

Soft
Stories

Soft Stories

Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Soft Stories
Exhibition Catalogue

{ *curated by* }
Sierra Zukowski
Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre
TREX Southeast

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acknowledgments

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) and the Travelling Exhibition program (TREX) acknowledge that the artistic activity we support takes place on the territories of Treaty 6, 7 and 8. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived on and cared for these lands for generations, and we are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers, Elders and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous communities and growing our shared knowledge and understanding.

This publication was produced in conjunction with the TREX Southeast exhibition *Soft Stories*. The exhibition will tour throughout Alberta to non-traditional gallery spaces from September 2024 to February 2027. For more information on the program and locations of each travelling exhibition, visit trexsoutheast.ca.

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about

alberta foundation for the arts



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial Travelling Exhibition program (Trex) since 1980. The mandate of the AFA Trex program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community. Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

{ *Trex Northwest* } Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

{ *Trex Northeast* } Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

{ *Trex Southwest* } Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

{ *Trex Southeast* } Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat

Each year, more than 300,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. Trex also offers educational materials to integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the Trex program are curated from a variety of sources including private and public collections. The program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 9,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 2,000 artists. As the only provincial art collection in Alberta, the AFA collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.

Visit the AFA online at affta.ab.ca.

esplanade arts & heritage centre



The Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre is where arts and heritage come to life in Medicine Hat, where the stories of our great collective culture are told through music and dance, theatre, visual arts, artefacts, archives and more. The centre is located on Blackfoot territory just steps from the South Saskatchewan River in the city's downtown. The Esplanade opened its doors in celebration of Alberta's centennial in 2005 and ever since, Medicine Hat has been proudly hosting a lively procession of artists and audiences, storytellers and story-lovers, from around the region and around the globe. To discover more, visit esplanade.ca.

curatorial statement

The travelling exhibition *Soft Stories* brings together work by six Albertan contemporary female artists working in the vein of fibre arts. Each individual artist's practice is unique and varied, resulting in an array of techniques and outcomes on display. Esther Neufeld crafts elaborate felted landscapes inspired by her surroundings; Molly JF Caldwell presents weavings that reimage representations of femininity; Danielle Piper shares soft sculptures made from traditional and upcycled materials, embellished with beadwork; Shanell Papp urges viewers to reconsider macabre themes through embroidery and rug tufting.

In works by Wendy Tokaryk and Nicole Riedmueller, fibre is not the primary medium. Tokaryk utilizes textiles in the printmaking process, drawing attention to the treatment of lacemakers in 18th century France, while Riedmueller adds quilted elements as backdrops to ceramics exploring domestic labour.

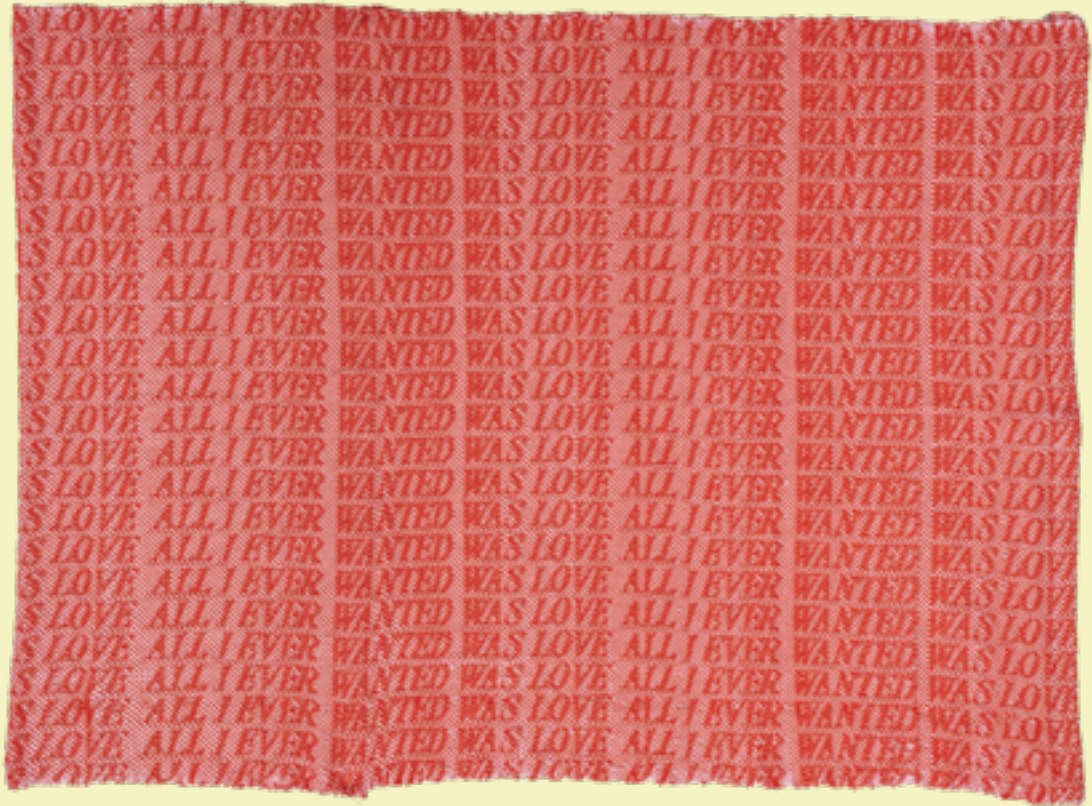
A common thread running between the works is storytelling. In some of the pieces, the stories are autobiographical — expressions of personal lived experience. Others share accounts of ancestors or people who were treated unfairly

throughout history — voices that can no longer advocate for themselves.

The history of storytelling and fibre arts is long and intertwined. For centuries, large woven textiles called tapestries have been a medium of choice for commemorating events or depicting myths and fables. In fact, the words text and textile derive from the same latin verb *texere*, meaning “to weave”. While the stories presented in this collection unfold on materials that are soft, the pieces punch above their weight. The more time one spends with each, the more visual and narrative details are revealed. Ultimately, the exhibition is a testament to employing age old techniques of fibre arts as a contemporary method of expression and sharing knowledge, ideas and stories through fibres, fabrics and threads.

