

Making Crafts to Make Conversation

Description

After donation and beautification, notification is the third tenet of Craftivism.* Compared to the other two tenets, notification tends to garner the most discussion. Unsurprisingly, it is also the one most likely to hit people with the biggest punch, as it features a juxtaposition between the â??softâ?• world of craft and the â??hardâ?• world of issues, disorders, and injustices you may see in a newscast.



A cross stitched version of anti-war graffiti I did based on graffiti found in Riga, Latvia

After making items for donation, I began a series of cross stitch pieces based on international anti-war graffitiâ?? specifically due to the inherent juxtaposition between cross stitch and graffiti. Showing this work to others means opening up a conversation about an issue (war) that could otherwise be divisive. The trick here is that by using an unlikely medium (craft) to depict graffiti about war, open and honest conversation is more likely to be a result vs. a rebuttal in a conversation or a sign held up in protest. Therefore, the main point of notification is opening up difficult discussions in a more peaceful way.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt



A photo by Flickr user perspectiveâ?? of part of The AIDS Memorial Quilt laid out on the National Mall in Washington, DC, as part of the 2012 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The most well-known example of craftivism is The AIDS Memorial Quilt, which, since its beginning in 1987, has collected over 96,000 squares to raise awareness about both the illness and the people that it affects. A recent article explains the quiltâ??s origins best:

> â??The idea had come to [human rights activist Cleve] Jones during a 1985 march to remember Milk and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, who were both murdered by a gunman at City Hall in 1978. Jones asked participants to carry signs featuring the names of San Franciscans who had died from AIDS. At the end of the

procession, they taped the signs to the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building. The patchwork look reminded Jones of a quilt.â?•

After this event, they began to make quilt squares that were 3â?² x 6â?² (the size of a human grave) and put out the call for others to make them, too. Even now, so many years later, the Names Projectâ?? still receives â??a new panel almost every day.â?•

The Blood Bag Project



Some of the donations Leigh has received for The Blood Bag Project

Sometimes these projects are massive like The AIDS Memorial Quilt, and sometimes they are smaller like Leigh Bowserâ??s The Blood Bag Project. This project began after Leighâ??s niece Chloe was diagnosed with Diamond

Blackfan Amemia, which requires Chloe to have blood transfusions every 3-4 weeks in order to stay healthy.

Leigh began this project in order to both raise awareness for the disease and donating blood as well as a way to support Chloe. She asks for people to make cloth blood bags, which she collects and displays for exhibitions. When asked a bit more about the projectâ??s intention, Leigh writes, â??blood donation is something most people can do but donâ??t necessarily think about it. The project is a gentle, non-aggressive reminder that blood donation is very important for the well being and survival of innumerable people across the globe.â?•

I frequently talk about this project when explaining notification to people because it is truly â??a gentle, non-aggressive reminder,â?• which raises awareness surrounding donating blood. And it is the â??non-aggressiveâ?• quality that is at the heart of this part of craftivism, as projects like this truly give people a way to approach difficult subjects that may cause strife when brought up in more traditional ways.



A close up of a cloth blood bag made and donated to [The Blood Bag Project]

Sewing Circus

Francesca Aikenâ??s daughter Scarlett playing with her Science Institute Legos.

Some difficult conversations deal with issues besides health or world news, and instead focus on issues related to more personal spaces like the home. Taking inspiration from her daughter Scarlett, Francesca Aiken, started her â??unisex handmade childrenâ??s store,â?•â?? Sewing Circus, a â?? shop on a mission to make clothes less gender specific. You can check out a

pattern for making a girlâ??s skirt here.

What I like about Sewing Circus is that just by coming into existence, it allowed a group of like-minded parents to find each other, who then startedâ?? Let Clothes Be Clothesâ?? last year, as allies of the Let Toys Be Toys campaign. Let Clothes Be Clothes has already had some major traction, with Aiken telling me that theirâ?? â??#dinosaursforall campaign was backed by major politicians and forced Marks and Spencer to include girls in their licensed Natural History Museum range.â?• How cool is that?









A few of Francescaâ??s kidsâ?• clothes and hatsâ?? in patterns seen previously only for little boys, not little girls

These projects show how craft can help tackle difficult discussions, from war to an epidemic to a disorder affecting a loved one to gender-based clothing. While the projects last week may have been more adorable than the ones here (although I think some of the blood bags and dresses here are pretty cute!), I hope the projects I shared today helped you think about another way that your craft skills can be used for good.

Have you ever participated in a project that would fit under the notification tenet of craftivism? If so, what was the project? And did it help open the door to any difficult dialogues or have any other unexpected results?

*This is the 4th post in a series about craftivism. The seriesâ?? first post wasâ?? a craftivism introduction, and followed with posts about donating your handmade items and making items to brighten up your city.

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2. TEXTILES IN COMMUNITY
3. TEXTILES IN HISTORY & ART

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