

## **Artist's Statement**

### **Susan Barrett Merrill**

My work is essential fiber, primitive and tribal. From windswept Flat Island, off Addison Maine, where I help with the shearing of hardy island sheep, to the dye meadows where I collect nature's colors, these masks embody the spirit embedded in the life of the earth.

If I am known as an artist, it is for my unique technique of off-loom dimensional weaving and weft-wedging. Communing between the natural and supernatural worlds, the woven figures personify an identity with their spiritual ancestors. Earth's materials find a home in the organic forms, creating a powerful living presence.

The spirit of root and flower remain alive in the color. It is not so much color variation as perfect harmony with the fiber that makes natural dyes so beautiful. I use ancient methods of twining and interlacing structures to embellish the felted headdresses, adding essential detail to spark awareness of the earthy texture of the handspun woolen faces. The felting of the faces onto headdresses seems to give birth to the mask persona. Out of water and warmth and labor, a new being emerges.

*Zati* is an Urdu word meaning "from the inside out" or "the spirit inside". A mask is made to be a sacred space. Through mask making, I am learning to see all creation as a mask of the divine.