



MARYNA SOCHA

IF IT FITS YOU, YOU ARE LUCKY!

'During my seven months in German and Italian refugee camps, I was asked to join a Czech jazz band to tour Germany and although I was tempted, I chose instead to join my sister and cousin on board a ship bound for Sydney, Australia.

'Once in Sydney, life was hard work but there were also social pleasures. A regular meeting place for many Czechoslovakian refugees was at a hotel near King's Cross. It was during this time that a man unknown to me, who had heard of my singing, asked me if I would sing at a concert. The concert was to be held at the Concord Repatriation Hospital for returned soldiers from Korea and the then Minister of Immigration Harold Holt (who later became Prime Minister) would accompany me on the piano.

'You will not be surprised to know that this offer was not declined! A week later a government limousine was organized to pick me up. Even today when I remember this, I am amazed that without any rehearsal and only a brief discussion with Harold Holt about the music I had chosen to sing, we entered the stage to begin the concert.

'You will ask, 'So why did I end up a knitter and not a singer!' Fate being what it is, I became a single mother and had to work fulltime to make a living. The creative career path I really wanted to pursue was not possible, and so I worked as a clerk for 25 years for a Swiss insurance company.

'The daily one and a half hour train journeys to work and home were long and boring, so to break the monotony knitting became an integral part of my journey. With time, this knitting became more exciting for me and what started off as simply practical, grew into an art form. I would be so engrossed with my knitting that on several occasions I could be seen getting off the train with various different balls of wool trailing behind me!

I prepare different coloured wool that I wish to use, the same way an artist would prepare their paints and the knitting needles are like my brushes.



MARYNA SOCHA is an unstoppable 92 year old who, when she isn't knitting, is an enthusiastic international traveller. Maryna says: 'I am not a professional knitter. When creating a new piece, I never use a pattern, the design simply comes to me as I go, through a semblance of images in my head.

'I prepare different coloured wool that I wish to use, the same way an artist would prepare their paints and the knitting needles are like my brushes. This is why people often hear me say, 'If it fits you, you are lucky!'

'As a young student in Prague, my creative interest began when I studied fashion design at The School of Decorative Arts, at the same time as completing English exams at the Charles University. During that time I also persevered with private singing lessons as I always wanted to be an opera singer. Unfortunately, the Second World War interfered with my burgeoning singing career, and the intolerable political circumstances had me fleeing my homeland of Czechoslovakia for different shores.

'My knitting technique is far from traditional. It begins with what would be the bottom of a coat, skirt or a vest, which means that I have up to 300 islets and anywhere up to 60 balls of wool on one needle. Why so many balls on one needle? This is because of all the different colours I am blending, as well as the design shapes.

'My garments are always made as a whole piece, excepting the sleeves which are two pieces done on one needle. I use anywhere from five to ten colours which repeat themselves throughout the whole garment. One row can take me half an hour or more because when changing colours on the one needle, I need to knot twice to keep it together.

'When I finish a garment I usually take it for a walk, and I am always stopped by people in the street because they are intrigued and want to know if what I am wearing I actually made myself. I like to know why people always ask me that same question, and the one time I did inquire, the lady simply answered 'because it's different'.

Maryna Socha was born in Nove Zamky Czechoslovakia and today lives in Coffs Harbour New South Wales near her artist daughter Aloisia Fenyes. When she began to make her intriguing knitwear she usually made a size to fit herself (quite small) and her first commissions came from Sydney boutiques in the 1980s. Later Maryna exhibited her pieces in Blue Mountains galleries - Nolan on Lovel Gallery, Katoomba, Brown Paper Packages and Gallery Lane Leura - often in collaboration with her daughter's artwork. Today Maryna exhibits at the popular Butter Factory at The Black Hole Gallery in Bellingen.

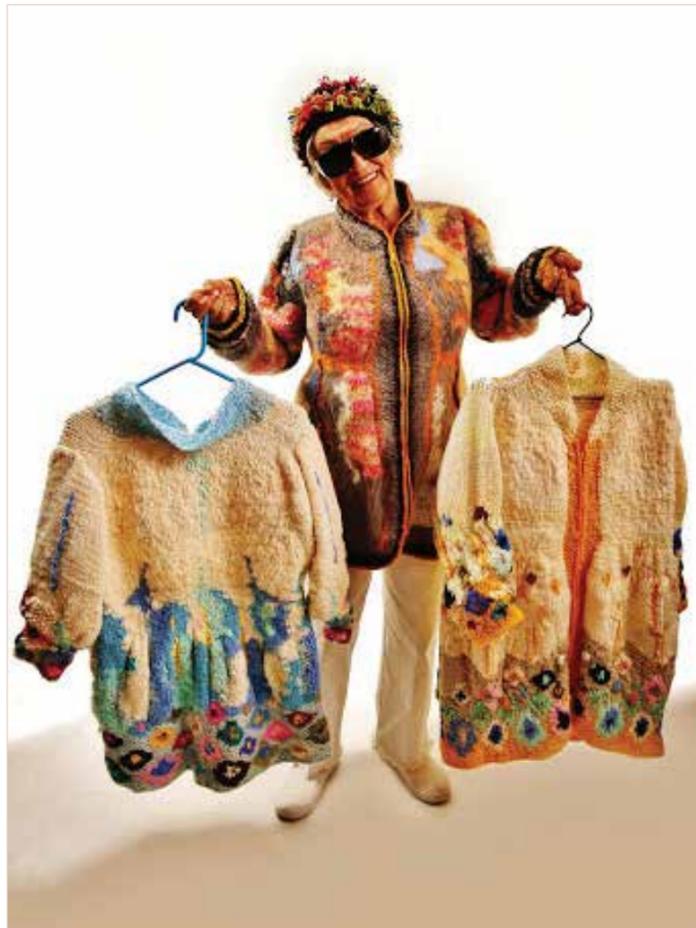
Maryna's work has many collectors and has travelled around the world. Her pieces are regarded as heirlooms: they are beautifully crafted and being of a timeless design are handed on by women to their daughters and granddaughters.

In 2013 ABC OPEN participated in the making of a short story on 'Maryna's Knitting' which can be viewed at <https://open.abc.net.au/people/8329>.

Photography Bruce Thomas
Model Aloisia Fenyes



*When I finish a garment
I usually take it for a walk*



BT