Curatorial Statement by Sierra Zukowski





molly jf caldwell



molly jf caldwell

artwork credits

pages 6 & 7, left to right, top to bottom

Molly JF Caldwell
ALL I EVER WANTED WAS LOVE
2022
100% mercerized cotton
Collection of the artist

Molly JF Caldwell
SWEET
2020
100% cotton, polyester thread, silver charms
Collection of the artist

Molly JF Caldwell
GODDESS
2021
metallic and cotton boucle, hand spun yarn
Collection of the artist



artist statement

My name is Molly JF Caldwell and I am a textile artist who works with representations of femininity, historical and contemporary misogyny, and reimagined narratives. I live and work in Mohkinstsis ("Calgary, AB").

My work creates alternative and speculative worlds where narratives are reimagined. Textile processes allow for me to unpack and subvert questions around power and submission in contemporary society. Imagining our world through a softer gaze, I recontextualize images with sensitivity and fragility.

The softness of care. The softness of textiles. Escapism through compassion. Desire led by radical empathy. Endless yearning for connection.

My work pulls at the threads of stories, and rewrites them using feminist frameworks. I unspool the relationships between our bodies and textiles and reconsider the intimate roots we weave throughout. Using care as a framework, the objects I create lack the contours of harsh capitalistic expectations and instead give the viewer permission to explore more emotional landscapes.

bio

Molly JF Caldwell is a yonsei artist living and working in Mohkinstsis (so-called "Calgary, AB"). Graduating from the local art school in 2017, Caldwell has since been cultivating her textile-centric art practice, from international residencies to artist-run centre exhibitions. Although Caldwell has a deep, unending passion for all-things-textiles, her other interests include Marxist Feminism, Mariah Carey and dogs.

mollyjfcaldwell.com



esther neufeld



esther neufeld



artist statement

Train in the Sky – High Level Bridge, Lethbridge ~
There is nothing quite like standing under the High Level Bridge and watching a freight train rumbling overhead.

Goldfinches and Heart-leafed Arnica ~ These delightful little birds are like winged flowers flitting through the garden.

A Sweet Riot of Colour ~ This piece is a collaboration with my grand-daughter Emma who selected, placed and felted the fabric pieces. Granny performed the hand stitchery.

artwork credits

pages 10 & 11, left to right, top to bottom

Esther Neufeld and granddaughter Emma
A Sweet Riot of Colour
2023
felted silk collage in the spirit of Japanese
Shasiko stitchery
Collection of the artist

Esther Neufeld
Goldfinches and Heart-leafed Arnica
2022
felted wool
Collection of the artist

Esther Neufeld
Train in the Sky – High Level Bridge, Lethbridge
2023
felted wool and silk
Collection of the artist

bio

Esther was born in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia surrounded by the natural world. Her family was of farming and craftsman stock, and she learned early on that what was done with the hands was of particular value and worthiness.

In 1972 she graduated from Simon Fraser University following four years of courses which included English, geography and languages, as well as procuring a fifth year Professional Education Certificate. She then relocated to Nelson, BC, where she taught school from 1972 to 2005. Through this period she established a weaving business where her main focus was designing and weaving saddle blankets which she exhibited and sold at the Masters Event in Spruce Meadows just outside of Calgary. Her new home on the banks of Kootenay Lake continued her lifelong contacts with nature, which in turn further ignited her creative endeavours. In 1975 and 1976 she attended Kootenay School of the Arts where she studied colour, design and the fibre arts. Throughout these teaching years she continued to immerse herself in the dying of fibre with both acid and natural dyes as well as further mastering and refining the crafts of spinning and weaving.

In 2005 she moved to a small farm in the foothills of Alberta with her husband Phil where they built up a homestead and set about raising livestock and establishing market gardens. This dramatic new landscape gave Esther further inspiration from which to draw in her quest for new forms of expression to represent the surrounding natural world, including now entering the world of wearable art. And so the journey continues to this day.

underthearchfeltingstudio.com

shanell papp





shanell papp

artwork credits
pages 14 & 15
left to right,
top to bottom

Shanell Papp
Left Eye
2022-2023
textile (rug tufting)
Collection of the artist

Shanell Papp
Shaggy Skull
2022-2023
textile (rug tufting)
Collection of the artist

Shanell Papp
Falling (from series)
2017
textile (embroidery)
Collection of the artist

bio

Shanell Papp maintains an intensive studio art practice, working in textiles, sculpture, photography drawing and recently learning AI, hairwork, rug tufting and machine knitting. Papp's work has earned a large following online. The work blurs and redefines the boundaries of Textile Craft and Fine Art. At times grotesque, horrific and other times painfully funny. Their work can mesmerize with its charming laboured oddness.

Papp has had solo exhibitions at CASA, Pith, The New Gallery, Gallery Gachet, University of Saskatchewan, Estevan and Latitude 53. Selected group exhibitions include the SAAG, University of Lethbridge, Triannon, AKA, The Esker, City of Craft and Textile Museum of Canada. Her work has also been featured in the publications "CBC" in 2020 and 2018, "Ripley's Believe It or Not! A Century of Strange!" Vol. #15, "Ceci n'est pas un pull" Pyramyd editions, France, 2017, "I laughed, I cried, I split my side" Blackdog press, England, 2016, and "SNAP CRACKLE POP" University of Lethbridge, 2010.

shanellpapp.com



artist statement

My practice is part skills building and part research based. The work centers on darker and peripheral themes. Primary areas of interest are crime/evidence, horror/film props and textiles/information systems. My work shares thought threads with Foucault, Zizek, Eco and Cronenberg; they explore ideas of beauty, violence, social order and the media. I'm interested in investigating these difficult subjects and hopefully making the material more accessible — providing horrors and healing undivided.

Continuous skills development is part of working in textiles. There are so many ways to develop; when you have reached a plateau or mastery with a skill, it doesn't last long. You find new places to build on your practice, new fibres and techniques are a constant draw. I'm currently developing rug tufting, machine knitting, hair work, giant crochet sculpture and more recently, a Master of Library Studies where I am interested in information systems. Artificial Intelligence, metadata, VR and machine learning are also interests.

