

Felt Workshop in Makelamardi with Elisabeth Schiemer from Austria on 10th – 13th February 2006

Elisabeth Schiemer and some of her friends from *INTERSOL* (Austrian NGO) had come to Makelamardi to give a 3-day workshop on wool felting. Elisabeth is living on a farm in Austria where she is keeping sheep. She regularly gives workshops in felting and sells her products, such as bags, hats and chapels in a small shop on her farm (www.wollgartl.au). Her aim was to share her skills and techniques of felting with the people from SAS and she was open to learn new things from us.

On the 1st day, we started the workshop by making a small ball to get a first feeling for working with wool. We were using our deccani wool along with Austrian wool which Elisabeth had brought from her sheep.



The mixture was to be a symbol of unity between the Indian and Austrian people and culture, who were about to intermingle during the following days. In doing this first exercise, we realized that for the art of felting, ***natural wool, warm soap water and the hands are the only tools required.*** With ***warmth and moisture*** (hot water), ***pressure and movement*** (use of hands) the most creative styles can easily be made. There are 3 different forms of felting: we started with ***form felting (1)***, which consisted of shaping a ball in our hands by rolling it.

For the next exercise we were divided into several groups and were trained in ***surface felting (2)***. for which, a flat surface was needed (table or floor). We created our personal designs such as flowers and rangolis by dipping pieces of wool into hot soap water and by arranging them on the floor. Then, we covered the design with 2 to 4 layers of wool and chose the size which we wanted our sample to have. We had to take into consideration that our surface was about to shrink 30 % due to the rolling of the wool. The next step was to pour hot water over the wool and slowly press with the palm of the hand before rubbing in small circles. Once the water had cooled down, we dried the surface with a towel. The same process was to be repeated and the rubbing grew stronger and harder as the surface grew more compact. After this procedure, we started rolling our piece on all 4 sides until the felt had reached certain strength and Elisabeth approved that the quality was good. The felt had to be rinsed thoroughly and dried in the sun.

In the afternoon, Elisabeth explained piece by piece what had been done correctly and where she could see faults and difficulties.



The 2nd day started with a dying session. Nazeer Kamal, our master craftsman demonstrated how to prepare the natural colors such as indigo and golden yellow and the dying procedure of the wool. Elisabeth shared her recipes for washing and dying wool with a suggestion of adding little vinegar or limejuice to the rinsing water. After the wool had been dyed and dried, everybody was eager to use the colored wool to design bags. So we were about to explore the 3rd form of felting known as ***hollow felting(3)***. To felt a bag, *stencils* are required because a hollow part is needed where objects can be kept in. We used plastic as stencils and cut the desired shape, which we wanted our bag to have. Anand Sir, a master craftsman from Raichur, who is helping SAS for many years, once again surprised everyone of us with his great talent in designing.



The 3rd and last day consisted mainly in finishing the 5 new bags that had been designed and started the previous day. These bags were designed for exhibiting in the Indian Handicrafts & Gift Fair 2006 in Delhi. Moreover, Anand Sir, designed a beautiful landscape with a shepherd and his herd. This was the biggest surface we felted during the workshop. The result was astonishing. (see pictures). Eli's friends from *INTERSOL* had brought a couple of sewing machines and gifted them to our center. They were demonstrated how the electrical machines functioned and how to use them.



On the last day of the program Fr. Joe organized a meeting with all the participants of the workshop and others and the Austrian team to review what learning from one another. At the end of the day, Fr. Joe screened all the pictures and videos taken during the workshop on the wall so that everybody was able to see and relive the beautiful work experience of the previous days.

A lot of positive impressions were collected during the workshop. First of all, there was plenty of curiosity to get to know about Elisabeth's felting technique. Everybody was very eager to pick up new skills and Elisabeth was struck by the enthusiasm the men and women from Makelamardi showed. A good amount of cooperation was necessary because Elisabeth techniques were slightly different than ours. She was, for example, used to work on a table and sit on a chair, whereas our people were used to work on the ground. A table had quickly been made to simplify the work.

All in all, the work of Mrs. Schiemer has been very enriching for SAS and the art of felting is fitting perfectly into the handicraft center in Makelamardi. We can add here, that the felt bags of the workshop got a quite good response on the ***EPCH Fair in Delhi***, which was held from 16th to 20th of February.