

# exploring fiber art: 4 free contemporary fabric art projects

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## **1** a piece of cake: easy, colorful fabric books

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WEN REDMOND

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DIANNE RICHARDS

## **4** fiber effects: colorful needle-felted trading cards

KELLI PERKINS



Express your love of color and fiber with four fun projects from the artists featured in *Cloth Paper Scissors*. You'll find inspiring ideas and instruction on how to make artist trading cards (ATCs), fabric books, and mail art, all with step-by-step instruction along with plenty of inspiration for the using fiber art that's explained for beginners, with fiber art projects that are great for seasoned artists as well.

First, get inspired with Debbi Crane's adventurous fabric book art project, which took her from creating a simple handmade book, to a 14-book rainbow of color in "A Piece of Cake." Make your own fabric journal with a few simple supplies and your favorite colors and phrases. (Hint: Debbi likes to use poetry in hers.)

Then release your inner muse with "Fabric Collage Mail Art" by Wen Redmond. "This collage process is a quick approach to composing a complete series of fabric-collage postcards," explains Wen. "It's also an ingenious way to use up all of your scraps and leftovers from other projects. Try it, and enjoy spontaneous artistic flow while creating stacks of unique postcards. So take out all of your goodies, and let's get creative."

"Silk and other fibers can be used to make your own unique fabrics for a variety of textile-based projects," says Dianne Richards, author of "Fusing Fabrics and Fibers for Fantastic Effects." She continues, "This fabric can be used as inspiration for stunning textured collages, usable artwork

such as bags, boxes, or book covers, or incorporated into bigger works of art like quilts or wall hangings."

Last, but not least, try your hand at needle felting with "Fiber Effects: Colorful Needle-Felted Trading Cards" by Kelli Perkins. Kelli provides needle-felting basics, and offers plenty of great tips for the beginning fabric artist.

I hope you enjoy this exclusive collection of fabric art projects, and that you create colorful, new fiber effects on your own mixed-media projects.

