

# Fiber Art Now

Fall, 2011  
Premier Issue

Contemporary Rug Hooking  
Quilting on the Edge: Stitched the Film  
Knot Tying & Sculptural Basketry  
First Person: When a Painter Uses Fabric  
Wrapping Traditions: Korean Textiles Now

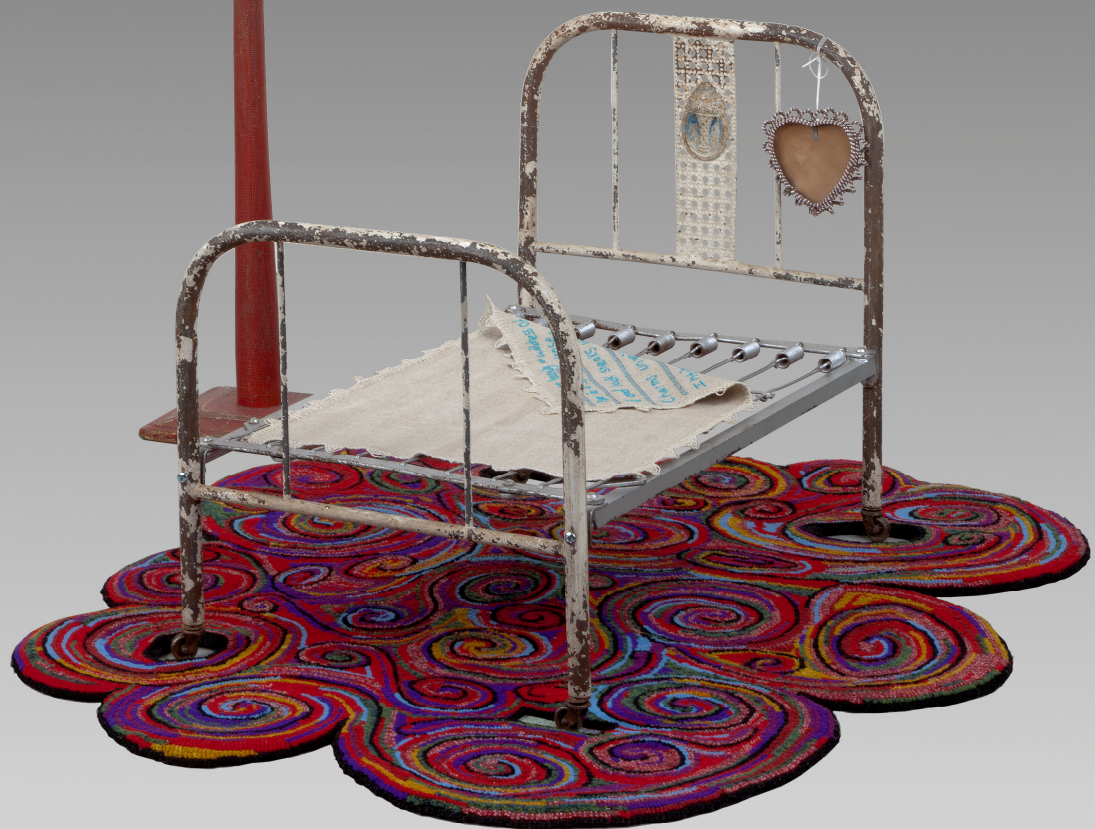


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# Coming of Age

## Contemporary Rug Hooking Gets Its Day

By Marcia Young



## Coming of Age Contemporary Rug Hooking Gets Its Day

Liz Alpert Fay gathers large pieces of colorful wool, passes each one through a wool stripper, and drops the resulting 1/4" strips onto one of the piles that already surround her chair. Sitting in front of her hooking chair, amongst the all of this color, one can imagine Liz perched there for hours as the mounds grow in size and her latest creation starts to take shape.

Rug hooking could be considered the "jazz of the fiber arts world." Jazz was born out of the American experience, and so was modern rug hooking. As far as we know, it originated in Maine during the 1800s. Like most fiber art media, its origins were a practical matter—a way to make the most use of worn out clothing and feed sack burlap.

Much like jazz, contemporary rug hooking has evolved to embrace improvisation and interpretation, interacting with the medium, altering melodies harmonies or rhythm at will. And much like the 'hand' of other crafts, for Liz Alpert Fay, the work itself feeds the artist.

