even as they also speak to difficult global truths.

Of the three art works considered here, one is mine—*The Knitting Map,* made with Richard Povall in 2005. This means I am embedded in this work as maker, and in this article as both academic and contingent artistic thinker. I propose in this essay[1] that the two grammatical meanings of "knitting" (verb and noun) resist such grammatical binaries to operate on an arc of difference tangling processes of making (verb) with the made (noun) to engage in urgent debates, especially as they relate to climate. I have been making professional art work and writing critically about this work in peer reviewed publications since 1995.[2] I am a different kind of academic writer because I'm also an artist (including a creative writer), but perhaps more importantly I performatively enact a resistance to easy binaries at the same time as identifying this as a shared strategy in these artworks involving knitting.

The three works I've chosen here are sometimes made unsettlingly present through vastness of scale, and sometimes through the proximity and intimacy of smaller works or performances. Such contemporary textile transgression experienced and made though knitting, community and pleasure, troubles the stories, we tell ourselves and the world about located place in a different vein.

My examples are slipknots for collaborative thinking. I counterpoint making and placemaking through knitting as trope, antagonist and anchor. My first examples are from *The Knitting Map*. This project was commissioned for Cork's year as European Capital of Culture in 2005. It was both a large-scale and long-term project, eventually involving more than 2000 people in its construction. This community of (mostly) older, working class women from Cork City used weather and motion data

converted into yarn color/knitting stitches to hand knit a collaborative textile every day for a year. In doing so, we made a vast abstract map of our city.[3] Two performance events from *The Knitting Map* serve as examples of ordinary and extraordinary mischief tangled from two sticks and a ball of yarn; the "Pied Piper" an ambulatory event involving *The Knitting Map's* ornate edge in July 2005 and my own performance in April 2004 at Blarney Woolen Mills, part of the monthly *Knitting Map* events that we scheduled that year as a way to raise the profile of the project and recruit knitters. The essay then moves on to look at Romy Owens' more recent work *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* (Owens 2016) which documents lost terrain in Tulsa, Oklahoma by using knitting to depict a vast rural landscape. This work is a lively comparator with *The Knitting Map*, especially in its engagement with a large community of knitters to collectively make something singular. It also speaks directly to earth grief—to the affect of losing a connection to unadulterated landscape. Owens' title calls us through the language and labor of knitting to notice what it is we are able to bear and what we can't. Finally, I look at *The National Parks Tempestry Project* and the small comparative climate textiles knitted, placed, and photographed in dozens of US National Parks.

The focus in this essay is primarily on the two examples from *The Knitting Map* and *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes*. The implications of *The National Parks Tempestry Project* deserves a fuller analysis than I have space for here, and so it acts as a provocation to the earlier part of the essay and an invitation for other artists and scholars to dig deeper. Such activism takes place as critical counterpoint to the textile industry's significantly negative impact on the environment. This is also beyond the scope of this essay to address directly, but it is the dominant global narrative related to textile production/waste and climate change and haunts this essay and all textile projects which engage in climate activism.[4]

The Knitting Map was made at a time when public debates about climate change were in their infancy, and so whilst we *were* making a large-scale tempestry, documenting weather of all kinds (not just temperature) every day for a year through knitting, we initially envisioned the project as a kind of feminist collaborative cartography. *The Knitting Map's* connection to the environment of Cork City through movement (human bodies, vehicles, dogs, birds, etc.) and meteorology, knitted almost entirely by older working class women was also an ecofeminist gesture which brought together ideas about the exploitation and denigration of women with the exploitation and denigration of the urban and natural world. The following two examples from *The Knitting Map* speak to the ecofeminism of the work. They also exemplify ideas about edges and edginess as well as the spectrum between the noun and the verb of knitting, as we move between the materiality of knitting as object or costume and trouble such "thing-ness" (noun) with the "doing-ness" (verb) of event and performance.

