

IFA Region 18 - Canada Whisper Project

January 2024

Sheila Thompson - Region 18 Canada subregion

Whisper Project Initiative

- Regional groups are always challenged to find ways to build community and camaraderie within a large dispersed group. Monthly meetings and speaker series are helpful, but a shared creativity project can really help boost engagement between members.
- In early 2023, Sheila Thompson (then co-rep for the Canada subregion) suggested that the Region 18 Canada subregion begin a Whisper Project.
- Sheila's local SAQA group did one in 2022 to great success in engaging members.

Whisper Project Concept

- The Whisper Project takes its cue from the child's game of whispering a phrase down a line of kids one to the next and then seeing how that phrase is transformed by the end of the line.
- Beginning with photos of any set of subjects, the first person in a group creates something in felt inspired by that photo.
- They photograph their work and pass it to the next person in the sequence. That second person then takes their inspiration from the photo they are given. The whisper part is what each person picks up from the previous person. What do they see, feel? what thoughts come to mind?
- This process of inspiration provided by photos, making a piece and passing along a photo to the next in line continues to the end of the group.
- No other information is shared between participants until the end.
- Our participants could make anything they wanted if it was felted and inspired by the photo.
- The fun is seeing how the creativity links and travels through the sequence and in identifying the inspiration points from one to the other.

