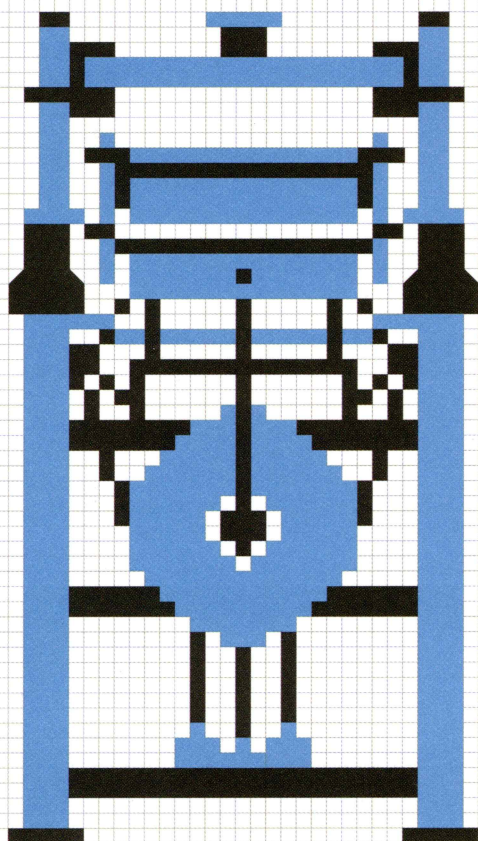


# KNITTING NOTTINGHAM





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## DON'T GET COMFORTABLE...

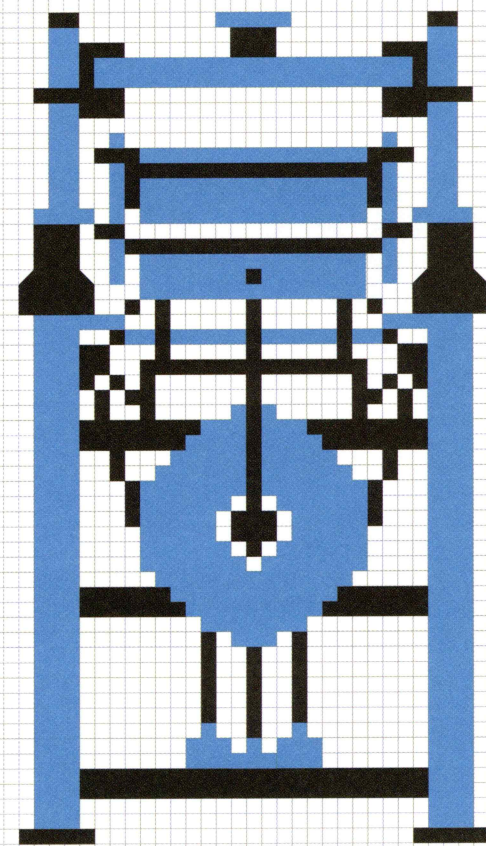
Knitting - it's typically warm, elastic, soft and fuzzy.

Popular notions of knitting seem to revolve around 'grannies' (and maybe the odd youthful 'yarn-bomber') making things 'cosy'; babies' feet in booties; heads and hands in woolly mittens and scarves.

Teapots, boiled eggs, smoothie bottle tops, even lamp-posts and railings get smothered in an attempt to make those harsh urban spaces feel that bit more friendly; to cushion vulnerable human bodies from the tough man-made world.

But this exhibition, staged to celebrate 170 years of education in knit at Nottingham Trent University's School of Art & Design, and the substantial role played by Nottingham in the growth of the knitting industry and knit technology, demonstrates that this cosy perception is far from the whole story.

From the primal comfort and nostalgic memories of blankets, toys, and home-spun hand-me downs to the hi-tech, futuristic, playful and conceptual, *Knitting Nottingham* provokes a serious question: what is knit and just how far can we stretch our ideas about it?

