



HOOKING

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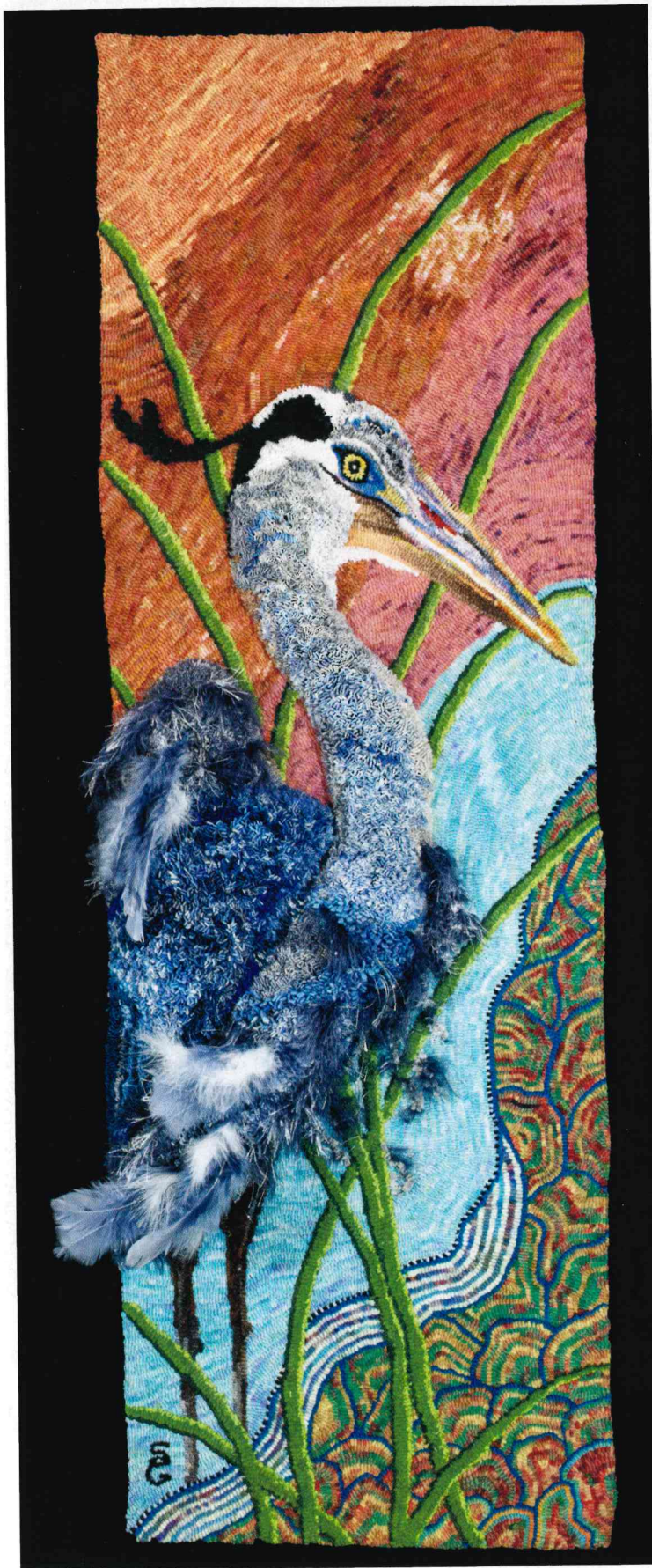
**FOLK-ART
HOUSES**

**FANCIFUL
FEATHERS**

HOOK AN IDIOM

**UPCYCLE! COMFY
COTTON RUGS**

FLORENTINE BIRD



LEFT: Bucky the Blue Heron, 16" x 46", #3-, 4-, and 5-cut hand-dyed and metallic-fused wool, velvet, silk, and feathers on linen. Designed and hooked by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2018.

