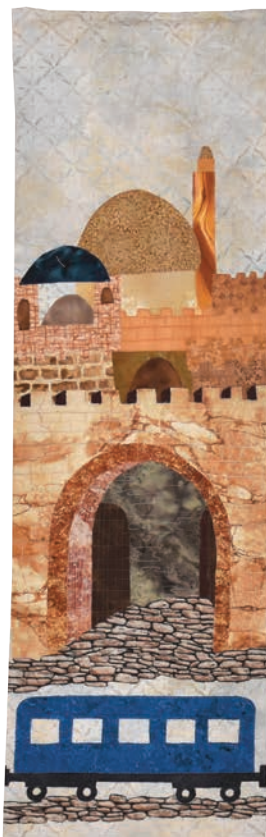


# All aboard!

*The Orient Express takes viewers on a grand tour*

by Elizabeth Byrom and Annegret Fauser



## **Train 2**

Elizabeth Byrom, USA/France: *Along the Way*

Shoshi Rimer, Israel: *The Holy City*

Ethelda Erasmus, Ireland: *Istanbul, The Exciting Start of a Journey*

Lena Meszaros, France: *Pharaon Express*

Photos by Stuart Byrom

Imagine boarding a fabled train that takes you to places of beauty, intrigue, and leisure. That is what members of SAQA's Europe & Middle East region did as countries shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rather than booking tickets to Paris, Vienna, Budapest, or Istanbul, SAQA artists answered a call for entries from Lena Meszaros, a quilt artist based in France, who proposed creating textile panels that express their "individual inspiration related to the Orient Express in the widest possible way." This prompt led to



#### **Train 4**

Sally Hutson, United Kingdom: *In Vogue*

Geneviève Attinger, France: *Orient Express Venice-Simplon Logo Variation*

Leah Cooke, USA: *The Voyage*

Regula Affolter, Switzerland: *Trip to Davos in My Mind*

Denise Grégoire, France: *Très Chère Agatha*

scenes of passengers, train-car interiors, destinations, and landscapes seen along the route. The only fixed parameters were the size and subject of each panel: approximately 31.5 x 10 inches (25 x 80 cm), with either a train car or a locomotive represented in the panel's bottom section. As the finished quilts traveled to art venues across the region, they were grouped into "textile trains" containing a locomotive followed by several cars.

Members eagerly responded to this call. Bieke Paternoster of Belgium said: "I remember that the presentation of the project sounded like music to my ears. I was desperately looking for a kind of support, something new to focus on in those difficult days and weeks."

Through Zoom calls in 2020 and 2021 organized by regional representative Birgit Schüller of Germany, forty-four artists from fourteen countries created an inspiring exhibition. Participating artists are from Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Other artists for whom SAQA Europe & Middle East is their secondary region, live in Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, the island of Saba, and the United States.

Meszaros says that the project was inspired by Georges Nagelmackers, a Belgian civil engineer and entrepreneur who founded Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits, which operated the various Orient Express

routes. The train line was established in 1883 to connect Paris with Constantinople, as Istanbul was then known, before expanding to London and beyond.

Together with the Silk Road and the Oregon Trail, the Orient Express counts among the most storied travel routes of Western culture. Tales of seduction, espionage, and even murder have contributed to the myth of the glamorous train. Its passengers included crowned heads of state and celebrities such as fashion icon Coco Chanel, novelist Ernest Hemingway, and British intelligence officer Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence, who became known as Lawrence of Arabia. The train is the setting for many famous fictional stories, including



Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train*, and Ian Fleming's James Bond adventure, *From Russia with Love*.

For some artists, participating in the project was a personal journey through cloth. Maria Billings of Oregon House, California, says, "The Orient Express was a project that made me think about my life, the 'train' of my life with its major stations." Other makers such as Lydie Bihlet of Lus-la-Croix-Haute, France; Bamboat Kurshid of London, United Kingdom, and Teresita Leal of Olivos, Argentina, found joy in exploring the mythic aspects of the line. Bihlet asks, "Is it not a fabulous challenge to travel on this king of trains—or

trains for kings—across the countries of Europe through the creation of an artwork?"

