

Preliminary Report:

### **Painted and Plaited Baskets with Jackie Abrams at MAFA 2017: A Participant's Eye View**

I have not attended a MAFA conference in a long time. The offerings for the 2017 conference were irresistible, and much to my delight, Jackie Abrams was teaching her Painted and Plaited Baskets workshop. Amongst my weaving friends, the beginning of nearly every conversation for months was "What are you taking at MAFA?" I finally crunched the budget numbers, and signed up for the class. And in spite of a lack of air-conditioning in the building where my workshop was held. I was not disappointed by my choice to attend the conference and this workshop.

A good friend reminded me that MAFA fellowships were available and prodded me to apply. Imagine my surprise when I was awarded one. The choice to attend MAFA just got better and better!

Jackie Abrams is a wonderful woman and an awesome teacher besides being an amazing artist. She was patient, clear and kept a sense of humor given our somewhat steamy classroom, which was cooled slightly to tolerable with an incredibly loud industrial fan.

When Jackie said that she often teaches 5-day workshops, I thought, ugh, that's a long time! At the end of 2 ½ days, I was wishing I had 2 /12 more! The time flew by! There was so much to learn and it seems that we just scratched the surface.

Here's how it went:

Day one morning was intros, a slide show of Jackie's work and lots of demos as we went along. We used acrylic paints to paint 2 sheets of large watercolor paper on both sides. Of course there was drying time in between, and for the not-faint-of-heat, using a hair dryer to hurry that along. Jackie talked about the 2 projects we could choose from, and how to cut out paper into strips.

Lunch break at the cafeteria building, which thankfully was air-conditioned. We shared the time with high-school football and girl's field hockey teams. Yum!

Day one afternoon: We cut out paper in strips with a pasta machine (which our group did NOT break!) and razor knives. And we started weaving, actually, bias plaiting. At first, it was like wrestling with an octopus, but it got easier and more fun. I chose a structural basket, which is basically anything goes: color, width of strips, direction of weaving, turns, twists and braiding. And lots of demos.

Day one evening: Did I mention how thrilled I was to run into Madeline in the elevator? Her keynote was funny & informative. I stood up to take my bow as a fellowship recipient (yikes!) and enjoyed the dessert reception very much. Just what I needed, sugar and caffeine when I was supposed to be winding down to sleep in a strange bed. Oh well, it was worth every bite!

Day two: More weaving, more demos, more painting, more making strips A, lots of ooohs and aaaahs! This group was one of the least complaining, most co-operative and quiet group. We had work to do, and were totally rapt and engaged. A few of us showed up for studio night to keep Jackie company and work on our projects. I did slip out to see what else was going on in our building, meeting Kathrin Weber face to face; she will be coming to our guild to teach soon

Day three: Varnishing, finishing, showing off! Some folks had time to make more than one basket.

Passing it on: Since arriving home, I have painted and plaited at least 20 more baskets of varying sizes, shaped and colors. I just can't stop! I am experimenting with techniques I didn't get a chance to do during the workshop.

I am scheduled to make a presentation to my guild, Jockey Hollow Weavers on November 1. It will be a lecture, power-point, short demo of the technique and an exhibit of the baskets I made during and after the workshop. My friends are hoping for a hands-on experience, and I plan to offer a “play date” with a small group, probably after the holidays.

My sincere thanks to MAFA for the fellowship, which was a huge help to defray the costs of attending the MAFA conference this year. Being immersed in the weaving/fiber arts world for a few was so inspiring and rejuvenating.

Jerri Shankler  
Jockey Hollow Weavers Mendham NJ

#### Final Report:

My challenge following my 2 ½ day workshop at MAFA with the delightful and talented Jackie Abrams was to give a sense of the experience to my guild members. Over 2 ½ days, I painted watercolor paper with acrylic paints, tried not to get obsessed with watching paint dry. Hairdryers helped, and we even blew a fuse with running too many at once. We cut the paper into sections and then ran those sections through, here’s the magic, a pasta machine, fettucine size. I practiced using tiny alligator clips to hold the octopus tentacles of the plaited basket that emerged before my surprised eyes.

I was totally hooked. I came home and collected supplies and then painted and plaited basket after basket. Each one is an improvement over the previous one. In Jackie’s workshop, we had a choice of making a structured, pillow shaped basket or an unstructured anything goes form. Since I went for the unstructured form at the workshop, I did experiment with the pillow and kimono baskets, but really prefer the magic of the unstructured basket. I have only a vague idea of what the end result will be, and just follow the next curve, mountain shoulder or twist.

I brought the completed baskets, and a few baskets in various stages of completion, as well as recently painted papers, paint and of course, the pasta machine. I shared my experience at MAFA, told a few jokes described the process from paper to finished varnished basket. The group had some great questions, and I think I answered most. The level of trained artists and experienced basket weavers in our guild are way above mine. My painting skills are pretty much limited to throwing acrylic onto watercolor paper to cut into strips. I’ve made a few baskets, but again, my basketry skills are limited, although I am learning more and more about bias plaiting with each basket I create. I’m sure a clever basket maker could use these fun paper strips in a lot of different ways to create amazing piece of art.

