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Identify & Understand Your Audience

Alyson B. Stanfield

Your art is personal and comes from deep within you. It is all about you and it should be all about you. However, once you put your work out there for people to see, to respond to and/or to purchase, you cannot forget about them. In fact, you should have them in mind all along - not because you are going to alter your work for them, but because you begin the process of connecting with them when you remember that you want others to find meaning in your work and that you want to sell your work to them.

This article, taken from my e-class and book and revised for SAQA readers, follows a format similar to my weekly e-newsletters for artists. "Know This" and "Think About This" are bullet points to help artists zero in on key points, while "Do This" action steps are motivational and focused encouragement. I began writing about this subject because the audience is almost always neglected in discussions about the business of art. My knowledge comes from working with audiences for ten years in art museums and my goal is to help artists build communities for their art, a built-in audience if you will, that is there for them no matter what.

Think About This

In a sense, viewers complete the creative process. When you forget about them, you are robbing yourself of the complete artistic experience.

Getting the Response You Want

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone *loved* your art? Think about how great it would be if everyone saw in it exactly what you had intended! I know that many artists like people to find their

Mental Un-block

Ralph Marston

Are you having trouble getting something done? Does it seem that there's some kind of mental block which prevents you from taking the effective actions you know you wish to take?

If you feel like you're operating under a mental block, that's great! Because it's something you can change very quickly. If your mind has the power to hold you back then it also has the power to move you forward.

Think of whatever it is that you haven't been able to bring yourself to do. Think of it and see yourself doing it. Experience yourself doing it, easily, naturally and effectively. In your mind, go there. How do you see yourself sitting, or standing, or walking while doing it? What is the expression on your face? How does it feel? What does it sound like? What people are around you? How great does it feel to be getting it done?

Rather than letting your mind stop you, let your mind take you there. Visualize yourself accomplishing the task with confidence, with creativity and with ease. Experience yourself getting it done. Experience it with clarity and richness, with feeling and awareness.

And suddenly, the mental block is gone. Suddenly, you're on your way, filled with ideas, inspiration and energy. Go there first in your mind, and the reality of your life will surely follow.

Identify & Understand Your Audience

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own meanings in the art, but you can't ignore the fact that too many people are intimidated by art. They are afraid to form their own opinions for fear they would be based on inaccurate interpretations. You have to give them clues as to your intentions.

Before this can happen, you have to define your intentions. Not in your head. You have to write them down, refine them, and talk about them. You have to be absolutely clear about who you are and what your work is about. Just because it is clear in your head does not mean that you have found the appropriate words for it. And don't be deluded into thinking that your art will speak for itself. Sometimes it will, but more often than not, whether it is abstract or realistic, it needs a boost. The more words you can come up with, the more likely it will be that one of them will be the magic word that means something to a potential buyer.

This About This **Knowing what you want from your audience equals the ability to get it**

What do you really want people to say when they see your work? This should be more than that they think work is "happy," "uplifting," or that it "moved" them. Study your work and the process by which it was made in order to answer this. You cannot do this in an hour or two. It takes time. It takes time away from the work and time with it again. Perhaps you would like for people to recognize the hours and hours of work you put into it. Or maybe you want them to credit you with a keen sense of color or an uncanny attention to detail. Whatever it is, you have to know before you can expect them to know. I am an advocate of journaling, experimenting with words, and simplifying thoughts.

What I Know About (Some) Artists

I was recently checking out an online artists' discussion forum in which the topic was something like "dumb things people have said to you as an artist." I realize that there are some crazy notions about artists out there, but much of the time artists are doing very little to help the situation. When the discussants in the forum asked how to respond to such silly questions or thoughts, instead of offering good, solid advice, most artists joined in the whining. "Poor us! We are so misunderstood! The rest of the world be damned! We're

artists!" After awhile, I was so disgusted by their attitudes that I decided to log off for fear I would say something I might later regret. What I wanted to say is this, "Yes, artists are often misunderstood. But, so what?! Almost everyone is misunderstood. Can you comprehend every aspect of a civil engineer's job? a plumber's? a stockbroker? a personal assistant? a physician? Do you know the training involved in each job? The demands on their time? The bureaucracies they fight?" It is doubtful that anyone could know every-

thing. At the same time an artist's studio work might not be taken seriously by others. I hear artists sometimes making both overt and covert comments that amount to cultural elitism. In other words, they are looking down their noses at people outside of the art world. "If you don't understand art, don't bother looking at my work." You can see how the divide between artists and the rest of the world is fomented by both sides.

You should do everything possible to help break down existing barriers between yourself and your audience. It is up to you to quit whining and start doing. I would like to tell you that artists are a special breed. In some sense, I believe that to be true. But when you begin to think of yourself and your profession as more worthy or noble than others, you start to alienate yourself and you lose touch with reality and the people who might buy your art.

