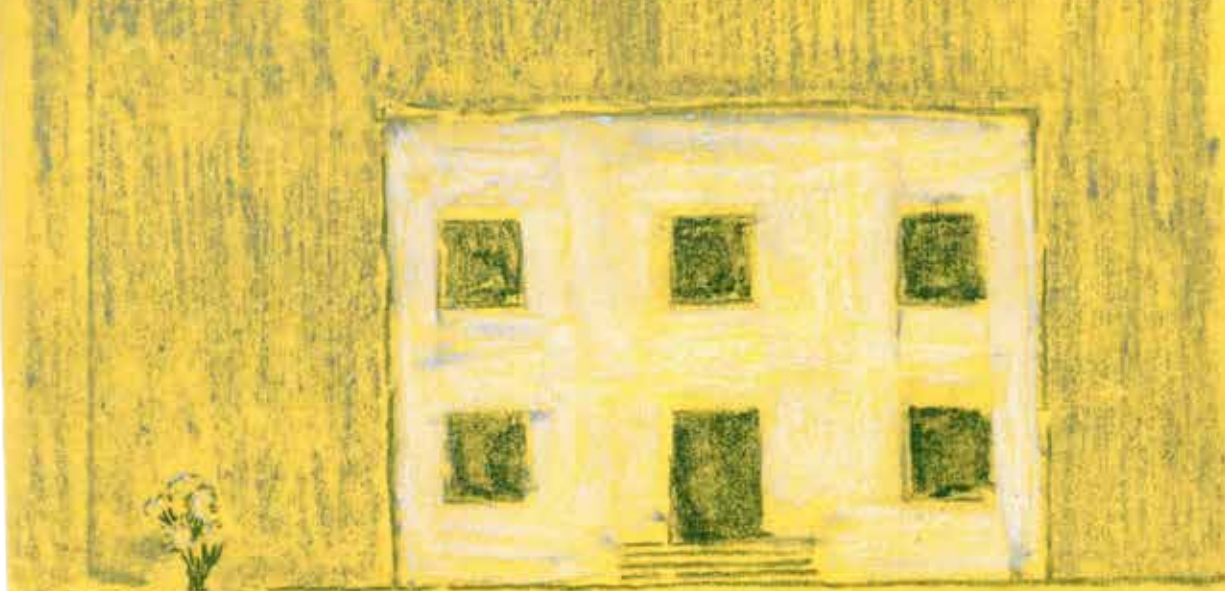




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Step 1

Build four walls using baked bricks and cement. Punch equally spaced holes for windows. At bottom center take hole all the way to floor. Once walls have set place concrete lid above. Add steps to front door if desired. Preheat oven



Step 2

Fill holes with windows, and place rain protection above each. Support door projection on pillars and get contractor to add random horizontal lines wherever he wishes. Sleep over the horizontal lines and pillars.



Step 3

Remove columns and horizontal lines and decorate windows with fresh early morning outlook of Classicism. Run plaster bands around windows; check central window for possible crown. Place balustrade above door projection. Sit back, relax, flip through European magazines.



Step 4

For a moment forget comfort and practicality. Concentrate on 21st century ideals that should be stated on facade. Think Revival and Imitation. Knowing that the best things have already been done, start by building up cornices around windows in plaster. Add fake frame around door; stick traditional looking brackets under projection. Create artificial double corner to give depth to composition. Stir Spanish stucco onto surface. Let simmer.



Step 5

Open up Dictionary of Classical Forms. Borrow studied and known elements from the past and apply them with scholarly flourish. Plaster panels, pediments, medallions, curls, ionic and floral patterns - stick them self-consciously all over facade, keeping in mind that architecture is poetry in stone. Twirl plaster as window edging till it drips. Add delicate Italian balustrade to projection to resemble French balcony. With no door leading to it, it becomes a French balcony that can't be used. But don't fret. As long as it's art, it's OK.



Step 6

Finally release all pent up ideas from system. All images of building collected over years of foreign travel, bits of detail picked up from French cathedrals and Gujrati havelis, and other memories and lurking desires. Use Greek columns and capitals liberally to frame composition. Statuary may be applied according to taste. Sprinkle Indian terracotta and filigreed screens as garnishing. The final flavour should give off deep whiffs of European history emanating from a traditional Indian present. Let dry for a day. Serves family of six.