My work is a combination of technical skills and observations. The internet, social media and pocket devices have provided my work with a large online following. For me, it is an exciting time when the boundaries of art/textiles are expanding along with the knowledge

base of the internet. Interestingly, textiles and programming languages share much in common. Textiles can make quick references based on the history of materials / techniques / utility / design. Textiles are associative and make them a perfect mode for interesting materials and juxtapositions.

The depth of textiles drives me to research new practical skills and pioneer new conceptual conversations for textile art. In an ever expanding practice, material choice is critical in my work as a layer of meaning information. For example, crochet is only made by hand, knitting can possibly be machine and not all knitting. Some types of complexity require people. Furthermore, the making of textile work is layered when considering who made the fabric and threads, how it is used and what relationship it has/had with the body and narrative. There are the hidden depths — many layers of meaning and labour. Textiles may be the perfect medium for addressing the multi facets of life. It can contain multitudes.



danielle piper



danielle piper



bio

Danielle Piper holds a Bachelors of Fine Art with Distinction from the Alberta University of the Arts, majoring in Drawing and awarded in 2020. Piper has attended artist residencies around Alberta, including at the Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity, and has partnered with institutions such as the Calgary Public Library and City of Calgary. She is the owner of Wapakwaniwin Craftwork, her business. She is also a member of the Alberta Craft Council and founder of artist collective ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ wasakamapiwak, formed in 2023.

daniellepiperart.com

artwork credits

pages 18 & 19, left to right, top to bottom

Danielle Piper

ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (*pahpahscis*)

2024

cow leather, dyed deer hide, glass beads, wool, fish leather, dentalium shell, wire, acrylic paint and caribou hair
Collection of the artist

Danielle Piper

ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (*apisci kakakes*)

2019

antler, canvas, cow leather, glass beads, dentalium shell, cotton thread, artificial sinew, acrylic paint and wire
Collection of the artist

Danielle Piper

ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (*pihpihciw*)

2019

cow leather, glass beads, wood, leather and thread scraps
Collection of the artist

artist statement

Cos' Tansi.

Danielle Elizabeth Piper nitsiyhkason. My name is Danielle Piper, and I am an interdisciplinary artist based in Mohkinst'sis, Treaty 7 territory. I am a band member of Cold Lake First Nations in Treaty 6 territory, and of nehiyaw, Métis, denesuline and European mixed ancestry.

My artistic practice is rooted in traditional craft techniques and articulated in a mixture of nêhiyawêwin — my ancestral language, and english. Utilizing craft, I've found the potential for material exploration to become a gateway through which to deconstruct the colonisation of our everyday lives. The slow labour of craft echoes that of reclaiming my language and cultural identity, as well as the labour required of us all to build forward in mutual understanding.

I believe that as an artist my foremost duty is to my ancestors, to honour work that they did to survive and pass down the knowledge that we all need to move forward in a good way. My next responsibility in making is to honour the materials and the land itself through deep consideration for the lived histories held within them. I am striving to express the complex interconnectivity of our very existence in human bodies through the use of varied materials which include animal

skins, seashell, porcupine quills, fish scales and plant fibres, but also paints, nylon, synthetic furs and upcycled textiles. Animal and plant materials have perhaps a more obvious context for their past lives, yet the synthetic and recycled materials you also find littered through my work deserve the same level of recognition. With needle and thread, I explore the tensions within the land as I work to heal alongside her.

nicole riedmueller





nicole riedmueller



artwork credits

pages 22 & 23, left to right, top to bottom

Nicole Riedmueller

Elemental Play I

2024

ceramic, textile and yarn

Collection of the artist

Nicole Riedmueller

Elemental Play II

2024

ceramic, textile and yarn

Collection of the artist

Nicole Riedmueller

Elemental Play III

2024

ceramic, textile and yarn

Collection of the artist

artist statement

Elemental Play is an exploration of ceramics, weaving and quilting as feminist languages. Slip cast, disembodied doll arms holding tools are utilized as allegorical symbols of invisible labour — the work performed in domestic spaces. While the small weavings and quilting geometries point to a history of womens' narratives. In this, craft and handwork embody the notion that repetitive labour generates the necessity for exploration and playful inquiry.

The staging of *Elemental Play* places a fragile and difficult form into a tender, soft space situated for viewing. Its display asserts an investigation into the intersection of art and craft. The candy-coloured glazes mask and blur the politic in this work by offering palatable, sugar-coated imagery. The small weavings denote the gesture of wrapping these forms in love and care. The quilted textiles offer a layer of safety and protection, giving these delicate ceramic hexagons a secure and comfortable home. The soft edges of the hand stitching is a salient aspect of the process, echoing the flow-state of the maker, situating *Elemental Play* in the present moment. These pieces serve as a proclamation that play and imaginative creation deserve to be viewed as essential and worthwhile work.

bio

Nicole Riedmueller is an artist and educator based in Treaty 7 Territory, Lethbridge, Alberta. Riedmueller holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Nova Scotia University of Art and Design, a Bachelor of Education from the University of Lethbridge and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Lethbridge. She has attended artist residencies at the Guldagergarrrd International Ceramics Research Center in Denmark and the Medalta International Artist Residency in Alberta. She currently teaches ceramics as an instructor in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lethbridge.



wendy tokaryk



wendy tokaryk



artwork credits
pages 26 & 27, left to right

Wendy Tokaryk
Lace (Unite)
2014
soft ground etching and relief printing
Collection of the artist

Wendy Tokaryk
Lace (Reign II)
2014
soft ground etching and relief printing
Collection of the artist

