

Creative Industry Report: **Kobakant** by Toh Yixue

After graduation I will try to practise a combination of part-time and freelance. Currently I feel that out of the many artists that continuously inspire me on a day-to-day basis, the duo *Kobakant* stands out as I identify closely with their philosophy and artistic/technological aesthetics.

Kobakant is the brainchild of a pair of United States-based artists/researchers: Mika Satomi and Hannah Perner-Wilson. Their work centers around e-textiles, with an equal blend of electronics, physical making and code.



Source: <https://www.kobakant.at/DIY/?p=8354>

For the duo, their work starts mostly from researching how similar commercial products work. Then through the extensive process of making and experimentation, new methodologies and ideas are developed. The whole process is documented, some in more detail than others. Makers can be great at making stuff, but not terribly good at showing or teaching others. That said, I really appreciate the duo's uncanny ability at both. This also exemplifies an ideal I hold true to my heart; seamless intersection between research, art, teaching and making.

There are many tutorials online nowadays but there are many that are either too basic or too hard/inaccessible. Over at *Kobakant*, there is a balance between complexity, accessibility and availability of materials. These are all very important points for the tutorials to be useful to a global audience. Also, a lot of the design work is open-source, so with the requisite knowledge anyone will be able to recreate many of these examples. Many of these are custom-made for real-world, commercial work; rather than basic, run of the mill projects that have limited use cases in reality. I have recently started a bit of teaching on the side after interning at a STEM education studio. Coincidentally, I have also been tasked with developing new and improving existing projects



for use in classroom settings. Thus, I have been able to put my knowledge to good use, though it's quite a challenge to develop cardboard kits with limited materials and ease of assembly, in addition to conducting only online sessions(lacking much needed forms of in-person assistance).



Source: <https://www.kobakant.at/DIY/?p=7639>

Many modern electronic devices rely on some sort of input. Through Kobakant's examples, I have gained a better understanding of the underlying basic principles in a more visual and direct manner. A touch surface is no longer an ordinary looking piece of plastic. From the example above, the sensing surface is composed of 2 pieces of conductive lines making up a grid. Also, many of the materials used are commonly available, the slightly niche ones can be bought from major electronics distributors as well. We live in an age of abstraction; many things that we use on a daily basis are so complex that it is hard to fathom how they work or how to fix them when they break down. One of my principles in learning is to understand how things work on a more fundamental level, as I strongly believe that true innovation can only stem from the roots. As more concepts and techniques are developed(hardware and software-wise) while being increasingly blackboxed, I strongly feel that it is pertinent in one's practice to seek a better understanding of true fundamental knowledge, upon which to further develop new projects and ideas.

Being an artist usually means a compromise on focusing heavily either on commercial, artistic or other interests. But Kobakant's work seems(at least to me) to be able to straddle comfortably amongst being explorative, with lots of experimentation, developing reproducible techniques and tangible products, being artistic and design-centric thematically all at once. I sincerely hope that after graduation, I can continue to be inquisitive, artistically-honest, while still being able to make ends meet.