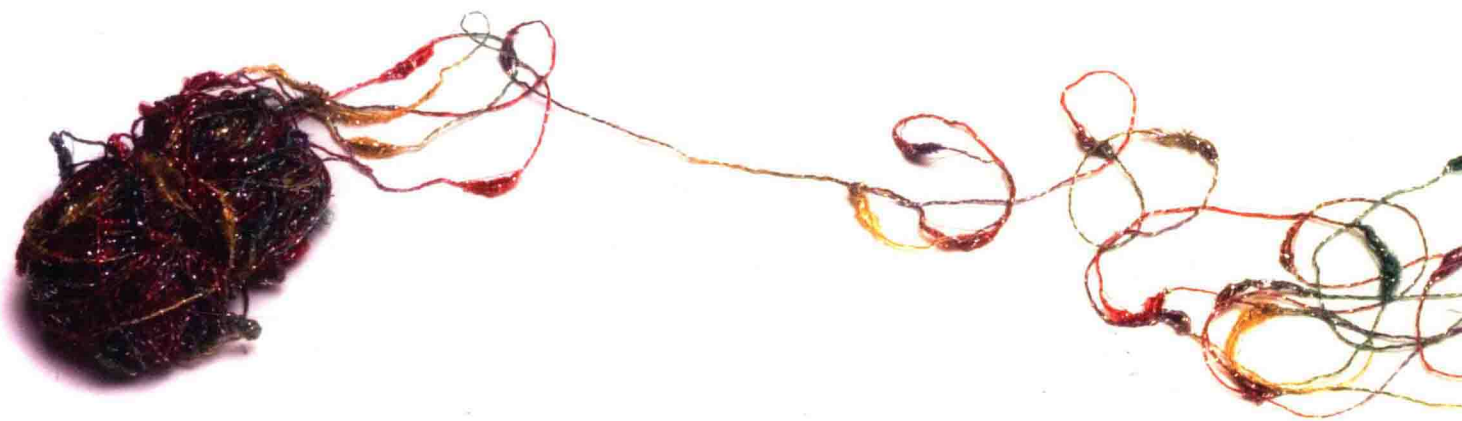


Robert Hillestad *A Textiles Journey*



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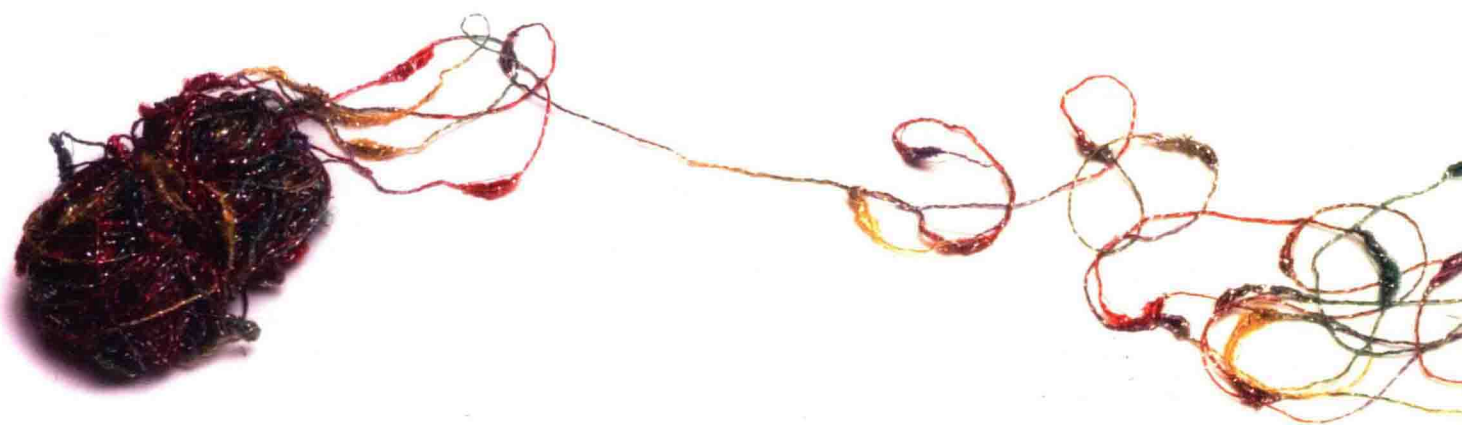


