

Yarnbombing

is a form of sometimes-guerrilla public/street art//protest. It's a kind of craftivism (craft activism), a term coined by Betsy Greer in 2003 to describe "a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper and your quest for justice more infinite."

It started in 2005 in Houston, TX, with Magda Sayeg and a friend—going by PolyCotN and AKrylik—who started what became Knitta Please (or Knitta, for short). Yarn graffiti, as it's also called, takes all kinds of forms all around the world: cozies on trees, rocks, doorknobs, benches, lampposts, chain-link fences, and bridges, crocheted or knit signs and pothole filling, and free-form 3d objects like flowers and mushrooms. And just like graffiti, some yarnbombing projects are illegal—while others are ignored by the law or commissioned by individuals, civic bodies, or other organizations.

One iconic example comes from Copenhagen in 2006, when knitters and crocheters covered a WWII-era tank set in front of the Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center with over 4000 15x15cm squares in various shades of pink in protest of war in Iraq:



(Photo by Barbara Katzin. Marianne Jørgensen with the Cast Off Knitters, Pink M.24 Chaffe, 2006.)

In 2011, during the Wisconsin protests knitters covered benches in slogans like "This is what democracy looks like!" and "People united will never be defeated!" (two often-heard chants in and around the capitol building in Madison). During the 2012 student strike in Québec, strikers knit and crocheted hundreds of red squares (a symbol of protest against rising university fees), joining them into a red quilt and using them to cover surfaces around campuses and the city. And that same year, the Hillcrest AIDS Centre, outside Durban, South Africa, was yarnbombed to raise awareness for World AIDS Day.

Yarnbombers might seek to beautify eyesores, bring attention to often-overlooked elements of the landscape, soften the hard edges of cities, add color to a monotone palette, draw attention to a message included in the tag, among other things. But the practice has its limitations: in wet climates, yarn can hold water, damaging trees, rotting wooden structures, and rusting metal ones. Tags can get dirty, dingy, and saggy, defeating the purpose of beautifying an area. If left long enough to the elements, the yarn will break down, becoming its own kind of litter (and so making its way into waterways — but also into bird nests).

So if you're ready to accept the risks (like citation or arrest) and responsibilities (maintaining your project or taking it down before it becomes an environmental problem), it's time to do some yarn work!

Yarnbombing is pretty evenly divided between knit and crochet. (Knitting is the one with two sticks, while crochet is the one with one hook.) Both have their advantages, but since crochet is a bit more freeform (and, in my experience a *bit* easier to learn at the beginning), that's what we're going to do today. Some yarnbombing projects involve working right on the object being covered (like Knitta's London double-decker bus), but most projects—certainly *beginner* projects—consist of pre-made squares or rectangles that are joined to other pieces or themselves on-site (often using zip-ties). So we're gonna get real square[ish].

Beginning Square Crochet

Slightly adapted from the Learn to Knit & Crochet website (learntoknit.com) back in 2009. (So, the webpage this is adapted from is long gone.)

These instructions are to make square things; once you get a hang of the concept, feel free to stitch into different loops or to try to make circular things. I learned to crochet by watching YouTube videos and seeking out other tutorials online. There are LOTS of good, free resources. (So if these directions don't make great sense to you, it's very likely that you'll be able to find another approach that does.)

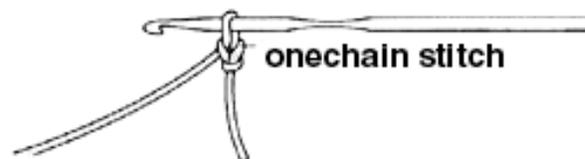
Step 1: Hold crochet hook in right hand and make a slip knot on hook.



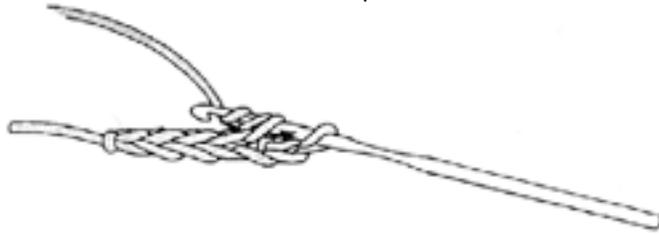
Step 2: Bring yarn over hook from back to front and grab it with hook.



