



HOW I LEARNED TO LOOK

Art, attention, and a lifetime of noticing

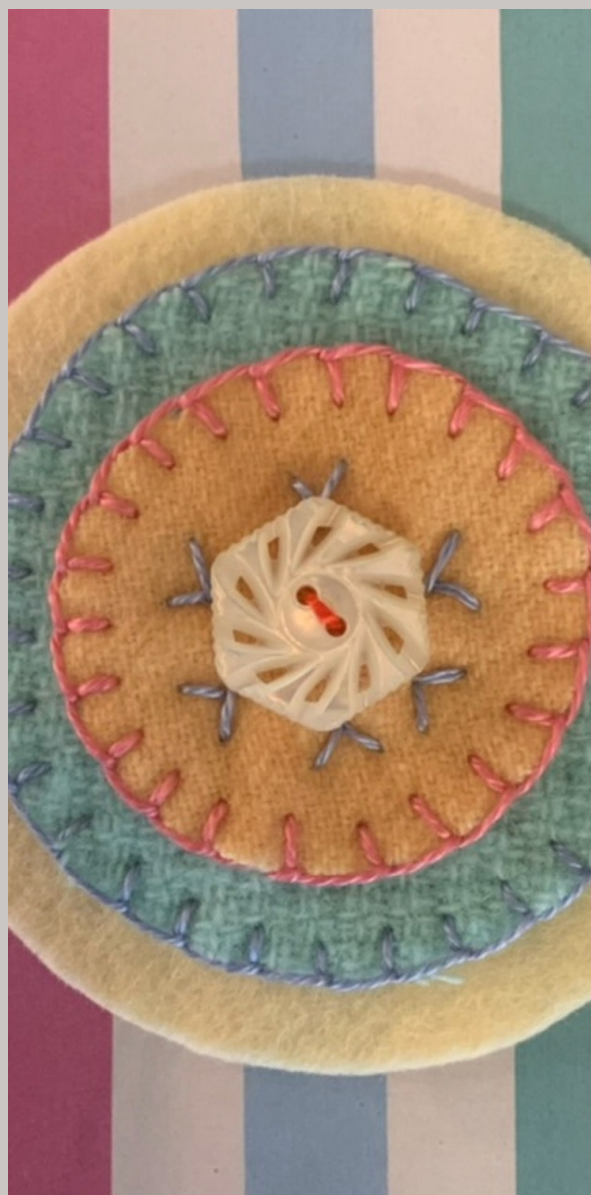
JANE POLLAK

How I Learned to Look

During a Studio Art G2 class at Mount Holyoke College in the spring of 1967, Professor Maxfield pinned our completed color study assignments across a wall-sized bulletin board for critique. I was 19, and I think it was the first time I truly looked at art.

What makes something interesting, beautiful, worth lingering over?

What makes one piece command attention while another lets the eye pass by? And, inevitably: what makes my work stand out?





That semester, an editor from the college literary magazine came into our classroom, after hours, and chose one of my pieces for the cover of its next issue. Something had begun.

My eye has always been attracted to color, symmetry, pattern, intricacy and movement. Although I was gifted with an ability to draw, it wasn't until I began teaching art at Westhill High School in 1972 that I started consciously creating my own body of work. At that time, I used pysanky - Ukrainian Easter eggs - as my medium.

Seeing the Extraordinary

In my late 20's, I visited a new friend's home in Darien, CT. I lit up the moment we walked into her small dining room where her resourceful and talented husband had created a swing set as seating for the table. Swings. At the dining table! I was exhilarated by the creativity, ingenuity and sheer audacity of it.

In my late 30's, as a juror for the esteemed Westchester Craft Show in White Plains, NY, I selected the artist Liz Alpert Fay as Best in Show. She was a rug hooker who used children's drawings as inspiration instead of traditional Americana. I was completely charmed and inspired by the courage it took to be so minimal in one's approach. That experience was the start of a decades-long friendship.





Now, in my late 70's, I continue to be attracted to what's different. It could be as remarkable as the Iris Van Herpen fashion exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, or as routine as an experience in the waiting room at Penn Station where my eye caught a gray-haired woman in a hand-embroidered blouse, sporting a carefully constructed 'do' and carrying a Keith Haring tote.

**I recognize these immediately, because I've always
been looking for them.**

The Objects That Followed

In 1972, while teaching art at Westhill High School, I learned the craft of Ukrainian Easter eggs. Like many beginners, I imitated traditional folk designs to improve my technique. I also learned about patchwork and appliqué quilting - another craft form I taught my students.

When I showed friends what I was working on artistically, to a person, they were drawn to my art on eggs and barely noticed what I was doing with fabric. In short order, I started applying quilt patterns onto my eggs! And got my first national recognition in *Country Living Magazine* for that work.





I'd seen quilts. I'd seen decorated eggs. Then the two worlds met.



For thirty years I created and displayed my eggs up and down the East Coast. They adorned catalog covers and were featured in magazines, in the press and on TV.

I stopped producing anything artistic in the early 2000's and focused on coaching other talented women - and continue to do so - until March of 2020 when I took a class in Penny Rug Pillow Making with Liz Alpert Fay (of rug-hooking fame!).

As you all know, everything shut down in mid-March, and I found myself continuing what I learned in Liz's class to this day. Again, my work has been given national publicity in magazines and on TV.



A traditional form. A new question.

What else could felted wool do? The answer kept changing as I stitched: pillows, wall pieces, grids, experiments in color, and new combinations of familiar forms.

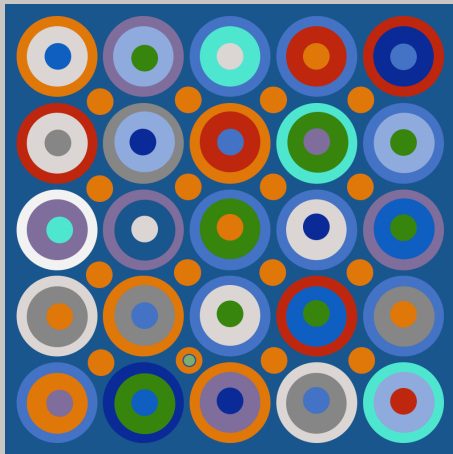
What I'm Still Learning

The best piece of parenting advice I ever received was from a mother of four (which, to this mother of three, felt exponentially more impressive): "As long as the general direction is forward," she declared, "it's all good."

I've carried that advice straight into my creative life.

At 78, I'm still taking classes, trying unfamiliar tools, rearranging colors, learning technology, and asking what else felt wool might do. My studio has never really had walls. It's wherever I'm paying attention.





David Hockney's Mulholland Drive - inspiration



Looking. Translating. Making.

An inspiration, a digital sketch, and felted wool.

I'm not looking to arrive.

I'm continuing to become.

JANE POLLAK

Come Along

The late, great Gloria Steinem, a role model of mine, referred to herself as a 'champion noticer.' I recognized myself in that description immediately.

My monthly letters are where I share some of what I've noticed - beauty in likely and unlikely places, people who intrigue me, things I'm making, things I'm learning, and occasionally something I'm still trying to understand.

If you're someone who likes to look a little longer, wonder a little more, and notice what others may pass by, I think we'll enjoy each other's company.





Welcome.

I'm glad you're here.