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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

RUG MAKING: AN EXPLORATION

By

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May 19, 1990

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PREFACE

The motivating factor for this thesis stemmed from a personal love for the art, craft, and history of textiles. Almost all nations seem to express themselves through their fabrics; most specifically rugs, wherein there lies a rich cultural heritage. Knowing this, a desire has been bred to know more about what rug making techniques exist, who practices them, and how they are done.

After approval of the thesis proposal, a period of time equaling about eighteen weeks was taken to explore three rug making methods; rug hooking, felting, and needlepoint. During that time, the contemporary and historical aspects of the three processes were researched and a series of pieces was produced for a thesis show.

The scope of research included studying written information about the three processes. A present day expert in the field of rug hooking, Ann Brink, was interviewed on several occasions. She deserves special thanks for opening her home and sharing her knowledge. Approximately forty volunteer hours were spent working with exquisite examples of textiles, including needlepoint, at the Strong Museum of Rochester. Thanks also to Patricia Tice, Curator of Furnishings, for providing such an invaluable opportunity.

It is hoped that *Rug Making: An Exploration* will provide those in the fine art and craft fields with new insights and methods of approaching rugs.

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To Greg Alan Cooper

1

INTRODUCTION

The following pages were written out of the desire to know about the past, present, and future of rugs and the people who make them. In addition to studying written sources and questioning textile experts, searching of oneself became an integral part of the learning process. A journal was kept throughout the creative journey. Writing, questioning, and searching has become a large part of the creative process; therefore it was considered vital that some of these thoughts were shared.

Technical proficiency with textiles has been viewed as having utmost importance. To master a skill, it should be learned, practiced and finally honed to the point of being nothing short of superior. It has been thought that mastery of a technique should include thorough knowledge of it, including its history. The historical aspects of rug hooking, felting, and needlepoint contain a vast amount of information; however, the limits of this project have afforded that they would only be touched on briefly in this paper.

Two influences from recent history that deal with pattern should be noted. Pattern upon pattern has been a recurring topic of interest. Pierre Bonnard's paintings have been a constant influence because of their abundant amount of color and shape. The need to view and admire intense design is reiterated when calling attention to Indian Miniatures, which have been another source of inspiration for the thesis pieces. Their brilliant colors, richness, and intricate patterning cause the paintings to become delicate treasures.

Because of the small scale of Indian Miniatures, they have a sense of being precious gifts rather than carrying the aura of grandiosity. This idea of bearing the quality of an unpretentious gift has had an effect on the rug pieces. Like Bonnard's work and the Indian Miniatures, the small scale thesis pieces were created with the intent that they would be

packed with powerful composition, color, and design. Similar to a beautiful leaf or flower with detailed design, the miniature rugs are able to be picked up, held in one's hands, and shared with others. The tiny images may be viewed with intimacy and pondered; almost meditated upon, similarly to phylacteries or prayer beads.

Phylacteries are little leather boxes containing small strips of paper with scriptures written on them. They are typically worn as reminders as one is strapped onto the forehead and another to the arm of the wearer. The reference to them is found in Deut. 6:6-8 of The Bible: "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.", (NIV).

All of the images in this thesis were created from ideas that were meditated upon and questions that were pondered during the time consuming process of completing them. They serve as reminders of those thoughts, and are titled accordingly.

As the completion of the thesis draws near, another journal will be opened and filled with meandering thoughts and questions. It is hoped that it will be accompanied with yet a new series of designs in fiber.

PART ONE
A HISTORY OF TECHNIQUES

2

RUG HOOKING

The word “rug hooking” covers an array of definitions and processes. The following history will deal solely with the original or primitive method of rug hooking in America.

The process of rug hooking is fairly simple. One end of a length of yarn or cloth is pulled with a special hook-shaped tool through a loosely woven backing such as burlap. Repetition of hooking produces a loopy rug surface.

There are no records that reveal an exact origin of the rug hooking process. Several sources cite that some Coptic textiles had a similarly piled surface. Scandinavian “brodded” or “pegged” mats closely resemble a predecessor to the hooked rug; that is, the bed rug. A metal “brod” or a wooden peg was poked into a backing through which a length of wool was sewn. Although sources are able to speculate that rug hooking began overseas, there has not been definite proof that they specifically influenced American rug hooking. It is thought that the Finnish brodding method traveled to the British Isles where Scots “pulled” rugs. From that point, it is theorized, the technique sailed to America on the Mayflower with the colonists.

Colonists considered every scrap of cloth or wool valuable. Bed rugs were made from leftover warp waste. These small bits of wool were called “thrums”. Very few examples of Early American bed rugs exist; those that remain were found in New England. They were used as coverlets for beds and furniture on cold New England nights. It is interesting to note that the Norwegian word for a coarse bedcovering is “rugga” or “rogga”.¹ Noah Webster in his 1806 *Compendious Dictionary* defines a rug as “a rough woolen

¹ Shirley Marein, *Creating Rugs and Wall Hangings* (London, England: Cassell and Collier Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1975), 116.

coverlet for beds.”² Also, the word “rug” in old provincial English meant “snug” or “warm”.³ Bed rugs seem to have been created up until the early to mid 1800s.

Meanwhile, Eastern Canadians began hooking wool into backing to create floor rugs. It is believed that the French brought the skill to North America. Thanks to the Acadians, the colonists learned that a thick loopy surface created an ideal and very warm floor covering.

