

Omaha: North, Midtown, South
Expanding Reach & Involvement to create engaging, inclusive diversified communities.

FIBER ART OMAHA

“It’s about celebrating the art, small makers and entrepreneurs, including crafters that may not know they’re in the fiber and textile art genre, such as basket weavers, papermakers, bookmakers, sewers, textile designers, silk painters and others, including producers of animal and plant fibers,” says Calandra Cooper, executive director and self-described creative.

“I believe there’s a great resource of artists, fiber entrepreneurs, creatives and crafters that’ll embrace fiber arts as the fine art it is.”

While Cooper’s passions focus on learning and teaching, she’s also a creator.

“I’m pretty diverse and diversified,” says Cooper, “I try not to live within the limitations and expectations of others. I don’t want to be a stereotype or limit my life experiences because it makes others comfortable or uncomfortable.”

After working as a continuing education instructor and artist in the New Makerhood District for Metropolitan Community College (teaching fashion draping, vintage couture sewing, natural dyeing and gardening), in 2017 Calandra opened a small art studio in midtown’s Center Mall, Center Studio 518.

The three-room studio is not only her creative quiet space for creating, but also serves as a non-competitive and non-threatening space for hosting art classes, including acrylic water color batik, paper arts, pastels, textile art, weaving, embroidery and cold wax painting.

“I stress to visitors, no one else has to like

what you do. You do.”

Cooper has also spoken and taught at churches, community outlets and educational venues in and around Omaha.

Operating along the peripheral of the established, exclusive circles, within the Omaha art community, Calandra created a unique pathway in opening Inigo, which means “my little love”.

Shortly afterwards, Cooper began eyeing the future; envisioning small creative events; leading to larger creative gatherings centering around art for enthusiasts and more-than-enthusiasts; particularly focusing on mature adults, which often seemed to crave the most involvement, but are most often overlooked in favor of young art-hipsters.

Why the interest in fiber arts? It was a combination of acquiring frame looms, the tapestry craze and the diversity of genres available within fiber arts; especially because many involve plant and animal fibers, specialized tools and by-hand processes.

So was born, Fiber Arts Festival Omaha a/k/a Fiber Arts Omaha in 2019.

Fitting appropriately within Cooper’s endeavors Fiber Arts Omaha is an intricate part of Cooper’s *Inigo Apiary, Flower Farm & Fiber Studio*, a micro “vacant-to-green” flower farm and dye studio located in North Omaha. She and her husband, Sam, a United States Coast Guard veteran, operate.

The Coopers grows flowers, herbs and fiber plants, many native to Nebraska, which are

incorporated into activities involving Inigo Arts, the art studio, and other connected endeavors. The Coopers are working with *C.W. Youth Resource Center*, a long-standing non-profit, more than 43-years in operation, located in downtown Omaha, ran by Carl Washington. As the son of the late Golden Gloves champion and center volunteer, Harley Cooper, Sam has been involved with the *C.W. Youth Resource Center* as a volunteer coach since 2000.

Calandra is re-implementing a diversified arts program at *C.W. Youth Resource Center* and introducing urban agriculture and bee keeping to children involved in the center.

In addition to the already present honey bees (Calandra is a 6-year keeper), butterflies and chickens, Calandra plans on incorporating fiber animals: angora rabbits, sheep and Alpaca into the mix.

As a small business owner, it’s not easy and steering through Covid 19 was a challenge. Through it all, Cooper kept the doors open.

The 2020 show was cancelled due to Covid. The Aug. 2021, show went on at Bancroft Street Market without a hitch.

During the 6-day event which included 5 days of fiber-art-related workshops, including 2 days of open-air vending.

Classes included weaving, yarn dyeing using natural substances, spindle spinning, Bogolanfini, a cultural form of natural dyeing using fermented mud Calandra sourced and made using Mud from Nebraska’s Missouri River and sheep fiber processing; taught by

by Cooper. Other classes included a wet felting class taught by felting artist, Deb Koesters, a lecture and natural building demonstration by Jim Schalles of Tallgrass Hearth and Home and a crochet class taught by Rita Cooper, a fiber-artist and upcycling creative who also showcased her spectacular tapestry weavings during the event.

Artist and quilter, Cheri Vossberg, in addition to her own intricate hand quilts, displayed a number of her late mother’s heirloom quilts.

As Fiber Art Omaha grows we hope to attract instructors from within the community and abroad.

Activities also included a indigo t-shirt dipping session as part of Calandra’s annual Natural Dye Social, which began in 2017.

The beginning of what Calandra says is a long adventure into art and much more than a vendor’s mart, Fiber Arts Omaha, focuses on quality; not quantity.

Classes invite participants to engage in the fiber arts and to make them and their by-hand processes a way of life.

The bonus vendor’s mart is an opportunity for aspiring fiber artist to see, meet and engage with those already involved. Vendors are encouraged to demonstrate, if

possible, what they do.

“We’d like hand-selected vendors that are absolutely passionate about their products and services; such as those on board now that are selling exotic fibers, roving, yarn, equipment, looms for weaving, spinning wheels, spindles, felting, sewing supplies, paper, fabric, textiles and more;”

Cooper continues, “I want attendees to immerse themselves in fiber arts without being overwhelmed and swallowed up; while supporting vendors that are providing the products and services, we rely on in support of those arts.”



“I want to bring people together thru the arts regardless of their race, religion or creed.

Building bridges of trust, embracing collaboration and demonstrating mutual respect and appreciation through the arts is satisfying. I want to create spaces where everyone can participate and be part of the experience, regardless of their attributes, skill level, age and economic standing,” she continues,

“But one thing I don’t do is deal with people with bad attitudes. They’re never worth the wasted time and energy they cost. Besides, there are plenty of other places for them to go.”

“We’re not a “milling venue”. Fiber Arts Omaha doesn’t desire to become so big as to swallow up vendors and attendees, overshadowing and overwhelming both, we want deliberate, diverse, engagement. We’re uniquely different.