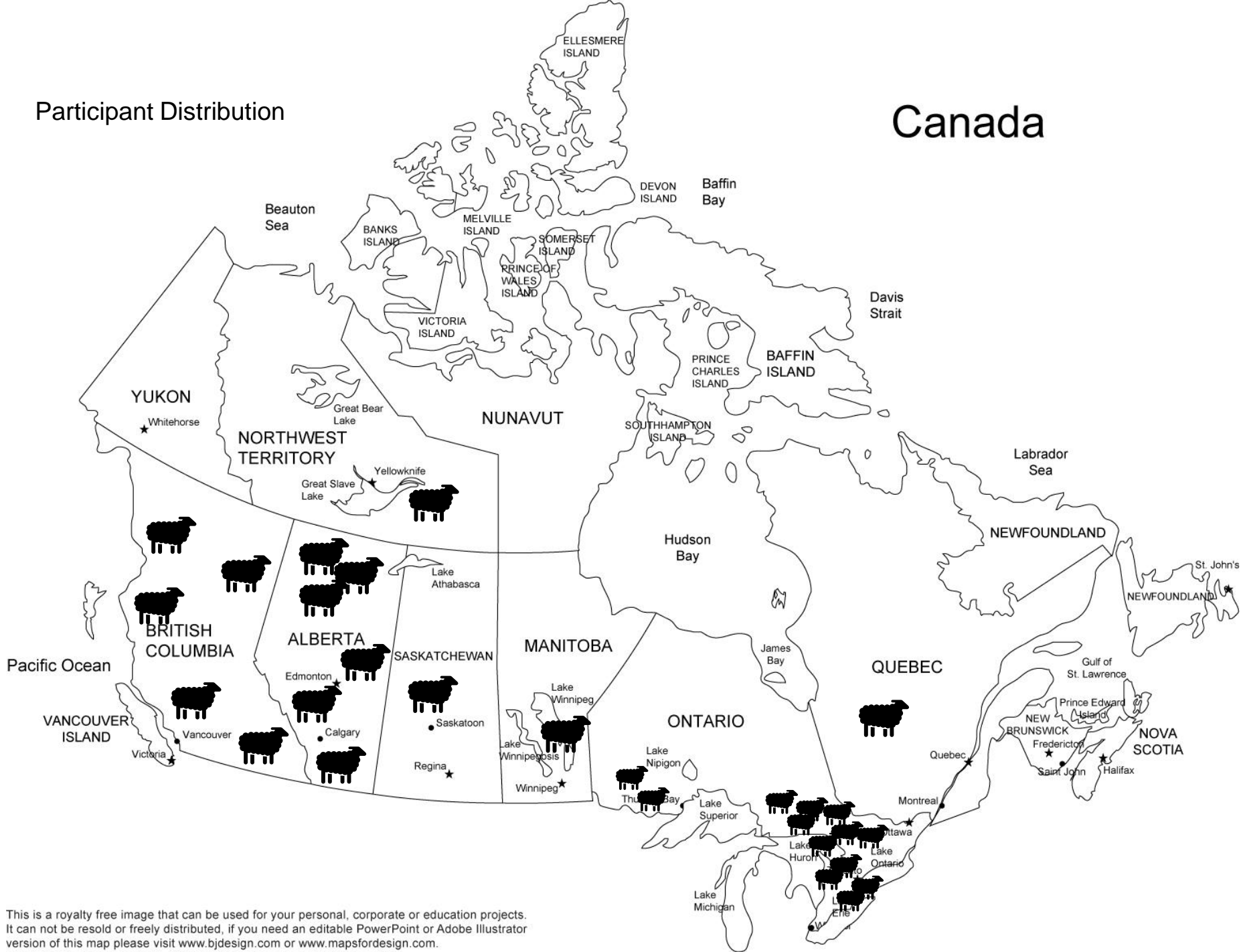
Participants and Timeline

- Representation from BC, Alberta, NWT, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec
- Three groups of six participants and two with five.
- Duration of project was 7 - 8 months. Each person was given 5 weeks to complete their project for the next person.
- Curator and project management – Sheila Thompson

	Whisper Project Groupings				
5weeks	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
May8-June 13	Sheila Thompson Ontario	Melanie Mathieson Ontario	Denise Rohr Ontario	Colleen Thomson Ontario	Patti Cook Ontario
June 14-July 19	Raegan Maier Saskatchewan	Pat Tarr Alberta	Deb Dumka BC	Jan Taylor Ontario	Pauline Thompson BC
July 20-Aug 24	Fay Hodson Alberta	Barb Mathieson BC	Diana Kennedy Ontario	Carmen Laferriere Quebec	Heather Lawrie Ontario
August 25-Sept 29	Anna Armitage Ontario	Sandra Barrett BC	Rosemarie Peloquin - Manitoba	Jeannette Makad Ontario	Judy Lewis Ontario
Sept 30 - Nov 6	Monica Bennett BC	Cheryl Weighill Alberta	Debbie Tyson Alberta	Yvonne Bilan-Wallace Alberta	Carolyn Mackenzie Ontario
Nov 7 - Dec 7	Chris Liszak Ontario	Marilyn Samuels Alberta	Pat Moore NWT		

Participant Distribution

Canada



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Original Photos Acknowledgement

- Thank you to Canadian photographer Lori Ryerson for graciously providing the five photos we used as the starter photos for each of our five groups.
- Her photos are all taken in Canada and are landscapes, birds, plants and icebergs.
- Contact – loriryerson.ca or [@focalcity](https://www.instagram.com/focalcity) on Instagram

Group A



“French River”

Group A1- Sheila Thompson

The iconic photo of a pristine boreal forest reflected in the clear blue water made me think about how rare that scene is becoming. My vessel picks up the key idea of a reflection but with a twist. While the upper part is an abstracted boreal forest, the reflection is a series of black houses and buildings - perhaps foretelling the future.

Size: 12"H x 9" D (30x23cm)

Techniques: wet felting over resist,
nuno felting, embroidery

Materials: Merino rovings and prefelt,
nunofelted silk digital images by maker,
embroidery cotton

Photo Credit: Sheila Thompson



“Unreflected”

Group A2- Raegan Maier

My inspiration vessel gave me the sense of the earth taking back what was originally hers through the strong emphasis on the forest and water with the slight reflection of the city stitched in the water. I wanted to make something that showed this reclaimed feeling. I'm always in awe of the beauty of old highways that have been long since abandoned. The crumbled texture and the way the earth takes back the pavement is a beautiful reminder that we are merely borrowing, not keeping, that which is not ours.