Sandra has hooked more than one Bucky the Blue Heron, and this was her first; it was also a 2019 Celebration winner. She says, "I worked on this while taking a workshop with Diane Phillips who lives in the Rochester, New York, area. I was at a point where my backgrounds bored me and I wanted to explore new ideas, so I especially focused on what she taught us about background designs, using different styles. I tried her black-and-white beading technique (where black and white strips are hooked in a single, alternating line) along the back edge. In addition, I really enjoyed her cobblestone technique where circular shapes flow up the side. This works especially well with marbled wool." Sandra also experimented with having the subject placed off center, with the heron flowing off the edge, while still being able to give it dimension. She says, "My 92-year-old mom suggested we name this piece Bucky in honor of my father who had passed away. From the time we named this heron, I felt my dad sitting on my shoulder, watching it come alive."

me stitchery techniques and, of course, hoving (hooking loops higher than normal) and the Waldoboro technique (clipping the hoveed loops, leaving the pile high so that it forms three-dimensional shapes). These techniques are an important part of the work I do today with my bird creations."

"I have been fortunate to have a variety of excellent teachers over the past ten years of rug hooking, and they have all influenced me in many ways, big and small. I was a teacher for many years, so I go into each class without expectation. That helps me intuitively find things that I can take away. Teaching this medium is an art in itself. Various teachers' styles and ways of creating have helped things come together in my own work," Sandra explains. "At one time I felt my efforts were a bit too arranged and organized. Then I took a class with someone who is so open and loosely structured, I learned I could bring that feeling into my own work."

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Owl Series: Long Ear Owl, Barn Owl, Northern Hawk Owl. Each is 6" x 8", #3- and 4-cut hand-dyed wool, various yarns, and feathers. Designed and hooked by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2019.

"My Owl Series has been the most fun for me," Sandra says. "I took time from the big project, Owllet Leaving the Nest, to work on some cute owl faces. This also allowed me to use beautiful scraps of wool for backgrounds. During my visits to the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, I met their owl keeper and photographer. Owls are not easy to see up close in nature, so I feel lucky to have been able to study them intimately. I've now completed my tenth owl."



Hawk Eye, 36" x 30", #3-, 4-, and 5-cut hand-dyed wools, various yarns, feathers, roving, pipe cleaners, and wire on linen. Designed, hooked, needle felted, and constructed by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2017.

The Green Mountain Rug Hooking Guild issued a challenge for its 2017 Hooked in the Mountains Exhibit, asking

people to create hooked-rug based pieces that were three dimensional. Sandra had already been exploring sculptural effects in her bird pieces, and was inspired to bring it to a new level after watching a demonstration by Peg Irish, who showed how to create a wire armature for shape and support. Sandra says that, at the same time, she was noticing a lot of red tail hawks hunting birds at her feeders at home, and they also swooped in front of her car in her driveway on numerous occasions. She says, "I realized they were getting my attention, so I did research that suggested when you see them frequently, they are bringing you a message. The message was that many things in my life were changing. They inspired me to try something new and different with my birds."