What I Know About Art Viewers and How You Can Put it to Use

Everyone will respond to individual works of art in their own way, but here are some things I learned about how and why people look at art. These are only generalizations and there are always exceptions to the rules.

- Many, many people do not go to galleries or museums because they think they don't know enough and they fear feeling stupid. They often think original art is for an elite class and is too expensive for them. Entire generations missed out on a good art education and our schools are not doing such a hot job of it currently.

Do This - Little things like greeting visitors at your opening reception and making them feel welcomed, go a long way. Also, consider showing in less threatening venues like shopping malls and art festivals or organizing exhibit

THOUGHTS FROM The President



Katie Pasquini-Masopust

I am sure that most of you have read, or heard of, the article in the *Wall Street Journal* concerning art quilts. Some of you may have written responses and some of you have been talking about it with your friends and colleagues. All of us have our own opinions.

I agree that it was not a very complimentary article about something that we know and love and strive to perfect. But the one really good thing about that article is that it has everyone talking. Bad press is better than no press at all. And if we continue to conduct ourselves in a professional manner, we can change people's perception of the art quilt. Continue to do your very best. Continue to learn about our medium. Realize that an art quilt must include formal art considerations, such as composition, a color scheme, full value range, and the intention must be apparent. If we want to be considered artists, we must create our quilts as artists. If our integrity is strong, our art quilts will shine and be accepted as the fine art that they are. SAQA uses our PAMS portfolio to show off our works and to encourage galleries and museums to showcase our talents. Regional groups have shows and workshops to help educate as well. Many members enter their works in fine art shows or mixed media shows as well as the art quilt venues. The more art quilts that are exhibited in fine art shows the faster our recognition will grow. Do not be discouraged, art quilts are gaining recognition!

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The DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Sharon Heidingsfelder

I had a brilliant idea to highlight our foreign members in this newsletter. The reason I thought of it was that Wendy Huhn had suggested that I read the book, *Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver. It was one of the most interesting books I have ever read. It concerned the life of a missionary family who went to Africa to teach the natives about their god. Little was said about the religion the preacher wanted to convey to the natives, but more was said about the life and times in that country. It was an excellent book.

One of our international members, Dena Dale Crain, who is highlighted in this newsletter, contacted me concerning a gallery page on our website. She now lives in Africa. I had asked her if she had read that book and, of course, she said she did. Having been raised in Kentucky and Ohio, she had lots to tell me. So as you read her article, as well as the others international members who wrote, you can understand the hardships some of our international members face.

Inge Hueber, from Germany, is another of our international members. I politely asked her what was the meaning of my last name, Heidingsfelder, as you all MUST know, is German, and I come from a long line of German lineage. My mother's father and my father's mother both came from Germany to America early in the 20th century. Inge was kind enough to translate my name which means, "Fields of Heather." Now isn't that a nice translation for such a guttural language as German.

More of our international members will be featured in coming newsletter. If I missed any of you, please feel free to write an article.

Identify & Understand Your Audience

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events. (I discuss the latter in depth in my book and class.)

- People who don't do it on a regular basis often think viewing art is going to be boring. They are almost always pleasantly surprised and even excited when they find something to which they can relate. Likewise, they are often amazed when there are nice people around who will talk to them about the art.

Do This - Give people something to which they can relate such as stories describing your art and how it was made. Also, make a habit of watching people view art in galleries and interact with art in buildings, restaurants, and other public spaces.

- Many people think abstract art is a secret code. The code is between the artist and art world insiders and isn't for anyone else to understand. Moreover, many abstract artists have refused to help educate the public by talking about their work in easily understood language.

Do This - If you are an artist whose work is primarily abstract, make sure you are using easy-to-understand language. There are always alternative words for the ones overused in art magazines. On the other hand, quilts, by definition, are often abstract and accepted as such. Makers of contemporary quilts have other educational challenges that go along with creating non-functional art in a medium traditionally considered to be functional.

- Young children love big, colorful abstract work. Older students and adults are generally more skeptical of abstraction. High school students love realism and anything that tries to fool the eye.

Do This - Winning over some people is a process. Begin the process now! Also, consider doing community programs for specific age groups depending on your style.

- Some people will never change their feelings about specific works of art or styles. However, most people will go to great lengths to try to connect with an artwork, even if they don't like it upon first viewing. They read labels and explanations in books, attend tours and lectures, and so forth.

Do This - Make sure to have the information available and easy to find for these people. It sounds like such a simple thing, but it is rarely executed in an engaging manner.

- People like to see themselves in the art. In other words, they like to find things in art that relate to what they

already know. This should not be news. People like to see themselves everywhere and would much rather talk about themselves and hear about themselves than anything else.