Size: 15"Hx13.5"Wx3"H (38x34x8 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting, nuno felting, stitching

Materials: Wool, silk, cotton and various other plant-based fibres

Photo Credit: Raegan Maier



Group A3- Fay Hodson

Reagan's charming little bird perched on a bed of felted stones, leaves, and flowers scattered on yellow-lined pavement "whispered" several thoughts: the juxtaposition of natural and man-made objects; nature's resilience in its struggle to adapt to a human-generated environment; and how we subjectively define beauty. This inspired me to go off on a tangent with a project that I have been thinking about for a while: growing plants in felt pots.

Size: 13"Hx20"Wx12D (33x51x30 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, stitching

Materials: Wool batt and roving, thread, earth, live dandelion

Photo Credit: Fay Hodson



Group A4- Anna Armitage

The photo that was sent to me included a watering can, a pot, and a desiccated dandelion. This suggested to me that the maker didn't have a green thumb and could kill weeds despite the care and attention she gave to them. Thus, I had to make a healthy and thriving dandelion to suggest that I DO have a green thumb and can grow weeds in abundance, especially dandelions. "One woman's weeds are another woman's treasures".

Size: 7:Hx11"D (18x28 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, embroidery, machine stitching

Materials: Merino roving, Corriedale roving, handmade Merino prefelt, embroidery cotton

Photo Credit: Anna Armitage



Group A5- Monica Bennett

Why is one part of Nature revered as a food source and the other is barely considered as such? This is what I thought about as I viewed Anna's artwork.

The inspiration piece's three-dimensional quality was my first response point. Then, I considered how the dandelion's place in our society is to be a weed onto which toxic chemicals are poured. Thirdly, the colours of the piece gave me the frame to set off and surround my 3D, toxic mushrooms.

Size: 10"H x 10"W x 1.5" D (25x25x4 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, resist felting

Materials: Merino roving, wool nepps, silk fibres, hemp fibres

Photo Credit: Monica Bennett



Group A6- Chris Lyszak

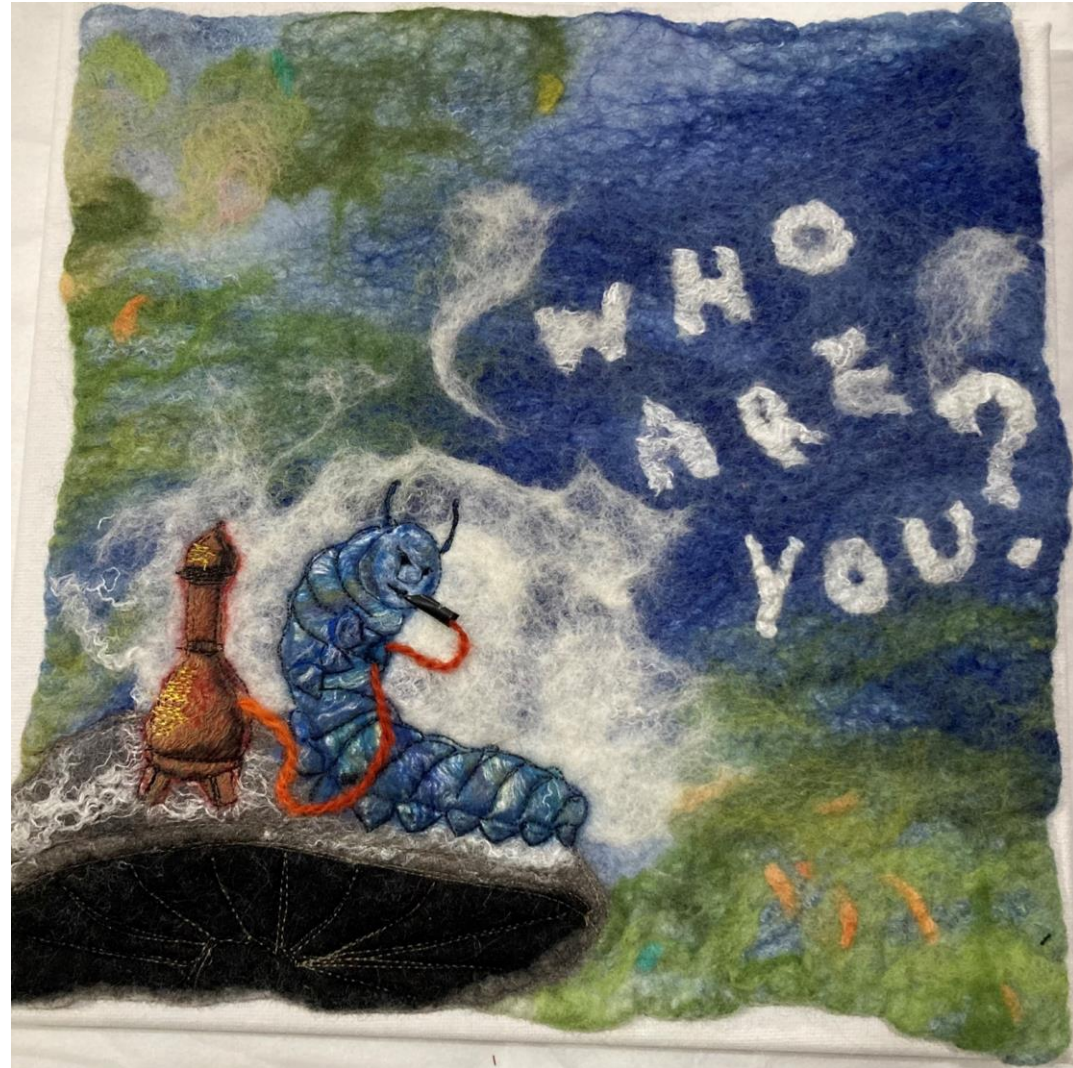
I received Monica's toadstools in the forest. They reminded me of fantasy stories like *Alice in Wonderland*. The image of the hookah smoking caterpillar came to mind. So here he is.

