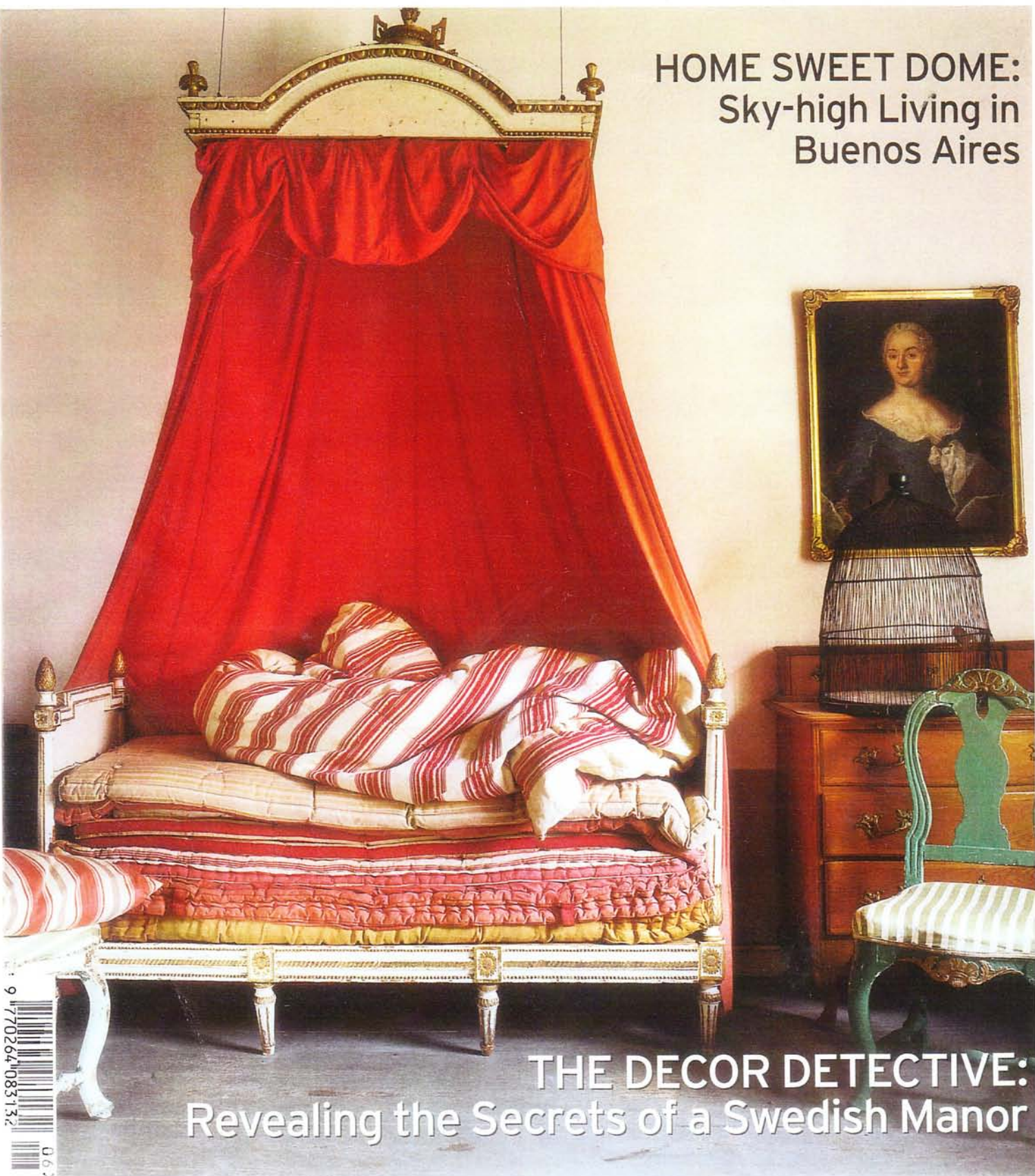


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Kate's Café REBECCA HOSSACK ART GALLERY 28 Charlotte St, London W1

Wool artist extraordinaire Kate Jenkins possesses an uncanny and arresting facility for turning yarn into unlikely fancies, be they sardines on toast, dainty fairy cakes or a deliciously pretty full English breakfast – a still life of star-shaped fried eggs, rings of mushrooms, rippling rashers, even baked beans – all hand-crocheted with a pleasing degree of verisimilitude and just enough homespun-ness. They are displayed in frames, behind glass. Her inventiveness in fashioning objects such as peas, cigarettes and black pudding is dazzling. She finds crochet easy, having started at 15, and does it by eye, without preparatory drawings. Her variations on the themes of comfort food and tea treats seem to be endless. More astonishing still is the fact that she only started on these creations two years ago and that this is her first ever art exhibition.

Jenkins crochets rather than knits, but her surreal feasts seem to have a kinship with the recent trend of knitting clubs and guerrilla knitting – as evinced in the Crafts Council's show *Knit 2 Together* (Wol March 2005), where exhibits ranged from giant cobwebs and lacy dresses to pieces made of human hair, knitted sex adverts and Donna Wilson's deranged dolls. Jenkins's approach is gentler, wittier, more whimsical and bubbling over with British seaside humour. As a child I pined for the plates of bacon 'n' eggs made of sugar that were sold on Clacton pier; unlike Jenkins's

version, those were edible, but the conceit is the same. Sure enough, she studied knitwear at the University of Brighton and still lives there, with a workshop on the seafront. Fashion came long before food, however, and after graduating she spent several years producing pieces for Marc Jacobs, Donna Karan, Missoni and Sonia Rykiel before setting up her own label, Cardigan, in 2003.

It was because of Cardigan that she began to make woollen food. 'I wanted to promote my label with something that appeals to everybody, so chose food – fried breakfast, then fish and chips,' she explains. 'Every day I got more excited as I thought of new things.'

The result was *Comfort Food*, shown with acclaim at her studio-cum-shop in 2007. She followed it up last year with *Cardigan in Bloom*, a collection of flora and fauna – boxes of Victorian specimens such as butterflies, bugs and beetles. 'But people kept asking: "Haven't you done any food this year?"'

So this month Jenkins is transforming Rebecca Hossack's Charlotte Street gallery into a fantasy café, with wool-worked sugar doughnuts, a huge variety of fruit tarts, English breakfasts, crocheted ketchup bottles, cake stands and even cups and saucers. 'It's like painting with yarn,' she explains with glee. 'In my studio I have hundreds of colours, so I just pick the one I need and get going.'

KATE'S CAFÉ runs 8-27 June, Mon-Sat 10-6 ■ ANNABEL FREYBERG writes on art and design



Clockwise from top left: *The Wool Patisserie*, 2009; *Fish and Chips*, 2009; *Sequined Anchovies*, 2009