

Basic technique

My best-known body of work includes images of people, often elderly. My signature style is accomplished by screen printing. I start with plain black or white fabric. I often alter the plain cloth by painting, inking, or dyeing to create backgrounds for my figures.

I screen print on fabric (cotton or linen) using artist's acrylic paints. By printing a single screen or layering screens in various orders, I end up with progressions of images that move across the surface of my art quilts.



The Long Run (detail)



The Long Run

I stitch my art quilt tops by machine, often cutting and sewing quite large pieces depending on the surface design.

I quilt by machine. The only hand stitching I do anymore is finishing (binding, sleeve, and label). These final touches by hand seem to bring my process full circle from camera or brush in hand to needle in hand.

I have refined the quilt designs I now use to straight-line patterns. From an old Korean wood-frame window, I developed a modified cracked ice pattern that I frequently quilt where figures stand or walk across my art quilts. Diagonal quilting lines set at a near vertical angle I derived from rain lines of Japanese ukiyo-e prints.

I quilt larger expanses with irregularly spaced vertical lines that echo the zips I use to create movement and rhythm in my art quilt designs.

Choice of imagery

I take photos of whomever or whatever catches my attention. Without the time lag and expense of film photography, digital photography has greatly enabled my process.

Street photography, mainly from my time living in Asia and Europe, provides the subjects for my work. I notice people and things that are unnoticed by others. I keep computer folders with my photos of the people who have caught my eye and refer to them often.

At the same time, I have notebooks where I write words, character descriptions, and narratives about the people I have photographed. These backstories are, of course, imagined because almost all of the people in my work start as images of people I don't know but have photographed because something about them made each one stand out (a stance; a garment, shoes, or hat; a walking stick; bags or baggage...).



Colsh Composite with Gray Coat woman in Warsaw depicted in several of my art quilts

Participating in the recent SAQA Alphabet Project, I realized that I now have quite a sizeable population of different characters in my work. While they are all written about in my master character notebook, I now have so many that I needed to make a database index so I could find an individual more easily and know which art quilts each person appears in.

Neutral palette

Working in a neutral palette presents me with the widest, richest range of value to design with and compose. I often incorporate the very darkest blacks, a range of grays, and the lightest white in a single piece. Palettes ranging through black-gray-white or dark brown-tan-beige permit optimal drama, mystery, and strength of statement.

I'm old enough to remember a much more black and white world: I grew up with black and white television; newspapers were all black and white; even Life magazine, with its striking red logo, was mostly black and white.

In Korea, we lived in the center city, and the Seoul palettes tend to be dominated by gray (sidewalks, buildings, streets). Light in more northerly, higher latitude places, like Belgium where I lived for 24 years, is less intense, especially in winter. Because the sun is lower in the sky, light slants, creating longer shadows and a slight dulling of colors. This phenomenon, plus spending a great deal of my time in urban settings throughout the Continent, influenced my palette.

European cities are often dominated by Belgian bluestone or gray cobbles, white limestone, creamy sandstone or poured concrete.

