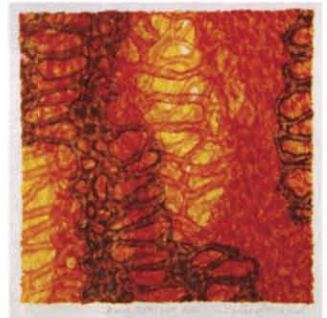


# Make, Unravel, Remake

*Printmaker Carol MacDonald depicts knitted states of being as spiritual metaphor and process.*

By Rebecca Klassen



**K**nitting is a process of transformation. From the singular line to the interlocked arms of loops in fabric, yarn undergoes a state change in the way that flowing water hardens into ice. Artist Carol MacDonald brings this tacit alchemical awareness into view, printing and drawing the structures and stages of knitting.

“The way that you make mistakes and unravel things,” MacDonald says, “the way that you can fix things and reknit things, the way that often yarn is just a huge tangle of line and it can be re-sorted and rolled into a ball and something made out of it, the messes we create, the disruptions:

All of that is incredibly interesting to me.”

For much of her forty-year career, MacDonald has created fiber art—on paper, that is. To create her knitting series of prints, begun in 2007, she works in two basic modes: printing the tracteries of knitting, often by lifting textures from stitched pieces in a monotype process, and rhythmically drawing and painting the lines of yarn formed in knitting patterns. (Firmer fibers that leave crisp impressions print the best, and she relishes the crunchy cotton, hemp, stainless steel and paper yarns from Habu Textiles.) These two types of mark making—one the impression of real fiber, the other stemming from her imagination—

suggest narratives when used together: the movement from idea to reality, or the gap between perfection and the actual, which might fall short of expectations. In the monotype process, an inked plate that has been freshly run through the press can be printed again, though more lightly. MacDonald uses ghosting, as the technique is called, to create layers that conjure memories, changes and the

subconscious. Others, such as her Knit Stratum series, convey intense cellular worlds.

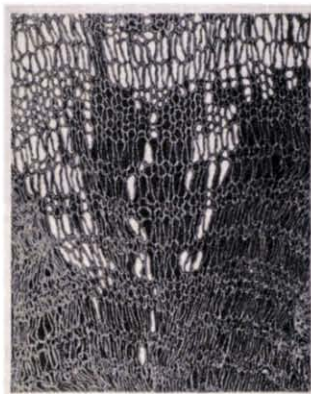
Drawing and painting also allow MacDonald to portray structures in large scale, providing a microscopic view on-to the contours and movements of yarn. It “shines a light just on that pattern,” she says. “It’s the delight in thinking, How

does this pattern actually work? In a finished piece of knitting, often you’re seeing the surface and not necessarily how the thing is looped together. But knitters really understand how it works. This just further explodes that.”

As snapshots of malleable textiles, her works have tended to reflect emotional and spiritual moments in her own life, or act as catharsis, though she strongly believes that the personal is often universal. For instance, in the 1980s MacDonald was active in the feminist Women’s Caucus for Art. While many women artists at the time questioned traditional roles and wondered if motherhood and professional success could co-exist, she decided to celebrate domesticity by portraying



**Above:** MacDonald creates a monotype print. **Top:** Steel & Silk I, 2009. **Right:** Knit Stratum XIII, 2011. **Below:** Knit Stratum I, 2009.