Do This - Vary your language. The more varied your language and the more avenues you explore in your statement (formal elements, style, inspirations, etc.), the more people you are likely to connect with. I have also developed ideas for using other people's stories when showing artwork, which I discuss in the book and, frequently, in my e-newsletter.

- People, especially males, like to know how things are made. Men, too, like to talk about the dollar value of art and to try to understand it.

Do This - Know your craft, its tradition, and your materials. Figure out a way to explain it in the simplest, yet most colorful, language.

- Almost everyone is amazed by artists' talents and their devotion to their passion. They often can't imagine living such a life and would love to hear about yours.

Do This - Study the proud artistic heritage from which you come. Wear a beret (or anything else that identifies you as an artist) and say proudly, "I am an artist."

If you have never before thought much about viewers, this will be an ongoing process of discovery. You are unlikely to take them for granted ever again. You must assess your art, how it is made, how you show it, who sees it, etc., and figure out how you could be doing a better job finding your audience.

Know This

If you want to expand your audience, you must practice talking to all kinds of people about your work without getting defensive or talking down to them. You have to be able to tell good stories.

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International Members

Upcountry Quilter Dena Dale Crain

At age 19, after reading Robert Ruark's *Uhuru*, story of the Mau Mau uprising, it left me breathless with intuition that Africa was my destiny. Twenty years later, that dream came true. By 1991, I found myself living in Kenya, partner to Jonathan, eldest son of the best-known Kenya Leakeys. We live at Lake Baringo, 200 miles north of Nairobi. In need of occupation and with a background in design and textiles, I took up patchwork quilting. Mine has been a kind of Cinderella story, and certainly it has had its moments.

Take, for example, the day I sat quietly working on a quilt. Suddenly I was aware of soft, padding footsteps coming gingerly down the hall. I looked up just in time to see the whiskered muzzle and curious open-eyed expression of our baby hippo peeking through the door! Orphaned by her mother because of serious drought, Cleo lived with us for three years. She became notorious for waltzing the sofa around the living room, chewing on cushions, trying to eat the lawn sprinkler, and generally bullying everyone into letting her into the house! Too big, and too people-friendly to remain with us, Cleo now lives at Bamburi Nature Centre, just outside Mombasa.

In a later drought, the country suffered major water shortages, and these affected electrical service. I wrote an article for our guild newsletter on how to cope, including suggestions for maintaining two workloads, one for machine and one for handwork. Switching from one project to another helped ease frustration. Having a laptop with operating battery is a good idea, too.

Kenya is very dry and dusty, and dirt gets into everything. My finished quilts are quite filthy, and washing them in lake water doesn't help. (It doesn't do much for my hair, either.) My sewing machine repairman takes no notice of the dust and spider webs in my machine. He's seen it all before.

Needing help with sewing, I found a fundi (Kiswahili for craftsman) and put him to work on an old treadle machine. In no time, Patrick was quilting free-hand without marking and without a

walking foot. At that time, I didn't know what a walking foot was, and certainly couldn't buy one in Kenya. They say, "ignorance is bliss." Well, it never bothered Patrick and me!

Then there was the time a shout went up from the gardener trimming tree branches away from the roof. Next thing I knew, I was clearing the way through the house for Jonathan, coming right behind me and carrying a huge black mamba on a grabstick. Having caught the snake on the roof, he could not figure out how to hand it down to the workers below, so through the house was the only way out.

Friends often ask if I get bored living upcountry. As you can see, there's never a dull moment. Knowing that I grew up in Kentucky and Ohio, they want to know whether I miss living in the States. Of course I do, but the hand of some guiding spirit directed me here, and I've had no regrets.

People often ask whether living in Kenya has influenced my quilting. They probably expect me to make nothing but "African" quilts (whatever that means). What has most influenced my quilting has been the color of Africa. East Africa isn't the bright pure color of lush tropical jungle. It's the soft pastel of open grassland, hazy escarpments, and a glorious sunset of silver, cream, and peach. Unable to buy solid color cottons, I was forced to dye my own. It's there that the color of Africa finds its expression in my art.

Selling my work has been the hardest part of quilting in Kenya. Without a shop in Nairobi, I'm dependent on selling on commission or by exhibition. So one problem is not having steady access to the market. But the other problem is cultural. Most people in Kenya don't know what a quilt is. Duvets arrived from Europe, but quilting has yet to catch on. My best friend still introduces me with, "You know Dena - she does duvets." Well, Dena doesn't do duvets!

German Quilter Inge Hueber

There is always an advantage and a disadvantage. To be an American quilter is, of course, the best way to get a successful quilter to make personal individual quilts. The United States is not just rich in traditions, but also rich in possibilities to show what you have done, most of all in Quilt National. Only when I was includ-



ed for the first time in Quilt National '87 did I learn about its status and importance. I hesitated first hand to submit slides as a foreigner because of its title. In the meantime the title did not change, but many international quilt artists took part. In Quilt National '03, it will be my fifth time and this means a lot to me, selected by always-changing jury members. Since 1987, it is my personal challenge to submit each time and always my best three new pieces.

