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Stormy Weather: Textile Art, Water and Climate Emergency

Fionna Barber & Jools Gilson

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Stormy Weather: Textile Art, Water and Climate Emergency

Abstract

This paper entwines the voices of art historian Dr. Fionna Barber and Artist Scholar Prof. Jools Gilson to propose the critical importance of textile art in contemporary debates about the climate emergency. Framed in collaborative counterpoint to previous work on femininity and water (notably Neimanis 2012, 2017), this discussion focuses on three textile-based projects through two meteorological exhibitions; *Mapping Climate Change: The Knitting Map* & *The Tempestry Project* at the Berman Museum of Art in Pennsylvannia, US and *Strange Attractors* at Tate St. Ives, UK, both 2021. The paper proposes *The Knitting Map* as a way of thinking about textiles and climate, as well as an artwork. It visits Cork City, the Irish bog, and Cornwall, traversing tropes of landscape, weather and national identity as it tangles textiles, analysis, and story.

Keywords: knitting; community; hydrofeminism; climate emergency

FIONNA BARBER

Dr Fionna Barber is Reader in Art History at Manchester School of Art. In addition to current research interests around artists' responses to climate emergency, she has also published extensively on Irish art, with a particular focus on issues of female embodiment and resistance from the early twentieth century to the present day.
f.barber@mmu.ac.uk

JOOLS GILSON

Prof. Jools Gilson is Professor of Creative Practice at University College Cork. Her work as an artist scholar spans the disciplines of dance, theater, creative writing and visual art. She was a 2021 Irish Fulbright Scholar at the University of Colorado Boulder and publishes performative writing related to female embodiment and place.

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Stormy Weather: Textile Art, Water and Climate Emergency

Introduction

This paper focuses on three textile-based projects that have a particular significance in these times of climate crisis. This is especially relevant to this special issue focused on Textiles and Place. Climate change is irrevocably bound up with a sense of place and location, as shifting and unpredictable weather conditions continue to make parts of our planet uninhabitable for both humans and non-humans alike. Heat and rain coupled with the rising of the oceans are reconfiguring our sense of place, as land—homeland for many—becomes lost forever, and what remains becomes increasingly contested on different levels. Indeed, the materiality of water as an active agent in the effects of climate change has remained close to the surface of our thinking. We are aware of some of the ways in which textile and water can be seen as irrevocably bound up together. Notably, the political imperative of addressing the human and environmental consequences of the devastating effects of textile production on water systems across the globe needs to be foregrounded. And the human cost involved is also inescapably present in one of the most stunning works in the 2021 British Textile Biennale, Lubaina Himid's *Lost Threads* installation at the Great Barn in Gawthorpe Hall,[1] that focuses on the significance of water, with oceans and rivers transporting enslaved people or migrant workers in addition to raw materials and finished commodities. Yet the meanings of water can never be fully contained. In what we discuss here water takes on a different significance, a reservoir of cultural and metaphorical connections that flow between and within three textile-based installations.

In the face of an uncertain future, the stitching together of meaning, the weaving of interconnections of empathy, affect and resistance becomes even more important. This informs our selection of projects, which embody, albeit in very different ways, how the processes and resonances of textile can provide ways of engaging with the unthinkable. They are associated with different locations: *The Knitting Map*, first shown in Cork in 2005; *The Tempestry Project*, dating from 2017 onwards and derived from a range of places, initially across the United States; and finally, a much more recent gallery exhibition, *Strange Attractors*, by the South Korean artist Haegue Yang, shown at Tate St Ives 2020-2021.

There is a growing body of literature around climate breakdown and art practice that reflects the expanding range of exhibitions and projects that address this issue. One of the most recent additions, and to date the most comprehensive, is the *Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture and Climate Change* (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021). Yet despite its exhaustive coverage of art projects clustered around a range of key

themes, the focus is predominantly on digital rather than more manual or craft-based practices, which are also absent from most other writing around this pressing issue. Our paper, and its focus on work where textiles play a central role, begins to address this gap, and to explore the possibilities that open up as a result. Our reading of these three textile-based projects therefore explores some ways of engaging creatively with the circumstances of a planetary future that is no longer predictable, just as they might also suggest the possibility of what Demos, Scott, and Banerjee (2021, 1) envisage as "new worlds of imagination."

In its uncontained and uncontainable nature, climate crisis disrupts our sense of boundaries and expectation, and as such we are interested in the necessity for new collaborative and hybrid forms that also break down boundaries in art or craft practice. Our examples give three models: *The Tempestry Project*, with a primarily community focus; *The Knitting Map*, combining both art & community concerns; and finally, the gallery project *Strange Attractors*. All of these forge kinship between the making of textiles and meteorological science to produce hybrid results, albeit in different ways. *The Tempestry Project* and *The Knitting Map* are both based on predictive meteorology and empirical observation of known conditions. *Strange Attractors*, by comparison, relates more to a model of meteorological uncertainty, as climate conditions continue to unravel.

