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PATTERN
HOLIDAY LIGHTS PILLOW

HOOK A CHRISTMAS CARDINAL

R·U·G HOOKING

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A Tale of West Virginia

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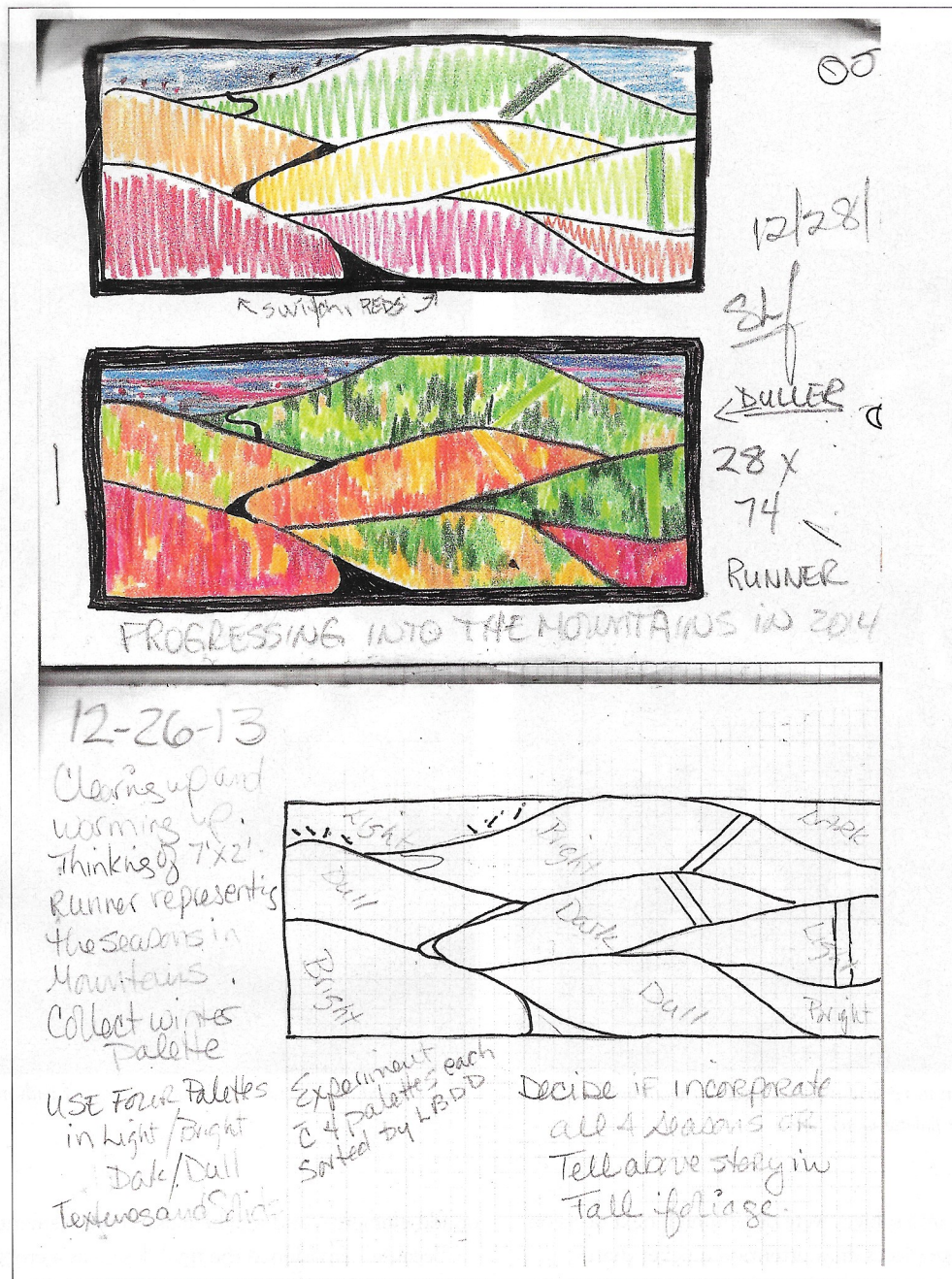
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSAN L. FELLER

Artists often use their skills to bring attention to issues important to them. How can these concerns and observations be conveyed using rug hooking? The topic addressed in my visual communications usually is how man's use of nature and the limited resources affects the environment and hence the future. My personality favors positive vocabulary and bright colors.

