



SOFT SCULPTURE is another art form Ms. Wilkerson enjoys. For the Community Art Development Project she is doing research for

a series of masks. She particularly enjoys the artist in residence part of the program, demonstrating at local schools.

"For now I'm pleased to be working 40 hours a week for the Community Art Development Project, making wall hangings, dyeing batiks. I'm doing research for a series of masks and especially enjoy the artist in residency part of the program, demonstrating in the local schools.

"I don't like constricting or much pre-planning. That's why I don't care for macrame but prefer freer art forms. Even my philosophy is primitive and not concrete and intellectualized. I live life by my feelings.

"I enjoy art work and travel and cross country skiing. I like Oriental rugs and woven floor coverings and fiber hangings and beads and artifacts on the walls. I like crocheted jewelry.

"I'm also primitive in that I love to trade things. I trade with my dentist, trade at craft fairs, trade my work for other services.

"I read some. What do I read about? Mostly about primitive cultures. I visit with my friends, who are very important to me. What do I talk to them about?" She laughed. "What else? Primitive art.

"What pleases me most always are things of the earth. They make me happy. I've been told I'm an old soul that's been around, with an attraction to many cultures. I sense it myself. I accept it."

To Ms. Wilkerson, if one has lived before, one will live again. Weave the weavings, bead the beads, dye batiks, intertwine the textured fibers into hangings for the wall.

Then pack them all on your camel — and go with the flow.
(WEDNESDAY: Malcolm Tervo)



DARLENE WILKERSON spins her own lamb fleece on a drop spindle, above, and below works on a wall hanging, combining strands of

jute, puffs of wool, feathers, rabbit skin, seed pods and leather.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a six-part series the Tribune will run on artists in the Community Art Development Project, a program federally funded and sponsored by Tahoe Art League.)

By STARR EPPS

Artist Darlene Wilkerson believes she has probably spent several previous lifetimes in primitive cultures.

Her work indeed evokes images from National Geographic, touches of the far off and aboriginal, of native women at their looms, camels bearing riders silhouetted against a starry sky, baskets of branches and leaves on proud heads.

She may be found separating lamb fleece by hand, carding it with brushes, spinning it on a drop spindle and coloring it with vegetable dyes distilled from weeds, berries, nuts, onions and insects.

Or she may be engaged in a batik process originated in Indonesia more than 2,000 years ago, applying wax where she does not want dye to take, dipping the cloth into pale yellow, rewaxing and then dipping into orange, and then perhaps into red.

Or designs as free and natural as the way in which rivers bed or clouds shape may flow beneath her fingers as she combines strands of jute, puffs of wool, feathers, rabbit skin, seed pods and leather for wall hangings.

"Each of my hangings includes ropes I have hand dyed," Ms. Wilkerson said. "Each piece speaks of the way in which I view an experience in my world. The language it communicates is pure terrestrial, for I love the earth and its forms.

"I love to use the contrast of soft against coarse, thick alongside thin, to combine textures and colors in earth tones, for these represent all the aspects of living.

"I feel like I was probably a weaver in a small village in a primitive society and probably at times a nomadic person. I am still very definitely an earth lady and I love to travel.

"I went to college for two years and saved money to go to Europe for the first time. Then I went to college for another year and went to the Virgin Islands and lived there for a year.

"I finished college in the next two years with one summer in Mexico and one in Canada. Of the places I've been, Afghanistan and Nepal are absolutely my favorites because of their primitiveness and beautiful handicrafts.

"In Afghanistan the nomadic women wear bangled bracelets and beads and full dresses with buttons sewn all over them and hair in tiny little braids with bells on the end of them, and go barefoot with rings on their toes.

"I have an affinity with such lifestyles and soak up the culture and transmit it to my art. Many of my batiks are taken off slides and photographs from places I've visited, the women with their jewelry, the symbols, the villages."

After receiving her bachelor of arts degree at Long Beach University, Ms. Wilkerson worked with children and adults at Del Amo Psychiatric Hospital in Torrance, Calif.

She taught macrame, weaving, ceramics, leather, crochet, sewing, cooking, gardening and current events for two years and then decided to move to Tahoe to sell her art work locally and travel to out of town craft fairs.

"I hope in the future new doors will open for gallery contact and work with decorators," she said. "I would love to combine art with travel.

"Also, I've recently heard of the possibility of working for a master's degree in tribal nomadic textiles at the University of Washington in Seattle and I'm really excited about that. That might include a year's research in a country of my choice.