The Knitting Map 1: Marion O'Sullivan and the Interlocking Twist

We had originally planned that *The Knitting Map* would be edged on both sides with a consistent complex cable, so unlike the rest of the map, these edges would document the weather in their changing yarn color, but the stitch would be consistent (see Figures 1–6). Among our many volunteers, we had a small group of expert knitters and among them, we only had one person who had the skills and the time to commit to knit an edge in this way, but she couldn't do two. Because of this we made the decision to just do one ornate edge. Marion O'Sullivan was the person who took on this role and knitted one edge of *The Knitting Map* every day for a year—a 100 m of interlocking twist.[5] In July, half way through the year of the making of *The Knitting Map*, Marion and the team took her glorious edge out for a jaunt around the city. What kind of performative activisms were out and about in Cork on that day, and what of these might speak to us today?

It's an Aran stitch—a triple cable. Trying to picture it in my head, it's been so long - that's all I can tell you. (Marion O'Sullivan, Cork, WhatsApp message September 30, 2021)

Marion O'Sullivan's skills at knitting were (and remain) extraordinary. A lively character, she could crack jokes and chat away at the same time as knitting a complex interlocking twist for one edge of the map every day for a year—her fingers a blur of mathematical complexity. While she changed colors with the change of weather, her stitch remained the same, unlike all the other knitters, whose stitches changed daily according to the busyness of the city. The brewing controversy about *The Knitting Map* in 2005[6] was partly a response to the upstart notion that knitting could be great art, one

newspaper at the time quoted a businessman saying "we want the All Ireland Final in Cork, not a pack of oul' biddies knitting" (Lynch 2005, 26). With this sentiment in the air, edges of all kinds were on the agenda. Marion is from Mayfield, a working class suburb of Cork City. She was knitting the edge of an artwork which was being debated in the local and national press/radio and TV as being of dubious worth, something about it was beyond the edge of what should have been commissioned—something less wooly, less female, less, I don't know, progressive? As Marion knitted her edge, she also knitted the weather, of the meteorological and media variety. She was the only person among our almost two and a half thousand knitters who stayed with one section of the map. She was perceived as from the edge of the city, knitting her edge in a climate of edginess about the worth of the project itself.

As well as responding robustly to the emerging controversy, the women who ran *The Knitting Map* during the year of its making, were constantly inventing new ways to engage our publics and keep the project present in the social imaginary, in a time before social media had really arrived (Facebook founded in 2004, Twitter 2006 and Instagram 2010). This included a Celebrity Knit-In (June 8); Pom Pom workshops (every Friday in July); a Summer Camp (August); and the Pied Piper which took place on Thursday 28 July. And here I turn specifically to the archive photographs of this event.

These photographs document Marion O'Sullivan's fierce ownership of the map and her joy in taking out her handiwork from the crypt into the daylight with a gang of other knitters, some performers and a musician. Marion leads the group of women who parade the edge out into the city, down from the top of Summerhill North, on the way getting some men who are mending the road in their high-vis. vests to knit part of the map (see Figures 1 and 2). Then off along McCurtain Street, Bridge Street, across the bridge and onto Patrick Street (see Figure 3) and eventually into the English market (see Figures 4 and 5). Marion is at the head of this long textile held by women, it's she who has the place where it's still being made, and she is proud and glowing. While her knitted border documented the weather only in its color, for a day in July it was taken out of the crypt of St Luke's into the light and down the hill into the city where it passed through dozens of hands and was knitted by a taste of Cork City. At the sojourn's end, the knitters sit in Bishop Lucey park with it wrapped around their shoulders (see Figure 5). And this day of edge-joy of edge-playfulness is both ghosted and literally present in the map itself, the stitches from knitters cajoled to knit on the street, or in the English market knotted quietly in the middle of the map's edge and remaining there still.

The Knitting Map 2: The Blarney Woolen Mills Performance

In the year prior to this one, in April 2004, I came back from holidays to do the fourth installment of a series of monthly knitting performances[7] in a public place in Cork to raise awareness of *The Knitting Map* project and to recruit the many knitters we needed to make it (see Figures 7 and 8). This essay follows this performance as it moves from dancing swan to the political terrain of women knitting Aran sweaters and cardigans for poor pay in a commercial store.

