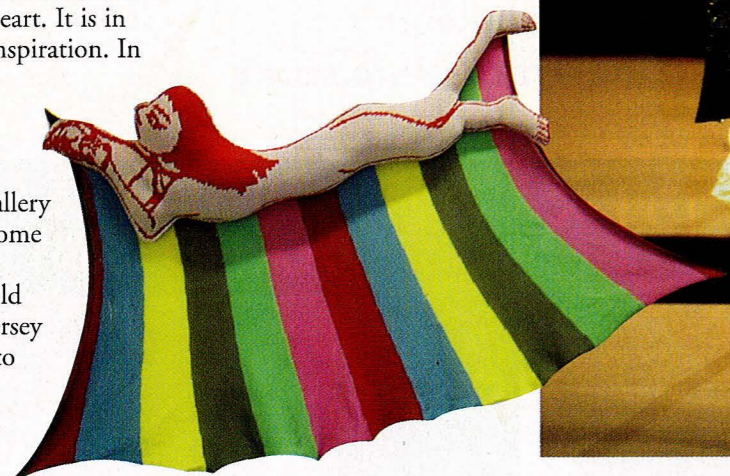


There is a saying, which goes; "If you bring forth what is within you, what you have within you will save you." I asked Christa Michel what inspires her 'to bring forth what is within' and she has said, like most creative people seem to do; "Everything". We can see from her knitted creations that she has been inspired by tigers, castles, animals, tattoos, Bambi, space ships and the Paris metro. The challenge comes in how we interpret our inspiration from a scene, or a view or a thought, into a knitted, wearable garment or a knitted wall hanging. Example: one day we find our beloved marmalade cat playing in the sun with a new ball of pale green wool.

It is a lovely sight full of colour and joy and it warms our heart. It is in fact the beginning of inspiration. In order to interpret our cat, (we shall call him Tim) into a high street fashion item or a wall hanging for the Tate gallery we would have to do some mental skipping and bouncing first. We could for example design a jersey with a pattern similar to the markings on Tim's fur and we could knit him in soft marmalade coloured wool. The pale green ball of wool that he was playing with could be interpreted in the lining of the hood of our patterned jersey. In order to remember the sun playing on the wall, we could hang knotted yellow and green tassels from the hood, or we could knit a two-metre scarf with diaphanous layers of marmalade silk woven into it. The possibilities of Tim and the wool start to multiply themselves; how could we knit 'Tim' gloves for example?

#### WALL KNITS

When one looks at one of Christa's beautifully structured multi-layer, knitted skirts hanging against a wall one immediately wants to wear it, but this is a delusion, because she does not make wearable art, they are knitted art which were made to snugle permanently against a wall.



# Knitting with a motive

Margaret Hennig reviews the themes of textile artist Christa Michel

The knitting metamorphosis of jersey to object d'art has been slow and was initially an unintentional one. We can trace this process from the beginning when she started out at sixteen as a window dresser, to this year when she completed her first *Wall Knits* for a gallery. Along the way we find out where Christa gets her inspiration from and how she has, in the past, magically transformed her inspiration into wearable knits.

#### SPACE TRAVELLER

After a time as a window dresser Christa enrolled at the Art School in Zurich. Still in her early twenties, she enjoyed being back in a learning environment again and spent her student years working in new disciplines and specialising in textiles. It was during this time she also spent a few months in India, which had an enormous influence on her later work. She went to the North of India, and worked with a

woman who owned a small company producing tablecloths and curtains with hand stitched appliqué. She assisted with the printing blocks, tie dyeing and the hand stitching of the fabrics. When Christa returned to Zurich, she studied textile design and it was at that point that she started to interpret her inspiration by knitting on a very simple domestic machine. The theme of her first collection for her diploma in 1998 revolved around

the Galaxy and views reaching into another world beyond our civilisation. This futuristic theme of science fiction, robots, Mars, Flash Gordon and space, was a culmination not only of the influence of millennium fever, but of her own personal fascination for the science fiction comic books she used to read and the film *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang. She used layers of red nylon over her woollen dresses to give the impression of an outer planetary landscape. ▶

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT  
Wall Knit, Untitled 2003; 'Castles' collection of felted knits in neon colourways; 'Castles' and 'Knights' collections show a melding of the past and present with new technology machine knitting