Hand crafting with textiles often evokes and actualizes touch and intimacy. The holding and making of something held directly with the hands, close to the body has a particular rhythm and resonance of care and, as we will argue here, a connection to public and private gestures of repair. In *The Knitting Map* and *The Tempestry Project*, these practices tangle the ordinary and domestic with the planetary, as they combine hand knitting/crochet with weather data in ways that implicate makers and viewers in affective activist acts of visualizing the weather and weather changes in our time of climate emergency. We want to suggest that such implication is an activist act of repair in a time of growing damage, not in ways which suggest an actual repair of the damage caused by climate change, but a repair to the terror of feeling that we can do nothing. Such affective and material modeling of repair also enables the possibility of broader reparative processes.

The Knitting Map and the Tempestry Project

The large-scale textile work *The Knitting Map* (Figure 1) was exhibited at the Berman Museum of Art, Pennsylvania US, June – November 2021, as part of *Mapping Climate Change: The Knitting Map and The Tempestry Project*, supported by the Coby Foundation and Culture Ireland. The work had previously been shown at The Glucksman, Cork, Ireland (2015), under the title *The Knitting Map: Art, Community and Controversy 2005 – 2015*; in the Ganser Gallery, Lancaster PA (2007); at the Millennium Hall, Cork (2006) and during the year of its making in St. Luke's Church, Cork City (2005).

The Knitting Map is an abstract cartography documenting a year in the life of Cork City. This large-scale textile installation by the British/Irish artists Jools Gilson and Richard Povall was made collaboratively with a community of mostly older, working-class women, during Cork's year as European Capital of Culture in 2005. A weather station and surveillance technologies were programmed to generate complexity of stitch, which was linked to the busyness of the city, and the color of yarn was linked with the weather. The project involved more than 2000 people and was hand knitted every day for a year.

The Tempestry Project (Figure 2) produces "'tempestry'" kits, exhibitions and collaborations in the United States and internationally. Tempestries are produced by one person knitting or crocheting a single row in a specified color representing the high temperature of a particular place for each day for a year. Importantly they offer contemporary as well as historic climate data/tempestries.

Framed together under the umbrella title, *Mapping Climate Change*, *The Knitting Map* and *The Tempestry Project* echo each other's fluid meanings as they trouble climate, place and textiles in counterpoint and synchronicity. For *The Knitting Map*, weather data was gathered specifically for the project every day in 2005 through a weather station which documented multiple streams of data including temperature, wind speed and precipitation. This information was combined by Richard Povall and mapped onto a palette of muted colors in tones of creams, greens and blues/mauves. The resultant textile clearly documents, for example, the rain and floods of that autumn in a swathe of purples and blues. For *The Tempestry Project*, weather data is sourced from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—specifically the highest mean temperature for one day in one place—and yarn colors are standardized;

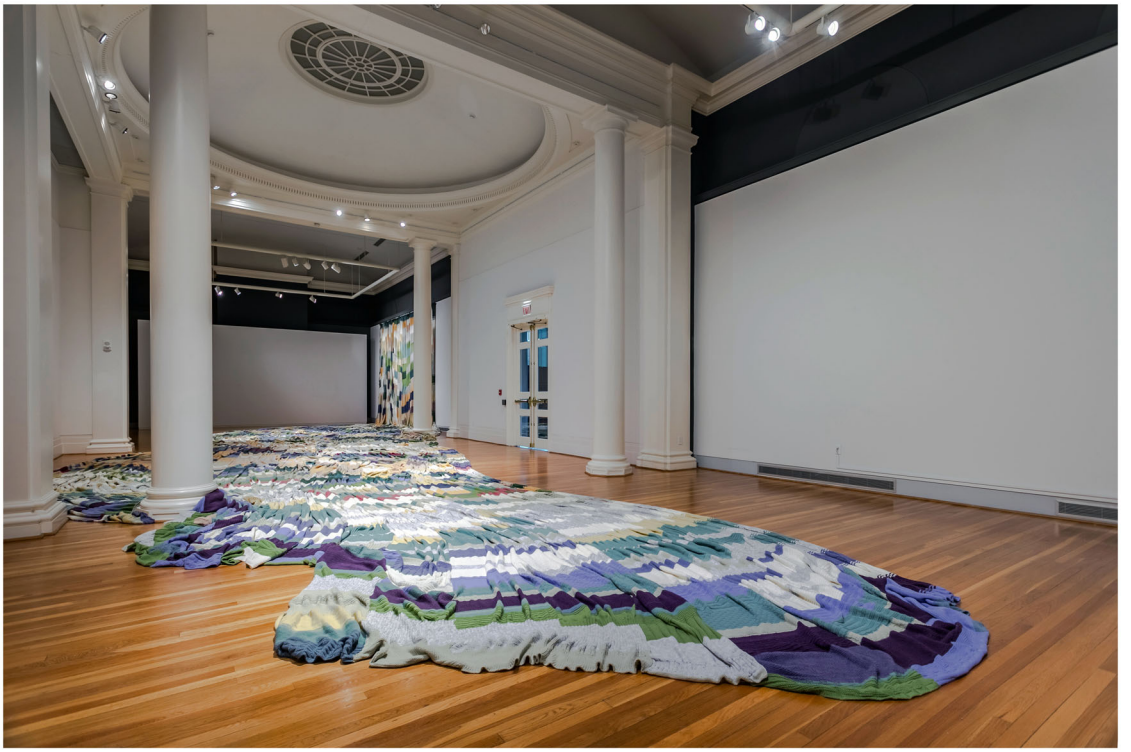

Figure 1
Jools Gilson & Richard Povall, "The Knitting Map" as part of *Mapping Climate Change: The Knitting Map and The Tempestry Project*, Berman Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, US, 11 June – 30 November, 2021, photo credit, Sarah R. Bloom.

generally greens/blues for cooler temperatures and oranges/reds for warmer.

