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FiberARTS | FOCUS

Felting Dreams into Reality



Fiberarts Editor Marci Rae McDade visits felt artist Janice Arnold in her converted schoolhouse studio in Centralia, Washington.

by JA FELT; wool, mohair, silk, metal, linen, soy, Tencel; felted, sewn; 22' x 15' x 27') in the venue's observatory, filling the room from floor to ceiling. The majestic soft structure is comprised of fifty-eight individual felt panels (of varying heights and widths) and hangs from a free-floating custom-built steel frame that mimics the shape of the conservatory's domed glass ceiling. Upon entering, visitors are bathed in soft sunlight that filters down through the intricately felted panels and are invited to rest on felt-upholstered benches. The textile designs are inspired by her extensive research and travels to study with a traditional felt master in Mongolia.

Janice Arnold likes to dream big. For the past three decades, this felt artist and owner of the textile company JA FELT based in Centralia, Washington, has undertaken massive design projects for high-profile clients that include Cirque du Soleil, Nordstrom Corporation, and Saks Fifth Avenue. For the past ten years, Arnold has worked primarily with felt to create large-scale works seen most recently in Fashioning Felt, an international exhibition of felting traditions and innovations, hosted by the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York (through September 7). A review of the show by Nell Znamierowski is featured in the September/October 2009 issue of *Fiberarts* (on p. 54).

Arnold was partially commissioned by the museum to raise her monumental Palace Yurt (2009, felt fabrics made



The rural schoolhouse location offers a range of indoor and outdoor wet-felting workspaces.



Janice Arnold shown with a model for her monumental Palace Yurt (2009) at her "dry" studio in Olympia, Washington.

When I met Arnold at the 2009 Surface Design Association conference in Kansas City, Missouri, I was taken by the scope and beauty of her artistic vision and curious to learn how these gigantic pieces were constructed. She graciously invited me into not one but two spacious studios: her "wet" workshop in a renovated schoolhouse in rural Centralia, Washington, and her "dry" studio in nearby Olympia, Washington. Roughly the size of a small airplane hangar, it was here that Arnold and her crew pieced together the many ideas and components that eventually took shape as the Palace Yurt—on the other side of the country.

Janice Arnold's amazing ability to felt dreams into reality is the subject of the Creative Process article in the upcoming November/December issue of *Fiberarts*. Look for it in your mailbox and on newsstands in October!

Warm regards,

Marci

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