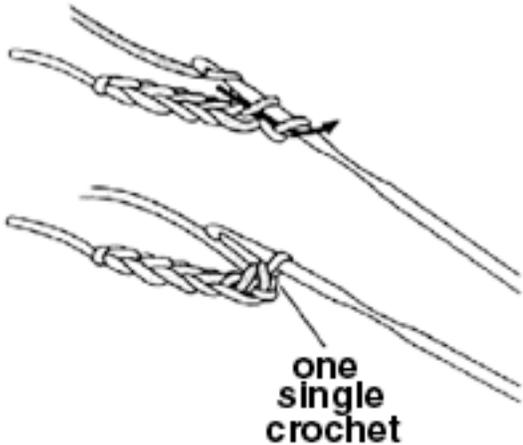
Step 3: Draw hooked yarn through slip knot and onto hook. This makes one chain stitch. Repeat steps 2 and 3 in sequence.



Step 4: To loop back around and start a new row, skip the first chain stitch.



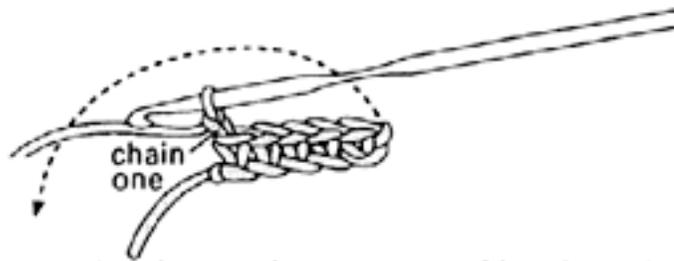
Step 5: Insert hook into center of next chain stitch. Draw yarn through the chain stitch and up onto the hook. There are now 2 loops on hook.



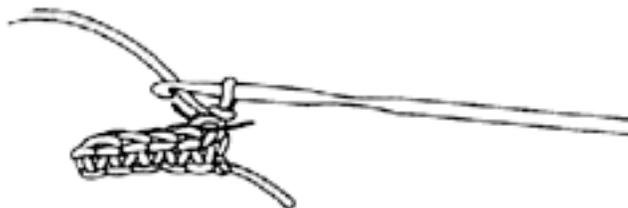
Step 6: Bring yarn over hook from back to front, and draw it through both loops on hook. One loop remains on the hook, and you have just made one single crochet stitch.

Repeat steps 5 and 6 through your row of loops. Be sure to work in the very last chain—at that point, you will have completed one row of single crochet. Woot!

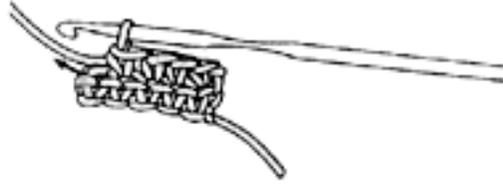
Step 7: At the end of the row, make one chain stitch, then turn the work counter-clockwise, leaving the hook in the chain.



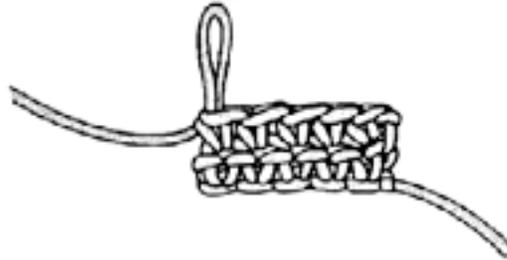
Step 8: Now you can begin another row, working into the stitches of the previous row. Make one single crochet stitch in first stitch and in each remaining stitch of the previous row.



Be sure to work into the last stitch. Then turn and repeat step 7. **Repeat steps 7 and 8** until you're done.



Finishing: When you have about a 6" end or more on your yarn at the end of a row, draw the hook straight up, bringing the yarn through the remaining loop on the hook, to make a knot. Thread yarn into yarn needle and weave back and forth through stitches to secure.



Once you have a finished square or rectangle, you're set! You could embellish the piece (by stitching words onto it, by making little flowers to apply to it, by joining it to other pieces) or just head out to wrap and zip-tie it around an appropriately-sized and -located object. BOOM!



This image—of yarnbombers at work on a bridge in Berlin—is part of a 2014 series called “yarnbombing for lgbt* rights” by Flickr user distelfliege. The album tags include “sochi2014,” “lgbt,” “pride,” “humanrights,” and “uganda.”

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Want more? There are books (like *Yarn Bombing: The Art of Crochet and Knit Graffiti* by Mandy Moore and Leanne Prain, *Knitting for Good! A Guide to Creating Personal, Social, and Political Change* by Betsy Greer, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* edited by Maria Elena Buszek, and *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting* by David Revere McFadden) and websites (like knitta.com, castoff.info, and yarnbombinglosangeles.com) and lots of social media groups. Maureen Daly Goggin has presented on yarnbombing at conferences but hasn't, I think, published on it yet.