

Knitted Spy Ship, one of several exhibits in the Knit Invaders in Aqua Metropolis Osaka project (2015)  
Photo: Tomohisa Nakui

# Get Knitted

Saki Chikaraishi is working to create a new relationship between people and towns through the colorful medium of knitting.

TOSHIO MATSUBARA

Saki Chikaraishi is a “hyper knit creator” fabricating a new method of communication through art projects which entail wrapping human beings and towns in colorful knitted items.

Chikaraishi’s works initially attracted attention in 2003 when she presented the ManGlobe, a



Traveling Knitting Machine at Shenzhen in China (2016)

Photo: Courtesy of Stellar Course Arts

work created for a graduation project of Tama Art University, where she was learning media art. The work was a knitted globe with an eye placed on each of the five continents. The globe was equipped with a built-in sensor and motor that made the eyes wink when people approached it.

“I wanted to suggest that the world is one by knitting a globe using one thread,” says Chikaraishi. “People everywhere associate knitted items with warmth, so the impulse is to reach out and touch anything decorated with knitted materials. I became aware of the unique charms of knitted materials through the creation of this work.”

In 2009, Chikaraishi obtained support for a project from a Japanese radio station and created

works on the Gold Coast of Australia for two weeks. While there, she found that she grew bored remaining indoors producing works; so much so that she began to create knitted items on the street in an improvised fashion and put them on anything that caught her eye, one after another.

“Decorating things with knitted materials not only made me feel that I had a relationship with the town, but also helped to initiate communication with people who were interested,” recalls Chikaraishi. “It was an experience that made me confident that this was what I should do.”

Years later, after she married and gave birth to her first daughter, she took time from child raising and continued knitting to decorate a variety of items on the



Saki Chikaraishi  
Photo: Kazuhiko Tsuchida

streets of Tokyo such as public telephones, electric transformer boxes and tables, presenting works that would “cause people walking along the street to create a new relationship between people and towns by making them notice something unusual.”

In 2014 Chikaraishi started to work on the Traveling Knitting Machine. The art project, which was aimed at the visualization of “distance,” which is intangible, by knitting, was intended to create works to make people think about the process that knitted items undergo and connect people with somewhere they don’t stand now.

The knitting machine used for the project is installed on top of a carrying case. When the carrying case is moved forward, the knitting machine begins to rotate in conjunction with the rotation and

produces leg warmer-like knitted items, automatically.

How long the knitted items become is in proportion to how far the artist walks with the machine. Because the case is transparent, people can see how things are knitted. When she walks with the case, Chikaraishi is asked what the items are by people passing by. She then decorates the neck and hands of the people who have talked to her with an item that has just been knitted. She travelled to London with her first daughter in 2014, taking the machine with her. She was approached by many people and various kinds of exchanges were created there.

The Knit Invader, a project which Chikaraishi started the same year, was intended to decorate a range of items in a town, such as roadside trees and hand-rails, with items knitted using extra-thick knit produced by a knitting machine featuring the

image of a UFO, “invading” items by covering them with knitting. A highlight was the “invasion” of a boat sailing on the rivers of central Osaka in October 2015, an installation which attracted a significant response.

Chikaraishi’s unique art activities are attracting attention overseas as well. She is an invited guest to a public art project being held from December 2016 to February 2017 in Shenzhen, China under the theme of “Useful Or Not.” Chikaraishi is producing works, holding exhibitions and conducting workshops.

“Knitting is a means of communication for me,” says Chikaraishi. “I want to visit more countries and interact deeply with more people. My mission is to connect people with people and people with towns. I continue to research towns and acquire knitting skills, and want to deliver the output to towns one after another.”<sup>17</sup>



(Left) ManGlobe (2004)

(Right) “Tatsuo,” an electric transformer box on a street in Tokyo covered in pink knitting (2014)

Photo: Kosuke Natatsuka