

# Stories are Made



Loop by Loop

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	Elizabeth Miller detail 'Breaking the Cycle'	Karen Miller one of series Silhouettes
Cheryl Bollenbach  detail 'Urban Icons'	Meryl Cook detail 'Breaking Open'	Terri Todd  detail 'Imbalanced'
Domenica Queen  detail 'On my Belly in Grass'	Mary B. Lopez Morales detail 'This Valley of Thistles'	

## Loop by Loop

*Curated by Susan Feller*

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[SusanFeller.com/contact](http://SusanFeller.com/contact)



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# Rug Hooking Today

With origins unknown, rug hooking evolved in a similar fashion to quilting - using worn clothing to make utilitarian objects (bed cloths then floor coverings).

By the mid 1800s with the open weave of feed sacks providing a common backing material, women (handcrafts are often presumed to be women's work) cut strips of fabric and, using a hook, pulled them through the backing, forming loops. A hook was as simple as a bent nail in a wooden handle. Designs of common motifs - flowers, houses, people, animals - were arranged as artfully as the maker's skills. Rugs were for comfort in the home, not intended for public critique or sale.

Today with the conveniences of time, economics, and life style the creatives in this collection are examples of contemporary fiber artists throughout the world.

Using the rhythmic, slow process each loop is pulled into a unique design. They speak of benefits from the meditative actions - healing, advocating, and self-esteem. These works are for public view and often for sale.

Look at the work before reading their stories. Consider how you react to the design. Is there a story you can tell by seeing the elements? Are you curious to know the tale?

Issues raised in this series include experiencing motherhood, healing through journaling, society and veterans, along with using disposable materials. They are not new subjects, yet each story is.

Videos introducing you to basic rug hooking are easily found on the internet. .

*Elizabeth Miller describes beginning to hook:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxZhAkyIWjE>





*Bliss* model cutter from 1954 with changeable blades to make different widths. Simply by turning the handle, the blade slits several strips at a time. This is quicker and more consistent than using scissors. There are several different models on the market including an electrified version.



Uncut fabric, some strips and three hooks. *Top* is similar to a crochet hook inserted in a handle which can fit in palm or be held as pencil. *Middle* is a long pencil. The steel shank is tapered like the *bottom* wider one. The tapering helps to open the hole so a strip can be pulled through easily.





# Motherhood and Identity

Social categories - gender, place of birth, job, education carry biases depending on our upbringing . Artists explore the presumptions evoked by these labels.

A mother carving out personal time to create is an important lesson for family members. Rug hooking projects don't need a separate space. You can grab a few minutes to hook and put it down, continuing when you return. Children can help and even see their own designs develop. The next generation learns from example.

These two makers share their experiences with motherhood and self worth.

# Elizabeth Miller

Elizabeth Miller is a Maine fiber artist, writer, and teacher. Her sources of inspiration are North Atlantic landscapes and matters of being human, including love, motherhood, trauma, and grief. [NorthAtlanticFiberArts.com](http://NorthAtlanticFiberArts.com) is a container for her inspirations, Maine and Nova Scotia, and the artistic themes she revisits as a result of her ties to both places.

She is the author of *Heritage Skills for Contemporary Life: Seasons at the Parris House*, published by Down East Books in 2021. Elizabeth has had articles in *Making* magazine and *Rug Hooking Magazine*. She has also appeared on the Magnolia Network show, *Maine Cabin Masters*, and her art has been exhibited during Rug Hooking Week at Sauder Village. Her work is included in *The Art of Mothering: Our Lives in Colour and Shadow*, by Karen D. Miller, published by Ampry Publishing.

[www.northatlanticfiberarts.com](http://www.northatlanticfiberarts.com)

