

JEAN HICKS

MILLINERY
INTERVENTION**AS A MILLINER, I BALANCE TRANSFORMATION AND FUNCTION.****AS A FIBRE ARTIST, I FOCUS ON NOT SETTLING FOR EASY, BUT RATHER, SIMPLE.****AS A MAKER, I PRACTISE BY DOING, EACH DAY, SOMETHING IN THE STUDIO.****AS A TEACHER, I LEARN MORE FROM MY STUDENTS THAN FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE.****AND, AS AN ARTIST, I AM CURIOUS BECAUSE I CHOOSE TO BE WITH OTHERS WHO ARE CURIOUS TOO.**

I have always loved hats. This hat love I inherited; all my grandparents were avid athletes and hat wearers. We skied in hats, climbed mountains and flew planes in hats. We celebrated and mourned in hats. My great grandmother, Loma Hicks, would buy a new hat every time my great grandfather James gambled. My grandfather, Virgil, would ski across the MacKenzie pass in a hand knitted hat and have a formal Stetson strapped to his pack for socialising when he reached Eugene. Transformation, illumination and illusion, utility, protection, religion, retribution and sartorial splendour; all of this suited my creative pedagogy.

I made hats with whatever material I could find. As a child and young adult, having grown up on wooded coasts and mountainsides, I made them from animal fibres. I learned to spin, knit and dye from a student teacher in my high school independent art studio class. This teacher mentored me and another student, and we both became professional fibre artists. When our class graduated in 1980, our teacher went to Iran to study rug making and dyes, arriving just before the ousting of the Shah. She returned to the US reluctantly, but with great stories of the kindness and kinship of Persian textile artists.

I came to felt making through knitting mittens and hats. In my formative years, I spent a lot of time outdoors. As a competitive cyclist and skier, I naturally felted my pieces when I trained. The resulting material was protective, durable and stylish. I was hooked. At first, I made simple hats sewn together from felt yardage, but soon found by making 3d felt, the variety of my hats expanded. While studying with a local milliner, I was introduced to the hat wearing and making community in Seattle. I became a co-founder of the Millinery Artisan Guild, an organisation that now holds an annual conference, as well as a variety of guild shows and museum expositions.



I have a long history of teaching, and have taught both locally, in the public schools as an art specialist, and globally, as a teaching artist at international arts and craft schools. Teaching, along with artistic residencies and research, has afforded me the opportunity to travel to Siberia, Finland, Estonia and Canada. For me, teaching is the great master class; my students challenge and push me out of my comfort zone into many cultures, via the art of felt hat making.

To create consistent felt I am meticulous about the quality of animal fibre. The Pacific Northwest is full of growers of felting fibres; sheep, goats, rabbit and alpaca are abundant. I contract local growers to cross breed animals, and then have a local processor create specific mixes depending on my millinery uses.

Shaping the hats happens several times

during the felting process, first by the lines of the resist, and then by using wooden hat blocks. Midway through the process, I use steamers and shaping tools to give the hat its form. Colour is added to the wool's natural palette with indigo, cochineal, madder root and black walnut. Again, the hat is blocked and then, once dry, it is finished with sizing ribbons and trim.

My current focus is to find the balance between informality and exotic fibres whilst retaining glamour. A hat that is comfortable and can withstand hard use while looking elegant is my goal. I have lovely clients who provide collaboration, inspiring me and providing critical feedback. Invaluable!

A lot of my work has been in performance arts; theatre, dance and occasionally music, and I have collaborated with

local choreographers Maureen Whiting, KT Neihoff and Wade Madsen, with musicians Wayne Horvitz and Lori Goldston and the cast and costumers of Teatro Zinzanni. I have received honours in the form of grants and fellowships: NEA, Warhol Family Foundation, Artist Trust, 4Culture and Poncho.

Recent book publications I have had the honour of being a part of include: Artistry in Fibre, Vol. 3, Wearable Art, authored by Anne Lee, E. Ashley Rooney, 2017
Worldwide Colours Of Felt, Ellen Bakker, 2016 (Textilelink)

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PHOTO CREDIT
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