

Bits and Pieces from the Thrum Chums



Eight active members of a group that call themselves the Thrum Chums have their hooked rugs in Cedarburg Art Museum's exhibition "The Art and Craft of Rug Hooking." As you visit this exhibition, you might wonder, what is a Thrum Chum? These area women came together with an interest in creating traditional hooked rugs, and in gathering over the years, have become good friends--or Chums.

So we know a bit about the Chums, but what then, is a Thrum? Simply, a "thrum" is a scrap of wool. It may be the tail end of the strip that is discarded for being too short for other uses, or a longer piece that can be incorporated into other projects. With rug hooking having its origins as a utilitarian craft using any scraps on hand, the term "thrum" honors the tradition of the art and craft today.



Left to right, and top to bottom, the Thrum Chums are: Nancy Allen, Jo Fox, Renée Haugen, Kathleen Limbach, Lynn Rix, Emily Robertson, Joanne Young and Mary Alice Schueler.

Thrum Chum member Renée Haugen tells us that she first learned rug hooking in the 1980s from Lynn Raffensberger who taught classes in her home in Whitefish Bay. When Lynn stopped teaching she encouraged her students to start groups or join guilds to continue their rug hooking. The Thrum Chum group formed with six members; some were from the East Side of Milwaukee, others from as far as West Bend, Wisconsin. Of the original members, only Renée from West Bend remains in the group today. Besides Renée, seven other current members have their work in this exhibition: Mary Alice Schueler (Cambellsport), Jo Fox (Cedarburg), Emmy Robertson (Milwaukee), Lynn Rix and Joanne Young (Mequon), and Nancy Allen and Kathleen Limbach, also from West Bend.

Nancy Allen reflects about her association with the group: "As women we gather together to work with our hands, as do women in other disciplines. It seems to come naturally. Color and design pull us into this art one loop at a time, and then one rug follows another. The [meetings of the] Thrum Chums, as we like to call ourselves, is where we share, encourage and evolve our rug hooking skills. There is nothing better than to see our work on our floors, walls, and homes just for the love of rug hooking."

When asked what the most common question they hear about rug hooking, several members noted that most often they must explain that what they do is traditional rug hooking, as opposed to other activities such as latch hooking, which involves using a hinged hook to knot, then draw pre-cut pieces of yarn through a base material.

Emmy Robertson notes that she is most often asked about the amount of time a hooked rug takes her to complete. One square foot of hooked rug may take six to eight hours, not including material preparation. As an artist who creates her own pattern designs and who dyes her own wool, Emmy's rugs are immensely time-consuming. Some rug hookers in the group may work at one project for hours on end, while others may take years to finish a rug, working small amounts

of time at one sitting. A number of members enjoy crafting rugs from pre-designed patterns, while others elevate the craft by creating original designs. Some enjoy the challenges of dyeing their own wool, while others purchase their wool already dyed.

-Laura Weber, 2017.