**IG @northatlanticfiberarts**

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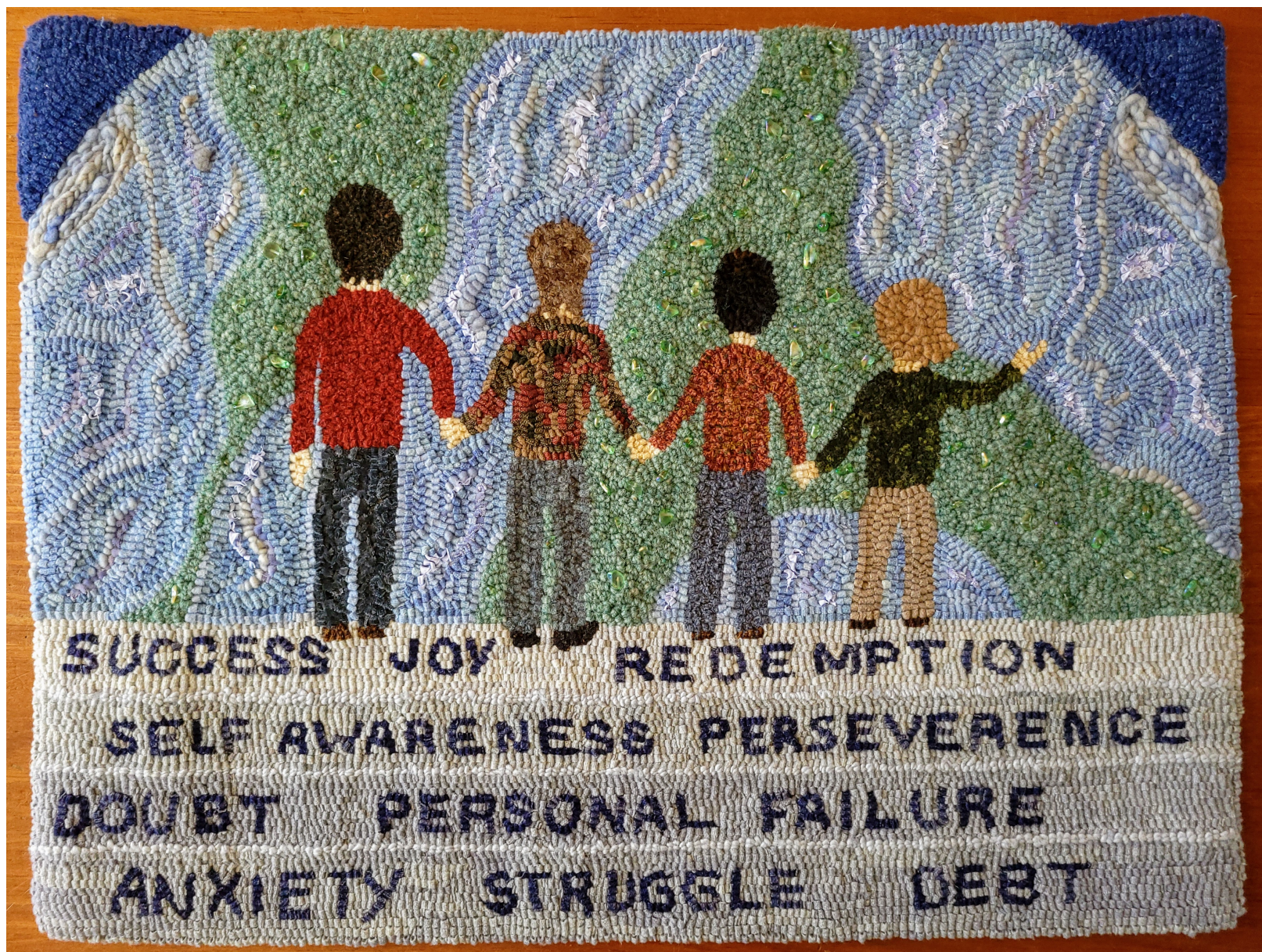
## **Breaking the Cycle, 2020, Elizabeth Miller**

18" x 24" hand dyed mixed fibers and fabrics, beads hooked and stitched

In raising my four sons I was continually aware of my attempts, successes, and failures in breaking the cycle of generational family trauma. As a writer as well as a visual artist, any hooked design starts with words for me, even if they are not explicitly included in the final image. I imagined the words on the staircase in *Breaking the Cycle* as representing aspects of motherhood as I stumbled upward accompanying my sons to their adulthood.

I watch my sons and their wives become parents. I am humbled to see that they have broken the cycle more completely than I was able to, sending forward generational healing. Their lives contribute to the overall healing in our world.





**Breaking the Cycle**, 2020, Elizabeth Miller, exhibited at  
Virginia Quilt Museum, Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, Schwenkfelder  
Library and Heritage Center



**Bring it up Alive**, 2023, Elizabeth Miller

mixed fabric, yarns, hooked

Maine's waters have always been places of healing for me. *Bring It Up Alive* uses the diving loon in a pine-surrounded Maine lake as a metaphor for raising generational trauma to the surface, almost as prey, so that it can be surfaced, seen, and processed in its "live" state. The portrait in the center is of my younger self, eyes wide open to both present reality and future possibility as I navigated my way out of dysfunctional patterns and situations. The swirls on the face's forehead, cheeks, and throat represent thinking, feeling, and speaking truth. They also appear in a multiple of four, which is found often in my work as a nod to my four sons. Another design in this series shows the loon, wings spread out of the water, with the prey in its mouth to be seen.





