



Who's Who In Crochet

A focus of interest on those that have inspired crochet

Bonnie Meltzer

"Since the early 1960s, Bonnie Meltzer's unwavering commitment to using the element of crochet to link all her concepts together in sculptural work has brought crochet to a wider audience. Artist and activist, Bonnie has exhibited continually since 1969. She has an impressive resume of art education, exhibitions, teaching, collaborations and commissions. Her work is materials-oriented, and she will crochet anything that is long, skinny and flexible. She explores more crochet opportunities by crocheting around an object or over a core.



Bonnie's current work, *Tikkun Olam – Mending the Social Fabric* excites not only her, but also those who come together with her on this collaboration. She relates, 'I am soooooo excited, and so is everybody I tell. People become invested in the project while helping me make it in the studio; working on it is so healing.'

Bonnie elaborates, 'In 2018, I produced an exhibition shown at the Columbia Center for the Arts with the theme of the unraveling and unweaving of the social fabric. It was time to turn to making an artwork about mending. The Jewish principle of Tikkun Olam has guided my thoughts. It means *repair the shattering world*. Last spring, my proposal to create an exhibit called Tikkun Olam - Mending the Social Fabric to the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education was accepted. It will run from October 2020 through January 2021.'

TIKKUN OLAM gives visitors opportunities to use textile mending techniques to fix tears, holes, and rips in a symbolic social fabric made from a giant parachute. The interconnected structure and familiarity of fabrics make them a dynamic metaphor for society. *Moral Fiber*, *Social Fabric*, and *Threaded* are well rooted in language. Fiber is fundamental. Our intimacy with textiles — clothes, sheets, rugs — gives us a visceral grasp of the metaphors. The social fabric is unraveling and being unwoven.

In *Tikkun Olam*, Meltzer turns fiber metaphors back into actual crocheted, sewn and woven fabrics to exemplify their roots. Crocheted and embroidered text embellishes and clarifies the connections. When a fabric, actual or metaphorical, is compromised,



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even by one thread or law, it can unravel, fray or tear. This interactive installation is one that addresses the mending, reweaving and healing of our society.



Bonnie Meltzer's artmaking, activism, community building and gardening are linked together like crochet; one thread looping with itself creating an interlocking fabric. Throughout her career she has used fiber art techniques (mostly crocheted wire) and found objects to make social commentary. Environmental topics, especially coal, air quality and land use dominated her work in the last decade.

Since the 2016 election she has added social justice to the mix. Her work has been exhibited throughout the Northwest and beyond and is in private and public collections, most notably The National Science Foundation, University of Washington and the City of Portland. *The Fine Art of Crochet* features *Global Warming* and *Artistry in Fiber: Sculpture* features *Connected* on their covers.

OPB produced a video about Meltzer and her "No Coal" artwork for their 2013 "Voices of Coal" series and was in an early episode of Oregon Art Beat. She has an MFA from University of Washington.

A child of the sixties, her sense of social justice has translated to a strong political and social voice in her work. Found objects like computer parts and crocheted wire are the bases of her highly textured wall work. It seemed only natural to her that the two should marry in her work; she uses these ordinary objects as metaphors that reflect both social commentary and personal history. Calling herself a 'A Very Mixed Media Artist,' Bonnie's large collection of found objects has, in part, contributed to keeping stuff out of the landfill. She says, 'Each object comes with its own symbolism to be exploited.'

A dedicated gardener, her garden is alive with fruits and vegetables that sustain Bonnie and her husband throughout the year. Intertwined with her art, she believes that 'a garden keeps one aware of the cycles of life; growing is related to making art. The seed is planted, and the quality of the end-product depends on the steps the gardener or artist takes along the way. There is something seductive about both pulling a huge carrot out of the dirt and seeing an artwork finished.'

Meltzer has consistently been accepted into exhibitions that are not necessarily crochet or fiber oriented resulting in a vast collection of sculptural works. She believes crochet is an expressive medium, no different than painting, bronze or ceramics. As part of her



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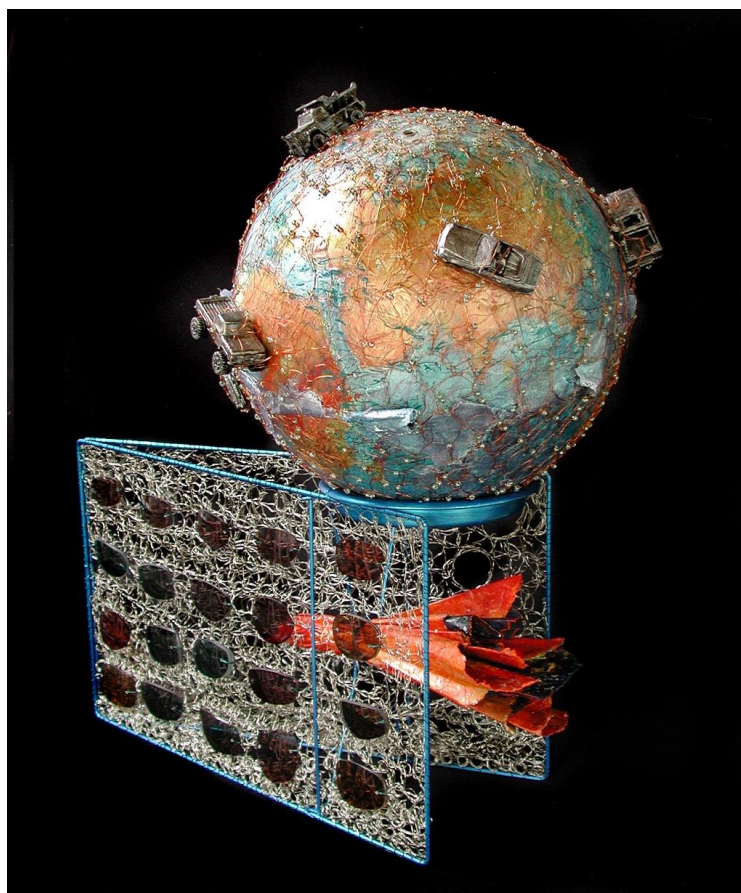
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crochet outreach she has offered free workshops in her studio in which the students help her make elements for her crocheted installations.

Two series that Bonnie worked on concurrently are globes and clothes. Built on specific subject matter that morphs into new points of view over the life of the series, globes are repainted and covered in a crocheted mesh then combined with other found objects that make comment on the state of the earth. The iconography of clothes pulls inspiration from judges' robes, farmer's overalls, blue work shirts, and school band uniforms.

Bequest, exhibited in 2005 in *Change on the America Farm* at Maryhill Museum, combined Bonnie's interest in food production with her artwork. In 2016, she offered the first of her participatory, 'crochet around a core' sculpture events. At the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, visitors to the museum worked on one giant, evolving sculpture.

If you are not able to experience *Tikkun Olam*, follow its progress at [mending.the.social.fabric](https://www.facebook.com/mending.the.social.fabric) on Facebook.



Images:

1-*Twins: Social Justice & Moral Fiber* (detail); 2018; 4 feet wide

2-*Social Fabric; crochet, mixed media, World War II supply parachute, found objects*; 2018

3-*Global Warming: found objects, crocheted wire, painted paper*; 24 x 24 x 15 inches.

Resources:

Blakley Kinsler, Gwen. *The Fine Art of Crochet*. Bloomington, Indiana: Author House; 2013.

<https://www.facebook.com/mending.the.social.fabric>

Oregon Jewish Museum & Center for Holocaust Education

Lee, Anne & Rooney, E. Ashley. *Artistry in Fiber, VOL 2: Sculpture*. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2017.



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