

# The Art of War

*Adrienne Sloane tunes in to world news, creating knitted works that reflect political conflicts and global crises.*

By Rebecca Klassen

**K**nitting without tears” may have been a goal for readers of Elizabeth Zimmerman’s treatise. But a few viewers of artist Adrienne Sloane’s knitted work have been so moved, they’ve cried.

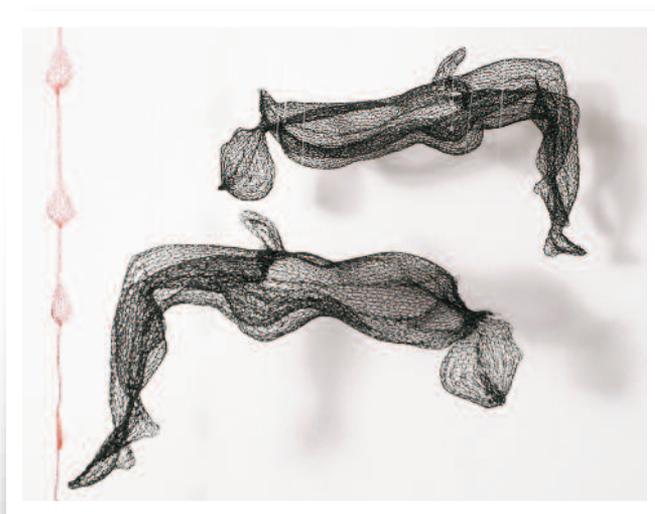
They were responding to an anti-war piece called *Fated Glory* (2008), an American flag whose red and white stripes run with slack bodies

knitted in linen. “When I can touch people that way, it’s very meaningful to me,” Sloane says regarding the viewers’ visceral reactions. It’s part of what she calls her NPR Series—artworks made while news from the public radio station played continually in her studio.

The series, which often draws upon potent symbols of human bodies or flags (the collective body), began in 2006 with *Cost of War*: knitted, flaccid male bodies in a hauntingly neutral linen, pinned to the wall in a horizontal gridded scheme. However, unlike some artists who’ve made anti-Iraq-war works that refer to specific tragic episodes or have paid tribute to individuals who’ve lost their lives, Sloane’s are an emotional response to anxious news chatter. “I’m channeling what’s going on out there,” she says. “If you were listening to the radio during the intensity of the Iraq war, it was all war, all the time. It was horrific.”

Her works-in-progress at the time of this writing continue in a hard-hitting vein. A dystopic vision of insects swarming around pallid pod forms, *2 Degrees Celsius* refers to the issue of climate change—specifically, the 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) maximum increase in global average temperature that international leaders targeted in 2009, lest the natural world go awry—and recent reports that we are on course to far exceed that limit.

*Face Off*, a cascade of facial profiles delineated in I-cord-covered wire, speaks to Congressional gridlocks including the recent fiscal cliff crisis. It’s a theme she also explored in *A House Divided* (2011), a flag whose stars have fallen and whose I-cord stripes are tied into knots. At the suggestion of a student—she frequently teaches classes on sculptural knitting, including at last year’s Vogue Knitting LIVE in Chicago—Sloane had an image of the work printed onto a postcard with a fiber metaphor-laden enjoiner on back. She then asked people to send it to their legislators, a project she calls “Lobby Congress with Art.”



Though known as a political artist—a reputation upheld by writing and presenting on the topic—Sloane is elusive around questions about the future and certain mechanics of her creative process. Not all of what she does is weighty and serious. Some are whimsical; others, explorations of shape, form or technical innovation. “These things evolve,” she’ll often say. “I don’t know how things are going to go.” With *Face Off*, for instance, “I had an idea about

something I wanted to do, or at least a technique that I wanted to employ, and it just evolved. I thought I was going to do X with it and I ended up doing Y. And then Y turns into Z, and it comes together. It’s interactive: It and I are having a conversation. Or, it’s having a conversation with its own development or something.” She prefers to stay nimble to situations that arise and to answer tugs of intuition.

Sloane, who is based in the Boston area, had clocked nearly a decade making lively and unusual machine-knitted hats for the Art to Wear and fine craft market, starting in the late 1980s. Then, in 1999, a fire ravaged her studio building. She lost many tools, supplies and hats. What she could rescue repaired to her home basement, where the items stayed

for the next five years. In the meantime, she took on leadership roles in arts nonprofits, including helping to set up a local arts center. Finally, “When I saw that my dining room was filling up with fiber, I thought, ‘Hmm, I see something’s going on here,’ and I got another studio.”

One thing was certain: Knitting wouldn’t be as it was before. In 2004, using her salvaged cotton yarns, she made a knitted cake (very hatlike in its basis, she admits) and called it *Unfinished Business*. And, marking a new-found wedding of the personal with the political in her work, the day it was finished

coincided with the legalization of gay marriage in her state. “When I was working with the hats, it was like I had blinders on,” says Sloane. “I was doing my own thing. I wasn’t looking up or looking around; I wasn’t teaching. I wasn’t particularly involved in the fiber community. My whole approach has changed dramatically.”

“I’m not out holding signs on the corner as an artist, but I’m making statements. It’s more meaningful to me when it’s not just pretty,” she says. “I really enjoyed making hats—a lot of fun and color and playfulness, and people loved them. But to be able to move somebody to tears, that’s a whole different level of impressing somebody.” To view more of the artist’s work, visit [www.adriennesloane.com](http://www.adriennesloane.com).

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***Unfinished Business* (2004), knit with yarn rescued from a studio fire.**



Top row, from left: *2 Degrees Celsius* (2013; work in progress), cotton and wire; *A House Divided* (2011), cotton. Middle: *Truth to Power* (2007), wire (see detail on opposite page). Bottom row, from left: *Fated Glory* (2008), linen (shown in detail and full size); *Face Off* (2013; work in progress), cotton, wire.

