

# Mille Fleurs for Mary Burkett

## A world-wide project for feltmakers

The year 2000 has been chosen by the IFA (International Felt Association) to commemorate that it is more than twenty years since Mary Burkett brought new light and life into the felt world. As the Director of Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal, she initiated and organised the exhibition *The Art of the Felt Maker* and wrote accompanying book, which is now famous. Without her networking over the years, her active research, her warm felt friendships, her enthusiastic lecturing all over the world, felt would not be the same today. As part of the celebration every felt maker in the world is invited to take part in the project 'Mille Fleurs for Mary Burkett' and to felt two flowers. One of the flowers will be felted into a mille fleurs felt carpet and the other one will be part of an archival creation, representing the state of felt in the year 2000.

### RECEIVING ATTENTION

According to what is written in the foreword of the *Art of the Felt Maker* it was not expected in 1979 that felt would become so popular with craftsmen and artists in various disciplines: "Although felt is one of the earliest materials to have been made by man it has, until recently, received comparatively little scholarly attention. Perhaps its primitive nature, humble use amongst nomadic herdsman, and lowly position on the floor, caused it to be neglected and despised among the rich cultures of successive generations" and "some travellers had been fascinated by it in the 18th and 19th centuries, but only recently has it received the attention, scientific and artistic, that it deserves".

### "ROLLING A BUNDLE OF SOMETHING..."

Mary told me that she herself discovered felt in the sixties while she was travelling with a friend in Syria. At that time - 1962 - she was trying to leave her job as an art teacher and come back to work in a new art gallery, Abbot Hall in Kendal. In Northern Persia at Gunbad-i-Qabus some people were rolling a bundle of something on a bed of leaves. "What on earth are they doing?" Mary wondered but hadn't enough Persian to understand the answer - which was making felt (see photo In the *Art of the Felt Maker*). The antiquity of the designs, and the unusual and simple nature of the process, filled her with amazement Why had such an ancient art got lost? The designs were wonderful, timeless in quality and the process could be revived in this country for infinite uses. But the West had totally lost interest in felt except for a few factories which had taken the place of the small felt workshops of medieval times. Wills often mention the few scanty possessions of the poor which include a felting bow or block. After that the factories in Britain used only rabbit fur with the exception of Christies for bowler hats. Mary Burkett spent the next 16 years of her spare time doing research on felt in the East. Hence the *Art of the Felt Maker* in 1979 and the touring exhibition. This is a brief description of how she started to make a tremendous contribution to the resurrection of felt. She became a world-wide ambassador, well known for her enthusiastic and heartfelt lectures Many

artists and craftsmen were inspired by her and 'converted' to felt. The International Feltmakers Association was founded and chose Mary as president. International symposia love to invite her as a guest speaker and grateful student call her 'Mother of Felt'.

### THE STATE OF FELT 2000

Your participation In this project will be highly appreciated. To take part you have to felt two flowers. Flower '1.' is your congratulation, this should be a flower in a pre-felt stage, because it will be felted/ felled into the carpet shape and colours are your free choice. The size should not exceed 10cm square. It will be one of a million flowers felted in a workshop during celebrations activities in Kendal. All activities will be announced. Flower '2.' is your contribution to the state of felt 2000 a source of knowing which will become an archival creation. Therefore you are asked to design a story-board, size A4, (paper weight 600 grs/mtt). Attach your finished flower to it, with your name and address written clearly and tell/ draw/paint your story, as you like to describe the way you feel felt, your technique, philosophy, theory and/or method. Send your flowers and the story-board to: Sheila Smith, 17 Cleveland Way, Miniott, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, YO7 4LN, England They can be sent at any time up to the deadline 31st January 2000

*Inge Evers, Haarlem, Holland is an artist, a teacher and a writer (author of a.o. Feltmaking and Het Complete Papierboek) She works internationally as a guest-teacher/lecturer.*