Whilst *The Knitting Map* was made as a durational textile installation with a large community of knitters in one city for one year in Ireland, *The Tempestry Project* has provided kits for multiple years and places, including every state in the US as well as international contexts. The kits are used in schools and science education, they hang in Government offices as well as galleries, and the project directors have collaborated with national organizations, including the National Parks Service. Primarily framed as climate activism through yarn, *The Tempestry Project* has been exhibited in galleries, but the work also exceeds this framing in ways that speak powerfully to an emergent strategy for resisting easy differences between activism, art and science.

The Tempestry Project (2017, Ongoing)

Tempestry is a word that combines temperature, tapestry and tempest in a neat and poetic integration of climate change performed in yarn. In the Berman exhibition, *The Tempestry Project* had comparative tempestries from the hottest and coolest places in the United States—Utqiagvik in Alaska and Death Valley in California—alongside a selection of tempestries from the local region of Philadelphia. "*The Tempestry Project* is personal and collaborative fiber art, environmental awareness, and climate activism via data visualization all rolled into a sprawling community of friends, artists, crafters, teachers, scientists, activists, nature lovers, and more" (Connelly, Connelly, and McNeill 2022).

The Tempestry Project was founded by Emily McNeill, Asy Connelly and Marisa Connelly in 2017 in Anacortes, Washington, in response to the newly elected President Trump's climate change denial, his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the vow to close the Environmental Protection Agency. Concerned about the removal

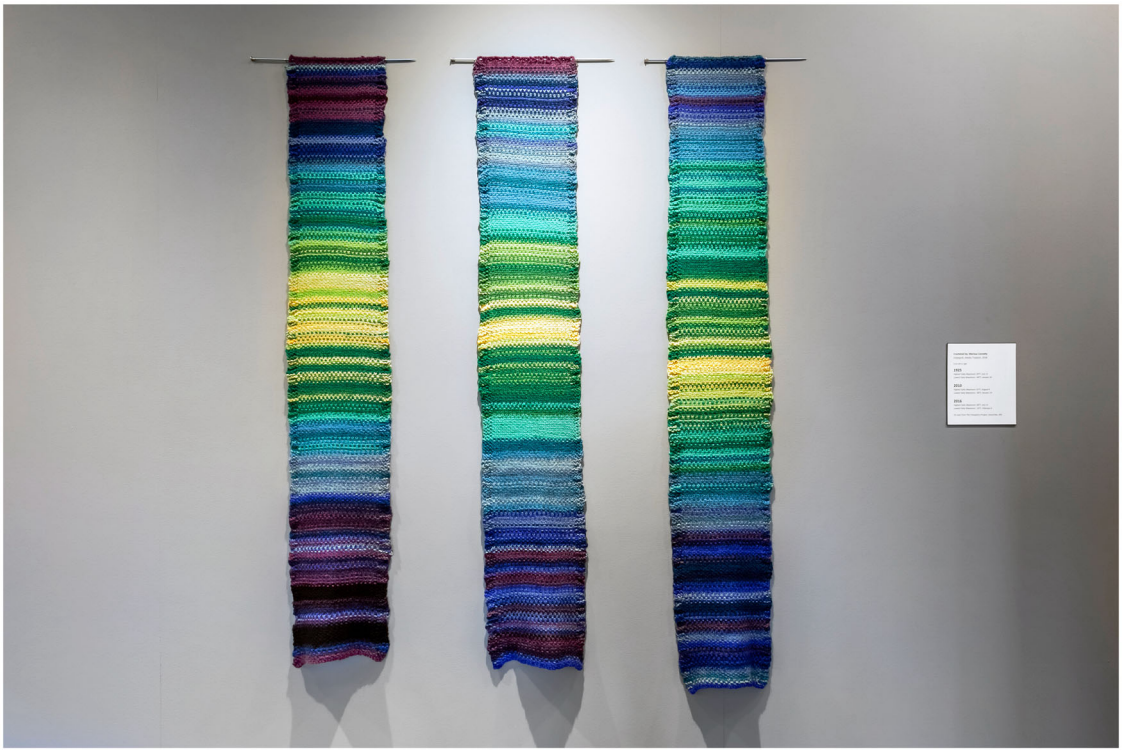

Figure 2
Marisa Connelly "the Utqiaġvik Triptych" from *the Tempestry Project* (Justin Connelly, Marisa Connelly & Emily McNeill), as part of *Mapping Climate Change: the Knitting Map and the Tempestry Project*, Berman Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, US, 11 June – 30 November, 2021, photo credit, Sarah R. Bloom.

of climate data from Government websites, McNeill and the Connellys put together kits of colored wool that knitters could use to make wall hangings documenting local temperature changes by knitting one row a day for a year. Critical to the project is the matching of yarn color to temperature so that different projects can easily be compared. Thirty colors represent temperatures ranging from −31°F to 121°F in 5°F increments. Temperature blankets were already popular and established in 2017, but *The Tempestry Project* sought to move beyond a personal temperature context to become a global project, in particular through the use of comparative historical data. "They recognised the vast scale of conversations about climate change and turned it into something tangible, relatable and beautiful" (Quagliarello 2020).

