

Nothing New – A Season of Reuse with the Manitoba Weavers and Fibre Artists

A theme was born! and a season of weaving supporting the 3R's was the focus for the Manitoba Weavers and Fibre Artists (MWFA) guild in 2021-22. Items from scarves to rugs were woven and fibre ranging from sweaters to plastic bags were used.

After one of our newer members, Jose M, brought a completed project to a meeting for Show & Tell and members learned her process, and saw the results, the idea arose to ask her to make a presentation on her process. From this, a theme of the '3R's: Reuse, Recycle and Repurpose was generated. Our 2021-22 season included Jose's presentation (more provided below), short demonstrations by members of small projects that could be made with loom loss and keep our hands busy during the pandemic, then the annual Guild Challenge: weave an item supporting the 3Rs.

We were also fortunate to have Lennard Taylor, local clothing designer and artist, make a presentation, sharing his vision on sustainable fashion and what the average consumer can do; we can support quick and dirty production or organic garments with lasting quality. Lennard incorporates fabric waste into some of his art, but hoping to expand on reducing his footprint further, he sought the member's knowledge in weaving cloth using denim or other fabric strips.

The weaving process requires a warp, which runs vertically on the loom, and a weft, which is woven between the warp threads horizontally to create the cloth. During the weaving process, loom loss occurs. Loom loss (or thrums) is the lengths of fibre (yarn) that cannot be processed by the loom due to its design. Thrum fibre could range from cotton to silk to hand spun alpaca. Weavers can reuse their own thrums as well as repurpose other materials in support of the 3R's.

The MWFA members took on the challenge and not only support the Guild Challenge but showed new weavers this is nothing new! MWFA members have been supporting the 3Rs for years. We were also reminded that a little bit of work warrants more satisfaction, a more sentimental item and sometimes a better outcome.

Jose M has been weaving off and on for over 30 years. She primarily weaves scarves, throws, and baby blankets. Re-using is a way of life for Jose and she avoids purchasing anything new when possible. She has not purchased new yarn in many years, using previously owned or reclaimed yarn. Jose's reclaimed yarn comes from used knit garments made of natural fibres. She dismantles the garments and unravels the yarn. She can use the yarn as is or modify the thickness of the yarn by splitting it or doubling it to an appropriate weight for the project.

Using reclaimed yarn requires a different approach to project planning. Instead of planning a project and purchasing the appropriate yarn in the desired colour and quantity, she purchases garments when she finds them based on their potential. On

occasion she will plan a project and wait for the appropriate garment in the desired fibre and colour to be found.

Jose finds the properties of the reclaimed yarn preferable to traditional weaving yarns. "I find that my approach adds to the creative process, any perceived limits become challenges to use what is available to achieve the desired end. The textile industry negatively effects the environment through consumption of water, use of pesticides, loss of biodiversity, energy consumption, use of toxic chemicals, pollution of water, emissions, and the production of non biodegradable fibres all resulting in a glut of new and used garments in storage facilities and landfills around the world. My contribution to a healthier environment by reclaiming yarn is very small but the potential for change is massive."

Jo-Anne T has been weaving for over 40 years and most of her weaving is for household or decorative items and accessories.

Jo-Anne used fabric strips as weft for some of her earliest work - weaving placemats as gifts for relatives and used two sets of curtains for some and new fabric for others. "I enjoyed using repurposed fabrics because they had a softer feel and were easily woven into place."

A drawback to using fabric is the time required to cut strips and sew them together before they can be used as weft. Rag cutters can be used or the fabric can be torn in strips but that is a dusty task that is best done outdoors. Jo-Anne has a set aside flannel sheets and a colourful duvet cover for future rag rugs and prefers repurposing large pieces compared to clothing to avoid dealing with the bulkiness of seams.

For the 3R's project, Jo-Anne wove a striped wall hanging and a rag rug. The fabrics were repurposed from rag weaving workshops she had taken many years ago. "It was good to give the fabric strips a life beyond being in a box in the closet. Both woven items are now in use in my home."