As a way to raise the profile of *The Knitting Map* project and to recruit the hundreds of knitters we needed to complete the work, I did a performance in a different public location in Cork every month during 2004. In April this was at Blarney Woolen Mills. For each of these performances I wore a different knitted outfit, usually made by the Project Manager Kate O'Brien or Project Co-ordinator Sue Tector-Sands. In April, I'd been away and so hadn't seen the design planned for Blarney. When I returned and tried on the dress I was startled by its skimpiness. It only just covered my breasts and was attached on both sides by ties which gapped to show flesh. It was beautifully made in fine cream wool with small twists of cable, and a delicate cloak edged with feathers, but I could hardly wear the tiniest of underwear without them being seen. I told the Project Manager that I was really concerned about wearing this costume for these reasons, but the Project Co-ordinator Sue had spent many many hours making it, and she was understandably upset by the possibility of me not performing in it, and so I wore it. Sue had based her design on the *Children of Lir,* which is an Irish folk tale on which *Swan Lake* is based. I am no swan, but I found a way to develop a performance that could honor the commitment put into constructing this costume and also do some wooly activism with the help of a big grey cardigan and some willing children. I am trained in contemporary dance/improvisation, and started with a spot of lovely dancing up on the jumpers in Blarney Woolen Mills who were very good sports to let me roll around on their merchandise. These monthly

Figure 1
Marion O'Sullivan, knitters and performers from *The Knitting Map* getting a workman to knit part of the edge of the map. Summerhill North, Cork, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

Figure 2
Marion O'Sullivan, knitters and performers from *The Knitting Map* on Summerhill North, Cork, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

Figure 3
Marion O'Sullivan parading the edge of *The Knitting Map* along Patrick's Street, Cork, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

performances had so far been playful engagements with audiences who had chosen to come, and those that just happened to be in whatever public space we were in (by April, this was—the Crawford Museum of Art, the offices of Cork 2005 at Civic Trust House and Merchant's Quay Shopping Centre). In Blarney Woolen Mills I wanted to move away from the spotlight of being a pretty dancer, to make performance *with* the people who had come and those who had happenstanced here. I pulled on a big grey hand knitted Aran cardigan and called out the name of the woman who knitted it, hand written on a label attached to it (See Figure 8). And then I found the performance I wanted to make as I discovered the neat piles of folded Arans each with the name of the woman who made it. I cajoled the children in the audience to help me—to find and call out the names of the women who knitted these jumpers. This was an improvised performance, and such somatic skills attune to the present tense and tone of place, space and opportunity. In performance, here constructed from moving speaking bodies and knitting, we can actuate a political activism tangled between textiles and somatics. Through playfulness, through twinkling invitations for children to join with me in calling out these women's names, together we collectively assert their presence. The embodiment of the women who made these sweaters with their hands amidst busy lives, come to be present in this big wool department store in the bodies of children, who touch their crafted jumpers and cardigans, and through this come to speak their names. I call out "Mrs. Crowley! … Mrs. O'Kelleher! shout them out! Mrs. O'Connell!" And the children do the same. The prefix of "Mrs." for all we found that day, placed these women self-identified in married life in a way which suggested (even in 2005) that they were older women. Such name calling brings presence to their poorly paid labor of knitting in the commercial space of Blarney Woolen Mills.[8] As I make this performance I teeter on edges. I am on my tippy toes moving between traditional femininities of the dancing and knitting kind, oscillating between

Figure 4
Workers on the tripe & drisheen stall in the English Market in Cork knitting the edge of *The Knitting Map*, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

signs of femininity that would have me for their own. I see the edge twinkling and play there, it's a dangerous and pleasurable space, and it is irreverence as well as wool that cloaks me in my brazen endeavor to tell a different story. Here in this performance these wily narratives of knitting somehow refuse to remain stable (a blur of objects and actions). O. They are strange trouble indeed, let me tell you. There in Blarney (of all places) in the spring of 2005.

