

The Politics of Knitwear

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Caroline Stinger '16 put the entrepreneurial work she was pursuing during Field Work Term to effective use on the campaign trail this January, proving that even knitting can be political.

She was in Los Angeles developing a knitwear brand called Knitsugi. It specializes in repairing and recontextualizing destroyed and discarded natural fiber knit clothing, using playful and poetic repair techniques in the Japanese tradition of kintsugi (金継ぎ) to illuminate moments of aging and breakage as important milestones in the life of an object.

She and her collaborator, Grant Levy-Doolittle, were approached by the model and actress [Emily Ratajkowski](#) with an idea. Ratajkowski had seen a sweater Doolittle had made for Lena Dunham in support of Hillary Clinton, and wanted the duo to design a sweater that she could wear while stumping for Vermont senator and US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in New Hampshire. (They also made one that Ratajkowski gifted to Sanders himself.)

[A picture](#) of Ratajkowski in the pink and red sweater, which takes on the theme of women's rights by replacing the "i" in "Bernie" with the symbol for woman, went viral on Instagram, garnering almost 200,000 "likes." With the help of another Bennington student—Asad Malik '19—Stinger set up [a website](#) to sell the sweater, with part of the proceeds going to Sanders' election campaign. They've been inundated with orders.

Stinger says the experience has taught her a lot about the process of working on a large scale and in the contested space of public discourse.

"We've gotten a lot of orders online and it's rewarding to be able to donate proceeds to Bernie's campaign fund because we both support him as a candidate," she says. "In addition to online orders, we've gotten emails and direct messages on Instagram from people asking about a discount in order to purchase the sweater. That's been really cool-- to engage people about trading or arranging a more financially attainable price point. We really want whoever wants the sweater to have one and it's inspiring when people reach out to us to engage in a dialogue because they know when they contact us they're speaking directly to the designers and technicians."

San Francisco Bay Area Alumni Cooperative co-chair, Adnan Iftekhar '97 helped support Stinger's FWT activities and provided mentorship throughout the seven weeks under the aegis of the Iftekhar Entrepreneurial Grant.