

FELTSCAPE

Cora Jongsma -
Making Landscape with Felt
Text: Martien van Zuilen

FELTSCAPE: a depiction of the landscape that is constructed out of several layers of wool which have been made into felt, using water and soap. The stratification is created in the interchange between the making process, research into the landscape's history and visual experience. In doing so, a parallel is created between the making process of the feltscape and the making process of the landscape itself. (Cora Jongsma, *Matterscape – Taskscape – Feltscape*)

Setting the scene

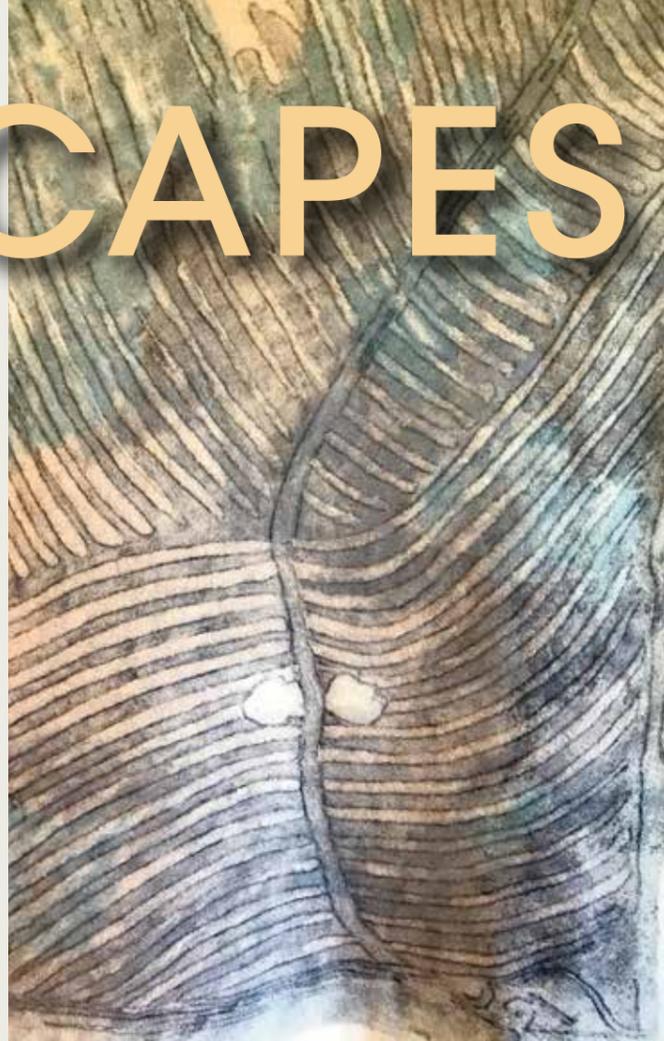
Cora Jongsma (The Netherlands, 1968) is a landscape researcher and visual artist. She makes large feltscapes, artworks that depict the surface of a landscape and its creation as a whole: culture, historical characteristics, natural reliefs and modifications made by farmers and owners. Cora studied Monumental Design at the Dutch art academy ArteEZ, and Landscape History at the University of Groningen (2017). She lives in Assen in The Netherlands. Halfway around the world, the **Margaret River region in the south-west of Western Australia** is renowned for its wild beaches, surf breaks and vineyards, attracting an estimated 500,000 visitors annually. It is the country of the Wardandi cultural group of the Nyoongar people. Following British settlement in the mid-1800s, large-scale timber logging commenced to create economic opportunities. In the 1920s the district saw an increase in arable land holdings and farm-related cultivation.

The Farm Margaret River is an 80-hectare property near the township of Margaret River. Farmed over four generations, the current owners have a strong commitment to the arts and community and a deep regard for the land. Several artist studios on the property provide a creative and immersive environment for exhibitions, open studios and visiting artists.

In 2019 Cora Jongsma was the first international Artist-in-Residence at The Farm Margaret River and we met and spoke towards the end of her 5-week residency.

Felt Meets Landscape

Cora 'rolled into felt' some twenty-five years ago, during her time at the art academy. She used commercial felt, a fabric that didn't fray and didn't require hemming, to create large machine-embroidered works.