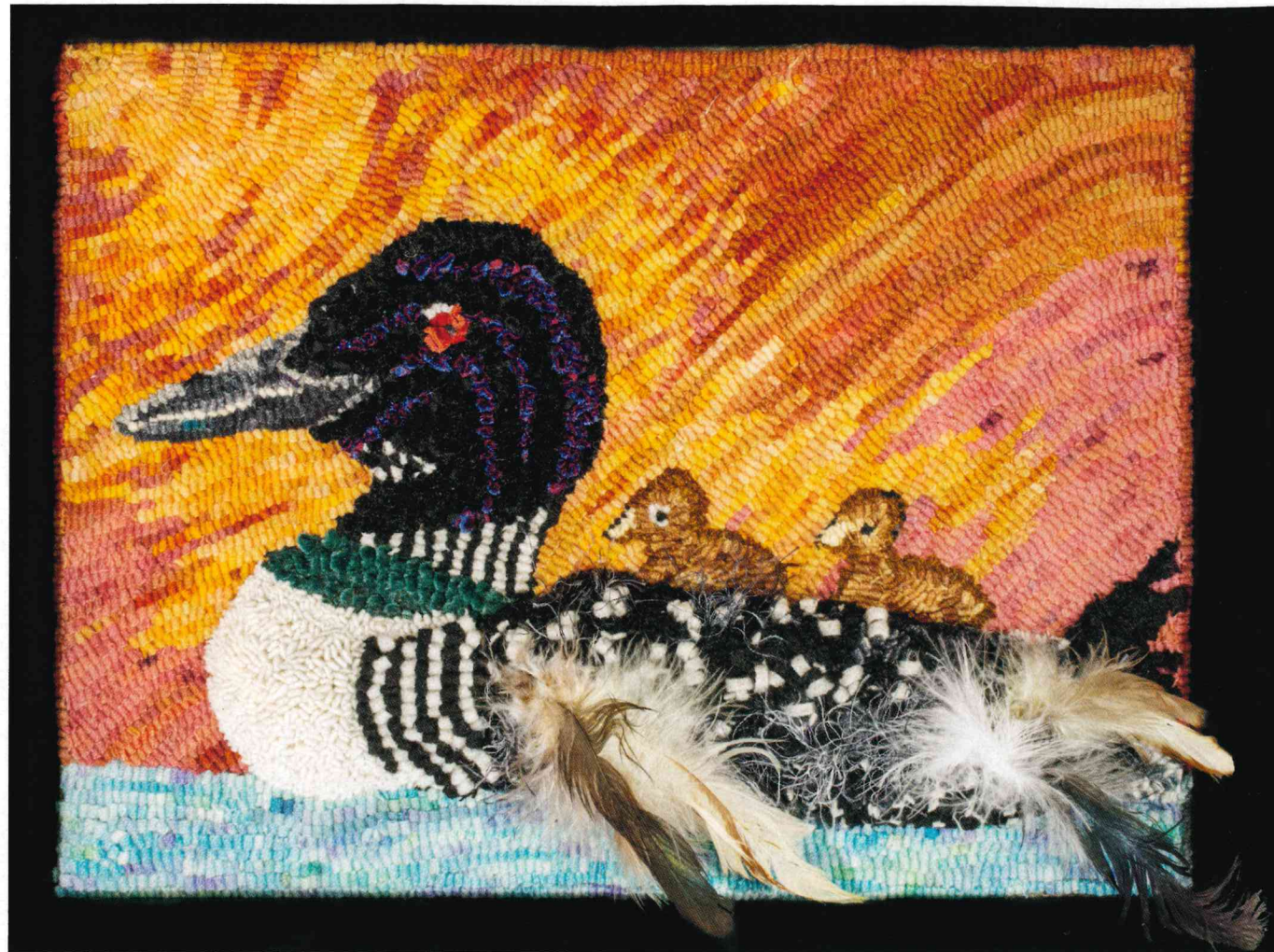


Sandra began by drawing a life-sized, 36" hawk. She proceeded to hook it in her usual fashion, creating long (hoveed) loops and sculpting them (in the Waldoboro style). She explains, "Every aspect of this bird became a challenge. How was I going to shape it, keep all the detail and feathers, and also edge and frame and support it with wire?" It took Sandra three different attempts to get the wire armature secured strongly enough to support the wings. She created the head with needle felting

(which she learned for the first time for this piece). Trial and error lead to her figuring out how to secure needle felting to linen and wool in a way that covered the wire support. The feet were a challenge. She tried applying a pair of metal ones she had acquired, but they were too heavy. A friend showed her how to instead create a pair of feet using pipe cleaners.

Her final challenge was figure out how to mount the bird for exhibit. "I secured plastic loops from the hardware store to the bird, and attached wires to them for hanging. I also found a folding metal stand for displaying if hanging Hawk Eye wasn't feasible in a particular display venue. This project is one of my favorites because it encouraged me to work through a lot of creative problem solving as I strove to do something unique."





