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On Craft, Anxiety, and Political Activism

So far 2017 has been terrifying to live through. We are in the most unstable period of recent history, politically, economically, environmentally. It's overwhelming. I wish I was a kid again. A kid who didn't have to worry about work, politics, our planet. Just a kid who didn't realise they would never make enough money to afford a house, because we just built our own from the dining room table and blankets. So that's what I'm doing. Making a blanket fort.

Anxiety UK states 1 in 6 young people live with some form of mental health problems. It's been theorised that crafting of any form can alleviate the symptoms of anxiety and depression. "Hands-on work satisfies our primal craving to create solid objects; it could also be an antidote to our cultural malaise", says neuroscientist Kelly Lambert, author of "Lifting Depression." I am combining my craft, embroidery, with a physical safe space, a place to rest from daily life. You cannot fight injustice if you're too mentally exhausted to move. Apparently a panic attack uses the same amount of energy as running a marathon. Last Saturday I had 3. How do I protest against everything wrong in the world when I've just run 78 miles? My embroidered fort soothes a worried mind, just as creating it calms a hurried heart.

My work reconciles personal feelings of anxiety with the principles of the Arts & Craft movement laid down by Morris and Ruskin. Ruskin forcibly wrote in *Unto This Last*, "THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE", believing that only through creating would we achieve true happiness. We are greater than machines turning the pain in our feet and our back into profit for others. The idea that there is more to life than working is key to my interactive installation art. My fort, a place soft in nature but strong in meaning, is embroidered with flowers, each with significance. At first it looks cozy, feminine, filled with fairy lights and cushions. But the cushion covers are Morris & Co Prints, machine stitched with political messages, the fabric stabbed a thousand times with the needle, violently spitting statements of uprising, revolution, words taken from protests throughout the years. "Deeds Not Words" from the Suffragettes, "Eat The Rich" a bastardisation of the Rousseau quote used during the French Revolution, "Silence = Death" taken from the AIDs epidemic of the 80's. This convalescence is not apolitical...

My fort has been in my bedroom for 2 months now. In the morning I'll drag my duvet and pillows onto the fort floor and I'll either read or paint or sew. It's made out of crisp sheets with an embroidered sunflower yellow back sheet, and the inside of the fort glows. It's a peaceful place to be, so reminiscent of the rainy days of my childhood. As I create, I heal myself. I regain lost strength, the strength needed to fight back against this society, one that judges your value on your capacity to work, your worth by your beauty. The questions of craft and health need to be spoken about in the same space as questions to do with craft and activism. The sense of security and integrity that making provides is itself political at this point in time. I don't feel scared in my blanket fort.