Have fun,

*Cherie*

**Cherie Haas**  
Online Editor,  
*Cloth Paper Scissors Today*

**cloth·paper**  
scissors COLLAGE ARTISTIC  
MIXED-MEDIA DISCOVERY

Exploring Fiber Art:  
4 Free  
Contemporary  
Fabric Art Projects

*presented by*

**Cloth Paper Scissors®**

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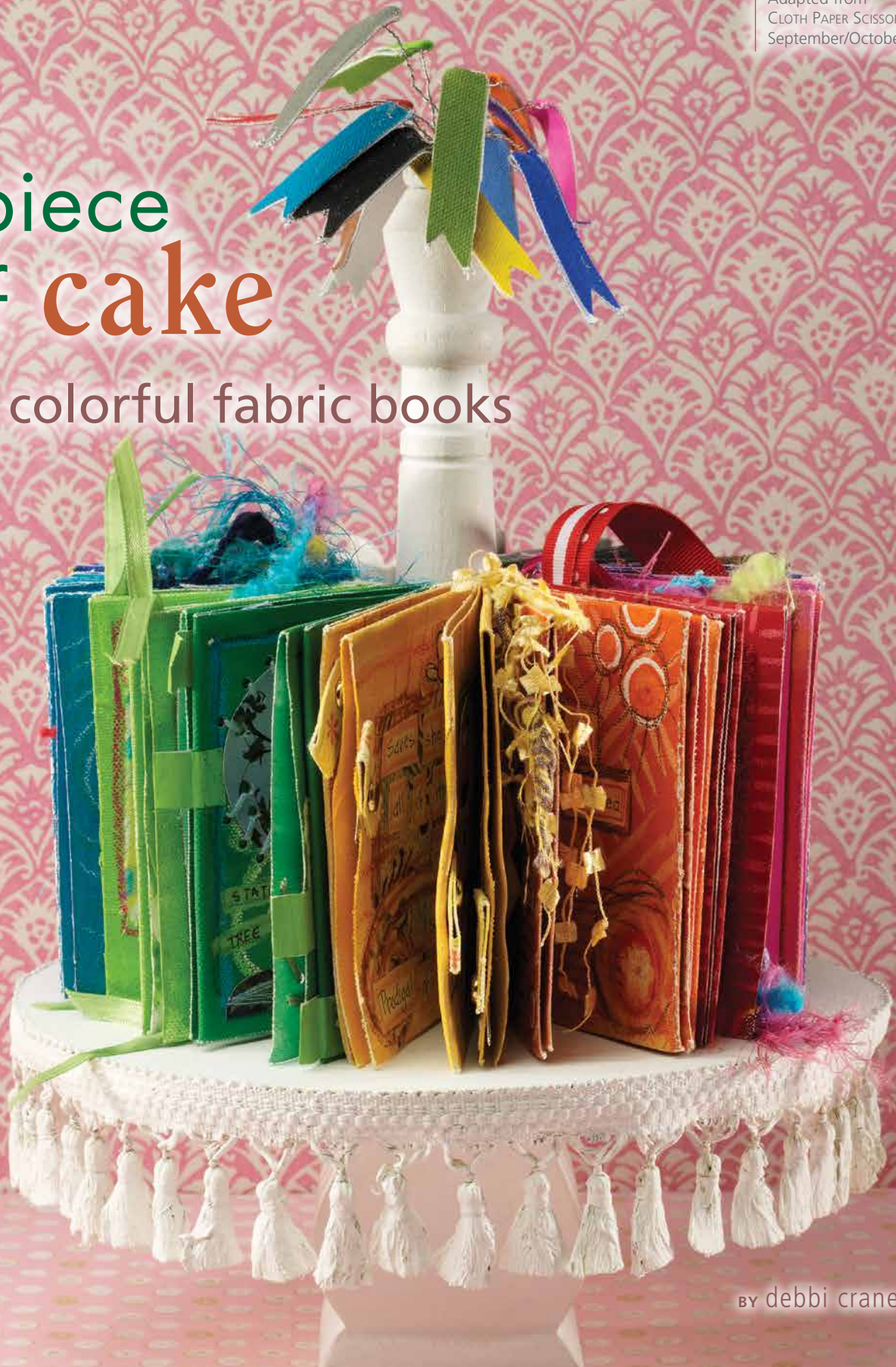
Jane Moore Houghton

Molly Lemaster



# A piece of cake

easy, colorful fabric books



by debbi crane



a watermelon is kind of a mystery, isn't it? How can a fruit that large grow from a seed that is so proportionally tiny? Art is like that sometimes. One little idea, thought, or phrase can grow into a big project. And you don't need a green thumb or Miracle-Gro®.

When I first read of the 2008 "True Colors" paper quilt challenge in *QUILTING ARTS MAGAZINE*® (see some of the results in the July/August 2008 issue of *CLOTH PAPER SCISSORS*®), I thought it sounded like fun, but I knew I had no time or ideas to make an entry. Then, sometime in February, I read an entry on Kim Sherrod's blog in which she strongly encouraged all of us to participate in the challenge. She talked me into it. In about two days' time, I had created a 12" square paper quilt, featuring a loud and wild orange dress. Orange is my

true color. It's bright and sunny, but less predictable than red and stronger than yellow.

The "True Colors" idea stuck in my head and took over as I planned the project for the class I was teaching at Make It University!™ (MIU) in Chicago. I wanted to teach a project that would be easy and interesting for all levels, one that would incorporate fabric—it is a quilt show, after all—and one that had a color theme. One of my favorite color poems, "Nature Rarer Uses Yellow" by Emily Dickinson, came to mind. This

poem became the text for the MIU book, which, of course, was yellow. Using a poem is a painless way to create text in a book if you think you can't write. Don't let your imagined shortcomings as a wordsmith stand in the way of making a book.

I made this book from a favorite material of mine: acrylic-coated canvas. To make acrylic-coated canvas, I begin with plain white canvas duck from the fabric store and, working with a half yard at a time, apply two or three coats of acrylic paint to each side. This process takes a lot of time, as each coat must dry before the next is applied. When the paint is dry, the canvas retains the nature of fabric; it can be easily hand or machine stitched.

