



**Crafts Council / Education**

## **Craft Journey**

Jacqueline James / Rug Weaver



Jacqueline James. All images courtesy of the artist.

### **What I do**

I design and make one-of-a-kind hand-dyed and woven rugs and wall hangings for exclusive interiors. Durable and natural wool or cotton yarn is used for the weft and strong linen threads for the warp. I use traditional techniques combined with contemporary design to create bespoke commissioned work for private collectors, interior designers, architects and places of worship.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rug.

My rugs and wall hangings are in public and private collections in the UK and USA. I exhibit my work throughout the UK at quality galleries and craft fairs. I occasionally run textile-related workshops and give illustrated talks about my weaving work to craft guilds and art groups.

## Jobs in textiles

Jobs in textiles include:

Professional designer, maker, manufacturer, sole trader, employed by the textile industry, workshop leader, public speaker, dyer, spinner, technical assistant in a weaving workshop, college or university, author, journalist, expert, lecturer, teacher, mentor, artist in residence, gallery educator, policy maker, freelance artist, consultant, event organizer, administrator, occupational therapist, inventor, researcher, curator and archivist to name a few. I have actually done most of these jobs myself!

As a full time, self employed sole trader, I am completely responsible for all the many and varied tasks that are related to running my small creative business. Half of my work routine involves designing, making, dyeing, setting up my loom, winding yarns, weaving and finishing. The other half of my time is dedicated to marketing and administration including bookkeeping, research and development, business training, email marketing, newsletter / blog writing, databases, promotion and publicity, social media and everything else involved.

My schedule is full each day, but I like the variety.

## Why craft?

From my earliest memories I have always enjoyed creative activities, learning new craft skills and making things with my hands. My interest in yarns and textiles first began as a young child when my granny and mum patiently taught me how to knit, crochet and sew. When I was ten my family traveled around Europe for several months where we visited many incredible museums and art galleries. This experience gave me a fundamental interest and great appreciation of modern and classical art, design and architecture.

When I was growing up we lived near a university and I occasionally walked through the art department on my way home from school. I can clearly remember being fascinated to see all the colourful threads and hear the rhythmic beat of the floor looms. I was enchanted. I did not imagine then that I would become a weaver, but I definitely knew I wanted to be an artist.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rug.

## What I studied at school

I was born in the UK but grew up on the North West coast, USA. As a teenager I had an excellent four year foundation in arts and crafts during high school and experimented with many different art and craft mediums including painting, ceramics, batik, printing, weaving and jewellery making.

This is where I completed my first basic woven tapestry made on a wooden frame loom when I was 16.

## What I studied after school

I really appreciate my parents who gave me a lot of encouragement and support and who allowed me to attend a number of extracurricular creative short courses and workshops including painting, throwing pottery, jewellery making, spinning and dyeing yarn from fleece and of course weaving.

I returned to live in the UK in 1982 and attended a one year Foundation course in Art and Design at York College of Art and Technology. Following this I went on to study Woven Textiles and achieved a BTEC Diploma in Woven and Constructed Textiles at Harrogate College of Art and Technology where I specialized in rug weaving and gained many excellent and valuable design, weaving and yarn-dyeing skills.

I continue to constantly attend short courses and workshops related to weaving, dyeing and marketing given by established textile professionals who inspire me and enable me to learn new skills from experts. I also do my own research and development and spend time experimenting and sampling.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rugs.

## My career path

Early in my career I was fortunate to have the opportunity to design and weave several important public textile commissions in major cathedrals in the UK including York Minster, Westminster Abbey and Blackburn Cathedral. This experience helped me gain professional recognition and gave me confidence to continue this sort of collaborative commissioned work.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rug.

Throughout my career I have been honoured to receive several important grants, bursaries and awards related to my craft of weaving which have all given me wonderful opportunities and positive outcomes. When I was setting up my weaving studio I was given financial support and lots of good business advice from Arts Council England, Crafts Council and The Prince's Trust. In 1997, I received the Winston Churchill Trust Travel Bursary Award which allowed me to travel to the USA and Canada to attend a major international weaving conference and research indigenous textile craft traditions. In 1998, I received a Theo Moorman Trust Bursary Award for weavers which enabled me to experiment with different materials and dyes. I am very proud of these acknowledgements and these experiences have had a positive influence on my creative business.

My work experience also involves facilitating textile workshops with adults and children and giving illustrated talks to craft guilds and art societies. For ten years during my career, I worked regularly as a freelance artist in primary schools and taught basic colour and design skills plus basic textile techniques.

### Important decisions

For the majority of my 30 year career I have focussed on designing, dyeing yarns and making rugs and wall hangings for exhibition and commission. I have always sought and gained information, advice and inspiration from established art and craft organizations like Crafts Council, a-n, Arts Council England and The Design Trust.

My family, friends and creative colleagues have also contributed to my career.

I have exhibited my rugs and wall hangings at numerous quality galleries and craft fairs throughout the UK and continue to do so today. Last year I attended my first trade craft fair and discovered that I do not want to sell my work wholesale to the retail sector after all. My work is very niche and I love the bespoke aspect of it through collaborating and creating one-of-a-kind pieces for clients.

I am a member of many craft guilds, art societies and professional organisations related to weaving and crafts in general. I always enjoy networking at meetings and events to gain support, share relevant information, learn new skills and be with like-minded people. This helps to support and inform the development of my creative small business.

As a mid career artist I recently made the excellent decision to invest time and money to learn new skills to help grow my small creative business. For the past 18 months I have been training and working closely with the Design Trust which has given me so much helpful advice, structure, accountability and especially more confidence and courage.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rug.

## Challenges

I have always been a positive and self-motivated person. I accept and adapt to most challenges in my life and work. The main challenge I have experienced throughout my career has been not earning a consistent income and spending many years not knowing how to earn more from my craft. This has been partly due to my low expectations and lack of knowledge about good marketing strategies.

A lack of money prevented me from investing in good quality photography and web design until I decided to borrow some money for this purpose last year. Having unprofessional images did not reflect the quality of my work and I missed opportunities as a result.

Sometimes, over the years, I have experienced a lack of self confidence and courage or fear of rejection which prevents me from applying for opportunities. I am currently being very proactive as a mid-career weaver by investing lots of time and money into training with The Design Trust. I continue to gain more confidence and direction, learning important business and marketing skills.



Jacqueline James, handwoven rugs.

## My advice to you

I would positively advise and encourage young people to pursue a creative career in crafts. To succeed, you will need to be well focused, organized, self motivated, confident and persistent. It can be lonely working on your own, but you can get a shared studio or join relevant art groups and craft societies for extra support. You may need to do further training to gain necessary skills and I would strongly recommend thoroughly learning about costing and pricing your work properly, business management and marketing skills, continue professional development and keep learning. I believe it is important to be flexible, adaptable, inventive and most of all persevere to realise your dreams.

# Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:  
[www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers)



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