Loon with Babies, 16" x 10", #3- and 4-cut hand-dyed and metallic-fused wool, various yarns, velvet, and feathers on linen. Designed and hooked by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2017.

"I had been hooking loons for a while, and was especially drawn to scenes where the babies sit on the backs of their mother. This required designing with sufficient space for the loon family," Sandra explains. "The family is backlit by a colorful sunset."

"Sometimes, influence comes from other rug hookers who may be doing things totally different from me," Sandra continues. "That can inspire me to try and use other techniques. In addition, going to different hooking groups opens one up to seeing and trying new things in ways one might not otherwise have imagined."

Sandra finds special inspiration from the work of botanical painter Mindy Lighthipe (Florida), and rug hookers Gene Shepherd (California), Diane Phillips, (New York), and Capri Boyle Jones (Florida).

Sandra believes the biggest influence in her work comes from the birds she sees

in her environment. "I create series of different species in a variety of gestures and positions. At present, I am drawn to owls of all kinds. Last year, I attended an owl festival at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) in Quechee, Vermont, and was fascinated to learn of the variety of owls there. They have different personalities and habits, making them such interesting subjects for my hooked rug creations."

Once Sandra starts to explore an idea, she will continue pursuing it as a concept morphs from one piece to another. "While making one piece, I may get the idea to try the subject in a different way, and so

second and third versions follow, each enhancing the original idea. At present, I am fascinated with how some shapes look if they are cut out near the edge of the subject instead of having a straight, finished border or edge. This idea is a challenge to execute because of the way I frame some of my pieces on a stretcher. I have also made birds that are three-dimensional structures, and others that are like cutouts of birds."

Linen is Sandra's backing of choice. Some of her favorite materials to work with are hand-dyed velvets and textured yarns. She works in #3-, 4-, and 5-cut strips of hand-dyed wool. She finds these



Owlet Leaving the Nest, 36" x 30" x 24" deep, #3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-cut hand-dyed wools, feathers, wire, wood, and other embellishments. Designed, hooked, and constructed by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2019.

Sandra had been working on a series devoted to owls for about six years when she became inspired to create a hooked nest attended by a mother as the owlet flew the nest. Sandra explains that "the idea of just hooking the scene on a piece of linen didn't excite me. I also wanted to try a new method of supporting the owl that wasn't the same type of wire armature as I had done for Hawk Eye. I began working on the mother, and did her as a cutout, thinking I would hang her on the wall. I have a friend who makes frames, and she suggested we try backing her with foam core board because that would lighten her weight for hanging. I then completed the owlet, and while still unsure of how to display the concept, I backed it on foam core too. A big challenge was how to finish edges, since they weren't being bound by whipping with yarn. Instead I needle felted roving to the edges, also securing it with glue. Now I had two owls and had to create their nest, which I finally did with raised wool loops, sculpting, and embellishing. I painted egg shells to match the actual colors of owl eggs, and I collected a variety of branches to add stability to the nest. I then finished it with roving, moss, and fiber.