Wendy Tokaryk
Lace (Guild)
2014
soft ground etching and relief printing
Collection of the artist

artist statement

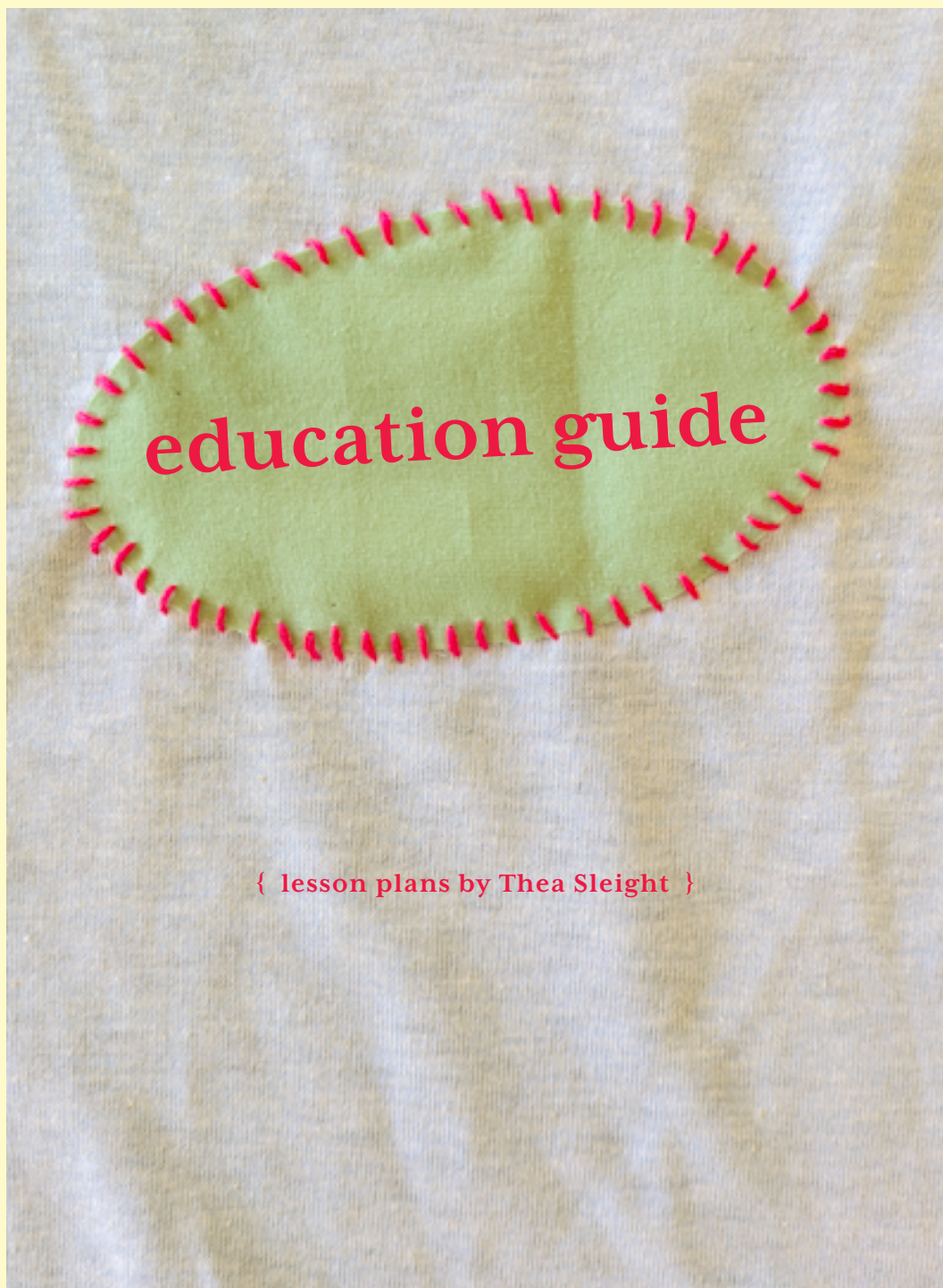
Lace is a series of fine art prints that reflect upon socioeconomic and political systems that impact the textile industry and manufacturing. This series was motivated by the historical period of the French Monarchy (circa 1789) when lace making guilds were established to support the production of luxury textiles. At the time, revolutionaries perceived this labor force as supporters of the aristocracy because of their occupation. Lacemakers were considered associates because they were trained to support production for the manufacture of luxury goods. Following the French Revolution, decorative lacemaking (and other non-essential production) was a symbol of royal excess that led to the economic depression of France. For this reason, many guild workers and trades people were beheaded.

The *Lace* prints were created through the processes of relief printing and copper plate etching. The central motifs for the etchings are decorative patterns influenced by Western European architecture, domestic interiors, and textile design. The compositions are arranged to illustrate various strategic power relations that consider governance, organization, revolt, hierarchy, subordination and industry.

bio

Wendy Tokaryk is a visual artist dedicated to exploring and developing skills in a wide range of contemporary and historic printmaking mediums and the craft of handmade paper. Wendy received an MFA (printmaking) from the University of Calgary, a Studio Art honours degree (BFA with distinction), and a BA Honours in Art History from the University of Saskatchewan. Wendy completed a certificate in Graphic Design from Humber College in 2021. Her projects and exhibitions have been supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Canada Council for the Arts. Wendy is the Print & Paper Facilitator for Visual Arts Residencies at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

wendytokaryk.com



criss, cross, criss



overview

Weaving is considered one of the longest surviving methods of creating fabric, dating back to at least 10,000 B.C. and performed cross-culturally. Either hand-woven or on a loom, the fabrics created through weaving are used in a myriad of functional and artistic applications, from baskets to tapestries. Of course, this craft has also remained steadfast in contemporary art, an example being in the work of artist Molly JF Caldwell.

Within her diverse practice, Caldwell creates textual and poetic weavings that are deeply feminist and highly informed by her love of pop culture. Inspired by Caldwell's works featured in *Soft Stories*, this activity invites participants to consider how their favourite poems, words or phrases might be visually translated into a weaving of their own.

vocabulary

Loom ~ A device that holds lengthwise threads taut while other threads are woven through them crosswise.

Skein ~ A length of thread or yarn loosely coiled or knotted.

Taut ~ Stretched tight.

Warp ~ The lengthwise threads that are held taut in the process of weaving.

Weaving ~ The craft or action of forming fabric by interlacing threads.

