



SPECTRUM
of
INSPIRATION

BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ '98





Peggy Haller Hannum '51 is an artist, a creative mind inspired by color and texture. She's flattered when galleries ask to display her work, and gratified when those pieces win awards. But Peggy's never gotten hung up on art for art's sake: She's a rug hooker and a practical woman. If you ever have occasion to visit her home, be sure to look down because it's her art you'll be treading on.

"A rug is a rug and it belongs on the floor," said Hannum, a Shippen School graduate who has been honing her craft for more than 30 years and teaching it for more than a decade. A juried member of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, Hannum currently instructs 40 students in four separate classes on the intricacies of rug hooking.

Whereas weaving involves the interlacing of two different strands of wool, rug hooking consists of taking a long, single strand of wool and pulling it through a stiff, typically burlap base as a loop.

"From a distance, [the results] might look similar," Hannum said. "But up close there's no mistaking one for the other."

While weaving textiles through denser material dates to antiquity, rug hooking in its modern form began humbly, when people began pulling loops of fabric through burlap seed bags. "It started as a purely practical thing and has really evolved into an art form," Hannum said. She specializes in traditional rug hooking, which creates more of a fine, tapestry result than the other principal method, wide-cut.

Hannum said that hooking a large rug takes her the better part of a year, starting with a background form stencil. "Then it's mostly about color improv," she said. "I can't see how the colors are going to come together in the end when I start, but I do start with an idea of what I want, and that idea grows as I'm working."

Hannum dyes all her own wool in a basement workshop that's equal parts art studio and laboratory, and the result is hundreds of yards of cloth, hung in meticulous rows in a magnificent spectrum of colors. "I enjoy painting with wool," Hannum said. "We're meant to torture it," she said with a laugh.

For Hannum, the dyeing process is just as important as the actual hooking. "When I first started, I thought, 'Wow. This is it.' The colors inspire me," she said. "There's always something new and it's always exciting."

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