Felting basic workshop

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**What is felting?**

 Felt is a textile made from wool that is manipulated to bond together. Wool felts because of its microscopic scales that are apart of its follicle. Through the use of a vehicle (in this instance, soap and water), agitation and change in temperature, the fibers weave between one another and latch together to form a tight meshed fabric.

 Wool is cross-hatched, moistened with warm soapy water and agitated. The hot water causes the scales of the follicle to open and the fibers to slip passed one another during agitation. After the fibers have formed a tight, tangled mass, the work is soaked in a series of hot and cold baths to open and close the scales, clamping and adhering the fibers together.

**Uses of felting**

Felting can be textural, sculptural and or two-dimensional. The material can be pre dyed and fibers can be added, this along with treatment to the surface, can create a variety of interesting shapes, textures and color combinations and color effects.

**Textural**

As a sheet, felt can act as a textural skin. With several other treatments, colors, textures and added fibrous materials, felt can be manipulated to create different effects that can be applied to the surface of a different material.

**Sculptural**

Wool can be an additive process by both needle felting and wet felting. In both processes, one can build up layers of material to create three-dimensional forms that have a soft quality.

**Two Dimensional**

Careful application of colored layers can be used to create a 2 dimensional image. This is done with the use of a fine mesh screen that prevents layers from shifting during the agitation process.

**Materials**

For this basic hollow form workshop, you will need the following materials:

A spray bottle, Warm soapy water, bubble wrap, a fine mesh screen, some plastic bags, and roughly 8 oz of wool.

**Procedure**

1. Bubble wrap – a fine bubble wrap provides a slick surface and adequate pressure and agitation during the felting process. The bubbles help the shifting of the surface, causing more suds to form.
2. Lay out wool in thin perpendicular layers slightly larger than desired.These layers, with the use of soap for lubrication, allow the fibers to slide and weave between one another responsible for the cloths integrity.
3. For this workshop, we will be making a hollow form. In this instance we will be using an extra piece of plastic between two sides. Cut out desired shape and place it on top of your first layer of woolen layers.
4. Moistened the insert and fold over the wool on to the other side of the plastic insert. These layers will be tucked over every time you alternate sides. Now lay a new layer of perpendicular layers.
5. Moisture – the water you use should be warm, and slick to the touch from soap. You would wet the wool so that it is barely moist to the touch, but not saturated. You should add moisture gradually between checking your progress. Wool that is too saturated will not felt, it will end up being a horrible hairy mess.
6. Lay out mesh screen over surface of wool. This mesh prevents the wool from shifting too much in the first part of the process. When the wool has been felted a good amount, you may choose to remove wool and felt directly.
7. With a grocery bag, move wrist in a circular motion, lightly touching the surface. A plastic bag provides the perfect amount of pressure to start out with. Barely touching the surface is the perfect amount of pressure, as time goes on (a good bench mark is every five minutes) you will slowly increase pressure. You should be able to see a light layer of suds form on the surface of the mesh, if not, you need more moisture. This is a good indictor that you are felting correctly.
8. After every five minutes, carefully lift the mesh screen to prevent the wool from adhering to it.
9. Flip over and felt the other side of work after ever five minutes. Add perpendicular layers to each side until the desired thickness is reached.
10. Continue to agitate for cycles of five minutes. You may choose to occasionally check the work the make sure it is felting properly. To do this lift the mesh screen and pinch the layers of wool. If the wool pulls up in layers, it is not yet ready, if it lifts as a single sheet instead of hairy webs, you may move on to the next step.
11. If your work is pinching up as one piece, you should continue for one more five-minute interval, roughly agitating. You may choose to use an extra piece of bubble wrap instead of a plastic bag to agitate.
12. The insert inside can now be removed while the work is soapy and wet. Cut a small hole half the size you desire and remove the form from inside, using for fingers, you may now stretched the opening to the desired size.
13. After you have finished agitating and can freely pickup and manipulate the work, fill a bucket with hot water and allow the work to soak for five minutes before removing it and allowing it to soak in an ice cold bucket. Repeat this three to four times before allowing the work to dry.