French quilt artist Denise Grégoire sees the Orient Express in her piece, *Dearest Agatha*, as "the symbol of the art of traveling, associating luxury with the elegance of its superb décor. But it is also inextricably connected to Agatha Christie's famous novel, with its unbelievable and charming detective, Hercule Poirot." German quilt artist Uta Lenk also found her inspiration in Christie's story, quoting the final lines in her piece, *The End*.

Many participants looked to the cities and landscapes along the tracks: Amsterdam, Basel, London, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Luxor, Munich, Paris, Rome,

Saloniki, Venice, and Vienna. Countrysides depicted include the Netherlands and Romania, Switzerland and France. Not all these cityscapes and landscapes are idyllic. German textile artist Ute Gilles makes a point to show the many everyday people "cheering, living, and working along the route." And Els Mommers from Saba in the Dutch Caribbean remembers her journey through Romania on the Orient Express, where she noticed that at almost every station the train passed there were many damaged buildings and old rusted trains. Whether inspired by personal memories or historic locations, the panels present a magnificent kaleidoscope of European and Middle Eastern geography and history.

If one panel looks outside the train windows, another focuses on the travelers. There is a single woman traveling alone in Leah Cooke's (United States) Matisse-inspired panel. Vera Holmgren (Sweden) embroidered a young woman holding a delightful

### Train 5

Alexandra Kingswell, United Kingdom: *Windows*

Regula Affolter, Switzerland: *Dancing in the Orient Express to Davos*

Maya Chaimovich, Israel: *Crown of Royalty*

Lydie Bihlet, France: *Belle Ingénues*

Maria Billings, USA: *Locomotive of the Dream Train*



bouquet. Two elegantly attired women feature in Bihlet's *Belles Ingénues*, and Brenda Wroe's (United Kingdom) leading lady is waiting with luggage to board the train.

Other artists wondered what the train, the advertisements, and other material objects might tell us about the Orient Express. Maya Chaimovich (Israel), Maryte Collard (Lithuania), Sandra Grusd (United Kingdom), and Maggie Harris (United Kingdom) are among the artists inspired by the colors, ornaments, posters, and decoration of the trains.

Close inspection of the trains shows that in addition to addressing a variety of themes, the panels incorporate a wide range of techniques and materials.

Techniques include collage, screen-printing, digital photography, fabric dyeing, fabric painting, thread painting, machine embroidery, and strip piecing. Materials were equally diverse: vintage silk kimonos, African cotton, lace, rusted fabric, fusible web, plastic, and paper napkins.

When panel creators were asked to share their thoughts about participating in the Orient Express project, they emphasized the shared experience of creating this imaginary journey, discussed on Zoom and celebrated the panels that were shared via Facebook and PowerPoint.

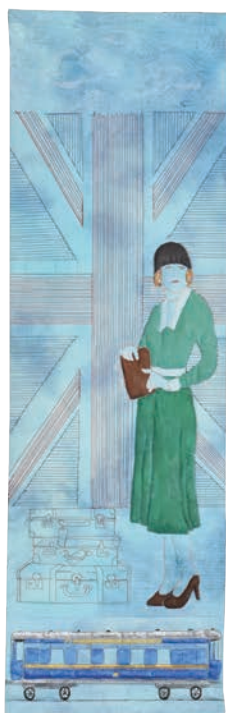
The exhibition made its public debut at the Dutch Guild's see "Orient Express" on page 41



Rita Berghuis Ensing, Netherlands: *On My Way – Orient Express*

**Train 8**

- Duffy Indeherberg, Belgium: *Bon Voyage!*
- Brenda Wroe, United Kingdom: *All Aboard*
- Gisha Wogier, Israel: *Sunny Day Along the Route*
- Lynne Seaman, United Kingdom: *Orient Express Trip 2001*
- Chantal Guillermet, France: *Welcome to Istanbul!*



## Orient Express

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annual show in Rijswijk, Netherlands, in April 2022. Several viewers noted that the project was an excellent way of creating a community of artists, especially during a difficult time. Others admired the creativity and diversity of themes represented by the panels. Yet the most rewarding reactions were the smiles on viewers's faces.

The Orient Express trains continued their voyage in Europe throughout the summer. Upcoming stops this autumn will be in Hungary and Belgium, with a trip planned to the United Kingdom in spring 2023. For more details, visit [www.saqa.com/orientexpress](http://www.saqa.com/orientexpress). ■

*Elizabeth Byrom and Annegret Fauser are members of the SAQA Europe & Middle East region.*

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