

# Fiber Craft Studio

Threefold Educational Center

Dear Friends,

This year at our Threefold Michaelmas Festival, various institutions, initiatives, and study groups were invited to share any verses that they used and how they inspired their work.

The verse by Rudolf Steiner, below, has been spoken at the Fiber Craft Studio for years to open and close our weekly study and Advisory Circle meetings.

*In the head the light of thinking,  
In the heart the loom of feeling,  
In the limbs the strength of will.*

*Weaving of radiant light,  
Strength of the weaving,  
Light of the surging strength,  
Lo, this is man.*

It describes an image of the human being that supports the way of working that we strive for at the studio, and of course, we love the reference to weaving, to handwork. Engaging the whole human being in artistic craft activity is the impulse that the studio carries into all our work and also one that we strive to bring to our courses and workshops. It is a unique approach in the world of craft in contrast to tutorials on YouTube, for instance, and one that we hope you will support.

The Studio operates modestly under the generous umbrella of the Threefold Educational Center, but are responsible for our own operating budget. We have managed, but our income from tuition and sales does not allow for capital improvements. We are in need of new pots, burners; we have dreams of a structure for dyeing outdoors. There is equipment that would make dyeing large pieces of cloth and large batches of yarn much more efficient, in which we cannot afford to invest at this time. The Studio strives to support our Applied Arts students with scholarships, which is often needed to help them complete their handwork education program.

Please take the time to read the articles inside to learn more about our work, and consider how you can make a contribution on our website [www.fibercraftstudio.org](http://www.fibercraftstudio.org).

With Gratitude,

*Chris Marlow*

Chris Marlow

Director, Fiber Craft Studio

Director

Chris Marlow

Advisory Circle

Jaime Arenas

Renate Hiller

Miho Suzuki

Chris Marlow

Kelly Minehart

Applied Arts

Program and Renewal

Faculty

Chris Marlow

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Giannina Zlatar

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Tjitske Lehman

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Co-Workers

Janet Gomez

Kristin Dunn Quinn

April Kornberg

Volunteers

Yukiko Sakai

Waka Imamichi

Kei Zemlicka

Judith Symonds

**Our deep gratitude  
to the many people  
who helped at our  
Sheep and Wool  
festival.**

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## Transformation of Materials and Maker

by Chris Marlow

The mission of the Fiber Craft Studio includes the intention to bring renewing impulses to the fiber crafts based on the spiritual view of the human being, the earth and the cosmos as presented by Rudolf Steiner. As we work with natural materials at the studio, we strive to know them, and to understand their unique qualities. Choosing the right material for any project comes from knowing its characteristics and listening to how it responds to the applied process in the craft activity. Personal transformation of the maker accompanies the transformation of the materials. Colors are chosen and form is created which adds to the beauty and function of the crafted item. To work with color and form, requires an understanding of their language, which relies on a capacity beyond our usual language skills. Through this experience techniques are honed, judgment is enhanced, an idea is made manifest in a beautiful way – the human being and the materials of nature are changed and uplifted.

*“Steiner demonstrated that our individual creative activity is not just personal. Our creations do not originate out of thin air or solely out of ourselves, but from an objective world of spirit with which we are intimately related in the depths of our being. .... Works of art are vehicles of particular spiritual qualities and in bringing these qualities into the sphere of human life, artists become responsible for the spiritual effects their work has on themselves, on others and ultimately on human evolution.”. \**

*\*Michael Howard, Art as Spiritual Activity, p.104*



Without being pretentious, we believe the way of working at the craft studio brings craft activity into the realm of artistic activity. Both engage the whole human being in a transformative experience which can be the opening to the development of spiritual capacities.

These thoughts, which permeate all our activities, our dyeing, gardening, designing, and teaching create a unique initiative in the world. When people come to the studio they often recognize that something different stands behind our yarns and guidelines, courses and workshops. Handwork teachers are drawn to our 4-year Applied Arts Program for the depth of understanding and experience they encounter which strengthens their work with students. It is our hope that our work will continue to be recognized and supported.

## Elevating Craft

by Kelly Minehart

The division between the work of art and the work of craft is an interesting exploration. The Fiber Craft Studio is a *craft* studio. But what *is* craft? How does craft differ from art? And how might these distinctions matter? Both require creative work. Craft is defined as more structured, skilled work using practiced techniques that result in something tangible that has an aesthetic and functional utility. Art is by contrast “boundless”, hard to quantify, and expresses emotions, ideas, feelings, and vision. It is not reproducible and art does not exist to be functional.

The word “craft” has become skewed in our present time. At one time, being a craftsman/craftswoman was a compliment and instilled pride as craft was vital to every culture. Craft is now considered a “grade below” art, and even worse makes people think of mass produced, inexpensive, and disposable ornamental/holiday items purchased at big stores and involving glue. Meanwhile art is associated with non-functional items and affluence. There is a history of devaluing and under-appreciating the fiber arts made mostly by women that are both functional and beautiful. Can craft be reclaimed?

