

Sheila Farstad

Sheila Farstad is a creative soul with a studio in North Portal, SK who utilizes creative expression to explore inner-landscapes of her experiences and life. Her practice has included many different art techniques, workshops, retreats and classes over the past decades. In 2013/14, Sheila decided to explore the concept of “Art as Healer”, obtaining her Expressive Arts Therapy certificate and Creative Grief Coaching course. She shares her passion for and love of artistic expression with others who may need a way to express their voice and light in the world through healing art workshops and retreats. She shares meditation techniques through guided classes and private sessions. In addition to using art as healer, Sheila has training in many healing techniques and traditions and offers healing energy treatments out of her healing room beside her art studio.

List of Works:

All are wool needle felted and dyes on paper

<i>Big Hairy Mauve Flower</i> , 2016	<i>Big Hairy Red Flower</i> , 2016	<i>Big Hairy White Flower No. 1</i> , 2017
<i>Big Hairy Orange Flower</i> , 2016	<i>Big Hairy Purple Flower</i> , 2017	<i>Big Hairy White Flower No. 2</i> , 2017
<i>Big Hairy Green Flower</i> , 2016	<i>Big Hairy Gold Flower</i> , 2017	<i>Big Hairy Chartreuse Flower</i> , 2017
<i>Big Hairy Blue Flower</i> , 2016	<i>Big Hairy Black Flower</i> , 2017	<i>Big Hairy Pink Flower</i> , 2017

Image List

Cover Image: *Big Hairy Brown Flower* (detail), wool needle felted and dyes on paper, 2016.
Interior images, top to bottom: *Big Hairy White Flower No. 02*, *Big Hairy Chartreuse Flower*, and *Big Hairy White Flower No. 01*, all are wool needle felted and dyes on paper, 2017.

Selected Bibliography:

Farstad, Sheila. *Artist Interview*, 11 October 2017.
Farstad, Sheila. *Artist Statement*, 2017-11-09
Wilberg, David. “Farstad’s work chosen at art show”, *Estevan Mercury*, 16 November 2016.
<http://www.estevanmercury.ca/news/arts-entertainment/farstad-s-work-chosen-at-art-show-1.2787228> (accessed 12 October 2017).

This publication accompanies the exhibition *I Felt Inspired*, presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from November 10th – December 8th, 2017.

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I Felt Inspired

Sheila Farstad, November 10 – December 8, 2017



Explorations in Botany

They are eye catching. Such vibrant colours stand out against the stark white walls of the exhibition space. You cannot help but be drawn to them. The allure is their rich colours and tantalisingly soft appearance. These *big hairy flowers* reach out to their audience from the wondrously dyed paper upon which they are mounted, like plants stretching forth to the sun. Each flower is a massive soft sculpture, made from needle felted wool, most of which has been hand-dyed by the artist, their dyed paper support stretched over wooden frames providing stability.¹

Sheila Farstad entered five such flowers in to the Estevan Art Council's Ev Johnson Memorial Adjudicated Art Show in November of 2016.² It was a new venture, combining old loves, dyes on paper, with new passions, needle felted wool. She fell in love with wool a few years ago when she did a wet felting class. The appeal was instantaneous, she was drawn to the warm, soft, and tactile nature of fibre.³

This body of work has emerged from Farstad's long-time adoration of flowers.⁴ Never one to limit her form of expression,⁵ when she found the right medium, the *big hairy flowers* were born. An extension of Farstad's desire to renew, interpret, and transform in her creative process, presenting a unique perspective. These larger than life, fantastical flowers are an invitation to transport her audience to a world where the oft overlooked beauty and mystery of the natural world is manifested before you.⁶

To Sheila these works are "simple, honest, and playful"⁷. They are certainly spirited, with their large, often flopping petals, stamen, and pistils. By presenting these majestic specimens in such a large scale she presents a clear view of the intimate inner workings of the flower, exposing the male and female parts, and yet, the obvious parallel between fertility and flora is not an element under examination with these pieces.

Art is an important means of expression to Farstad. It provides an opportunity to explore her emotions, to present the intangibility of these feelings and sense of the chaotic explosion of colours of the dyes in every work. Her work is a representation of her inner self, her soul laid bare. Quirky, bold, inventive, her works and her process mimic who she is as a person. In her practise with dyes, Farstad sprinkles powdered pigment at random across paper. She leisurely adds water to the work, allowing the dyes to spread and swirl, creating an uncontrolled, entirely unique and organic landscape that she uses to mount her flowers. There are no preconceptions, with the exception of colour, the final product is the opposite of the flowers themselves, uncontrolled and free.

Needle felting, counter to the dying process, is long, tedious, and delicate work, but the results are stunning. The time-lapse video demonstrates the gradual creation of one of the felted flowers in the exhibition, *Big Hairy Gold Flower*. The steady building of the soft sculpture is interesting to observe, the layering and needling, piece by piece, of the wool to eventually reveal a single pedal from the flower, soon a whole ring of furry petals. It provides great context into the creation of these otherworldly botanical wonders.

These imaginative three-dimensional sculptures are whimsical in their very essence. At times, we recognise the flowers we know, but simultaneously dismissed as unfamiliar due to their overwhelming size or the process by which they were made. They spread out, across their vibrant backdrops, their petals flopping or draping beyond the confines of their colourful world. Tendrils twining in the unoccupied space, offering beautiful contrast and play with

⁷ Farstad, Sheila. *Artist Statement*, 2017.



the chaotic explosions of dyes beneath their bodies.

The *hairy flowers* are supported by armatures, making them posable, while also giving them an element of freedom beyond their floral form. There is a suggestion of strength beneath their soft, compliant exterior. Hung on a diagonal, there is no specified right or wrong way to mount them.

Sheila wants to transport her audience into a magical world of her own making. That she, like many before her, has chosen flowers as the perfect medium to convey a sense of easy joy and whimsy to the viewer is a testament to their versatility in the art world.⁸ Throughout history, mythology, and religion, flowers have held significant meaning. Their symbolism changes from culture, to culture, across time, and depending on the type of flower and even their individual colour. Perhaps the most famous examples would be the use of flowers during the Victorian era to convey sentiment, today, still red roses are held as an indicator of romantic affection.

For Farstad, the meaning of her flowers is perhaps a little more imperceptible than that. Through her work she desires to establish a relationship with her audience to evoke light-hearted emotions.⁹ She has for years photographed flowers, nurturing her love of them, without truly understanding why, until this body of work.¹⁰ This work embodies the limitless imagination we all possess, to take what we see around us in the natural world and to rework it into the fantastical.

These mesmerising constructs titillate our imaginations, they offer us an opportunity to look again at the small, simple things we can often take for granted in our daily lives. We are reminded to take a moment in our day to, as the cliché goes, stop and smell the roses.

¹ Interview with artist, 2017.

² *Big Hairy Red Flower, Big Hairy Blue Flower, Big Hairy Mauve Flower, Big Hairy Orange Flower, and Big Hairy Green Flower*, were the names of Sheila Farstad's original *Big Hairy Flower* series submitted for the Estevan Art Council's Ev Johnson Memorial Annual Adjudicated Art Show, in 2016.

³ Wilberg, David. "Farstad's work chosen at art show", *Estevan Mercury*, 16 November 2016. <http://www.estevanmercury.ca/news/arts-entertainment/farstad-s-work-chosen-at-art-show-1.2787228> (accessed 12 October 2017).

⁴ Interview with artist, 2017.

⁵ Farstad, Sheila. *Artist Statement*, 2017.

⁶ *ibid*

⁸ Farstad, Sheila. *Artist Statement*, 2017.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Interview with artists, 2017.