**Bring it Up Alive** Elizabeth Miller Work in Progress as of June 2023  
completed and exhibited at  
Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, the Dairy Barn,  
Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center

# Karen D. Miller

Karen D. Miller is a contemporary textile artist and writer using the traditional technique of rug hooking to create conversation around the consequences of motherhood on women's identity, perceptions, relationships, and value. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and the United States, and has been included in international publications.

She is the author of *The Art of Mothering: Our Lives in Colour and Shadow* (2022) and *Eyes Open to the World: Memories of Travel in Wool* (2019), both published by Ampry Publishing. Originally trained as a lawyer Karen is now pursuing studies in Fine Arts and Art History at the University of Ottawa. Karen lives and works in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

[karendmillerstudio.com](http://karendmillerstudio.com)

**IG @karendmillerstudio/**

**In the Shadows**, 2020, Karen D. Miller

8" x 8" yarn wool, hooked

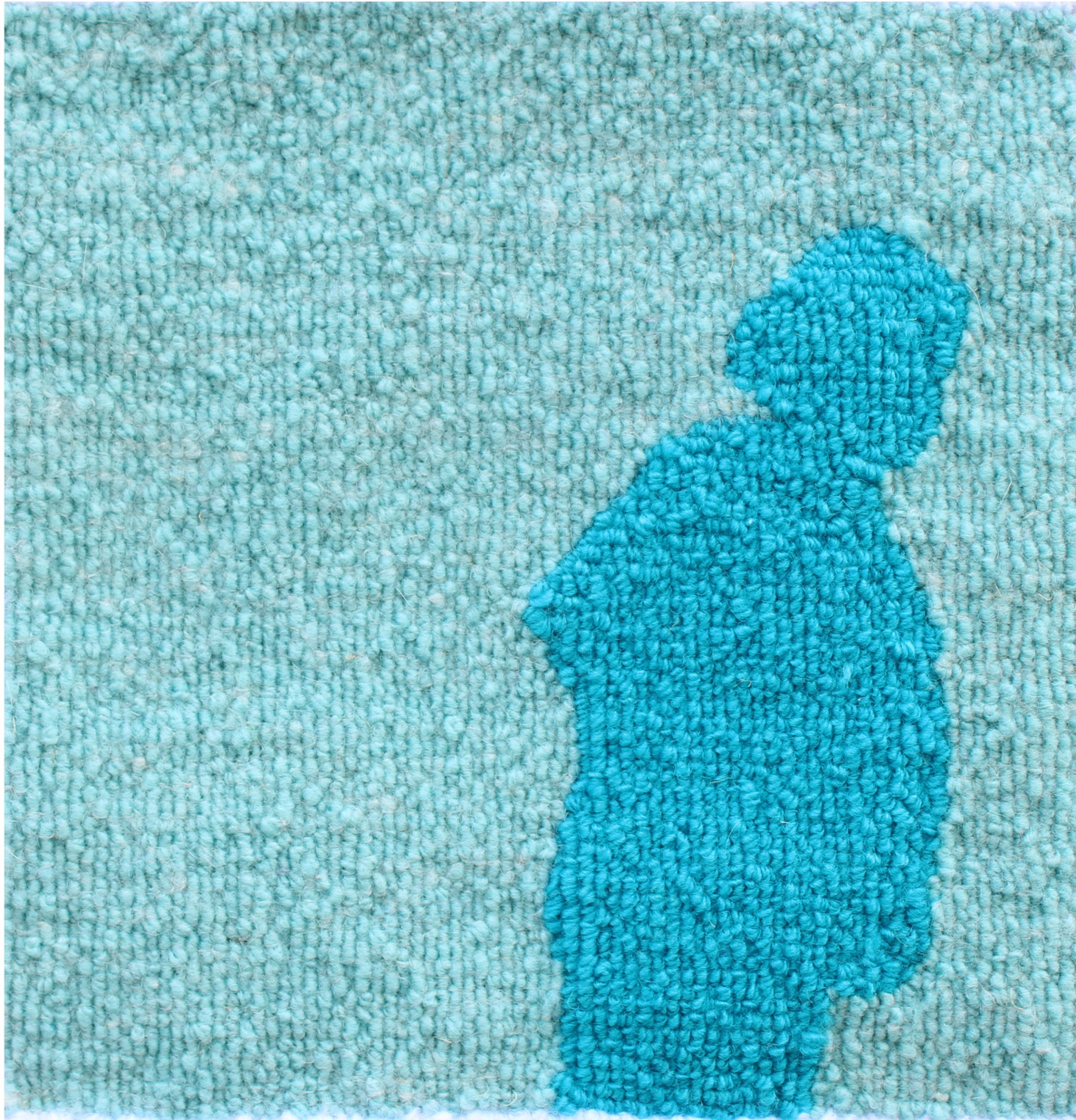
Unlike a reflection in a mirror, shadows provide no details to dwell on. Instead, they act as ephemeral and distorted snapshots of my relationships. We clearly take up our own space in each piece. With shadows, my invisible labour as a wife and mother is made visible. I see my children grow, and I am also aware of all of the ways in which my own identity continues to shape-shift and evolve as their needs change. When captured in individual loops of yarn, these shadows provide ongoing evidence of my presence, my work, and of the role that I play in their lives.