## MATERIALS

*for one book*

- Piece of canvas duck, at least 11" x 14" to allow for slight shrinkage when the canvas is painted
- Acrylic paint (craft-quality is fine)
- Ruler
- Scissors or craft knife
- Bone folder





The painted canvas will hold a crease, so it can be used like paper. The yellow canvas book had a substantial feel to it, more so than if it had been made from paper.

The little yellow book had been fun to make. So much fun that I wanted to make more, using different colors. This is where it started to become a watermelon. What colors make good books? Should I stick to the primaries and secondaries? What about tints and shades? I made a quick list in my sketchbook of the colors I might like to use for books and came up with 14. How in the world does one innocent little book become a series of 14?

The colors I chose are not from the real, art teacher's color wheel. They are colors that I like, colors I can work with. Hot pink, black, and brown aren't on the plain old color wheel, but I couldn't imagine working without them.

I painted the canvas, cut pieces to size (9" × 12"), and then folded and cut to make the bright, but blank, books. I had listed vague ideas for content, with the help of my daughters, when I made the original color list, but vague ideas don't fill books. Good books, anyway. I began to eat this watermelon, one bite and one book at a time, and sure enough, as I finished—or while working on—one book, the content for the next one became clear to me. The most valuable lesson I learned in the process of making this series of 14 books was to trust my process. I don't need to know all the answers before I begin working, they will be revealed to me as I need them.

All the time I was working on this wacky color wheel of books, I was planning a storage or display container of some kind. I wanted them to be seen in a wheel shape, in a certain order, not

simply tossed in a box. It struck me as I looked at the assembled wheel of books on my desk that they looked like a cake, a cake of color. I must have been watching Paula Deen when I fell asleep some night, because the cake idea took root, and before I knew it I was wandering the aisles of a home improvement store looking for odds and ends I could use to build a cake stand. I used some unfinished wood pieces, foam core, and some lime green tassels, all painted white, to make the cake stand. Then there was the problem of how to keep the slices of cake, I mean books, on the stand in the right order. I made a set of pegs from a skinny dowel, painted the end of each to correspond with a book color, and set the dowels around the center spindle of the cake stand. The flags on top of the center spindle were the finishing touch of each color.

I had 14 books to fill with text and images. I was finishing lucky number 13 and had nothing for number 14, which turned out to be the hot pink book. The entire project was done, except for this one book. What's the best way to end a book? With a colophon, of course! A colophon tells you everything you might want to know about a book: the materials used, when the book was made, how it is bound, and who made it. Like the hot pink book says, leave it to a book artist to answer a question before you even ask it.

## directions

### make the book

1. Paint the canvas on one side, using 2–3 coats of acrylic. Allow to dry between coats.
2. Flip the canvas over and paint the other side.





3. When dry, use the ruler and craft knife, or scissors, to cut a 9" x 12" rectangle.
4. Fold this rectangle in half lengthwise and crease with the bone folder. Open.
5. Fold it in half widthwise, crease, and open.
6. Turn the canvas so the widthwise crease makes a peak.
7. Fold each end in to the center peak. Crease. Open.
8. Fold back in half widthwise.
9. Use the scissors or knife to make 1 cut, from the center of the fold to the next crease on the fold that is already there.
10. Open. Fold back in half lengthwise.

11. Push the ends of the canvas to the middle to create a book shape with pages. Use the bone folder to align the pages and get the crease just right.

## add content to the book

1. With the book folded, mark the front and back covers and number your pages.

**TIP:** It is helpful to make a model out of scrap paper to lay out sequential text.

2. Open the book completely flat. You can paint/decorate all of the pages without waiting for anything to dry.
3. The back of the pages will never show. Sew fabric or paper onto the pages or use rivets and eyelets.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Fabric and paper scraps
- Sewing supplies or rivets and eyelets
- Caran d'Ache® or colored pencils
- Stamps and stamp pads

4. Caran d'Ache or colored pencil will write over the acrylic paint. You can also stamp with ink or acrylic on the pages.
5. The book is a small size, so its pages are the perfect place to make collages of all those precious but tiny scraps you have been keeping. ●

[URL here](#)



# fabric collage mail art

This collage process is a quick approach to composing a complete series of fabric-collage postcards. It is also an ingenious way to use up all of your scraps and leftovers from other projects. Try it, and enjoy spontaneous artistic flow while creating stacks of unique postcards. So take out all of your goodies, and let's get creative.