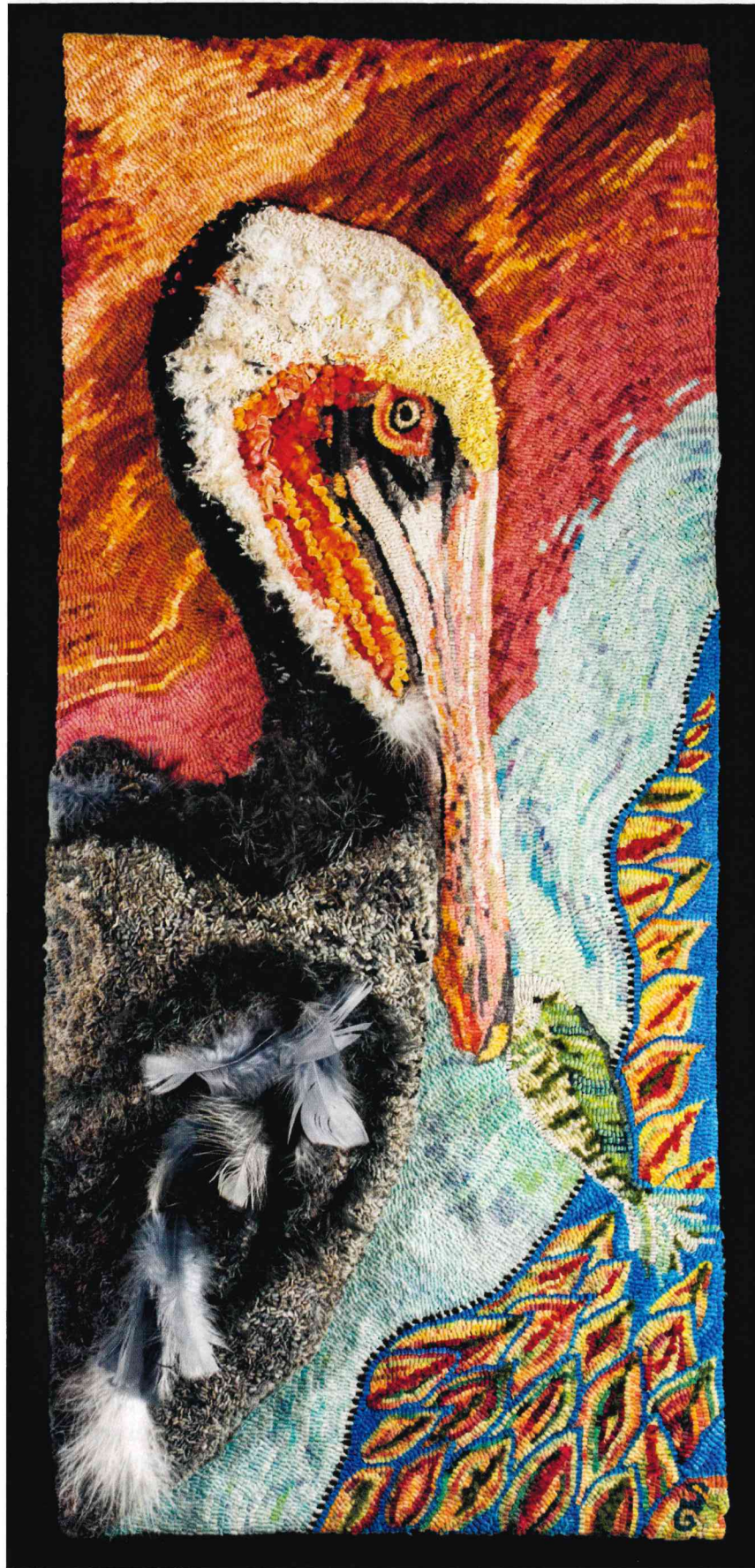
"I had two owls and a nest, but didn't know how to present them as a single, cohesive installation. I mentioned this to Anne-Marie Littenberg as we were planning on her photographing the work for this article. She suggested I explore the possibility of a diorama-style presentation. I gave it some thought and designed and created a base that suggests a tree branch (wood bark and all). My framer added dowels to the owls, and they are slid into holes in the base. The nest got positioned accordingly. It is amazing how an idea can evolve."

sizes work best for hoiving. "I like to work in a range of values and tones of a single color," Sandra continues. She also likes plaids in both raised and flat-hooked areas if they are in the right color and shade. "The style of hooking I have come up with has more depth to it, so it can be difficult for colors to easily blend. I like to use strong contrasting colors while blending more subtle shades together for backgrounds." Sandra also enjoys dyeing.

"Learning to dye was a natural sequence after I learned to hook. My favorite thing lately is marbleizing wool. It is fun and creative, with a surprising variety of results."

