

MAFA Guild Roundtable
Diversity
July 14, 2020
Via Zoom

Welcome

MAFA President Helena Valentine welcomed the participants. She remarked that one of her goals when she became President was to help open a dialog with guilds about diversity and help guilds increase their inclusivity. She noted the reality that “fiber folk” are a small cohort, and that many of the crafts in this orbit require an investment in time and expense. There is a gender gap in guilds, as well as a lack of diversity of ethnic background and age in many of our guilds. She challenged guilds to think about “When do we meet,” “Where do we meet,” the programs we include and what types of outreach we do.

Helena introduced Elisa Eiger, a past-president of MAFA (as well as past-president of Jockey Hollow Weavers Guild in NJ). Elisa noted that her guild Jockey Hollow Weavers is fairly diverse without trying. She thinks it may be because once someone sees a minority member, they are more apt to feel welcome. She encouraged the guilds to be aware of the subtlety of racism. Our mission as guilds is to educate about the fiber arts, but we should all be aware of social injustices in our activities because wherever social injustice exists—it lessens all of us.

Here are some of the questions and comments that were voiced during the Roundtable:

A comment received via email noted that there is also diversity in economic background. This prompted some discussion of how to advertise to people of lower economic ability, such as advertising the availability of equipment to lend etc. The guild in Rochester, NY, has a physical weaving center where they offer classes at a reduced fee. A community of Bhutanese in the area had been encouraged to share traditions, to little success and this brought up the idea that there may be lower confidence in immigrant communities to participate.

Sally Orgren (Jockey Hollow Weavers, Frances Irwin Handweavers) noted that she does a lot of demonstrating. She emphasized that the age group we really need to encourage now are young adults. Familiarity with younger artists and with Instagram is a plus.

Gail Pietrzyk (Harmony Weavers) teaches through a program supported by the County that has a lot of diversity. They have 15 looms and run year round programs that build a community. They charge \$5 per hour for evening time to use the equipment. Carol Ireland reiterated the sense of community in this program.

Elisa Eiger emphasized the question: Who are we missing? It seems to be the Latinx community.

There was a suggestion to include one of the members of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color working in the fiber industry) in a future Roundtable discussion.

Marion Flint (Triangle Weavers NC) reported that they do have a number of men in the guild. They have a building and prior to Covid were able to have “drop-ins” for one-on-one instruction. They are using Zoom to achieve this now. Other discussion centered on “cultural appropriation.” The attitude should be one of sincerity in learning about a culture, to be humble. All of our fiber crafts have a variety of cultural components. Elisa Eiger spoke of her experiences coming from an environment where everybody borrowed everyone else’s traditions and that it was thought of as a compliment rather than an insult. She sees some of the outrage over cultural appropriation as “permissible aggression.” There was further discussion about the negatives of “borrowing” when it financially harms an individual or group.

Lesley Reynolds (Fredericksburg Spinners & Weavers Guild) suggested that potential guild members will feel more welcome and understood if there is someone there that “looks like you.”

Margaret Briggs, MAFA, asked “what can MAFA do better and how can we help the guilds.”

Sherry Necker (Warped Weavers) would like a resource in MAFA to discuss how to grow guilds—this seems to be a general concern among all the guilds.

Helena wrapped up the meeting, thanking everyone for attending and encouraging further discussion.

The next roundtable to continue a discussion on diversity is tentatively planned for Tuesday, August 18, at 7:00 pm.

Here is the link to the Reps IO discussion on diversity. These questions and comments are deep and thoughtful, and we encourage you to read them prior to the next diversity roundtable:

[Diversity in Guilds thread on groups.io.](#)

Following are a few of the questions, comments, and ideas that came up on the “Chat” during the meeting:

- Is there a recommended level of awareness that we could or should cultivate in our art practice?
- South Jersey Guild of Spinners & Handweavers use mentors for new members. They also use demonstrations as outreach in their community. Additionally, they have guild equipment that can be used at no cost to members.
- Sally Orgren suggested follow up with new members, such as a call to ask if they had questions; what would they like to learn? She noted the following benefits to entice

young members to join a guild: learn to warp faster, access to equipment to rent or borrow, library and other sources, opportunities for grants and scholarship information.

- Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers (pre-covid) had a reception to welcome new members four times a year that are typically well-attended.
- Sara Robbins mentioned that some in her guild teach at local yarn shop and that has brought in new members.
- Bath Glauber asked “How many were a member of a guild while working and raising a family?” Of the responses, most joined guilds after children were grown and/or they had retired. Several noted frustrations that workshops were held during the week; some guilds meet in the evening which makes it easier to attend. One participant mentioned that when she wasn’t able to attend daytime meetings, she formed a new guild with a few others.
- Barb Diefenderfer (Weavers’ Roundtable) submitted information on her guild: “we are in an area of western Maryland where there is little ethnic diversity and the majority of guild members range from 60-75 years of age, with just a few that are younger. There are two men who attend regularly.

The following are additional resources mentioned during the Roundtable:

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color working in the fiber community)

<https://bipocinfiber.com>

A book that is highly recommended: *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Tatum.

Link to the recording of the Roundtable:

<https://youtu.be/Rhb77l4iEXs>

Attendance

MAFA Board members attending:

Helena Valentine, President

Sara Robbins, 1st VP; Communications

Margaret Briggs, 2nd VP; Membership Chair/Conference Chair

Dave Banks, webmaster

Karen Miller, Past President

Marla Campbell, Treasurer

Patty Chrisman, Secretary

Guild Members attending:

Dave Banks, MAFA webmaster, Williamsburg Spinners & Weavers Guild
Diane Beier, Third Star Fiber Artists Guild
Kacey Blaney, Southern Tier Fiberarts Guild
Aileen Campbell, Fredericksburg Spinners & Weavers Guild
Pat Canaday, Tryon Guild
Jill Coghlan, Harmony Weavers Guild
Annette Devitt, Third Star Fibre Artists Guild
Ellie Divito, MAFA Conference Committee
Elisa Eiger, Jockey Hollow Weavers
Deborah Faehner, Handweavers of Bucks County (PA)
Margie Finn, Weavers' Guild of Rochester
Marion Flint, Triangle Weavers Guild, Chapel Hill, NC
Debbie Gilbert, Walk In Art Center Fiber Arts Guild
Beth Glauber, Frances Irwin Handweavers
Debbie Hadfield, Three Rivers Fiber Focus
Gail Hamill, Potomac Fiber Arts Guild
Deborah Herrin, Weavers Guild of Greater Baltimore
Val Hildebrand, Potomac Fiber Arts Guild
Carol Ireland, Fiber Guild, Harmony Weavers Guild
Denise Kash, Fredericksburg Spinners & Weavers
Hedy Lyles, PGHW, JHW, HWBC
Susan Makuka, South Jersey Guild of Spinners & Handweavers
Dena Manchester, Handweavers Guild of the New River Valley
Joan Martin, Chautauqua Weaver's Guild
Karen Mason, Harmony Weavers Guild
Katherine Mayer, Jockey Hollow Weavers
Calvert Necker, Warped Weavers of Harford County
Sally Orgren, Frances Irwin Handweavers, Jockey Hollow Weavers
Debbie Patsel, North Country Spinners
Dolly Perkins, Potomac Fiber Arts Guild
Ellen Phelps, Frances Irwin Handweavers
Jane Phillips, Washington Spinners and Weavers
Gail Pietrzyk, Harmony Weavers Guild
Linda Pistilli, Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers
Lesley Reynolds, Fredericksburg Spinners and Weavers Guild
Wendy Roberts, MAFA Social Media
Robin Schaufler, South Jersey Spinners and Handweavers
Jenny Sethman, MAFA Social Media
Carol Steuer, New York Guild of Handweavers
Mary Strouse, MAFA Grants and Fellowships
Laura Womack, Handweavers of Bucks County

Submitted by Patty Chrisman, Secretary

Sara Robbins (MAFA) submitted a list developed by the Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers of artists who are actively talking about diversity and may give online presentations. We have included this information below:

Artists and Diversity

Dana Williams-Johnson (professor of marketing at U Maryland and knit designer) <https://yardsofhappiness.com/>

Diane Ivey a.k.a. Lady Dye
<https://ladydyeyarns.com/about/>

"Creative Ceci" Cecelia Nelson-Hurt is a knitter and diversity activist. Here are YouTube interviews. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dr0PRcI4IQ>

The following is a list (courtesy of Lady Dye above) of diversity blogs, books and other ideas that she recommends for raising diversity awareness:

Podcasters to Follow:

- *2 Dope Queens*: Comedy podcast hosted by Phoebe Robinson and Jessica Williams, covering everything from sex and dating to race and politics.
- *Latinos Who Lunch*: FavyFav and Babelito engage in conversation about everything from pop culture to art and identity.
- *The Mash-Up Americans*: Editorial website and podcast that creates content for mixed race, multi-ethnic Americans and their families, and seeks to inform the companies and brands about what real “Mash-Up” Americans want and how to deliver it.
- *Represent*: A space for discussion, highlighting movies, TV, and online shows created by and/or about women, people of color, people with disabilities, and those in the LGBTQ community. Hosted by Aisha Harris for Slate Magazine
- *See Something Say Something*: Every week, BuzzFeed’s Ahmed Ali Akbar gathers folks together to drink tea, tell stories, and talk about being Muslim in America.
- *Code Switch*: NPR's podcast offers great insight into intersectionality and how experiences of people of color play out in everyday life, especially in workplaces.
- *Pod Save the People*: Organizer and activist DeRay Mckesson explores news, culture, social justice, and politics through deep conversations with influencers and experts, and the weekly news with fellow activists Brittany Packnett Cunningham and Sam Sinyangwe, and writer Clint Smith.

Resources for discovering new BIPOC designers and dyers

- Social Media is actually key! It's probably the single most important way to find BIPOC makers. I suggest following these accounts on Instagram: @bipocmakers, @biopocinfiber, @disabledmakers, and this hashtag #makersofcolorcollective
- The other best way is to attend large craft shows. From a diversity standpoint in North America, I recommend Vogue Knitting Live NYC and Stitches West.

Recommended Reading List:

- *Brothers and Sisters* (Bebe Moore Campbell)
- *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation 1st Edition* (Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor)
- *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Bell Hooks)
- *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Bell Hooks) -- Honestly, I highly recommend all of Bell Hooks books.
- *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (James Baldwin)
- *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority* (Tim Wise)
- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Robin DiAngelo)
- *The New Jim Crow* (Michelle Alexander)
- *We Should All Be Feminists* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)
- *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Debby Irving)
- *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates)
- *1984* (George Orwell)
- *The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite* (Daniel Markovits)
- *Lead from the Outside: How to Build Your Future and Make Real Change* (Stacey Abrams)
- *How to Be an Antiracist* (Ibram X. Kendi)
- *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* (Beverly Daniel Tatum)
- *Bad Feminist: Essays* (Roxanne Gay)
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Rebecca Skloot)
- *Crafting Dissent: Handicraft as Protest from the American Revolution to the Pussyhats* (Edited by Hinda Mandell)

Resources for local yarn stores

This is very important for stores to know: **People are already shopping and spending their money with their values.**

Data from this site: (<https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/retail/inclusion-diversity-retail>)

Shoppers are not just turning away from retailers that do not share their values, they are turning toward those that do. Twenty-nine percent of all shoppers, and still more diverse ones, are likely to switch to a retailer that reflects the importance they place on inclusion and diversity. 42% of BIPOC shoppers would switch to a retailer committed to I&D AND 41% of LGBT shoppers would switch to a retailer committed to I&D.

In order to bring change within your own community, it's important to understand who YOU are as an individual. If you are trying to help your store be more inclusive and diverse please read, listen, and learn. Furthermore, consider these steps when implementing inclusion:

1. **Listen** - Listen to what people are saying about their experience in your shop. Listen to the way your staff communicates with customers.
2. **Action Plan** - Set goals for yourself and your store with tangible action plan steps to create clear objectives and outcomes for diversity and inclusion. Add this to your business model.
3. **Value Feedback and Input** - When people are giving feedback, value it and follow up with it. It is not them criticizing you, your customers are your greatest resource.
4. **Communicate** - Hold yourself accountable to the outcomes your store created for inclusivity. Be open to communicating your plan within your community. Furthermore, when thinking internally, make sure your communication is a "two-way street."

Then use the following resources to make the changes in your community.

- Bring in experts with professional backgrounds to do diversity training with you and your staff and guild meetings.
- Unisex samples of knitting/crochet/sewing. There's a more diverse group of people crafting. Providing samples of gender-neutral garments and accessories show that you care and understand not all people identify as a particular gender.
- Monthly trunk shows highlighting diverse group of indie dyers, designers, and other makers - this is VERY important because there are so many diverse businesses in this industry. Use social media to seek out more diverse people. Try following hashtags such as #blackgirlsknit, #blackcreatives, #BIPOCmakers, #asianknitters, #latinaknitters, etc.
- When you are marketing to your customers, make sure your images reflect a diverse representation of people.
- When hiring new staff, consider how you are reaching out to seek new employees. Consider asking people outside of your community for input and spreading the word. If you stay within your community, you will continue to keep the same demographic.

- Hold weekly/biweekly social events across other communities - step outside your community into other communities. There's no reason not to work with other yarn stores outside of your community for annual events.