Hooked rugs had become a household necessity during the nineteenth century. Not only housewives, but sailors wrought hooked rugs. Sailors created beautiful seascape scenes and obtained new images from examples they had seen in European ports.

Wealthy colonists were able to import lusciously designed rugs from Europe. The majority of Early Americans; however, needed to hand make their rugs. The very earliest examples of hooked rugs were backed with homespun linen. Gunny sacks were used, and later on, jute burlap was manufactured and imported from India.

Designs were hand drawn onto burlap with charcoal which was merely burnt wood from the fireplace. Colonists tried to capture the rich design quality of the European rugs that they could not afford. They drew flowers to resemble the English gardens that they remembered. Women also obtained inspiration from embroidered bed coverings which bore Indian and Persian patterns.⁴ Besides floral images, colonists created simple stripes and geometric shapes. Authors disagree as to whether or not geometrics preceeded florals. Naive representations of landscapes, complete with churches, houses, barns, and farm animals were drawn onto burlap. Favorite animals, fruits or themes such as biblical scenes and patriotic subject matter were hooked with wool.

All cloth was hand dyed with natural materials such as lichens, bark, and berries. Eventually natural dyes were replaced with synthetics such as anilines.

In the mid 1800s, a man whose wife was an adept rug hooker came up with what was thought to be an ingenious idea. Edward Sands Frost cut out copper templates which

² Noah Webster, “*Compendious Dictionary*” in *A Winterthur Guide to American Needlework* (New York, NY: Crown Publisher, Inc., 1976), 134

³ Anna M. Laise Phillips, *Hooked Rugs and How to Make Them* (New York, NY: MacMillan Co., 1930), 52.

⁴ Marein, 119.

were used for hand stencilling and mass producing pre-printed rug designs. Women who were unskilled drawers quickly purchased E.S. Frost's products. There was a high demand for pre-printed burlap. As E.S. Frost's business grew, competitors entered the printing market. By the 1890s, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward were selling stamped burlap rug designs.⁵

Because of the speed of production and easy accessibility to printed designs, the craft of rug hooking spread from the New England area down the coast of the United States. Rug hooking was a needed and popular skill that was practiced until the Industrial Revolution whereupon all handmade products suffered decline.

During the early to mid 1900s, Americans developed a new interest in Early American crafts. Educated city dwellers recognized the business possibilities and began what was called "rug frolics" which were similar to quilting bees.⁶ Several communities began their own cottage industries. Hooked rugs had again become very popular during the 1920s and 30s. Sources cite many examples of successful rug hooking cottage industries that were spread throughout the East coast. An especially interesting one was "The Spinning Wheel" of Asheville, North Carolina. This was a community center where Appalachian families worked on various handicrafts including rug hooking for their sustenance.⁷

The craft of rug hooking suffered decline once again after World War II when women entered the workplace. Since then, rug hooking has ebbed and flowed. It has grown to include many styles of rug hooking which are still popular today.

⁵ Joel and Kate Kopp, *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs: Folk Art Underfoot* (E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975), 39.

⁶ William C. Ketchum, Jr., *Hooked Rugs, A Historical and Collector's Guide* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

3

FELTING

The craft of felt making has a deep rooted history. It is coupled with an amazing repertoire of countries that have utilized the technique. Since major highlights of felt's history will only be touched on in this writing, it is recommended that reference is made to the selected bibliography where sources for detailed reading are listed.

Felt is a non-woven fabric which is made by wetting, then agitating wool to a point where fibers are irreversibly locked together. Although the exact onset of felt making is unknown, there are many myths that tell of wool being accidentally felted. For example, St. Clement, patron saint of hatters, is said to have created felt when he made his sandals more comfortable by lining them with wool. Moisture, movement, and wear felted the wool.¹

Authors differ as to the whereabouts of the origin of feltmaking. It is generally agreed upon that one of the first areas to extensively produce felt was Central Asia. Handmade felt was made into objects of utilitarian need; usually an article of clothing or a covering for protection against the elements. It was also used for religious purposes. For example, nomadic cultures made idols from felt. Historians believe that felt articles were buried with the dead with the intention of aiding their travel into the spirit world.

The most outstanding example of ancient felt was found in Pazyryk which was a village in the Altai mountains of Siberia. During the early 1900s, the discovery of Pazyryk's kurgans, or underground tombs, was made. Because of the earth's frozen surface and absence of air in the tombs, felt articles dating from approximately the sixth to the third century B.C., were kept in near perfect condition. Two hundred and twelve tombs contained a mummified Prince and his wife or concubine along with felted rugs, a

¹ Nina Hyde, "Fabric of History, Wool," *National Geographic*, May 1988, 561.

saddle cover, and four three-dimensional figures of swans. Author M.E. Burkett wrote, “It is perhaps possible that the four stuffed felt swans found at Pazyryk, which were probably meant to decorate the four corners of a cart, were not mere decoration but if not idols, had symbolic or magical powers and perhaps transported the souls.”² The Pazyryk people were excellent feltmakers and displayed an advanced knowledge of the craft.

Other cultures generated their lives around felt. Areas such as Central Asia including Iran, Turkey, and China; Russia, Hungary, Poland, Scandinavia, Greece, and India have depended on felt for their personal lives and their livelihood. Due to modernization, feltmaking is not as much of a necessity as it was in the past. It was then that felt became known as a material of the nomads.