Size: 9"Hx9"W (23x23cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, machine stitching

Materials: Merino roving, prefelt

Photo Credit: Chris Lyszak



Group A



French River



Sheila Thompson A1



Raegan Maier A2



Fay Hodson A3



Anna Armitage A4



Monica Bennett A5



Chris Liszak A6

Group B



“Winter Classic- Banff”

Group B1- Melanie Mathieson



In the photo I saw predominately shades of white and blue/greys. I worked to capture the subtlety of all the colour variations of a snowy forest, mountain scene but also the texture of the trees, snow and ice. I used the fibres to build the colour variation but in the end for me, it was the use of locks for the tree line and on the fringe that provided the extra texture and colour I saw in the photo. The biggest challenge I had was fitting all that I wanted to express into the dimensions of the silk scarf base.

Size: 72”L x9”W (182x23cm)

Techniques: Nuno felting

Materials: Merino roving, silk chiffon scarf, Wensleydale locks, hand-dyed Teeswater locks

Photo Credit: Melanie Mathieson

Group B2- Pat Tarr

When I received Melanie's photo of her scarf, I saw a winter scene with trees along the snowy bank of a river with the blue shadows of a winter day. I was inspired by the colours she used, and her use of locks and I wanted to create a strong visual connection while creating my own unique response. I have used blue merino on dyed silk fabric as a base, adding silk to create tree shapes along the back and down the front of my vest, silk and other fibres to give the impression of moving water with ice, finishing off with wool locks and a brooch.

Size: Vest 55.5"Lx 21"W (140x50cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, nuno felting

Materials: Merino roving, hand dyed silk, Margalin silk, locks.

Photo Credit: Pat Tarr



Group B3- Barb Mathieson

Perhaps the reason I immediately saw water as the focal point of the vest that came before my piece is because I live on the coast and the ocean is a big part of my life. I immediately saw the white foam of the waves as they broke on the shore and the beautiful tangle of blues that is the water. I decided that my piece must somehow represent the ocean shore, and more specifically, a wave as it arrives on, and becomes one with the beach. Given that I wanted the piece to somehow flow like a wave, I decided to create a purse that had a flap that quite literally flowed over the base piece.

