

Feltmaking Terminology in North America by Pat Spark, © 1993

Last fall I wrote an article for Echoes on Mosaic Felts of Central Asia. A short time after this, I was talking (via letter) with Ewa Kuniczak (the Editor of Echoes) and I learned that British felters have a different definition of mosaic and inlay felt than we do in North America. Apparently not all English-speaking feltmakers from around the world use the same terminology for their craft. In some cases the same terms have exactly the opposite meaning from one country to another! This idea really intrigued me. Perhaps the North American felters did not use the same definitions either. I decided to survey some of the material which has been published in North America to see if there is any consensus regarding definitions in this region. My findings are recorded below. There is definitely some different terminology for the same processes while the same terminology can refer to different processes! It seems we can not take for granted the notion that everyone will know what we mean if we use words in a certain way.

The following definitions are paraphrased from their usage in the publication. If more than one publication had a similar definition usage, I have listed them all. Where an * is before the word, the word is one of the ones which has conflicting definitions in North America. By the way, according to Ewa, the British definition of a mosaic felt, is one in which the design is felted in from the beginning. Inlay felt is felt which has motifs cut from finished felt, and then sewn together patchwork style. These definitions are exactly the opposite of the ones we use in North America for these words.

***FELT**

Felt: 1. A pressed, matted fabric formed by the interlocking of wool and certain other fibers, made with no spinning, weaving, or knitting. 2. The process of making felt fabric. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.)

Felt: "A textile structure composed entirely of fibers physically interlocked and consolidated by the utilization of mechanical work, chemical action and moisture without the use of weaving, knitting, stitching, thermal bonding or adhesives." (Committee on Textiles of the American Society for Testing and Materials)

***FELTING (1)**

Felting: The name given to the beginning part of the process. The wet fibers are rubbed until they begin to matt together and feel firm under your hands. (Felting a Hat by Anne Sneary; Jan/Feb. '92 Handwoven)

Felting: The change in wool as the result of water, soap, and continuous massage; turning a mass of wet fibers into a piece of material. (Felting by Hand, Anne Einset Vickrey)

Felting: Name given to the first process of producing felt. The felting of the wool fibers takes place through the application of hot water and soap, pressure and massage. (Felting, by Annelise Stockflet Jorgensen)

***FELTING (2)**

Felting: The name given to the entire process which causes wool fiber to shrink. It can refer to shrinking fleece, or some type of fabric which has been made from wool. (Using a process such as weaving, knitting, crocheting, etc.) When the term is used like this, it is not meant to refer to the first part of the process only. (As above.) (Trillium-Flower Felted Jacket; Jan/Feb. '92 Handwoven)

SOFT FELTING

Soft Felting: The permanent bonding of wool fibers by moisture and mechanical action. (I Felt the Need for a Hat by Carol Sperling)

SOFT FELT

Soft Felt: Just-hardened felt; felt that has meshed together enough to form a solid mass, but can still be manipulated. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.) (Scandinavian-Style Feltmaking by Patricia Spark; Fundamentals of Feltmaking by Patricia Spark)

FELTING PROCESS

Felting Process: Divided into two parts; the actual making of the felt and the fulling or hardening of the felt. (Felting by Marlie Claessen) (Fundamentals of Feltmaking, and Scandinavian-Style Feltmaking by Patricia Spark)

***HARDEN, HARDENING (1)**

Harden, Hardening: The process of felting wool and/or other fibers) to the point where it has formed a solid mass that will no longer come apart with gentle pressure. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.)