Nomadic tribes and other cultures differ only slightly in their felting processes. The wool is first fluffed and spread out evenly either by hand or by a type of bow and mallet. A carding machine has replaced the primitive methods of some countries fairly recently. Agitation of the wool for hardening and fulling is a strenuous process that consumes approximately five hours of the day. It is either rolled in leather and then dragged on the ground by a horse and rider, kicked or pulled back and fourth, or tromped on while chanting or singing. Depending on the culture, felting may be either a man’s or a woman’s duty. Feltmakers have been able to make the wool extremely tough and impervious to water by treating it. Mongolians have soaked felt in tallow or ewe’s milk to make it waterproof.³ In Scotland, famous Harris tweeds were soaked in stale human urine which cleansed and hardened it.⁴

A well known use for thick, tough felt is a yurt, which is a round tent-like structure with a domed roof. An underlying skeleton is covered with many felts, then bound. It is a portable tent, thus a nomadic structure. The inside of yurts may be highly decorated, depending on a tribe’s quantity of time spent in one location. The ancient structure has been primarily built in Central Asia and is still in use today.

A Kepenek or szur is another common product of felt which is still in use. The

² M.E. Burkett, *Art of The Feltmaker* (Kendal, England: Titus Wilson and Sons, Ltd., 1979), 22.

³ Beverly Gordon, *Feltmaking: Traditions, Techniques, and Contemporary Explorations* (New York, NY: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1980), 24.

⁴ Hyde, 566.

object is a mantle or cloak which is worn over the shoulders of a shepherd. It is also folded and used as a cushion. In evenings, the kepenek or szur doubles as a sleeping bag and tent. Central Europeans, specifically Hungarians, have a long and interesting history of the szur family. A recommended authority on the subject is Ms. Veronika Gervers-Molnar.

Likewise, hats were proudly felted in quite a few areas. Greeks and Romans lined their helmets with felt. The Hungarians, Moroccans, Persians, Indians, English, and Turks are just a few of the peoples that produce hats of many sorts and shapes.

Miscellaneous hand felted objects include rugs, floor mats, curtains, bags, socks, shoes, boots, mittens, cloaks, window, and door covers to name a few. Central Asians utilized such a vast amount of felt that in the fourth century B.C., Chinese neighbors called that area “the land of felt”.

Sadly, the skill of hand felting is diminishing rapidly throughout the countryside. Modernization has pushed aside the need for hand felted goods, which are for the most part, considered something of the past. Felt now has many industrial and artistic applications which are especially evident in North America.

NEEDLEPOINT

Needlepoint is a method of stitching onto canvas in a decorative manner. Canvas, an ancient material which has been made out of a variety of fibers such as agave, hemp, flax, cotton, silk, or wool, is a loosely woven cloth into which a threaded needle can be easily inserted.

The history of needlepoint spans many geological areas. Forms of embroidery similar to needlepoint have been recorded since ancient days of Rome and Egypt. It has been practiced through the Middle Ages, colonial days, the Victorian era, and continues on today. The development of needlepoint is fascinating. Its highlights will be noted in the following pages.

Sources cite that samples of needlepoint have been recorded in literature, found in ancient burial tombs, and handed down from one generation to the next. Decorative fabric has evidently been an important part of more than a few societies. Egyptians, Phrygians, Peruvians, and Romans have left examples of work behind that is similar to contemporary needlepoint. It is likely that fibers for these very early pieces were stitched into canvas with either fish bone or thorn needles.¹

Opus Pulvinarium was a name for a type of stitching primarily wrought for church kneeling cushions during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It has also been called point de marque or cushion work.

In Europe prior to the sixteenth century, fine tent embroidery stitches were made in canvas to mimic the expensive hand woven tapestries. The first form of this stitching was called "tapestry embroidery" and then "canvas work". It was most likely worked with

¹ The National Needlework Association, *How To Needlepoint, The Needlecraft Resource Library*, Volume One (New York, NY: The National Needlework Association, 1988),1.

a steel needle.² Although authors differ on an exact time period, steel needles came into being between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some stitches for canvas work were named after the French towns where the tapestries were made such as Goeblin and Aubusson. Wool crewel yarns were primarily used along with some metallics or silks which were used as accents. A fine example of this is Martha Washington's twelve shell patterned chair cushions which she made for her three grandchildren when she was sixty-nine years old.

Through the ages, embroidery seems to have been a valued pastime. In colonial days, wills and inventories were often listed in order of importance as they gave evidence of the value of textiles. After land, money, and silverware came household textiles, clothing, and needlework.³

Canvas work was an elegant technique. Young women who had the means to do so were sent to finishing schools where they learned a variety of embroidery stitches. It was there that the young women designed and wrought an impressive graduation piece which was later hung in their homes. These pieces most often consisted of a human figure in a landscape, a portrait of a famous man such as George Washington, or a biblical scene.

After a period of dignified coloring, stitching, and mostly original designs; a rather humorous era of needlepoint arose. It began in the early 1800s when a German printsetter developed a method of printing and hand coloring complete needlework designs. The patterns were made on a type of graph paper which was called quadrille or point paper. Teachers of the day detested these preconceived patterns as they quenched all creativity of the maker. "When the work degenerates into the mere copying of patterns conceived in defiance of all true art principles, it helps to degrade and not elevate the mind."⁴

A soft, lightly twisted and worsted merino wool which was dyed in Berlin was introduced for these printed designs. Thus the name Berlin woolwork was born. This rather thick yarn was referred to as merino, German, or zephyr wool. Because of its size,

² Ibid., 1.