Living in West Virginia among the abundant natural resources of the Appalachian Mountains, I'm tuned into the natural world. The experiences of Girl Scouting, my present day self-sufficient lifestyle, and my interest in traditional crafts all influence how and what I create.

Over the past four years, my observations have focused on the human impact in the 21st century on the visual beauty of these mountains. Several designs came to mind. One idea was a series depicting how man's traveling methods changed the landscape over the centuries. The Indians and early settlers walked, creating paths along ridges, rivers, and passes through the high mountain ranges. From a bird's viewpoint, this would not have disturbed the forests much. However, with human presence, clearings for food plots appeared and the woods were cut for lodging and fuel.

Progress in the Mountains, 27" x 84", #6- and 8-cut wool on linen. Designed and hooked by Susan L. Feller, Augusta, West Virginia, 2015.



Here is my first idea—a horizontal orientation showing the ridgeline. My sketches show how I planned to proceed.

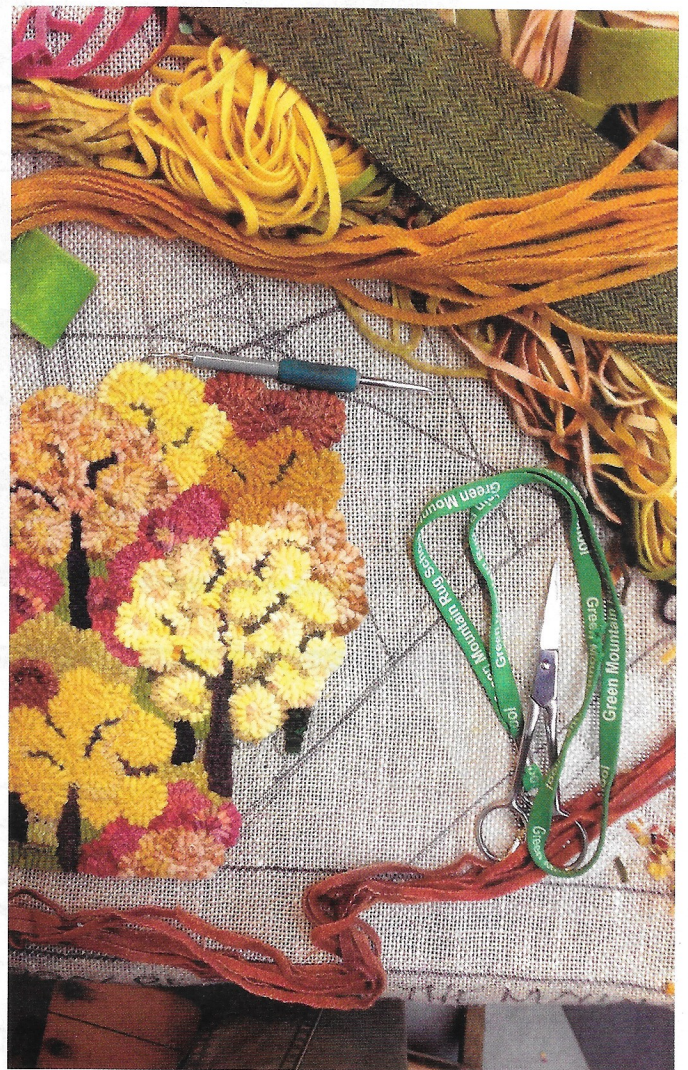
By the 19th century, the nomadic lifestyle of the Indian tribes disappeared and was replaced by villages and a network of rutted roadways. These highways widened and became straighter than the walking paths. Time goes on and populations grow; federal money opens the Appalachian corridor to tourists; commercial entities export lumber, coal, and manufactured products. Routes for trains and roads are built, and wide swaths of forest are cut for power lines. All of this becomes more and more visible from the air.

