

**Inside the Artist -
Elizabeth Fram
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Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.

I can't remember a time when I was not making things; art has always been part of my life. My family was very supportive, providing me with plenty of art supplies and other materials. My father made fine furniture in his spare time and my mother did handwork, including knitting, needlepoint, & sewing. So I always felt encouraged to work on whatever project I had going. Organized sports and after-school activities weren't as prevalent in elementary school, so there was more time for exploring art.

As I went through high school, I focused more on academics and couldn't squeeze in an art class until my senior year. Once I got to Middlebury College I loved the liberal arts environment, focusing on art but drawing connections between those studies and my other classes. It gave me the opportunity to try various mediums: design, printmaking, drawing and watercolor. After graduation I wound up in graphic design and worked as a freelance illustrator.

I settled on working with pastels, but when I was pregnant with my first child, I was concerned about the dust and how that would impact the pregnancy. After both my children arrived, life changed. Looking for a way to make work that I could manage with a young family, I discovered textiles as an art form.

I'd been exposed to quilting when I was 16; my mother and I took a traditional quilting course together. So, after my second baby was born and I came across an article about Katherine Knauer, who created *art* quilts, it was a eureka moment. Having learned many traditional processes as a young person, I had a good grounding in technique, but I had always had a need to push each method beyond the traditional in order to find a means of personal expression. Discovering a medium that was non-toxic and which I could squeeze into my everyday family schedule was a turning point. As more time opened up in my daily life, I found that I was reaching back to drawing, painting and printmaking, finding ways to incorporate a wider range of

processes into my textile pieces.

Along the way I met others who were working with and interested in textiles and eventually I wound up in a critique group that provided support and feedback. After that I began exhibiting my work regularly.

When I moved to Vermont and finally had a devoted studio space with a sink, it was wonderful! That sink served as a marker or a border; I had crossed into a new world where my art had its own space and daily life did not impinge on it. When we lived in Pennsylvania, what little fabric dyeing I tried was done in the laundry room. But since we lived on well-water and had a septic system, I shied away from much dyeing, concerned about the environmental impact.



Most dyes used in textiles require gallons and gallons of water and plenty of excess dye goes down the drain. With research, I eventually found a concentrated dye which adheres molecularly to fiber, using significantly less water. Since the color is absorbed by the fabric, it is depleted from the dye bath, leaving what is sent down the drain almost dye-free. Aside from alleviating my conscience, the added bonus of these dyes is that although there are limited colors, they are transparent and it is possible to mix them as you would watercolor, expanding one's palette immeasurably.

I find it very satisfying that the work I am making now allows for an interweaving of processes, pulling together many of the disciplines I have practiced for years, while always allowing for new avenues of exploration.

What is the medium you most like to work with/in? What draws you to this medium? What do you like about your materials?

I can't say I have a favorite. Right now I am juggling drawing/watercolor and textiles and find that they feed each other. I am very detail-oriented and both disciplines allow me to explore the finer nuances of my surroundings. Looking closely allows me to better understand objects and composition. Although my textile work tends toward the abstract, it is a representation of real circumstances.



My goal is to maintain a balance between control and happy accidents. It's not hard to find both with dyeing and watercolor. Shibori, an ancient Japanese method of stitched resist which creates amazing patterns with dye on fabric, is a wonderful example of that principle at work. While I begin with a drawn image and expectation of outcome, there is an uncontrollable element of serendipity that is inherent in the process, resulting in unplanned effects that contribute to that desired balance.



In 2015, I decided to make drawing/sketching a conscious practice. It is like yoga; it gives me the benefit of relaxation and improves my mindfulness. As a discipline, I think of drawing as a gift; it brings me closer to a subject while allowing me to take in the world with more sensitivity.



What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?

Right now, work begets work. Drawing inspires the textile work, which in turn inspires more drawing. I find that experimenting with various materials also breeds new ideas. And without a doubt, Japanese gardens are one of my biggest sources of inspiration. I am drawn to their design; their use of form and texture. I love the use of asymmetry and find them to be smart and multi-layered. A garden is living, growing and ever-changing. The gardener seemingly has control, yet must always be vigilant or nature will soon retake possession. I find them amazing as an artform.

Also, I read a lot and am inspired by much of what I read.

Finally, I started my blog **Eye of the Needle** in November of 2014 as a way to open my studio door and hopefully begin a conversation. It's been surprisingly wonderful in that it allows me to articulate the work I do and my response to other art that I

see, helping me to think things through, making each experience richer. The best part is how much I've learned from it and how much the conversations I have had with readers have inspired me. Teachers often say they love to teach because they learn so much from their students and this is how I see the blog. It started as something I felt I should do, embracing the way of the world today. Yet it has become a discipline I truly enjoy and has been a door-opener in so many ways. Also, my blog echoes what I loved about attending a liberal arts school; the unexpected overlap between seemingly different entities allows me to start seeing connections, and it's those connections that provide such a rich foundation for my work.



What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?

I check out quite a few art blogs as I find them to be a great way to stay connected with the art world, despite spending so many hours working by myself. Feedly.com is fantastic for organizing and accessing my favorite sites/blogs, allowing me to scan them quickly to see what's worth reading at a given sitting. Art-wise, a few I regularly read are **Hyperallergic**, which centers on art news that is politically and globally focused, and **Colossal**, a blog that covers art, design and visual culture. Recently I discovered Nicholas Wilton's blog **Reignite Your Creativity**. **World of Threads** is a Canadian site that highlights new and exciting work in the textile world, including some very interesting artist and curator interviews.

I am also very interested in productivity (who doesn't want to figure out how to work more efficiently?) and would recommend **The Study-Hack** by Cal Newport, which focuses on the importance of carving out time for deep, concentrated work, the opposite of multitasking, which he claims is a ruse.

Recommended books: **Living and Sustaining a creative Life**, essays edited by Sharon Loudon, **A Bigger Message: Conversations with David Hockney** by Martin Gayford, and **M Train** by Patti Smith.