³ Susan Burrows Swan, *A Winterthur Guide to American Needlework* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1976), 7.

⁴ Sophia Frances Anne Caulfeild and Blanche Seward, *The Dictionary of Needlework, An Encyclopedia of Artistic, Plain, and Fancy Needlework: A Facsimile of the 1882 Edition* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1972), 28.

larger canvases were produced. The resulting designs were clumsy looking when compared with masterpieces created in the finishing schools.

Towards the end of the Berlin woolwork craze, hilarious scenes such as dewey-eyed animals and huge parrots surrounded by flowers and ivy were common. The colors of these designs were close to garish since the invention of aniline dyes in the 1850s.

The unfortunate combination of large and awkward stitches, sentimental subject matter, and bright colors was exacerbated with the onset of the Victorian era. It was a time of sweet sentimentality and profuse decoration. Just about everything that existed in the home was lavished with Berlin woolwork. Sources cite examples such as needlepoint, chair cushions, benches, wall pictures, wall pockets, fireplace screens, lamp mats, rugs, lambrequins, purses, bags, wisk broom holders, bell pulls, and slippers. Household items were also stitched with loving sayings such as, “Don’t forget me, Mother” and “Until My Death Will I Love You”. While volunteering at the Strong Museum, Berlin woolwork examples of a bell pull, a wisk broom holder, lambrequins, and toss pillows were seen. The pillows were physically thick and heavy. They were not only stitched with wool, but were profusely decorated with glass beads. Evidently Berlin woolwork included materials such as silks, chenille, and beads.

Towards the end of the 1800s, Berlin woolwork finally faded away. Women continued to explore the possibilities of needlework as part of home furnishing until the English designer William Morris became responsible for the revival of needlepoint. He, together with the craft revival of the 1950s, defined that stitchery should not only be thought of as craft, but as a decorative process to be used in clothes, carpets, and art forms.⁵

The work of decorative needlepoint ebbs and flows in popularity. It seems to be less favored at present, but is sure to once again make its mark in history some time in the near future.

⁵ Amy Carroll, ed., and Dorothea Hall, contributor, *Needlepoint, The Pattern Library Series* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 1981), 6.

PART TWO

A DISCUSSION OF TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS

5

ARLO'S RUG

Arlo's Rug was borne out of many ideas and feelings. The intentions for creating the piece were threefold: to satisfy the desires of the artist, to learn the process of rug hooking, and to delight the eyes of the viewer.

The first inclination was to manifest a simply beautiful piece; something so filled with pattern and color that it would tickle the senses. Who's senses? The issue of trained eyes versus untrained eyes has been an important one. A goal was to appeal to those who can relate to concepts such as color theory, composition, and abstraction, and to welcome those who have had no formal art training.

Because of a desire to concede to non-artists, the unpretentious theme of cats reclining on rugs was conceived as the subject matter for *Arlo's Rug*.

The sketching of cats began. A friend loaned a series of slides on cats. Familiar cats were remembered with much bliss; a friendly stray named Longfellow was placed, stretched out, on the upper left hand corner of the picture plane. A particularly rotund male by the name of Arlo, from whom the piece is named, was sketched out in the bottom center of the picture. As the drawing of four cats, nestled on their own heavily patterned rugs was completed, it was evident that a very satisfying feeling of whimsy had become part of the preliminary sketch.

The technique of rug hooking had been of interest since childhood when viewing a family owned rug which was made in the New England area. The bits and pieces of wool, often being patterned themselves, formed larger mosaic-like images. From a distance, the looped surface formed a cohesive image of a seascape. In 1987, a hooked wool rug made by Marguerite Zorach in 1908 was seen. The colors and patterning were profuse. It was

obvious that she had been influenced by the Fauve painters which she had been studying in Paris. Upon seeing Zorach's work, the childhood memory of the New England rug resurrected feelings of intrigue and fascination. They were coupled with the whimsical naivete which is so much a part of childhood.

To portray the aforementioned emotions through rug hooking proved to be an easy task, once the technique was mastered. Several books were referred to as how-to guides. Chats with local artists and a slew of telephone calls became invaluable as contact was made with veteran rug hooker Ann Brink. Ms. Brink supplemented the work with appropriate equipment, lessons, and bags full of wool scraps. She also offered sage advice about dyeing. The experience of learning about many dyeing techniques was invigorating. A small amount of dip dyeing was practiced with knowledge that dyeing techniques is a subject to be explored in its entirety at a later date.

Samplers of rug hooking with various materials were made. The actual process of pulling a strip of wool through burlap is simple. Factors such as density of burlap, weave and width of wool cloth, and size of the hook must be taken into consideration, however. The decision was made to keep all wool strips uniform in width for *Arlo's Rug*. To accomplish this, a "Bliss Portable Strip Splitter" with a rotating blade was purchased. All strips were cut to a one-eighth of an inch thickness. This may be varied according to the size of blade that is used. An early style rug hook which is similar to a short crochet hook with a wooden handle was utilized throughout production of the piece. To hook a rug "in the primitive method" as it is referred to by some sources, proceed as follows: obtain an approximately twelve inch length of wool cloth and hold it beneath a length of burlap stretched taught by a frame. With the other hand, hold the hook as one holds a knife when cutting food. Insert the hook between the weave of burlap and catch the wool strip, pulling the end of it through to the surface. Repeat the process, pulling a loop of wool through to the top of the burlap. Repeat the process again. This will create several loops which keep each other intact because of their density. Some dated sources advise coating the backside of a completed rug with a rubberized compound to prevent deterioration, however this has been found by conservators to be detrimental to the rug.

