

A Bit about Feathers and Tapestry

Some of my earliest memories are of feathers. My Gramma holding me tightly after I had fallen and gifting me with a feather. Telling me lovingly that I needed to walk before I could fly... of feathers with bits of cloth tied to branches gently floating in the breeze. Feathers that told stories. Feathers that became stories.

Feathers that became harbingers of future events.

Harbingers and warnings about the "last days/evil days/heartbreaking days.

Feathers hung by doors and sometimes above doors. Feathers released into storms- physically, mentally even for spiritual meaning. Hearing my Gramma saying and murmuring softly whispered words that feathers have a language if one only listens.

AND, meanings that softly gently smooth a way the fear of the unknown or disperse anger or be a recognition of momentous events and tears. Of Feather effigies recognizing and

recognition of and for troubles and problems. *Feathers Floating away* taking their answers and qualms-be they good or bad as they float softly with their ribbon ties or left as offerings on poles and branches

of ancient trees. Trees densely adorned with mosses and feather like ferns. A feather fan held just right to whisper fantastic stories of beasts, shapeshifters, and daemons-that might be true. or not or might not be...

The graceful movement of hands holding a feather fan or sometimes a single feather with pale delicate swirling flowing tendrils of slowly moving veils of smoke and smudge and hidden *dreams of past, present, and future.*

So, began my fascination with feathers and the hidden qualms of being the oldest living Granddaughter of

the crazy haunted lady full of secrets who wore feathers and pearl button necklaces and lived up the constantly flooding river valley, over an almost deep



Figure 1 And He...the largest sewing thread twenty-two epi that I have woven. My Gramma's story. by klth



Figure 2Wool-detail of And He...klth

Georgietwee Wherley

Nov 3 · 🌱

i need a feather
where do they live?
who can tell me?
i need a "Sign",...
more than I can say
i need a feather
tweedles, ...
send me a feather
from the sky, from the trees, from the universe
i need a sign
where do they live?



Figure 3Verse by one of oldest friends

blood red mudded impassable road on the side of a hill that everyone was afraid of for one reason or another.



Figure 4 Friends forever! KLTH

The "old crazy woman" or not who passionately believed along with her indigenous beliefs in the magic of feathers and other things best not talked about that anything written in the **B**IBLE and taken with an unhealthy dose of Fox's Book of Martyrs always underlined in red and black,

committed to memory along with the book of Revelations was absolutely death defyingly going to happen. *AND*, if one believed hard enough and well enough one could "perhaps" do miracles. To true! *AND!!!*, if you believed hard enough and rightly enough miracles could absolutely happen even unto resurrecting the dead and healing and you could walk through the valley of death without fear and had! **But** only if...

Now that I am old, I wish I had been allowed to know her better instead of always looking back through the darkly coloured mirror of memories and stories told about her by others who did not value her secret self and the things she might have, could have, would have taught me.

And, then there was the other side-my adored "Mayflower Grandmother" - a descendant of the Schoolcraft's and Todd's-and "of cabbages and Kings.' She loved to quote from Lewis Carrol when people when people became too serious about their origins. This was the Grandmother who taught me to always be busy with my hands to stay out of troubles-embroidery,

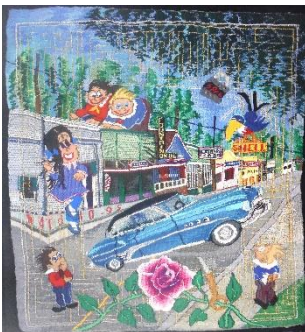


Figure 5 Safe Haven! KLTH
Check out bird feathers.

French sewing, quilting, Fribbles, Irish Crochet, weaving. Feeding my curiosity by challenging me to question everything and how it works-curiosity and nerdiness. By the time I was 8 or 9. I was drawing my own embroidery patterns for tea towels and copying traditional quilting patterns. *And* you guessed it! Stylized feathers for quilting patterns or the more acceptable or lady like

term was to call them plumes. *But*, hidden deep in my drawing tablets were always less stylized feathers floating, dreamy



Figure 6 Between to Grandmothers! KLTH



Figure 7 1950-60's

no logical backgrounds and or heavy quilted "horri vacui" backgrounds.

Of Backgrounds and Fribbles.

horri vacui

In visual art, horror vacui or kenophobia (from Greek for 'fear of the empty') is the filling of the entire surface of a space or an artwork with detail. In physics, horror vacui reflects Aristotle's idea that "nature abhors an empty space."



Figure 8 Feathers! klth

Backgrounds have always been difficult for me because of my early history in embroidered textiles and learning design from both my grandmother's- too culturally diverse ways of perceiving design, but, yet the same when it came to backgrounds. My Grandmothers perceptions were influenced or trained in design and taught them by their histories-No backgrounds- the design being free floating on a one colour background-cute and decorative. My other Gramma created

designs that were often fraught with meaning and the other not so much... Both arriving with beautiful designs but with slightly different purposes and with both backgrounds were unnecessary.