Size: 12"x12" (30x30 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, beading

Materials: Merino roving, silk hankies, wool neps, viscose tops

Photo Credit: Donna Robertson



Group B4- Sandra Barrett

I received photos from Barb Mathieson of a beautiful felted bag seascape, so immediately knew the theme. I visualized a series of waves flowing in and breaking on the shore. I created a three-dimensional seascape by felting a series of 19 fins in graduating shades of blue to depict the waves, contained within a copper tray. Breaking waves embellished with local Wensleydale locks create an active line of surf. Oyster shells became inclusions in the sand. Recently, I added further embellishments of beading, mirrors, and embroidery to enhance the movement and moodiness of the piece.

Size: 19”Hx8”Wx3”H (48x20x8 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, embroidery

Materials: Merino roving, copper tray, oyster shells, Wensleydale locks

Photo Credit: Sandra Barrett



Group B5- Cheryl Weighill

Sandra's 3D waves in shades of blue reminded of many walks along the water's edge. I was inspired to capture my thoughts and feelings of this favourite place. I thought about the many shades of blue where water meets sky on the horizon. Along the shore the waves wash up onto the beach; a riot of froth, foam and curls. Treasures glittering along the edge, waiting to be found. Sometimes a delightful surprise comes from under the waves.

Size: Waves – 23”Hx11”W (58x28 cm) Fish -
21” Lx8”Wx14”H (53x20x36 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, nuno felting,
beading, free motion stitching

Materials: Merino roving, cotton scrim, locks
and silk roving

Photo Credit: Cheryl Weighill



Group B6- Marilyn Samuels

A fish in the ocean was what struck me when I saw Cheryl's piece. I love being near the ocean and I love making felted fish so I knew that I wanted to make a fish swimming in the kelp. The background was structurally more difficult than I had envisioned. There are wires going through pockets in the felt to get the U shape. The kelp/reeds are also wired. The fish sits on a plexiglass cylinder and is attached with magnets

Size: 20"H x 16"W X 7"D (50x40x18cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, wiring

Materials: Wool, wires, plexiglass

Photo Credit: Marilyn Samuels



"West Coast Fantasy"

Group B



Melanie Mathieson
B1



Pat Tarr B2



Barb Mathieson B3

Winter Classic- Banff



Sandra Barrett B4



Cheryl Weighill B5



Marilyn Samuels B6

Group C



“Lilies Nouveau”

Group C1- Denise Rohr

When I received the picture, my eyes were drawn to the lily pads, so I decided to isolate just one lily pad. I wanted to make sure that the next person could still recognize what it was. I also wanted to make it a 3d sculpture.

Size: 17"Hx20"Wx3"D (43x53x8 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting, machine felting

Materials: Wool blanket, Corriedale roving, viscose

Photo Credit: Denise Rohr



Group C2- Deborah Dumka

My work Floating is a response to work by Denise Rohr whose photo whisper showed a 3D flower form, a purple water lily on a watery background. I was attracted to the deep purple tips of the petals and the shape of the flower and from that chose to base my interpretation on the circle. I colour blended 19 micron merino fibre for prefelts for the cut shapes and the background base and wet felted the prefelt components into this flat mat.

Size: 16" D (40cm)

Techniques: Wet felting

Materials: Merino roving, silk fibre

Photo Credit: Deborah Dumka



“Floating”

Group C3- Diana Kennedy

First glimpse, looking at my inspiration was awe and amazement. The piece was so beautiful and so exquisite. It spoke waterlily immediately. I was trying to abstract the piece by using a variety of textures and using just black and white. It's too complicated to be an abstract, took on a life of its own. There are many renditions.

Size: 10" D (25cm)

Techniques: Wet felting

Materials: Merino wool roving, silk, prefelts

Photo Credit: Diana Kennedy



Group C4- Rosemarie Péloquin

I saw below me, a young girl
crouched above a stream, still and
concentrated.