Finally I started designing my piece. The 21st

century would be the first panel because it is filled with interesting elements and it can tell an environmentalist's story. I experimented with small sketches of the many mountain ranges, using simple arching lines in a 12" x 5" horizontal format. Straight lines would show the power lines; the wide highway winding through would invite the viewer on the trip. I selected a fall color palette because it is exciting and has a positive feeling. I wanted people to be comfortable and "lean into" the piece. Then, as they were studying it, they would become aware of the message.



I changed the orientation to vertical and laid pieces of wool in place to get an idea of how the color palette would work.



As I worked on a section, I surrounded myself with my color choices.

The coloring and subject were determined; next decision was the size. Large pieces draw attention quicker than intimate ones. I drew out the design in a large horizontal format: 84" x 27". It sat for several months, not calling to me to begin.

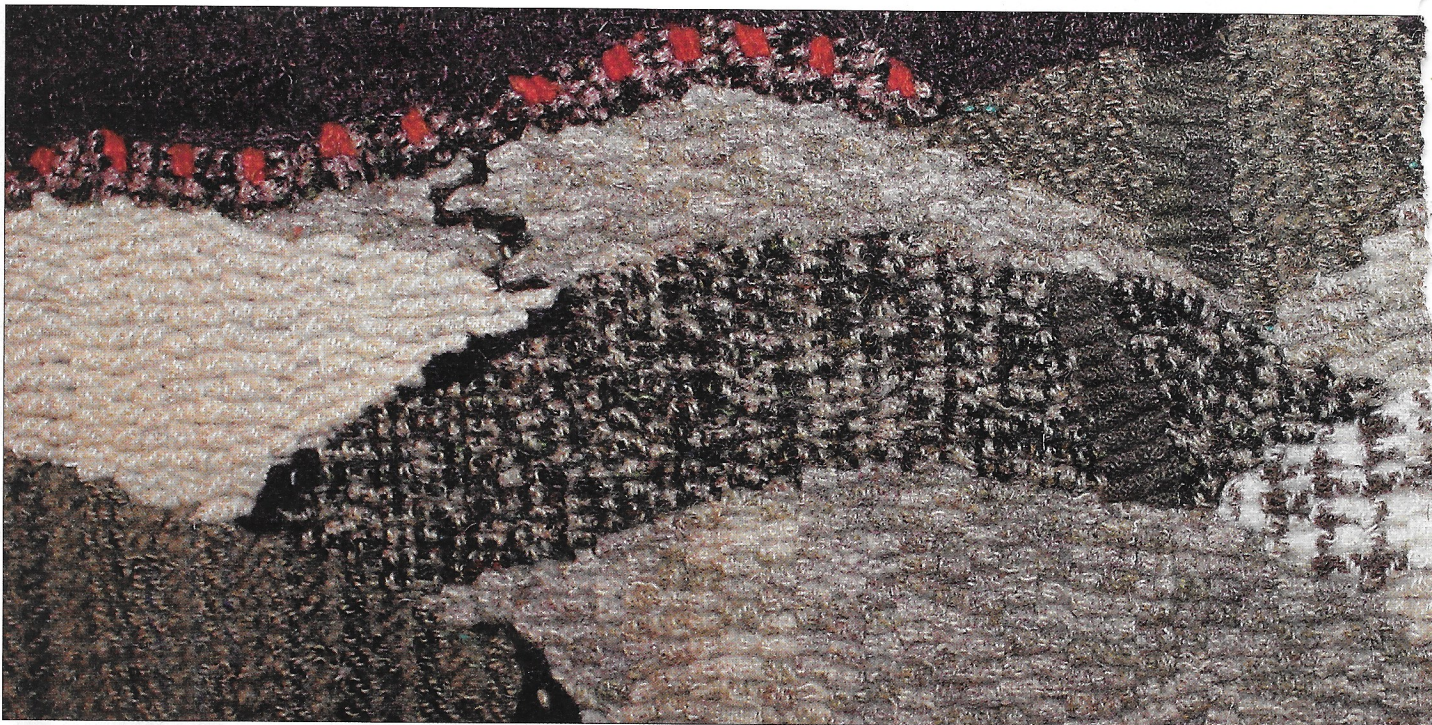
At Sauder Village I saw the Folk Life runners exhibit. Each piece was a vertical runner! I went back to the drawing board with two 12" x 5" pieces and I noticed how much more could be included in this orientation. I drew some basic lines on the linen to divide the space. Within days I began designing from the lower left to develop my story.