The preliminary sketch of *Arlo's Rug* was copied with black marker onto the stretched burlap surface. Colored wool was arranged in order from light to dark, as is a painter's palette. The notion was to approach the piece as a painting and to dabble on color and pattern bit by bit. Contrary to an advisor's advice, no color cartoon was utilized as a reference. Arlo and his rug were hooked first, then Longfellow in a opposite corner of the piece was hooked, and so on. Although the process of filling a burlap canvas with wool loops is labor intensive, the piece was viewed as something to be spontaneous. When the piece was near completion, the look of spontaneity was evident. There was also a look of disarray. It was decided that having a preliminary color cartoon is a wise option, and one was created before completion of the piece. It should be noted that hours worth of hooking was ripped out and re-hooked in order to visually balance the colors of *Arlo's Rug*. The piece was finished by mitering the corners and binding with cotton rug tape.

Arlo's Rug as a framed and finished rug was considered successful. The piece evokes a feeling of playfulness and whimsy with its color and patterning. The process of rug hooking was learned and enjoyed. Sharing the piece with artists and non-artists, and seeing that they could all understand and appreciate it was a most rewarding experience.



Figure 1. Preliminary sketch, *Arlo's Rug*



Figure 2. *Arlo's Rug*

6

THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT YET SEEN

Creation of the piece *Substance* followed immediately after *Arlo's Rug*. At that time, there was a possibility that the entire thesis would focus on rug hooking, rather than a variety of rug making methods; therefore, *Substance* consists of the same technique as *Arlo's Rug*.

A prevailing theme in all of the thesis pieces is the idea of questioning one's role as an artist and person. One method of resolving those questions has been through focusing on landscape imagery. It is interesting to observe the enjoyment of those with an untrained eye when viewing landscapes. The scenes encompass something with which the viewer is able to identify. Although embracing the needs of the non-artist has been a desire to fulfill, this has not been the sole purpose for utilizing landscape imagery. Development as an artist has, in the past, brought success. What happens when one strips away those things that have proven successful? An idea has been to throw out the techniques that have brought comfort and take away the visually symbolic jargon. After stripping oneself bare, can one create a good, strong piece out of something as simple and as pure as a landscape? This was a goal and a challenge which was embarked upon with much trepidation. Something that provided inspiration was the verse Hebrews 11:1 from The Bible: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not yet seen" which has become the title of the piece.

With faith in what was to be, the landscape was sketched in color from a hilly area

south of Rochester. The color sketch later proved to be quite valuable during execution of the piece.

Another goal has been to learn about the traditional process of rug hooking and then to add a contemporary idea to it, for example, texture. The rug was executed in the same manner as *Arlo's Rug* excepting materials, which were expanded upon. In addition to wool cloth; wool yarn, cotton yarn and thread, embroidery floss, silk floss and thread, ribbon, polyester-cotton thread, and a variety of novelty yarns were hooked into burlap. Yarns and threads were unplied, combined, then plied back together again before hooking. The process was extremely labor intensive and meticulous but rewarding. The landscape slowly emerged into a very dense piece which was visually and tactilely satisfying. The challenge of creating something interesting from a pure and simplistic image was met; the goal was attained. *Substance* became an immediate favorite among artists and to those who are less informed about art as well.



Figure 3. Preliminary sketch, *The Substance of Things Hoped for,
The Evidence of Things Not Yet Seen*



Figure 4. *The Substance of Things Hoped for,
The Evidence of Things Not Yet Seen*

LORNA'S ROOM

Upon completion of *Substance*, a decision was made to expand the thesis theme beyond the scope of rug hooking. It was to encompass a variety of techniques used to create rugs, including feltmaking. *Lorna's Room* was a surface design for upholstery to be used in a young woman's room. The intention for the final piece was to strengthen a two-dimensional design by integrating three-dimensional elements such as felt, silk, and hand woven cloth into the piece.

The original design for *Lorna's Room* was rendered in 1986. It consisted of blue-gray triangles, which were fringed with dark red colored thread, floating on a cream colored ground. The idea of *Lorna* fell dormant until 1988 when cream colored cloth, hand woven in a fine satin weave structure, was made for it. It was not until 1990, though, that the design for *Lorna's Room* was fully realized. The proposal included hand felted blue-gray triangles accented with dark red silk thread. The satin weave fabric was to be slashed and lined with a matching silk cloth by utilizing the bound buttonhole technique. Some felted triangles were then to be partially inserted into the slits for an interesting three-dimensional design.

Quite a few steps were involved in completing the piece *Lorna's Room*. Silk was dyed once, then overdyed with Cushing dyes to match the cream colored satin weave. A natural colored silk thread, which was to be used for tassels, was hand painted with French dyes in reds and blacks. Wool roving was dyed, carded, and felted, then later cut into individual triangles for the design.