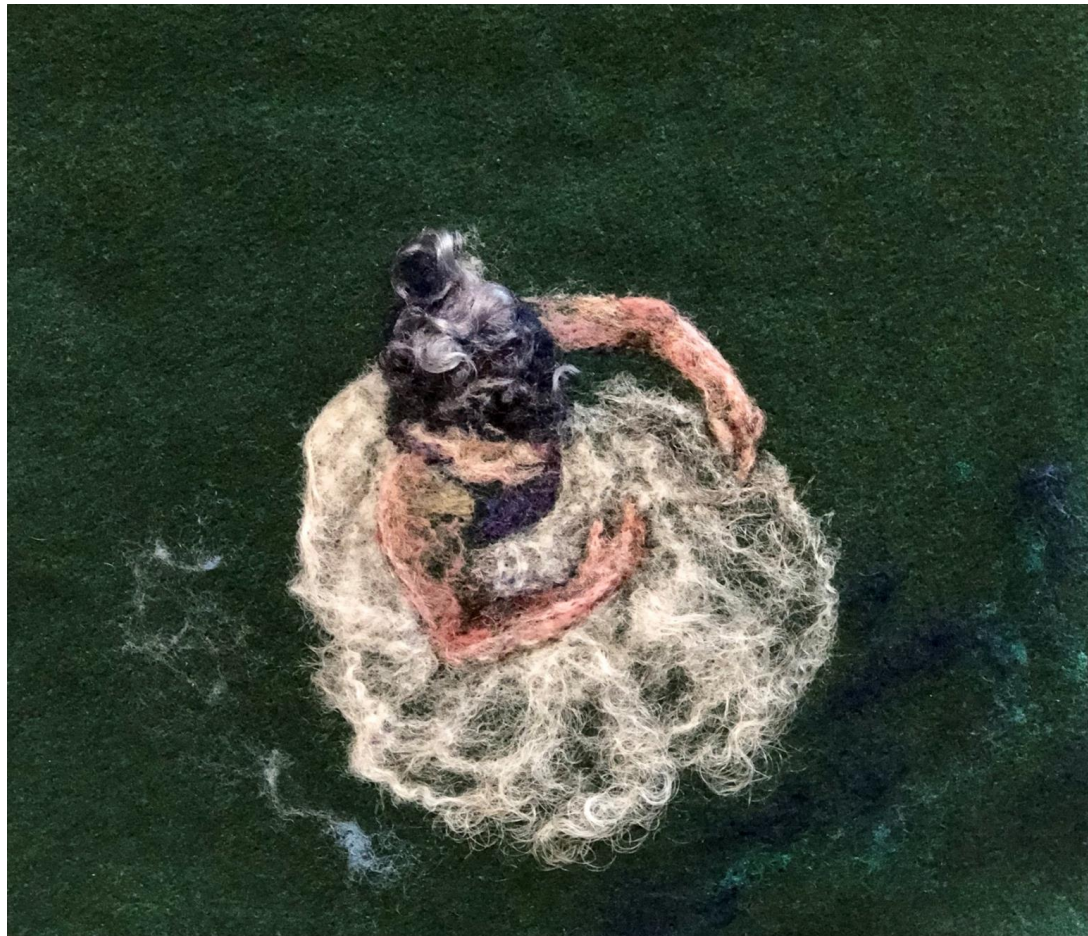
The more time I spent with her,
noticing and listening, I felt her
peace, her freedom. Then... she
twirled with joy.

Size: 9"Hx9"W (23x23 cm)

Techniques: Needle felting

Materials: Wool roving on reclaimed
wool coat

Photo Credit: Rosemarie Péloquin



Group C5- Debbie Tyson

I was inspired by Rosemarie's ballerina, twirling, dancing, you can feel her moving her body across the stage. I have been exploring vessels and wanted to capture the fullness of the dancer's tutu, her curly topknot and the movement of her arms as she pirouetted across the floor.

