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SPOTLIGHT

## Weavers Guild of Minnesota shows versatility in upcoming exhibit

By KELSEY O'HARA [kohara@northfieldnews.com](mailto:kohara@northfieldnews.com) Dec 28, 2017 Updated 20 min ago



Karen Searle used a traditional stitching technique, but instead of using thread, she used wire for her self-portrait. (Photo courtesy of Kristen Stoeckeler)

Kelsey O'Hara



In 1969, Karen Searle was strolling through the streets of St. Anthony Park when she stumbled upon the opening of a new center, Weavers Guild of Minnesota. The organization had just opened a new location in the area, and it spoke to Searle.

“I’ve always have been drawn to weaving. Even weaving baskets and sewing as a child, I wanted to learn more,” she said.

When she stepped into the lobby, she saw a slew of looms and an upcoming class about to start. She decided to sign up then and there.

“It became both a passion and career after that,” Searle said.

Today, Searle, of St. Paul, stays active in the Weavers Guild as it has grown throughout Minnesota and as a national organization. The classes and locations have expanded, and students have attended from across the country to learn.

Now, the guild is drawing from over 50 instructors, artists and makers from across to country to showcase traditional and contemporary weaving, spinning and dyeing-related works at the Paradise Center for the Arts.

Pieces reflect a full scope of techniques from WGM instructors including weaving, rag rug weaving, card weaving, inkle-loom weaving, tapestry, spinning, fibers, Bengala dyeing, textile designing and Kumihimo.

“There is a depth of expertise in the guild that astonishes me. People will find artists who work in traditional style and others who are working around the fringes of textiles and go outside traditional weaving expectations,” Artist and WGM Instructor Susan Hensel said.

Hensel worked on and off with WGM for the past 12 years along with on her own projects. She often specializes in using textiles in her art and teaches hand spinning at WGM. And for this exhibit, Hensel puts hand spinning on display by contributing pieces to a 3-D sculpture of a sea anemone.

“Spinning yarn is very peaceful, and it lets me smooth out the edges after a rough day,” she joked. “But it’s also very versatile.”

In the past, Hensel partnered with her son, a photographer, to create yarn pieces that conveyed themes about war through yarn. She said the pieces reflect how the techniques taught at the guild can create more than wearables.

“I wanted yarn to speak as a piece of fine art,” Hensel said.

It's the versatility and artistic expression that drew Maddy Bartsch to the Weavers Guild after studying in an apparel program at the University of Minnesota.

"I found that I was less interested in designing and making clothing and more interested in experimenting with textiles as an art form," Bartsch said.

She found courses at the textile center that allowed her to explore her newfound appeal toward textile-based art. And she has worked with the guild for two years as an instructor for natural dyeing, fiber processing and spinning.

Her piece for the exhibit blends her specialties with a process called "mindful stitching."

"I am naturally dyeing different sections of a long piece of fabric while incorporating mindful stitching; it is a technique that allows people to reduce stress and meditate," Bartsch said.

The process for most the exhibit pieces take an extended amount of time and focus to accomplish, and Bartsch said her piece intentionally shows that slow process.

"I wanted something that mirrored the process of building these pieces, and how each moment is captured through each step," she said.

These pieces and more will be featured at the exhibit which runs Jan. 19 through Feb. 24 with an opening reception that is free and open to the public from 5 to 7 p.m. Jan. 19 in the Carlander Family Gallery at the Paradise Center for the Arts.

Bartsch hopes the exhibit will inspire others to visit the Weavers Guild of Minnesota in Minneapolis and try a class that fits them.

"We all start as absolute beginners here at the guild, and this exhibit shows the years of work we dedicated toward our art," she said. "But we encourage people who see a technique or an art piece that speaks to them to come to the guild and experience it for themselves."

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## Correction

CORRECTION: The dates for the exhibit were update on Jan. 9 for the running dates to be Jan. 19 through Feb 24.

Reach Reporter Kelsey O'Hara at 507-645-1117 or follow her on Twitter @APGKelsey.

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## HISTORY OF WGM

Since its founding in 1940 by six women, including Hilma Berglund, the Weavers Guild of Minnesota has established itself as a nationally-recognized resource for the arts of weaving, spinning, and dyeing, according to the weavers guild's website, [weaversguildmn.org](http://weaversguildmn.org).

WGM offers classes and events year-round, serving nearly 700 new and experienced fiber artists each year. It was the catalyst in the formation of the Textile Center, where the Guild currently maintains classroom, retail and library space.

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## Kelsey O'Hara

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