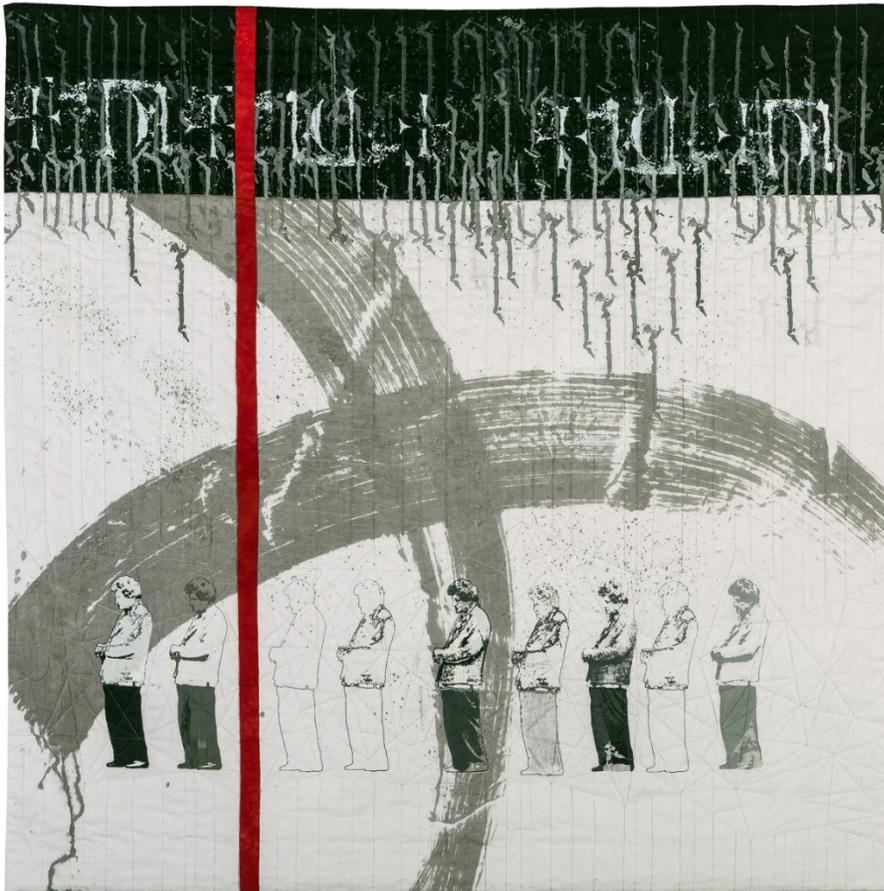


Prague cobblestones

The character of some European cities is colored by painted stucco (Baroque yellow, ochre, mauve, burnt orange, muted red, dusty pink or rose, soft turquoise ...). When I am searching for a touch of color to accent a composition that needs just a little something, I often turn to these remembered colors, or sometimes to the shock of brilliant stop-sign red.



Iron Lace (detail)



Melancholia

Where I now live, the change of seasons has and continues to inspire. Although I enjoy being surrounded by fall, summer, and spring colors and shades, those colors usually only find their way into my art quilts in supporting roles.

My favorite season, winter, resonates in my soul and my imagery. Bare, dark tree branches against white snow, gray mountains under lighter gray skies, creek waters seemingly blacker when white snow or ice frames them.



Deer Spring Creek: stones & reflections

Without snow, the beiges, tans and browns of forest floor and fallow fields inspire me to work in a brown-based palette. The red of local barns, always the same oxide red, is a go-to accent.

Adding a pop of color

I use color judiciously. Working primarily with values in neutral schemes, I leave in-progress pieces up on my design wall, sometimes for weeks or months to see if there is enough contrast and design interest to let live as an all-neutral piece. Letting work steep on the design wall is a good way for me to see if a design is working visually or if it seems incomplete or needs more. I think it's difficult for patchwork quilters, whose medium involves putting many things together, to decide it's enough – to stop. I have to keep reminding myself “keep it simple.”

Simplicity often means not adding the extraneous: whether that be overly complicated design elements, too much extra color, or heavy quilting. It's really just looking at a design as it comes together that says to me “this is perfect in just black-gray-white.” Or “this might benefit by adding a pushed neutral (a hue that is pushed far toward neutral from a pure hue, such as the pink *Almost There* or the mauve in *Gathering*.) Or maybe the solution is a surprise introduction of a high-color element.



Almost There



Gathering

I keep a rack of “zips” in my studio. Zips are the narrow strips of contrasting fabric that I use to move the eye across the picture plane and create a rhythm. I borrowed the use of zips from Barnett Newman, when I realized upon seeing his *Stations of the Cross* series, how effectively his use of what he calls zips creates a staccato movement across and around an entire room of paintings.



Rack of zips in my studio

Having these fabric strips to audition as I build a composition are how I determine if adding a color works or not: is the best zip a high value opposite, a pushed neutral color, or a bright contrasting hue?

Value contrast is the bedrock principle

Recalling Renaissance and Baroque drawings from my art history studies, I like to print on a mid-value background so that I can print both lighter and darker value paints on the background. This technique is properly called *chiaroscuro* printing.



Cabinet of Curiosities (detail)

In the current coronavirus environment, issues of presence and absence, removing oneself from public spaces to behind closed doors, leads me to look for even more ways to use high contrast neutrals to reflect our somber, tense times.

I look at some of the negative images I am printing of people, especially in very light paint on black background, and visualize being removed, like the hollow empty places left by creek stones moved away by the current; or the empty presence of a shadow; or disappearing into the fog. Very limited palettes with high value contrast best express these concepts.

Advice for working with neutrals

Teach your eye to see value and teach your mind to think in value ranges. Even if you stay with full color, seeing and thinking values will improve your compositions and strengthen your designs.

When I was teaching, one of my mantras to students was: "Aim for simple, know when to stop, strip away what isn't necessary." I repeat that often to myself as I create. If I feel myself and my work getting into the tangled weeds of "too busy, too complex," I purposefully work on something very stripped down, very simple, usually abstract or close to abstract with few if any distracting elements.



Ellipsis

I believe the simplest possible color scheme is neutral, so when I am making course corrections to return to simplicity, a neutral palette is a critical part of that process.