



## Knitted Wedding: Performance and Participation through Craft

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THE KNITTED WEDDING of Freddie Robins and Ben Coode-Adams was a fitting finale to the exhibition 'Ceremony'. The event was inspired by the fact that Pump House building gets used as a wedding venue, and despite its ironic humour—with knitted champagne bottles, sandwiches, candelabra, wedding cake and pom-pom confetti—the ceremony was surprisingly moving. There was a 'vicar' conducting the event with mock-serious readings celebrating both craft and ritual, and knitting 'facts' written by poet and broadcaster Ian McMillan, who weaves his stories around an invented history of the craft. The ceremony re-affirmed the marriage vows of the 'woollen bridegroom' and 'knitted bride', and at a time when weddings are often planned and managed in an increasingly corporate manner, the opportunity for light-hearted enactment was seized whole-heartedly by a diverse community united by the act of knit and purl.

The *Knitted Wedding* was staged by Cast Off, the brainchild of Rachael Matthews (originally with Amy Plant). For the last five years Cast Off has been a central part of the renewed interest in hand knitting, particularly through the staging of 'guerrilla knitting' events, such as knit-ins on the London Circle line tube. In contrast to the previous crafts revival of the late 1970s, this new wave has made knitting once again a social and participatory activity, referencing much earlier regional histories of communal living and working, where knitting was central, both socially and





Previous page:  
Procession of the bride with bridesmaids

This page:  
Knitted champagne and knitted sandwiches

Opposite:  
Knitted wedding cake



economically, and carried out at every opportunity—including walking from place to place and wherever people gathered. Later manifestations of the ubiquity of knitting could be found during the Second World War, when ‘knitting for the boys’ was a must for every woman at home.

Now, local groups have sprung up all over the UK, meeting in pubs, cafes and other venues. Knitting blogs abound and online communities have been forged, but these communities also exhibit the need to physically meet and knit in public to connect and participate, feeling somewhat subversive in the process. There is a new inclusive agenda—Cast Off is a self-styled ‘Knitting Club for Boys and Girls’—and although a predominantly female movement, the boys still show in reasonable force to bigger events. The movement has reached major art institutions keen to be part of the zeitgeist—recent knitting and craft events have been staged at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum and Tate Modern.

The concept of the *Knitted Wedding* struck a chord with an extraordinarily wide network of people—knitted objects for the ceremony and the outfits were sent from around the UK and beyond, binding all in the time-honoured expression of love through labour of the hands and heart. One of the key aspects of knitting to have survived the lean times has been the making of baby clothes. The *Knitted Wedding* seems to have tapped into this same vein of celebration and a ritual of love—with a good dash of humour special to Rachael Matthews. The wedding invitation included knitting patterns for bows and furbelows, sandwiches and cakes—literally everything was knitted. It was enough, though, to send in just a square that would be fashioned into the bride’s dress, complete with little tags of identification. All makers were individually acknowledged for their contributions in a slide show of images, and will secure their place in posterity in a planned permanent record. Craft skills were abundant, including a wonderful bouquet of knitted roses and other flowers carried by the bride. The same spirit of warmth and generosity as a real wedding pervaded, and guests also wore their knitted finery, with Rachael and her erstwhile assistant Annie Doi resplendent in their big stitch dresses, loosely knitted on large needles from shredded fabric or wool. They even knitted their shoes.