There is also a broader lens here in relation to what Fionna Barber calls the "constructed mythology" of women knitting Aran sweaters, and its part in the making of national Irish identity. While the story goes that women historically knitted Aran sweaters for their fisherman husbands, sons and brothers in different patterns so that they could identify their bodies should they drown, the Aran sweater doesn't turn up as a cultural artifact until the 1930s (Barber 2019, 29). In Blarney Woolen Mills in 2005 and to this day, women hand knit Aran sweaters for a largely international market. Their demographic continues to get older as the availability of knitting skills and the time needed to knit these complex stitches wane. In the performance at Blarney Woolen Mills in 2005, we collaboratively resist and re-work the ways in which the hidden labor of older women have been used to construct ideas about Irish nationality. And we do so with joy as methodology, and collective mischief as our aim.

I want to counterpoint this performance with Marion O'Sullivan's edge. Both are edgy in different ways. Marion's constant presence makes the collaborative endeavor of making *The Knitting Map* different in her hands since she always knits the edge, and it's only the weather that changes color. She navigates a wooly grounding, a sort of knotted certainty, that for all the changes of the map's knitters, the regulars and the visitors and the people who came because their friend was coming, Marion is always there, every day. She is both edge and center, she is peripheral and constant as she knits rain and storms and the balmy days of summer. And when she takes it out into Cork City with a band of women, she brings presence and playfulness and joy. She brings it out into the July weather which itself is generating the daily color of the knitting itself. In Blarney Woolen Mills I navigate a

Figure 5
Marion O'Sullivan getting a shopper in the English Market in Cork to knit part of the edge of *The Knitting Map*, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

textile costume which was lovingly and carefully made—an exquisite and beautiful thing, but which on my body, ties me up in stereotype, but I make the best of it with the help of a chunky cardi and some small assistants. In our collaborative play, we make a different kind of knitting present, the Irish home knitter, whose labour is here sold for a good deal more than she is paid, and Marion O'Sullivan who resists a barrage of media who would have us believe our project is rubbish, and attends to making and performing her edge with grinning aplomb, using embodied joy as strategy and performance.

Fionna Barber's "Entangled Map"

When people visited *The Knitting Map* in 2005, they often commented on its similarities to an aerial view of fields—the muted color palette, the connected series of squares and rectangles. Ireland's system of small fields is part of a colonial history of landscape, and the remnants of these can still be seen in the Irish countryside, especially in the West (Aalen, Whelan and Stout 1997 [2002], 134 – 144). And yet this was an abstract map generated from data in Ireland's second city—Cork: it was urban. In Fionna Barber's (2019) chapter—"The Entangled Map and Irish Art" she is also struck by the palette of *The Knitting Map* and locates the work within a longer history of Irish art, in particular the paintings of rural landscapes by Paul Henry (1876 – 1958). A central figure in the Celtic Revival, Barber suggests that whilst Henry's paintings depict a rural timelessness they are also powerfully historically contingent. After Ireland's independence in 1922, Henry's work became strongly identified with de Valera's vision of newly independent Ireland as a "predominantly rural, Irish-speaking, Catholic nation" (Barber 2019, 28). Barber goes on to

Figure 6
Knitters from *The Knitting Map* entangled in the edge in Bishop Lucey Park, Cork, 28th July 2005. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

suggest that Henry's muted color palette implicitly became "identified with the construction of national identity through an idealized archaism" (28) Drawing a connection between the color palette of *The Knitting Map* and Henry's paintings, Barber entwines thinking about Henry's depiction of the weather, and the weather which generates color in *The Knitting Map*. Both, she proposes, through their shared tonal range and use of meteorology trouble ideas about rural Ireland, national identity, and the place of weather in the Irish imaginary.

