

The Art of Giving

Sharing experiences through rug hooking

STORY BY GWEN DIXON/PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAROL McCALL



Run, Puppy, Run, 18" x 13", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2018.

"My puppy rug is based on our dear dog Joe who was adopted from the SPCA. My daughter Virginia had seen his photo in the local newspaper and thought he was sweet. We had been looking for a dog and wanted to adopt one, so off we went to the animal shelter. As soon as we walked into his kennel and bent down, Joe put his paws on my knee and his head in the crook of my arm. It was love at first sight, and when my daughter graduated with her master's degree, I created this rug. When Virginia was about 10 years old, I found a small drawing of Joe that she had done. I tucked it away and saved it. This rug is an enlarged version of her drawing."

Why do you make hooked mats? Beauty, creativity, self-expression, tradition, storytelling—there are many reasons why we love this art form. I really like to tell stories with my rugs.



Forget-Me-Not, 20" x 14", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2020.

"Our family moved to Newfoundland in 1996, where we spent 16 busy, active, and full years as our two daughters grew up. When we moved to Nova Scotia in 2012, I had to leave a wonderful friend. But despite the distance between us, our relationship has remained strong. I made this hooked mat to remind her that she will always be in my thoughts. I hope that, whenever she looks at it, she thinks of me and the memories we share."

CANADIAN CONNECTION



Tentacled Titan, 34" x 52", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2018.

"This giant squid is the largest piece I have made so far. When we lived in Newfoundland, my daughter Lily's grade 3 class took a tour of a squid plant. They brought a preserved squid in a jar back to their class. One day the glass jar broke and the squid spilled out onto the floor. The squid was rescued and lives at my house for now, but will be finding its way to Lily's home once she settles."

Marcie's Manes, 36" x 15", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2019.

"This piece was inspired by my hairdresser. Marcie has been my hairdresser for seven years and she is a wonderful listener. When I leave the salon, not only do I look better, but I also feel better. Marcie's kindness, generosity, hard work, and listening prompted me to make this mat for her. This piece hangs in the salon where she works."



I like to show my work, and I really enjoy it when other people can relate to what I have made. When I met my friend Carol McCall, she told me that she had never really shown her work in an exhibition or show. She showed me photos of her hooked mats on her phone and told me that she had attended the College of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland as a mature adult. We became friends, traveling to each other's homes and often talking about art and fiber.

Driving to Carol's home in Amherst, Nova Scotia, for the first time, I imagined that, on the walls of her house, I would see the colorful hooked mats she had shown me. I entered through the bright yellow front door and glanced at the walls. Carol had collected many art objects, but there were no hooked mats

Zap! 52" x 15", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2019.

"In 2018 I had radiation treatment for breast cancer. I was fortunate to have found it early and to not require chemotherapy. This piece represents the zapping of cancer cells and the ridding of them from our bodies. Whenever I received my treatment, I thought, 'Zap!', imagined scenes from Star Trek, and sometimes said, 'Beam me up, Scotty.' This piece will be donated to the hospital radiology department and to the doctor who sees me there, to say 'Thank you' for their wonderful care."



Biker Crow, 39" x 26", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2020.

"This piece was inspired by memories of feeding bread to the crows in the early morning while walking my dog. The crows began to recognize me and await my return, following me down the street and flying from lamp post to lamp post. The crows, with their black, shiny feathers, looked like they wore leather biker vests. One crow who stayed close to our home became my Biker Crow. This piece will go to my husband Charles, who named me 'Bread Lady' and who has been my biggest consultant and supporter since I became a textile artist."



Gabriola Garden, 24" x 8", wool fabric and yarn. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia, 2019.

"My husband and I ride a tandem bicycle and in 2019 went on a cycling adventure along the Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island. We stayed with artist friends on Gabriola Island who were creating a wonderful garden around their home. On our return to Nova Scotia, I made this mat as a thank you gift for their warm hospitality and for sharing their garden with us."



Avian Angst, 15" x 11 1/2", wool yarn, wool fabric, and sari silk on burlap. Designed and hooked by Carol McCall, Amherst, Nova Scotia. HAILLEY FAYLE

"Chickens always seem to be on the run. I suspect that, because they are not great birds of flight, they become easily distressed when being chased or followed. This fowl-feathered friend is making a hasty exit from a not-so-positive interaction with a rooster."

to be seen. She opened a glass-and-wood-panelled door and led me upstairs to her studio, which was full of collected objects. Fiber spilled out of boxes and drawers. Books and pencils lay on her desk, alongside notes, small sketches, and printed images. But no hooked mats.

I asked Carol about a hooked mat of a dog that I had seen her working on at a hook-in. "Oh, that's at Virginia's," she said. "Oh," I said, disappointed that I would not be able to see it in person. "What about the forget-me-nots?" I asked. "My friend Barb has that one," she said.

Since that first visit to Carol's house, I have seen more photos of Carol's work and had the privilege to hear more

about her mats. And I have even seen a few, like the giant hooked squid, on her dining room wall. Carol's mats are often large and colorful. They are often about a shared experience. They are made with a person in mind, and they are usually given away to the person who shared in the experience.

In his essay "On Experience," Michel de Montaigne wrote, "In my opinion, the most ordinary things, the most common and familiar, if we could see them in their true light, would turn out to be the grandest miracles . . . and the most marvelous examples." While Carol's mats are not necessarily about everyday occurrences, they are

about events that may seem ordinary in that they could happen to anyone, or that many people have had a similar experience.

I hope you have enjoyed reading about and seeing Carol's mats as much as I have enjoyed writing about them. Each mat is made with love, warmth, and texture, then happily and generously given away as a commemoration of an experience. In the making and the gifting of her mats, Carol celebrates the marvelous mini-miracles that occur in the experiences that we share with each other.

Recently Carol told me that she really likes chickens. I mentioned that my mother, who grew up on a farm, had said that chickens could be mean and that they used to chase her around the barnyard. "Chickens are just like that," Carol said. "They can't fly very well," she explained, "and they might know how their story ends." When I asked Carol who *Avian Angst* was made for, she did not have an answer. "Maybe I'll keep that one, as a gift to myself. I'm a chicken fan," she added.

"Great idea," I thought. **RHM**

Gwen Dixon is a fiber artist from Riverview, New Brunswick, Canada. You can find her at Gwen Dixon Wool Arts, on Facebook and Etsy. Her website is howtowoolart.com.



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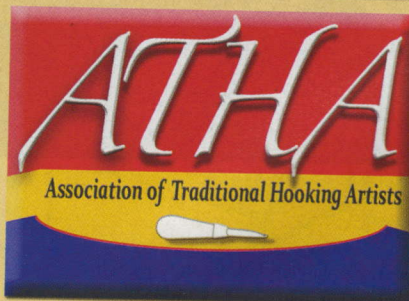
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