Patty S has been a weaver for 35 years and a member of the Guild of Canadian Weavers Manitoba Chapter for 33 years. She does all types of weaving such as scarves, table linens, tea towels, rugs, and blankets. Patty started by taking the beginner weaving classes at the Manitoba Craft Museum and Library and went on to take intermediate weaving and now teaches the beginner weaving class through our guild.

Patty's 3R Guild Challenge is made up of old t-shirts that were cut into 1-inch strips and mop material that was stained by oil. The mop company was going to throw it out, so she gladly took it. She twisted the two fibres together and cut the oil stains out as she wove the rag rug. She also made a long rug from just the mop fibres which is perfect for the kitchen at the cottage.

Patty has repurposed a lot of unwanted wool she has received or bought second hand. Patty also likes to support local alpaca farm in Manitoba and alpaca is wonderful to weave.

Carol K started weaving in Spring 1970 when she took an introductory 4-harness weaving course at NSCAD taught by Patricia McClelland.

Because she began early on re-purposing fabric she judged too valuable to send to the landfill, her weaving stash has nearly always included reclaimed fabrics in addition to the usual yarns. Carol use rag-woven yardage of various fibres and weights in garments, and weaves table linens and bags, as well as rugs. Size XL t-shirts, popular in the 90's, and still available, most in "like-new" condition, yield many yards of "yarn" for rag weaving.

Having accumulated a large number of used pairs of jeans, Carol has woven many denim rag rugs, tearing the fabric into strips and sewing strips together to make long strips for weft. It is eye-opening to see the many variations in colours, weights, and weave structures of denim, plus the many cuts and styles of jeans. For obvious reasons, Carol is not a fan of the recent fad of purchasing and wearing whiskered and torn jeans!

Current and emerging environmental concerns make recycling an imperative, and she finds that incorporating the 3Rs into the creation of functional and beautiful handwoven items offers many opportunities to explore and to learn. Re-cycled fibres have always been both readily available and economical.

One of her favourite hard-wearing tote bags is woven of cotton fabric recycled from a long dress she wore on a holiday in Jamaica in 1971. That bag holds wonderful memories for her.

Susan S and Twice-woven Rugs

It was probably my working-class upbringing, but after I got over the shock of receiving my first batch of yarn – 10 lbs. for \$20, I think it was, from Brassard 50 years ago, and it was all Synthetic (oh dear!!!), I decided I wasn't going to spend money for postage to return it. (Does that make sense to anyone?) It was the 70's and they were all synthetic yarns for upholstery fabric.

To deal with those synthetic yarns, I selected all the "natural" colours and wove a twice-woven rug. Twice woven rugs are rugs that entail two warps. The first is a "spaced" warp, mine is usually 6 threads, threaded alternately in the heddles but through 1 dent, and leaving one inch or so between groups of warp threads. This is woven with thrums of wool or fairly heavy yarn and when completed, cut apart in the spaces to give a chenille yarn which is then woven into a firm warp for a rug; that final warp may be heavier seine twine or linen and set anywhere between 6 and 10 ends per inch.



The first warp spaced apart.

My first rug remained in front of the sink for years, and in fact, the main 4/8 cotton warp wore out at one end eventually. I had read an article about someone re-weaving her (rag) rugs when the warp wore out but I thought I would never be rid of it, so it went out and I since regretted that decision.

That package also contained some green and purple synthetic yarns, and I wove a rug from that as well; that one lasted some 25 years and I told my daughter to leave it behind when they moved from their rental to their own home.

I also tried working out having a pattern appear in the repeat, sometimes more successfully than other times.

But I have continued to weave twice woven rugs in order to use up “thrums.” Yes, it can be tedious to sort and weave the bits but I think it is good ecologically. It might also make a good group project as it takes a lot of yarn and probably everyone could contribute.

Tricia B is a practicing artist with a focus on tapestry weaving and felting, often using thrifted yarn and loom loss. Tricia finds that loom loss expands her creativity to explore new ideas. Tricia is currently working on felting bricks to build a small-scale house and weaving abstracted houses from which she was awarded a Canada Council grant.

A theme, born from one weaver's regular practice, demonstrated the possibilities to new weavers and reminded us that the practice of supporting the 3Rs is not new, but it is practical, and has been a practice for as many years as weaving has existed.

Prepared by Brenda T, Sep 2022