**In the Shadows**, Karen D. Miller









**In the Shadows**, Karen D. Miller all 7 exhibited at Virginia Quilt Museum, Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, Dairy Barn Art Center, Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center



# Journaling and Healing

For many rug hooking helped them during ill health and emotional times. The repetitive action is meditative and cathartic.

Some choose to work on a commercial pattern. Others use journaling and sketching to begin the creative process. These personal designs develop into line drawings and healing continues as colors, materials and techniques combine on the frame .

# Meryl Cook

Colour, texture, joy and self-compassion define Meryl Cook's work as a fibre artist and writer in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada. As an emerging artist, Meryl is known for her use of the Chakra colours and her 'Wild Woman' series. She uses rug hooking, spinning, wet felting and journaling.

Since 2016, Meryl has been a motivation speaker and taught creativity workshops (in person and virtually) across Canada and the U.S. Her work has been juried into exhibits and residencies and is represented at the ART1274 Hollis Gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Meryl is the author of two books, *One Loop at a Time, a story of rughooking, healing and creativity* (2016) and *One Loop at a Time, The Creativity Workbook* (2017). She has work in Karen D Miller's book *The Art of Mothering*.

[www.merylcook.ca](http://www.merylcook.ca) **IG @merylcook**

## **Breaking Open**, 2016 Meryl Cook

19" x 28" hand dyed yarns and fabric, hooked

In designing this mat, I was thinking about how the breast cancer cells breaking open provided an opportunity for me to truly heal, to find my voice. It was a sharp and sudden experience, but was surrounded by so much love and support as I found my way and recovered.

The words from my journal that surround the mat are "*Breaking up to allow healing flow. Breaking open & shining from within.*" These words formed a meditation for me as I was hooking and are now on the back of the piece. It is hooked in orange (to represent the sacral chakra) and blue (to represent the throat chakra).





**Breaking Open**, 2016, Meryl Cook, exhibited at Virginia Quilt Museum,  
Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for Arts and Sciences, Dairy Barn Art Center,  
Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center



**Self Portrait (of the artist becoming) 2016**

Meryl Cook 16" x 16"

mixed fibers, recycled and hand spun

'Self Portrait' was the first of the *Heart Notes* series I hooked as notes of encouragement to myself. It is about becoming the artist I always dreamed I could be, a heart opening process.

This piece is very special to me as it was hooked with many of the fabrics I inherited from my mom. Hooking it felt as if her story as a talented rug hooker was becoming part of my story.



**Self Portrait**, 2016, Meryl Cook, exhibited at  
Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, Dairy  
Barn Art Center, Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center

# Terri Todd

A contemporary fiber artist, Terri currently explores mental health topics through large scale textile compositions.

The Blue Ridge Mountains (her happy place) and family provide hope beyond life challenges familiar to many of us.

As a quiet and unassuming person, her work sometimes surprises Terri. Her first influence was the newspaper comic page characters she copied as a child. This visual language further developed through graphic design coursework at Indiana University. Petroglyphs, outsider art, and Keith Haring's work are today's inspirations. Look for meaning in the pared down figures and the essence of emotions through the use of color, line, shape, and scale in each image.

**IG @territodd.fiberart**

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## **Spiraling'** 2021 Terri Todd

48" x 48" hand dyed wool fabric

Bringing emotion-filled doodles to life through large scale fiber art is the focus of my current series. I've created simplified imagery that started out personal, but also connects with a wide audience. Universal symbols such as spirals and drips within these pieces raise the questions of how emotions are experienced by different people, in different situations, in different cultures, throughout time.

While I am creating the design, repeatedly pulling loops, I am excited — motivated to give voice to the imagery. There is an ebb and flow to the process as filling in the background loops becomes meditative and relaxing. It, too, provides satisfaction as the background loops hug the loops of the composition, clearly defining it.





