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Voulez-vous crochet avec moi?



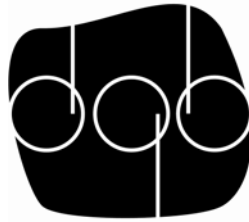
Photo by Beatrice Murch

The art of knitting is experiencing a renaissance. Where once associated only with grey-haired grandmothers and nightmarish visions of lumpy Christmas sweaters, it is now women under the age of 35 who are the craft's fastest-growing market in the West.

However, although firmly established in creative circles and as a popular pastime in Europe and the US, is the knitting phenomenon yet to hit Argentina? As a city whose cultural scene is a rich blend of the modern and the antiquated, I set out to investigate whether the art has taken its hold on Buenos Aires. Does knitwear have a place in *porteño* haute couture? And has the capital adopted the trend started by the group, 'Stitchin' Boozin' Bitches' in Miami, where the craft was first embraced as youthful, quirky and suddenly cool?

The 'knitterati'

"It's no longer just old women," Griselda Rios tells me as she crochets in a San Telmo cafe. She is a part-time philosophy teacher, part-time knitting teacher, and she has dreadlocks. As we chat, the 31-year-old barely looks down at the woollen garment



which is gradually unfurling in her hands. “My students are all young, and I teach guys too.” She maintains that in a lot of cases, her male students are the more careful knitters, describing them as *prolijos* (detailed and neat).

However, although the populace of those interested in learning the skill is growing and changing, Griselda says that here in Buenos Aires the knitting community (known on many internet blogs as ‘the knitterati’) is still relatively small. ‘Worldwide Knit in Public Day’ happens once or twice a year in cities all over the globe. Groups of knitters congregate in a park or square and quite simply spend the day knitting together. Details of the event are posted on www.wwkipday.com, and 2009 was the first year that Buenos Aires participated. “There weren’t really many people there, but that’s because it takes time to find out about these things. I know it’s picking up force and every year more and more knitters will turn up. It’s sort of like Creamfields.”

‘Get your crafty on’

Although in Buenos Aires the event is of epically disparate proportions to the electronic music festival, as a phenomenon growing from tiny beginnings, the two arts are perhaps comparable. Young knitters like Griselda are implementing a time-honoured, traditional craft; exploring how it can be updated as they test the bounds of their own creativity; and they are embarking upon the challenge of innovative design. Griselda knits to create “*ropa de diseño*”: clothes which are experimental, unconventional and *vanguardista*. She admits that the designs do not make for practical, everyday street-wear. However many young people are fascinated by the opportunity to create something of their own, via a technique which is so simple; yet once mastered, it is a technique with scope for limitless imaginative designs and garments.

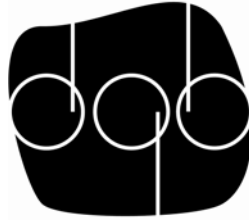


Photo by [Megan Koster](#)
Wall of yarn at Yanabey

‘Knitter’s Nirvana’

I ask about the resources necessary to take up such a hobby, and am pointed in the direction of Buenos Aires’ ‘yarn district’: Av Scalabrini Ortiz, between Córdoba and Corrientes. The area is astounding, boasting a selection of incredible window displays and wool in more colours and textures than I could ever have imagined existed.

This ‘Knitter’s Nirvana’ can offer a soul-satisfying afternoon of wandering from one yarn store to the next, with plenty of bars and cafes en route, making for a wholly pleasurable experience of the



city's crafty quarter. What struck me most was the stylish interior design of the shops. Yanabey's three walls of floor to ceiling cubbies filled with yarn of every shade and fibre are certainly impressive. Stacks of knitting magazines can also be found in the surrounding shops, and a trip to the district will most definitely enhance one's capacity for creation.

'Gettin' knitty wit' it'

Aside from the avant-garde, experimental pieces displayed in these shop windows, I ask Griselda about the place of knitted garments in the mainstream Buenos Aires fashion scene. "Aboriginal and indigenous style clothing is relatively popular at the moment; my students knit bags using the more coarse llama wool and more traditional techniques." She points to the thick, blue, cable-knit jumper that she is wearing and adds, "sweaters too."

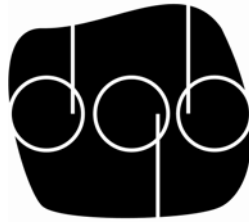
Indeed, I clearly recall Oscar de la Renta's Autumn/Winter collection of chunky knits in rustic hues, which graced the catwalks of this year's major fashion weeks. Thus, the collision of modernity and antiquity which defines Buenos Aires' cultural tendencies seems to have been appropriated by designers the world over, endeavouring to give their clothes a certain timeless chic. Trendy Palermo stores, such as Marcelo Senra, María Aversa, Ñann and Priscia use an interesting selection of knits and crochets in diverse palettes: some bright, some earthy, but all indisputably elegant.

'Stitch and Bitch'



Such designs are influenced by the traditional knitting practices, which have developed throughout Argentina's history. Evidence of such techniques can be found at the Museo de Arte Popular José Hernández, where an entire gallery is devoted to the museum's textile collection. The exhibition features ancient rugs, ponchos and needles, as

well as explanations of early knitting traditions. The space is also the meeting place of the 'Club de Tejedoras Santa Claridad': a group that meets once weekly to learn, improve techniques and, most importantly, to socialise, whilst working on pieces which they send to various charities. The group serves as much as a forum for the exchange of anecdotes as it does the exchange of knitting tips.



'Santa Claridad' is run by Dominique Besanson, an Argentine designer who promotes the concept of sustainable production, and whose pieces are showcased in New York and Milan. Dominique is stylish and gracefully expressive. When asked about the club (which she started in 2008 and held in her own home), she explains that for these knitters, the group is a time to be together. She is not a teacher and the meeting is not a class. No one feels the need to follow instructions and there is no competition involved. For Dominique, "knitting is communal."

A 'close knit' group

Dominique's clientele is slightly different from those who attend Griselda Rios' classes. The majority are women in their late 20s to early 40s: a generation who "connect the craft with their youth, recalling the way their mothers would knit while going about their daily business". Certainly, as I watch the women around me, their hands moving with astonishing speed and precision, they are talking, laughing and reading magazines. Dominique calls this "knitting's body language", referring to the way in which the needles become an extension of your fingers. "You don't have to concentrate as it grows as a habit. In certain Western societies, the techniques require more focus, but here in Argentina knitting has always been looser. We use bigger needles and lighter materials."

According to Dominique, it is this body language which compels so many women to take up the craft. "In creating, you find and identify with yourself; you project. Women are inclined to make time for this because knitting can be enjoyed anywhere. It becomes a lifestyle and it relaxes you."