The Fiber Craft Studio is well known for its plant dyed yarn, felt, and fleece in addition to the studio's educational programs. The plants are grown and harvested, the dye pots created, and the natural fibers are dyed using the skills, experience, intention and indeed heart forces of our plant dyers. As with art, crafted items are unique; they are not easily reproducible. Working with fibers and colors from nature quickly teaches you that when plant dyeing, matching color exactly from batch to batch or season to season is difficult to do.



When the “way of working” is studied, and practiced continuously, as is the striving at the studio, craft is elevated. When the skilled knitter or craftsperson creates an item of functional beauty it has an expressive quality, depending on the choices of materials, form, color and design. The activity of handwork itself can be renewing and therapeutic. The hobby can turn into a passion, and joy can be found in the creation. We can define craft as a living intersection between art and science (technique), and a craftsperson as one who carries out creative work that benefits their own life and lifts up the culture as well.



## Renewal of Clothing

by Miho Suzuki

When I was a child, my mother used to make clothes for me and my sister as well as her own. I made clothes for my doll with the leftover fabric as she worked on our clothes.

Making clothing had become second nature to me. To further develop my creativity and skills of pattern design, I decided to study at FIT (Fashion Institute of Technology). However, when I got there, I sensed that something was different from what I envisioned. I realized that they taught design for mass production and the fashion business rather than handcrafting each design. This is where I came across a company by the name of Fashion Forecast; they sell new designs and color trends each season. In order to make the fashion industry profitable they change the trend frequently.

Several years later I found the Fiber Craft Studio and learned through volunteering and studying to make unique clothing designs. I realized over time that I had been uncomfortable studying about mass produced fashion trends because they do not have any individuality or connection to our spiritual origin.

This quote from the paper “Rudolf Steiner in Action part 2” reflects thoughts I hold when designing:

*“The future art of dress-making will make clothes that give today’s ego-consciousness human being a new dignity, bringing to expression both his individuality and general attitude to life, as well as his relationship to his surroundings. We cannot, of course, go back to old forms, but must find new ones that relate to modern man.”*



Since coming to the studio, I have been involved in the research on the “Art of Clothing” movement which Renate Hiller and Mikae Toma have been pursuing since the time they worked together at the studio.

Indeed, Renate and Mikae created many beautiful garments and accessories as they explored knitting and crocheting. Recently our research on the “Art of Clothing” has expanded into sewing. We developed skirt, apron and tunic/dress designs. This past April we had the opportunity to hold a tunic workshop with plant-dyed linen fabric. I was glad to know there are still people who want to create their own clothing by hand, even though many fabric stores are closing and mass-produced, stylish clothing can be obtained easily at a very low price. In the workshop, we focused on two key points. First, we emphasized sewing everything by hand. Second, we introduced the idea of “zero-waste”, in which we cut the pattern pieces so that no fabric, or very little was wasted. Both points promote the movement of slow fashion.

*Below are excerpts from Applied Arts graduate, Dania Guido, who as her final project, explored the possibilities of applying indications given by Rudolf Steiner in the last century, to making her own clothing and creating new clothing designs suitable for our times. Dania is a handwork teacher at Green Meadow Waldorf School, grades 1-8.*

## Ensouling Clothing by Dania Guido

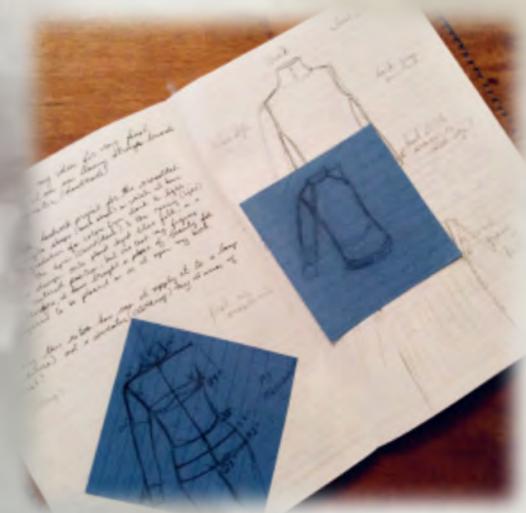
The idea for ensouling clothing came about a year into my research. I reluctantly went shopping with my mother to some of her favorite clothing spots. Walking around perusing the racks of mass-produced garments, I thought to myself: “Where was the quality and humanness of the garments?”

From this question, I decided to focus the research for my project on Rudolf Steiner’s indications around form and color in design, and how I could apply them to the clothing I currently own. The reconstruction of my wardrobe according to Rudolf Steiner’s indications became the new focus of my final project.



Now, we are planning an April workshop to design a tunic with sleeves and a one-year clothing course starting September 2019. In the one-year course, we will make items such as tunics, pants, jackets or ponchos using fabrics of different fibers and, of course, we will plant dye fabric, as it is one of the essential processes.

