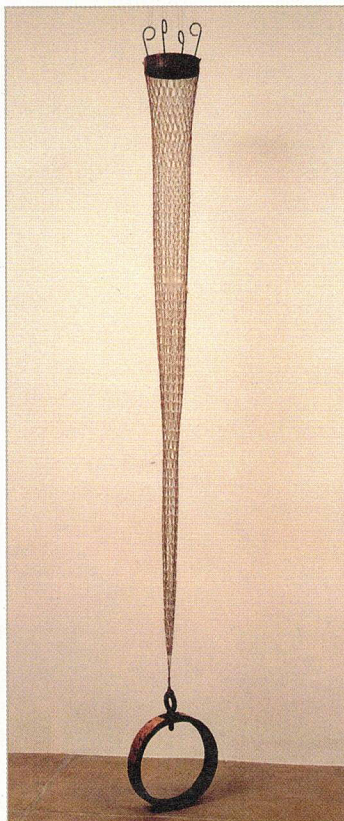


# TRACY KRUMM: Forging Crochet

It isn't often that you find a piece of delicate, crocheted netting that holds its own along side a heavy forged-metal structure, but it is precisely the incongruity of these items and the materials they're made from that Tracy Krumm embraces in her sculpture. In her hands, lace and metal find a lyrical balance. "People buy my work for what it is: the aesthetic combination of heavy metal and crochet, and the innovative use of materials. Some of my sculptures are huge, and often viewers don't even see that it is crochet."

Asked what inspires her, Krumm answers that nature has a lot to do with the objects she creates. She's an avid mountain climber who has long loved plants and botany. Yet Krumm's work draws on more than organic forms for its content; it addresses social issues as well, particularly how we live in the world. "For me, the creative process gathers remnants of time, culture, personal history, and my physical environment. My pieces address issues of transformation and subversion, both personal and social. I combine crochet, which is not a typical sculptural medium, with metal, which is. By using crochet this way, I transform it; I take it out of the world of handiwork and into the world of art. Crochet is a craft that is considered feminine, and I defeminize it by incorporating a masculine element, a piece of forged metal created in the craft of blacksmithing, one that is considered masculine. All parts of my work are important. The crochet supports the metal, and the final sculpture is genderless."

People frequently ask Krumm why she doesn't buy panels of netting to use in place of the crocheted fabrics that take her hours to finish. But for this artist, the process of crochet, of making a piece stitch-by-stitch, also contributes to the meaning of what she does. She meditates as she works. "I am not thinking about anything else as I crochet. I can go into a deeper level of creative energy and be completely absorbed in my task. As I work, I engage in an inner dialogue about gender-related activity, the transcendental nature of repetition, and how the materials I use and the forms I create simultaneously inform and reflect the current work."



All photos this page James Hart



Clockwise from left: Long Tapered Bag (108" × 10" × 10"), Wall Curtain: Saw Blade (104" × 78" × 10"), Tapered Bag with Big Hooks (33" × 14" × 6").

Krumm works on five or six pieces at a time, crocheting fabrics and finding ways to incorporate metal objects that she's found or forged herself. Her finished sculptures rarely turn out the way she originally imagined. Instead, she says, "They evolve from the process, from the activity of crocheting. I may have several ideas for what I'm going to make when I get started. As I work, one stitch at a time, I'm able to weed out the bad ideas. If the work didn't evolve from the process, I wouldn't be interested in making it."

Krumm learned to crochet from her grandmothers at age six. "I was fascinated that I could make things from yarn and a simple hook. When I was seven, I learned to read patterns in an afternoon school program and I

(continued on page 12)



(continued from page 8) **TRACY KRUMM**

made a granny-square vest. My teacher would sell us yarn on the porch of her house. I would save my allowance and walk there to buy yarn. Crochet was just a natural activity for me.”

After finishing an MFA in visual arts at Vermont College, Krumm explored the creative possibilities of papermaking and weaving, but eventually moved away from creating on a flat surface to work on sculpture. “At one point, I found myself contemplating what to do with a spool of wire I had on hand. Crochet hooks were among the many tools in my studio and the idea of crocheting with wire just popped into my head. I went back fifteen years to what I had learned about crochet and started again.”

Krumm crochets with very fine wire—26- to 30-gauge—in nickel, silver, copper, brass, and bronze. When the piece is completed, she applies chemicals to create a surface patina, then coats the final piece with a resin that stiffens the fabric and helps it to hold its structure.

Krumm can knit and weave, but it’s crochet that she chooses to use for her work. “Crochet is elemental. You work with one hook on one stitch at a time. The simplicity of crochet allows me great flexibility and freedom. I may not crochet forever, but for now I thoroughly enjoy the whole meditative process of one stitch at a time. I also enjoy having complete control over the construction of my work.”

Krumm traveled to Lodz, Poland, in May 2004, as an invited artist to the 11th International Triennial at the Central Museum of Textiles. The warmth in Tracy’s voice is audible as she explains, “Crochet is a common language that unites people at a very basic level. The fact that my work is made, in part, with crochet makes it accessible to people who don’t relate to the art world.”

—Gwen Blakley Kinsler

**For more information on Krumm’s work, exhibit schedules, and workshops, visit her website at [www.tracykrumm.com](http://www.tracykrumm.com).**

Gwen Blakley Kinsler is founder of the Crochet Guild of America.