

# Roving Beyond the Edge



Lise Poulson

**F**or a small, rural gallery, hosting a show of edgy, contemporary fiber art is gutsy, but this isn't the first time that Gaucho Blue has hosted a non-traditional, pushing the boundaries kind of show and you can bet that it won't be the last.

The idea behind the Roving Beyond the Edge fiber arts show is fairly simple.

It fulfills several needs that the local fiber 'scene' seems to lack: Contemporary fiber work is very exciting, and there are not that many venues that show collectors and the public generally what is happening in the medium. The number of fiber art shows have greatly diminished from Northern New Mexico, since the demise of

the annual 'Seeds' and the 'Beyond The Fringe' shows that were curated by Merce Mitchell in Taos. It's difficult for fiber artists to be accepted in galleries unless their body of work falls into recognized forms – especially as galleries and curators are nervous of pushing the envelope in the current low-sales economy. And Lise Poulson, the co-curator along with PattyMara Gourley, wanted to collect a show that would demonstrate new approaches to the medium, and to see what other artists are doing.

Poulson, who is a fiber artist, talks a bit about her attraction to the medium.

"I have always said that I can't draw or paint – and I never con-

sidered that I had any 'artistic' skills until I discovered hand-made paper and fiber." Poulson explains. "I get great satisfaction from the physical process – seeing and feeling the changes that the fiber goes through on its way to felt or paper. The more I work with wool fibers, the more amazed I am by the results that are possible. I actively research what other felt artists are doing – especially in northern Europe – and am constantly inspired to experiment and go 'beyond the edge'."

Hence the name for the exhibit.

"I spent my entire career in software development and management, and to keep Nick (her husband) company while he did

a printing workshop, I took a paper-making class at the local art league (in Palo Alto, Calif.)." Poulson says. "In order to do something useful with the paper, I studied book-making, and realized that it satisfied two personality traits: an obsession with the fine details, and the need to create something through a physical process. Apart from a few classes from other artists, I'm self-taught."

Gourley and Poulson put out a 'call for art' to every organization, publication, and online forum they could think of, as well as inviting a few people whose work they both admire. This was really, really worthwhile, and they both say they also gained some

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Ilse Bolle



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Brenda Roper



Ilse Bolle

ideas for further sources that they'll use next time.

"We set criteria for entry, which included what mediums we were looking for, and specified that the work should use innovative approaches and make unusual use of fiber," Poulson says. "We encouraged people to submit collaborative work that combined fiber with metal, clay, and other items. We actually had a list of criteria, and a scoring system to help us jury the submissions (An example of Poulson's previous life elbowing its way into the process). This approach really helped us to be objective and stick to the purpose

of the show. In the end, and with one exception, the results of our process actually corresponded with our emotional response to the submissions."

Although the criteria for the work was supposed to be edgy, Mary Cost's tapestries seem fairly traditional. Poulson comments on this.

"That is very true and we thought long and hard about including her work. In the end, we agreed that the quality of Mary's work merited her being in the show. This was our one exception to our process – and we both felt that her weavings were a good visual fit."

There are a number of standouts in this exhibit. Poulson and Gourley did a splendid job in their jurying process.

One of those standouts is Ilse Bolle whose piece "Off the Grid" is a perfect example of edgy fiber art. On her website she talks about her work.

"Growing up in rural Germany, I developed a special bond with nature. I loved creating with seedpods, tree bark, twigs, vines and grasses and, to this day, still gather most of the materials that I incorporate in my work.

"Layers of handmade paper, with inclusions of textural elements, knotted stick structures of willow and tamarisk are the bases for my fiber constructions. I strive for simple, yet strong forms, always working with the natural color of the materials. I am attracted to paper and the process of making it because the meshing and bonding of individual fibers create a strong, yet pliable, substance rich in texture. I enjoy slight, tactile imperfections and often emphasize them for their organic beauty. Found objects in the form of rusted metal find their way into my work because I value the past





Donna Foley



# Roving Beyond the Edge



Mary Cost



Group shot with Ilse Bolle "Sanctuary" in foreground

and its remains, for they provide insight to the present and connections to the future."

"Each piece, conceptually, starts out as a perfect form. As in nature, elements and forces alter each form, leaving their marks for the viewer to perceive. Window-like openings allow entry to or exit out of a symbolic space holding memories, experiences, attitudes and desires. This process directly relates to experiences I encounter in life which are a primary inspiration for my work."

Poulson comments on "Off the Grid."

"If I had continued with hand-made paper art, this is what I would aspire to. Again, I think it's telling of my aesthetic that this sculpture combines a fairly 'regular' and well-balanced 'base' of paper rectangles, then juxtaposes those bits of rusty metal and other bits and pieces. Very satisfying."

Poulson met Nancy Lay for the first time through this show. Lay is fairly new to Northern New

Mexico, and she hoped to find a supportive network of fiber artists to work with. As she describes her process, she will start with a piece of fabric – usually silk – and hand sketches the design onto it. She embroiders completely by hand, choosing specific colors as she goes. Her process is very fluid, but the results are beautiful, and look as though every stitch has been planned and deliberately placed.

Poulson's work is also very edgy and engaging. She's been making sculptural felt pieces for a few years, and "Pavillion I" brings together two directions Poulson has been pursuing: architectural forms, and creating texture and pattern with felt.

"My inspiration was some amazing contemporary pavilions recently constructed in the Arab world. I combined this with some experiments I've made with layering felt with other materials in order to create raised patterns – effectively a 'resist' in the fabric."

Probably one of this reviewer's least favorite inclusions into Roving Beyond the Edge are pods by Merce Mitchell although they are pieces that Poulson "... absolutely love, admire, or that cause me to ponder."

"Merce's Pods fulfill exactly what we were looking for – innovative use of fiber and other materials. I just love the texture and subtle coloring of this particular 'pod'. I love people's surprise when they realize what it's made from. Merce is a wonderful felter, and very active in the local fiber scene: it's exciting to see her pushing the envelope."

Margaret Sunday's tapestry pieces, such as "Continental Shims," are extremely detailed and complex, but are definitely not regular or "perfect" in a traditional sense.

Poulson comments on two of Sunday's pieces.

"As for 'Hop Hop.' I love the idea of landscapes and maps – I could read maps for hours. This piece makes me think of the irregularity of English fields.

The textures are varied, but quite subtle. For 'Way Up The Mountain-Middle Ground' I love the delicate use of color, and the way most of the piece is 'impressionistic,' then your eyes do a little double take at the little areas of well-defined detail. I could contemplate this piece for hours, and not get tired of it."

Donna Foley's pieces, "Shield and Totems," "Centering into Indigo" and "Prayers and Charms for the Journey" have a Native American slash Asian feel to them. They are formal yet non-traditional.

Roving Beyond the Edge is a fascinating look at contemporary fiber art. If you are looking for a spicy show to visit, with unexpected surprises, then you'll definitely want to visit this show.

## Essentials

**What:** Roving Beyond the Edge  
**Where:** Gaucho Blue Gallery, 14148 State Road 75, Peñasco  
**When:** Through Aug. 29  
**Info:** [www.gauchoblue.com/](http://www.gauchoblue.com/)