



*Into the Wild Blue Under*

A Falmouth artist embraces the many tactile characteristics of natural and synthetic fiber for stunning three-dimensional imagery.

BY SCOTT LAJOIE



Some art is to be felt. No, not in some figurative way like “that art touches my soul.” Felt, as in with your fingertips. Something, of course, which would surely

get you kicked out of a museum or gallery.

When it comes to fiber art and soft sculpture, the tactile nature of the medium just begs you to enjoy its softness. Even if you can’t handle it in a gentle way, your eyes can enjoy its three dimensions (and pass on the information to your body’s touch centers).

For the artist, it is all about experimentation. But it also takes experience to know how different fibers will react to plucking, brushing, and needling. Or how they might hang once adhered to their various foundations. In the mid-1990s, the fiber art world really exploded with huge expansion and developments in colors, synthetic fibers,



*Wild Water Wonders*



*Basajaun*

and new twists on natural fibers. Falmouth artist Toni Newhall was just starting to blossom as a fiber artist then, and she hasn’t looked back.

Newhall came to this medium in a roundabout way. As a child living in Arvada, Colorado, she was exposed to the fine art of embroidery and tatting (lace-making) by her maternal grandmother. She grew to appreciate painting; her father’s aunt graduated art school and was mostly a watercolorist. She graduated college with a BFA in weaving, since there was no concentration at the time in fiber art.

She spent most of her career designing needlepoint canvases, while she dabbled in more unique forms of fiber art on the side. When she and her husband moved to the Cape, she worked at a needlepoint store in Falmouth until it closed in 2008. With her kids grown, she decided to make a concerted effort to build her portfolio and continue to develop her style.

She tends to work in multiples. She has a bunch of work featuring—of all things—planets, inspired by the photographs that the Hubble Telescope has taken over the years. Turns out fiber represents the swirling and

Newhall's work can be viewed at Three Fish and a Ram gallery in Mashpee Commons or on her website [www.toninewhall.com](http://www.toninewhall.com).



Galene

translucent gases you see quite well.

Lately, she has fallen back to Earth and is working mainly on sea creatures, including all kinds of jellyfish. Her husband does underwater acoustics for the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, and the inspiration is in part due to his work, although she readily admits that she creates images from photographs; she doesn't have to be in the presence of the real thing. She layers cloth on cloth to give the work depth and chooses unique tulle and organza to represent the streaming appendages.

She also fashions portraiture, often using fiber to represent flowing hair. Recently, when a student artist mentee decided to do a portrait all in ribbon, Newhall

tried it as well. She also does the occasional landscape, which sells a bit better locally.

Fiber art continues to evolve. Newhall has embraced new developments, including use of flexible paste, so she is not constrained by sewing everything together. She also utilizes metallic fiber whenever appropriate ("People are drawn to sparkles," she says.)

Newhall is well aware that the sky is the limit, and there are plenty of fiber options to represent that sky.

"One of our nation's finest painters."

Elizabeth Ives Hunter, Executive Director, Cape Cod Museum of Art



Just After Sunset oil on canvas



Flowers in a Café Window oil on wood panel

Paul Schulenburg

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