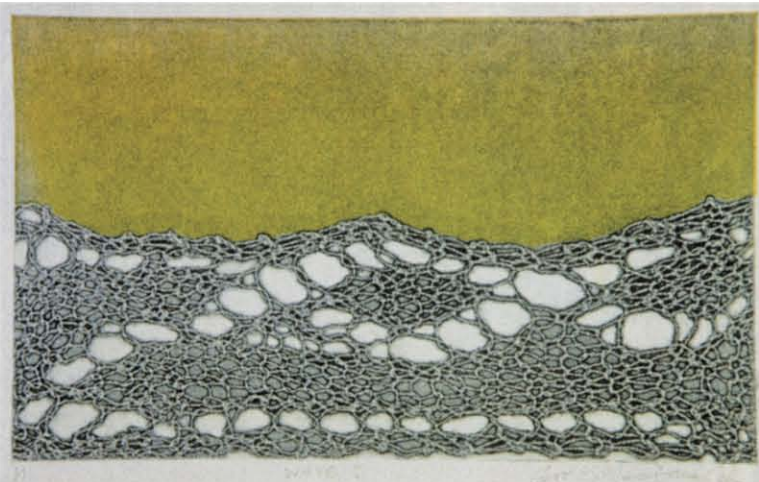
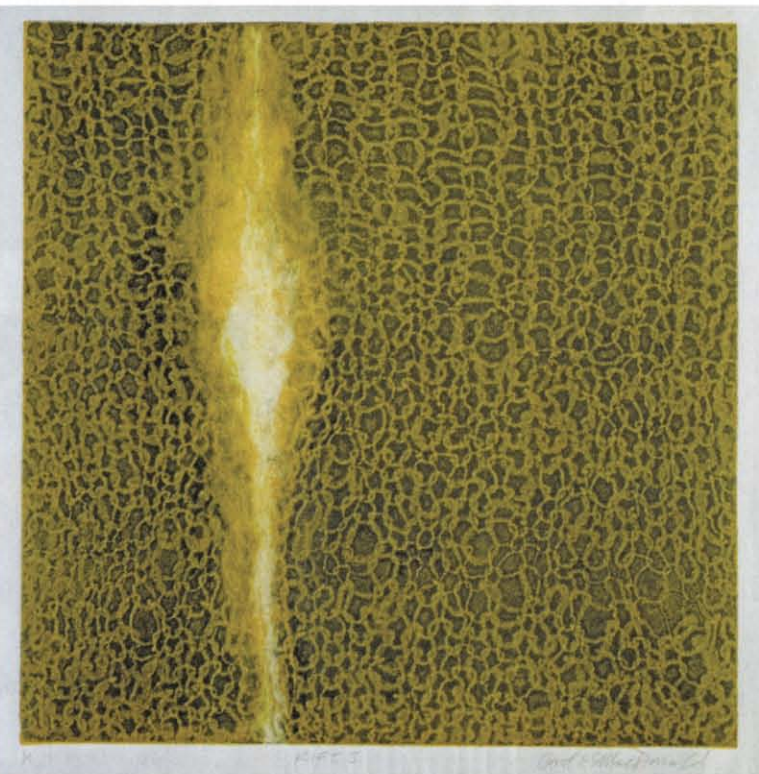




*“Knitting, as a repetitive process, is a way that we can come into our soul. It can bring us into ourselves.”*

**Above left:** Knit Structure I, 2009. **Above right:** Transition III, etching, monoprint, 2010. **Left top:** Rift I, 2009. **Left bottom:** Wave I, 2010. **Below left:** Moss Series III, etching, monoprint, 2012. **Below right:** Woolly Scarf I, 2012.

ARTWORK PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY DUBACK. STUDIO SHOTS BY ROB HUNTER



laundry piles, clotheslines and other household surroundings. “It felt like a political act to make work about having babies,” she says. This sense of homage to women’s work persists in her knitting series.

Her work in the early 1990s came from realizing that she had been abused as a young child by a neighbor. She began unraveling sweaters that her mother and grandmother had hand-knit for her, wrapping the ripped-out yarn to create cocoonlike objects. “They were sweaters that I had worn,” she says. “They were well-loved sweaters, so I had to take them apart. How I was in the world and in my family—I literally had to unravel my understanding of myself.”

Like so many now-knitters who sought solace following the tragedies of 9/11, MacDonald—taught to knit as a young girl by her mother—returned to the craft. Now she mostly freeform knits in order to print from the panels, stitching very few garments. “I’m not the greatest knitter in the world,” she says. “Knitting [garments] for me is a lot of ripping out and redoing and finishing



the thing and finding it doesn’t really fit and ripping it out.” For MacDonald, the pleasure lies in the process.

She finds the steady repetition comforting. “Most of life these days, especially with technology and how we’re barraged with the media, we’re constantly called out of ourselves,” she says. “Knitting, as a repetitive process, is a way that we can come into our soul. It can really bring us into ourselves. Printmaking, which is also very repetitive, is that same hands-on process.”

“A lot of my work is about that connection to self, and also to a larger being or the larger picture. The divine, the divine within, the soul. It’s what spirituality is, right?”

For more on the artist, visit [www.carolmacdonald.com](http://www.carolmacdonald.com).