**Spiraling**, 2021, Terri Todd, exhibited at Virginia Quilt Museum,  
Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for Arts and Sciences

**ImBalanced, 2022 Terri Todd**

72" x 72" hand dyed and as-is wool, encaustic panel and LED lighting; hooked

To create this artwork I dyed bold colors, transforming the natural toned wool cloth into vivid hues. The fabric was cut into 1/4" wide strips. I hooked the strips loop by loop into a powerful statement that visually demands to be heard. Yet using the comforting, warm fiber medium, the impact was softened.

The encaustic panel inset depicts the safety of home with twinkling stars in the sky.

I contemplated and experienced many emotions while creating these pieces, I'm curious as to how the viewer will respond to them. Through the common general experiences and emotions in life we are able to connect with each other.





**ImBalanced**, 2022, Terri Todd, exhibited at Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for Arts and Sciences, Dairy Barn Art Center, Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center





# Veterans' Social Issues

Advocating comes in many forms. Many protest with signs at large events, others write op-ed articles. Visual artists' work records social issues through the individual's eye. They could experience it, personally observe or empathize. Using hand crafts to protest has been termed Craftivism.

For the makers in this exhibit observations and personal experiences of veterans lives are depicted. Their work reveals how society and the military system addresses or ignores mental health.

# Cheryl Bollenbach

Cheryl has been driven to create with her hands from early childhood. An artistic grandmother, Effie taught Cheryl how to laugh, cook, garden and oil paint. Most importantly, she taught her how to see life with the eyes of an artist.

Cheryl earned a BFA University of Hawaii in 1990, with emphasis on figurative sculpture. Rug hooking has been a fiber passion since 2005. She created **[cdbStudios.com](http://cdbstudios.com)** to provide rug hooking supplies and instruction.

Bollenbach's hooked art has been featured in *Rug Hooking Magazine*, *ATHA Art of Rug Hooking* and *Celebration XXII, XXV and XXXII*, published by Ampry Publishing. Editor of *ATHA Art of Rug Hooking* for ten years, she is a member of The Colorado Rug and Fiber Guild and Natchez Trace ATHA Chapter in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Urban Icons**, 2020 Cheryl Bollenbach  
52" x 60" mixed media, found objects, fabric,  
needle felted, hooked, sculpted, applique'

My designs come from life observations morphing over time as I add layers of meaning — adding complexity to the overall composition.

My daughter owned two day-labor agencies providing temporary work for homeless men and women. There I observed the many American veterans and people with mental illness and alcohol and drug addictions who make up the homeless community. Their lives on the streets and their survival and dependence on society that shuns and marginalizes them are elements of that story.





**Urban Icons**, 2020, Cheryl Bollenbach, exhibited at Virginia Quilt Museum,  
Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences



details **Urban Icons**, Cheryl Bollenbach

This rug is full of female figures and symbols. The string of rocks around one woman's neck symbolizes the weight and baggage of mental illness.

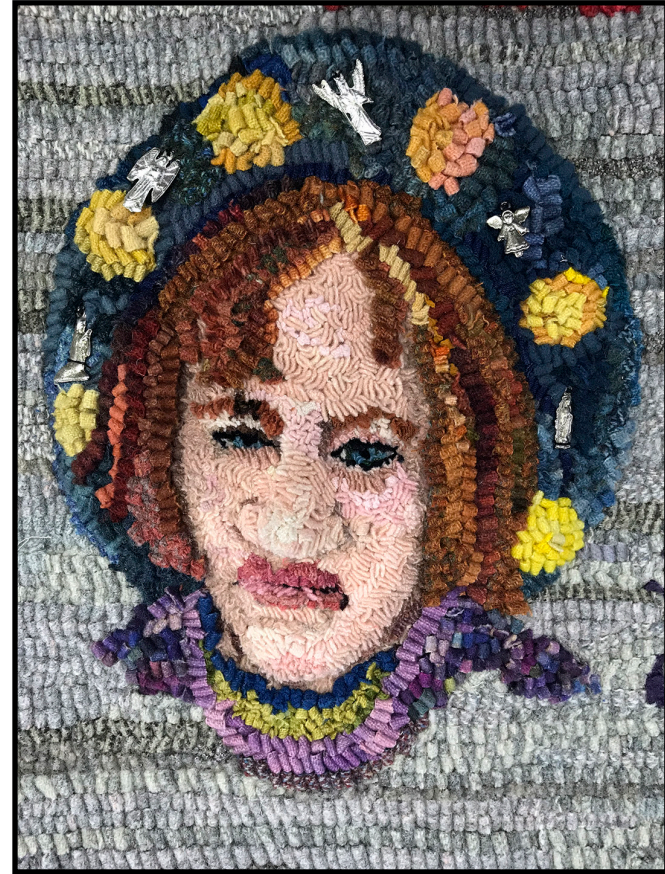
Around the central figure's head, a halo is created with tiny transistors that look like pills symbolizing addiction.

