

## ***Michelle Parrish and Amanda Quinby***

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“Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” opening at the Shelburne Arts Coop October 2 combines the textile work of weaver Michelle Parrish with gilt wall panels by [Amanda Quinby](#). Wool from sheep, plant-based dyes, and gold leaf (gold is both a mineral and an element) are the ingredients used that lend truth to the title. The luster of beaten gold applied to a textured surface inspired by natural forms, combined with naturally dyed wool texture and color promises to be an exciting combination. Besides the use of natural materials, a common thread between the two art forms might be the highly nuanced processes involved in dyeing, weaving, and gilding. Since mistakes are costly in terms of time and materials, this was an ambitious project for these artisans.

Parrish prefers to grow and harvest her own plants to produce dyes for her yarn. The small rugs she has woven and “shagged” are made using a Scandinavian technique for bed coverings called Ryas. Ryas were popular woven bed rugs that used a short pile placed face downwards on the bed to create warmth. A design was woven into the rug so that the reverse side was decorative as well.

Showcasing the “yarni-ness” of yarn was important to Parrish and one of the reasons she chose to make Ryas for the show. Tightly binding yarns into a warp hides much of the texture and shape of the dyed and twisted wool. In the Ryas wool flaunts its yarni-ness in the freedom to hang off the surface. The pile is made by tying three strands of yarn around two warp threads in a process Parrish likens to “eating corn off the cob” because of its obsessive, consumptive regularity.

Compositionally, the artist chose the central point as a way to tie the pieces together. She’s “a real fan of symmetry. Some find it boring, but I find it satisfying. It can give a feeling of distance to me, a traveling inward or a growth outward.” Each piece has a contrasting center surrounded by a color that either fades or intensifies towards the middle. A single dye bath is “used up” by dyeing successive batches of yarn in the same mixture, with each batch getting lighter. This produces the color series used in her rugs. Some of the plants used to dye the yarn include black walnut, marigold, Queen Anne’s lace, woad, cosmos, sunflower, and goldenrod. Some colors, like green, are created with an over dye (blue over yellow=green). An excellent blog of her process is available at <http://localcolordyes.com/blog/>

“Extravagant” is the word she uses to describe her lichen dyed Rya. She explains that the use of enough lichen to dye that amount of yarn meant months of collecting dried up bits from the edges of rock lichen. Since a four inch round spot of lichen on a rock may take almost 300 years to grow, she only harvests a respectful bit at a time around the edges instead of destroying centuries of growth.

The dyeing process was something she got into during a year of feverish self-sufficiency goals inspired by the Y2K scare. She also graduated from the 6 year long master weaver program at the Hill Institute of Florence, MA. After graduating from Hill, she didn't weave anything for a year. "And that wasn't ok. That's one of the reasons I appreciate the Coop, it gives me this other identity--I'm not just a school teacher, I can say I am an artist and have this other part of my life feel a lot more valid. It really helped me make space for my art and it gives me permission to prioritize that part of my life."



Parrish describes her friend and co-exhibitor Amanda Quinby as a "Renaissance woman" who is a screen writer and photographer as well as a frame restorer/gilder and fine artist. Quinby has a graduate degree in cinema studies and won a Massachusetts Cultural Council Individual Artist grant in 2003 for a screenplay she wrote. She has worked as a frame restorer for 20 years, a craft which involves many skills including gold leafing since many older frames are sculptural pieces with details in high relief that may need to be molded and cast as part of the restoration project.

Quinby's pieces in "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral" are part of a new artistic exploration over that past year or so. She creates designs and texture with layers of gesso on masonite and then carefully applies gold leaf. Gold has many unique properties. It is the only metal that is not silver or grey in its pure form, being yellow. It is not tarnishable and is very malleable. A gram of gold may be beaten into a thin sheet of 1 square meter. Gold is rich with cultural associations deeper than its lustrous surface: gold has often been used to reward human achievement, symbolize perfection or divine principles, or be used to mean something good, great, holy or wise. It is interesting to learn that the alchemic symbol for gold is also the sun symbol, a dot within a circle, which seems to form a symbolic link to Parrish's Ryas.