

**INSTITUTE FOR FIGURING PRESS**  
**P.O. Box 50346**  
**Los Angeles CA 90050**

**Ph: 323.999.7095**  
**www.theiff.org**  
**www.crochetcoralreef.org**

For Release: March 2015  
Contact: Christina Simons [mail@theiff.org](mailto:mail@theiff.org)

*Art, science, mathematics, and environmental consciousness combine in this visually stunning book about a project in which two sisters spark a worldwide, handicraft response to global warming.*

**Crochet Coral Reef**  
**By Margaret Wertheim and Christine Wertheim**

Stretching along the coast of Queensland Australia, the Great Barrier Reef is the first living thing to be seen from outer space. But reefs everywhere are under strain. Global warming and ocean acidification – both by-products of the CO<sub>2</sub> we are pumping into our atmosphere – now threaten these fragile ecosystems. Inspired by the marvel of living reefs, in 2005 Australian-born twin sisters Margaret and Christine Wertheim began to crochet a reef out of yarn and plastic thread. The resulting installations of large-scale sculptural fantasies have been exhibited at art and science museums worldwide, including the Hayward Gallery (London), the Science Gallery (Dublin) and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

The *Crochet Coral Reef* project also has roots in mathematics, for the frilly forms mimicked here are manifestations of what is known as *hyperbolic* geometry, an alternative to the Euclidean geometry we learn about in school. Loopy kelps, crenelated corals and curlicued sponges are all variations of a structure that mathematicians long thought impossible. While brainless corals effortlessly make hyperbolic surfaces, for humans it is not so easy. Only in 1997 did Dr. Daina Taimina, at Cornell University, discover how to make models of this shape – using the art of crochet. Experimenting with, and elaborating upon her simple technique, the Wertheims and their network of crochet contributors have spent the past decade developing a taxonomy of reef-like forms. Just as the diversity of living species results from variations in an underlying DNA code, so a huge range of crochet coral ‘species’ has been brought into being through modifications in a handicraft code. There is an ever-evolving crochet ‘tree of life.’

The *Crochet Coral Reef* also has a significant social dimension. From seeds in the Wertheims’ Los Angeles living room the project has grown into a global endeavor. To date almost 8000 women, (and a few men), have joined in making more than 30 ‘satellite reefs’ in communities across the USA and in a dozen other countries, including Germany, Latvia and the United Arab Emirates. Collectively these efforts represent a quietly vast response to some of the critical environmental issues of our age.

In the wooly archipelagos of the *Crochet Coral Reef*, mathematics, marine biology and evolutionary theory are united via feminine handicraft to create works of art at once visually powerful and ecologically pertinent.

To schedule an interview with Margaret or Christine Wertheim please contact Christina Simons: 323.999.7095, [mail@theiff.org](mailto:mail@theiff.org)

For more information visit [www.crochetcoralreef.org](http://www.crochetcoralreef.org)

### **About the Authors:**

**Margaret Wertheim** is a science writer and author of books on the cultural history of physics, including *Pythagoras' Trousers*, and *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* – a history of Western concepts of space from Dante to the Internet. She has written for The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Guardian and many other places. Her TED talk about the *Crochet Coral Reef* has been viewed more than a million times and translated into 21 languages.

**Christine Wertheim** is a poet, performer and faculty member in the School of Critical Studies at the California Institute of the Arts, where she teaches critical theory, experimental writing, and feminisms. Christine has published two books of poetry – *mUtter-bAbel* and *+t|me'Space* – and edited several anthologies of contemporary writing.

Margaret and Christine are co-founders of the ***Institute For Figuring***, a Los Angeles-based non-profit devoted to creative public engagement with science and mathematics.

### **Crochet Coral Reef**

Release date: March 2015

Institute For Figuring Press

\$45.00, large-format softcover, 208 pages. ISBN: 978-0-9779622-3-5



INSTITUTE FOR FIGURING

---

### **Advance Praise:**

“The *Crochet Coral Reef* is an SF story of string figures, science fact, science fiction, stitched fantasies and speculative fabulation.” — from the book’s *Forward* by Donna Haraway, Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of California at Santa Cruz.

“One of the most extraordinary and inspiring collective art projects of the 21st century.”  
— Ralph Rugoff, Director, Hayward Gallery, London

“The *Crochet Coral Reef* is a feminine kin of the AIDS quilt, for global warming.”  
— Lawrence Weschler, Director Emeritus, New York Institute for the Humanities.