



Fibers in the Art Classroom

An Art Educator Highlight



Amie Adelman
Professor
College of Visual Arts and Design
University of North Texas
Denton, TX
(Photo by Ahna Hubnik)

When did your personal interest in fiber begin?

My maternal grandma taught me how to crochet when I was 7 or 8...I crocheted all the time, I even had a subscription to a crochet journal. I wasn't very good at reading or math, but I could power through those journals! As an adult, I was reintroduced to fiber techniques when I was an undergraduate student at Arizona State University, where I received a BFA in fibers. The first fiber course that I enrolled in was Introduction to Fibers, Vicki Jensen taught the course. On the first day of class she introduced us to basketry; I was immediately hooked and quickly changed my degree from painting to fibers. I received a solid foundation in fibers at ASU by working with Janet Taylor in weaving and Clare Versteegen in surface design at ASU. I continued working in fibers at the University of Kansas where I received an MFA and had the privilege of working with Mary Anne Jordan in surface design and Cynthia Schira in weaving.

Give a brief description of the sewing and basketry classes you are teaching.



(In Stitches students) This semester I am teaching two new courses at the University of North Texas, *In Stitches* and *Subversive Structures*. *In Stitches* covers hand-embroidery, piecing and machine quilting. Students also gain experience quilting on the APQS computerized longarm quilting machine. In 2016, the longarm quilting machine was purchased from donations and a \$10,000 grant from the Helena Hibbs Endowment Fund grant offered through the Quilter's Guild of Dallas. The students are excited about the longarm, they use it often to transform their fabrics into clothing and artwork.

I always wanted to teach a class that focused on basketry techniques, this semester I took the opportunity to do it. *Subversive Structures* exposes students to historical techniques and contemporary artists who make artwork out of basketry materials

and techniques. For each assignment, students research artists using the technique we are discussing, then each student shares their research with the class through a PowerPoint presentation. Students also complete samples and sketches before beginning a piece of artwork. In the *Subversive Structures* course, students learn how to coil with found objects, create cathead baskets out of painted watercolor paper, as well as twine and wale with round reed. During a recent class discussion, the students talked about their experiences with basketry and the reaction people had when they mentioned the basketry course. Most of the students enjoyed talking about the course and mentioned how they gained a love and an appreciation for basketry.

What kinds of work are your students creating in your classes this year?

In Stiches - During the first half of the semester, students learned how to hand-embroidery, piece and machine quilt through a series of samples. For their first assignment, students were asked to make a piece of artwork that employs one or more of the techniques learned. The majority of students are making quilts while others are focusing on hand-embroidery or three dimensional forms.



Eva Semrad
Me and My Adult
Nightmare Syndrome
 Quilted and embroidered



Madolyn Mcphail
No Boun-dairy
 Quilted on the longarm
 quilting machine



Ashley León
Untitled
 Hand quilted form

Subversive Structures - The cathead technique takes patience and requires students to follow rules during each step of the process. It was fun for all of us to observe how different each basket form was even though each student followed detailed directions. It was a fun critique in which we discussed how each student's personality affected the final outcome in relation to color, form and pattern.



Hannah Chalker
Untitled
 Watercolor paper and acrylic
 paint



Bek Kruse
She's Inside and Out
 Watercolor paper and acrylic
 paint



Lara Asam
Untitled
 Cold pressed watercolor paper
 and acrylic paint

What kinds of prompts were they given?

To help the students understand the technique and the project, I use visual prompts that include examples of artwork in process and completed. I also provide students with a list of artists, websites and books to guide their research.

What kinds of materials do they have access to and/or are they able to decide what materials they want to explore?



In Stitches students have access to batting, cutting mats, rotary cutters, embroidery floss, needles, 2 ½" strips of cotton fabric and sewing machines. For the samples and projects, students have the option of purchasing new fabrics or up-cycling old materials such as denim. Students also have access to the Textile Fabrication lab, which houses the computerized APQS longarm quilting machine, AVL computerized dobby loom, cutting tables and more.

Carli Marriot

Unrestrained II

Machine quilted and hand embroidered

For the *Subversive Structures* course, students have access to the tools and equipment available in the sculpture area. They also have access to coiling core, yarn, needles, #4 round reed, #2 natural, smoked and dyed round reed and waxed linen.

Are there any connections to contemporary artists as inspiration?

Students are required to research contemporary artists and present their research to the class in a PowerPoint presentation. Here is a list of artists the students have presented on:

In Stitches - Natalie Baxter, Danielle Clough, Orly Cogan, Nancy Cordry, Zoe Hillyard, Severija Incirauskaite-Kriaunviciene, Inge Jacobson, Michael James, Sol Kessler, Hein Koh, Ninni Luhtasaari, Sophia Narrett, Alexis E. Marby, Katie Pasquini Masopust, Faith Ringgold, Jose Romussi, Molly Upton, Sherri Lynn Wood, Cayce Zavaglia.

Subversive Structures - Jackie Abrams, Debbie Benninger, Barbara M. Berk, Nancy Moore Bess, Carrie Bethel, Charissa Brock, Delores Churchill, Arline Fisch, Shelia Hicks, Mary Lee Hu, Ferne Jacobs, Kari Lønning, Cynthia Minden, Debra Muhl, Sopheap Pich, Lois Russell, Ed Rossbach, Frances Solar, Phyllis Kudder Sullivan, Gina Telcucci, Peeta Tinay, Matt Tommey, Felicity Truscott, Martha Wetherbee, Peggy Wiedemann.

What are some comments about fibers your students have made about their connections to either material or process.

"I love the repetition and muscle memory of working in fibers like weaving and basketry. It allows me to go into almost a trance, hours go by fast and the only proof I have of time passing is the tactile object that has been built up." - Dharma Casey

"As a photographer, I see fibers as such an intimate way of expressing yourself. The act of physically creating something tactile brings such a deep emotion to the work. This is something I've never quite