Each kit made by *The Tempestry Project* is customized—sourcing data from the location and gathering colors/amounts of yarn to sell to each crafter. *The Tempestry Project* have sold over 2000 kits, about the same as the number of knitters who made *The Knitting Map*.

Tempestries and Climate Scientists

As they move fluidly between private and public spaces, the tempestries of *The Tempestry Project* sometimes eddy around climate scientists themselves and allow technical data to become affective as well as technical lodestones of meaning.

In 2015, University of Georgia marine scientist Joan Sheldon crocheted the global average temperature for each year from the 1600s. *The Globally Warm Scarf* is mostly purple (average temperature) with some stripes of blue (cooler than normal) and red (warmer than normal) until the contemporary period when increasing reds become darker and darker. Sheldon said of this experience: "Putting a yarn color away because I wouldn't need it again, or getting out a new color that I hadn't needed before, really drove home the

changes as I worked through the timeline" (Sheldon 2017). Sheldon presented the scarf at the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation conference that year and was "stunned by the reaction. Even scientists who were familiar with the data wanted to touch the scarf, to find the year they were born. 'They never would [do this] with a science graph,' she says. 'It approaches you in a different way'" (Schwab 2019).

Laura Guertin, Professor of Earth Science at Penn State Brandywine, Pennsylvania used Tempestries in a poster display at the 2017 AGU (American Geophysical Union) *Advancing Earth and Space Science* Conference. "Over 70 people came by my poster to ask questions, take photos, offer suggestions for other types of data, etc. By far, this poster has helped me have the most engaged conversations out of all of the posters I've ever presented" (Guertin 2017).

* * *

In what follows, we shall weave an Irish story of textiles, land, deep time and the contemporary moment.

The Knitting Map (2005)

Cork is a watery city. Its center is built on marshy islands in the tidal estuary of the River Lee. Channels of the river originally separated these islands, and some of them were covered over by city merchants in the eighteenth century to form the principal streets of the city center. Oftentimes visitors get disoriented by the presence of two river channels in the city center. Unbeknownst to them, there are more underfoot. Perhaps it was just as well then, that *The Knitting Map* was made at the top of a hill on the city's Northside.

Both in its planning and its final form, *The Knitting Map* has repeatedly been a catalyst for exploring different themes: community (McCarthy 2005); the nature of textile controversy (Gilson and Moffat 2019); and what it means to document climate through knitting (Berman Museum of Art 2021). This insistent engagement with contemporary issues allows for fluctuation and renewal. *The Knitting Map* is at once powerfully grounded in Cork City in 2005 and an itinerant and provocative framework for thinking through femininity and climate, especially as they relate to time, place and water.

I stood there often in those days of the install, when I was alone with that great heft of femininity. After the curators had carefully hung the work vertically, and were off upstairs arranging the Albers. I stood there, and watched the wind rise across the lower meadow where the Glucksman stands. It was a strange thing to be in the presence of this contested textile, to be undone by the presence of it. I stood there in my knee pads, having a break between bouts of pleating, folding the work into this new space, noticing the drift between wool and leaf. (Gilson 2019, 183)

This overflowing textile documented rain and weather for a year in our over-abundantly watery city. We want to conjecture how it might be used as a conceptual and generative strategy through attention to place and fluidity. What might we perceive if *The Knitting Map* were cut loose from its temporal and spatial moorings in Cork 2005, drenched with touch and memory but ready for different conversations? At this point we want to reference Astrid Neimanis' work on watery feminisms; both her essay "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water" (2012) and her book-length study, *Bodies of Water*, (2017) in which she connects fluid embodiment with an environment in crisis: "this meaningful mattering of our bodies is also an urgent question of worldly survival. In this book I reimagine embodiment from the perspective of our bodies' wet constitution, as inseparable from these pressing ecological questions" (Neimanis 2017, 1). Here, we elaborate these ideas to meet a uniquely Irish context, one in which the landscape, in the form of the wetland peat bog, is often confusingly neither entirely liquid, nor entirely solid.

When visitors came to the crypt of St. Luke's Church to see *The Knitting Map* in 2005, they often likened it to a river flowing from the hands of twenty knitters, down the wooden slopes of our textile amphitheater and growing across the floor as the year progressed. Since then, *The Knitting Map*'s installations in the Berman, the Glucksman, and the Ganser galleries have all pleated, folded and swirled the work in flows of watery knitting, sometimes falling in folds down the gallery wall. And this watery textile has flowed twice now, across the ocean between Ireland and the US, like a tide.

