

Seven Sisters | Kyrgyzstan | Apparel
**Ethereal felt on
 silk textiles**



Zhanyl Sharshembieva of Kyrgyzstan is a member of a truly unique artist collective known regionally and globally as The Seven Sisters. As the name implies, this is a family group, created over a decade ago with the desire to preserve cultural traditions around felted textiles. The basis of this craft was taught to the seven sisters by their grandmother, who was a recognized master of the creation of a type of warm, woolly carpet called shyrdak. The sisters' father, an artist and ethnographer, is also integral to this collective, and the sisters say he is their main source of advice and criticism.

The sisters, well-versed in the ancient technique of wet felting, long ago refined by Kyrgyz nomads, took the tradition a step further by embracing nuno felting techniques which join wool and silk fibers through soap, hot water, friction, and a bit of genius. Their skills produce textiles with a light and delicate structure, whose airy quality makes them ethereal, almost weightless. From beginning to end, the entire

process is done manually, with only water, wool, soap, some simple tools, and skillful hands.

From ancient times, and still in many communities today, nomadic Kyrgyz people have relied on felted goods to stay warm while tending their livestock, as well as to stay cozy in their yurts. According to traditional beliefs, felted textiles with symbolic motifs not only ward off chills, but protects people from evil spirits and enemy forces. Products made by Sharshembieva and her sisters have received recognition not only in domestic markets but also in many exhibitions and festivals abroad.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ARTIST