

Having Fun with Fashion: The Madcap World of Ã•r JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir

Description



Photo: Diego Castro

Icelandic textile designer and artist Ã•r JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir has recently been making waves in the realms of fashion and textiles for her whimsical, colourful and fabulously eccentric garments, all produced under the label Yrurari. Knitting is the backbone of her practice, but her response to the craft is far from traditional, ranging from upcycling old jumpers with gaping mouths and protruding tongues to comical facemasks and balaclavas that look as though they are eating their wearers alive. Humour runs throughout everything she produces, even if she addresses serious messages about repurposing, sustainability, and the social significance of stitching, mending and making do.



Facemasks made during the lockdown period.

Knitting was in JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttirâ??s life from a young age, as she explains, â??In Iceland, we learn how to knit in school when we are 9 years old. I had a very good textile teacher and my interest lit up right away. I realized I could both read Donald duck comics and knit at the same time, creating a brand-new item of clothing stitch by stitch.â?• While this intensity waxed and waned over the next few years, JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir rediscovered the therapeutic possibilities of knitting in her teenage years. â??I got back to knitting after a bit of a break in my teen years, then knitting while watching TV,â?• she says, remembering, â??It was very soothing and a nice way of multitasking and doing more with my time.â?•



Facemasks made during the lockdown period.

In her later teens, she began to work outside the lines, pushing the medium of knitting in new ways. â??At around 19 I stopped completely following knitting patterns and started working on my own ideas in an experimental way,â?• she explains. From here, JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir studied textile design at Reykjavik School of Visual Arts, followed by textiles at Glasgow School of Art, from where she graduated in 2017. Knitting remained at the centre of her practice throughout this time. â??I think what attracts me most to it is both keeping my hands busy but then also the magic behind mixing my thought with a simple line of yarn and sculpting it into something fun and wearable,â?• JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir observes.



A second-hand sweater in a series made overs with knits, cutting, embroidery and more.

Working within the realms of textile and fashion naturally pushed her to think about the way her work responds to the human body, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways. â??I tend to think very practically and literally and very soon in my work it started to show a clear connection with the human body,â?• she says, adding, â??Since I was working with clothes that are made for human bodies it was quite a simple theme to turn them into human-like creatures that also respond with the movement of the body wearing them.â?• Since graduating, JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir has been showcasing her one-off knitted garments in both art and design related contexts around the world, including The Smithsonian Design Museum, the Textile Art Centre in New York and Reykjavik Art Museum.

Sustainability has become a central theme in JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttirâ??s practice, fuelled by an increasing feeling of discontent with the wasteful nature of the fashion and textile industries. â??In the past few years, Iâ??ve mostly been working with sweaters from textile gatherings or second-hand stores,â?• she explains. â??In my studies I deep-dived into finding knowledge on how the textile industry has been growing in a very toxic way.â?• Learning more about the harmful effects of fabric production nearly pushed her completely out of the fashion world.



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Image by Studio FrÃ¦

But instead, she chose to think about how to work with what was already out there in existence. Given her long-standing interest in knitting, it seems logical that she would look to old sweaters, and the ways they could be entirely reinvented through playful acts of intervention. â??Instead of giving up, which definitely was something that almost happened,â?• she says, â??I figured out a way to prolong the life of the sweaters people have been getting rid of. It also grew in my master project in art education when I worked on creating a fun approachable workshop sharing visible mending techniques suitable for beginners and also experienced crafts people.â?•

Like many artists and designers, the experience of lockdown had a marked influence on JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttir, leading to a surprising creative burst, as Yr explains, â??I was stuck, like most other people, at home and had to put all upcoming plans on hold. Shortly after everything closed down, I was supposed to launch a line of upcycled sweaters at DesignMarch (Icelandâ??s design festival) in Reykjavik. Since everything was already made for that show, I used the time to experiment with something new.â?• What she came up during this enforced isolation was a series of knitted, boundary-pushing facemasks, featuring protruding mouths, tongues, teeth and lips, that could be read as provocative, reactionary statements about the repressive state in which we were forced to live. â??The facemasks were a new reality,â?• she notes, â??and inspired by this new necessity I made some knitted masks, just for fun! They were not meant to be practical, more just like sketches for future ideas, but then they became surprisingly popular and are now all spread out in different museum collections.â?•



Pizza Time with FlÃ©tta and Ã•rÃºrarÃ. Photo: Sunna Ben

In recent months, JÃ³hannsdÃ³ttirâ??s schedule is busier than ever as she works towards a series of two major projects. â??First,â?• says Yr, â??Iâ??m opening my solo exhibition Presence at The Museum for Design and Applied Arts in Iceland, curated by Studio FrÃ¦. The exhibition is based on experiments with various textile methods bringing stronger presence and value to unsalable sweaters from textile recycling centres. In harmony of my former work the sweaters are mended in a playful and humorous way lighting up the everydayâ?•

Coming up next, is a surprising collaboration between Yrurari and Studio FlÃ©tta that merges knitting with sustainability and the pleasures of food. Yr explains, â??We recently purchased a needle felting machine for upcycling Icelandic wool leftovers. In May we will show the machine at work in an event called *Pizza Time* with FlÃ©tta and Ã•rÃºrarÃ where guests of DesignMarch can order felted wool pizzas from a menu, all made out of 100% wool leftovers!â?•

CATEGORY

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2. WOMEN IN ART

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Author
rosie-lesso