The process for felting is as follows: all wool must be carded before felting to create an even, unknotted batt or layer of material. After carding, place batts of wool onto a

surface such as fiberglass mesh window screening. Wool fibers may be placed laying in the same direction for the first layer, then placed perpendicular to the previous one for the next layer, and so on. Place a second piece of fiberglass window screening on top of the wool layers and stitch around the edges of the wool to secure the screening. Spray the wool with water. There are different theories as to whether this should be hot or cold. Hot water was used throughout the felting process for the triangles. Add soap, which acts as a lubricant, to the wool. Liquid Ivory soap was used during felting. To agitate the felt, the sandwich of screening and wool may be rolled back and fourth with hands, pressed on, or stomped on. All felt for this thesis was agitated with the feet. The process of saturating the wool, soaping, and stomping is repeated several times, which causes the wool to felt. It is called the hardening stage. After the felt has been sufficiently hardened, it may be removed from the screening for the fulling stage of felting. The fulling process brings the felt to its final phase of becoming completely felted. The hardening and fulling processes lasted about forty-five minutes altogether for the triangles. The felt piece was allowed to dry overnight.

The completed piece *Lorna's Room* was visually displeasing. The dark color and texture of the triangles fought with the delicate creaminess of silk and satin weave. Even though felt pieces were integrated in the ground by being pierced into the buttonholes, the overall effect was that the triangles appeared stuck on the surface. The piece was deemed unsuccessful by both artist and thesis committee.

More sketches were proposed to the committee. At first, they related to *Lorna's Room*, consisting of the same triangle motif only bearing different colors and textures. The later sketch had little resemblance to *Lorna's Room*, save the bound buttonholes which were to be lined with cherry red rather than creme silk. The ground was to be a textural black felt which would be perforated with violent looking protruding elements such as wire or porcupine quills. Brightly colored, heavily ornamented felt rectangles were drawn diving into the bound buttonholes as if for refuge.

The sketch was poorly rendered and *Lorna's Room* had deviated too far away from the original intent of creating upholstery for a young woman's room. The thesis committee gave directions to re-evaluate development of the felted rug and encouraged continuation along the lines of *Arlo's Rug* and *Substance*.



Figure 5. Preliminary design, *Lorna's Room*



Figure 6. *Lorna's Room*

DANCING ON SWEETS CORNERS ROAD

The sketch for *Dancing on Sweets Corners Road* was made from a beautiful vineyard in an area not far away from Fairport on a drive called Sweets Corners Road. A choice was made to approach the felting of *Dancing* in the same manner in which *Substance* was constituted; that is, to utilize many colors and textures.

A loom was warped for the plain weave structure with white wool yarn. The supply of materials which was drawn upon during the construction of *Substance* was ambitiously arranged around the loom along with a vast array of dyed wool fleece. The preliminary sketch for *Dancing* was referred to as bits and pieces of color were stuffed and woven into the warp. Attention to detail was considered key as minute threads were carefully looped around and under warp yarns.

The final woven piece carried a semblance to the sketch. It was removed from the loom and felted in the same process as were the triangles for *Lorna's Room*. Unfortunately, agitation by stomping completely obliterated the vineyard scene. After the piece dried, tufts of colored wool fleece were carefully placed on top of *Dancing* and it was re-felted. Stomping with bare feet on a small three inch by eight inch strip of wool required small, nimble steps, similar to some dance movements. It was then that the name for the piece, *Dancing on Sweets Corners Road*, was contrived. The steps did not prove to be nearly small or nimble enough, as the second layer of fleece had been agitated clear through the center of the piece, leaving a hole which revealed the original felt. Once again, wool fleece was placed on top of *Dancing* and it was carefully hardened and fulled. The resulting felt revealed an interesting effect of layers and textures; however the overall piece was nothing but a mishmash of color. With some feeling of exasperation, *Dancing*

was thrown into a dyepot of subdued rust color. Overdyeing had been an improvement on the piece, as it caused it to be more uniform, but the original vineyard still remained to be seen.

Suggestions for improvement of *Dancing* included brushing the surface with wire bristles to create a nap or texture in the piece and also to hand stitch or recreate the vineyard scene.

The surface of *Dancing* was vigorously brushed and sewn. The laborious process of hand sewing in random stitches was rendered in beautifully colored threads of silk, cotton, and polyester. The combination of brushing and sewing gave *Dancing* a unique texture and the scene itself became defined.

The finished piece was well accepted by the thesis committee. *Dancing* was not personally looked upon with favor, however, until it was put away for a period of time because of the emotional exertion expelled during the development of all of the felted pieces.



Figure 7. Preliminary sketch, *Dancing on Sweets Corners Road*



Figure 8. *Dancing on Sweets Corners Road*

**SEE, I HAVE PLACED BEFORE YOU
AN OPEN DOOR WHICH
NO ONE CAN SHUT**

Upon completion of *Dancing*, feelings of mental drain and an aversion for working in detail prevailed. A simply produced and spontaneous piece was in order.

A wool warp was wound, then overdyed in a purplish bath. The same loom that had been used for *Dancing*, with its surrounding placement of colored threads and fleece, was warped. Without a color cartoon or preliminary sketch, several pleasing arrangements of threads, mixed media, and fleece were woven into the warp for a total length of about one yard.

The entire piece was taken off the loom and felted. Agitation during the felting process caused purplish warp threads to squirm in an undulating fashion as wads of colored fleece bubbled and flowed out from their original positions. The resulting felt contained a deluge of design and pattern.

Rather than being left to confront an unfortunate distortion, there were many opportunities or “open doors” left open for the creation of delightful designs. Approximately five interesting areas of pattern, which became complete pieces, were chosen and cut from the yard long felt. They served as reminders of a promise in The Bible, “See, I have placed before you an open door which no one can shut,” (Rev.3:8b) which has become the title for a favorite of the five pieces.