## directions making the base

1. Determine the size and quantity of the postcards you plan to make. Choose your size and multiply accordingly to establish your base palette size, and then cut a sheet of interfacing to that size. For example, to make twenty 4" × 5" postcards, you would need a 20" × 20" base.

BY wen redmond





Figure 1

2. Assemble a family of colored fabric scraps and papers and spontaneously lay them on your interfacing base. Sometimes I lay the pieces side by side; sometimes I tuck just an edge of 1 piece under another piece. Continue layering until the entire base is covered and none of the interfacing is showing. (Figure 1)

**TIP:** As I work on various projects, I throw bits of cloth and paper cuttings into a resealable bag instead of throwing them away. This often results in bags of color-coordinated items to be used for collage at a moment's notice.

3. Carefully lay your collage on the ironing pad, and place the parchment paper over your collage. Following the manufacturer's directions, fuse the papers and fabrics to the interfacing with the iron.
4. Add additional embellishment to the surface. Collage small bits with a glue stick, stamp on the surface, write with markers, and iron fused transparent cloth on top for added depth. Don't make the surface too complicated at this stage.



Figure 2

**TIP:** Include some white and black fabric and paper for contrast.

5. Remove the release paper from the back of the collage and iron the backing fabric to the back side of your collage.
6. Use your rotary cutter, ruler, and cutting mat to cut your postcards from the completed base. (Figure 2)

## MATERIALS

- Interfacing, double-sided fusible, heavy-weight
  - Scissors
  - Fabric scraps
  - Papers (handmade, magazines, old documents, painted, tissue, newspaper, recycled coffee filters, candy wrappers, etc.)
  - Iron and ironing pad
  - Parchment paper
  - Glue stick
  - Stamps and ink pads
  - Markers
  - Pre-fused transparent fabric
  - Fabric for backing the collage
  - Rotary cutter, ruler, and mat
  - Acrylic paints (including metallics)
  - Paintbrushes (bristle and foam)
  - Plastic sheeting to cover your work surface
  - Colored pencils
  - Gloss medium
  - Water
  - Bowl
- optional**
- Sewing machine and accessories







Figure 3

## finishing

1. Check each postcard to make sure everything is securely glued. Use a glue stick to make minor adjustments.
2. Add accents and/or designs using paints, colored pencils, writing, etc. You can add stitching at this time as well.
3. Place a piece of plastic on your work surface. Use the foam brush to add metallic paint around the edge of each postcard. Set the cards on the plastic to dry.

**note:** The foam brush keeps the paint on the very edge of the card while a bristle brush will often separate, getting the paint on the surface of the card. It's ok if you get a small amount of paint on the card front; I think it adds to the charm, but you don't want to cover what you've just created.

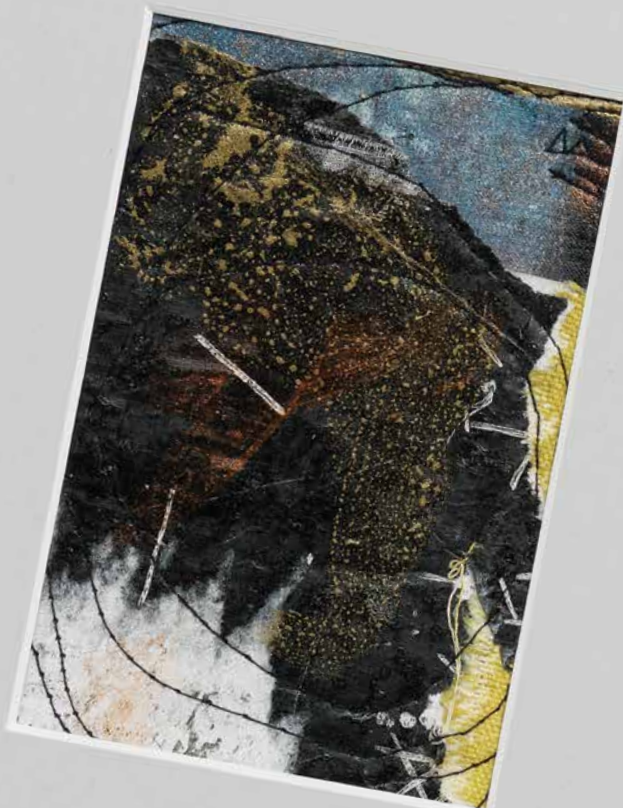
4. In the bowl, mix the gloss medium and water in a 1:1 ratio. The medium marries the sometimes-divergent elements and protects the surface of the postcard.
5. Using a bristle brush, work the medium into the top surface of each postcard, especially the paper areas and any lightly glued areas. Be sure to hit the edges with the medium for a rich finish. (Figure 3) Allow the cards to dry on the plastic surface.