Olek on a crocheted elephant created to support Elephant Family, Covent Garden, London, 2013.
Image Courtesy of Elephant Family



Tied up, for the moment

Polish crochet artist and performer Olek lets us into the ambiguity of her space, where the artist and the art are so intertwined with each other that to delineate the two would mean unravelling the pattern itself. And Olek is quite okay with that too

PRAVEENA SHIVRAM

Her fingers move in a flurry, like the wings of a hummingbird, and you wish for a moment you could slow it all down to view the details as they emerge in front of your eyes. It's like the magician and his repertoire of tricks, except this is no sleight of hand, and yet the magic persists, because somehow, with Olek, she makes you believe that the magic isn't an inaccessible portal in a galaxy far, far away, but is in the fact that you can pick up a ball of wool right now and unleash what's within you. She also doesn't shy away from breaking that spell, the mark of a real magician, perhaps? 'I sometimes have these nightmares where I can just see my hands moving and my eyes moving and I'm like "Oh my god, I have to stop! It's too much!"'

I spoke to Olek over a Skype conversation, but without the video option, which allowed me to imagine Olek dressed in long flowing robes, her hair cascading down in ringlets, a forest of wool around her, the colours like a carpet of exotic multi-coloured feathers, and Olek right at the centre of it all. And, of course, she breaks that spell too, as she quickly gives instructions to someone mid-way through the conversation – she is in Sweden in the middle of work. 'Right now I'm collaborating with the organisation Red (part of the Global Fund), working to fight HIV and AIDS, especially in Africa. It's their ten-year anniversary and I'm working on creating a product to raise funds. I love what they do. This is my mission, to somehow work for a cause. I

love their approach. I'm excited and I want to see where this goes.'

With Olek, you get a sense that this state of excitement, a constant enthusiastic engagement with an idea, the world, is a part of her personality. Having grown up in 'industrial, close-minded' Silesia, Poland, Olek backpacked her way to New York sixteen years ago, and as the cliché goes, hasn't looked back since. She speaks fast, her words rushing out like children at the end of a school day, and you are desperate to keep pace. But for those of us who can't, there is always the art she creates, sitting quietly, sedately almost, challenging you to embrace the world and still find beauty in it. Like she does, every single day of her life.



Olek on top of her crocheted homeless shelter, India, 2015. Image Courtesy of St+art Delhi Festival

Excerpts from the conversation

What does the act of crocheting mean to you? Is it a statement of your politics, or an expression of your creative synergy with that humble piece of thread?

It's both. Crochet is my language; crochet is a metaphor for everything and the way in which I communicate my ideas to the audience. We crochet by unraveling, the action never ends; it actually repeats itself. So this is the way I communicate. That's why I say, everything that becomes personal in my life, I hope it becomes universal. It's true that everything that surrounds me is crocheted.

So, then, how conscious is your thought process while you crochet?

You know what, it varies. Very often, when I'm making a piece, later, I realise why I'm making the piece and how I'm making the piece, that it's something that has influenced me. This process, sometimes, is very hard to explain to myself. I believe that anything

you eat, the air you breathe, the water you drink, the people around you, everything influences you and you put that into your work and you don't even know it is there. Now, for example, I am creating an installation in a museum, and I'm working with women from not just Sweden but also Ukraine and Syria, and that really influences my pieces here. As an artist you just sometimes have a canvas and a brush. In a way, it's very easy because you are working with your energy and your time, but working with twenty other people can be difficult; they are giving you so much more. They are giving you a lot of things that are irreplaceable, the energy, the thoughts, the ideas... all this by just being next to you and telling you their life stories.

Somehow, for me, using our hands to create a work of art or a piece of music has an almost meditative quality to it, and always inspires in the other a sense of awe. What does it inspire in you?

(Laughs) The hands are tired! Actually, it's interesting that when

I'm crocheting, very often, I'm thinking about the next pieces. My head is spinning very quickly in different directions. To be very honest with you, after I finish work here at the museum, and go back to where I am staying, I'm still crocheting but I'm crocheting something very simple, I'm watching a documentary on the nature channel and I'm relaxing. And you come up with good ideas in a way; your mind goes through the whole day and the things you have to produce and the things you have to do. The mind, like crochet, never really stops.

A lot of your work happens in different parts of the world, which means different energies that you are constantly dealing with. How do you then distil all this information that is coming to you? How do you bridge the gap between the read and heard as against the seen and the felt?