The outcome -I ended up being taught to stylize and objectify objects and then use those designs to create repetitive decorative designs by my Mayflower Grandmother or as my grandfather called them beautiful Fribbles.

And on the other hand, the image was more important than taking the time to worry about the background. The background just was.

feather visions of what might be or could be but not real-never real, or even close because they were never done...

SO, my first embroidered and/or woven feathers were clunky and heavily stylized as a child might draw with no real feathers in sight. And, of course, with my background as an embroider of fribbles, pillowcases and tea towels with

FRIBBLES

The semi, useless, utilitarian designs that women of good breeding and economic standing produced that made a man fill manly because he could afford to support his wife in a fashion that gave her time to create useless objects and not needful utilitarian things such as tea towels with embroidery and lace edges, or decorated pillow cases and decorative edges and of course the all-important hope chest-another term for a dowry chest of beautifully decorated textiles that would follow you wherever you ended up in later life...

We often/mostly copy the designs and use iconic stereotypes or the styles of things we see around us or are given by those who are our mentors or in a perfect world eventually deny those images and create our own designs.

Feathers or
Plumes from
an old French
book

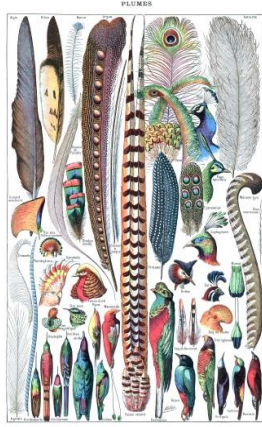


Figure 9 From a Dover Book on scientific illustrations

Depending on the things around us we will as children perceive our surroundings in much the same way as everyone else around us. Example-take a look at children's drawings of their homes

As I grew up, we copied the designs or the styles of things we saw around us, or my case given to me to by the group I happened to be associated with

that were considered to be good by one of 3 groups I was aligned with as a child.

Example-take a look at children's drawings of their homes. My Grandchildren were often the same as mine but without the mountain-no trees, but bushes as they lived outside of DC, but in the same way as almost every child. They drew what they saw as his home as they should. My early drawings were of a block house with a smoking chimney, a window on either side of the door with a knob, a tree in the front yard and a stylized triangle like Mount Hood with a snow line or timberline in the background with sun with ray, rainbows and and clouds.



Figure 10 Sharon Ryan Feather with added medallion

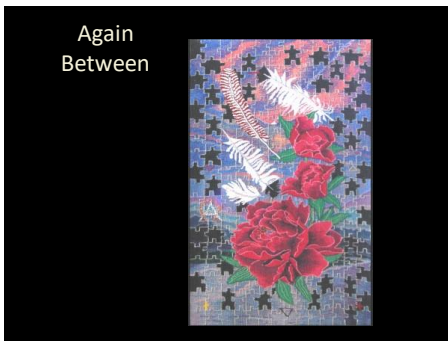


Figure 11 Again Between by klth

My feather drawings followed the same path—a shaft with vanes on both sides of the shaft—straight, slightly curved, or so curved as not to be anything other than idealized plume or patterning or comic book idealizations.

There is nothing right or wrong about this. It just is! My early feather drawings followed the same pattern—a shaft with vanes on both sides of the shaft—straight or slightly curved no detail all the sameness of a Walt

Disney cartoon sometimes attached to very sad stereotypical images.

There is nothing right or wrong or right about this. It just is!

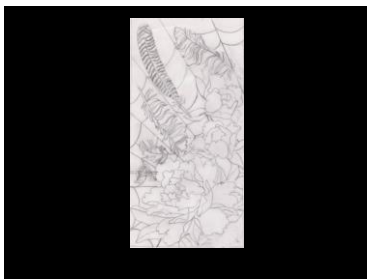


Figure 12 Original cartoon for Spiders Dilemma! by klth

AS I gradually evolved into my tapestry rendition skills(?) and began to think past and away from my learned stylization and moving towards a more pictorial narrative style. I begin study each of the objects I placed in a tapestry design and my work including my feathers has become more pictorially accurate and less stylized. Which may not be your path, but it is my path. And that is the way it should be. Each feather or object becoming more satisfying to weave—more mine. Feathers have become a

language presented and gifted to me by my “Crazy Gramma” and mean so much more to me and are yet so paradoxical to the embroidered fribbles of my Mayflower Gramma whom I respect deeply for all the things she taught me. But, not necessarily within my style of designing. Her gift was curiosity and exploration.

CAVEAT that always needs to be added that I write.