**note:** Use the medium to your advantage.

Tissue paper may wrinkle, adding more texture. The medium can glue down bits of thread, too. Double-sided printed papers like newspaper will become transparent when the medium is used on them, showing the opposite side and creating instant layering. More serendipity!

Enjoy this easy, spontaneous method of collage making and let out your inner muse. ●

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Adapted from  
CLOTH PAPER SCISSORS®  
Fall 2006

"Sunflowers" • 10 1/2" x 10 1/2"

# fusing fabrics & fibers for fantastic effects

BY dianne richards





**S**ilk and other fibers can be used to make your own unique fabrics for a variety of textile-based projects. This fabric can be used as inspiration for stunning textured collages, usable artwork such as bags, boxes, or book covers, or incorporated into bigger works of art like quilts or wall hangings. It can be embellished in many ways—using other fabrics, silk rods and cocoons, machine and hand embroidery, and beadwork. The possibilities are endless and as wide as your imagination.

In this article I will explain how to make the foundation fabric and show the variety of ways it can be added to and decorated.

## making the basic fabric

1. Cover a board with plastic and place 1 piece of netting on top.
2. Choose the colors and textures of fibers you require, tease out the fibers, and overlap them in layers on top of the netting. Customize this to the colors and design you want and when you have a good layer and are satisfied with the arrangement, place the second piece of netting on top making a sandwich: netting, fibers, netting.
3. The fibers are bound together by using either water-based or acrylic glue. Take some glue and, using your fingers, work it all over the surface of the netting.

4. Flip the sandwich over on your plastic-covered surface and repeat the glue process on the other side so that all the fibers are impregnated with glue. Leave this to dry on a flat surface that has been covered with plastic wrap. (The drying takes some time but you can speed it up by drying it on a warm, flat surface such as a central heating boiler.)
5. When dry the netting can easily be removed, leaving an inspirational piece of fabric.

## embellishing the finished fabric

Now that you have a base fabric, the fun can begin. Here are examples of four finished collages; I will explain how each one was decorated.

### "SUNFLOWERS"

The base for this picture of a bunch of sunflowers was mainly yellow/gold, blue, and purple. I decided where the centers of the flowers should be, scrunched up

## MATERIALS

- A variety of space-dyed silk fibers, e.g. silk tops, throwsters waste, silk noils, Italian silk waste, mawata caps, silk handkerchiefs, silk laps
- Plastic netting—2 pieces, each larger than the finished piece of fabric
- Water-based or acrylic glue. (I use a solution of wallpaper paste or CMC paste paper medium—pH-neutral archival quality—or acrylic silk paper medium, diluted, one-part medium to six-parts water. Approximately 1½–2 pints water needed.)
- Saran Wrap® or other plastic wrap to protect your surface

**note:** To make a piece of fabric 14" square, approximately 2 ounces (50g) of fibers are needed. The sheer luxury, richness, and range of colors and textures in silk produces exciting fabrics, but other fibers such as cotton, flax, wool, and ramie can be incorporated with silk to add another dimension to the fabric.

some clumps of brown silk laps, and stuck them in place using the same glue as I used for the base fabric. With the centers in place, I cut some petal shapes from sheer fabrics in shades of gold and yellow. Again I stuck them in place with the glue, leaving some free edges for a three-dimensional effect. When this was dry I defined some of the petals, leaves, and stalks with machine stitching. Some strands of wool and silk fibers were couched down for stalks and some hand





"The Jurassic Coast" • 8 1/2" x 10 1/2"





"Breakers" • approximately 13" square

stitching was done on the leaves, stalks, and petals. Finally, the centers of the flowers were embellished with French knots and beadwork.