Sandra says her experience drawing and painting botanical flowers has been helpful with her rug hooking. "However, that was tightly detailed work and I don't need so much detail when drawing a design on linen. Now I start with a loose

pencil drawing on tracing paper, which I transfer directly onto linen. When I feel the form of the bird is in proportion, I add lines with a permanent marker before starting to fill in with wool. I spend a lot of time thinking about how the shape fits the linen; Does it look better vertical or horizontal, or streaming off the edge, or contained within a border? I love color, so if the bird has neutral colors, I try to replicate its natural hues and then plan



Pelican's Catch, 16" x 38", #3-, 4-, and 5-cut hand-dyed and metallic-fused wool, velvet, silk, various yarns, and feathers. Designed and hooked by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2018.

Sandra says, "With the pelican, I wanted to continue expanding my ideas for backgrounds. I wanted movement and vibrant color behind the bird."

on a brightly colored background. I begin my hooking by working on areas where my loops will be low. I then move on to the areas where I will create raised loops for sculptural effects. I use a lot of velvet materials because it provides a sheen. I enhance my birds with varied textures and colors of yarns. I usually finish my birds with feather embellishments."

Sandra began with a Needlework frame. She moved on to a large rectangular frame for larger pieces. "Now I am hooking a lot of 6" x 8" pieces and I find a small tilting travel lap frame works well. The frame size I use depends on the size of the hooked rug I am working on. I don't use a standard straight hook; rather, I have grown to appreciate a small, bent hook. It seems to be easier on my forearm."

Sandra describes her workspace as "having long tables I can draw on. I use many reference books. I have shelves overflowing with hand-dyed wool, and bins of my marbled wool. When I am at my home in Warren, Vermont, my hooking chair has a view of the Green Mountains. When I am in my other home in Sunapee, New Hampshire, I have what I call my 'Hooking Nest'. I work while watching the woodpeckers come to the feeder or the bluebirds to their box. Many turkey families come to each location and leave feathers for me to admire."

Sandra's rug-hooking experiences include giving some private lessons to a few 14-year-old girls. "That was fun!" she says.

Her accomplishments are impressive. She has been juried into *Celebration* three times as of the writing of this article. In addition, she has been awarded "Viewers' Choice" at the Green Mountain Rug Hooking Guild's *Hooked in the Mountains* exhibit, and the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen's show.



Purple Finch, 8" x 6", #3- and 4- cut hand-dyed wool, various yarns, and feathers on linen. Designed and hooked by Sandra Grant, Sunapee, New Hampshire, 2019.

Part of Sandra's Songbird Series, this was created in response to the White Mountain Magic Rug Hooking Guild's challenge to create postcard-sized pieces depicting something from New Hampshire; the purple finch is New Hampshire's state bird. Sandra says there are challenges to creating such a small piece, including placement of the bird and how much hoing and embellishment can be done. Sandra likes how she can place feathers so they have a delicate drape over the frame. In the end, she found this size satisfying and has gone on to do other songbirds in the small format. The Guild's display of the entire challenge was on view at the New Hampshire State Fair.

In 2020, she will be featured artist at *Hooked in the Mountains*' next exhibit. In addition, she is a member of the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen and an image of her piece, *Bucky the Blue Heron* #2, was used to represent the League's 2019 Exhibition. It was featured on their promotional materials, posters, and t-shirts (which sold out!). The summer of

2019, the League featured Sandra's work along with that of other members of New Hampshire's White Mountain Woolen Magic Rug Hooking Guild.

Sandra says, "Rug hooking is a great medium to learn at any age because it can encompass such a wide range of subjects. It provides an open canvas to create whatever you come up with. The first

question I asked myself when I learned this craft was, 'How detailed and how much variety can I get with rug hooking?' Creating all my three-dimensional birds, I think my questions were answered. There is no limit to how creative you can be with rug hooking." **RHM**

Anne-Marie Littenberg is a rug hooker and photographer living in Burlington, Vermont. She periodically teaches rug hooking workshops, and is the author of *Hooked Rugs Landscapes* and *Hooked Rug Portraits*. amwittenberg@comcast.net