

"Color Story: Cabinet," pieced hand-dyed cotton wall hanging by Erin Wilson, at the New Hope Arts Center



An exhibit in New Hope pays tribute to textile arts such as weaving, sewing, felting and crocheting.

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Life  
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# High-fiber art

By GWEN SHRIFT  
STAFF WRITER

Sculpture for the body, for the foot; three-dimensional works to wear around one's neck; rugs never meant to be walked on, quilts never to be slept under extend the dimensions of utilitarian design and technique into the art world.

Though fabricated, there is something elemental about thread and cloth — not to mention raw animal or vegetable fibers — that speaks to seekers of pure expression.

Practitioners in such media find a venue at the New Hope Arts Center's "fiber, fabric, fashion," an invitational exhibition of textile art on view through March 20.

The show is broadly defined to embrace works as diverse as Annina King's intricately seamed and appliqued suits and rarified wall hangings made possible by Erin Wilson's skill with dye and sewing machine.

Like her other works, Wilson's "Color Story: Cabinet" takes the form of a pieced patchwork quilt that's miles above what one usually associates with the technique.

Each of the squares in this quilt (which is strictly for hanging) measure about 3 inches on a side; each is composed of tiny patches, some as thin as a toothpick, to convey stylized architectural interiors and exteriors.

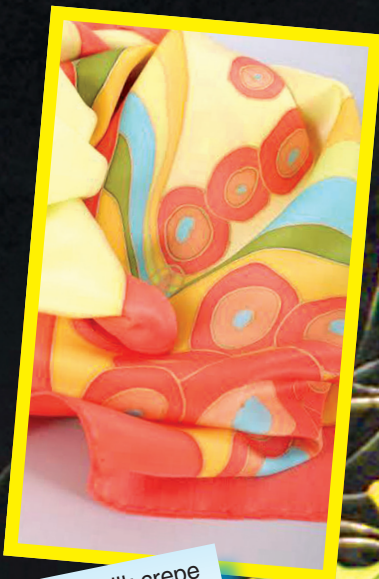
As if her needlework were not impressive enough, the artist also dyes her own cloth.

There is no shortage of love for basic processes elsewhere in the exhibit, as Gina Tavelli demonstrates with felted works that embrace the primitive technique.

Tavelli's kid mohair hat would have fit right in thousands of years ago in Central Asia. A pair of booties with generously turned-up toes is fanciful, and perhaps similarly influenced by ancient fashion; while Nellie Kouzmina's felt purses bearing oversized felt blossoms are completely of the moment.

Other artists deploy loom, hook and needle to great effect, such as the color-blocked rag rugs woven by Claudia Mills, which are useful, if you can bear to walk on art.

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Printed silk crepe de chine scarf by Addie Hocynec



"Cream & Sugar," a hooked wall hanging by Claire Marcus



"Peaches & Rose" dress by Nellie Kouzmina, modeled by Michelle Kott



Felted slippers with turned-up toes by Gina Tavelli

## LIFE AT LARGE

# Odd science facts mushroom into grand unified theory

By GWEN SHRIFT  
STAFF WRITER

The more chaotic and complicated things get, the more I long for an explanation of the universe that will fit into the span of the average newspaper story and that my editor will agree to publish.

Perhaps this is the dream of every reporter of a certain age, who has seen it all, and written about most of it, and scraped along with sufficient accuracy to sustain life. It is the lot of those who gaze in wonder at the heavens, but are paid to cover sewer commissions.

The challenge to make sense of it all is unending. So I decided that, whatever else I accomplished this week, I would buckle down and finally devise a grand unified theory.

These usually are applied to physics, of which I know nothing beyond the fact that grand unified theories seem always to elude the grasp of the best brains on the planet just as they are ready to pounce.

My theory, which I have provisionally titled the L@L assumption, will reconcile

the high with the low, the old with the new, the doo-wah-diddy with the dum-diddy-do, and other existential issues.

My theory began to take shape while I was driving to work and mentally reviewing recent highly entertaining developments in science, some of which achieve satirical symmetry with various other kinds of news.

Then it struck me, like a flash of sunlight through fog, that the probability of getting through the intersection before the light turns red is directly related to the emotional intensity of the cell phone conversation taking place between the driver in front of me, who has not noticed that the light has turned green, and her boyfriend.

Similarly, the odds favor a box of donuts adrift in sticky white powdered sugar appearing in the office the same day one wears a black shirt or sweater. Damage from donuts is linked to the phenomenon that produces high winds on trash-pickup day.

Do you think these are mere coincidence? The L@L assumption says otherwise.

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Mushrooms may look benign, but could these fungi be communicating with a giant underground organism?

FILE PHOTO

FILM CLIPS

# Disney’s ‘Zootopia’ will charm the entire family

By DEBRA WALLACE  
CORRESPONDENT

When an adorable rookie bunny cop teams up with a sly con artist fox it results in animated cinematic magic filled with important life lessons for all of us.