### "THE JURASSIC COAST"

This piece was inspired by a visit to the Jurassic Coast in Dorset, England. The fibers for the background were laid in layers like the rock strata of the cliffs. To reinforce the strata I collected a large

number of strands of wool, cotton, silk, etc., combining a variety of textures and using colors that complement the picture. These were stitched using machine and hand stitches to produce a lively, textured surface. Three small fossil ammonites found on the beach that I visited provided the final touch.

### "BREAKERS"

I live on the coast in the south of England, and the sea has a great impact on my life. In this collage I tried to capture some of its power. The foundation of this picture was basically three bands of color—light blue, turquoise, and gold. To give a real three-dimensional effect I stretched some dyed silk rods, twisted them, and then stitched them onto the background to





## “POPPIES”

I did not have a preconceived picture of what I wanted the finished fabric to look like before I began. Once the finished fabric was dry, I studied it and it looked like a lively composition of poppies to me. I then found some pieces of material, mainly sheers and silks but also knitted bouclé from an old sweater and some opaque fabrics. I cut out flower and leaf shapes and bonded these onto the background using a fusible webbing and bonding granules. Small amounts of black-and-gold checked material were added, giving richness and variety to the design. I also used netting, a silk rod for a stalk, and half a squashed silk cocoon for a poppy bud. When I was happy with the arrangement, the whole surface was decorated with hand embroidery using a variety of threads and stitches to produce a breathtaking original picture.

Collage pictures are just one use of these techniques. The basic fabric can be embellished as described and used to make many other items such as bags or book covers. Natural objects such as dried flowers and leaves, leaf skeletons, seeds like honesty, or dried seaweed can be incorporated into the surface as well. When wet, the fabric can be manipulated into shapes such as bowls or baskets. When dry it can be cut up and used to decorate other pieces of textile art. I could go on forever but now it's up to you—I just hope you have as much fun experimenting as I have. ●

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resemble large waves. Some touches of white acrylic paint were painted onto the edges of the silk rods. I cut shreds of space-dyed silk chiffon, heat-bondable Angelina®, pieces of net, and other scraps of suitable fabric. These were stitched onto the sea. The whole picture

was then embroidered using a variety of threads and stitches and embellished with beadwork, small found pebbles, and shells.



# fiber effects

Adapted from  
CLOTH PAPER SCISSORS®  
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## colorful needle-felted trading cards

by kelli perkins





big, fluffy bundles of carded wool, lamb-soft tails of curling top, and silky strands of intense hue beckon spinners and knitters. Who can resist dye-batch names like “lollipop,” “hot peppers,” and “moon goddess”? If owning sheep is not your cup of tea, there is undoubtedly someone in your community who thrives on it. My semi-rural town is rich with family-owned operations producing a delicious artist’s paint box of hand-dyed, unspun fibers. But what if you’re not gifted with the tools to turn roving into yarn? You can still join in the fun by learning the inexpensive art of needle felting.

With a variety of fibers, you can create a painterly effect. Subtle differences in color allow shadows and highlights, just as if you were creating with watercolors. If you’re truly ambitious, you can purchase plain wool or silk roving and dye it yourself. Be sure to use dyes appropriate for animal material, such as acid dyes. Each type of material requires a different dye process in order to create rich color and washable results. There are even new plant-based alternatives to wool and silk, like soy silk and hemp, as well as sustainable green fibers made from bamboo and other materials.

This simple artist trading card (ATC) project is a great introduction to the craft and a good excuse to indulge in some ultra-soft roving.

## preparation

1. Choose a felt color for the background of your artist trading card. Both wool and synthetic felt work nicely for this project, so choose whichever gives you the feeling you want.
2. Cut backgrounds slightly larger than ATC size (2½" × 3½"), as the surface will shrink a bit as you felt. It’s better to start larger and trim when you are done than to end up with an undersized card.