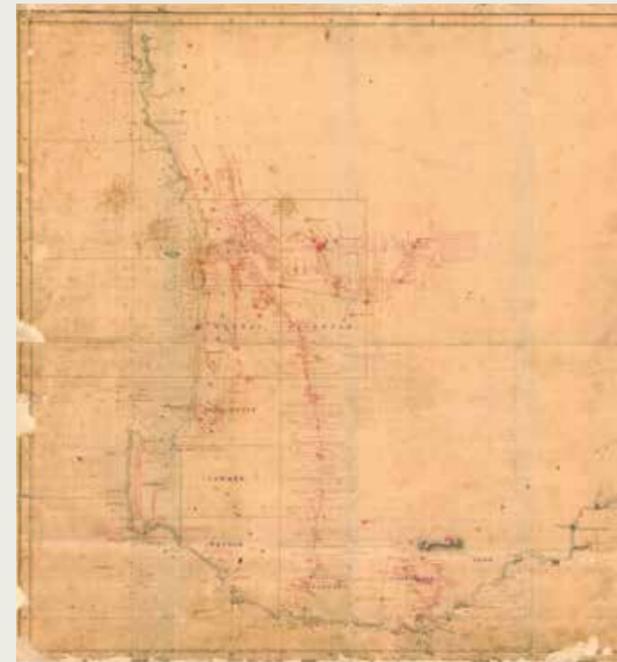
Feltscape – Nick's Food Forest.
Photographer: Cora Jongsma

'[But] I wanted to work with different colours and textures in the felt and then someone said – well you can make your own!'

Several years later, still making felt and working as a qualified art teacher in Rotterdam, Cora decided to move to a more rural area in the north of The Netherlands. She also returned to study: 'I wanted to feel more of a connection with the landscape, and I enrolled in a master's degree (Landscape History) where I could immerse myself, expand my horizons, and focus on my thoughts about landscape. I wanted to find a way to make the experience of landscape immersive, a sense of connectedness to landscape'.

It was during a study-tour to the Salisbury Plain in the UK in 2015 that Cora first linked her two main fields of interest: landscape history and the making of felt. 'Each student was tasked to research and prepare a presentation about the landscape. It had to have depth and be of value. I concentrated on the micro-relief or surface of the ritual landscape of Stonehenge (situated on the Salisbury Plain). I was looking to work in a manner that was comfortable for me, a way of researching but also experiencing the landscape, to share my story'.

'I researched the history of the landscape, and then I mapped that by making what I later came to call a *feltscape*. A large piece of felt which was like a cartographic chart of the landscape surface.



Historical Map, South-West of Western Australia showing tracks of early explorers, including Bannister and Dale, 1830-1831. Source: State Records Office of Western Australia

It became a focal point to talk about the landscape; the other students could look at it and I could point out, on the felt, "this is this and there". We then walked the terrain to experience the landscape itself. It was during that trip that I realised that, when I want to really understand something, I research it by way of *making*'.

Since 2015 Cora has undertaken numerous artist-in-residencies, mostly in Scandinavia, to develop her felt-based landscape research.

Central to her research is time; time to dwell in the landscape itself, to get a connection with the people that live in that environment, to learn about their daily lives. Her approach centers on the links between art, history and the creation of the landscape; the interconnectedness of seemingly separate elements such as natural features, wildlife and modifications made by farmers. As Cora explained, the cultivated landscape is often understood as if it is a natural environment: 'Our experience and interaction with the landscape is determined by the soil's upper layer, its micro-relief. Not the broader aspects but the type of soil, its location and especially how a farmer cultivates the landscape and applies their 'signature' to that landscape. A farmer doesn't just work on the land. By way of their engagement with the land they make and influence the landscape'.

Time @ The Farm

Coming from the northern hemisphere and being on unknown territory, Cora spent time researching the geological history of the Margaret River region, gathering historical and geographical information on the cultivation practices of British colonists, and the fire stick farming skills of Aboriginals in pre-colonial Australia. She spoke with locals to understand why people might farm here. 'I realised how connected people here feel to their surroundings, how they engage with the landscape and how farmers play a role in what happens to that landscape. Each had their own story and connections to the land'.

Tim and Nick are both farmers, albeit it in very different ways. Tim leases an area of land at The Farm which was once owned by his grandparents and then his uncle. His historical connection to the area is strong. Nick on the other hand is a relatively new farmer with different ideas. His vision was to create an organic food forest consisting of sections of various fruit trees on one parcel of land.