Romy Owens' *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes*

I want to sew a seam between *The Knitting Map* and Romy Owens' *The Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* (Owens 2016) in writerly wonder (see Figures 9 and 10). Both are large-scale collaborative artworks involving communities of (mostly) older women in hand knitting a work whose multiple edges are subsequently sewn together to make a single vast textile. But their differences are also important. Owens' piece was made in 2015 specifically for an outside context—an installation hung from the exterior edge of the art gallery 104 Contemporary in Tulsa, across multiple large and smaller windows (See Fisher 2015). Made for an urban context, like *The Knitting Map*, this work spoke to the loss of rural spaces in Oklahoma, specifically the prairie lands that would have been in this place if the city of Tulsa was not; a questioning posed through the language of the collaborative knitting of older women.

Textile artworks are notoriously vulnerable to their edges fraying, sun

Figure 7
Jools Gilson, performance at Blarney Woollen Mills, April 2004. Knitted costume by Susan Tector. Sands. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

damage, or otherwise coming undone.[9] Owens' *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* started with a conversation between the artist and Krystle Brewer (interim executive director of 108 Contemporary at the time) about making a work which scaled up the idea of yarn bombing, and so was always conceived as an outside project. In an interview in the *Tulsa World*, Owens says "The fact that the piece is changing—even deteriorating—reflects the idea behind it: that the way people today experience the landscape is changing as rapidly as the landscape itself" (Watts 2016). In this way, Owens brings together the physical weathering of this work with the entwined trouble of lessening direct engagement with rural landscapes, as that landscape itself disappears.

The Knitting Map and the *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* both tangle the weather with processes of hand knitting in ways which cause mischief through discourses of femininity, craft, climate, and environmental politics. While *The Knitting Map's* yarn color was daily generated from weather data, the *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* was literally out in the weather of an Oklahoma winter hanging (for dear life) onto the edge of a multi-storey building. Made from super bulky acrylic wool for this reason, it withstood 40 mph winds during its installation, intense rain storms, and snow.[10] It matters that this is work which is hand made in yarn, depicts a landscape, and isn't in the climate controlled space of the gallery. It is a work which speaks distinctively to our rapidly changing natural world. Erin Schalk (2015) agrees

Figure 8
Jools Gilson, performance at Blarney Woollen Mills, April 2004. Photo credit: half/angel 2005.

as she writes in *Art Focus Oklahoma* that *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* is "conscious of grave ecological issues that move beyond the state of Oklahoma to meet national and global concerns" (14 – 15). *The Knitting Map's* recent exhibition with *The Tempestry Project* called *Mapping Climate Change*[11] (Berman Museum of Art in Pennsylvania June–November 2021) similarly framed this work within contemporary environmental issues.

While *The Knitting Map* incorporated movements from the city through CCTV cameras and some handy programming (the busier the city the more complex the stitch generated for that day and vice versa), the *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* documents a different kind of movement – the artist's persistent and comprehensive travel across the state of Oklahoma to established and new knitting groups to involve communities in hand knitting the squares needed for her installation. This matters in the mattering of things material. It matters that each knot of this vast knitted image was made by someone in their hands, was touched, was cradled in a lap. It matters that like *The Knitting Map*, the demographic of the people who donated their labour (and sometimes their yarn) in this way were mostly women over 60. As well as Owens' tireless movement across the state of Oklahoma to different knitting circles, the work itself also moved people in the process of apprehending it. Best seen from half a block away, audiences were drawn close to notice the detail of hand knitting—and a thousand hand sewn edges. The work could also be seen from inside the gallery offices and exhibition spaces as it covered the windows. These same windows illuminated the work at night in an effect that Owens' describes as like a "stained glass

