

CCANW

Art, Ecology and the Economy exhibitor information

Mary Toon

Dartmoor
Feltmaker

Mary has been fascinated with the felting process for nearly ten years through making and selling, teaching, sharing ideas with fellow wool artists and promoting felt as a hobby or business. In 2009, she took a studio in the Duchy Centre for Creativity, where she can do all these things in a very public setting. This has brought exposure to people who knew nothing about felting previously and also new links with farmers who have knowledge of it from another viewpoint and have fleece to dispose of.



These experiences have made her realise how the imported merino fleece she has worked with, while felting quickly and easily, also uses many air miles and is commercially dyed. She has since taken a natural dyeing course and grows some dyes herself.

While she did not want to give up using merino altogether, she found it could be sourced locally and decided to experiment with more types of fleece from within the Dartmoor area. This has involved far more work scouring, washing and carding the fleece in a small space. However, this has given her a better picture of how farmers regard their flocks' fleeces, as asset or problem, a blessing or a curse. Mary is exploring how producing interesting items might convince farmers that there might be a future in turning fleece into fabric, fashion or even fine art rather than selling it at a loss or burning it!

She has identified two local fleeces for this exhibition (Blue-faced Leicester and Zwartble) to show and encourage artists/craftspeople and farmers/business people to see fleece as a beautiful, functional and flexible creative material, chemical-free and recyclable.

Mary would like to receive funding in order to expand these ideas in the form of a book/manual and local production business incorporating as Dartmoor fleeces.

Art, Ecology and the Economy was shown at CCANW's Project Space in Haldon Forest Park and Duchy Square Centre for Creativity, Princetown, in two simultaneous parts in Winter 2010. It was supported by Arts Council England, Devon County Council and Greater Dartmoor LEAF, incorporating funding from the EU, Defra, SWRDA and LEADER.

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Photograph: Chris Lewis