

Water World

AN OCEANIC ECOSYSTEM—
IN TEXTILE FORM.

They're identical twins. They're from Australia. And they're trying to teach the world about the fragility of coral reefs, one crochet stitch at a time. A few years ago, Christine and Margaret Wertheim experimented with using crochet to illustrate a geometry concept called hyperbolic space. When they injected some randomness into the patterns, the darn-ing duo noticed that their creations—wispy, colorful, structured yet chaotic—began to resemble a coral reef. "It's as if

they were going through evolution," Margaret says. The sisters set up a Web site, the art press picked it up, and before long the Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef Project went viral: More than 3,000 volunteers wielded hooks and yarn to create an array of specimens, which can fill a 4,000-square-foot exhibit space. The sisters hope their work imparts an appreciation for the plight of corals. "We can probably live without the reefs," Margaret Wertheim says. "But no one knows what the cascading environmental effects will be on the millions of species that rely on them." The hand-stitched sea simulacra are currently on exhibit at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York and will debut at the Smithsonian in DC in October. Check it out if your knowledge of marine biology is fuzzy. —MARIO AGUILAR



Cheat With Science! Learn a New Language Fast

Hablass Esspainyol? No? Well, *no te preocupes*. New research may help adult learners master foreign tongues. Scientists at the University of Haifa in Israel studied how language learners understood foreign words spoken in an authentic accent and those spoken in the learners' native accent. They found that you get a lot less information from the people who actually know how to pronounce stuff. *¡Qué rico!* So if you want to pick up a new lingo, take a new tack. —Katharine Gammon



DON'T GO NATIVE
Start by listening to speakers who have your own linguistic background. That way the words are different—but not *too* different. Your brain will process the familiar sounds more easily, letting you focus.

DON'T STRESS OUT
When you start working on the accent, don't worry too much in the beginning about rolling that *rrrrrr* or nailing the pronunciation of *Eyjafjallajökull*. If you're older than a teenager, your ear can't pick up all the subtleties anyway.

TAKE IT SLOW
After you feel comfortable with the gringo accent and can hear the difference between pronunciations, start incorporating the correct sounds. Then panic about the weird alphabet and all the vocabulary. *Bon chance!*