Sculpted figures have *Milagros* or "miracles" sewn onto the surface – protection symbols serving to tell the hazardous story of living on the streets.

The flattened craft beer and soda caps framing this rug symbolize a society that surrounds but steers clear of the homeless.



Flattened drink caps, necklace of rocks  
(weight and baggage of mental illness)



*Milagros* -  
symbols of protections living on the streets

# Mary B. Lopez de Morales

Mary was born in Florida, a military brat, she also served in the US Army, then emigrated to Canada, becoming a dual citizen in April, 2013.

4-H art, VA Art Therapy, military training in Electronics Engineering and basic CAD, and an education in Nursing Science contribute to her work. She is self-taught in hand hooked rug making learning from online videos.

In 2019 AnnMarie Halterman of [UnitingUS.org](http://UnitingUS.org) encouraged Mary to submit her work for review. Accepted pieces are sold through exhibits in and around the Washington DC area.

Mary draws on her history and life experiences creating art supporting her fellow veterans and heritage. Work has benefited the Southern Appalachian Museum Society and Wounded Warriors Project. She uses social media to show process as [IG @byjanesdaughter](https://www.instagram.com/byjanesdaughter) (honoring her mother).

## **This Valley of Thistles**

By Mary de Morales

Dear heart and gentle one,  
You have trouble near the water's edge. Thistles' roots  
take hold of you,  
This valley is all you've ever known.  
The thistles may not be aware,  
Seeing changes to speak of - I do not dare.  
For all they've done, withstood such pain, Strong and  
proud,  
I see their strength, These thistles.  
I reflect all the time of sadness growing, Receiving not  
one damn DIME!  
They're losing friends that needed losing, Found true  
hearts along the way.  
If these thistles become strangers,  
That would be so very sad.  
Tell them always so not to forget.  
I love you, Thistles.  
This valley is all you've ever had.  
Pain - Strength - Survival - MST !

*The hooked mat is a visualization of this poem.*





**Valley of Thistles**, 2016, Mary B Lopez de Morales, exhibited at  
Virginia Quilt Museum, Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences



# UnitingUs.org

Founded by AnnMarie Halterman and Tiffany Wheeler, [UnitingUS.org](https://unitingus.org) is a nonprofit that empowers veterans, military, and their families to inspire communities to heal, find wellness and unite through art.

Together, they designed a framework to inspire people and make arts accessible, empower creativity and engagement, and bring people together for meaningful discussions.

Mary says of her involvement with UnitingUs, *“I am so overwhelmingly humbled and grateful for the opportunity to share my artwork with others. UnitingUS has created a culture and environment to share, connect, and gain new perspectives on life through the arts.”*

See more of Mary’s work on the site at <https://unitingus.org/shop/ols/categories/fabric>

**@UnitingUs**



Valley of Thistles in progress. Mary uses locker hooking to incorporate subtle messages in the backgrounds of her work. The loops line up slightly differently drawing the viewer closer to decipher the words.





# Heritage Skills, Zero Waste

Rug Hooking encourages using discarded materials to make a new object. Just cut up worn clothing or bedding material and pull the strips into loops to make new colorful designs. For generations frugal homemakers passed these skills on.

While the economic reasons for thrift may have eased, contemporaries are consciously searching out materials to use in advocating for zero waste.

See what these artists save from the landfills in the 21st Century.

# Domenica Zara Queen

I am a Hispappalachian mixed media artist, using heritage textile and fiber art techniques to create heirloom artworks out of waste plastics. My goal with this work is to shift the developed world's collective view of plastic from "disposable" to "heirloom material" by highlighting its operational life through the context of heritage crafts. Plastic is a "legacy material" even if we treat it as disposable.

My work is heavily influenced by a combination of the skills taught to me by the women in my life and the aesthetics of Catalan Modernism and Art Nouveau. The work is equally likely to feature Gaudi-style mosaics, swirling natural forms or stitches that would be at home on a hanky your grandmother made.

**IG @madartsci**

**On My Belly in the Grass** 2022 Domenica Zara Queen  
12" x 15 1/2 " plastic bags, hooked

The images that come into the sharpest focus when working in my chosen medium of waste plastic are beautiful things that are slipping away. Growing up close to nature in West Virginia has made me acutely aware of what we are losing when humans are not in a good relationship with their environment.