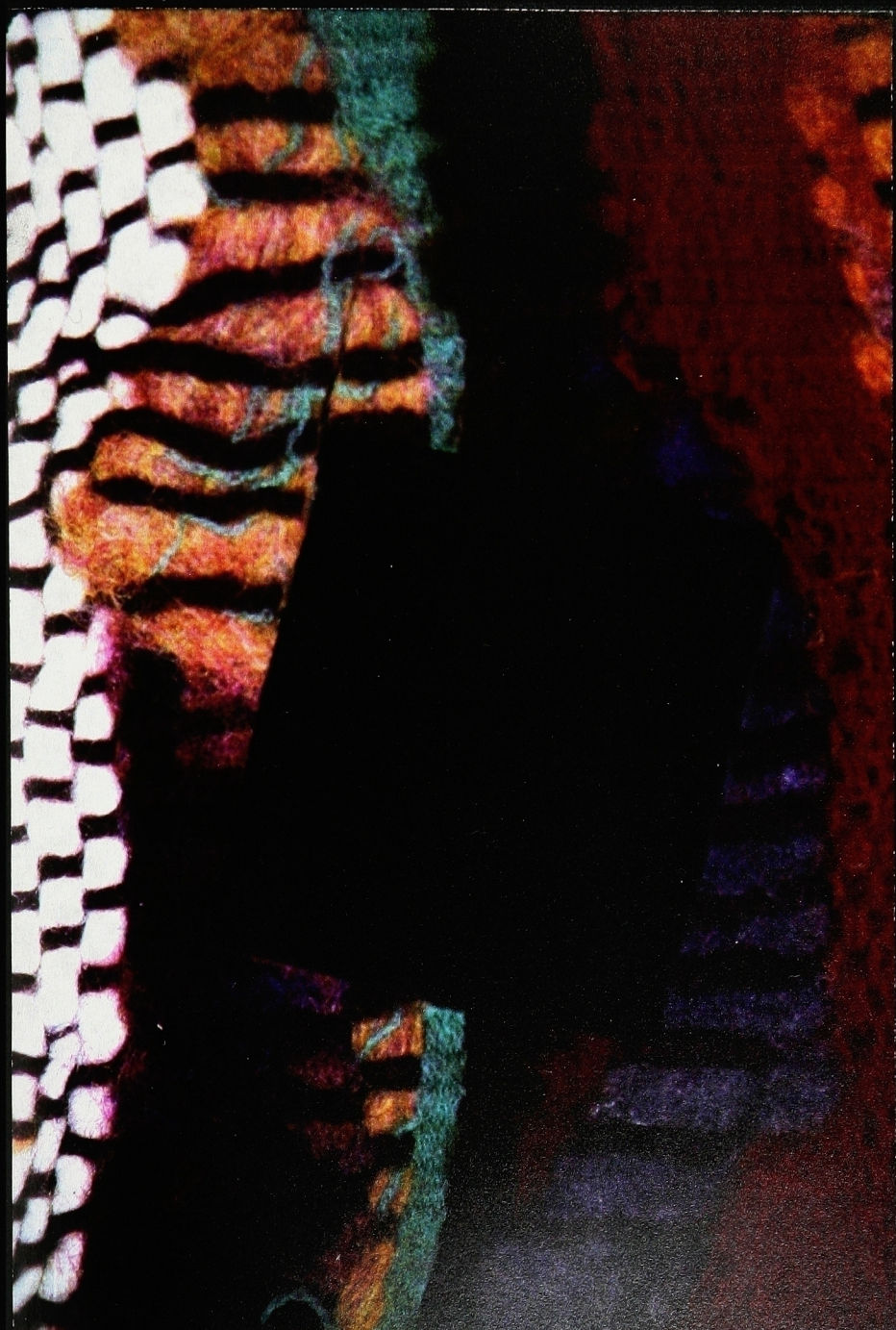


Figure 9. Felted cloth from which was taken, *See, I Have Placed Before You
An Open Door Which No One Can Shut*