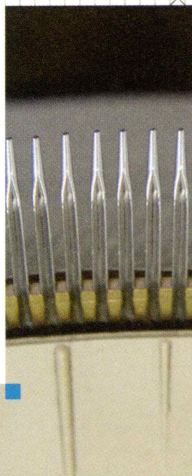
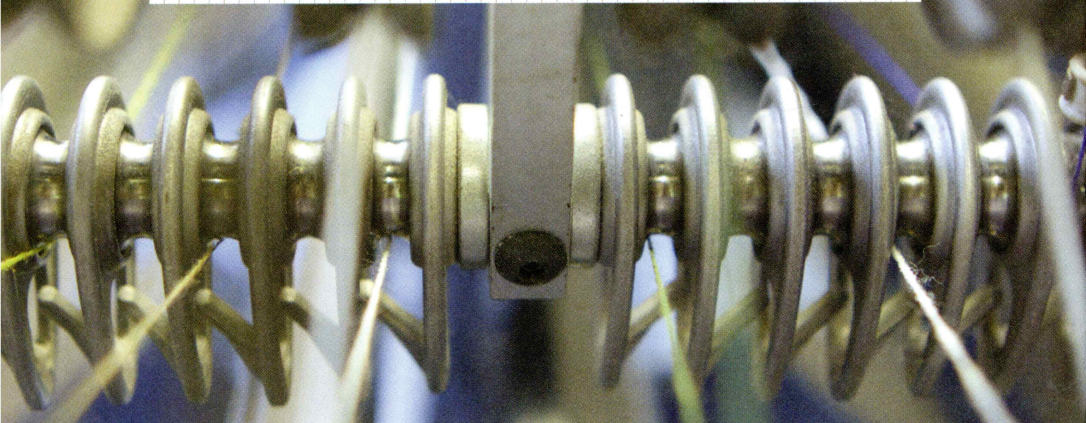


## COSY VS. COOL

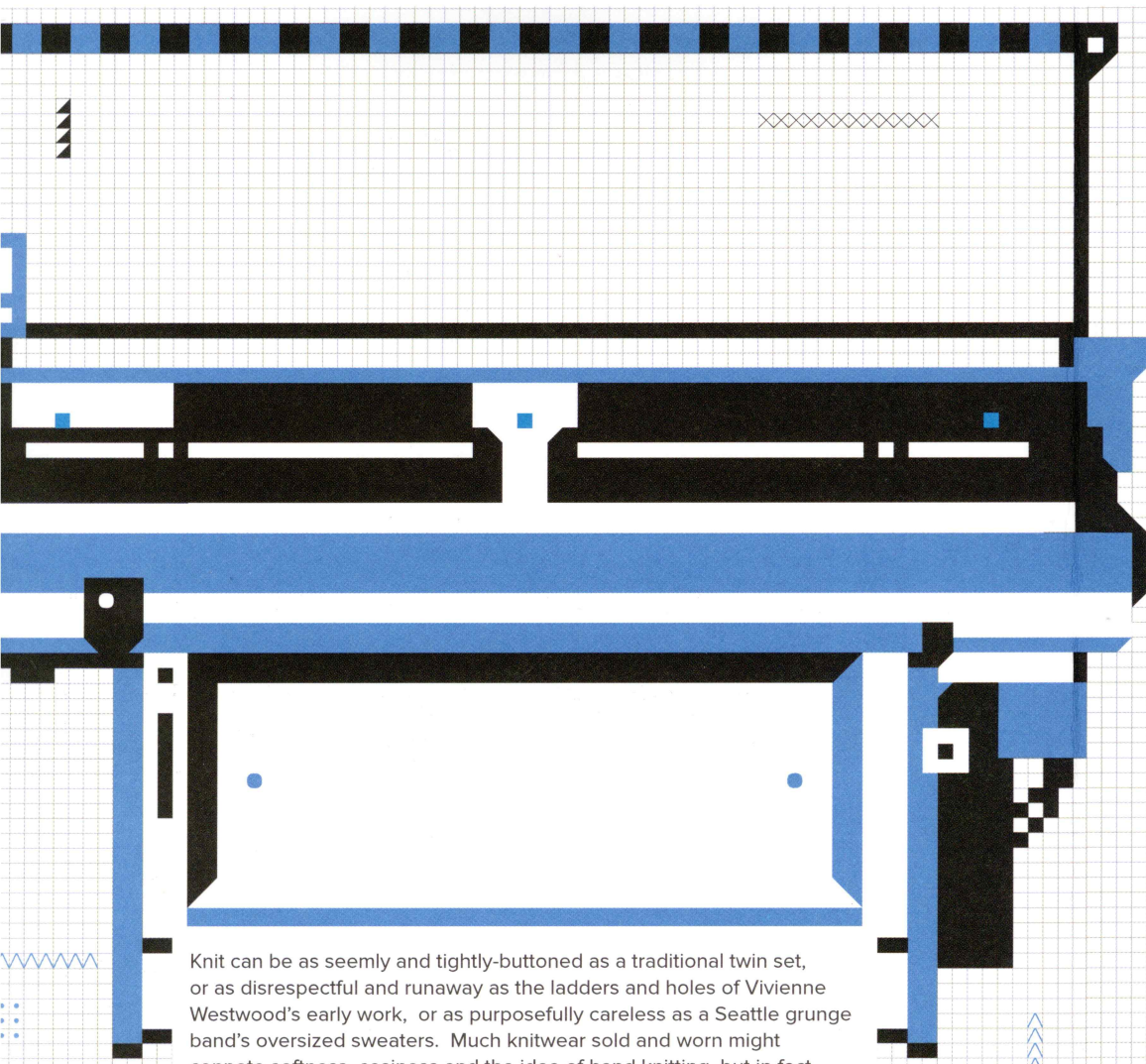
The popular notion of knitting places it firmly in a person's hands as a traditional handicraft. But of course knitting is not only done by hand. With machine knitting comes incredibly fine, dense textures which can be hard for non-knitters even to recognise as knitted.

