



Chapter 3

“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.”

- Scott Adams

**“You can’t use up creativity. The more you use,
the more you have. “**

-Maya Angelou

Our creativity is like a muscle. If we exercise it, it will grow. If we fail to use it, it will atrophy. Human beings are seekers of comfort. We often crave our safe space, wrapping ourselves in the familiar to nurture our sense of security. There’s nothing wrong with that essential urge. But to reach our full potential, we’ve got to leave that place. We need to locate that creative muscle and give it a good workout occasionally.

Remember that thrill of accomplishment you felt when you first learned your craft? If you’re like many learners, you may have kicked out a series of scarves, maybe a placemat or two, or a couple of tea towels. Once you have enough rectangles, where do you look to regain that feeling of excitement? Maybe you’re even one of those weavers who ran this course of early production, and now you’ve stashed that little loom in the closet, wondering why you invested in it in the first place. This chapter is intended to get you out of your shell, help you drag that rigid heddle from the closet, introduce an additional element to your weaving, and renew that sense of wonderment.

No more of that “I’m just not creative.” excuse. If that is you, park those excuses at the door. I hope we make you just a little uncomfortable here to expand that inner and outer creative being that is you.

I have to admit it. This chapter’s two inspired designs are probably the projects that pushed me from my comfort zone more than any others in this book. I decided to start with screen printing for the first piece, then added photo transfer to

the second. Although I did a little silk screening on paper in my college days, it has been too many decades ago to have retained much.

Feeling a little reluctant to try something new as I was? This next artist is one of the most authoritative voices in breakout strategies for “getting your creative on” in the fiber arts practice. Whether you are out to make some art or just looking for inspiration to take the next step, “beyond the rectangle,” grab your highlighter and let’s go!

Jane Dunnewold

I was first introduced to Jane Dunnewold when I purchased her *Creative Strength Training*, an inspirational book aimed at seeking out and growing your creative skills.

A prolific fabric artist and educator with a career spanning nearly three decades, Jane has mounted multiple solo shows, been the recipient of a host of international awards, and authored numerous books on surface design and artistry in fabric. Her archives were recently acquired by the International Quilt Study Center and Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska.

I met Jane in San Antonio in her spacious and well-appointed studio where she works and conducts classes. She was enthusiastic about her online courses and master class offerings as well.



I found her to be an authentic and articulate voice to help others find their way through the maze of self-expression.

You can find out more about Jane at

www.janedunnewold.com.



Still Life With Cat

In your published words, you've mentioned overcoming difficult times in your life through your creative pursuits. If you could tell your younger self anything, what would it be?

If I had to point out anything to my younger self, it would be to spend some time thinking about what I wanted to do; not to just run on default or on all of the things that everybody else told me I should do. If I was giving somebody younger advice, and that's what I do, I'd ask two questions: "Ok, what's practical, and what do you want to do?" It goes by so fast. If you can possibly manage it, it's good to be doing what you want to do. It's what I think of as alignment. Alignment is when what you love to do and what you are good at doing are somehow tag-teaming.

The other thing I would say is, "Take a deep breath and roll with it because it is going to work out one way or another." This doesn't mean that what happens is always what you want to happen, but it means that you're going to be capable of whatever it is.

You use a lot of symbology in your work. Would you describe your process, your choices, as more intuitive or more intellectual?

I think it's a mix. In my situation, I've had a life where I had to totally figure it out on my own. I had to develop my practical side. That side looks at something and strips it down to what it really needs

to be. I think that's good. But the intuitive side always begins the process. I didn't realize that until I had been working as an artist for a while - all of the series I've created started with some lightbulb moment. Lots of times, these come at 4:00 in the morning, or I may wake up with an idea.

One time I was looking out the window of my office where my studio was and saw these pigeons landing on a wire. Every time a new pigeon landed, they all scooped over, so they were the same distance apart. I thought, "Isn't that interesting. They have healthier boundaries than humans do." That intuitive realization spawned a series of 15 pieces about boundaries and human beings and how we allow borders to control us in ways that are frequently negative. Animals migrate wherever they have to go. They don't give a damn whether it's the US or Mexico.