Weft ~ The threads that horizontally cross the warp in the process of weaving on a loom.

Wool needle ~ A needle with an aluminum or plastic body and a nylon loop to thread yarn through.

materials

- ~ Cardboard
- ~ Ruler
- ~ Paper
- ~ Pencil
- ~ Coloured pencils
- ~ Scissors or X-Acto knife
- ~ Glue
- ~ Twine
- ~ Yarn (assorted colours and textures)
- ~ Wool needle

TREX Tips ~ Choose a thicker cardboard that is rigid enough to support the weaving. It's harder to weave on a loom that is wobbly.

For younger participants, wool needles can be replaced by popsicle sticks with thread wrapped around and attached by tape.

instructions

{ 1 } First, create a loom. Cut a rectangular piece of cardboard according to the size of weaving you would like to create. For example, the weaving created for demonstration was made on an 8 × 7 inch loom. Keep in mind that larger weavings will require a longer amount of time to complete.

{ 2 } Measure out a row of short lines along the top and bottom edges of the cardboard. These lines should be evenly spaced, ¼ inch apart and ¼ inch deep. Ensure that the top and bottom marks line up, as you will run lengthwise threads between them. Use scissors to cut incisions along these lines.

{ 3 } Cut two additional strips of cardboard the same width as the rectangular cardboard piece and 1 inch in length. Glue one piece directly below the top row of incisions and the other above the bottom row. These pieces will create a larger space between the warp and the back of the loom for the needle and thread to pass through and will make the weaving process easier.

{ 4 } Unravel (but don't cut) a string of twine from its skein and tie a knot at the end. Fit the knot through the top left incision on your cardboard piece. Bring the length of string down the front of the cardboard to the bottom left incision, wrap around the back of the tab and up again to the next top incision. Repeat until the warp spans the width of the cardboard, tie a knot at the back and cut.

{ Soft Stories }

TREX Tip ~ For younger participants, the loom can be prepared ahead of time.

{ 5 } Now onto the content of your weaving. Consider a word, phrase or poem you like. How does it make you feel? Do you associate certain colours, patterns or memories with it? What kind of image does it conjure in your mind? Does it have a shape? For example, someone may read the word pairing “Burgess Shale” and think of deep grey, purple and blue colours, round shapes and squiggly lines.

Cut a piece of paper according to the dimensions of space between the two strips of cardboard on the larger cardboard piece. Draw out and colour the visual translation of your chosen text.

TREX Tip ~ For beginner weavers, large blocks of colour, simplified shapes and limited colour palettes are a good place to start. Designs can become more elaborate as the weaver becomes more comfortable with the process.

{ 6 } Fit the drawing of your weaving behind the warp. This will be your guide.

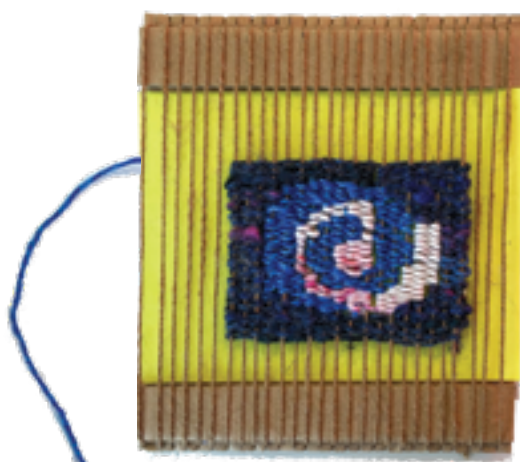
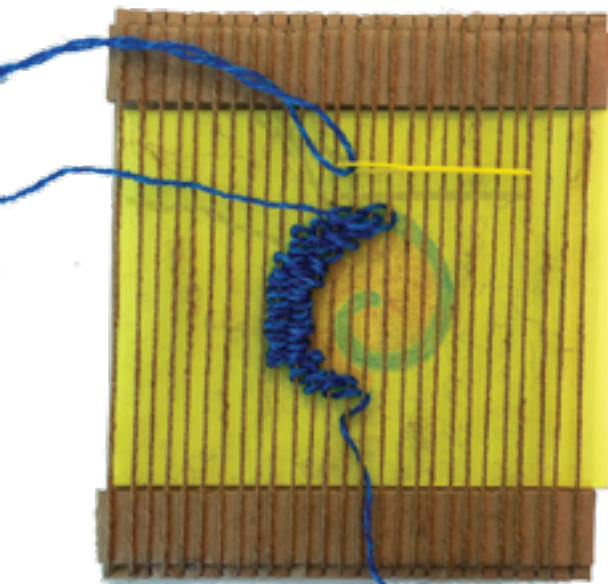
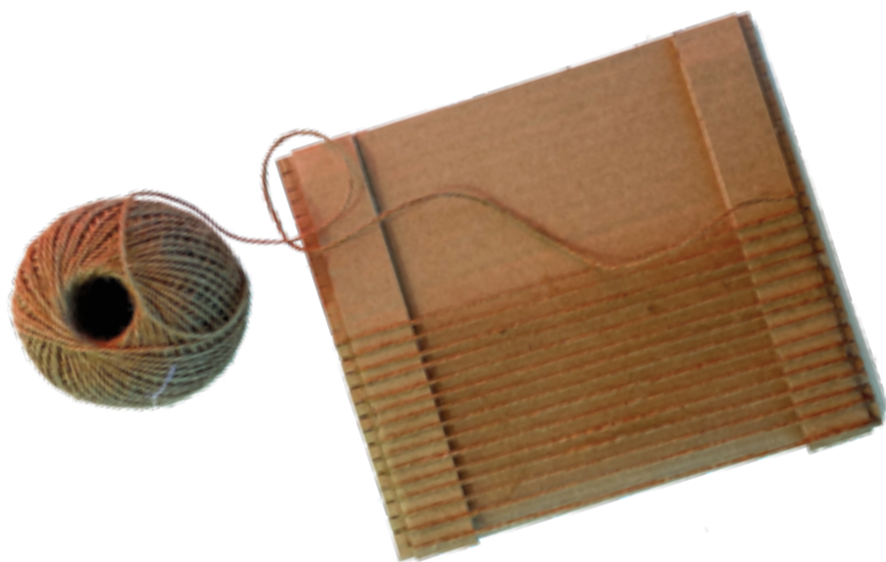
{ 7 } Select a yarn colour according to your drawing and thread the string through the wool needle. Guide the threaded needle through the warp in a horizontal line, using an over and under motion. Try not to pull the weft too much, as it could distort the warp and subsequently, your final weaving. Repeat this process to create

more rows above your first row. Push each new row against the preceding row to ensure the weaving stays tight.