Sexy sheer stockings, sleek bodycon catsuits and dresses and luxurious, fine draping, exude power and cool, a far cry from the chunky, fluffy stereotype.

Socially, knit has been shocking, democratising and liberating, playing a really significant role in upsetting the applecart of class and gender norms in the early twentieth century, when Chanel chose jersey as the fabric of modernist androgyny, taking the lowly material of under- and work-wear into genteel women's wear. Chanel's knitted separates made movement easy and comfortable, cheekily suggesting that the ideal woman of modernity might be more than a decorative, inert doll. As sports casuals then became a significant part of democratised modern fashion, machine knitwear became the wardrobe staple it is today.



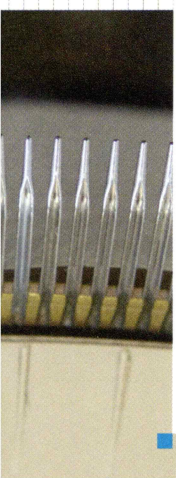




Knit can be as seemly and tightly-buttoned as a traditional twin set, or as disrespectful and runaway as the ladders and holes of Vivienne Westwood's early work, or as purposefully careless as a Seattle grunge band's oversized sweaters. Much knitwear sold and worn might connote softness, cosiness and the idea of hand knitting, but in fact most is machine-knitted.

Contrary to popular perceptions, the relationship between knitting and pushing the boundaries of technology is extremely close, going back to the beginnings of the industrial revolution, with the knitting frame a focal point of Luddite protest against technological 'progress' in the early nineteenth century.

The technology behind the industry and contemporary creative knitting practise and research is not always visible in the outcomes, but it is fundamental to knitting and a source of incredible innovation. Anyone who has ever knitted on a machine knows the almost unbelievable contrast between the solid, heavy logic of the machine and the springy, perhaps delicate, soft and joyful stuff that if you're lucky - and skilled - might emerge from underneath it.



## FUTURE TECH

Today, boundaries continue to be broken with technology and exciting new applications for knit in the fields of industrial textiles, performance wear, medicine and the military, allowing closer and more responsive relationships with human bodies.

In 2004, Will Hurley and Tilak Dias developed a three dimensionally knitted upper for the Nike 'Fly Knit' shoe concept. 'Scan to Knit' technology, also developed by Tilak Dias, enables precision fit and correct graduated pressures for compression garments. Other developments at NTU capitalise on the development of electronically functional SMART fibres and fabrics: the Plessey heart-rate monitor works via multiple electrodes in the fabric of a driving seat. The latest research is exploring the potential of knitted conductive fabrics for communication systems. All of these developments place knitting at the forefront of technical innovation unlimited by traditional concepts of fashion.

A new machine from Stoll, specialists in knitting machinery for over a hundred years, can produce fabrics with far more varied scale of pattern and at a much faster rate.

The idea of 'progress' in knit technology is also questioned by some of the work, which mixes up old and new methods and technologies: Laura McPherson and Mark Beecroft's work uses conventional knitting and 3D-printed elements to create innovation.