It's important that I feel what I feel, you know. It's crucial. That's why the world is always changing and moving and I have to travel for my work. For instance, the



La primavera,
Crocheted Obelisk,
Santiago, Chile 2015.
Image Courtesy of
Hecho en Casa Festival

Still with a skull,
c-print, 2015



Crocheted table, Brooklyn Artists Ball, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2014. Image Courtesy of Liz Ligon



only information that I read before coming to India, what really inspired me to come to India, was reading about the rapes, the marital rapes and all those horrible stories that you hear. But once I am there, I have my ears open for anything that influences my work. As an artist working in a public space, this is very important – to actually be aware of what is happening. That's why the work is more powerful, I think.

Tell us a little about your project in New Delhi with Maitri. What do such urban intervention projects really help in achieving? Or rather, what did you hope to achieve when you set out and what happened in the course of the project itself?

I had actually come to India a year ago, worked with women on a homeless shelter project and started to understand the issues here. That's why I wanted to make a statement this year through a performance on

International Women's Day. And I got connected with Maitri, an organisation that empowers women through vocational skills and employment. So I came up with this idea of doing a public performance piece of crocheting the apron as a metaphor for domestic work. And it was really an amazing experience, working with women who really have nothing, and yet they saw the vision, learnt how to crochet and were really proud to stand with me in a public space and work with me. It was a beautiful, moving piece and maybe one of the best pieces I've ever done. The performance is also everything that happens before and after – the way they were putting the sari on me, the makeup, the henna, everything is like preparation, you know? And all the women worked together and I love that it didn't matter if they were poor or not, they want to wear something beautiful and amazing, and that was really moving for me to see, how beautiful they are, inside and out.

When you are performing on the street, nothing is predictable and yet there is a definitive rhythm that you can feel of how that particular space works. What do you find more exciting to tap into while you are in the middle of a performance? The unpredictable nature of the street or the predictable rhythm that is there that holds the unpredictable space?

Oh my god, this is a really interesting question. I think it's kind of in between – we know the space, we choose the location, we know how it's going to be, but, of course, you don't know who's going to be watching you, what the weather is going to be like, and so on. In India, for instance, I was really surprised that people were always respectful, as against in New York, where people were acting in weird ways and throwing things at us. I think, in India, they were not sure what we were really doing, because it was so different from what they would normally see in public spaces. In New York, people are used to



everything. But that's okay. I liked that people were watching and questioning. Anything that you do in a public space, if it's an installation or a performance piece, you have to be open to uncertainty.

I was curious to see you chose NYC as your 'space', so to speak. But many of our ideas stem from things that constitute our childhood and upbringing. Does this dichotomy sometimes frustrate you, or is it always a source of lateral thinking?

A few years ago, my friend told me this: "Oh Olek, you crochet because in Silesia everything is grey" and I thought, yes, that makes sense. The other thing is I crochet a lot of big public sculptures, mostly illegally, and now I think it is because I was raised during communism in Poland. During that time, we were forced as kids during holidays to march in front of the big monuments and I never liked doing that. Subconsciously, there is a connection between the way you grow up as kid and what you finally see in your art. Marina Abramović said that the best thing an artist has is the artist's biography. And that's true, the biography is the story that we are writing in a way, through our art, knowingly or unknowingly.

And finally, how do you see yourself within this world of crochet? As puppet master holding the strings or threads together or as a piece of thread yourself, aligning with the pattern, perhaps?

I'd like to say I'm part of the pattern; I'm woven inside the crochet. The thing about crochet is that it's so organic and wonderful; it surprises me every time I'm doing something. I love that it is limitless. To me, what I love about it and realise is that I'm creating these socially conscious pieces. It brings people from different generations, different cultures, religions, together. They may not be able to communicate through language but they are able to communicate through crochet. I have always had different people crocheting with me, whether they are really small kids, or teenagers or really old grandmothers, and I love that. And that's the beauty; that it ties together generations and that's important to my work and that's one reason why crochet is so strong.



● **White Mermaid**, c-print, 2014, Collaboration with Pangeaseed

● **There is no such thing as part freedom**, Crocheted Installation for L.I.S.A. Project, New York, 2014

● **Knitting is for pus******, Crocheted Apartment, Solo Show, Christopher Henry Gallery, New York, 2010. Image Courtesy of Olek



Gulfam 03

Step 7

Accept builder's offer to demolish house and build flats. Take money, buy plot in suburbs, and start again from Step 1.