

Headline: Leslee Nelson, fabric artist, links the past to the present

This year's Wautoma Regional Art Program(WRAP) features an artist whose work is both personal and moving. Leslee Nelson will be both juror and presenter at the Wisconsin Regional Art Program(WRAP) at the Senior Center in Wautoma on June 5.

Leslee retired from the UW Madison Art Department faculty and is a former Director of WRAP. She's a fiber artist who always works in a series.

When her father-in-law gave her his mother's unfinished quilt blocks, she began a "collaborative quilt" to combine their work. To mark the difference between their sewing, she used gold thread. She loved the way it sparkled in the bulb of the 1913 Singer sewing machine, but the thread broke every six inches. With her bifocals and aching knuckles, it would be hard to rethread the needle and pull the threads through to the other side. So she left dozens of gold threads on the surface, making an undulating gilded layer.

She titled the piece "Nora's and My Quilt" and didn't want to stop, so she kept assembling the cut remnants and fragments. The result was a 16 piece "Quilt" series, which she sees as rescue work; recovering and finishing the abandoned quilt tops pieced by women long ago.

In 2003 Leslee created a fiber art installation at the now Chazen Museum of Art in Madison which was 18 feet long x 8 feet wide and 87" wide. It was made of fabric, bridal veil, ribbons and beads and shimmered in the light. inspired by a former teacher. It was titled "Gathering Stillness."

Since then she has been making Memory Cloths, embroidered stories from her life. As she worked on stories of her past she came to a place of forgiveness and peace.

In 2006 Leslee saw an exhibit **Weavings of War: Fabrics of Memory** from South Africa. The embroidered images on brightly colored fabrics had captions narrating the artist's traumatic experiences. Called "Voices of Women," these Memory Cloths became art therapy for the women who created them. Stitching became a form of meditation, a repetitive movement linking the past to the present.

It was Leslee's "Aha!" moment, and she began making cloths of her own memories; embroidering stories from her life.

By 2013 she was exhibiting at the Common Wealth Gallery, and included a Memory Cloth Circle as part of the exhibit. Each week people signed up to tell stories and embroider memories. When the exhibition ended, the group continued gathering and meeting weekly to this day.

Today the Memory Cloth Circle brings together 20+ professional and non-professional women artists from various backgrounds. All enjoy sharing ideas, narratives, and stories in stitches using vintage and repurposed fabrics through embroidery, applique, collage, and mixed media.

In December of 2013, Leslee was featured on Nancy's Corner on *Sewing with Nancy* on PBS. The segment opens on her studio filled with yarn, fabric, and fiber. On the program she describes the process of making the cloths, including the piecework and stories on the back.

In Leslee's honor, this year's WRAP exhibit will have a dedicated fabric art section (size limit 4' x 4' for each piece).

For those who don't enroll in the daylong event, Leslee's two-hour demonstration is available to the public for a \$5.00 guest fee. Leslee has asked participants to bring scissors and a needle and thimble you like to her demonstration. She will have memory cloths on display, and her book will be available.

The WRAP show will be held from 10 to 3 on June 5 at the Wautoma Senior Center W8220 Cottonville Ave, Wautoma, WI, 54982. Please bring your mask, lunch and a beverage if you plan to attend.