TREX Tip ~ It is easiest to weave the shapes first and fill the background in around them afterwards.

{ 8 } When you are finished with a thread colour, cut and tuck the thread behind the warp. You can either leave it dangling or weave it back in once the front of your weaving is complete. To begin a new thread colour, start the row from the place you finished your previous thread.

{ 9 } Once your weaving is complete, flip the cardboard over and carefully cut the warp loops around the tabs on the bottom edge. Tie the loose warp threads together in twos to form a knot just below your weaving. When all the bottom threads are knotted, repeat this step with the top warp loops. You now have a completed weaving!



follow-up questions

Why did you choose the text that you did?

What comes to mind when you think about it?

What are other ways you can visually represent words?

Does your weaving have a title?

bonus! activity

As an additional activity, you could create a larger scale collaborative weaving. Following the same steps as above, one participant would start the weaving with their word or poem in mind, then pass it off to another participant to continue. The end result will be a tapestry of everyone's texts, visual associations and memories.

images opposite

left to right, top to bottom

Cardboard loom with evenly spaced incisions.

Preparing the loom with warp threads.

Weaving in progress, following the pattern of the prepared drawing.

Completed weaving before being removed from the loom and tying off warp threads.

sources

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the land is soft and scratchy

overview

Some scholars consider wet felting to be the process used by our ancestors to make the very first fabrics. Wet felting is the simple method of using soap, water, agitation and compression to press wool fibres together, resulting in felt. Felt created in this manner is known for its strength, durability and weather resistance, and was used by early societies for clothing, tapestries and materials for portable dwellings.

The wet felting process persists into contemporary times and is adopted by many working artists, including Esther Neufeld. Many of Neufeld's works are representational and heavily influenced by her proximity to the natural world. For example, her piece *Train in the Sky - High Level Bridge, Lethbridge* depicts the High Level Bridge and surrounding scenery in Lethbridge, Alberta. For viewers familiar with this area, the work may evoke strong memories or nostalgia. In this activity, participants will make their own felted landscapes, drawn from either real or imagined places.



vocabulary

Agitation ~ Using gentle shaking movements to bind fibres together.

Compression ~ Applying even pressure to flatten an object or make it smaller.

Felt ~ A textile that is produced by matting, condensing and pressing fibers together.

Representational ~ Also known as figurative, this is art that accurately presents objects and people as they are in real life.

Saturated ~ Thoroughly soaked or holding as much water as possible

Textile ~ A material made from interlocking yarns or threads.

Wet felting ~ The process of using water, soap, agitation and compression to create felt out of wool fibres.

Wool roving ~ A long and narrow bundle of spun wool.

materials

- ~ Wool rovings (assorted colours)
- ~ Bowl or bucket filled with warm water
- ~ Bubble wrap
- ~ Spray bottle
- ~ Dish soap
- ~ Rolling pin
- ~ Paper
- ~ Pencil or coloured pencils

image below

Rolling pin and wool roving in assorted colours.



instructions

{ 1 } Fill a bucket or bowl with warm water, as well as a spray bottle with water and a small amount of dish soap. Set these aside.

{ 2 } Consider what kind of landscape you would like to create. Real or imaginary? Rural or urban? Are there structures or machines present? Animals? Fantastical elements? Sketch out your landscape on paper with pencil and fill in with colour.

TREX Tip ~ If you are a beginner to wet felting, it may be best to start with a simple landscape with a limited colour palette and work up to more complex scenes as you gain confidence with the process.

{ 3 } Select pieces of wool roving according to the colours on your drawing.

{ 4 } Place your drawing on your workstation and lay a piece of bubble wrap on top, bubble side down.

{ 5 } Arrange a thin even layer of wool on top of the bubble wrap according to the colours and composition of the drawing below. These pieces of wool should all be placed in the same direction, either horizontally or vertically.

{ 6 } Repeat step 5 at least four to five times, alternating the direction of the wool each time. For example, if you placed the pieces in the first layer vertically, the next should be placed horizontally, or vice versa. With



each layer, you can add more detail to your landscape, such as gradations in colour and animals, buildings or figures in the landscape.

{ 7 } Spritz the wool with the dish soap solution in the spray bottle until the wool is fully saturated.

{ 8 } Place another sheet of bubble wrap over the wool – bubble side up – and use a rolling pin to roll over it firmly in different directions until the wool binds together.

{ 9 } Remove the wool from the bubble wrap and submerge it in your bucket or bowl filled with warm water. Let it sit in the water for two minutes, then remove and gently fold and squeeze the water out. Repeat this step three more times.

{ 10 } Lay your felted landscape flat to dry and there you have it!

follow-up questions

What kind of landscape did you choose and why? Is this someplace you have visited or seen before, or did you conjure it from your imagination?

What feeling are you hoping to convey through your landscape?

sources

“Wet Felting.” Muddy Faces Ltd. www.muddyfaces.co.uk/activities/art-creating/wet-felting. Accessed May 2024.

“Wet Felting: The World’s First Fabric and an Enduring Technique.” Design Dash. 7 Dec. 2023, designdash.com/2023/12/07/wet-felting-the-worlds-first-fabric-and-an-enduring-technique/. Accessed May 2024.

images, top left then bottom right

Arranging wool roving atop landscape sketch.

