

# Rebuilding the Wall On My Own Terms

An Art Quilt Series by Karen Linduska

by Lynne Davis

One of the artists featured in *A Celebration of Women Artists in Fiber and Clay* from February 1 to April 21, 2006, at the Southern Illinois University Museum in Carbondale, Illinois, was fabric artist Karen Linduska. Her series, *Rebuilding the Wall on My Own Terms*, was a grouping of ten art quilts addressing the subject of creative recovery. These paintings in fabric and thread contain images that look bright and whimsical enough to be illustrations for a children's book. But they tell a deeper story beneath the layers — the story of Linduska's continuing spiritual journey in recovery from substance abuse.

Linduska says she has always been attracted to patterns—a line of trees, a stack of wood. Her walls of orderly

brickwork tie these pieces together. The wall is the central metaphor. For many years, Linduska says, she kept people at a distance, thinking she was protecting herself. In recovery, she lets them into her world again — but judiciously. A tiny, arch-shaped door in the wall, with eyes looking out, symbolizes this vigilance.

As a fiber artist whose artwork has appeared in many local, national, and international exhibitions, Linduska describes her work as “paintings with thread, markers, colored pencils, stamping, and bits of fabric.” They are highly textured. On average, ninety percent of the quilt is covered with thread. “I do layers and layers of rayon thread in different colors and different stitches to create the textured effect,” Linduska explains. “I usually machine-embroider sheets of fabric and then cut out the shapes I need from that sheet. They are then

appliquéd onto my quilt.”

Linduska's creative and therapeutic processes seem parallel — if not one and the same. She builds, tears down, rebuilds — in her art, in her life. Her current series tells the story of this process.

In the first piece, “Rebuilding the Wall on My Own Terms” (permanent collection of the Evansville Museum of Arts, History, and Science in Evansville, Indiana), Linduska is at the top of a beautiful wall. The stones are freeform, all appliquéd onto a sheet of fabric textured with layers of thread. The quilt has a vibrant quality, with the zig-zag rhythm of yellow corn stalks and a child flying a kite in the sun. The corn stalks convey Southern Illinois and its natural beauty, the home Linduska has found here, and the life she and her husband have made. At the foundation of the wall is a door with a prominent

*Another Visit from My Folks*, 23" x 25"



*Watching My Back*, 25" x 25"

lock and the words, “This time I have the key.” This quilt portrays the hope and the empowerment that come with release from addiction.

Linduska explores new ideas in a collage journal, and one of the pages is themed, “My Creativity Leads Me Out of My Darkness.” Her journal is made from an old Singer sewing book of her grandmother’s. It is a place where memories, dreams, and even dark visions can be explored and then turned into art. Some of the pages become art quilts that look charming but contain more than their surface charm.

In the next piece, “In Search for Middle Ground,” a ball and chain hang from Linduska’s leg as she climbs the wall. The wall cuts across the quilt, and Linduska’s magic door is in the middle. This quilt portrays the challenging task of finding a balance in one’s life — between the solitude that is particularly necessary for the artist, and the engagement with other people that is also necessary for a meaningful life.

“Another Visit from My Folks” shows a tornado glittering darkly with black beads on black stitching. It brings chaos and buried pieces of Linduska’s past. Linduska cowers behind the door that has been blown off its hinges.

“Watching My Back” is a gritty title for a picturesque, fairytale image of humming productivity — Linduska and her husband Tim at their house, rebuilding steadily and patiently after the tornado. In the background is a phalanx of friends, the support system she feels so lucky to have in her life. This quilt is joyous and enchanting.

Most of the pieces in this series are brightly colored, with an almost primitive charm. But “Dreaming, Wishing, Grieving” is made of dark colors, moving downward into deeper shades of blue, then purple. Black roses are the focal point. Linduska found the courage in the intensely personal artwork of Frida Kahlo to address the issue of her infertility, and to accept the fact that even in recovery, life presents difficult situations.



***Dreaming, Wishing, Grieving***  
40" x 28"

The later quilts in the series glow with images of hope and serenity — angels in one quilt; in another, a young girl playing in a cool, refreshing spray of water.

The collection can be enjoyed for its beauty and charm alone, but it also tells the story of a woman coming back to life after the long sleep of addiction. Look below the surface, and you see the artist reconnecting with her childhood, her dreams and wishes, and the people who are important to her. Having worked through many layers, she has learned to soar. The series is inspiring. ▼

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