



Play and experimentation are a key component of my work. I enjoy my practice the most, and it is most successful when I'm playing around; when I'm not quite sure what is coming next; when I take a failed piece and work on it, push it; or when I take new materials or a new stitch and see what I can do with it. Play has created new and interesting works in the textile world as well. You can feel the energy and excitement in that work. —Lori Zimmerman



TOP LEFT: Anastasia Azure, **Accentuating Focus**; 2006; monofilament, copper and brass, 3-D weaving; 7 x 7 x 3".  
 BOTTOM LEFT: Protean Forms detail  
 ABOVE TOP: Anastasia Azure, **Accentuating Focus**; 2006; monofilament, copper and brass, 3-D weaving; 7 x 7 x 3".  
 ABOVE BOTTOM: Brenda Mallory, **Protean Forms: A Performance in 24 Acts**; 2007; wooden props, waxed cloth, nuts, bolts; performed over a month at PDX. Contemporary Gallery Window Project.  
 RIGHT: Ellen Solari, **Random weave basket**; 2011; Dracaena Draco leaves, reed, seagrass, yarn, jute, jacaranda stems; 6 x 18 x 8".

# Fiber Trend WATCH

BY LORI ZIMMERMAN

There is an exciting sense of freedom these days in the fiber world. We're experiencing the fruits of a revolution that has been going on for some time; a constructive shift that is exploding in experimentation, pushing boundaries, and calling for nuance and meaning. As artists and audience, we all are benefiting from this change, for it has reached into every facet of the fiber world.

I was recently asked to create a presentation at Pellissippi State College in Tennessee, which led me to explore current trends in fiber. At about the same time, LinkedIn's *Fiber Art and Mixed Media/Fiber Art Now* discussion board was having a lively discussion around the same theme; *The World of Threads Festival* website ([www.worldofthreadsfestival.com](http://www.worldofthreadsfestival.com)) featured interviews with over 80 fiber artists from around the world; and Google and Pinterest summoned a myriad of images at the click of a mouse. I found myself flooded with information and images of bold talent and new directions.

Here is an overview of the major trends in the fiber world. While I've tried to be inclusive, these ideas undoubtedly reflect my own background and interests as well as my own aesthetics. In the fluid definitions of today's fiber world, mixed media has become a catchall phrase for the work of many artists who embrace multiple materials and processes. In their turn, artists who have never identified with fiber arts before, are turning to traditional fiber materials and techniques. Many of us are dropping the term "fiber" altogether from our self-title of "fiber artist." And why not? These days we are sculpting with plant material, drawing and painting with thread, and combining fibers with metalwork, wood, and other materials.

What about processes? Most people seem to agree that fiber is a process-oriented art, and as we all know, the processes are legion, including basketry, beading, book arts, braiding,

crochet, coiling, dyeing, embroidery, felting, hooking, knitting, jewelry, lacework, mixed media, needlework, paper, quilting, sculpture, sewing, spinning, surface design, textile design, wearable art, and weaving. In 1986, Janet Koplos wrote in *FiberArts Magazine*: "Art is an intellectual activity and the best work in fiber has thoughts or observations or emotions behind it." A fiber art piece is elevated from craft to art if the piece communicates an idea, describes a perception, or speaks of an emotion. In other words, art is created when the piece transcends the material by







NICOLE DEXTRAS

successfully incorporating the human element of intellect, spirit, or emotion.

There are major headline trends that affect most parts of the textile world, and minor, niche trends, that are more relevant to specific parts of the textile universe—such as trends that mainly affect the stitching community, or weavers, or people interested in ecology.

As fiber artists are pushing boundaries and expanding horizons, we haven't lost our love of filament, our infatuation with process, or our desire to express a part of ourselves. What we have added is a sense of play and creativity that has taken us to new places. This is exciting. For, in the words of Carl Jung, "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves." So, let's continue to enjoy our play, explore the objects we love, and discover where they take us.

**Lori Zimmerman** is a fiber artist working in the Los Angeles area. Her work incorporates fabric painting, photography, freestyle hand embroidery and collage. Follow her exploration of contemporary fiber art and see her artwork at [www.lorizimmerman.com](http://www.lorizimmerman.com)



## Major Headline Trends

• **Exploring a multitude of materials and pushing the boundaries of what we call fiber.** Everywhere we see artists experimenting with fibrous strands that were not traditionally manipulated into cloth or used to stitch, crochet, or knit. Pig's intestine, human hair, horsehair, plastic, metals, and even strands of acrylic paint are being felted, stitched, collaged, and woven. The choices seem to be endless and the results fascinating, often visceral.