A completed wet felted piece.



textile texture studies

overview

At times, there can be too much focus on creating completed works of art and not enough on the open-ended experimental processes that push artists to arrive there. Playful exploration and trial and error approaches to creativity allow for new ideas to foster in low-pressure environments and may lead to unexpected and exciting methods of making. Within these research and development stages, artists will sometimes create studies. A study can be thought of as a draft or prototype and is an opportunity to work out certain ideas and outcomes, such as how colours will interact with each other or how different materials can be used. The findings that come from this research may be used in future projects or kept as reference of discovery.

In her series entitled *Lace*, Wendy Tokaryk applies relief printmaking methods to textiles to create exciting compositions of texture, shape and colour. Likewise, this activity encourages participants to explore the textures and characteristics of different textiles through printmaking. This process could look like layering fabrics in a single composition to see how they interact, experimenting with saturation levels of ink on fabric, or manipulating textiles into new shapes to see what kinds of marks they leave. Play around, let loose and allow space for happy accidents!

vocabulary

Composition ~ The way different elements are combined to create an image.

Doily ~ An ornamental mat made of lace.

Printmaking ~ The artistic practice of directly transferring an image from one surface to another using ink.

Porous ~ An object that has tiny spaces or holes that liquid or air can pass through.

Relief printmaking ~ A type of printmaking in which raised areas on a printing surface are inked and printed, while the recessed areas do not pick up ink. In this activity, the printing surface is a textile.

Study ~ An artwork created to understand, plan, practice or prepare for a more formal or refined piece.

Textile ~ Material made of interlacing fibres.

materials

- ~ Ink or paint (assorted colours)
- ~ Ink roller or paintbrush
- ~ Doilies or other textiles (e.g. corduroy, tweed, twill, lace, purl, leno, cable knit, cheese cloth, dimity, hessian)
- ~ Paper
- ~ Heavy weight (e.g. textbook or frying pan)
- ~ Tape (optional)

instructions

{ 1 } Select the textiles you are interested in using. Focus on the texture, shape and design rather than function and colour. Feel the fabric between your hands. Does it have bumps or ridges? Is it heavy or light? Scratchy or soft? Are there interesting cut-outs? Can you cut it to change its shape? Can it be scrunched or folded?

TREX Tip ~ Keep in mind that these fabrics will be getting ink or paint on them. It might be best to select old or stained fabrics rather than ones you would like to reuse later.

{ 2 } Place a piece of paper on your workstation. Think about what you are curious about or what you would like to learn from this process. If you are interested in composition, take time to move your fabrics around on the page in different arrangements and orientations before inking them. If you would like to layer fabrics and ink colours atop one another, think about the order to lay them down on the paper, as this will affect the results. What would happen if you placed fabric inked in a light colour down first, then fabric with a darker ink on top? What if you layered differently sized and textured textiles atop each other? Perhaps you are interested in how colour is transferred from the textile to the paper. How might pressure, application of ink or paint, or weight placed atop during the print making process affect this? The experimental variations are endless!

TREX Tip ~ With the spontaneous and accidental nature of experimentation, it can sometimes be difficult to know how you arrived at a result, let alone remember what had happened later. While trying different techniques or forming new arrangements, document the process by taking photographs or writing notes. This way, you will not lose any precious discoveries.

{ 3 } Now you can colour your fabrics with paint or ink. Since fabric is porous, be sure to have a scrap piece of paper underneath when colouring as to not make a mess. To keep the fabric in one place when applying paint or ink, you can tape the edges to the scrap paper or press your finger down on one edge to create resistance against the roller or paintbrush.

TREX Tip ~ Paint or ink the fabrics one at a time to ensure that they do not dry out before you have the chance to lay them down on the paper you will use for printing.

{ 4 } Once you have a piece of fabric coloured, gently pick it up by its edges and press the wet side face-down onto the paper in the desired orientation. Leave the fabric there. Repeat steps 3 and 4 with your remaining fabrics.

{ 5 } When all your fabrics have been coloured and pressed into the paper, place another piece of paper on top of the textiles. Then add a weight on top, such as a heavy book or frying pan. The weight will allow

{ *Soft Stories* }

the fabrics to make greater contact with the paper and the ink will transfer better. With open palms, press down firmly on the weight, while being careful not to move it, as to not disrupt the composition below.

{ 6 } After a few minutes, remove the weight and top piece of paper and gently peel the fabrics away from the bottom piece of paper. What you are left with is a relief print! You could move on from this study and try new techniques or keep experimenting by creating another printed layer on top. Be sure to record any notes or technical details that you want to remember in case you'd like to recreate the outcome in a future artwork.



