

Leslie Buckle, Product Custodian

It seemed that purses didn't sell quite so quickly as they did at the 2015 sale when it sometimes seemed they just leapt off the tables! This will be our 13th year of selling purses (remember we started out under the name, Purses for Africa!) so we may have saturated certain markets and need to keep trying new things. Here are some thoughts on what we can keep doing, what we should avoid, and what we might want to try.

#### FABRIC

The quality of our fabric purses is fantastic. They are true purses rather than bags, with interesting fabrics, lots of pockets, and commercial-looking hardware. Pretty well any of these will sell. What may make a difference is the choice of colour and pattern in the fabric. Taste is so personal so it is hard to make recommendations. What we had difficulty selling was simple tote bags, perhaps because there are so many free or very inexpensive reusable bags available - the kind that contain advertising, whether for stores or non-profits. Tote bags, if we do make them, need to have some heft or substance. This can be provided by interfacing, batting, using a stiffer fabric, and perhaps including a hard bottom. We are looking for something to differentiate them from the 'freebies'.

Way back in our history, we had some lovely bags and purses made with upholstery fabric but there have been few of these over the last couple of years, so it would be nice to have more next time. With all purses, pay attention to the handles and make sure that they are substantial as well. Fabric handles should be batted or interfaced.

#### FELTED

The expectations for felted bags have really risen since we first started. Bags almost always need a closure such as a zipper, a magnetic snap, or a button and loop unless they are large shoulder bags. Lining has almost become a requirement as are pockets, whether zippered or open. When lining a bag, pay attention to fabric and colour. Substantial fabrics such as satin or moiré in a lovely matching or contrasting colour really draws attention when the bag is opened and increases the overall appeal.

Because some people are knitters and others are sewers, we can now take a team approach to producing felted bags. Knitters can submit an unfinished bag and the Purse Custodian will find a sewer willing to make a lining and pockets.

Last year, the larger felted bags sold better. As far as colour goes, bright colours take longer to sell as it may take time till just the right person (the one who just loves purple!) comes along. So we might want to focus more on neutrals such as beige, grey, and black. This doesn't mean that the purses need to be boring, though! Embellishments such as a beautiful button that doubles as a closure, or a cluster or row of smaller buttons, shapes cut out of felt, felted flowers or other shapes, beads and so on can be used. Finally, patterns using Fair Isle or Intarsia, where contrasting colours are knit into the purse itself, sold very well, so we would like to see of these next time.

For yarn, patterns, and questions, please contact the Purse Custodian via [handcrafts@ujamaagrandmas.com](mailto:handcrafts@ujamaagrandmas.com).