Visitors also likened *The Knitting Map* to an aerial view of the Irish countryside, its colors similar to a patchwork of fields. In 2019, Fionna Barber made a similar point by counterpointing the tonal range of *The Knitting Map* with that of the iconic painter of the rural West of Ireland, Paul Henry, 1877 – 1958 (Barber 2019, 27–29). So, this troubling textile is resonant both with the solidity of land and the movement of water, and this conundrum of forms is undone when it meets the affective realm and

actuality of the Irish bog. The Irish bog is resonant with meaning, and we claim our place in this discourse through its hybrid solidity and fluidity, through its resistance to simple categorization; its ancient forces of anaerobic pressure that have held bodies and textiles for a millennium and more. This counterpoint allows us to delve into the bog as we explore deep time and our global climate crisis to bear witness and make small acts of repair.[2]

The Lady of Cloonshannagh Bog (Wincott Heckett 2013) is a narrative whose palimpsestic layers echo *The Knitting Map*, as the eponymous lady was discovered and then studied by the archaeological textile expert Elizabeth Wincott Heckett in the same year that the knitters in St. Luke's were knitting their weather and their city in a collaborative and capricious knotting of yarn. "The significance of bog, as an otherworldly place between solid and liquid, history and contemporary, reality and mythology, echoed the place of my birth, neither wholly Irish nor wholly British, but liminal and unknowable" (Harper 2016, 4).

During mechanical peat cutting in a private bog just off the N4 between Termonbarry and Strokestown in County Roscommon, a female bog body is discovered, but not before she is violently shredded, uprooted from the peat, her bones and clothes spread out by the machine. It is May 2005, and just over a hundred miles away in Cork City, *The Knitting Map* is quietly being made in a crypt.

The textile archaeologist, Elizabeth Wincott Heckett, is called to the National Museum of Ireland to examine the shredded clothing. She must piece together hundreds of small fragments of fabric, but eventually she is "able to identify seven different textile types, including a possible pile-woven cloth that may have been a 'shaggy mantle.' Five textiles of excellent quality indicated that the young woman was a high-status individual" (Wincott Heckett 2013, 167).

If we overlay *The Knitting Map* and The Lady of Cloonshannagh Bog, we see a tangle of Irish femininities, textiles and place; the women who spun, wove and sewed the clothes of this young woman in the seventh century AD, the high-born woman in her early twenties who wore them and who then came to be lost in the bog, and the female textile archaeologist who takes such care to piece together her story through fabric. She is unmade and made again through science and art, just as *The Knitting Map* is being made.

Catherine Harper's work on bog bodies and Ireland in her art practice and critical writing, notably in *Land, Cloth, Body and Culture* (2016) uses bog bodies as material referent and metaphor—these ancient bodies, pressured, anaerobic, acidic, resonating with the violence of life in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. These works, such as *Bog Textile* 1989-90, include textiles coiled and troubled with paper, pigment, gold fabric and threads, natural materials including wool, horsehair, and sisal. The Lady of Cloonshannagh is a different human creature. She has no soft flesh, only scattered bones and shredded textiles, and despite the accidental violence of her discovery she is made again in narrative form by Wincott Heckett, and here in these words. We claim her as she tangles femininity, youth, textiles and deep time, held for a thousand years in the black embrace of the bog. As she meets the latticework of *The Knitting Map*, so we find a way to read women's lives/textile practices as a boggish and fluid reservoir.

Ireland's peat bogs have been cut for turf to burn in domestic houses for hundreds of years. The sweet smell of slow-burning peat is a powerful and affective presence in rural Ireland to this day, but its legacy is deeply troubling. Globally, peatlands are the largest natural terrestrial carbon store, locking in more carbon than all other vegetation types in the world combined, but once damaged they are a major source of global CO2 emissions (Tierney 2020). Following a landmark High Court judgment in 2019, and after nearly seventy-five years of industrial peat harvesting, Bord na Móna (the Irish "Peat Board") ended all peat harvesting on its lands in 2020 (Gleeson 2021). In Jan 2021 Bord na Móna announced a massive program to move from peat harvesting to peatland restoration and rehabilitation, but private peat harvesting with tractors/mechanical peat cutters in Ireland continues—the kind that woke The Lady of Cloonshannagh Bog so violently from her boggish sleep.

During the first Tempestry exhibition in Anacortes, Washington, a woman in her seventies came along who was something of a climate change denier, but who knew a lot of the women who had volunteered to make tempestries of their local area from the 1940s to the present. She had grown up in Anacortes, and at the exhibition, she kept walking up and down the wall looking at the different years of her lifetime, until eventually she shared that she remembered ice skating on local lakes as a child, and that the tempestries had made her remember this, and how it isn't possible to do that anymore because they no longer ice over.