What a difference changing this aspect of the project made! The lesson here is if the palette, format, amount of elements, or techniques do not inspire you, don't start. That means it is time to be creative—turn your design around, change the mood with colors and values, take out

or add elements, and maybe make some elements larger.

Because I envisioned the final design as a cropped photograph, I included a simple wide frame. My preliminary sketches showed a diagonal road narrowing and curving in the distance, deliberately straight lines for the electric power lines, and intersecting horizontal arches as mountains. I had a list of human influences I wanted to depict in the sections: transportation, agriculture, commercial poultry farming, logging and reforestation, forests, the power lines, wind turbines, and coal-powered energy generation.

As you look into the distance in West Virginia, the colorful foliage merges into blue mountains. The palette in nature often includes the full spectrum—warm and cool. This was a quandary as I progressed up the design: how should I drop the warm golds, reds, oranges, and greens and introduce the cooler blues and purples just about midway? If the colors changed abruptly, the middle



of the piece would be a bad place to do that. Cooler colors recede and are perceived lighter in visual weight than warmer colors. If I made the change exactly in the middle, the design would be too busy and heavy on the bottom and boring on the top.

As I worked on each section, I deliberately changed several elements to indicate gradual distance. The first section is curving leaves of bright colors and details in the trees, a shadowy hooked undergrowth, and on the right side, a bright yellow green with just a few hay rolls, then an open field with overgrowth. Throughout, whenever the ground is hooked, I used straight rows (horizontally or vertical). Shading is accomplished by changing the fabric along the rows. I designed the next section to be less cluttered with fewer trees in dull oranges, and a very dark ground. The hill in middle is hooked vertically with the same colors as lower left, but they are dull and only thin lines.

The top of the rug shows the more recent developments in the mountains, including wind turbines for wind-generated power.



Using neutrals, I experimented to discover how to show different layers in the landscape. For example, notice how I changed from dark solids to light textures.

*I felt like an author of a long novel
while creating this piece.
Each section became a small story
that linked to all the other stories.*

Back and forth, I used bright and light with fewer motifs, or dark and dull, to portray distance. In the distant blue mountains, I hooked a light mountain by constantly turning the loops to imply texture. I introduced dull purple into the shadows of a lower section. About two thirds of the way up on the right, I used all of the colors to depict one last fall mountain, this time hooked in simple rows.

To bring the viewer along, I hooked a bright yellow line in the road and outlined it with thin white. The white separates the border from the design and breaks as the road comes into and goes “under” the frame. Wider white cuts

create the wind turbines and the cloud over the coal-processing plant at the top. The clean palette of white and blue is light and appropriate for the top of this long runner.

I felt like an author of a long novel while creating this piece. Each section became a small story that linked to all the other stories. I entered the runner into the juried exhibit, “The Best of West Virginia,” at Tamarack in Beckley, West Virginia, and was pleased and validated when it was accepted.

Enjoy your time traveling along *Progress in the Mountains*. I hope you sense the multitude of layers and the many stories this rug conveys. **RHM**

Susan L. Feller explores environmental issues and traditional crafts in her textile artwork. The arts community within West Virginia and rug hooking are promoted in lectures, exhibits and workshops conducted internationally. Visit www.ArtWools.com to see a gallery of work and learn about the year study.