*"I love the process of hooking. It's sort of like a meditation. The hooking itself gives me a way to work out ideas. Still, it's all an experiment for me. That's why I have so many different projects at the same time. Right now I'm working on incorporating sculpture. I often find new materials that I want to work with in new ways."*

*"I know that many people feel you must stay with one thing and get really good at it. I feel like I do whatever it takes to express myself. I started out as a quilter and still I incorporate quilting techniques if I need to. I'm always looking at obscure techniques and how to use them to express my ideas."*

It's clear from the variety of materials: buttons, threads, yarns, fabrics, found flea market items, and collections of ephemera in Liz's Sandy Hook, Connecticut studio, that rug hooking is simply one of the vehicles she uses to explore color and reflect on life.

She also uses items found in nature, such as tree stumps, reeds, vines, dried plant matter and other treasures found in her garden or the woods of her family's cottage in the Adirondacks. Although much of her work as a hooking artist results in rugs for the wall or floor, her ideas are often best conveyed in three-dimensional mixed media art.



**FACING PAGE: Liz Alpert Fay Collector of Words, I Dream in Color** Hand hooked rug, recycled wool on linen, antique linen textile, hand embroidered. Reclaimed metal bed, beaded picture frame, 85"x40"x45.5, 2011. All art credits: Brad Stanton, studio photo credits: Deanna DiMarzio.

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Liz's unique *Tree Skirt* series is an example of her gift for experimenting with a variety of materials and media. She began that series five years ago when her studio was under construction, and many trees were being cleared from her property, which got her thinking. Her compulsion to create, (regardless of the construction zone that she was working in), led her to see the felled trees as a source of new works.

Each trunk is the inspiration that begins each piece, and the skirt tells the story. In Liz's words, "I try to keep the wood as true to its natural state as possible, although I do sometimes embellish it. The skirts draw the viewer to examine the wood more closely, and give clues to the meaning behind each piece."

*The ideas come from my surroundings. Either I get an immediate idea or sometimes it takes a while to germinate. I usually think of a title right away. I write down the concept or draw it in my sketchbook if I've got other things in progress. I often can't keep up with all the ideas."*

For *Annual Rings*, Liz used a penny rug technique, which was typically used during Victorian times for decorative tablecloths and bedclothes. Instead of using traditional symmetrical circles, she created organic forms that emulate the cross-section of a tree. A final tree ring frames all of the small cross sections, keeping them from floating away. The years of Liz's life have been stitched into the final ring that surrounds the piece.

According to Liz, each highlighted year carries a unique significance, but she leaves us to wonder what it is. What happened in 2008 and 1958?



Although we don't know, it prompts us to consider: "Which years' rings of my life would I highlight?"

Liz uses her work to draw clever analogies, much like she did in *Lost to the Wind*. When Liz spends time at her family's home in the Adirondacks, she hikes through birch-peppered forestland, where the birch bark has an annual habit of peeling and floating to the forest floor. As it happened, while her studio was being built, a tarp was blown off in a storm, curling and shredding, much like the birch bark that she sees in the forest.

The birch tree in *Lost to the Wind* is relatively unadorned or changed, and the bark has peeled, ready to drift in the wind. The skirt is made from the shredded tarp that she ran out into the wind and rain to tack it down before it peeled off. While she was too late to save the tarp, it became another thoughtful piece in the *Tree Skirt* series.



**RIGHT: Liz Alpert Fay Tree Skirt: Annual Rings** Found wood, wooden dowels, paint, wool, cotton thread, hand stitched, 12"x36.5"x34", 2007.

**ABOVE: Detail, Tree Skirt: Annual Rings**

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In *Spunk and Spontaneity*, Liz explores the surprising beauty of the temporary. Imagine taking a routine walk down your street or to your local store; taking a typical stroll down a road, or working in your yard, and something unexpected happens. This is what *Spunk and Spontaneity* explores; the beauty and energy in the unexpected –a shock of green bursting between sidewalk cracks, an intriguing painting through a window, or a personal moment shared between two people. These temporary and surprising experiences sneak up on us.