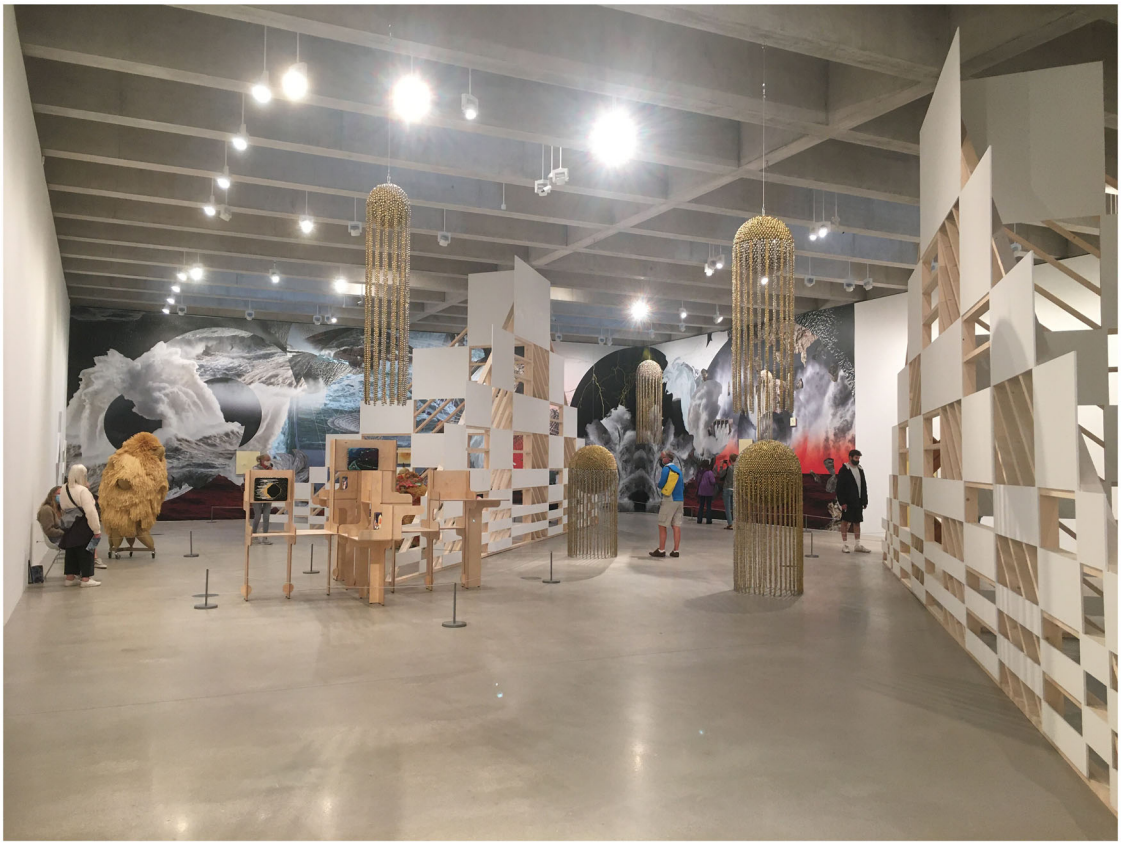

Figure 3
Haegue Yang, *Strange Attractors,* Tate St Ives, 24 October 2020-25 September 2021, installation view, photo credit Fionna Barber.

We tell this story to place it beside the story of the Lady of Cloonshannagh Bog and *The Knitting Map*. Elizabeth Wincott Heckett, like Bord Na Móna, is involved in processes of repair that aspire to mend the violence of bog harvesting in different ways. Tempestries involve participants in processes of aspirational climate repair that refuse to believe that our climate is beyond mending, and *The Knitting Map* knitters rose up to knit the weather for a year in a collaborative community meteorology in yarn, in order to map something together we didn't yet know was injured. There is something unsettling and particular about textiles and climate change—the link to craftivism and the accessibility of textiles—our daily touch of things made from fibers that can generatively tangle realms within and beyond the art world into politics, community activism, through libraries and school rooms and into government offices and back to the private domestic spaces in emergent and joyful processes of actual and aspirational repair.

Strange Attractors

Let us leave the lady of Cloonshannagh Bog, now violently rebirthed from her amniotic waters, and move to one final example that, like *The Knitting Map*, also brings together both textiles and art intertwined with meteorology and, in this case, an additional cosmological perspective. This is the exhibition *Strange Attractors* (Figure 3) by South Korean artist Haegue Yang, installed at Tate St Ives until the end of September 2021. The title comes from the research of mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz about the extent to which weather patterns can be predicted: what he discovered was that even small changes in a range of factors can produce significant and unexpected divergences. As

a scientific principle of operating within chaos, for Yang this also invokes the ways whereby humankind negotiates the random and the unpredictable, and in which art and material objects can embody the systems of belief that evolve as a means of doing this.

The main feature of *Strange Attractors* is a gallery-sized immersive installation, dominated by a specially created digital wallpaper that collages together stock images of stormy seas against a rocky landscape: its crashing waves and atmospheric effects overwhelmingly convey a sense of the tumultuous forces of nature, while also more specifically referencing the coastal landscape of West Cornwall, where Tate St Ives is situated. The space itself is filled with a range of different constructed objects that interact on different levels with the giant seascape. In many cases they evoke the exhibition's location, not only in the gallery on a beach in St Ives, but in Western Cornwall. Yang's interest in the fabrication of textiles across different cultures also permeates many of these elements: the latticework of the shaped walls in the middle of the space has a further connection with meteorology, being derived from the dynamic interlocking geometries of Binakul, a Filipino weaving pattern that references wind and tidal movements across the sea. Meanwhile, the *Sonic Intermediates*, three human-sized hybridized figures whose construction draws on techniques of straw weaving, provide a shamanic—and comic—representation of the iconic figures, not only of Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo (key figures within the heyday of St Ives postwar modernism), but also of Li Yuan-Chia, the Taiwan-born artist who worked for much of his life in Cumbria in the North of England. Li's tapestry is also included with works by Hepworth and Gabo in an entrance gallery before the viewer enters the main installation.