I have spent long, happy hours watching grass grow and listening to everything alive around me.

It's been getting quieter in my lifetime. The weather is capricious at best and becoming dangerous. Single-use thinking is catching up with us. I made this work as a way to remember hope and peaceful moments. Lovingly rendering this portrait I hooked each loop wholeheartedly. I thought about my affection for the only earth we have. Repairing our relationship with nature is a marathon and we have to rest if we want to keep running.



**On my Belly in the Grass**, 2022 Domenica Zara Queen, exhibited at  
Virginia Quilt Museum, Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences,  
Dairy Barn Art Center, Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center



# Laura Salamy

Laura Salamy lives and works in New Mexico where there's a long tradition of fiber art. A background in environmental regulatory compliance predisposed her to experiment with all kinds of fibers and textiles, specifically those that might otherwise end up in landfills. When teaching, she encourages this same kind of exploration of materials. [www.HighonHooking.com](http://www.HighonHooking.com)

Laura's work has been exhibited in New Mexico, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee and New Brunswick, Canada; published in *Rug Hooking Magazine*, ATHA's *Art of Rug Hooking*, and Karen Miller's *The Art of Mothering: Our Lives in Colour and Shadow*. She serves as President of the Adobe Wool Arts Guild.

**IG @highonhooking**

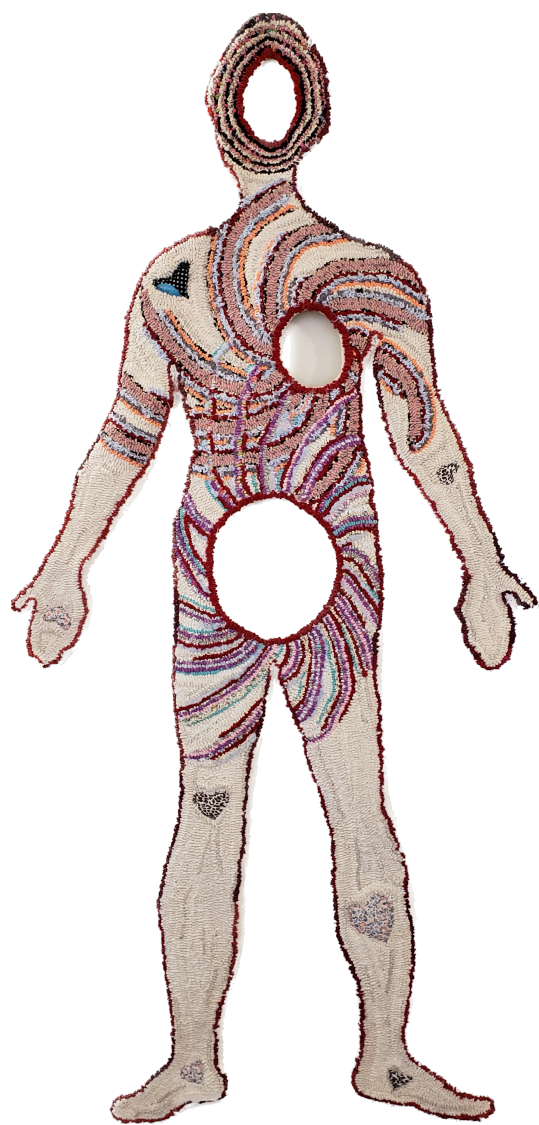
**Holes**, 2020, Laura Salamy

life size; child garments, hooked

Motherhood leaves behind holes, real and irreversible. Damage is physical and deeply emotional, no matter the child. Children leave holes just by moving on - from the womb or, later, from the home.

The piece is hand-hooked using mostly recycled textiles: crib blankets, onesies, and little girls' clothing. As children wear out their garments, they often leave their mother in tatters as well, be it from weariness, stress, relationship rifts, or self-sacrifice.

Swirls suggest the intertwining of life, blood, spirit. Life and love are dynamic, always flowing between mother and child. Life constructs life, but it also destroys. Some of that dysfunction can heal or at least be patched so that life and love go on.



**Holes,** 2020, Laura Salamy, exhibited at Juliet Art Museum Clay Center for Arts and Sciences,  
Dairy Barn Art Center, Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center

# Curator - Susan Feller

Raised in the New Jersey Appalachian highlands, Susan learned handcrafts from family, explored her rural environs, and earned life skills through years of Girl Scouting.