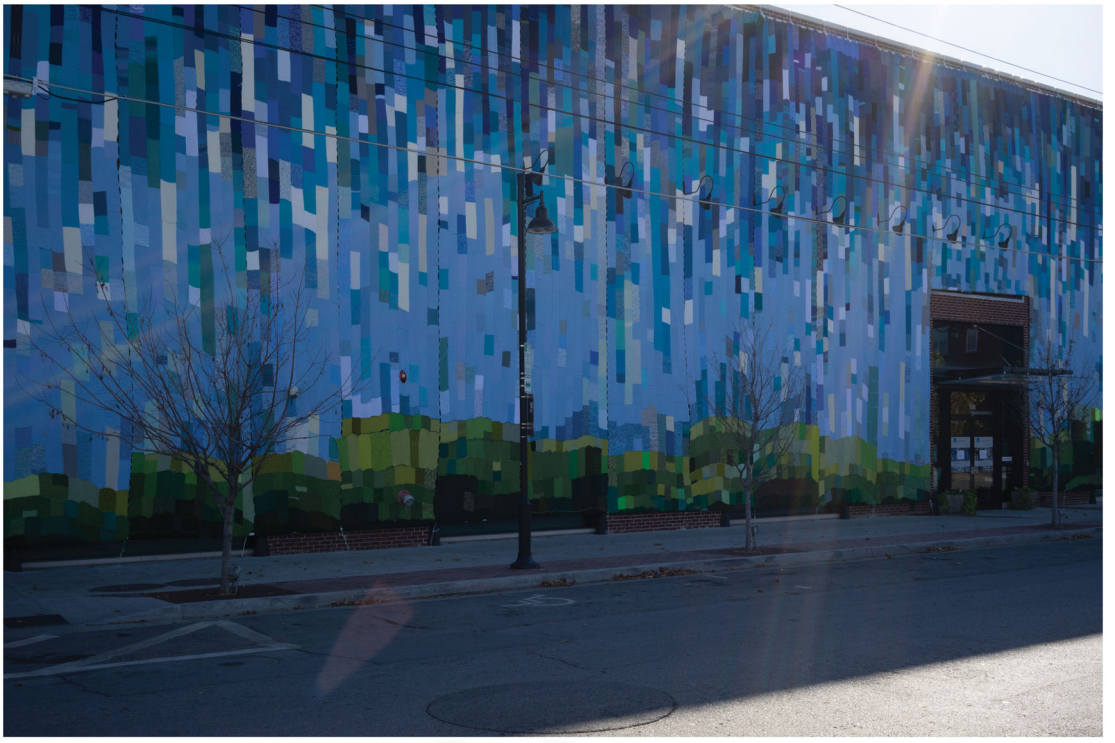

Figure 9
The Unbearable Absence of Landscapes by Romy Owens (2015). Photo credit: Romy Owens.

window" (Owens 2016). In this way, both works connect moving embodiment to urban and rural landscape, in their making and apprehension. These choreographies are part of the meaning of these works, as they reinvest processes of mapping and the viewing of landscape with the individual textile making gestures of touch and care, felt through muscle, bone and breath.

Given that these works remember bodies powerfully, it is unsurprising that in their construction they comprise body-sized widths of knitted textile. *The Knitting Map* was knitted in one place for an entire year, with twenty knitting stations, and so produced twenty long strips of knitting, whose edges were then sewed together to make four panels. The *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* was made up of thousands of small squares/rectangles, each of which had to be sewn together into strips, before they could be joined horizontally into larger panels. This all meant that the labor of seaming edges was as significant as the labor of knitting in Owens' work and produced a pixilated image. This pixilation was an important part of the meaning of the work for Owens as it referenced the "current screen-based culture and the sprawl of urbanization, the pixilated landscape represents the physical absence as well as our digital obsession and disconnect with nature" (Text accompanying video documentation of Romy Owens' Artist's Talk[12] at 108 Contemporary, uncredited). This resonates interestingly with *The Knitting Map* which was knitted from stitch/color prompts displayed on recycled computer monitors. It also ghosts the history of the computer itself and its links to the weaving of Ada Lovelace (Plant 1995), tangled with our contemporary obsession with all our personal screens through which our worlds are so often mediated. Romy Owens' *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* made space for the seaming of knitted edges by older women to evoke a vast landscape, its loss and our retreat into screens. It is both chilling object and

Figure 10
The Unbearable Absence of Landscapes by Romy Owens (2015). Photo credit: Romy Owens.

evocative action, and asks what might be mended were feminine wisdom allowed to run rampant with the edges of the world.

