



**ARTS & EVENTS**  
**Wrapper's Delight**

**Akemi Maegawa's  
latest works showcase  
her fancy for felt.**

By Kriston Capps  
Posted: August 15, 2007



The Fabric of Our Lives: Maegawa wrapped her entire artist's studio in felt. (Photo: Pilar Vergara)

When sculptor Akemi Maegawa decided to wrap her artistic tools in felt for her latest piece, she knew exactly what she'd save for last. In fact, she didn't have much of an option.

*Wrapping Project New Studio* features a chair and a broad desk upon which dozens of objects—including books, hammers, a spray bottle, a glue gun, and various other tools of the sculptor's trade—are neatly arranged. All of them, down to the chair and desk, are individually wrapped and sewed shut.

By the time she finished, "I had only needle and thread left," Maegawa says.

The Bethesda-based artist has temporarily moved her entire studio into Irvine Contemporary, where *Wrapping Project* is on display as part of "Introductions3," a juried survey of new works by recent art school graduates. Maegawa completed the piece while attending the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where she earned a master's degree in ceramics earlier this year. Wrapping represents only part of her sculptural portfolio. Irvine is also showing two sets of porcelain baby bottles with silhouettes of weapons printed across each set; when one set of bottles is arranged in sequence, they reveal an image of an AK-47.

# IRVINE

CONTEMPORARY

With her studio under wraps, Maegawa soon ran into an obvious problem—so she turned to wrapping other people’s work. Namely, a central-campus statue by Carl Milles depicting Europa and the bull.

“I’d finished *Wrapping Project New Studio*, so I had no tools,” Maegawa says. “I chose [Milles’ sculpture] because, even though I saw it every day, I dismissed it. It was part of the landscape, and no one paid attention to it.”

Maegawa’s work on Milles’ statue highlights how her style differs from Christo, the elephant in the room wherever wrapped art is concerned: Maegawa wraps objects extremely tightly, whereas Christo’s wrapping somewhat obscures the underlying form. The features of the statue are plainly visible through the fabric.

“Christo’s more like drapery,” Maegawa says. “My intention was to appreciate the really precise contours and create something like a cocoon.”

Bead Blanket, Maegawa’s next project, is designed for when she has absolutely nothing left to wrap but herself: It is her shroud. Hand-woven from glass beads, the blanket hugs the body but obscures as much as it reveals. “If we’re fat or too skinny or shrinking, it doesn’t show anything, the points we’re used to evaluating,” she says. “It shows color, a little bit of contour, it’s not totally translucent. If you’re covered, you can’t tell whether you are dead or alive.”

Images of the artist under the shroud look eerie, as if she were herself made of glass. She won’t consider the piece quite done, however, until she’s lying underneath it for good—which she hopes won’t be for a while.

“It’s a piece I want people to experience—but maybe not right away,” Maegawa says. “For now, we’ll use photography.”

*“Introductions3” is on view from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, to Saturday, Sept. 8, at Irvine Contemporary, 1412 14th St. NW. Free. (202) 332-8767.*