So the intuitive hit is usually there, and it sparks the initial idea. After that, I go about things rather deliberately. I put down words at the top of a page, then use free association to connect the dots out of my unconscious onto the paper. That's where the symbols come from, so what represents boundaries: maps, birds on wires, wholesnesses, the moon, the sun, roundness. I explore all of that, and it guides me to make the tools I create.

These tools are basically for printing because I'm a surface designer by nature. Then, when I've got

Etude #23



those all ready to go, they fit together seamlessly because I did the work. After that, it goes back to intuitive playtime.

What kind of planning and research do you do before beginning your work?

I'm big on series. One thing we tease apart in my advanced classes is what's going on with something that isn't working. Sometimes it's because there are two pieces slammed into each other instead of being two separate pieces.

Once you learn to use free association and the strategies I use to come up with designs, tools, etc., you realize that if it's got a lot of juice to it, it is going to take a series of pieces.

If I work in a series, I'm thinking long term about what is going into it. I also, at that point, think about limiting what the variables are. I was invited to do a show where I realized I was going to need 40 pieces. How was I going to get 40 pieces done in 8 months? So I thought, "Ok, I'm going to need to limit the variables, so I don't have so many choices to make." I had to decide in advance that each piece was going to be between 12-18" tall and 20-35" wide, so they would all fit together in the space. I'm going to work only in grey, white and black to see how far I can carry that. I'm going to start each week by dyeing four pieces of fabric in that rough size. So done, boom, decided. It sounds very regimented, but it's actually a system within which there is a lot of freedom.

If it's something more topical, I shouldn't admit it, but I love Google. If you're curious, it's so useful because it's so much more instantaneous than flipping through a dictionary or encyclopedia. I was thinking about the fact that I always use the word strategies. I've been very deliberate in what I write, choosing my words so they have meat to



Zebra Thistle

them, and I can turn them into my own language. So I looked up strategies, and it means layers, strata. It's layers of the work that you do; it's layers of who you are as a human being. A strategist is the master of the layers. We are the master or mistress of our layers, whether it's choosing our colors, or warping the loom, or adding the embellishments, or whatever it is. It made it so much more profound by understanding what the word meant in a way that I had never thought about before.

In your book, *Creative Strength Training*, you offer several ideas for overcoming stumbling blocks. What are some of your favorite strategies to become unblocked?

I used to have a studio on the 3rd floor of a dilapidated church building. What I loved about it was that everything around it was in disrepair also.

Sometimes when I had a student who was stuck, I would get some oranges from the store and make the student stand at the 3rd-floor window and throw oranges onto the parking lot across the street to see them splat!

Another exercise I did was tape a paper tablecloth down on the sidewalk below and had people pour paint on it from the window.

A big thing to do when you don't have the advantage of a 3rd-floor window is tape a large piece of paper to the floor, then take some cheap black paint and a broom and draw with the broom in really big brushstrokes. We get so tight, which is part of being stuck. Students will usually do these exercises, and they immediately break the block.

I don't get a chance to do these as much as I used to, although I've done them, and I know how they feel. My version of it now is, like with the piece I was working on last week. I had gone as far as putting this very large focal point on it and fusing it down, so it's done, Jane!

