

Graffiti's Cozy, Feminine Side

By MALIA WOLLAN. MAY 18, 2011

THE bronze statue of Rocky near the Philadelphia Museum of Art irritated Jessie Hemmons. She found the statue too big, too macho and too touristy, so last month Ms. Hemmons, a 24-year-old artist, bombed him. With pinkish yarn.

Using a stepladder and a needle, Ms. Hemmons stitched a fuchsia-colored vest on the fictional boxer with the words "Go See the Art" inscribed across the front, to push tourists to visit the museum that so many skip after snapping their photo with the statue.

She calls the act of artistic vandalism "yarn bombing," adapting a term for plastering an area with graffiti tags.

"Street art and graffiti are usually so male dominated," Ms. Hemmons said. "Yarn bombing is more feminine. It's like graffiti with grandma sweaters."

To record their ephemeral works (the fragile pieces begin to fray within weeks), yarn bombers photograph and videotape their creations and upload them to blogs, social networks and Web sites for all the world to see.

Not all artists who use yarn in their work are thrilled with the woolly trend.

"I don't yarn bomb, I make art," said Agata Oleksiak, 33, an artist in New York who has been masking humans, bicycles and swimming pools in neon-colored crochet since 2003. Last Christmas Eve, Olek, as she prefers to be called, covered the "Charging Bull" statue near Wall Street in a pink and purple cozy, and uploaded a video of it to YouTube. "If someone calls my bull a yarn bomb, I get really upset," she added.

"I started it with a bike and ended up with the Charging Bull as a Christmas gift to NYC and a tribute to the sculptor of the bull, Arturo di Modica, who placed the bull on Wall Street in Christmas of 1987 as a symbol of the "strength and power of the American people" following the 1987 Stock Market crash."

Olek, whose work has been shown in museums and galleries worldwide, considers yarn bombing to be the commonplace work of amateurs and exhibitionists.

"Lots of people have aunts or grandmas who paint," she said. "Do you want to see that work in the galleries? No. The street is an extension of the gallery. Not everyone's work deserves to be in public."

Adapted from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/fashion/creating-graffiti-with-yarn.html? r=1>