



## ENTERING CREATIVE FIBRE EXHIBITIONS

Catherine Jane

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In the June 2025 issue of *Creative Fibre* magazine, Vicki Browne listed things to consider when entering an exhibition. The list is useful if you have already decided that you want to enter. The following article is aimed at those who haven't yet made that decision and are unsure exactly what is eligible and what is involved in entering an exhibition.

Part of the joy of crafting is showing what we have made to other people. This may take the form of wearing a garment to a group meeting, describing what you have made to the recipient, taking your creation to a show-and-tell session or just showing it to a friend. There's nothing quite like the buzz you get when someone says something along the lines of, "Wow, did you make that?"

It is another level, however, to see your creation displayed among others at an exhibition, where it has been hung in a gallery that is open to the public. Many Creative Fibre groups and areas have exhibitions like this, and there is also a regular national exhibition, which is usually run at the same time as a national festival.

Too often though, members of Creative Fibre are not brave enough, or sure enough of what's involved, to put forward their creations for an exhibition. Many people think that their work isn't good enough, and/or they don't know what's expected. This article aims to address those hesitations.

### WHAT CAN BE ENTERED

As a rule, Creative Fibre exhibitions don't create categories of items to be entered. There are likely to be awards that have eligibility stipulations, but unless otherwise indicated, almost anything handmade from fibre can be entered. The term "fibre" can be applied quite widely, from the commonly known and used fibres like wool, alpaca and silk, to materials that might not be commonly thought of as fibre, such as wood fibre under the bark of a tree, long grass and even copper wire. The item does need to be largely handcrafted — for example, a framed tapestry made using commercially spun yarns would be considered handcrafted because of the tapestry weaving involved, whereas a picture that had been embroidered on commercial canvas with commercially spun silks might not be seen to have enough of a handcrafted component to be eligible —

though this is not a hard and fast rule. So, unless there are stipulated categories and/or you are aiming to win a particular award, your imagination and creativity are not limited, except that there needs to be a demonstrably large component of handcraft in your entry.

### TO SELECT OR NOT TO SELECT

Many, if not most, Creative Fibre exhibition entries go through a selection process before they are mounted. There are many different points of view about this process, ranging from the belief that it is elitist and puts people off entering, to the argument that if gallery space has been hired and the exhibition is open to the public, only the best should be displayed.

There are valid arguments supporting both viewpoints but it is very difficult to accommodate them both in one exhibition. It is important that entrants are informed ahead of time whether their entries will go through a selection process.

### THE SELECTION PROCESS

It is normal to have a number of selectors — to reduce personal biases and to ensure expertise in as wide a range of techniques as are available. Selection needs to be anonymous, so the person and team in charge of managing the exhibition must make sure that selectors are totally unaware of the name of the maker. For that reason, your entry will be given a number or other unique identifier, and only the title of the entry and the description of what it is, and what materials and techniques have been used, will be seen by the selectors. If the selector is someone you know, they may guess that something entered was made by you, but they won't know for sure, and selectors often guess wrongly. They need to be totally unbiased so they can judge each entry on its own merits. What you write about your entry in the description is also important as knowledge of the construction methods and the materials used, as well as

the intended use of the item, is useful to the selectors, and assists with assigning awards. Descriptions shouldn't be too long, or they risk being less carefully read.

Each item will be meticulously examined. Some selectors like to have a quick overview of all the entries before they look at each one individually, but often, this step is omitted. If your entry is a garment, it might be put on a mannequin, or one of the team working with the selectors might be asked to wear it to see how it looks on a human shape. If it is a picture or a wall hanging, your entry might need to be held at a distance to be seen as it is designed to be viewed. The quality of the workmanship will be carefully examined, and if there is any question relating to quality beyond the expertise of the selection panel, an expert in the technique might be consulted. Finishing is paramount — your entry needs to be very tidily finished, and every detail considered: for example, seams, neckbands, buttons and buttonholes. Where suitable, wash and block your entry so it is shaped to its best advantage.

## EXAMPLES OF THINGS TO LOOK FOR

The following list is by no means comprehensive, but will hopefully be an indication of the kinds of things to look for. If in any doubt, consult someone with more experience.

Are the materials used, for example, the fibre or fleece type, suitable for the end product? For example, a beautifully spun and knitted scarf or shawl may be rejected if the fleece used is harsh to the touch and therefore unsuitable for something worn against the skin.

If hand spun, is the amount of twist suitable for the thickness of the yarn and/or the fibre used? Does the twist in the ply match that of the singles so that the yarn is balanced, looks attractive and will lie neatly when it is used to make something, e.g., the yarn doesn't slope in knitting?

If knitted or crocheted, are all the details neat and tidy? Are seams neatly sewn or stitches picked up neatly placed so that the lines of stitches at the seam are evenly retained? Is the stitch used suitable for the yarn and/or end product? Are all the ends neatly tucked in and unlikely to come loose?

If woven, are the selvages neat and even, if these show? Have you checked over the entire weaving to ensure that there are no errors — floats or loose ends? Is the beating even so that the fabric is the same throughout the weaving? Has it been appropriately fulled? If the weaving has been made into a garment, is the woven cloth suitable for the finished product? Is the finishing on the sewing also up to standard?

Felting needs to be completely finished so that it will wear well. The surface of the felted fabric should be firm enough so that if it is pinched, no loose fibres on the surface can be pulled up between the thumb and finger. Even cobweb felting needs to be well enough finished so that it won't fall apart when in use.

## WILL YOUR ENTRY BE GOOD ENOUGH?

There is only one definitive way to find that out — enter! Follow all the guidelines on the entry form and have the courage to send your entry in. You can get advice from more experienced exhibitors beforehand, but no one can predict the final outcome. Selectors are essentially judges, and any

judging process is, by definition, subjective. There are many reasons why an entry gets accepted or turned down, and these may not even have anything to do with the quality of workmanship. You might love the colours you have used, but if they are not to the selectors' taste, or even if they don't fit in well with other items at the exhibition, the colour scheme could be the reason an item is not selected. Sometimes a selector is only looking for new and interesting entries, and will turn down a beautifully made entry just because it is "nothing new". At another exhibition, that same entry might be thought worth displaying because it is a beautifully made example of a classic and timeless design. So enter your best work, but don't be too devastated if it doesn't make the cut — this time.

## COST OF ENTERING

It is a sad fact that exhibitions usually have to charge an entry fee, which is unlikely to be returned if your entry is not selected. This fee is to cover things like the cost of hiring a venue, printing catalogues and posters, and advertising the exhibition. It may also cost you money to send your entry in, and postage is expensive. The costs might make you decide that it is unaffordable to enter a national exhibition, but if you have a local exhibition near to you, the cost might be lower. Consider too how much you paid for the materials you have used, and whether you might be able to sell the entry at the exhibition.

## IF YOUR ENTRY ISN'T SELECTED

Try not to be too discouraged. Many well-established and respected handcrafters have had items rejected. You should get constructive feedback from the selection team, which will help you for future entries, and may help you to improve your techniques. You may disagree entirely with the comments of the selectors, but remember that someone must make the ultimate decisions.

## WHEN YOUR ENTRY IS DISPLAYED

Take lots of photos. Take lots of friends to the exhibition. Take huge pride in your achievement, and thoroughly enjoy the moment.



Floats showing on a woven piece

Sleeve seam on a jersey. The stitches of the seam have been carefully placed between the knitted stitches on the front of the garment so they are in a neat straight line.