The new family movie “Zootopia,” began five years ago with exhaustive research from its co-directors, Byron Howard and Rich Moore. Howard is best known for directing “Tangled” and “Bolt,” while Moore is the creative force behind “Wreck-It Ralph.”

During a recent Philadelphia press day for the movie, the directors called the latest animated Disney movie, which opened Friday, a contemporary buddy comedy with a twist. They both grew up loving the “great Disney animal films.” Howard’s favorite childhood film was “Robin Hood,” while Moore’s was “The Jungle Book.”

“We wanted to honor that legacy,” Howard said, “but in a new and different way that dives even deeper.”

“Zootopia” takes place in a contemporary city that happens to be populated by animals. This is a unique place where no matter what you are – from the largest elephant to the smallest shrew — you can pursue even your most lofty dreams. But that doesn’t mean the road may not be extremely bumpy.

When rookie officer Judy Hopps (voiced by Gennifer Goodwin) arrives, she discovers that being the first bunny on a police force of big, tough animals can be daunting.

Determined to prove herself, she jumps at the opportunity to crack a mysterious case of missing animals, even if it means partnering with Nick Wilde (voiced by Jason Bateman) — a fast-talking, scam-artist fox.

Comprised of intricately detailed neighborhoods that celebrate different cultures, Zootopia is a unique city with adorable residents that will charm several



Disney from Associated Press  
Mayor Lionheart (voiced by J.K. Simmons) and Assistant Mayor Bellwether (voiced by Jenny Slate) in “Zootopia”

generations of moviegoers.

In “Zootopia,” there’s ritzy Sahara Square for desert animals, Tundratown for the polar bears and moose, the hot and humid Rain Forest District, Little Rodentia for the tiniest mammals, and Bunnyburrow for the millions and millions of bunnies. The downtown area, Savanna Central, is a melting pot where a wide array of mammals from every environment come together.

Among the other expert voice artists are Idris Elba, Bonnie Hunt, Tommy Chong, Don Lake and Shakira, as Zootopia’s big international pop star, Gazelle.

Howard, who grew up in Landsdowne, said he aims to make

movies for everyone in the family. “We as adults want to enjoy this as much as our kids do, (so) there is a lot of humor in ‘Zootopia,’ for adults.”

Moore said that the movie has been dubbed in some 40 languages and he recently had the opportunity to watch the film with an audience in Brussels, Belgium.

“When it came to the scene at the DMV and they are waited on by sloths, there was one dad who was cracking up and howling with laughter,” he said. “I looked over and saw his little boy watching his dad, and he loved that they were sharing that experience.”

To the directors this was a great example of their chance to tell

stories that everyone can find their way into. “We really try to make the types of timeless movies that I grew up loving,” Moore explained. “These are stories that play on multiple levels and I can feel good taking my kids to — tales that are not only entertaining, but have some depth to them.”

Moore said that whatever the subject matter — video game characters, futuristic robots or charming animals — the directors must become experts in order to foster good storytelling and engrossing filmmaking.

“The first thing we did after the initial idea,” explained Howard, “was spend almost an entire year conducting research on animals

and animal behavior.”

This work took them first to Disney’s Animal Kingdom Theme Park, and later, their 14-member creative team went to Kenya. They directors said it was the most incredible experience of their lives.

“I have been a lot of places before, but there we were in the middle of the Savannah grasslands. Suddenly, we were stepping into animal society and we were among wildebeest, zebra and giraffes,” Howard recalled. “Our first camp was near a watering hole, and it inspired one of the scenes in the film. No one was eating or attacking each other. They were cooperating — much like in a human city.”

The directors quickly learned that in the mammal world, there are 90 percent prey animals and 10 percent predators. “This started to form the plot and the emotional story of the fox who is a predator animal and his reluctant partner who is a bunny, and also a prey animal,” explained Howard.

The directors kept in mind how much children and adults love animals, and how we see them as a reflection of ourselves. They also saw rich life lessons in the story that they wanted to tell.

“I can definitely relate heavily to Judy’s pluck and determination,” said Moore. “She wants to go to this new place to make the world better, and she gets right in there and finds out that sometimes the world does not agree with your passion.”

Moore added that Judy realizes by the end of the movie that “changing the world can sometimes mean changing yourself and your way of thinking. Through self-examination, she makes herself a better person and a mature version of the girl we fell in love with. I really like seeing our main character take that journey.”

It is definitely worth taking a journey to “Zootopia.”