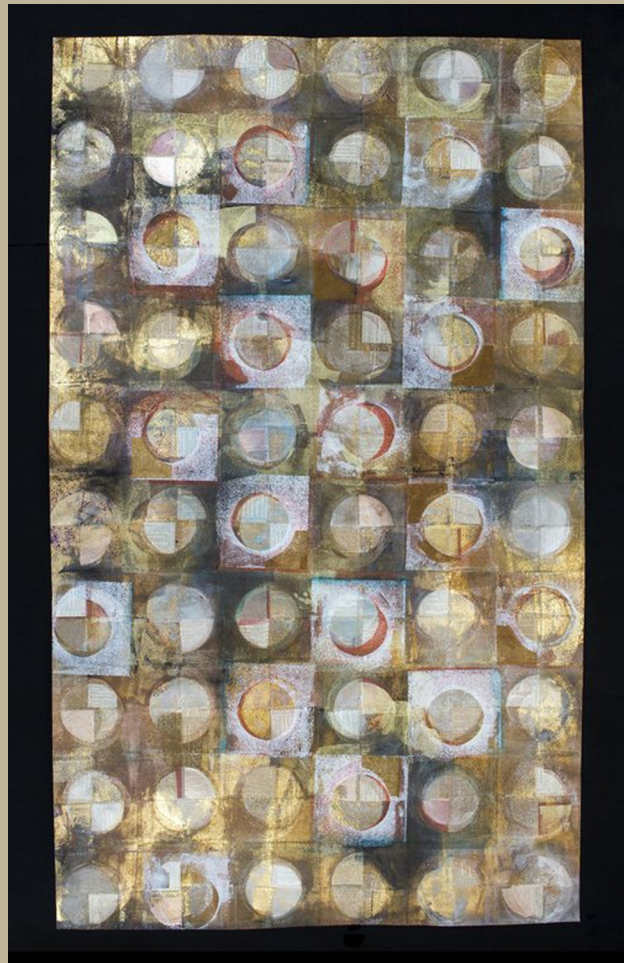
I kept looking at it and thinking, "It's not right." The proportions just weren't right. Finally, I just ripped it off. There were all the little tears in it. I was going to have to deal with it. Fortunately, I was able to cover the damage that was there and reestablish the focal point. For me, I have to be stuck long enough that I will do just about anything to get out of it. It's like when you're standing on the edge of a swimming pool, knowing it's going to be really cold and you have to jump in. Finally, you dive in, and it's great and refreshing. That period of angst almost has to be there. You have to get so fed up that the tide turns, and you're just going to do it.

What advice would you offer to those among us who may suffer from a feeling of inadequacy in their work?

I'm very interested in archetypes and how those symbolic patterns address human behavior.

There's an archetype called the wounded healer. This is the person who can heal other people because she herself has experienced whatever the student is going through. I don't have a degree in art: I'm completely self-taught. I was going to go into the ministry.

I have a degree in psychology. That has been really useful, partly for the teaching that I do and partly



Structure #1: Messengers

because that's what has introduced me to all these wonderful symbolic references that come back into my work.

I've worked very hard to be a good teacher, and part of that is recognizing when students feel as though they are not good enough. So I call it out. The first thing I say in the morning of our first class is, "We're not going to look around and say, "Oh, hers is better, or HERS is better, and what am I doing here. Let's acknowledge that's what we all do, so we can put all that negative energy outside the door, come back in here, close the door; this is our sacred space for creating."

What currently influences you, and where do you see that going in your future work?

It's important for me to continue the teaching that I do. I don't teach surface design as much as I teach

self-actualization as an artist. The master program that I run is a 2-1/2 year program where the same people come back five times. I'm shifting from technique and process to interior development. I see the next few years of my career focusing on that because it kind of comes full circle to my psychology background.

From an artistic standpoint, I've consciously decided that I want to work smaller. I spent a lot of the early parts of my career working bigger. I see my work as scaling down in size. Part of this is to make my work more accessible to people who would like to have a piece but can't afford it or doesn't have the room for it.

Also, I'm much more interested in working with pre-existing vintage materials rather than creating brand new cloth from white fabric. With so much stuff in the world now, I've gotten more involved in appropriating vintage embroidery made by some unknown maker that has now shown up at Goodwill. I'm also interested in unfinished quilt blocks, or things that can be used to complete a story that somebody else started.

What are a couple of parting thoughts you might provide to encourage our readers to find inspiration?

I think it's a good idea, because we all have phones and cameras, to pick a topic each month. You can make a list of a year's worth of ideas in advance if you like. I'm taking this from an exercise in a class we do online called "The Creative Eye." I pick a topic each month like "sky," and everyone is challenged to post pictures that represent the sky on this private forum page. So there are pictures of the sky reflected in windows and sunsets, of course. Every single day there is a new way to see the sky, so spend that month with the camera taking pictures that represent your topic. The crazy thing about noticing is that it's everywhere as soon as something comes onto your radar. It's a great way of establishing a habit of really looking at what is around you.

Another thing is to surf around on YouTube and look at things other people are doing. Sometimes I



Frieda's Gate

type words randomly, like "Funny Art," because I have to research the videos that I create. Don't remain the observer. If it looks fun, don't just think, "Oh, I would never do that." Do it! Buy the little pens that they've got there or whatever it is. Order it and set aside a day to explore it. That's why classes are good. A teacher makes you do things that you will not do yourself.

