



by *Julia Farwell-Clay*

Your first urge when you see one of Tatyana Yanishevsky’s giant knitted flowers is to reach out and touch them. “They are tactile,” she says. “ I see people try to restrain themselves from touching them, because they think it’s wrong. But I let some people. After all, the pollinator has a tactile experience of the flower. That’s the whole point. It’s how the plant reproduces.”

Yanishevsky began knitting giant flowers out of a marriage of impulses: the amount of work that goes into knitting, a frustration with the unpredictability and impermanent appeal of knitted garments, and her studies in the field of botany. Yanishevsky explores plant structures through their knitted versions, investigating symmetry through exact stitch counts and repeating patterns, or at times just knitting spontaneously, according to the requirements of the plant’s structure.

In making a new piece, she begins with the sex organs, what she says are often the most intriguing part of the plant, and enjoys exploring what is usually tiny, hidden, and unnoticed. The finished pieces, like a five foot wide Hibiscus blossom, towering basketball-sized rose hips in various stages of decay, or a Passion Flower with foot-long coronal spikes may be charismatic, cartoonish, or even monstrous, but the flowers at this scale become confrontational, which is what Yanishevsky



wants.

“I’m really interested in the dichotomy of something warm and fuzzy, something grandmotherly like knitting and flowers, and just by shifting the scale, you get this weird plant human plant interaction, like they are alien creatures.”

Yarn as an artistic medium presents Yanishevsky with creative opportunities and mechanical challenges that are different from the materials of her somewhat traditional art training. “At first, I had a lot of faith in yarn as the medium in which I could do anything. You can increase all these different ways; the end result leans to the right, or to the left. Knitting can’t lie! It’s about the direct process, no layers being built up like in painting or sculpture. If you mess up, you take it out. But it has to be honest.”

A graduate of Brown University who concentrated her studies in biology and visuals arts, Yanishevsky also studied at RISD. In 2005, Yanishevsky was the youngest of 19 artists invited to the Outstanding Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture exhibition at the [International Sculpture Center](#) in Hamilton, New Jersey and has had her work exhibited in a number of settings, including an installation at the Children’s Museum In Boston, Massachusetts in May of 2008.

Photography by Megan Jones

