

crafters that queer craft must consist of rainbows...and that our craft is just a means through which we express our Pride," says QCC jeweler Meaghan O'Malley. She worries that labeling her crafts as "queer" will cause them to be regarded as a novelty or, worse, ignored altogether.

Rainbows or no, many crafters feel that the act of creation—the act of crafting—is always political. Mainstream media depictions of the Handmade Revolution frequently imply a global female battalion of artsy-craftsy hipsters, housewives and post-third-wave feminists all stitching away and bitching as they craft a new, sparkle-felted vision of neo-retro-domesticity. "Not your granny's crafts!" the headlines declare. It's true that in the age of mass-market sweatshop goods, doing for oneself has a revolutionary edge. Many crafters argue that choosing to practice skills that are traditionally labeled feminine (like sewing, knitting, needlework, etc.) is, in part, an ironic subversion of gender stereotypes.

Perhaps this is doubly true when the crafter is queer. "All the cues socially and culturally tell me that I should be focusing on other things, but here I am embroidering and playing with beads," O'Malley says.

However, pushing the boundaries of gender and sexuality through handicraft is only one part of the queer crafter agenda. Both the QCC and the Queer Etsy Street Team hope to create an alternative handmade marketplace where queers can offer support to one another artistically, socially and economically. Part of queer crafting, for QueenofQueens, is "keeping our money circulating amongst ourselves as much as we can." She argues that this new twist on "buying local" is one of the driving principles that makes the queer crafting community special.

While crafting is a business for all queer crafters we spoke with, ultimately, the bottom line for many crafters cannot be expressed in dollars and cents.

"It's always a fun experience at art fairs when queer people notice my rainbow resin pieces," explains Bober. "Most people don't think I'm queer when they look at me, but when they see the pendants, it makes them do a double take. Often they will smile or start talking with me. I feel like I've made a connection." ■

## NOT YOUR GRANDMA'S KNITTING CIRCLE

### The Northwest's indie movement.



Artist Nikki McClure has a following of dreamers and farmers, artists and pragmatists. Her trademark, an annual calendar with 12 paper-cut images (above) and one-word directives like "congregate," "revive" and "mend," hangs in the offices of *The Progressive* and Patagonia.

But she's no longer looking for the spotlight. In fact, she hardly goes out—spending her time instead with her partner, JT, and their 5-year-old son, Finn, or craned over a drafting table in her Olympia, Wash., studio, where she carves images of nature, labor, community and wonderment from single sheets of black paper with an X-Acto knife.

Until Finn recently entered kindergarten, McClure was following the "two-nap rule." She had to complete each piece in the time it took for two of his naps. "Motherhood made my work tighter, more focused," she says.

There was a time when McClure jumped into the spotlight head-on. She was in her 20s and living in Olympia, Wash., the epicenter of the early '90s punk movement that bred the riot grrrrs. "It was a creatively explosive time," says McClure, who sang at K Records' first International Pop Underground Convention and shared the stage with Bikini Kill and Kurt Cobain.

"[Performing] taught me I had a voice, and that it was important," says McClure. She was living the DIY ethic even then, circumventing the requisite collegiate coffee shop gig to make mittens for K Records. "Everyone had T-shirts," she says. "But who had mittens?"

When she began experimenting with paper cutting in 1996, she joined a growing group of musicians and artists who were building on the independent ethos of punk rock to, among other things, reclaim craft. "As I began to make things visually," says McClure. "I realized I didn't need to express myself on stage anymore."

"One thing that the Pacific Northwest

has going for it that some other places didn't in the past is that DIY and underground music culture was a big part of it," says Faythe Levine, director of the recently released documentary film *Handmade Nation*. "A lot of the people who are involved in the DIY community now came out of that, out of riot grrrl and out of certain underground punk communities."

Pat Castaldo and Aaron Tuller were the first to connect that burgeoning community with the rest of the nation. In 1999, they created buyolympia.com. What began as a place for fellow Olympians to sell their handmade arts and crafts quickly evolved into a nationwide hub of commerce for Indie crafters. McClure was their first artist, her calendar the first item.

In 2008, buyolympia.com relocated its warehouse to Portland, Ore. Then last fall, they opened Land, a retail shop and gallery adjoining the warehouse on Portland's trendy Mississippi Avenue. "The great thing about this is that it's curated," says Gail O'Hara, former store manager and co-editor of the now-defunct *Chick Factor* magazine. "Etsy is great, but...it's like, OK, I want a tote bag, and 300 pop up to choose from."

Land's bright second-floor gallery hosts monthly shows from old-guard Buy Olympians as well as occasional new artists. The shows and the handmade prints, cards, DVDs, jewelry, books, clothes and kitschy, crafty odds and ends that fill the store are primarily the work of female West Coast artists.

"Handcrafts are traditionally woman's work," says Levine, who traveled over 19,000 miles documenting the nation's indie craft community. She saw woman reclaiming roles that were once thrust upon them—on their own time, in their own ways. "When I cook and sew in front of my son, it's like I'm a magician," says McClure. "This isn't feminist-based. It's about the salvation of humanity. [Nina Lary]