



# MAX'S

# WORLD

*Helen Barker bravely enters Max's World: a place where horror knitting, strange creatures and knitted animations lurk*





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Max Alexander

**A**lthough some of Max's designs border on the macabre, we needn't have worried. Max's creatures are beautifully designed and are rather endearing. Max Alexander studied Sculpture at Camberwell College of Arts in London where she found herself doing a lot of welding and metalwork before she "discovered the wonders of wool" during the second year of her degree.

It transpires that Max has been knitting since 2005 when she was given a ball of wool and some needles as a birthday present from her Mother. "I started with a scarf which I don't think I ever finished as I discovered much more interesting quicker things to knit through the *Stitch 'n' Bitch* book and soon after I found the huge world of internet patterns. I got

really interested in knitting during my degree; I soon worked out that you can knit things in any shape you like and my first knitted sculpture was the Severed Monster Head, which is two metres tall. I'd already been working on projects that combined scary imagery with soft cuddly materials and knitting was the perfect medium to realise my ideas in."

### Versatile medium

The versatility of wool appears to be very important to Max and she explains that this is a medium where people are interpreting textiles in so many different ways. "You really can make anything from sticks and string. The most inspiring things for me come from being part of the wider craft community that's filled with exciting creative people—for example, graffiti knitters, pattern designers and all the incredible artists working in wool. I met a great deal of them during the 2012 exhibition *Wonders of Wool* in Cumbria and everyone was using wool in a completely different way."

**Above:** Benoit the Bee print can be purchased from Max's website





*A woman from  
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tattooed on her leg*



Gary Alexander gaspweb.co.uk



Max Alexander

It isn't surprising then to see Max take inspiration from the freedom of wool and re-create something completely different by marrying it with stop-motion animation. But how did it all come about? "I hadn't been knitting long when I came across a pattern for some small creatures on knitty.com. They were very quick and fun to make and they seemed to have really distinct characters that I thought it would work well when animated. I didn't have much of a plan when I started animating them in The Knitties as I wanted to see how they moved and work out what they wanted to do from there. It turned out they needed to start a band and one of them was secretly evil...!"

At this point we had to ask Max just how she manages to produce knit animation and what the challenging aspects are in doing this. "One of the earliest problems to overcome was the fact that my characters would fall over all the time. It can also be pretty tough working in the dark all day as you need to make sure that the light stays the same so you can't have any daylight interfering."

With continuity in mind Max explains you have to be very patient when creating the pieces. From the initial production of the knitted creatures to final animation can take months. "It takes too long! I worked on 'I am Ahab' for around ten months. Although having said that it, I have made some very short and simple pieces in one or two weeks."



The Knitties

## Continued inspiration

So knowing how long the process can take how does Max come up with so many wonderful, yet challenging and scary creatures and does it affect her next idea when knowing how long a project could take? "I think a lot of my ideas come from watching TV and films. I've had ideas for strange creatures whilst watching nature documentaries to horror movies. I'm currently working on knitted hexaflexagons, which are usually made from paper, and I discovered them through a YouTube video. They are hexagons that are folded from a long strip in a certain way that makes them have six faces. They are really fascinating and I'm developing a cowl based on their shape."

We're huge fans of Max's knitted octopus, a project that many knitters are probably familiar with. We wondered how long it took to make and how intricate the process was. "It took a couple of weeks. It's knitted on 2.5mm needles with quite a fine yarn so some bits were fairly fiddly. The most time consuming bit was all the tentacles, but that was more due to getting a bit bored of doing the same thing after I'd made two of them."

The Octopus has been featured on many blogs and craft websites but Max tells us that one of the most unexpected reactions came in a recent email: "A woman from America got in touch to let me know that she'd had my knitting octopus tattooed on her leg. It was really flattering to hear that someone liked the image of my work that much. I've also been really impressed with all the different versions that people have made from the pattern. There's one with a laptop, another crocheting and lots of variations on the tiny hat."

## Sense of fun

The general reception for Max's work is one embraced with fun and this is so important to her. "I find people react most to the humour in my work; it seems to generate a lot of smiles. The art which I enjoy the most generally has a certain light-heartedness and sense of joy to it. I work hard

**Above:** One of the best loved creations from Max's World, the knitting octopus

**Far left:** A colourful Monster's severed head

**Top left:** Max Alexander

**Bottom:** The Knitties



Max Alexander

on ideas that make me laugh and hopefully that comes through and I'll find something that other people will enjoy too."

The sky's the limit when it comes to original ideas; they seem to come naturally to Max. She explains one of her favourite things to work on is cartoon characters. "If I'm not able to animate something I like to bring it to life through a cheeky expression or glint in the eye. I also really enjoy making jewellery; I originally started making jewellery as I wanted a way to express my love of knitting when it was too warm for knitwear. It's really lovely to know that I'm helping lots of other knitters to do that same thing all around the world."

Not only does Max create her own earrings but her talents also lie in knitting as she beams when she tells me she also dyes her own yarn for the earring range. "I wanted bright rainbow colours for my jewellery and the best way for me to get the full range in the right weight of yarn was to use acid wool dyes. I'm thinking of working with natural dyes for future collections. They look like they'd be a lot of fun to experiment with."

With so many ideas swirling around Max's head at any one time it does beg the question, what does she do when she isn't knitting and thinking of the next scary addition to the portfolio? "I regularly practice Aikido. It's a Japanese martial art and one of the key themes is co-ordination of mind and body in daily life. It's totally absorbing and very enjoyable. I became a bit obsessed with it last year and I'm even planning to try out a new martial art soon."



Max Alexander

**Above:** Ahab animation – the creation that took ten months to complete  
**Left:** Just some of the colours on offer in the earring range

So what's can we expect to see next? "Well, I've recently discovered the existence of an underwater creature called an Axolotl. They look like prehistoric cartoon characters and I really want to make a knitted one. He'll also need to have a silly hat to match the octopus's tiny top hat. If it works out I'll release a pattern and there can be an army of knitted axolotls!"

So far, 2013 doesn't look like it will be slowing down for Max as she is planning to release at least one new knitting pattern every month on her website and on Ravelry. She also has a lot of ideas for a new jewellery collection. But you could say the most important thing for Max this year is "to keep having fun with yarn!"

**Max's website:** [www.maxsworld.co.uk](http://www.maxsworld.co.uk)