The National Parks Tempestry Project

At the essay's end, I turn briefly to *The National Parks Tempestry Project,* which acts as counterpoint and spur to these discussions here and others yet to come (see Figures 11 and 12).

The Tempestry Project's tempestries contrast markedly in scale from projects like *The Knitting Map* and the *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes*, but they are as powerfully political. A tempestry is a small hand knitted or crocheted textile where one person knits one row every day for a year with a color of yarn linked to the temperature for that day for a specific location. They allow an individual to document climate in a specific place using data sourced from the US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Started in 2017 in response to the threat of losing climate data when Trump got into office, *The Tempestry Project* standardized colors to represent temperatures ranging from −31 °F to 121 °F in 5 °F increments. Data is available for most locations globally, and historic data is also available. The standardization of temperature color and the

Figure 11
Point Reyes National Seashore Tempestries; 1966 on left, 2016 on right. Crafted by Laura Koloski as part of *The National Parks Tempestry Project* 2016. Photo credit: Stephanie Panlasigui.

Figure 12
Grand Canyon National Park Tempestries; 1966 above, 2016 below. Crafted by Roxy Peck as part of *The National Parks Tempestry Project* 2016. Photo credit: Grand Canyon Conservancy.

availability of historic data allows for resonant comparative tempestries.[13] Placed side by side these twinned or tripled tempestries performatively document climate change through knitted/crocheted textiles in unsettling counterpoint.

To commemorate the centenary of the National Parks Service, Erika Zambello co-ordinated volunteers to knit/crochet paired tempestries for 1916/1966 and 2016 depending how far back the data went and to photograph them in the National Parks they depicted.[14]

This project places such provocative political knitting within the US National Parks Service, a federal bureau in the Department of the Interior. Here edges are powerfully literal (tempestries placed beside the Grand Canyon, for example) as well as performing through knitted yarn the precipice of climate emergency. Apparently pristine landscapes are interrupted by these narrow rectangles of wool, which speak to slow but perceptible processes of warming. These textiles become deictic pointers—"all is not what you see!" "damage is happening!" Unlike *The Knitting Map* and the *Unbearable Absence of Landscapes*, these knitted textiles don't themselves provide the large scale, but their placed context - the actual landscape of US National Parks do. These modest but provocative documentations of climate change act as indices of climate crisis. Just as the larger scale projects involved whole communities of knitters, so does this project—as knitters across the United States volunteered to make tempestries for a US National Park dear to them. The weather in these photographs is usually sunny, but time and weather are further documented in wool and yarn color, in counterpoint and plea. Edges abound in these photographs as knitted/crocheted tempestries are draped, hung or placed beside cliffs, canyons, river valleys, forests, waterfalls and oceans, as they quietly assert that it is here, in this beautiful public space that change is happening, as well as our own back yard. *The National Parks Tempestry Project* acts as invitation

to infiltrate governments under the guise of knitting, to surreptitiously communicate our comprehensive warming world through textiles, to turn in the materiality of their resonant political knitting and the deftness of seeming to collaborate with a wing of the US Government on climate activism.

Coda

All these works speak to environment, place, the craft of knitting and the fallout of its femininity. They knit and sew together edges of multiple kinds, or are placed on literal as well as metaphorical precipices. Their edgy strategies collide and coalesce around scale and place, around processes of disintegration, loss as well as presence, playfulness and joy. They propose playfulness as serious methodology, or a radical re-thinking of our connection to climate using the ordinary labor of knitting to communicate and embody the extraordinary importance of communities and connection in a time of crises. This is what it means to knit close to the edge.