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# Robert Hillestad *A Textiles Journey*







*Dedicated to the former students of Robert Hillestad*







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## Acknowledgements

Just as *journey* is the metaphor for this monograph, so has it been a theme in producing it. Many persons have participated in this fascinating journey. We acknowledge their valuable contributions. Dee Lynch, president of Friends of the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery, launched this excursion in 2002 and encouraged her board members to follow. As subsequent presidents took over the helm, year by year, each kept it on course. Those persons were Vicki Bromm, Jay Rich, Conchita Alonso, April Stevenson, Anita Ducey and Victoria Kovar.

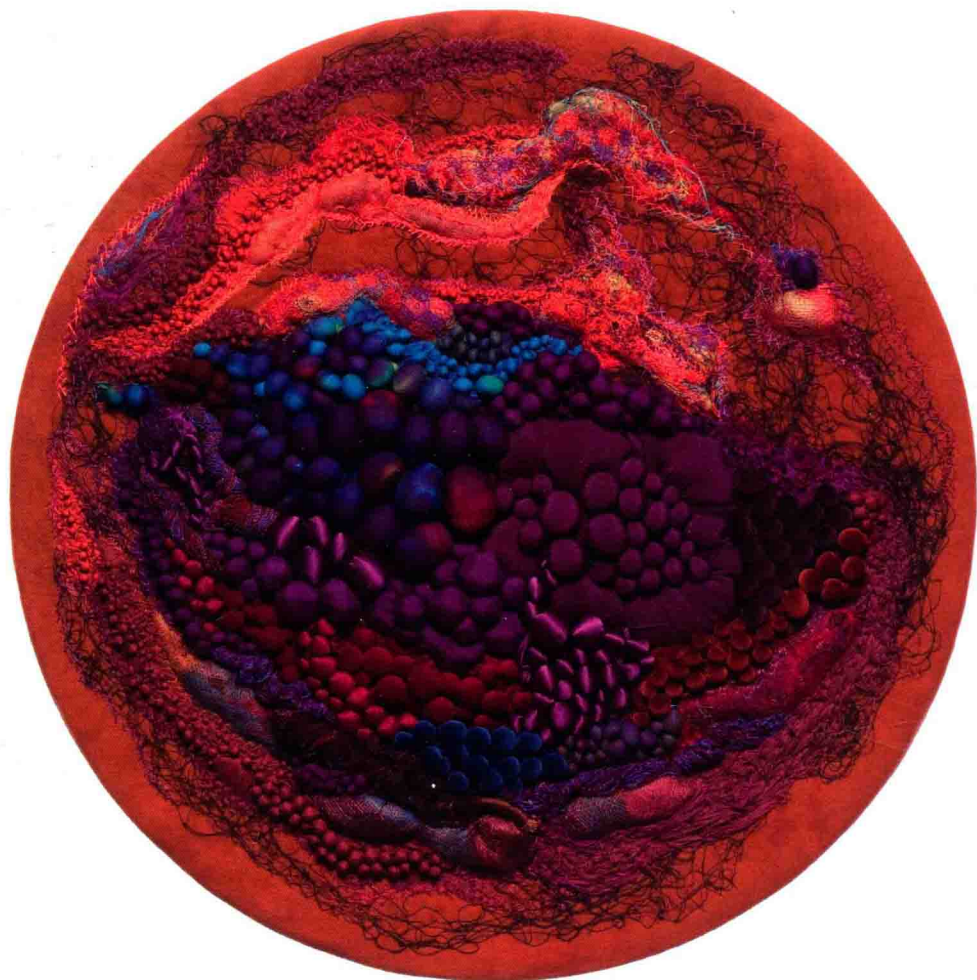
JoAnn C. Stabb, Beverly Gordon and Mary Logue added their narratives to the content of this adventure. Dick Hay and John Nollendorfs provided photographic images, while Dika Eckersley covered the territory with layout design. Jeanne and Lyle Harms as well as others kept us afloat through generous

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The steering committee is grateful to Jane Dunnewold, Julia Lauer-Cheenne, Jane Ellefson and Michelle DeRusha for reviewing the manuscript when our journey was nearing completion. Finally, we thank the members of Friends of the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery for continuing to support the mission of the Gallery.