The hanging of Li's tapestry at the start of this exhibition has a particular effect, of identifying a genealogy of migration and travel within a globalized artworld, linking together both Yang and Li as East Asian artists within St Ives, the home of a modernism that is particularly identified as British. So, it is notably the role of textiles within this exhibition to function specifically in terms of *place:* not just through the inclusion of Li's tapestry, but also through part of the main display, the *Mundus Cushion – Yielding X* (2020). This consists of eight cross-stitched cushions, each bearing a different image derived from space, cosmology or meteorology, and displaying their title on the side: Orbit, Tempest and Eclipse among them. These are in fact prayer cushions, originally designed for use during Christian church services, protecting the knees of worshipers from the discomfort of hard wooden pews. In *Strange Attractors*, these small sturdy cushions are displayed in a distinctive supporting armature. They form an explicit link with the epic scale of the watery cataclysms of the gallery's wallpaper viewed behind them, bringing home the human dimensions of climate disaster and how it affects us as embodied subjects.

Yang's published statements around the exhibition affirm a direct relationship with Cornwall as a place of multi-layered meanings; parts of the gallery installation "reference the windy, foggy and wet weather … and also the community traditions, beliefs and labor around water" (Lloyd-Smith 2020, online). Yet she has additionally stressed a more metaphysical interpretation of these material conditions derived from an awareness of "local cultural and sacred landscapes" (Lloyd-Smith 2020, online) that also have a wider resonance. West Penwith, the Cornish peninsula beyond St Ives, has the largest number of surviving prehistoric megaliths in Europe, and remains a region where pagan and Christian interpretations of place are closely interwoven. And Yang also states that the *Mundus Cushion – Yielding X* "connects the hopes and anxieties found in Cornwall and at sacred sites across different eras and locations" (Ray 2020 online).

Yang also had a particular community in mind: one based around the church in Zennor, a small settlement out on the cliffs to the west of St Ives itself, and which she visited in 2018. Both Zennor and the surrounding area are renowned for their deeply embedded traditions, notably the stories of a beautiful mermaid who lived in the sea nearby and whose image is carved on an ancient chair in the church. The church was originally founded in the seventh century by St. Senara, coincidentally the same period during which the Lady of Cloonshannagh lived; in one version of the story Senara is reputed to have traveled to Cornwall across the sea from Ireland. Her church is also built on top of a much earlier Bronze Age site. Rather than specific references to this distant past, however, Yang selected a feature of the church decoration that has a very recent and specific provenance, even though it may appear otherwise. The feature is that of the many prayer kneelers throughout the church, so numerous they are on almost every seat waiting

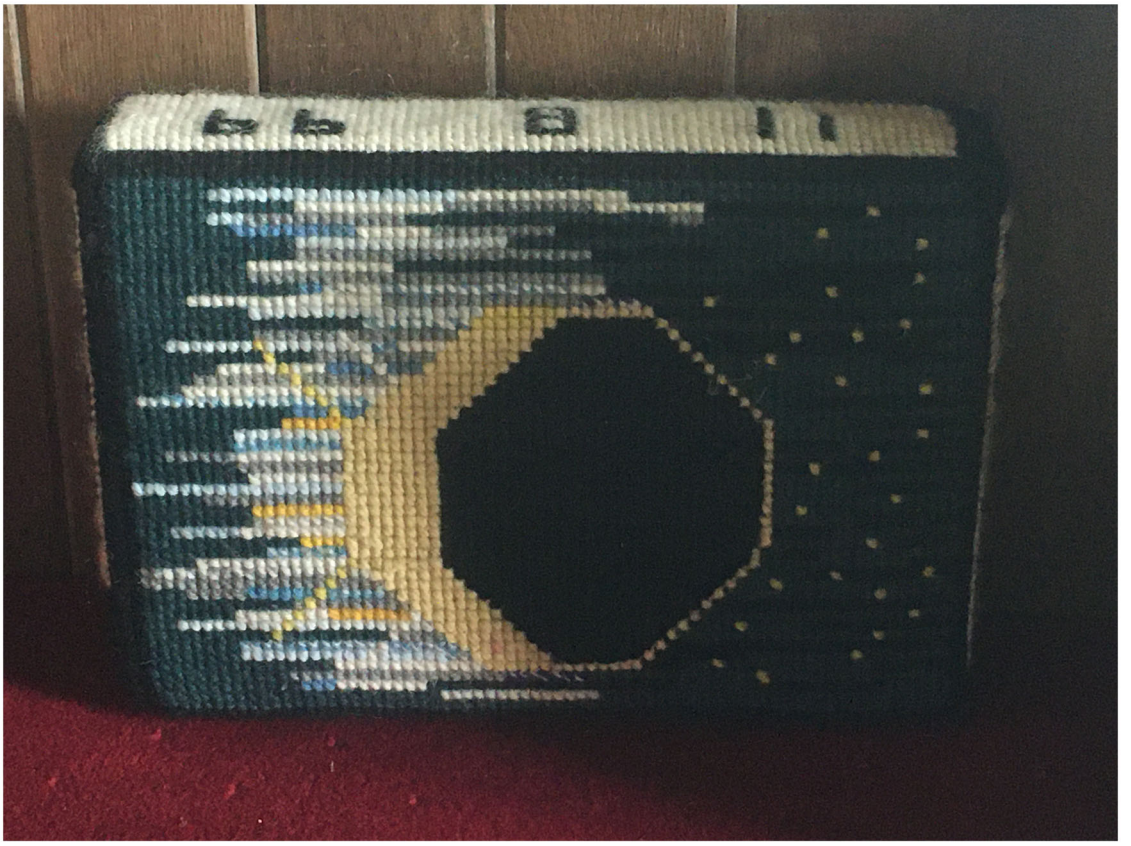

Figure 4
Eclipse Kneeler, St. Senara's Church, Zennor, Cornwall, photo credit Fionna Barber.

to be used during Christian services, while the format of the supporting armature in Yang's exhibition also resembles that of the carved pews and the chair for the clergy in the chancel. The St. Senara kneelers are ultimately derived from those designed by Louisa Pesel and Sybil Blunt for Winchester Cathedral in the 1930s and produced by a large number of volunteer stitchers, mainly women, a situation similar to the volunteer knitters of *The Knitting Map* many years later.