Notes

1. I am indebted to one of my anonymous reviewers for suggesting this connection between the noun and verb versions of the word "knitting" and the ways in which this might link to addressing the climate emergency.
2. For a full list of these publications, please see https://joolsgilson.com/publication/.
3. O'Sullivan Vallig (2021) gives a good overview of *The Knitting Map* project: https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsandculture/arid-40762944.html. There are also two books written about the project: Gilson and Moffat (2019) and McCarthy (2005). Recent/forthcoming exhibitions include *Mapping Climate Change: The Knitting Map & The Tempestry* Project, Berman Museum of Art, Pennsylvania June–November 2021 / Wriston Art Galleries, Wisconsin, Fall 2023; *The Knitting Map: Art, Community, Controversy*, Glucksman Gallery, Cork, 2015.
4. Clothes, footwear, and household textile production / waste are responsible for water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and landfill. Major statistics on this are: excessive water use (79 billion cubic meters of water in 2015); microfibres which comprise 35% of microplastics released into the environment annually; and 10% of global greenhouse emissions caused by clothing and footwear production. These statistics sourced from European Parliament: *The impact of textile production and waste on the environment (infographic)*. Updated: April 26, 2020 at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201208STO93327/the-impact-of-textile-production-and-waste-on-the-environment-infographic
5. "This was one of the most complex of all our knitting stitches: Interlocking Twist (knitting pattern where K = knit, and P = purl): The pattern begins on the wrong side, so work 1 row knit before starting. Row 1: K2, p8, k2; rep to end. Row 2: P2, C4B (slip next 2 sts onto cable needle and hold at back of work, k2, k2 from cable needle) C4F (slip next 2 sts onto cable needle and hold at front of work, k2, k2 from cable needle), p2; rep to end. Row 3: As 1st. Row 4: P2, k8, p2; rep to end. Row 5: As 1st. Row 6: As 4th. Row 7: As 1st. Row 8: As 4th. These 8 rows form pattern. Repeat" (Matthews 1984, 63).
6. (As in Note 3) You can read a summary of this controversy (O'Sullivan Vallig 2021) here: https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsandculture/arid-40762944.html.
7. Short video clips of eight of these performances can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiSe-F_bzFOoCHW7ajIV6eqyxgNRfgD1z; Photographic documentation of all 12 performances can be found here: https://joolsgilson.com/portfolio-2/performance/. See also Sweeney 2019.
8. You can watch a short video of this performance here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tE6Ho9iaosA&list=PLiSe-F_bzFOoCHW7ajIV6eqyxgNRfgD1z&index=6 The section with the calling out of knitters' names is 20 s between 1.19 and 1.40.
9. And that's just physically! For a wonderful theoretical exploration of the trouble of textiles and the slippery

etymology of the word "fray," see Bryan-Wilson (2017).

10. There's a beautiful video of *The Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* in the snow here: https://www.romyowens.com/landscapes.
11. Berman Museum of Art website page for the *Mapping Climate Change* exhibition: https://www.ursinus.edu/live/profiles/4975-mapping-climate-change/_ingredients/templates/berman-2018/exhibition.
12. Youtube Video of Romy Owens' Artist's Talk about *The Unbearable Absence of Landscapes* (January 9, 2016) is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag5lL6KTVwY.
13. For example, in the 2021 exhibition *Mapping Climate Change* at the Berman Museum of Art, PA tempestries from *The Tempestry Project* were displayed for the hottest and coldest places in the United States—Utqiagvik in Alaska and Death Valley, California. For each place two or three tempestries were exhibited side by side for distant time periods (up to a century earlier) and a recent year.
14. See Zambello (2019). There is comprehensive documentation of the US National Parks Tempestry Collection here: https://express.adobe.com/page/SynDUSs9izWdc/ A book documenting the project is available to order through *The Tempestry Project* website here: https://www.tempestryproject.com/product/national-parks-tempestry-project-book/.

ORCID

Jools Gilson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6287-9941

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