Other designers are looking for the outer reaches of possibility and functionality, with fibres made conductive and electroplated in the form of Frances Geesin's strangely unfamiliar knitted cup of tea, and Will Hurley and Cathy Challender's endless 'comforter' for the infinite bronchi of an imaginary troubled lung.

Nike 'Fly Knit' shoe development by Will Hurley and Tilak Dias.







## **FIT AND SCULPT**

Unlike wovens, knitted fabrics offer the unique potential to fit extremely close to the skin while remaining comfortable. The body's contours can be followed, defined and re-imagined, in the shaping of a shoulder, heel or fingers, for example.

Juliana Sissons' work draws on the cutlines used by plastic surgeons, getting ever-closer to the tension and coverage of human skin on bone.

Fully fashioned, cut, or digitally shaped, knit offers a great variety of texture and volume, lending it to sculptural forms which can go way beyond the norms of the human body in playful, alarming, or political ways.

Knit also readily assumes forms which invoke the natural world: waves, geological formations or the contour lines of relief maps.



## **EXPRESS AND CONNOTE**

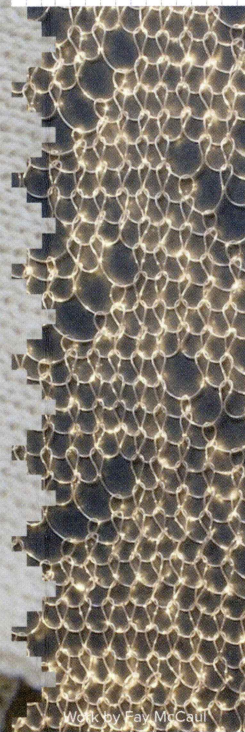
Other work in the exhibition shows off the exceptional scope for expression with colour and the opportunity to create imagery.

Illuminating knitted structures as exhibited by Fay McCaul, gives them the playful and other-worldly intensity of deep sea creatures, or the revelations of microscopy.

Combined with extremes of texture, colour and pattern, knit makes an ecstatic statement on the catwalk, as it does in the hands of Henrik Vibskov. The depth and intensity of fully saturated colour blocks, subtlety of colour and the chalky, broken, or seemingly 'pixelated' line all play with levels of expressive integrity. Pattern doesn't sit on the surface; it is integral to the structure of the fabric, giving a striking level of authenticity.

Bomi Han's work explicitly tells us it is 'honest', as the word literally emerges from a 'transparent' knitted dress (on second thought, that transparency is an ambiguous one. If it were honest, would it need to announce itself as such?). The broken line also challenges the integrity of graphic content, reminding us 'this wasn't drawn by hand', making a connection between 'craft' and the digital; it speaks of interference, noise and frustrated intent (either that, or we cannot help but marvel at the smooth illusion of a liquid, living line).

Ian McInnes' work explicitly explores the connections between drawing and knit, achieving painterly 'brush' strokes, gestural marks and the visceral in the interplay of fibres, construction and manipulation.





## CONCEPTUAL

Since the fibre arts movement of the 1970s, the scope for knit to be a medium for fine art and conceptual expression within fashion has gained ground. Within feminist art and contemporary craft practice, knit has been deployed at times to hoodwink (or at least disarm) the viewer. Sometimes they look out of place, question the place, or go on to reveal unhappy truths of gendered experience or to disrupt conventional thinking. In a gallery setting, those most tactile, domestic and intimate materials are elevated to the sacredness of objects that we must not touch.

Shelley Fox's boiled wool with embossed braille speaks in a muted and tactile way; her conceptual clothing speaks in the contexts of both art and fashion, as she practises both with, and outside of, the fashion collection calendar.

Françoise Dupré's work, on the other hand, engages communities with collaborative projects using simple spool or French knitting, to evoke the most 'everyday' – and 'feminine' – of materials and techniques, challenging the conventional media deemed suitable for minimalist art. Dupré values those familiar and domestic associations which some other artists and designers have been keen to challenge.

A designer whose work confounds categorisation in a hyperactive, liquid modern profusion of colour, form and texture is Emma Lundgren. In her work knit becomes easy, child-like and playful, but also complex, irregular, digital. Futuristic and folkish, she combines neons and forms with such open frames of reference as to suggest classical geometric pattern, luminous lichens, tribal adornment and acid club cultures.



Work by Françoise Dupré



Work by Emma Lundgren

Work by Amy Twigger-Holroyd

## SUSTAINABLE?

Knit, like every other field of material production and consumption, is facing up to the challenge of creating a more sustainable way of life.