Aerial view of Nick's property. Images courtesy of Nick



Tim mowing. Photographer: Cora Jongsma



The Farm Margaret River with GPS pattern indicating Tim's mowing pattern. Image by Cora Jongsma



Wool Fibres



The finished Feltscapes of Tim's land and mowing pattern



Cora working on Tim's Feltscapes



Nick's Feltscapes (detail), showing the ridged soil lines.



Landversations – Nick's Feltscapes. Photographer: Cora Jongsma



Landversations – Tim's Feltscapes. Photographer: Helen Taylor

Conscious of the geological relief and water-locked soil of the location, Nick elevated the soil in ridges to protect the roots of the trees against stagnant water.

During her residency at The Farm Cora created two new, large *feltscapes*. One depicts a section of Tim's paddock and the other is an aerial map of Nick's food forest. Both works reveal the tracks and traces of the farmers' respective farming methods and interactions with the land.

Cora gathered research data for the feltscapes using a drone camera and GPS equipment. For example, Tim was given a GPS to record his movements as he mowed the land. Cora also interviewed both men to gain insights about their working lives and interactions with the land.

She feels strongly that, through her research and felt art, she is in some ways making the landscape itself. 'That means that I am entangled, engrossed in the experience.



QR code
Cora Jongsma at
The Farm Margaret
River (short film), by
Christopher Young

[But] it is not my design; I'm not making it up. The design can be found in the landscape, it is the story of the farmer who worked this landscape.' And looking at Tim's *feltscapes*, this became very clear. It is not just a rectangular block of land, and the mowing pattern recorded via GPS is not straightforward. There are features in the landscape that affect the way the land is mowed; odd corners and 'obstacles' such as rocks, trees and holes to avoid.

To create the actual feltworks, Cora used a combination of different fibres: dyed merino wool tops, fine metallic fibres and natural coloured coarse Drenthe Heath Sheep wool which she brought from her home-region in The Netherlands. The choice of colour in the works was not paramount; often it can have a symbolic value rather than a realistic function. Of most interest is the way the different fibres react with one another and the effects that can be created.

For Cora, the transformation of the material during the felting process and the parallels between the feel of the fibres and the structure of the work, matches what landscape can be: 'As soon as you make a map of the landscape it becomes part of you. And that experience and feeling is incredibly special. You can only experience that by the doing of it, by being a maker. I can touch it, the inviting gestures of the landscape, the feeling that it can evoke. Landscape is tactile, as is wool. I feel an affinity with the act of painting. You know that the first layer of paint is not always the layer that is exposed. And that is the same when working in felt. It is multi-layered. I also like to draw a parallel between making interventions during the process of feltmaking and the farmer making interventions through cultivating and maintaining the landscape.'

Landversations

Once finished, the *feltscapes* take on an additional dimension by way of conversations with the farmers about their relationship with the land.

'We had a gathering with a few local people and Tim and his partner were present. And it was a special moment. Tim had not seen the *feltscapes* I had created yet he absolutely

recognised the markers of his land in my work, the landscape and its features; he could relate the sequence by which he mows the surface of the land, why he moved in certain ways. The work is abstract in nature for everyone but the farmer and me. He could 'read' the work. That is a special conversation or, better put, a *landversation*. A conversation about the land, so that people gain an understanding about what is important to the person working the land.

For example, farmers often mow the land from the outside in, but on Tim's land there is a section containing residual stones; it functions as a protected area for small wildlife. Quails hide in the grass. Tim knows the birds are there, he knows the area needs to be mowed, and he knows that if he injures one of them the hawk that is sitting in a tree on the edge of the forest immediately reacts to grab the injured bird. It is not only about *when* to mow the grass or about production. The *feltscapes* serve as a point of entry by which farmers' stories are shared about their engagement with the landscape. And in return, through my archival research the farmer can discover new things about their surroundings. It is a way to create connections among people, to gain insights and more respect for each other, and to create a lasting connection between landscape and art.'

Photographer: Christopher Young (unless otherwise noted). To see the short film by Christopher, about Cora's residency at The Farm Margaret River, load the QR Code.

For more information about Cora Jongsma and her work, visit her website <https://feltscapes.blog>

The Farm Margaret River:
www.thefarmmargaretriver.com.au

Christopher Young, photographer: zebra-factory.com
Cora's residency at The Farm Margaret River was in part funded by Artsource, the peak membership body for visual artists in Western Australia www.artsource.net.au