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An Interview with the Tempestry Project

Sparrow Potter

The Tempestry project centers around creating a visual representation of climate change. Crocheters, knitters, and all other crafters come together to create a quilt with a color-coded version of temperature over the years. Each Wednesday, you can find this dedicated group of crafters showing up with balls of yarn. It's a very small-knit (no pun intended) atmosphere. Those who are veterans teach the newer ones, and each kit comes with instructions. Conversation is very companionable. Some people are working on the project, others seem to be working on their own side projects. The yarn has been specifically chosen for SUNY Geneseo by partnering with a local yarn shop called Fuzzy Bunny. The Tempestry Project wasn't founded at SUNY Geneseo, but the college has taken up its importance.

What is the Tempestry Project all about?

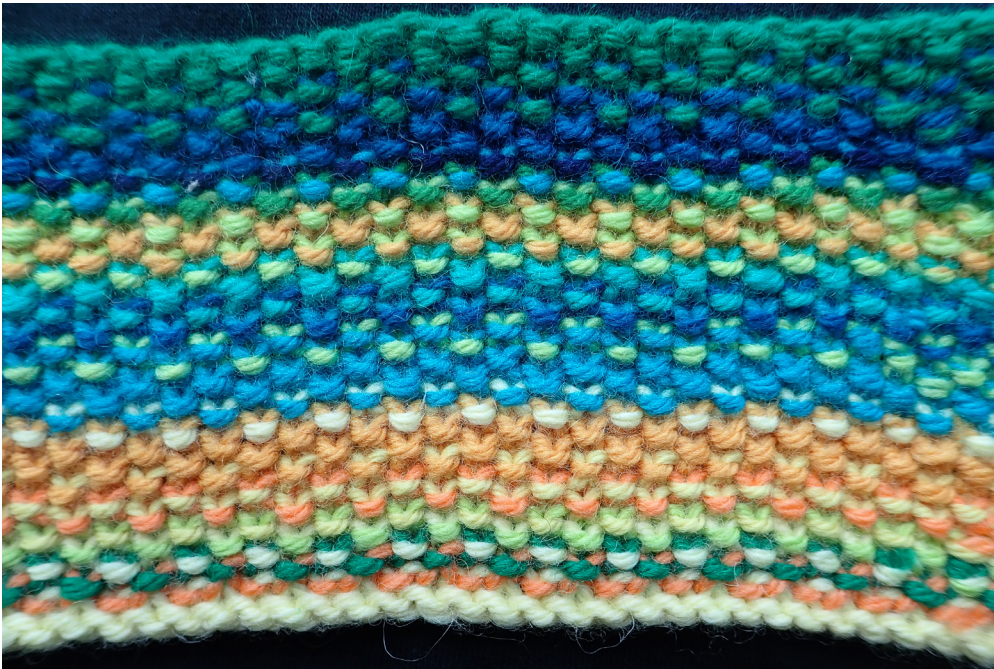
Greta Hermann: The Tempestry Project, in our case, is about using fiber arts to show temperature changes in Geneseo due to climate change, because it is a little bit easier for some people to visualize the changes in color than in data.

Allison Wing: The project encapsulates everything that surrounds my education. I'm a geology major so there's a lot of focus on how climate has changed throughout the entire history of the Earth and then in comparison to how human interaction with the environment is. Being able to physically put it up on the wall, have people see it, is a really important visual aspect of the project, and that's where its power comes from.

What does the Tempestry Project do differently than other climate change projects?

Jackson Kelly: It is very hands-on and so it allows us to be creative and use a different part of our brains. Not everyone is specifically a graphical learner. Even if you learn better with lectures, looking at graphs and data points, that's involved in this project as well. Or if you can just look at something and go, "okay wow, now that I can picture it in front of me, it's a whole lot different than what people have just been saying to me," or if you learn well by doing, it also includes the tactile approach where you can make something and actually learn through your actions.

Kaylee Rains: It's easier to understand. When it's laid out in this way, whether it be crochet or knitting or some other project, it's a really cool way of showing its difference. When you look at a bar graph or read a research paper, that can get boring and repetitive,



Each stitch in this piece represents the highest temperature of a day. Most Tempestry participants chose a particular month and year to knit, crochet, or quilt.

and use a lot of terms that you might not understand. It's easier to understand this, and by crafting it by yourself, that also helps you understand it better.

Macy Benz: I think that line graphs are boring, [*laughter*] because they're created by something else. With this, you can group more people in and make it more fun, even though it's not a fun topic. It makes it at least a little bit more lighthearted.