Liz experiences this feeling while walking in the woods and coming across a brilliantly colored mushroom that has burst through the forest floor. There is a lot of energy in that experience. *"You'll notice that some of the bark remains and some parts are smooth, where it has peeled away. Dichotomous mushrooms are the same way. Ironically, the most striking ones are the most deadly."*

While each piece in this series is exquisite on its own, imagine twelve of them, each as interesting and layered in meaning, methods and materials as these three, spaced out from one another in a large room, each one resting on a platform. As you walk through the installation, you would feel as though you were on a woodland walk, experiencing each tree skirt and the ideas it conveys.



**ABOVE:: Liz Alpert Fay Tree Skirt: *Lost to the Wind*** Found wood, paint, deconstructed plastic tarp, spool knitted cotton. 22"x30"x30", 2009.

**LEFT: Liz Alpert Fay Tree Skirt: *Spunk & Spontaneity Toadstool Series #2*** Found wood, paint, wool, thread, hand stitched. 17"x32"x30", 2007.

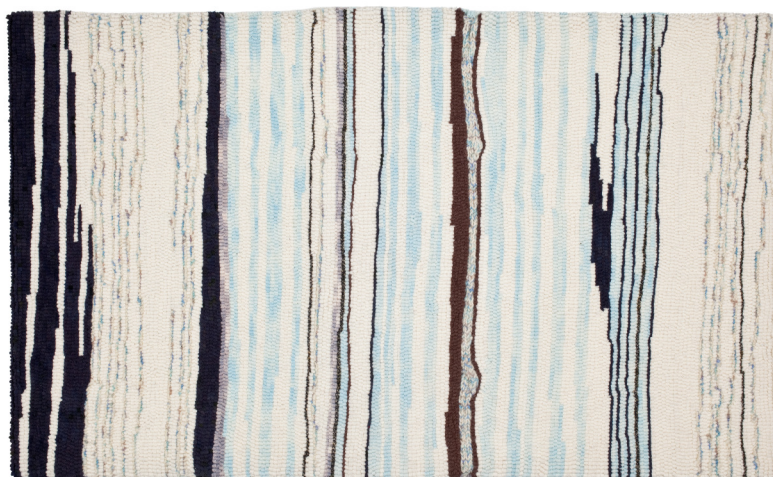
## Coming of Age Contemporary Rug Hooking Gets Its Day



In the *Winter Series*, Liz Alpert Fay ushers us through a winter season in seven rugs. The lines in each of these were inspired by the negative spaces between trees, as they shift in the wind or remain absolutely still on any given day, or when they are viewed from two slightly different angles, and those spaces appear completely different from each other.

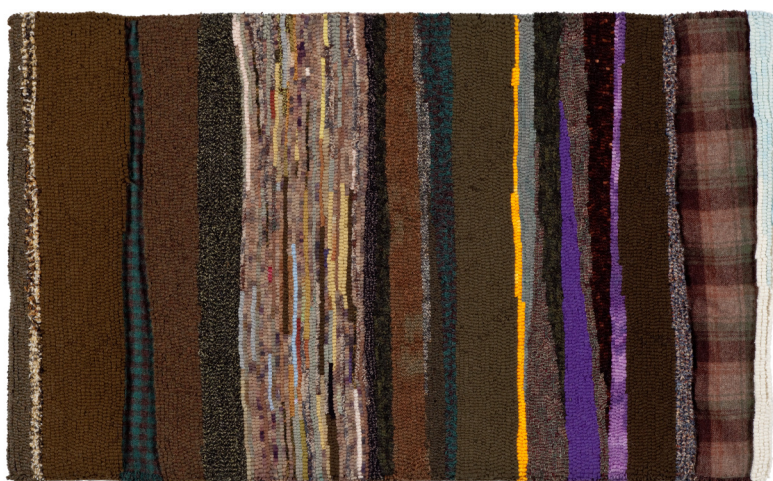
The *Winter Series* started with a cache of hundreds of line drawings that were created as Liz studied the forest. Those drawings were all posted on her studio walls while she lived with each one and watched the colors of the seasons pass outside.