Subsequently, after the Second World War, the making of church kneelers became popular across England, with community groups and individual stitchers designing and executing a wide variety of images. They can be figurative or more purely decorative, and they can include biblical subject matter or historical commemoration in addition to themes of more local relevance. The kneelers stitched by the church community at Zennor represent this diversity; there are rural scenes and decorative motifs, but also the stormy seas that are a constant threat to a maritime community, and which find a resonance in the backdrop to *Strange Attractors*. However, the relationship between gallery exhibition, place, community, and belief can be seen as focused particularly around one specific element that Yang replicated almost directly from St. Senara's church. This is the *Eclipse* cushion (Figure 4), whose original version also incorporates the date, 11 August 1999, when a total solar eclipse plunged the sun into darkness over Cornwall for a period of three minutes. Yet eclipses themselves have been surrounded by superstition, seen in many cultures as portents of bad times to come: in the uncertainties of climate breakdown, this also carries a fresh significance.

Conclusion: Binding the Projects Together

Finally, it is time to draw these three projects together in an imaginative space that also allows us to formulate some more general conclusions and propositions for the future. And water once more surfaces as a fluid yarn whereby we knit these projects together. We envisage *The Knitting Map* as cut loose from its temporal and spatial anchoring in Cork 2005, lured across the Celtic Sea to Cornwall by the mermaid's song, retracing St. Senara's voyage of centuries before. Having slipped its moorings in the Irish landscape, this vast work now undulates across St Ives Bay, in dialogue with *Strange Attractor*s in its gallery on the beach. And the *Tempestries* are coming too, making their way like sea serpents across the ocean, although these days the currents and winds are unpredictable.

All these projects, *The Knitting Map*, *The Tempestry Project*, and *Strange Attractors* are instances of works that not only collapse the boundaries of art and craft, but whose affective and embodied engagement with meteorology helps to stitch together strategies that are complementary to scientific and political debates that have been the main focus of climate emergency. As Demos, Scott, and Banerjee (2021) point out, in addition to the material consequences of rapid and unpredictable changes, there is also a range of possibilities for how these shifts might be most effectively represented and challenged. As they argue, "artistic practice, including its substantial historical resources, forms, and techniques, is uniquely poised to get at the tremendous complexity and the variegated multisensory, material, and representational aspects of climate breakdown" (2021, 7). In this situation, despite the proliferation of digitally based arts projects, there is no one answer, no one type of practice that can encompass a response that will make the scope of these changes comprehensible on a human scale. We therefore need different types of projects that are dynamic and adaptive, and that transgress and challenge, offering visual and material possibilities for apprehending the state we're in and where we may be going. But a danger of this focus is that other non-digital, material and manually based practices may become less visible as a consequence. Writing as an art critic and historian and an artist scholar, we want to claim these projects discussed here, not just as case studies of representational diversity, but as evidence that textiles are already well placed to operate generatively in times of representational crisis. We want to meet climate crisis with emergent strategies that tangle genre and art/political context with deft stitches, and so to finish, we move from critic to storyteller—from one yarn to another.

And Silstren takes our little girl's small hand and leads her down the white road from the lighthouse, and into the white sailboat, and she casts off from the island jetty, and sails round in front of the village of Ballyolann. The little girl turns, and sees that the sun is setting, and when she turns to face the village once again, she notices that the water in front of the boat seems strange, and as she looks, out of the blue green sea rises the huge, gorgeous piece of knitting, held in the arms of dozens of Spinstren.

"Breathe in" says Silstren, and so she does.

"Now blow," and our little girl and Silstren and all of the Spinstren there, silver green and beautiful in the water, let out their breaths at the same time, and the wide knitted fabric flies up away from the sea and into the sky, up and away over Ballyolann, where it floats like a strange, knitted cloud.

The next morning, in Ballyolann, everyone is up early as usual, eager to get to their knitting, but when they get outside, they stumble backwards, and gasp at the sight that meets them.

"Someone's knitted the sky!" said Tommy O'Driscoll quietly.

Everyone in Ballyolann thought it a beautiful thing, and wondered at it. Surely it was lovely, but their knitting entangled them and lured them back to their projects, and so after a gasp and a wonder they all went back inside and got back to their knitting.

from The Girl of Ballyolann

Jools Gilson 2021

Notes

1. Lubaina Himid, *Lost Threads,* The Great Barn, Gawthorpe Hall, Padiham, Lancashire: 1-31 October 2021.
2. This is a reference to: *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* edited by Stephen Bottoms & Matthew Goulish in 2007.

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ORCID

Fionna Barber http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2181-2150

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