• **Combining several different traditional fiber techniques in a single piece and pushing processes into nontraditional territory.** This is where mixed media comes into play. It includes combining stitching with drawing, painting, ceramics, or metalwork; using three-dimensional weaving techniques to create jewelry or sculpture; and expanding the scale of free-form embroidery to create cloth. It could also include using silk in the felting process to create a lightweight fabric. Artists are tweaking, playing, and pushing process to create vibrant new forms.

• **Elevating the work by moving beyond process and starting with a base of ideas, perceptions, or emotions versus material or technique.** Much contemporary fiber work focuses on process and transcends the materiality of its elements. Fiber artists are unifying their pieces around a central concept; creating mythology and personal language; exploring story; using nature and science as inspiration; delving into psychology; expressing an emotion; basing their practice on ecological concerns; and much, much more.

Within these major trends we can also detect minor niche trends, which are just as important, but are mostly relevant to a subset of fiber artists, such as artists who work as quilters, or dyers, or weavers; or artists who have embraced technologies; or who are passionate about the environment. As we go forward, we see that many new works reflect more than one trend.

## Minor Niche Trends

• **A profusion of embellishment, layering, and collage.** This is a bit of a catchall, but there is an underlying principle of using multiple materials to create an image. This includes using transparent or translucent materials for layering, piecing together an image through collage, and sometimes embracing a *more-is-more* aesthetic, such as quilting that incorporates paint, embroidery, and beading as embellishment. Lots of gorgeous color, texture, and pattern is found here.

• **Use of, or reference to, technology, especially photography.** Some fiber artists are embracing or reacting to new technologies. We see the use of extremely sophisticated hand or machine jacquard looms and of knitting and embroidery machines with increased capabilities; the use of new materials such as soluble fabrics and pigments that look like dyes; incorporation or use of photography; and also work that references the digital world, often in reaction to our new harried landscape. Many an artist embraces the slow processes of fiber as a protest against our contemporary fast-paced lifestyles.

• **Use of vintage fabrics, found objects, and nostalgic subject matter.** Artists are cleaning out closets and haunting resale shops to find vintage fabric that adds the weight of history to their pieces. Others are using found objects from junk piles and alleys to add interest, curiosity, or randomness to their art. Environmentally conscious artists are protesting our wasteful culture by making better use of non-biodegradable plastics. There's lots of added content here!

• **An ecological focus and use of natural dyes, eco-prints, and rusting.** Artists have been using natural dyes for centuries both in dyeing yarn and transferring image or color onto fabric. That trend stands strong. In addition, artists are making contact prints out of plant matter and taking advantage of the natural process of rusting to make a mark on fabric, with often stunning results.

• **Fashion design merging into wearable art and sculpture.** We see a lot more play in fashion design as the practice of producing unique one-of-a-kind pieces looks more and more like wearable art. And wearable art often looks less wearable and more about concept and aesthetics. This is fashion that truly makes a statement.

• **Moving off the wall and into sculptural pieces.** When I was in college in the '70s the most exciting textile work was often in the sculpture department or from textile teachers who had escaped the sculpture department. That inclination has come into its own. Weavers have embraced three-dimensional form. Fabric is being stuffed, hung, or waxed into freestanding structures, and traditional armatures are being covered with fibrous materials.

• **Exploration of site-specific installation art.** As in the art world, or maybe more correctly stated, as part of the art world, fiber artists are also exploring site-specific installation art. We see art installations in storefront windows, in galleries, and outside as environmental art. Christine and Margaret Wertheim's *Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef* has involved over 5,000 people, been exhibited in 13 locations, and spawned another 28 satellite installations. The *yarn bomb* phenomenon has reached around the world. Individual fiber artists are producing work that climbs off walls to come to terms with the gallery space, or climbs into trees, the landscape creating a relationship with both time and place.



FAR TOP LEFT: Nicole Dextras, **Yucca Prom Dress**, 2005; yucca fronds and flowers, thorns.  
FAR CENTER LEFT: Anna Mayer, **The Institute For Figuring's Crochet Coral Reef**, detail  
FAR BOTTOM LEFT: Anna Mayer, **The Institute For Figuring's Crochet Coral Reef**, 2006–ongoing.  
CENTER LEFT: **The looms in our bones**, 6; 2012; detail  
LEFT: Izziyana Suhaimi, **The looms in our bones**, 6; 2012; embroidery, watercolor, and pencil on acid-free paper, 28 x 36 cm