Nobody will make a coal garden [i.e., a colorful spiked creation made from coal and simple materials] unless a teacher makes them do it. Pretty soon, you're open to all kinds of things you wouldn't have tried. That stretches the creativity and builds the muscle memory.



Surface design on fabric is a broad and beautiful study. I narrowed it down to a little printing and photo transfer in the two pieces in this chapter.

This will allow you to dip your toe in the water without making a big investment upfront.



Folium and Sphere Cowl

This cowl (or optional scarf length) is done with a clasped warp to create the vertical color changes shown. Instructions for this special warp are in the pattern that follows. You may choose to repurpose a previously woven piece that just needs a little extra jazz instead.

If you weave the clasped warp pattern, you can adjust the number of color changes depending on the available yardage you have. This one is great for using up small quantities from your yarn stash.

Finished Measurements approx. 9-1/2" (24 cm) W x 41" (104 cm) L for cowl length. 70" (178 cm) L for scarf - changes in parenthesis.

Equipment for Weaving

- Rigid heddle loom with at least 12" (30.5 cm) weaving width
- 8 dent reed
- 1 stick shuttle

Warp: You will want to use plant-derived fibers such as bamboo, Tencel, rayon, or organic cotton yarn for good printing results in a DK (3/2) or sport gauge. Don't use synthetic or protein fibers such as wool as they won't accept the dye effectively. I used Interlacements ZigZag, 100% rayon, 8 oz. = 500 yds (457 m).

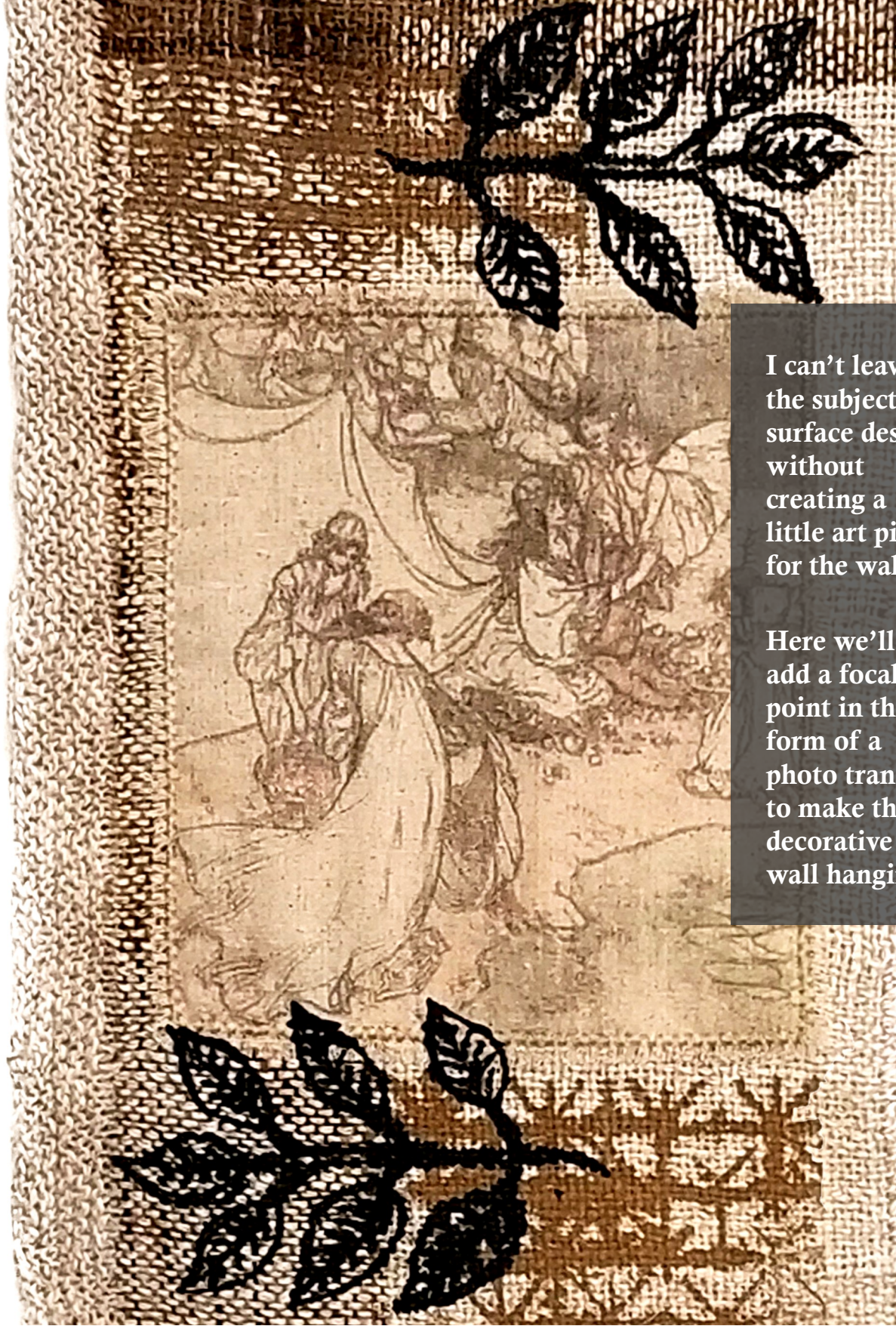
Color 1: Olive uses 178 (260) yds, 160 (235) m
Color 2: Brown uses 125 (182) yds, 111.5 (163.5) m
Color 3: Champagne uses 43 (62) yds, 36.5 (54)m