A BFA from UMass/Boston in art and interest in history intertwined in 1994 when she was shown how to rug hook. The craft's traditions and ease in using the tools and materials lead to designs based on folk art motifs and a pattern line - Ruckman Mill Farm. (available from [GreenMountainHookedRugs.com](http://GreenMountainHookedRugs.com) ).

Settled in West Virginia since 2006, in the log home she and her partner built, Susan uses her fiber art to bring attention to the delicate balance between human need for progress and the limited natural resources we draw those benefits from. The work shows the beauty of the region yet, when reading each title and description, asks viewers to think of their impact on our environment.

Juried into national exhibits, her work is in private collections, the State Museum of West Virginia, the US Department of State's Art in Embassies program, and select galleries in the region.

An advocate for the arts throughout Appalachia she has served on review boards awarding grants and fellowships economically supporting individuals in the region.

Susan links past generations by networking, curating, and promoting contemporary makers assuring the craft of rug hooking will continue into the future.

**[www.ArtWools.com](http://www.ArtWools.com)**

**[www.SusanFeller.com](http://www.SusanFeller.com)**

**[@artwools](https://www.instagram.com/artwools)**



# Reference Notes, Professional Resources

A Passion for the Creative Life: Textiles to Lift the Spirit, Mary Sheppard Burton, Sign of the Hook Books, 2002 *Historical overview of rughooking*

Craft & Legacy: Writing a History, Preserving a Field, 2019 Haystack Mountain School of Crafts papers from conference focusing on makers responsibility to document process, archive work

Crafting Dissent, handcraft as protest from the Amerian Revolution to the pussyhats edited by Hinda Mandell, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019

String Felt Thread, The hierachy of art and craft in American Art Elissa Auther, University of Minnesota Press, 2010 *thesis addressing fiber as art vs craft and its acceptance within the art world*

This Present Moment Crafting a Better World Mary Savig, Nora Atkinson, Anya Montiel, 2022 Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum catalog *evolution within studio craft and sharing the diverse talents in media and peoples*

## Publications:

FiberArtNow.net

*calls for exhibits, articles featuring rug hooking*

RugHookingMagazine.com

*articles, advertising links to resources*

## Organizations:

ATHArugs.com

McGownGuild.com

TIGHR.net

## Search online:

#ContemporaryRugHooking

#TraditionalRugHooking

#FiberArt and #FibreArt

@handhooked\_current

@fiberartnow

# Exhibit Schedule 2023-2024

**Virginia Quilt Museum, [www.VAQuiltMuseum.org](http://www.VAQuiltMuseum.org)**

301 Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA

**July 12 - October 7** Exhibit

**September 23** Reception

**Juliet Art Museum at Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences**

**[www.theclaycenter.org/museum-of-art/](http://www.theclaycenter.org/museum-of-art/)**

1 Clay Square, Charleston, WV

**March - June 2024** Exhibit

**The Dairy Barn Art Center, [www.DairyBarn.org](http://www.DairyBarn.org)**

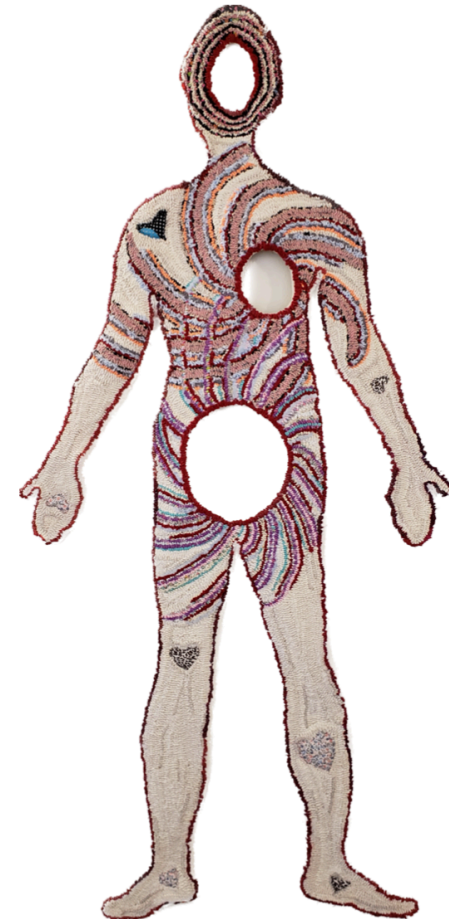
8000 Dairy Lane, Athens, OH

**July 5 - September 11** Exhibit

**Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center**

**[www.Schwenkfelder.org](http://www.Schwenkfelder.org)** 105 Seminary St. Pennsburg, PA

**September - December** Exhibit



**Holes, Laura Salamy**