It is time to contemplate the existing significance of fashion and to be conscious about what we choose to wear. Our research at the studio will continue through transforming fibers and creating clothing while working towards rediscovering our individuality and reconnecting to our spiritual origin.



Many questions arose: How were the indications related to garments? How to truly apply them without being dogmatic? After some reflection, I narrowed my research to the elements of color and form within the realm of functionality. I intended to create garments to my personal taste, with artistic expression.

The first piece I worked with was a magenta cashmere/wool sweater dress that I had purchased in a thrift store in San Francisco, in my early 20’s. I didn’t wear this sweater very much; I had always felt that there was something off about it. While digging through

scraps of sweaters, I came across a remnant of a light grey sweater speckled with a multitude of colored threads. This was what was missing! I took the sweater and cut it into cuffs for my sweater dress. Rudolf Steiner indicated that around the face and hands the choice of color should be lighter.

Having always felt that my sweater dress was too short at the wrists, I added this lighter colored sweater at each wrist. But where else could I make adjustments? How could I alter this dress to appear more open at the face, but still be functional in warming my neck? I held a piece of this light sweater swatch at the front of my neck. That was it! Suddenly, by adding some lightness around the face, the appearance of the garment had changed.

After some time, I returned to work with a vision of a sweater designed from pieces of knitted cashmere, as well as parts from some of the sweaters I owned. The



color for this sweater would be tones of gray. I began by trying different combinations of knitted pieces. As I worked, I always asked where and how I should fit the different pieces together.

The image from my mind became clear as I drew out my design. Rereading Steiner's indications reinforced what I knew: color can indicate weight, function, and form. Where the body enters the item or around the hands and face, the colors can be lighter to indicate openness; where there is meant to be strength, weight or proximity to the earth, the colors can be darker. Fortunately, these notions allow for flexibility as well as challenges in clothing design while working with color, form and function.

In the end, the placement of each piece of the cashmere sweater followed a natural use of light and dark around the body. Inspired by Rudolf Steiner's indications for working with these elements, the lightest pieces were placed at the wrists and neck/chest; the medium pieces were placed at the arms and lower front; and the darkest pieces were placed at the shoulders and back. As I began assembling the sweater, I decided to hand sew as much of the project as I possibly could, which was most of it. The hand sewing, I felt, was also a way of ensouling my work. Every stitch was sewn with intention and care. It was almost meditative as I slowly pieced each section together. I made my stitches as small as possible, as to ensure that I had strong seams. The process of hand sewing gave me the time to work through all aspects of making my garment. This time gave me the space to stand back from my work and see where I needed to make adjustments. One aspect that kept coming up for me was the transition between seams of different grey tones. I decided to embroider a seed stitch of similar colors at the seams of my sweater. This hand embroidery created transitions between the colors; the seams appeared more fluid and less straight.

Through his many lectures and books, Rudolf Steiner stressed the importance of beauty for the modern world and for future generations, as modern industry was pushing humanity further and further away from the spiritual world. From my reading and practice of handcrafts and art, I have gleaned that working towards beauty through the elements of color, form and function allows one to approach spirit behind matter; ensouling the material items around us brings beauty into the world and reflects a connection to the spiritual. I now have a whole new approach toward clothing. The experience I received from my handwork training as well as teaching has given me a new sense of confidence. I feel that this work was a beginning of a line of clothing, designed with intention for the human being and the purpose for which the clothing is worn.



Photo caption: Judith, friend and volunteer at the Sheep & Wool Festival's weaving station.



Above: The Fiber Craft Studio's display at the NY Sheep & Wool Festival in Rhinebeck, NY

*The studio would like to thank our faithful volunteers who generously supported us through the year by offering their skills, energy and time to help with daily tasks and with the preparation of special events. Volunteers assist in various ways, from weeding the garden to carding wool to smashing black walnuts. We thankfully acknowledge that it is their continued support, as well as that of generous donors, that enables us to accomplish our goals.*

## **Art of Clothing Course**

*Empowering individuality and sustainability in garment making*

A year-long exploration

Begins September 2019

One Saturday per month for 10 months, we will meet and design, plant dyed and sew garments that fit us—body and soul.

## **2019 Preview**

### **Sheep to Shawl**

One-Year Course

(meets 10 Saturdays per year 9 am- 5 pm)  
Explore Fiber Transformation and Color  
Jan.19, Feb 23, Mar.23, Apr. 27, May 25,  
Jun.8, Sept. 14, Oct. 5, Nov. 9, Dec. 7

### **Beginner's Knitting**

Wednesday mornings,  
January 23, 30, February 6

### **4 Seasons Table Puppet**

Thursday mornings  
March 21, 28, April 4, 11

### **Sew a Linen Tunic with**

**Sleeves**  
April 12-14

### **Plant Dye & Knit a Cotton Shawl**

Saturday mornings  
May 4 and 11

### **Fiber Craft Studio Sheep and Wool Festival**

Sunday, May 19  
10:00- 4:00 pm  
rain or shine