

Connecting Threads

by Judy Newland

What happens when you bring an eclectic group together to share their stories around a dye pot? Joy, hope and love explode into the most beautiful creations and friendships. As the cauldrons boil, we contemplate life, enjoy new experiences, and ponder art, nature, making and living. Over time, we bond over the beauty we have created or the mistakes we have made. How did this happen?

It was the summer of 2022. Three studio open houses that **Janet Thomas** and I hosted at her home studio in Blaine, Washington brought a bevy of visitors. Items were for sale, but a dye pot and indigo vat were going at each event and visitors kept asking if we would share this fun with them. We accumulated a small group over the summer and started down our path of discovery.

*I find myself excited each month knowing I was going to learn something new...all that the earth provides for natural dyeing. Judy and Janet are patient as they teach and hold space for everyone. It has been an honor to be a part of this community. **Elena**¹*

Creating connections

Through cloth, paper, scissors, paint, pigments and cauldrons of color we build the connections that swirl between us and the treasures we create. We construct safe spaces for exploration and play; no pretense, make what you want or just ponder and enjoy the view. No expectations. It is a maker space, but so much more. Our only rule: just make stuff and see what comes out the other side...beauty, laughter, caring and JOY.

*The social awareness, camaraderie and generosity of experience are amazing. You set out to educate, inspire, welcome and give... and you do it all and much, much more. **Ruth***

*This group has been such a gift in my life for a variety of reasons. It's been really great to connect with other creators and not feel like there is judgment or expectation. Exploration is a high value here. It has sparked my desire to make wearable art. I love wearing unique items and it has been so fun to play in this arena and be okay with whatever shows up. **Michelle***

We gather in the garden

Being close to the land in our amazing marine environment grounds us. Gathering plants in the neighborhood and found objects along the bay leads us to create work that emerges from the earth. We grow dye plants in our gardens and share the



Judy Newland and Janet Thomas on the patio during studio tour, 2023. Photo: Calvin Stutzman.



Judy Newland, *Brazilwood Beauties*, 2023. Hand-dyed wool and fabric. Photo by the artist.



Creative Color Collective gathering dye materials in the garden, 2023. Photo: Calvin Stutzman.

bounty. We walk the waterline and pick up seaweed and other remnants of nature. This connection to our surroundings is a key focus for the group. We gather, connect and hunt for little gifts that appear in our habitat. Then we explore the science of plants and dyes to deepen our knowledge and appreciation of this amazing landscape. The plants in the dye pot are telling us stories about our culture, botany, science and rituals. It's an entire world to explore and share.

Providing a space where ideas can develop freely and independently while engaging in a common interest, in our case, plants. We are a "think tank" of our relationship to another living organism. You could call it the vegetable soul. What makes this group unique for me is that it is always in motion, always evolving, it is alive...as are plants. Janet

Every bundle we open becomes a mini event. Dye pots produce a plethora of colored cloth, waiting to become whatever strikes the imagination. Waves of beauty and happiness abound and spread. Laughter echoes in the harbor.

The connecting threads: community learning and sharing

We try to reach beyond our small group and embrace social practice projects that center around climate, politics and people. We take field trips and visit various studios and creative spaces in our area. Stirring cauldrons together brings up history and tradition and so we travel back and forth through the multiple strands of our textile history. Exploring these threads together as various colors bubble, we consider the meaning of textiles in our lives and society. Textile history is our history, and we pick it up and move it forward with delight, weaving



Creative Color Collective collecting materials along the bay, 2023.
Photo: Judy Newland.



Sharon Allen, 2023. Photo: Judy Newland.



Creative Color Collective, 2023. Photo: Calvin Stutzman.

a web with strands running through our community garden, the senior center, elementary schools and our communities. Intergenerational sharing is a goal. Each person brings skills and knowledge to share.

We have created an atmosphere with the focus is on process over product. That focus loosens and challenges our preconceived concepts of what is OK and shifts to what brings meaning into our lives. As a creative community we all strive to meet each other at the point of our needs at any given time. Janet

It's all on offer: pick your fun?

Dreaming, planning and laughing are the main events. And who have we collected on our journey? Yes, artists, but makers, therapists, potters, gardeners, painters, explorers, shamans; all who are together creating a community of wonder and wonderful kindness. The group is open, evolving, welcoming, exploring and supportive; forever sharing laughter and making room for more. What started as a fun get-together became a



Janet Thomas in her studio, 2024. Photo: Judy Newland.

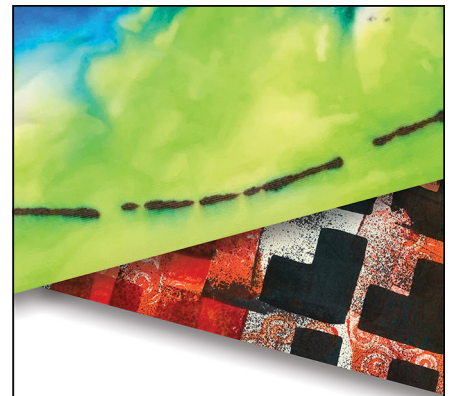
group of kindred spirits moving toward a space for joy. We are a creative color collective, come join us.

Why do I come to these gatherings—the people, the energy, the love poured into the doing and making, the passion and joy of creating and co-creating, the boundless generosity of spirit. It gets into me and opens me. Vaune

¹All quotes provided in conversation with the author, February 2024. Respondents are referred to by first name only, at their request.

—Judy Newland (she/her) *Culture and the environment are the two main topics I address in my textile art. I have been working in textiles for more than forty years as a maker and later as a textile historian. My background in textile history and museum anthropology allows me to bring a deep cultural engagement to everything I create.*

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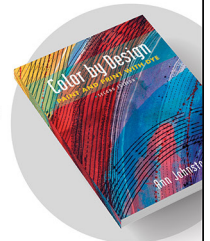
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