## Fiber

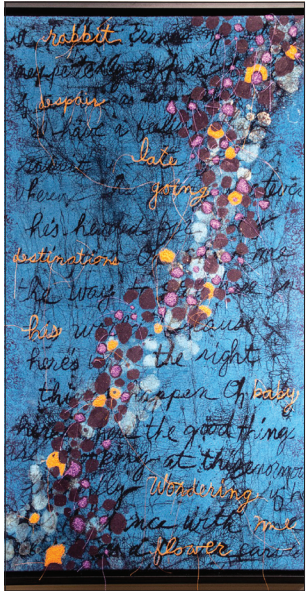
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Claire Marcus is highly skilled with hooks, crocheting “Angel Wing Coat,” a sophisticated piece of wearable art suitable for the most style-conscious street in Manhattan.

Her wall hangings, such as “Cream & Sugar,” employ a rug-hooking technique using ribbon and lace as well as the more usual yarn.

Some works use stitching as a painter uses brushstrokes; still others drape, paint or stuff cloth to achieve sculptural effects. Bits of raw fiber such as hemp make textural points in mixed-media pieces.

Among the most painterly work is that of Michael Mamp, who literally adds extra layers of meaning to resist-dyed pieces with beads, stitching



“Hidden Words, Forgotten Heroes,” textile art by Michael Mamp, at the New Hope Arts Center.

and tails of thread.

Machine embroidery illuminates selected script

in Mamp’s “Hidden Words, Forgotten Heroes, Graffiti,” while the assemblage “Mama Died” takes the form of a wire grid overlaid with images printed on cloth, the whole embellished with naive stitching.

Other artists uphold the playful tradition of soft sculpture, of which cloth and fiber are essential components.

Holly Abbott offers an ingenious, conceptual floor covering-that-isn’t, “Wonderland Rug.” The artist composes a dimensional magic carpet of foam, chiffon, chenille, velvet, metallic-print knits and LED lights.

Joyce Vollmer plants a tall tree made of draped and painted cloth near a personal-sized patchwork tent devised by painter Illia Barger, which formerly furnished a boutique.

Among the most novel fashion sculptures in

the exhibit are two by Lia Nielsen: “Raw,” an evening dress in repurposed materials that include wooden “fish scales” on a long, trailing skirt; and “Green with Envy,” an openwork structure worn over a strapless minidress.

“Fiber, fabric, fashion” is a departure for the arts center in subject matter, and in visitor engagement.

Organizers opened the exhibit with a runway fashion show and, for the run of the exhibit, include a boutique selling clothes and accessories.

Among the offerings are fashions by designers and artists such as King and Ginnie Burke, plus painted silk scarves by Addie Hocynec and jewelry by Joanne Eisenberg, Janice

Hengel and others.

The arts center is at 2 Stockton Ave. in New Hope. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday, and by appointment. Phone: 215-862-9606. Website: newhopearts.org.

Gwen Shriff: 215-949-4204; email: gshriff@calkins.com

## Life

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According to my research, events up and down the food chain are dictated by the phases of the moon, plus geological activity on the other planets in our solar system, which take their orders from converging black holes, random radio-wave signals from distant galaxies and Halley’s Comet (part time).

At the planetary level and below, this means that two mushroom-type organisms, each in excess of three square miles in size, are in charge here in the United States, despite what anybody else tells you.

These are called honey fungi, and have been scientifically proven to sound like a bad joke.

The honey mushrooms, in turn, are governed by a series of evolutionary events involving a recently newsworthy 650-million-year-old sponge, said to be “full of cholesterol,” and a shrimp-like creature dating back 520 million years and known to

have a nervous system.

The connections among these creatures are still murky, which calls for bold thinking.

Under the L@L assumption, ancient sponge genes somehow split off and infiltrated the honey fungus, making it nothing like a device for the bath and extremely delicious. Or so says a top chef interviewed by the BBC.

If one pauses a moment and looks at the stars, one may be overcome by the grandeur of a system that over billions of years could produce a tasty fungus and also Donald Trump, and then one might need to emotionally regroup for a month or two.

Highly evolved specimens can blame the necessity for this psychological work on Chengjiangocaris kunmingensis, an ancient Chinese arthropod that was full of nerves.

As near as fossil investigators can determine, this little creature had approximately 80 legs and likely was far more high-strung than its modern relatives such as

the velvet worm. Studies are pending on the silkworm.

As evidence of the superiority of Chinese fossils over those found in other nations, the scientists revealed that they had actually seen the animal’s nerve fibers, perfectly preserved in rare sediment.

By now it may be crashingly evident to followers of the L@L assumption that sinister fungi capable of making normal human beings regress to their inner arthropod is a handy metaphor for American political life.

However, those followers would be wrong. Our major political parties are nothing like giant underground fungi.

According to the BBC, the fungus is made up of cells “that can communicate, and that have a common purpose or can at least coordinate themselves.”

I predict an easy win if the honey mushroom ever runs for president. It is all there in the prophecies of Nostradamus.

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