Size: 5"Hx 5.5"Wx5.5"D (13x14x15 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting over resist

Materials: Merino roving, prefelt, locks

Photo Credit: Debbie Caseburg Tyson



Group C5- Pat Moore

When I saw the piece of felted art that Debbie Tyson made what I "heard" was blue squares. In my head there were main colours of blue squares some with more texture than other. My squares are 3" by 3", two have blue locks, some have velvet, but most are blue merino.

Size: 24"H x 19"W (61x48cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, nuno felting

Materials: Merino roving, paper, velvet, wool locks

Photo Credit: Pat Moore



"Blue Squares"

Group C



Lilies Nouveau



Denise Rohr C1



Deborah Dumka C2



Diana Kennedy C3



Rosemarie Peloquin C4



Debbie Tyson
C5



Pat Moore
C6

Group D



“Cardinal Rules”

Group D1- Colleen Thomson

I love cardinals. They visit me regularly, flitting back and forth to the feeder. Their oh so clear call alerts me to their presence. The passing of a sunflower seed from male to female is enchanting. I took the words whisper and enchanting as a theme for my barely there wet felt representation. The circle reflects their life-long commitment to each other.

Size: 30"Hx30"W (76x76cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting

Materials: Corriedale roving, Merino roving, silk, cotton fabric

Photo Credit: Colleen Thomson



Group D2- Jan Taylor

In a summer of devastating wildfires, the image that I received seemed to be suggesting just that: a glimpse of charred wood against a smoke-filled sky. My response offers a more distant view, but features a stalk of fireweed, one of the plants that is often the first bit of colour and the first hopeful sign of life to appear after a fire.

Size: 19" Hx16"Wx4"D (48x41x10 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting

Materials: Merino roving, wire, beads, paper

Photo Credit: Jan Taylor



Group D3- Carmen Laferrière

I received a photo for the Whisper Project which inspired me to reflect on nature's force to recover following forest fires in BC. My work is a metaphor for resiliency, layers upon layers growing anew.

Size: 36"Hx17"W (91x43cm)

Techniques: Wet and needle felting, carving, embroidery

Materials: Hand-dyed wool, upcycled wool blankets, hand dyed yarns.

Photo Credit: Carmen Laferrière



Group D4- Jeannette Makad

I saw a lot of colour and movement in the piece before mine that instantly brought to mind the Gombey Troupes from Bermuda where I lived for several years. I could almost hear the drums and flutes, so I chose to do a representation of a Gombey in mid-dance amongst the Bermuda rooftops.

Size: 11"Hx8"W (28x20 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting, handsewn embellishments

Materials: Merino roving, silk roving, embellishments (trim, feathers), silk thread

Photo Credit: Jeannette Makad



Group D5- Yvonne Bilan-Wallace

Inspiration for Prairie Dancer came from the image of feathers in a dancers' headdress. I imagined how the extraordinary mating dance and plumage of such birds, as the prairie sage grouse, might have inspired human dancers over the eons.

Size: 16"H x 24" W (41x61cm)

Techniques: wet felting, needle felting, hand stitching

Materials: Merino and Corriedale wool, cotton and wool thread, woven stabilizer backing

Photo Credit: Yvonne Bilan-Wallace



“Prairie Dance”

Group D



Colleen Thomson D1



Jan Taylor D2



Cardinal Rules



Carmen Laferrière D3



Jeanette Makad
D4

Yvonne
Bilan-Wallace
D5



Group E



“Layers of Light”

Group E1- Patti Cook

Although I was impressed by the sheer enormity of the massive blue iceberg lumbering near the shore, it didn't inspire any ideas. As I zoomed in to take a closer look however, I noticed a solitary seagull standing on top, seemingly unaware of the huge mass of ice beneath.

He became the focal point of my piece. I imagined him standing in all his seafaring glory surveying the scene, unintimidated by the iceberg almost to the point of commandeering it.