## Preface

This monograph is about the life, career and artistry of Robert Hillestad. Although his name has been well-known in the field of design education for many years, and images of his garments, accessories, wall pieces and sculptures have appeared in more than 150 print and electronic publications with corresponding narratives, a comprehensive volume about his background has long been missing in the literature. This publication is intended to fill that gap.

Requests for information about him began to increase in 1997 when The Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, East Campus, was dedicated in his honor. Some requests came from writers who were seeking information about the gallery's

namesake, others were from scholars studying in the area of fiber art and wanted to include information about him in their research, still others were from former students who were interested in learning of his whereabouts. Since a seminal work on his life, career and artistry had not been published, the Board of Friends of the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery assumed that responsibility in the year 2002.

Although the composition of the board has changed several times since the inception of this project, the enthusiasm and commitment have been sustained. Three of us, all past presidents of Friends of the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery, have assumed major responsibility for seeing the project to completion.

*Vicki Bromm*

*Anita Ducey*

*April Stevenson*





# To Wear a Celebration for Robert Hillestad

by Mary Logue

Clothes cover bodies  
Like bark a tree,  
a leaf here, a flower there.

We walk inside them  
and they move, too, separately.

\*

cotton boll  
unroll

silk cocoon  
creamy moon

sheep's wool  
knit and purl

\*

Thrift-store negligee  
dances back to life.

Tie torn off a neck,  
dress tossed in a corner,  
flutter into scarves.

A man undoes a shirt,  
thread by thread, makes  
clothes from clothes.

indigo hue  
ocean blue

brazilwood  
red as blood

bloom of weld  
yellow held

\*

Unraveled, threaded together,  
fabric shuttled  
through such good hands.

Pleating, pinching, snipping, sorting,  
sewing, dyeing, trimming, felting,  
twisting, lining, pressing, smoothing.

We celebrate life by wearing it,  
second skin of earth that makes us one.



## The Warp and Weft of a Voyage *by Robert Hillestad*

I wanted to avoid using the metaphor that my life and textiles have long been interwoven with one another, but there is no better way of stating the relationship. When I was a small child, my mother found a practical way of calming me down. She sat me in the middle of a room and emptied out her rag bag in front of me. I was dazzled repeatedly by the scraps of fabric, sorting them again and again, first by color and later according to pattern and texture. It is easy to conclude from those early childhood activities that I was not only pacified by textiles, but launched on a lifelong journey of involvement with them. In the years that followed my journey evolved like a large bolt of fabric unrolling. It became an adventure during which textiles were my road map, mantra, muse and mentor. I took to textiles like one might take to drink! Textiles were my enduring companion as I made my way through life. Had that bag contained blocks of wood, pieces of metal or some other kind of material, my life might have been quite different.

Aside from my birthplace and the areas I lived while serving military duty, matters over which I had no control, textiles played a role in

attracting me to every locale I have lived in thus far. With the exception of military training, all the formal educational programs that I pursued after graduating from high school focused on some aspect of textiles. One way or another, working with textiles enabled me to make a living for myself. Throughout my life I have remained more curious about various aspects of textiles than any other topic, and I've spent considerable time and expense pursuing that interest, always in the spirit of adventure. Textiles have long been a medium of creativity and celebration. Just as some of the most exhilarating moments of my life have been associated with textiles, so have I turned to textile production during periods of disappointment, sadness and grief – times when I literally rehabilitated my psyche, stitch by stitch. In a strange and mysterious way, the textiles journey has taught me the most profound lessons about the meaning of human life.

This essay is a collection of anecdotes about the role of textiles in my quest for meaning throughout this fascinating journey. All together they tell the story about the warp and weft, color, pattern and texture of who I am.