3. To speed up the process, you can cut a template out of cardstock and zip around it with a rotary cutter. I keep a bunch of pre-cut felt bases with my supplies, so I can start a new one without missing a beat.
4. Gather some fibers for your project. Any loose fibers will do; I combine natural and synthetic fibers on my ATCs. You will see wool spinning fibers referred to as roving, top, or sliver (pronounced with a long “i”). These should form the base of your image because their fibers will more easily become entangled with the base felt, creating that familiar felted look. But throw in some other fibers for fun, like tussah, silk hankies, or throwster’s waste. You can mix them up with the wool or use them on top for an added splash of color.
5. Determine what kind of image you want to create on the front of your card. Start with larger, less complex shapes and work towards more intricate designs as you gain experience. A simple heart or flower is a nice beginning.

## needle-felting basics

Here’s a quick introduction to needle felting. It’s much less intimidating than traditional soap and water felting;

## MATERIALS

- Ruler
  - Scissors
  - Felt pieces
  - Felting needle
  - Foam felting block (see “Felting Tips” on page XX)
  - Roving (assorted wool, silk, soy)
  - Fabric pieces
  - Fusible webbing
  - Iron
- optional**
- Embroidery floss
  - Beads
  - Sewing machine and thread
  - Oil pastels

the first time I saw a demo, I was entranced. It’s so easy that it feels almost silly. But the results are beautiful and look very much like traditionally felted designs. You’ll need a special felting needle, but they’re very inexpensive. They are usually shaped like an “L” with an extremely sharp point on the long side. Notches are cut along the shaft and the resulting barbs cause the fibers to get trapped on the back side of the base felt.

There are other types of felting devices available, with four, six, or more needles attached, or you may have seen the popular electric needle-felting machines, which look like sewing







machines and make needle felting a breeze.

**note:** Hand felting needles come in various gauges and each will be suitable for a different type of roving or project. Try several to determine which you prefer. A middle-of-the-road 36- or 38-gauge is useful for most things.

The only other equipment you need is a piece of thick foam for felting into. You can find it with the other felting

supplies, or improvise, but make sure the foam is thick enough to prevent the needle from reaching the bottom (and a body part!).

## felting

1. Place a pre-cut felt base on the felting foam.
2. Pull a small tuft of roving and fold or roll it into a loose ball roughly the size of the image you want to create.

Lay it on the felt and poke the needle into it a few times to secure it to the foam.

From that point, poke the needle into the roving repeatedly until it begins to form a bond with the base. Be extra careful to know where your fingers are in relation to the needle at all times. After poking for awhile, pick the base up from the foam and move it to another position. You'll



see that the roving has migrated to the back of the felt base.

**note:** It is only necessary to push the needle into the foam ½" or less.

3. Continue poking the roving, tucking and folding the edges over with the needle as you go to form the image you are trying to create.
  4. Once you've outlined the basic form, select small tufts of different colors and place them on top of the already felted area, then felt over them again to meld them into the picture. You can create highlights and shading with various shades of wool or silk. Go ahead and mix different kinds of roving and even lengths of fun fibers and yarns. Many things will felt up nicely.
5. Add embroidery stitches, machine stitching, or beads to finish your project. You can also add more highlights or shading with oil pastels, but use a gentle hand so that you don't tug at the fibers.
  6. Once you've finished the front, stretch the ATC with your fingers to make sure it's flat and not bunched up. Measure and trim it to the correct size, 2½" × 3½".
  7. Cut a piece of backing fabric the same size and iron it to the back of the ATC, using fusible web.
  8. Create a blanket stitch border with floss or fancy machine stitches. ●

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## felting tips

- Be sure to insert the needle directly up and down and not tilted to the side or it may bend or break.
- Felting needles are very sharp! Watch what you are doing at all times.
- Spread your fingers wide to hold down the piece of felt while keeping your fingers as far away as possible from the felting area. There are nice chunks of foam available from felting suppliers, but a piece of foam rubber works fine as long as it's deep enough to absorb the full length of the needle. The foam will eventually become compressed and worn out and will have to be replaced.