images, top to bottom

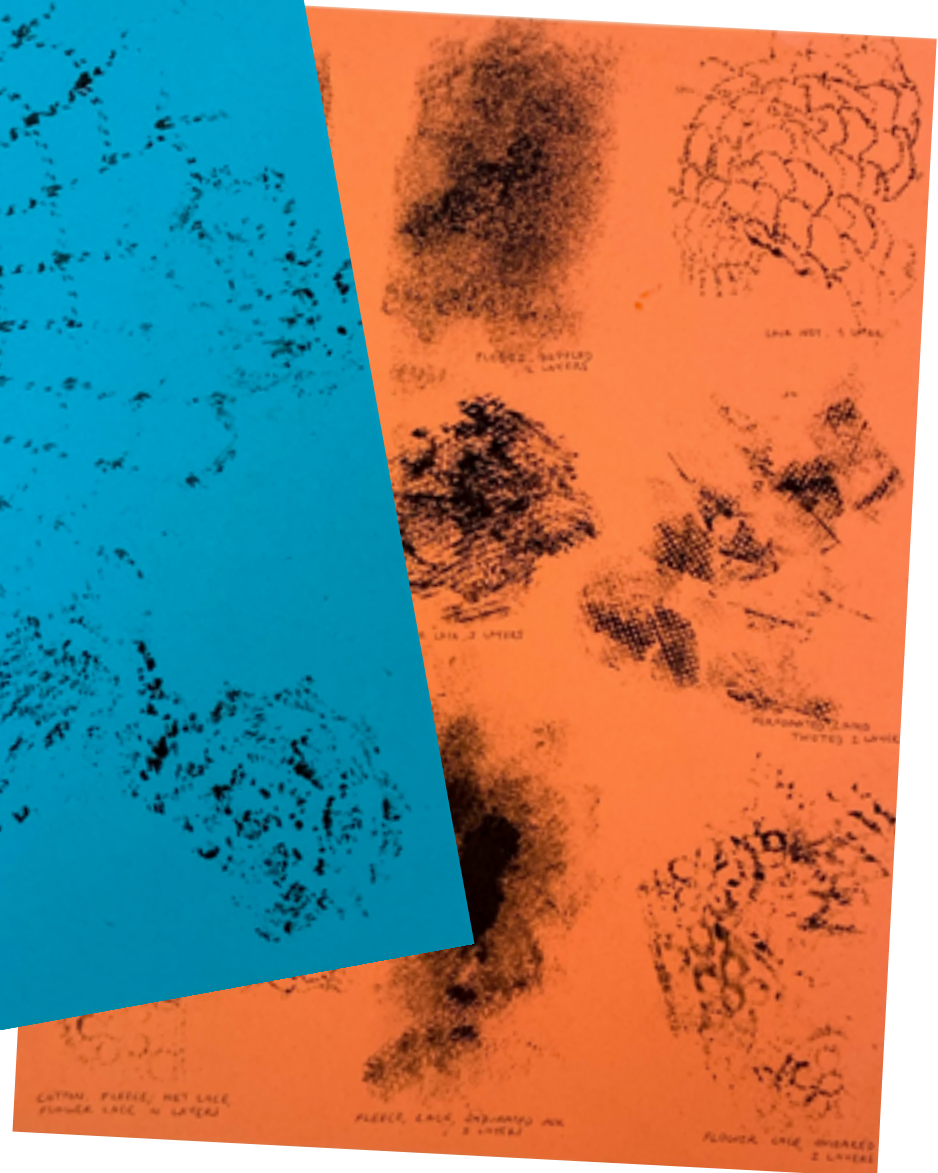
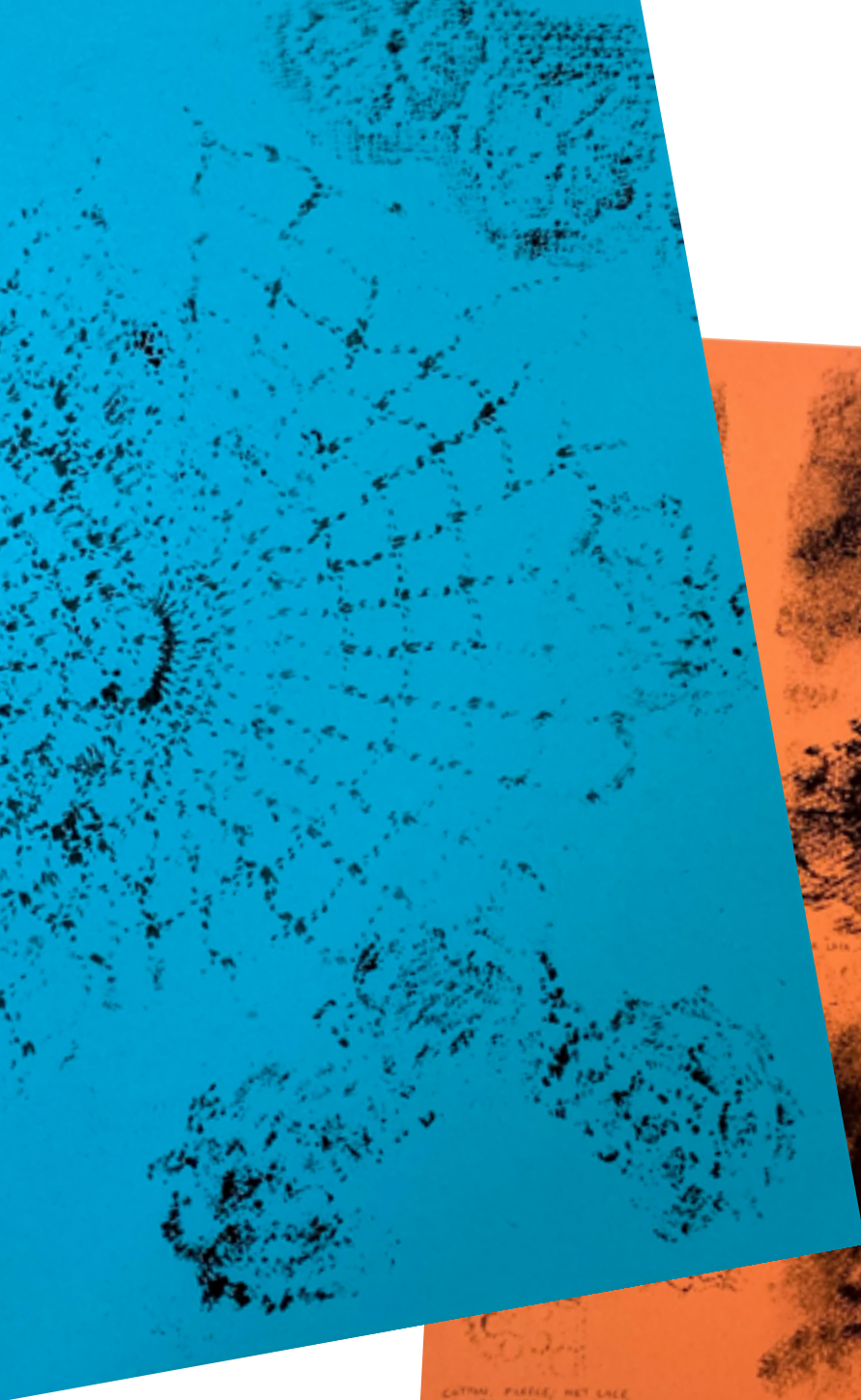
Inking fabric using an ink roller, with scrap piece of paper behind.

Peeling away a fabric scrap to reveal a relief print.

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Examples of texture studies.





COTTON FIBER, NET LACE
FIBER LACE IN LAYER

FIBER LACE, INJURED AND
IN LAYER

FIBER LACE, INJURED
IN LAYER