The environmental impact and the social consequences of mass production in a market seemingly motivated by a need to consume and discard at an ever-increasing pace, demand our attention.

What are the special qualities of knitted goods that make people hang on to them?

What makes us feel the need to replace them?

How can designers and technologists of knit intervene, throw a beneficial spanner in the works?

Can we knit with less waste, and better fit?

Can we encourage people to 'keep and share' as does Amy Twigger-Holroyd?

Can we find a way to do that without asking everyone involved to stop reaching for 'something new'?



## KNITTING NOTTINGHAM 2014: EXHIBITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Nadira Adams  
Emily Bradshaw  
Cathy Challender  
Ting-Hsuan Chen  
Professor Tilak Dias  
Françoise Dupré  
Salome Egger  
Professor Shelley Fox  
Doctor Francis Geesin  
Doctor Martha Glazzard  
Bomi Han  
Professor Jessica Hemmings  
Will Hurley  
Tsao Chin Ke  
Rory Longdon

Chu-Tai Lu  
Emma Lundgren  
Fay McCaul  
Laura McPherson  
Ian McInnes  
Claire Anne O'Brien  
Emilia Pancheri  
Professor Emeritus Jane Rapley  
Thea Sanders  
Juliana Sissons  
Sir Paul Smith  
Rebecca Swann  
Jane Taylor  
Doctor Amy Twigger-Holroyd  
Henrik Vibskor

NTU Nottinghamshire Schools Knitwear Design Competition: winner Danielle Stradansky, and runners-up, Sophie Bowater and Patrycja Kucharska.

Sincere thanks to staff from the Fashion, Textiles and Knitwear departments for their support and enthusiasm in the realisation of this project; to technical support staff for their help in the planning and installation of the show; and to the following organisations for their support in the development of the exhibition:

BBC Radio Nottingham  
John Smedley Ltd  
Manakin.co.uk  
Nike UK  
Ruddington Framework Knitters Museum  
Shima Seiki Manufacturing Ltd  
H Stoll GmbH & Co.

Exhibition direction and curation: Ian McInnes and Cathy Challender.  
Knitting Nottingham project committee: Anne Adams, Maggie Burnett, Cathy Challender, Sarah Connor, Tom Godfrey, Will Hurley, Ian McInnes and Juliana Sissons.

Brochure concept and design: Jason Holroyd ([www.jasonholroyd.com](http://www.jasonholroyd.com))  
Copy: Doctor Vanessa Brown

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### NOTTINGHAM KNITTING

Since 1973, the Fashion Knitwear Design course at Nottingham Trent University has been preparing graduates creatively and technically for careers in knit.

Indeed the School of Art & Design, which opened 170 years ago, was campaigned for and funded partly by local industrialists of the knitwear industry who recognised the need for high quality education in the field.

A fine stocking was even buried in the foundations of the School, symbolic of this important connection and the special place of knitting in the culture and livelihood of Nottingham and the East Midlands more generally.

Rare and beautiful objects relating to this history are also on show here alongside Jane Rapley's oral history work with Nottingham factory owners, standing testament to the pioneering spirit of Nottingham's knitting industry and reminding us of innovative threads we might yet pick up again.

Outstanding examples of student work from recent graduates accompany the exhibition, which also includes the work of staff, masters and PhD candidates who continue to ask today's big questions of – and through – knitting.





## KNITTING NOTTINGHAM 170 YEARS ONWARDS...

*Knitting Nottingham* is a richly diverse collection of the futuristic and the retrospective; it challenges the popular perceptions of knitting, showcasing creative design, art, technology and research across a wide range of knit-inspired work from internationally renowned designers, artists and researchers.

As part of Nottingham Trent University's 170 Years of Art and Design event series, we celebrate the transformational role played by Nottingham in the growth of the knitting industry and embrace the future of knit technology.

**EXHIBITION OPEN: 6 – 28 NOVEMBER 2014**

Monday – Friday: 10 am - 5 pm

and Saturday 15 November 11 am - 3 pm (closed Sundays)

Location: Bonington Gallery, Dryden Street, Nottingham

[www.boningtongallery.co.uk](http://www.boningtongallery.co.uk)

All course information: [www.ntu.ac.uk/art](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/art)

170 years of Art and Design: [www.ntu170years.co.uk](http://www.ntu170years.co.uk)

