

# Wool, Hot Water, Agitation

By Laura Jean Whitcomb  
With just three ingredients,  
Vermont artist Neysa Russo  
creates amazing felt tapestries.

Neysa Russo loves textiles, all kinds. She learned felting from her mother, a spinner, felter, dyer, knitter and sericulturist who teaches and travels

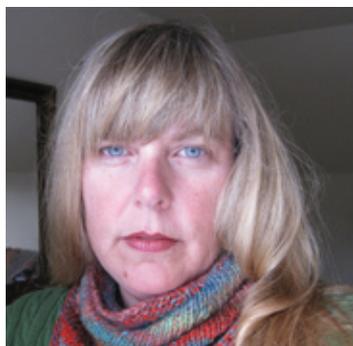
around the United States. Then Russo took it to the next level — such as turning a blank sheet of wool felt into a colorful series of panels relating to harvesting the Tree of Life.

Russo has been creating wool felt rugs and tapestries for 10 years. “I love textiles, all kinds,” the Bradford, Vt., resident says. “I can get all my supplies

locally and often know not just the owner of the sheep, but the name of the sheep whose wool I use. I love the fact that it is a local product.”

Russo designed needlepoint canvases for years, learning the importance of design composition and color coordination, before she made the switch to wool. “My mom is a fiber artist and she taught me to felt wool. I have not needle pointed since,” she says. “Although she will take credit for teaching me how to mix the wool and hot water, the designs that I have created with the needles are nothing that she has ever done.”

She does create needle felt kits (a combination of her past and present talents), but her medium remains wool. “I love wool because of its durability and warmth and history. I am endlessly amazed at the cultures around the world that still utilize wool felt for their homes, and that felt is a fiber that is made the same way today as it was 2,500 years ago,” says Russo. “I love making felt because it is so simple: just wool and hot water and agitation.”



Neysa Russo  
Bradford, Vt.  
[neysa.russo@live.com](mailto:neysa.russo@live.com)  
See her work at the  
Lyme River Gallery in  
Lyme, N.H., Deck Dock  
in Sunapee, N.H., or  
The Vault Gallery in  
Springfield, Vt.

Russo’s felt tapestries feature intricate designs — realistic stripes and manes on zoo animals or flowering vines exploding from a vase — and look like

something you might see on a needlepoint canvas, not a sheet of wool felt. Her work table is the size of a piece of plywood. She lays out the fluffy cleaned and carded wool; saturates it with hot water and soap; and rolls it to agitate. Then she needle felts her colorful designs to the surface of the sheet with barbed needles.

Although Russo is partial to medieval and Renaissance themed pieces, she derives her inspiration from “ancient textile fragments from various regions throughout the world,” she says. Her mother taught her Kumihimo, a Japanese braiding technique used to decorate Samurai warrior costumes, and you might see some Kumihimo in Russo’s wool work. “I am

only a beginner at that technique, but it is a pleasing addition to the design landscape of my felt pieces.” ♦

*Laura Jean Whitcomb is the editor of Kearsarge Magazine and Upper Valley Life.*