

The excitement of beginning an art quilt collection

by Sandra Sider



Can you recall the excitement of purchasing your first art quilt—and then the additional excitement of realizing that you had found your focus for collecting? Texas rancher, photographer, and conservationist Frank Klein spoke with me at the Texas Quilt Museum in February about his discovery of quilts as contemporary art and his commitment to build a significant collection. (Five minutes after our interview, he purchased a quilt by Kate Themel from SAQA's **Wild Fabrications** exhibition on view.)



photo by Frank Klein

Could you tell us about your Monarch Ranch? That sounds very interesting, and I'm assuming that you're in or near the Monarch butterfly migration path.

Yes. I own approximately six miles of river frontage along the Devil's River in Val Verde ("green valley") County, in one of the major migration routes when the monarchs are heading southward to winter in Mexico. This past year in October-November they were very plentiful and I was able to photograph draperies of monarch butterflies hanging in the trees.

I believe you purchased several quilts from the current touring show Butterfly Whirl: Contemporary Quilt Art presented by the Texas Quilt Museum. Do any of the quilts depict monarchs?

Yes, they certainly do!

What is your personal background with quilting?

My grandmother, mother, and sisters all quilt. I don't quilt myself. My sisters advise me on potential purchases, sharing their insights and technical evaluation of the quality of work. So far, I have bought a dozen art quilts at Texas venues made by artists across the country.

How long have you been collecting art quilts?

I've been collecting for two years but have been interested in quilts since attending the 2003 International Quilt Festival in Houston. I was utterly



Wendi Bucey
Angel of Silver
70 x 38 inches, 2014

collection of Frank Klein

amazed by the craft, talent, and time it takes to make a quilt. Obviously, I'm particularly interested in art quilts.

Any special focus, such as the natural world?

Yes, my special interest is nature but I can appreciate any subject matter if done well. For example, *Angel of Silver* by Wendi Bucey appeals to me because I have photographed numerous angels in cemeteries.

As a conservationist, I believe in following nature — for example, I raise Beefmaster cattle that are grass fed. You can't go wrong with nature.

Do you also collect traditional quilts?

Not so far. Perhaps in the future.

What appeals to you about quilts as contemporary art?

I like the whimsical aspects of art quilts, and I love the sheer beauty of them and the feelings they evoke. They speak to creation itself, something out of nothing. If that isn't art, what is?

How or where do you usually buy your pieces?

Mostly at the Houston International Quilt Festival, especially from Studio Art Quilt Associates. SAQA quilts debut every year at the Festival in Houston. Therefore, I get the first shot to preview and possibly buy them. So far I have bought four of my dozen quilts from them this year. I also subscribe to SAQA's *Art Quilt Collector* magazine and receive the *SAQA Journal*.

Can you tell us a little bit about that experience at Houston?

Very exciting. First come, first served! I am thrilled that “my” art quilts are being displayed all over the U.S. and internationally.

Do you collect other art mediums (if so, what are they)?

Yes. Paintings, photography, sculptures, and first edition illustrated books.

If so, do you display them along with quilts?

Yes, I will when my quilts return from their tours.

How do you think that art quilts fit into your overall collecting strategy?

I don’t have a strategy. I buy what I love. You can’t really sell art — art sells itself. Either it stops you in your tracks or you just walk by it.

How do you see your quilt collection ten years from now?

I do intend to acquire and collect art quilts. If requested, I would eventually love to loan my collection to institutions and galleries for public display and education of the arts. Most people have never seen anything like these quilts!

Frank Klein credits his grandmother, mother, and sisters for his interest in collecting art quilts.

below: **Lucile Klein**
Stars Crossing



Mary Ann Vaca-Lambert
Rustic Sphinx Moth
46 x 41 inches, 2013

collection of Frank Klein