The iceberg is still there in the icy blues of the seascape, but the seagull is the Captain of the Cerulean Sea!

Size: 8"H x 11" H (29 x 28cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, Needle felting

Materials: Merino Roving

Photo Credit: Patti Cook



“Captain of the Cerulean Sea”

Group E2- Pauline Thompson

Patti 's wonderful depiction of the Lessor black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus subspecies graellsii*) perched on an iceberg inspired me to research this little adventurer and wonder where she was headed. Once a rarity in Canada, it is becoming a relatively common winter visitor as populations increase with a decline in use of pesticides in their breeding areas.

This submission shows the winter migration area in eastern Canada. The map was embroidered in linen thread on a merino beret with the yellow section indicating the migration path.

Size: 10"D x 5.5"H (25x14cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, embroidery

Materials: Merino roving, linen thread, Icelandic yarn.

Photo Credit: Pauline Thompson



“Overhead: Bird’s Eye View”

Group E3- Heather Lawrie

When I received my whisper, a hat with the image of the Maritimes, I saw the yellow overlay as a weather map of the impending Hurricane Fiona of 2022 – a harbinger of climate change. "Canada on Fire" is a reaction to fires burning in Canada from coast to coast in the Spring of 2023. I felt the impact personally as I drove through smoke-filled skies from Ontario to Nova Scotia while listening to the reports of devastating fires across Canada.

Size: 8.5"Hx7.5"W x 8.5"D (21x19x21cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, embroidery

Materials: Merino roving, prefelt, silk roving, viscose

Photo Credit: Heather Lawrie



"Canada on Fire"

Group E4- Judy Lewis

My first impression from the photos that I received was a globe featuring the raised felted surface of Canada on one side with a circle of red felted flowers at the top of the globe. I immediately thought of global warming. Heather's interpretation inspired me to make a weather map indicating the abnormally high temperatures and forest fires across North America currently (August 2023) raging across North America. The flames at the top of the frame were placed to emphasize the unusual heat.

Size: 10" diameter (25cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting, embroidery, beading

Materials: Embroidery hoop, Merino roving, decorative thread, red and orange beads

Photo Credit: Judy Lewis



Group E5- Carolyn Mackenzie

My approach to any challenge is to ask, “what are the possible outcomes of this?”

Judy Lewis sent me an evocative and serious challenge: forest fires on our continent. After much thought, I chose to focus on both the felting process and creativity in answering my own question of possible outcomes. The textures and colours of burnt tree bark provided me with the opportunity to experiment with various techniques and materials before being satisfied with my final piece.

I was grateful to be able to answer my outcome question. I only wish that the seriousness and cause of forest fires around the world wasn't beyond our reach.

Size: 17”H x 11”W (43x28 cm)

Techniques: Wet felting, needle felting

Materials: Corriedale roving, Merino prefelt and roving, Tussah silk roving, pulled silk, and Angelina

Photo Credit: Carolyn Mackenzie



“Aftermath”

Group E



Patti Cook E1



Pauline Thompson E2



Heather Lawson E3



Judy Lewis E4

Layers of Light



Carolyn Mackenzie E5

Key Takeaways

- Felters loved being free of constraints on size and items to make
- Many people included ideas of nature, climate change and resiliency
- Such projects can help bridge our vast geography and help us learn about each other and from each other
- The trail of inspiration often lead to unexpected twists and turns depending on the personal experiences, timing of the work and creativity.
- We have seen reflections upon the human environmental interaction turn to ponderings about dandelions, weeds, toxic mushrooms and finally a fantasy about a hookah smoking caterpillar. Group A
- Winter scenes in Banff ended up as ocean seascapes Group B
- Lily pads became dancers and blocks of blue squares Group C
- A cardinal morphed into forest fires then joyful dancers and back to prairie birds Group D
- Birds on icebergs turned to maps of migration then climate change and forest fires Group E

If you are interested in the process and management issues / practices behind this project, please contact Sheila Thompson.
sheilathompsonfibreart@gmail.com