

THE INSTITUTE FOR FIGURING

PRESS RELEASE - September 2010:

A mathematical odyssey into climate change.

The Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef on exhibition
at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History
in Washington DC.

Exhibition Dates: Saturday October 16, 2010 – April 24, 2011

Exhibition Location: Sant Ocean Hall, Focus Gallery, Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

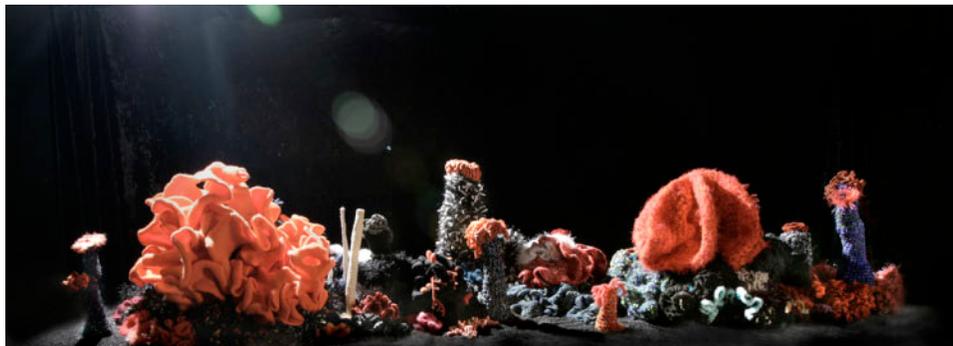
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The Ladies' Silurian Atoll by the Institute For Figuring

The Institute For Figuring is pleased to announce that our *Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef* will be on display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. The exhibition opens October 16, 2010. After major showings in London, New York, Chicago and Dublin, the Reef is coming to Washington, D.C. Discover the geometric beauty of nature and the fragility of underwater ecosystems through this unique fusion of art, science, mathematics and environmentalism.

In coral reefs we witness endless whimsical diversity: wavy strands of kelp, crenellated corals, curlicued sponges. All these forms are biological variations of a mathematical structure known as *hyperbolic* geometry, an alternative to regular *Euclidean* geometry. Although mathematicians long believed that such a structure was impossible, nature has been playing with it permutations for hundreds of millions of years. For humans, the best way to mimic hyperbolic forms is with crochet - thus if one wants to model a coral reef, crochet becomes the logically necessary medium.

Created and curated by Institute For Figuring co-founders, Margaret and Christine Wertheim, the *Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef* is an artistic invocation of a living wonder that has become in itself a new kind of woolly wonder.

Around the world coral reefs are being devastated by global warming, over-fishing, and ocean acidification. If current trends continue, scientists predict that reefs may be gone by the end of this century. In 2005, sisters Margaret and Christine created the *Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef* project as a response to the decline of the Great Barrier Reef in the Australian state of Queensland, where they grew up.

Consciously interweaving mathematics, marine biology, handicraft, and environmental activism, the Crochet Reef project also operates in the tradition of community art practice. Over the past five years the Wertheims and the Institute have worked with communities all over the world to create *local* crochet reefs in cities as far flung as New York, London, Melbourne, Cape Town and Riga (Latvia). The latest of these “Satellite Reefs” is the Smithsonian Community Reef, which is currently being made by people throughout the D.C. area and beyond. On display in the Smithsonian exhibition will be a selection of the Institute For Figuring’s most beautiful Reefs, along with the brand new Smithsonian Community Reef.

Luxuriant and quietly vast, the *Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef* mirrors the living reefs it is designed to invoke both in its visual power and organizational ethos. “Just as living reefs result from the collective power of millions of tiny coral polyps, so the Crochet Reef results from the work of many human beings,” says IFF director Margaret Wertheim. In this woolen wonder we may find a metaphor for hope: Though we humans are individually insignificant, working together we have the power to sustain a more beautiful world.

Exhibition Location: Sant Ocean Hall, Focus Gallery, Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, 10th Street and Constitution Ave N.W., Washington D.C. Open daily 10am to 5:30pm.

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The Institute For Figuring is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational science organization based in Los Angeles. www.theiff.org

IFF director, Margaret Wertheim, is an internationally renowned science writer and author of books on the cultural history of physics. IFF co-director, Christine Wertheim, is a faculty member in the Department of Critical Studies at the California Institute of the Arts.

--For more information about the Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef project visit:
www.crochetcoralreef.org.

--For more information about the Smithsonian exhibition and the Smithsonian Community Reef visit: www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/hreef/index.html

The Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef project has been assisted by the Annenberg Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Norton Family Foundation, and all the Crafters who have contributed pieces to the exhibition.

The Smithsonian Community Reef, created under the auspices of the National Museum of Natural History, has been supported by the Quiksilver Foundation, the Embassy of Australia, and the Coral Reef Alliance.