

Throughout history, activities performed by men and women have become so gender specific that the objects people use to perform these tasks have become emblems of gender identity.¹ In the same way that tools and construction came to embody masculinity, sewing and knitting have come to embody femininity and women. As a student in engineering, a male-dominated field, I have spent four years enduring shocked looks and confused questions from strangers, friends, and family when I tell them what I study. I was introduced to crafts like sewing and knitting as a young girl and have created many things with them. As an engineer I have used wrenches, hammers, and screwdrivers to create. I wanted to explore the juxtaposition of these feminine hand crafts with common tools that are typically emblems of masculinity.

I chose to knit and sew the tools not only for familiarity, but also because soft sculpture is a phenomenon that captivated me since I first discovered it. To create works of art out of thread, stuffing, fabric, yarn, and other materials is something that is relatively new in the scale of the sculpture world. In the late 1960s, art critics finally began calling objects made of soft materials 'art' and the word soft sculpture was applied when these objects became an expression of concepts.² Soft sculpture pieces are easily changed and modified, easily poked and scrunched. This is an aspect that other sculptures do not typically have and makes soft sculpture unique.³ By interacting with sculptures, pieces become much more powerful to the viewer. One of the forerunners of the soft sculpture movement, from whom I have taken inspiration, is Claes Oldenburg. Oldenburg is well known for his large (not soft) pieces found in cities, but he played an integral part in the soft sculpture movement in the sixties.⁴ He began to create pieces out of painted canvas and tarp, with the intention that people would touch and move and mold the objects.⁵ Oldenburg believed that others should be involved in the art, not just the artist. By stuffing his objects, he ensured the pieces were easily changed and conformed to various shapes. Oldenburg's soft sculpture pieces ranged from light switches, bathtubs, and toilets to ice cream cones and hamburgers (Figure 1).⁶

I hope you find the same joy in this piece as I have had in constructing it.



Figure 1: Claes Oldenburg's Giant soft hamburger, 1976

¹ Beaudry, Mary Carolyn. *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006. 2. Print.

² Meilach, D. Z. *Soft Sculpture and Other Soft Art Forms*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1974. 3. Print.

³ Kozloff, Max. "The Poetics of Softness." *American Sculpture of the Sixties*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967. 26. Print..

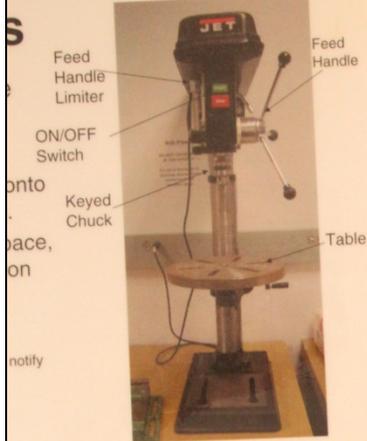
⁴ Oldenburg, Claes. *Claes Oldenburg: an Anthology*. Comp. Germano Celant. New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum, 1995. Print.

⁵ Meilach, 7.

⁶ Bell, Kristine, Greg Lulay, and Alexandra Whitney, eds. *Claes Oldenburg Early Work*. New York: Zwirner and Wirth, 2005.

Our retention guard button will attract you if you make wood chip tools disappear!

ED TO USE THIS MACHINE.



October 2003



7 Sept. 2009

Sorry, 0.125 bit

A large pegboard with various tools and handwritten labels:

- Labels: "SLOT WRENCH", "WIRE CUTTERS", "NEEDLE-NOSE VISE GRIP", "LARGE VISE GRIP", "SMALL PLIERS/WIRE CUTTER", "SCREW-DRIVERS", "FILES", "DRILL CHUCKS", "MARKERS/PENS".
- Tools: A wrench, pliers, wire cutters, a large vise grip, a needle-nose vise grip, several screwdrivers, a set of files, a drill chuck, and a set of drill bits.