As the year progressed, she matched particular line drawings with the colors that worked best. The colors of each piece are very intentional. The pieces here were chosen to show the dramatic color variety in the series, but like all of Liz Alpert Fay's work, they should really be seen and considered as a group. Together they tell the story they were created for.



The inception of the *Meditations on Color* series (shown here on the facing page), lies in more than 50 drawings of tree rings. Liz says, "I considered how I felt about the way trees grow. I let the series develop organically, as I worked through my ideas."

In this series, color is most specifically intentional. "Often in hooked rugs, there are many areas of interest and many colors being used. I wanted to pare down the imagery in these pieces to very simple designs where each color was as important as the next. You will find that expressed in nature as well. Every living thing has a reason and a purpose. I was trying to be very directed about what each one portrays."



All of the works here were recently shown at The Mobilia Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Until they find their next gallery home, view the whole collection at [www.lizalpertfay.com](http://www.lizalpertfay.com).

**UPPER: Liz Alpert Fay Winter Series: Sugar Maple** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked and stitched, 27"x40" mounted, 2008.

**MIDDLE: Liz Alpert Fay Winter Series: Mud Season** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked and stitched, 27"x40" mounted, 2008.

**LOWER: Liz Alpert Fay Winter Series: Shadows on Snow** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked and knit, 27"x40" mounted, 2008.

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Get a glimpse into Liz Alpert Fay's studio in *Caught on Camera* (page 46).

Go to [www.fiberartnow.net](http://www.fiberartnow.net)  
to share your ideas and  
find out what others think.



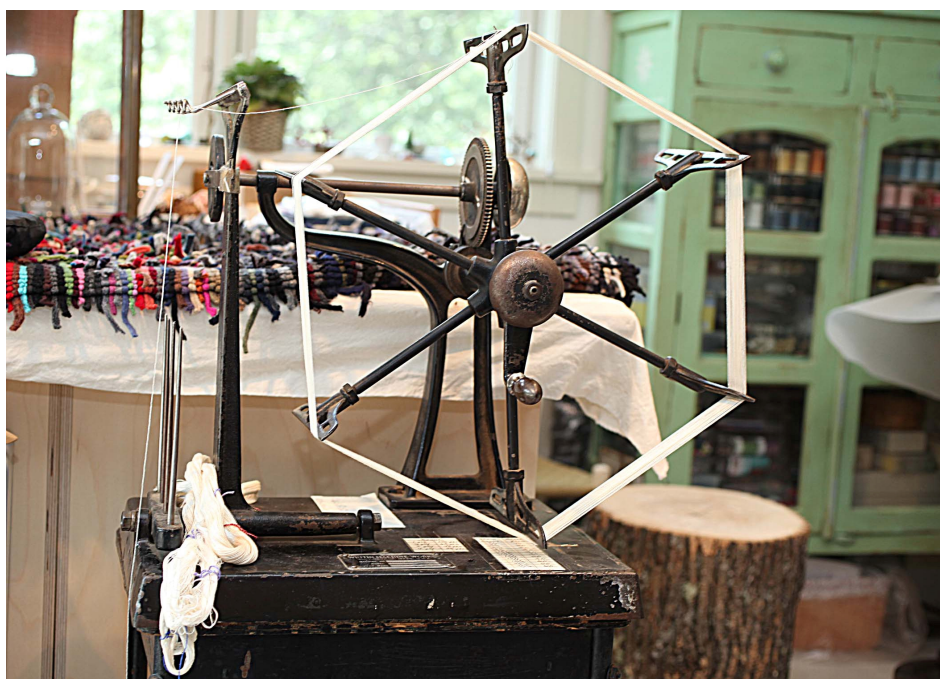
**LEFT: Liz Alpert Fay Meditations on Color: Earth Meets Water** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked, 26"x32" mounted, 2007.

**LOWER LEFT: Liz Alpert Fay Meditations on Color: Annual Rings #1** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked, 26"x32" mounted, 2007.

**ABOVE: Liz Alpert Fay Meditations on Color: Annual Rings #3** Hand dyed recycled wool on linen, hand hooked. 26"x32" mounted, 2007.

# Caught on Camera

[Enjoy a glimpse into the studio space of Liz Alpert Fay. Read about her work on page 20.]





# Caught on Camera



Photo credits: Deanna Dimarzio  
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