

# The domestic craft of knitting

Sociology



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Born in 1923 in Fresno, Phillips began as a traditional knitter in her childhood. But after high school, she got into studying design and then learned to weave under the guidance of Marianne Strengell and Lola Saarinen at the Cranbrook Academy of Art situated in Michigan. Phillips followed that up with a stint as a weaver under designer Dorothy Liebes in San Francisco, which helped her discover her own potential as a textile designer.

Her renown as a textile artist grew as she opened her studio in Fresno, and she had the privilege of working on the textiles for the much-renowned Arizona home of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Phillips eventually finished her graduation by the year 1960, and it took her another three years to do a master's in fine arts, specializing in innovative textiles.

But the turning point in her career came from the suggestion of a famous fabric designer and friend Jack Lenor Larsen, who urged her towards artistic expression through knitting. Phillips took up her old hobby once more, but this time she had qualifications in fine arts and innovative textiles, and her perspective had evolved from following pre-existing knitting patterns towards contemporary expression.

Phillips broke all knitting conventions in order to express herself, using unconventional materials for knittings like paper tape, metal wire, linen, and silk. She created huge hangings with ample negative spaces, diaphanous and transparent areas, and an ability to dramatically enhance light effects. This was improvisational art, which could only be used for display but nothing else, as opposed to traditional knitting which always has a utility article insight like a garment or piece of furnishing.

She took her inspirations from all around her, whether it was a lattice grill

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design or another work of art like the drawings of Paul Klee, the creations of Wassily Kandinsky, or the architecture of Antonio Gaudi. She once said: " The works of Paul Klee never fail to give me new ideas. Many of his compositions are harmonious lattices of verticals and horizontals, linear qualities that are so inherent to knitting."

Not many women identified with Phillips' sense of knitting aesthetics, but she was responsible for almost single-handedly raising the craft of knitting into a refined art form. Her work won critical acclaim, and museums around the world clamored to acquire her work. Phillips' knit arts are today on display as part of permanent collections in almost two hundred museums around the world, including the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D. C., The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh, to name but a few.

Phillips continued to create masterpieces of art throughout her career and was awarded a fellowship of the American Craft Council in recognition of her merit. She had also written five books related to knitting and macrame, which all talk about the ability of these crafts to rise to the level of a refined art form. Some of her titles are " Creative Knitting: A New Art Form", " Knitting Counterpanes: Traditional Coverlet Patterns for Contemporary Knitters", and " Step-by-Step Macram,", all of which work for the elevation of these crafts.

Her singular contribution to bringing the domestic craft of knitting into the arena of the art form has been recognized as one of the most remarkable and influential phenomena in the art scene. Her career has inspired a lot of followers to take up knitting as an art form.