

Introduction to craftivism for environmental issues

Craftivism (craft + activism) uses craft as a tool to serve activism causes, often in quiet, kind and memorable ways for the maker, viewer and receivers of the craftivism object. You can use the meditative process for mindfulness and to reflect thoughtfully rather than react thoughtlessly about how you can be part of the positive change you wish to see in our world.

You might keep your object as a physical reminder to keep being part of protecting our planet and animals and not forget about them. Your object might be used to show in public to inspire change in others or engage communities in important causes. You could even consider making an object to give to your local politician or other people in positions of power to encourage them to help support our environment.

For young people, craftivism offers an unusual, memorable and impactful way to contribute to environmental and conservation efforts. Especially anyone who is shy, introverted or anxious of louder forms of protest.

This guide introduces you to the concept of craftivism, providing historical and contemporary examples of how craft and art have been used to advocate for environmental issues.



What is craftivism?

The term 'craftivism' was coined by Betsy Green in 2003 and is a form of activism that uses crafting techniques (such as knitting, sewing, paper crafts and hand embroidery) to convey messages and advocate for social and environmental change in different ways to different people (politicians, the public, business leaders and others). It blends creativity with activism, allowing individuals to express their concerns as a catalyst for conversation and connection and help mobilise others through these hands-on, tangible projects.

Historical example of craftivism

The Suffragette Fellowship (Early 20th Century)

- **What happened:** During the early 20th century, suffragettes fighting for women's right to vote used craftivism to spread their message. They created banners, badges and embroidered items with slogans and symbols supporting women's suffrage
- **Impact:** These craftivist efforts helped to visually communicate the suffrage movement's goals and gain support. The use of craft made the movement's message accessible and relatable, enhancing its visibility.
- **Why it matters:** This early example of craftivism shows how art and craft can be used effectively in political and social movements to draw attention and foster solidarity.



Contemporary Examples of Craftivism

The Craftivist Collective (2009-Present)

- **What happened:** Founded by Sarah P Corbett, the Craftivist Collective uses craft as a form of “Gentle Protest” to help deeply engage the maker (craftivist) as well as public and powerholders such as politicians to be part of the positive change needed on issues such as human rights, gender equality, the unethical side of the fashion industry and environmental justice. Projects include embroidery pieces to gift to decision makers to encourage them to use their power for good, street art as a catalyst for conversation and thought in members of the public passing by or to gain media and social media attention, as well as using craftivism projects to create hopeful, welcoming and kind community events for people to join in.
- **Impact:** The Craftivist Collective’s projects have engaged people in creative activism, encouraging them to reflect on and act upon environmental and social issues. Their work has helped change laws, policies,, hearts and minds around the world and has been featured in exhibitions and media globally, reaching a wide audience.
- **Why it matters:** This contemporary example illustrates how a ‘Gentle Protest’ approach to craftivism can address modern challenges, including environmental issues, through engaging and accessible methods.

The “I Am Not A Plastic Bag” Campaign (2007)

- **What happened:** British designer Anya Hindmarch created the “I Am Not A Plastic Bag” campaign to raise awareness about the environmental impact of plastic bags. The campaign involved producing reusable cloth bags with a strong message, which were distributed and sold to encourage people to reduce plastic use.
- **Impact:** The campaign succeeded in raising awareness about plastic pollution and promoting the use of reusable bags. It also sparked a broader conversation about sustainable practices and consumer habits.
- **Why it matters:** This campaign showcases how craftivism and design can influence consumer behaviour and drive environmental advocacy.

The Climate Quilt Project (2018-Present)

- **What happened:** The Climate Quilt Project invites people to create quilt squares that represent their personal concerns about climate change. These squares are then assembled into large quilts that are displayed at events and exhibitions.
- **Impact:** The quilts serve as a visual representation of collective concern about climate change, fostering community engagement and dialogue on environmental issues. They have been used in various campaigns and public displays.
- **Why it matters:** It demonstrates how craft can be used to create a powerful visual statement about climate change and unite people in a common cause.

How can you get involved in craftivism?

- 1. Search online for craftivist projects:** Look for craftivist projects you can join or to get inspiration to create your own focused on environmental issues.
- 2. Share your project on social media:** Use craft techniques like knitting, sewing, or painting to create items or art that promote environmental messages. Share your work on social media to spread awareness.
- 3. Collaborate with others:** Team up with friends, family or local organizations to work on larger craftivist projects or campaigns.
- 4. Educate and advocate:** Use your craftivism projects as a platform to educate others about environmental issues and advocate for positive change.

Craftivism uses handicrafts as a tool to serve social causes in activism to address important environmental and conservation issues. By participating in craftivism, you can use your head, heart and hands together to make a difference, raise awareness of an injustice and inspire action. Historical and contemporary examples show how craft can be a powerful tool for advocacy and change. Use the colours, size and aesthetics of handicrafts to help your activism contribute to a healthier and more sustainable world.

The Craftivist Collection



We spoke to the founder of the Craftivist Collective, Sarah P Corbett, to give you some advice on the best ways to get into craftivism if it's a form of changemaking that interests you.

Here's what she said:

"I'm proud to say that our work has helped change policies, laws, hearts and minds around the world. With Craftivism, we're not starting from our love of craft and allowing that to lead us. As with any form of activism it's important to start by creating a robust strategy. So, we always begin by asking - 'what's the injustice?', 'what realistic solutions can be put into place?', 'who are the decision makers involved?'. And then, 'is craftivism the right tool to serve the cause most effectively?'. We then build our strategy around how we can respectfully engage power-holders, and those they listen to, to feel inspired and supported to be part of the positive change we need in our world. Sometimes, our craftivism is used to gently nudge people, in spaces where you might not usually see social justice issues addressed. And sometimes it's making an object for ourselves, to keep as a physical reminder to be more intentional about how we show up in the world.

Our craftivism doesn't replace other forms of activism - it is another tool we can add to our activism toolbox, so that our campaigning for social justice can be as positive, powerful and as effective as possible. The process of crafting is just as powerful as the final product. It allows us to slow down, think clearly and help us to be mindful of what we bring to our craftivism. The slowness, and repetitive hand motions, create space to channel our feelings of powerlessness, anger, sadness, into something proactive rather than reactive. And we can use the time for deep engagement and critical thinking around the many layers of

injustice that we need to help dismantle: How we use the senses to serve the cause? What materials, colours and even fonts have we chosen? Are we using non-violent language, open questions? Threading through your motives; are they pure and selfless, or is there a little bit of ego in there that we need to unpick? It's important for us to think about all of these threads, so that our craftivism is as inviting, attractive and effective as it can be."

If you're interested in using craftivism for your Conservation Changemakers' project, find out more on Sarah's website where you can also find her handbook on starting your own craftivist projects and lots of other helpful resources: **Craftivist Collective**