

Lynn Perry



I've done enough interviews now—about three years worth, I reckon—the see a pattern emerge. Once again, I climbed into the hills to reach a home studio; a unique vista, a home full of particularity and personality; a woman of experience and diverse talents waiting to share her artistic biography; the interview begins with wry self deprecation and gathers momentum as the narrative chugs along through the decades before arriving at the fateful day of reckoning: jurying into a membership position with the motley and talented crew at the cooperative on Bridge Street!

At any rate, sometimes you can just tell that someone has an interesting story by just looking at the work they present at the gallery. I was sure that the creator of the fabulous and fun “Wool Pets” or “Ragamuffin” stuffed wool creatures seen at SAC had an interesting and unusual life story and I was not disappointed.

Lynn Perry's home is built on land with a view of higher summits in Heath where wild blueberries thrive. Colorful tiles and textiles, nooks and crannies, and unusual teal trimmed windows within the space show her fondness for Mexico, a country where she defiantly began her adult life in



1967.

She arranged a semester of research at the Newberry Library in Chicago while she was at Cornell College studying history and philosophy. She met and fell in love with Charlie Miller, and when he returned to Mexico to continue his writing there she dropped out of college to live with him there. It was an impulsive move at the time, and she didn't have the money to get all the way there; she actually ended up borrowing cash from a baggage handler at the airport to get there.

They were married in Mexico, and made documentary films in a village that was famous as the subject of anthropological studies conducted by Robert Redfield. They stayed for two years, “living like kings and queens on 200 dollars a month,” then went to New York to edit the footage.



Charlie, who was also a poet and friend of W.H. Auden, was much older by thirty years or so, and her parents initially disapproved and threatened to disinherit her. They were ultimately won over and the marriage lasted 25 years, ending with Charlie's sudden demise in 1992.

Charlie had friends in Guilford, Vermont and the couple eventually were drawn to the area, renting a house in Montague. Lynn worked at a bookstore in Amherst, and then the couple decided to open their own store, World Eye Bookshop, in Greenfield and bought a house in Shelburne.

Those being the optimistic days of "redefining community" with unconventional living situations, they joined with two other couples to purchase a large farm of several hundred acres in Heath.

Communal living gave way to the dividing of acreage eventually, and she and Charlie built their own house on 70 acres in 1987. One other couple still lives next door, in the original old homestead, and they remain close friends.

When her son was little, Lynn did some weaving, making ponchos that she sold in the book store and funky wreaths that she gave to friends. She didn't consider these artistic endeavors; she loved working with wool and thought she could supplement their meager income while staying out of the work place.

They sold the bookstore, Charlie published a book on his friendship with W. H. Auden, and Lynn went back school and emerged with a masters in psychology. For many years she was a counseling psychologist at the Franklin County Technical school, retiring about 5 years ago.

"Everyone told me to leave my retirement time unscheduled. To not plan anything, leave it free. I had no idea what to do with myself when the time came," explained Lynn. Her close friend, Suzanne Crawford of Stump Sprouts (a cross country ski lodge in Hawley) introduced her to some dinosaur stuffie patterns that utilized felted wool sweater material.

This caught her fancy. Before long, she was living with 70 felt creatures and was designing her own patterns for new ideas. She worked at her kitchen table from tubs full of



sweaters.

Then she connected with the Shelburne Arts Coop.

“I feel so intensely about the coop. I feel like myself there,” she commented. “It’s not so conformist—people say what they think and respect each other. They aren’t demanding.”

Recently, her good friend introduced her to another woolly art, that of needle felting. Lynn’s needle felted animals have proved even more successful than her felted sweater creatures. They are precise and realistic sculptures.

Lynn pulled a hunk of washed and carded white wool out of a giant bag to show me how she creates the core of these animals from tightly packed and felted wool. Then she builds up the details in layers on top of the form, and attaches wires for legs as needed. These new sculptures have taken many forms: owls, polar bears, wolves, dogs, and meerkats among them. Great pains are taken with felting realistic eyes complete with a white “shine” spot. It can take a day or more to build one up from scratch, she says-- A week to make her large Purple People Eater creature for the Purple Show at the coop this summer.

She has also recently made wall pieces that are somewhat three dimensional, with central figures that protrude from the surface in bas relief (or “ba-a-a relief,” as we dubbed the one of a sheep). She’s done a collaborative piece with Nancy Baker attaching a felted raven to the surface of Nancy’s painting, and another with a Robin feeding a nest of chicks. She is scheduled to do a joint felting exhibit in 2017 with coop member Flo Rosenstock.



Suzanne and Lloyd Crawford also introduced her to her current partner, Rol, who is an avid outdoorsman and former bicycle racer. They have been together since the mid 1990s.

New to Lynn’s life is her own separate studio space. Instead of working at the kitchen table out of bins, she is in a new room complete with tidy stash cubbies for her materials.

What we find is true in Lynn’s life is true about our coop : Leave space. Follow your heart. Nurture friendships that expand your world. Come home to yourself.