

Audio 3.08

Granny graffiti

The statue of Rocky outside the Philadelphia Museum of Art is very popular with tourists, who often stop to take their photo in front of it without bothering to visit the museum itself. This irritated Jessie Hemmons, so last month the 24-year-old artist knitted a bright pink jacket and put it on the statue of the boxer. She chose the colour because it attracts attention. On the front of the jacket, Jessie has knitted the words 'Go see the art'. Jessie hopes that her message will result in more people visiting the gallery.

This form of street art has become known as 'yarn bombing'. The craze is believed to have started in 2005, when Magda Sayeg was working at Raye, her shop in Houston, Texas. One day she decided, just for fun, to knit a blue-and-pink cover for the shop's door handle. She loved it, and – unexpectedly – so did her customers. Pedestrians stopped on the pavement outside the shop to photograph it, and even motorists slowed down to take a closer look. Their reaction inspired Magda to make covers for other objects in the street, such as a stop sign, a lamp post, a parking meter – and even an entire bus, which took a whole week to complete! She decided to set up a group of knitters, which she called 'Knitta Please'. Photos of their creations kept appearing on blogs and social networking sites and the craze soon spread. There are now yarn bombing groups in dozens of countries and they have covered bus stops, bicycle racks, benches, phone boxes and even fountains! Like most types of street art, the works are temporary and begin to fall apart within a few weeks, so yarn bombers photograph and film their works and upload them to the internet, where everybody can see them.

Some of the men who want to have their photos taken with Rocky are disappointed when they see the jacket, but Jessie is pleased that they react that way. She believes that most street art is done by men and that yarn bombing is a more feminine activity. But not everyone approves of the new form of street art. Some people argue that if it is done without permission, then covering public objects in wool is vandalism and littering. That may be true in the eyes of the law, but the police appear to take a relatively relaxed attitude to yarn bombers. They might interrupt them if they see them at work in the street, but yarn bombers say the police are more likely to find their activities amusing than view them as criminal.

However, yarn bombing has landed Polish artist, Agata Oleksiak, in serious trouble. Agata – or Olek, as she calls herself – has been an active artist since 2003, and has covered cars and diggers in wool, as well as a whole train in her native city of Łódź. Her work has been shown in museums and galleries around the world. But when Olek knitted covers and attached them to sculptures in an underwater museum near Cancún, the Mexican authorities were not very happy. Like Jessie Hemmons's jacket, Olek's covers had a political message: she wanted to draw attention to endangered species such as the whale shark. But the director of the museum claims that Olek may herself have harmed the marine life that grows on the sculptures. Olek is puzzled by the reaction. She claims that her message is a positive one and sees herself as a professional artist. She believes that her creations are as good as the paintings you see in the world's best art galleries, and if anyone calls her work 'yarn bombing', she gets quite upset.

Whether you see yarn bombing as a bit of fun that brightens up drab cities, or as a form of high culture with a serious message, it is a craze that is likely to continue.

GPS challenge

Claudia's blog

Dear friends! Sorry I haven't blogged for a while. I've been a bit busy lately. You'll find out why But first of all, have you ever heard of Geocaching? It's a kind of treasure-hunting game that uses a GPS device - usually your smartphone - to find small containers called geocaches. These are hidden all over the world - but usually people start with geocaches that are close to their home. The great thing about Geocaching is that it leads you to some beautiful and amazing places that you probably didn't know about. I can definitely recommend it - it's healthy and it's fun. Although I should warn you that it's also seriously addictive!

So how does it work, exactly? Well, the first step is to go to the Geocaching website or download the geocaching app onto your phone. Then you choose a geocache and you start looking. People have been hiding geocaches for more than ten years, so there are literally millions of them around the world. There are sure to be some near your home, wherever you live. (There are geocaches across all seven continents, including Antarctica!) Some are very hard to find. They may be hidden beside a river, up a tree or even below the ground.

Geocaching is a quite a new game: it began around the year

2000. However, similar games did exist in the past. For example, in the middle of the 19th century, a game called

'letterboxing' became popular in the south of England.

People who enjoyed walking in the countryside began to hide boxes all along the route. These boxes contained postcards addressed to themselves. When other walkers found a box, they collected the cards and posted them. This often took many weeks, because the boxes were often hidden in remote places, not by the paths.

In Geocaching, the boxes don't contain postcards. They contain a logbook, where the person who finds it can write their name and the date. (They also record the find on the website.) As well as the logbook, geocaches often contain a toy or gift. You are welcome to take this, provided you replace it with something you have brought with you.

The basic game just involves finding a geocache and recording it online and in the logbook. However, there are lots of variations. For example, there are multi-cache challenges, where each cache contains the co-ordinates for the next cache, until you reach the final cache containing the logbook. There are also travelling caches, where each person who finds the cache then hides it in a different location and updates the information on the website. And there are webcam caches. When you do these, you don't find a physical container or logbook; you find a public webcam and then capture an image of yourself on the webcam as proof that you have been successful. I've tried all of these types, and personally, I've enjoyed the multi-cache challenges the most.

Geocaching is an activity you can do alone or, like me, with a couple of friends. But there are also Geocaching events where you can get together with hundreds of other fans of the game. For example, the 'Fumble after Dark' event is held every November in Sweden and sounds like great fun.

About a thousand geocachers get together for a day of talks and presentations about geocaching. And then they head outside into the darkness for some night-time adventures!

I've been enjoying my Geocaching experiences so much that I'm seriously thinking about going to 'Fumble after Dark' next year. So why don't you get into Geocaching too, and I might see you there!

Bye for now!!

Claudia