Hardening: The initial felting or hardening process during which the wool fibers attach themselves to one another. (Sculptured Felt Coat by Beth Beede, Fall '90) (Yoruk, The Nomadic Weaving Tradition of the Middle East, by Veronica Gervers)

***HARDEN, HARDENING (2)**

Hardening: Hardening the soft felt and shrinking it to the desired size. (I Felt the Need for a Hat by Carol Sperling) (Fundamentals of Feltmaking, and Scandinavian-Style Feltmaking by Patricia Spark)

FULLING/MILLING

Fulling: A continuation of the felting process in which the felt is vigorously rubbed until it shrinks, becoming firm and hard. (Felting a Hat by Anne Sneary; Jan/Feb. '92 Handwoven)

Fulling: Rubbing the wool felt on a washboard, felting board, or similar rough surface to shrink and toughen the material. (Felting by Hand by Anne Einset Vickrey)

Fulling: The shrinking of the felt by rubbing on a feltboard or washboard. In fulling, the felt acquires sturdiness and great strength. (Felting by Marlie Claessen)

Fulling: The intense shrinking and interlocking of wool fibers through the action of moisture, pressure and usually heat, occurring after they have been either felted together (hardened) or woven or knitted into a fabric. The latter is also called Milling. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.)

Fulling: Rolling, pounding and working the coats into their final shape and size. (Sculptured Felt Coat by Beth Beede Fall '90)

Fulling: The name given to the second part of the process of making felt. Fulling takes place when the felted piece is rubbed against the washboard while hot water and soap are applied. At this point the wool will start to shrink, become thicker and firmer. (Felting, by Annelise Stockflet Jorgensen)

Milling: Another name for fulling. (Felted Slippers in Handwoven '92, Jan/Feb.)

HARD FELT

Hard Felt: Felt that has been fullled and is dense and unpliant. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.)

FELT INLAY, INLAID COLOR, ROLLED PATTERN TECHNIQUE

Inlaid Color, Inlaid Designs: Patterns made in felt by colored designs of unspun, loosely spun or lightly felted wool laid on the backing material or wool batt. The design felts along with the rest of the wool. (Feltmaking by Beverly Gordon.)

Felt Inlay: Decoration which is worked into the felt during the felting and fulling processes, using colored or dyed fleece or yarn. (Felting by Hand by Anne Einset Vickrey) (Fundamentals of Feltmaking, and Scandinavian-Style Feltmaking by Patricia Spark)

Inlaid Ornamentation: Professional craftsmen in Iran and Turkey today prefer the inlaid ornamentation formed by (pre) felted strips, roughly spun yarns, and/or bits of colored wool for patterning felt rugs. While considerable skill is required for the general layout of the ornament and, once applied, to keep it in place during the hardening and fulling processes, inlay is a much faster way of producing ornate felts than is mosaic work. (Yoruk, The Nomadic Weaving Tradition of the Middle East, by Veronica Gervers)

Rolled Pattern Technique: A pattern of coloured wool is laid out on a background of several layers of undyed wool, after which the mat is rolled into a bolt to compress the wool. (Along the Silk Road, Nomads and Townspeople in Siberia and Central Asia, (exhibition catalog) "Carpets and Felts", P. 42 by G.N. Simakov) (Nomads of Eurasia, "Yurts, Rugs and Felts" by Vladimir Basilov and Olga Naumova, P. 103)

MOSAIC

Mosaic: Intricate geometric designs cut from felt of different colors and then sewn together to form a subtle play of positive and negative motifs in balanced color compositions. (Yoruk, The Nomadic Weaving Tradition of the Middle East, by Veronica Gervers)

Mosaic: Patterns are cut from two pieces of felt of different colours, and the pieces are sewn together and bordered with wool cord. (Along the Silk Road, Nomads and Townspeople in Siberia and Central Asia, (exhibition catalog) "Carpets and Felts", P. 42 by G.N. Simakov)

Mosaic: Patterns are cut from two pieces of felt of different colors and the pieces are then sewn together; the piece of one color serving as the background and the other, the foreground pattern. Colored cord that emphasizes the ornamental outlines is sewn on top of the seam joining the background to the foreground pattern. The patterned felt derived from this process is superimposed on a felt piece of coarser wool, and the two pieces are quilted together along the outlines of the design. The edges of the rug are bordered with wool cord. (Nomads of Eurasia, "Yurts, Rugs and Felts" by Vladimir Basilov and Olga Naumova, P. 103)

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