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## Fiber artist uses felting process for her textiles

JOCELYNN BROWN



Every artist has a chosen medium for self-expression.

Twenty years ago, Sheila M. Palmer chose fiber to convey her artistic individuality. Since then, she's been designing and creating handmade textiles bursting with different types of colorful fibers -- wool, silk, linen and cotton -- using a wet felting process.

In 1995, Palmer, who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fiber and art history, became the first African-American to show at the International Contemporary Design Show at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan.

"That put me on the map (as a fiber artist) because I was able to produce 18 pieces for that show and sold out. I did about \$10,000," recalls the Detroit resident and owner of Quetarshe handmade textiles, also based in the city, which she started back in 1994.

While some of her textiles are used as home decor and theater set designs, it's her wearable art, worn by local movers and shakers, that's earned her recognition among those with a passion for unique fashion. She describes her customers as "people who are already collectors of fine art."

Palmer teaches fiber art and mixed media as part of the Community Arts Partnership Programs at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

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## Additional Facts

**Wet felted scarf**

**Level:** Intermediate

**Estimated time:** 4 hours

**Tools:** 36 inches of 6-inch diameter PVC pipe, rolling pin, string, large pot, steam iron, stove, flat work surface, bottle with top for sprinkling water, Pyrex measuring cup, funnel

**Supplies:** 2 towels, bar of Ivory soap, a 54- by 72-inch piece of dark bubble wrap (available at pool supply shops), nylon mesh fabric (54 by 72 inches), wool roving in colors of choice

**1.** Prepare a 2-gallon pot of water with soap. Place on stove and let simmer until soap melts.

**2.** Place bubble wrap on work surface with bubble side down. (You will design/lay wool out on the smooth side.)

**3.** Gently pull roving apart, arranging it to cover entire length of bubble wrap. Repeat steps to match width of bubble wrap. (**Note:** Felting process will decrease size by about 40 percent.)

**4.** Now, create four criss-cross layers of roving.

**5.** Place mesh fabric over layers. Use measuring cup and funnel to add warm soapy solution to bottle. Now sprinkle entire piece with soapy solution.

**6.** Use rolling pin to distribute water over fabric, making sure it's completely wet and flat before rolling with PVC pipe. Use string to secure bubble wrap firmly around pipe for control.

**7.** Lay towels over rolled-up pipe and do a gentle, but firm, back-and-forth rocking motion using full-length of forearm, about 200 times. Once finished, wool has started to felt.

**8.** Untie strings and remove pipe and nylon mesh from felted fabric. Use hand to do a constant beating/kneading pressure for more felting.

**9.** Add more warm solution until fulling begins. Squeeze excess water out, and unroll wool to see if more felting is needed.

**10.** Once you have a thick felted scarf, rinse with cold water, lay on flat surface and pull/stretch into desired shape. Let dry. To block, steam-press with iron.

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