Sparrow Potter: I like the part about the line graph not really being man made. It's more being made by a computer, whereas here there's a bunch of people doing it together.

Macy: And you think about it, and we talk about it. That's really important.

Why do you craft?

Greta: I'm an obsessive fidgeter of a person, and pick my skin, and I'm just absolutely terrible with anxious ticks, so for me it's a great mental distraction when I'm supposed to be doing other things. That and I get bored, so it's fun to learn new things and have, like, ten different crafts to jump between when the inspiration strikes.

Sparrow: I do that too with embroidering and I've noticed that it doesn't involve all of your brain. You can use half of it for that while you focus on another thing.

Greta: Yeah, I do in lecture classes too—not ones you have to take good notes in, but when you're talking it's just a nice thing to keep from picking.

Macy: I always love it because I always feel so welcome. There's a lot of people like me. It's really nice. In a good way, not much has changed. We're looking to do more things. Hopefully we'll be a club soon, but the whole idea of why we've started has carried through, and I can see that every time I walk into the room. We're making good strides.

I'm an early childhood education major, so I really like teaching, and because I'm in this club, I hope that I can reach out to more people. I mean, I'm not perfect at crochet or knitting at all, but I want to help more people get started. I want to do that.

Sparrow: This is a great example of what children can comprehend instead of making them look at a line graph.

Macy: Exactly!

Has anything changed from last year to this year?

Jackson: Well, we're now getting closer to the Gallery, so we are very much preparing for that, as well as getting ready to set up the club. So we're now getting everything consolidated to make an eboard, but we're also close to completing the Tempestry project as a whole. We can actually take a look at some of the data and pieces that we've created and see everybody's own interpretation of the data. It will never end, because...

Sparrow: Time keeps going.

Jackson: Time keeps going, temperature always changes. But for us, we are coming to close with our portion of the project. We had a lot of people doing 2021 as a year, specifically in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Geneseo. Then we had other people doing other years, like the year that CIT was founded, so we can actually take a look at how big of a difference it is based on what colors are used. Primarily in the months, so if September was once all green and now it's all red, there's a big difference there.

What's the plan for the future?

Greta: Yes, this project is ending because it was for the 150th anniversary. As for the club... I graduate in December, so I have not... Well, I've thought about the direction it's gonna go in since I'm gonna be pretty active in starting it, but I won't be around. When I was a freshman here, pre-COVID, there was a crochet club, and I think that space is missing on campus for a lot of people. And there's a lot of interest in it, so I'm hopeful that it'll help to fill that. I think the craftivism lens is cool. I know there's a lot of charity groups, angel blankets, premie hats, that I'm sure could use the support, so hopefully they can get into that. But again, I won't be around to see that. Set some bones, find some resources, and then pass it off.



Allison: I'm honestly really excited to dip my toes into some new kinds of crafts. Obviously crafts around the world are being used for different things. I think in Argentina they're using quilting as a method of craftivism. Thinking of different ways these crafts that we've grown up around can be shifted into something that's tangible and has visual power has me really excited.

What drew people to this club?

Allison: A lot of it has been based on the craft so far. I know most of us did the same year of data last year. I felt like there could have been more of a focus on different years but that's my geology thing wanting to say, "go back as far as possible!" A lot of people had a little bit of history with it or were like, fresh off and were introduced by people who were already in it. It's definitely exciting to see people learn. I started crocheting a little bit before the club came up as a way to relieve stress, and it's definitely taken a turn to more excitement for the tangibility of the project. Before it was just making one long stretch of practicing stitches and I wasn't actually making anything. Now it feels like I can actually finish projects.

Kaylee: I came to the very first meeting before it was even a club-type thing, with Jackson and Macy. We were just going because we were like, "oh yay! Crocheting and knitting, that'd be really fun." Then it turned into something bigger.

Greta: I think that people have had a lot of different goals. A big part of crafting is also community, so I think a lot of people are coming because they get told about it

by their friends, and a lot of people are like, “my friend mentioned this, so I came, my friend brought me.” A lot of people do want to learn the craft. I don’t know how many people are coming from the activism temperature data goal. But I think it’s definitely an interesting one and I think that maybe through doing this, people will have more of an appreciation for it.

Sparrow: Especially with the gallery coming. It will give a chance for more people to see it.

Jackson: Originally it was people coming because they didn’t have a place to crochet or knit on campus. There wasn’t a club for that. Others were coming from science departments because they wanted to learn the crafts but they were also very interested in climate change. So there was an even balance but it’s become more of a merge. If it was black and white before, now it’s more of a gray.