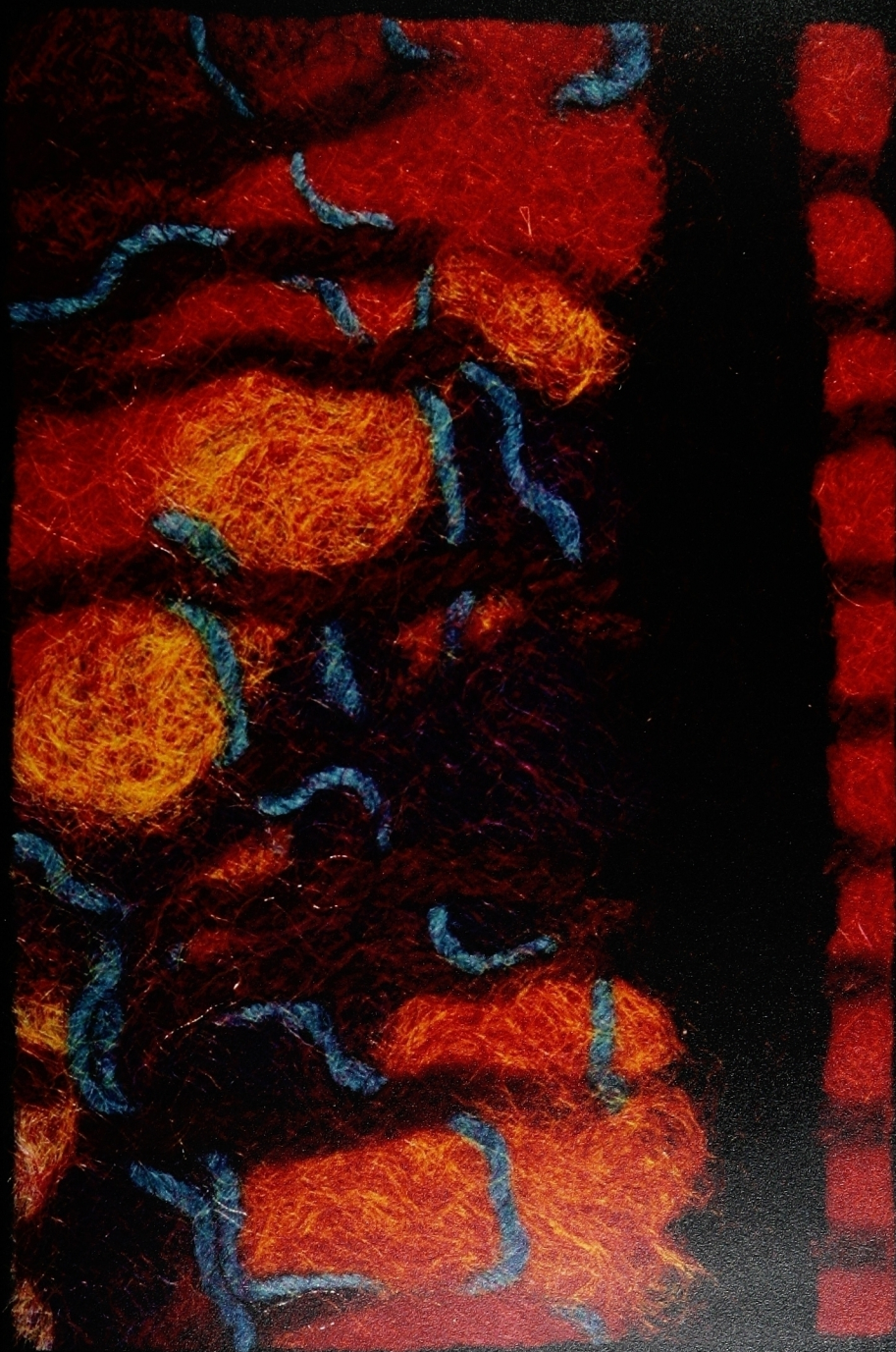


Figure 10. *See, I Have Placed Before You An Open Door
Which No One Can Shut*

LAKE ONTARIO: AT SEABREEZE

Rochester yielded an unusually bright and sunny day in mid-March. Thesis work deadlines were drawing near and as with all of the previous works, subject matter for the needlepoint piece was not easy to come by. As the stress factor increased, creativity decreased. With no reserve of sketches in the artist's notebook, it was decided that a drive around the area would provide plenty of drawing opportunities.

Needlepoint was another craft; the third in the thesis, to be learned. Goals for the process were to first produce samplers of stitching techniques and then to create a finished piece.

Lake Ontario glistened. Sun shining on the water constantly changed its palette of colors which reflected onto the land nearby. To capture the essence of the water and its horizon line, the sketches were made short and wide. The bright blues, aquamarines and violets were an enjoyable change from subdued tones of landscape drawings made earlier in the year.

Brightly colored Persian yarns and embroidery floss were purchased for the pieces, along with ten and twelve-point mesh penelope canvas. Needlepoint books were referred to for direction. With twelve-mesh penelope canvas tacked to stretcher bars, samplers were worked. Continental and basketweave stitches from the tent stitch family were wrought with varieties of yarns, flosses and silks along with unconventional materials like wire. After the basic stitching was learned, two, three, or four strands of different colors or textures were plied together and worked. The twist, color change, and reflective quality of some yarns combined well with the area of diagonal stitches. The resulting area of needlepoint gave a feeling of movement and flux, like the water itself at Lake Ontario.

The sketch of Lake Ontario at Seabreeze, for which the piece is named, was viewed. It had the same long rectangular shape as all of the other pieces in the thesis. For the sake of variety, the drawing was cropped, leaving a square that measured two and three-quarters of an inch by two and three-quarters of an inch.

The continental stitch was chosen for *Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze*. The technique is similar to cross stitch, only half of the “x” is made. Continental stitch must be worked either horizontally or vertically, so *Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze* was worked in horizontal lines from the bottom to the top. Visually balancing shapes and colors by random placement was impossible, therefore, the preliminary sketch was an invaluable guide. The weave of the penelope canvas was separated in half. Rather than twelve stitches per inch, twenty four petit point stitches were made. The entire canvas was neatly worked in petit point, producing approximately 576 tiny stitches per square inch.

The resulting surface was monotonous. Another problem that had occurred was that the image appeared stratified. Colors and elements of the image did not overlap and work into each other smoothly. It was then decided that the canvas would be re-worked with a second layer right on top of the first.

Re-working gave the surface of *Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze* a very satisfying texture. The size of the stitches were altered to remove the pristine, almost sterile effect of petit point. The second layer of stitches helped obscure the harsh horizontal blocks of color. The canvas eventually became completely packed with stitches to the point where a needle could no longer be inserted. *Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze* was blocked and the corners mitered. The edges were finished with rug tape.

Lake Ontario should become a stepping stone for future works. The challenge of working with the new medium of needlepoint was met with the enthusiastic condition that it would be built upon in the future.



Figure 11. Preliminary Sketch, *Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze*



Figure 12. Lake Ontario: At Seabreeze

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