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Spotlight: Tracy Krumm, Fiber Artist

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by [Create Whimsy](#)

Tracy Krumm explores the relationship of textile structures to scientific principles to create intricate works of art. Using a variety of fibers and materials, her pieces are a nod to the crafts of “women’s work”. Look closely at her pieces to see the finely crocheted wire and dyed plant materials.



How did you find yourself on an artist’s path?

I started learning how to crochet and embroider when I was about seven years old. My grandmothers crocheted, stitched and tatted. The things they made fascinated me. I loved to spend time sitting with them, watching their hands working with materials. It was like magic, watching images, laces, and fabrics emerge.

I learned to knit and do needlepoint about the same time in school. All of the color and textures in these processes, and the sequences of stitches and patterns, took focus and concentration. I learned about the world of design as I worked. This eventually progressed to sewing and beadwork. The details of precision and the intricacies of complex structure opened my mind to new worlds.

It wasn't until I was in college that I discovered that fiber and textile art were a field of inquiry and an art form. By that time, math and the natural sciences were my forte. I discovered that I am really a systems thinker, who understands things in three dimensions, seeing overlap and connections everywhere.

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Plotted

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The relationships of textile structures—things like weaving and interlaced 3-D forms, and dye and pigment chemistry—to scientific principles and the environmental systems I was studying gave me a vocabulary to work with, paving a way for me to make sense of the world.

I would say that fiber art and textiles, as the basis for my creative practice, speak to how I see and communicate in the world and how I relate to communities and makers from all over the world. The textile arts have made me comfortable in the world.



Strips (Plaited)

What different creative media do you use in your work? What is your signature that makes your work stand out as yours?

My creative media is the world of textiles—textile structures of all sorts. Textile materials, anything that is or uses a flexible linear element; materials from metal to plastics to plant and animal fibers are my medium.



Pannier

At the same time, the histories and traditions of the field have always been a big influence on what I do. I grew up around women who engaged in crafts and “women’s work”, juxtaposed with the 60’s and 70’s visual culture (where colors, to me, were loud and bold and happy and swirling with energy—that is what I have always loved), feminism and the women’s movement.



Swoop Dee Doo

This is the time the fiber art movement began to take hold and press the field of crafts up against the fine arts. These influences are expansive and have motivated a lifetime of research and exploring. The influences are technical, cultural, and generational; they are spiritual and intellectual; they reach into history, economics, and the worlds of natural and cultivated resources; there is so much to be mined in the discipline.



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Right now, my signature work combines my love of color, experimentation with natural materials, and use of metal, with which I have worked for over 25 years. I started using metal because I couldn't get away from textiles in my practice and I wanted it to change. I kept the technical parts and started experimenting with non-textile materials and found objects, making things monochromatic so I could focus on form.



Portrait (Armored)

I am known primarily for my works created out of crocheted wire and mixed threads. Blending materials has allowed me to expand my palette, and I am also using dyed fibers mixed with copper, brass, and steel wire. The forms tend to be flat right now, and I am focused on layering and interweaving these hand-fabricated materials into complex images that grow from constructed surfaces.



Portrait (Aproned)

My palette also includes inks, dyes, and pigments that I make from flowering plants, and stripped and dyed basswood bark that I am experimenting with as a new material.



Naturally dyed and twined basswood in the studio

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Where do you find your inspiration for your designs? What motivates you artistically? What do you do to keep yourself motivated and interested in your work? Do you plan your work out ahead of time, or do you just dive in with your materials and start playing?

Inspiration comes to me from traveling and the natural world. I do close observations of human interactions, and observe the balance of relationships between things, down to minute observations of how plants and other organic forms grow and develop. I am endlessly fascinated by how all of the often bizarre and disparate parts and pieces come together in this world.



Layered

And no, I don't have a particular way of working. Sometimes I sketch (mostly so I don't forget my ideas), sometimes I find an object that is deserving of a response.

Often I don't know what I am going to make, but I need to be busy and focused, so I just pick a material, set up some colors in a palette, and start to crochet some sort of fabric. Or I pick flowers, dry and sort them, and spend time cooking inks and dyes and making pigments to add to my collection of materials.



Draped (Screwed)

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Work tends to generate more work, so something always gels and culminates in an idea worth pursuing. The problem right now is that I have 20 unfinished pieces in my studio, and I haven't had the focus in the last few years to finish them yet.



Furrowed

It takes a certain energy to push through to the end of a piece, and it takes a lot of time and concentrated focus. It is like a frenzy that needs to go on for a week or even more. Recently, I just have not had the time or space to be in that place.

I have had a long career and there is still time to resolve a lot and formulate plenty of new ideas. I just have to work at not getting distressed about not moving as fast in my studio

work right now as I have in the past. There is a lot to balance these days. I want my creative practice to be a joy, not a burden.

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TRACY KRUMM

CREATE *Whimsy*

Where can people find your work?

My website is www.tracykrumm.com and Andrea Schwartz has represented my work for years: <http://www.asgallery.com/andreaschwartzgallery-tracykrumm.html>

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