Weft: Fingering gauge (5/2) bamboo, Tencel, or rayon. Uses 137 (235) yds, 125.5 (215) m. I used Dragon Tale 5/2 rayon in Olive, 8 oz. = 1050 yds (960 m).



For Printing:

- Household rubber gloves or disposable nitrile gloves (optional)
- Small squeegee or old plastic credit card, key card, or loyalty card to use as a squeegee
- Fabric paint - avoid glitter paint as this may clog your screen.
- Thermofax screens with designs of your choice
- Worktable and scrap fabric (I used muslin) to allow 4 layers to cushion the work and absorb paint
- Scrap cardboard to fit under your printing area and T pins to secure the fabric to the cardboard
- I was very messy and glad that I had a cheap, paper table cloth to cover my work area.



I can't leave the subject of surface design without creating a little art piece for the wall.

Here we'll add a focal point in the form of a photo transfer to make this decorative wall hanging.

Folium and Fairies Wall Hanging

To introduce a third element for this piece, I tried Jane's suggestion. I started writing words down that would associate with the natural forms I had chosen for the screen printing: nature, plants, floral, wings, feminine, fairies. With those ideas in mind, I found the line drawing, shown at right, on the internet. This image is considered public domain, not subject to copyright laws.

You may have your own photo, or there are several websites where you can obtain royalty-free, no accreditation (no credit to the photographer required) in the resources section. On both moral and legal grounds, It is important to respect the rights that are due to the originator of any words or images we appropriate.



Finished Measurements approximately 11" (28 cm)

W x 19" (49 cm) L

Equipment and Materials

- Laser copy of the image you want to transfer - I went to the local office supply store to make mine.
- Woven scrap for the foundation. I salvaged one side of a linen cowl that wasn't being worn. Be sure to select natural plant based fiber to accept the paint effectively.
- A small piece of light colored or light neutral fabric (plant based fiber) for photo transfer
- Sewing machine and thread or needle and thread to secure fabric piece to the weaving
- Household rubber gloves or disposable nitrile gloves
- Expired plastic credit card, key card, or loyalty card to use as a squeegee (or a small squeegee)
- Kitchen spoon for burnishing the transfer
- Citrasolv cleaner and glass (not plastic) bowl or jar to hold a small quantity
- Sponge or sponge brush to apply Citrasolv. I cut a piece of memory foam I had on hand.
- Fabric paint, non-glitter
- Masking tape
- Thermofax screens with designs of your choice
- Work table and scrap fabric (I used muslin) to allow 4 layers to cushion the work and absorb paint
- Scrap cardboard to fit under your printing area and T pins to secure the fabric to the cardboard
- Cheap plastic table cloth to cover the work area
- Colored or soft graphite pencils to sharpen transfer image (optional)
- Hanging Poster frame (optional)