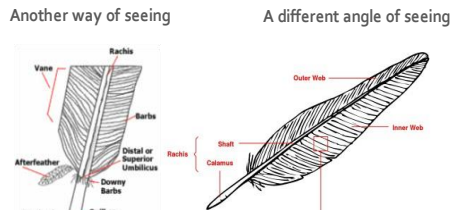
This blog has never been meant to be a critique or a manifesto on how others should weave feathers. It is about what is right for me with nothing meant to be a judgement on how others do things or weave feathers. Also, I realize I am a bit of a nerd when it comes to tapestry techniques and will always have a didactic ritualistic way of using technique and designing tapestries.

That Said-Beginnings-

So here begins my journey of weaving feathers- my way! With inclusions of feathers woven by friends and students.

For me to weave a feather I had first to learn to really look and see for myself what feathers look like and how they are constructed. To see how the anatomy of the feather affected the design of the feather once I began to weave the feather.

The typical anatomy of a feather



So let's thing about the anatomy of a feather. Did you know that there are seven distinctive styles or shapes of feathers? Each feather groupings all have particular uses and particular shapes?

Feathers are composed of a Rachis or shaft which is hollow and a vane on each side that is composed of barbs. The feathers hook together and you can style them move elements of the vanes around to produce effects in the shape and how one sees the feather emotionally.

Then, you have the seven basic shapes of feathers which is determined by how they are used by the bird. (For more about the anatomy of feathers you can just enter *Anatomy of a feather* into any search engine.)

Feathers fall into one of seven broad categories based on their structure and location on the bird's body.



But simply— 1. Tail feathers. Feathers that are usually arranged in a fan shape grouping. A bird will have six of these feathers. These are the feathers that interlock and support precision movement in flight. Tail feathers are arranged symmetrically in pairs. Then of course there are the showoffs the birds that have evolved into showy ornaments that are useless to flight.

2. The next type of feather is called a contour feather or in some cases covert



Figure 13 feather (3.5 inches by 6 inches by Linda Franco

that cover the body and streamlining their shape. These feathers are attached to the bones. They are arranged in overlapping patterns like shingles.

The waterproof tips are exposed to the elements and the part of the feather next to the body is downy. Sometimes drab coloured and sometimes showy they often determine whether the bird is showing off his colours or being used for camouflage.



Figure 14 Sharon Ryan

3. Wing feathers are created for flight and speed. Their surfaces are characterized by smooth uniform windproof surfaces or vanes on both sides of the feather shaft called remiges. Feathers are asymmetric with a slimmer less flexible edge that prevents twisting in flight.

4. Semi plume feathers are mostly hidden beneath other feathers. They have a central shaft or rachis but have no hooks on the feather barbs which creates a fluffy downy insulating structure.

5. Downy—They are similar to semi plumes but have an even looser structure of the barbs or barbules and little central shaft or rachis.



Figure 15 Rebecca Hooper

Usually noticeably short and positioned remarkably close to the body where they

My Feather Drawings & tracings of the drawings that I will use in the sampler & the Tapestry we will weave in the Weave Along for Feathers & Etc



trap body heat.

My Feather Drawings & tracings of the drawings that I will use in the sampler & the Tapestry we will weave in the Weave Along for Feathers & Etc.



Briefly to weave a feather-

So, to begin find a feather. Take a really good look at the feather. Ask yourself what the unique things about the feather. Write about the feather or list the elements you want to be part of the feather. Draw the feather.



Figure 16 First 2/3rds of Asana after the final turn on my Mirrix. klth

Or, Copy the feather on your scanner. Reduce the feather simplest form as an outline. Realize that a feather is composed of three elements, the vanes, the barbules, and the shaft-which can be arranged in sharp edges or in some cases downy lines. Choose to simplify the various shapes. Trace the image to create a cartoon image to weave. Decide which elements are the more most important. For me, the most important technique to create feather details is vertical and

Figure 19Nasty ladies unite!...
by Klth

geometric shapes that are created from the values within the feather. Some angles are easier than others so decide how the



Figure 18Laying out placing
the ten feather tracings that
will become the cartoon for

architectural soumack. Choose your background design. Choose the angle the feather will lay on. Reduce the design in your thought processes to

angles fit with in your design. Know that the choice is yours to make. Weave the background and begin to weave the feather at its lowest point.

Realize-You have all sorts of incredible techniques that you can use to create the feather such as bobbin

blending, line and dot soumak, lacing the edges, pic-n-pic(demi-duites), graded line soumack, textual bobbin blending (mixing various textures together within the bobbin blending & always outlining.

Do not be afraid to weave a mistake and then unweave it. Just think how much you learned from doing it!

Remember there are no tapestry police! Have fun. I do offer personalized instruction in weaving feathers.

Inquire at betweenandetc@comcast.net if your interested in critiques or learning to weave a feather and the techniques I use to create the feathers.



Figure 17Kristel Cromheeke's
Marquette for feather and
spirals.



Figure 20Kristel Cromheeke's finished feather
and spirals at her cutting off celebration on
Between & Etc's Wednesday zoom meeting.

fini