But what are the advantages of living in a country without a tradition in quilting? With no expectations you can do what you want and explore this field from the outside. When I made my first quilt in 1980, it was the first time I touched one, I only knew them from books. I never did a quilt for a bed, but started to think of my quilts only as soft objects for a wall, giving no physical but emotional warmth.

I learned sewing by sitting next to my mother as a small girl when she tried to dress four children just after the war. And, I got some art training at the Teachers' University and taught art as well as other subjects for 15 years as a primary teacher in Cologne, Germany. But as a quilter I feel self-taught because I never took a class but only studied the book by Beth Gutcheon, *The Perfect Patchwork Primer*. It was a real primer and I learned everything else just by experimenting with my home-dyed cotton.

From the beginning, I was a member of SAQA as I had met Yvonne Porcella. I am also a founder member of Quilt Art, a small group of professional quilt artists based in England. Starting only with eight members we are now 21, including Dominie Nash from the USA.

From the inside this looks all very important and successful, but when you ask somebody about quilts in the streets of Cologne, where I live, you probably would get a strange look. Many people in my country never heard the name quilt, and there is no translation.

But I do not want to take part in the complaining by many quilters of not getting the recognition they deserve. In a small niche you get more recognition. I am very aware of this advantage to be included in so many books and catalogues. It means to be perhaps even one little dot in the long history of quilts!

But better than anything else is meeting other quilters. I love to travel! Let's talk together at the opening of Quilt National '03 in May next year, or write an e-mail to me at Inge.Hueber@Netcologne.de

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International Members

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Australia Quilter

Glenys Mann

Hello, I am Glenys Mann. I live in Tamworth, New South Wales, Australia, which is about six hours northwest of Sydney, in the "bush." I have been quilt making since 1976 and teaching since 1982. I used to make very traditional quilts that were based on American traditional patterns as that was all that was available in Australia. But now I make very contemporary quilts. Australia does not have a strong history of quilt making, it was a "make do" type of construction. But during the time that I have been quilting, there has been a massive interest in making quilts and it is now a huge industry with a large number of people quilting. But, as usual I have gone off the track, for I am here to tell you about my world of quilt making.

Traditionally, all of my first quilts were made of cotton cloth. As my hunger grew for the "out of the ordinary" quilts, I started looking at alternative cloth. Old clothes, silk, wool, old blankets, and old sheets, the fascination came from the "used" rather than the "new." It was not hard to find, scouring the opportunity shops for all

sorts of textures. Old reels of thread were also gathered and this added another interest to my work. As I started to gather these pieces, I also looked at how to dye the cloth to make it even more unique. I was not a very good chemical dyer and it seemed that I could never make the same colour again, perhaps it was because I was not very good at measuring accurately! I then started to read about natural dyeing. This seemed to me one of the most simplest and easiest way of changing the colour of the cloth, without using chemicals and without measuring.

So, I now became a "gatherer." I would gather all kinds of leaves, bark, grasses, dirt and any other natural products that I could find. These became my new tools to colour my cloth. It was such a revelation to see what colour these natural things produced. From the limeiest of greens to subtle browns, to vivid oranges. There was always a surprise when the cloth came out of the pot.

My quilts started to become very minimalist as the colour of the cloth was more important to the art work than any surface work. I started using old blankets as my whole cloth then added hand stitches and a small amount of silk appliquéd to the surface. This was a huge transformation to my work from what I had previously done. The subtle

colours had a power and a magic all of their own and the cloth had a difference about it.

The series that I am working on at the moment is "Horizons". . . "concentrating on the effect that the line on the distant horizon has on the eye. The deception of what IS there and what MIGHT be there. The closer we try and get to that line the more things change. Such a line exists in life, forever changing and deceiving our perception of a perfect existence." I have made 27 quilts so far in this series and seem to have a lot more to create.

I work in my studio at the bottom of my prize-winning garden. I work alone. I do not have any mentor around me and my only critique I get is when I enter a quilt competition. If I am accepted, then my work must be up to a standard. If I am rejected, I stand back and look at my work in a different light.

I have a huge teaching load. I teach contemporary quilt making and contemporary machine embellishment. I travel all over Australia as well as internationally, teaching. I will be teaching in America during 2003, at QSDS, QBL, Alaska, San Francisco, and Cleveland, OH. It would be great if we could meet during some part of my tour.

It has been nice talking to you.

Portfolio Rotations

Sharon Heidingsfelder

Over the last six months, the professional artist members (PAM) have made a concerted effort to upgrade the portfolio sent to museums, collectors, galleries, etc. Finally it is done and it looks wonderful! One person who received it, called to tell me that it was the most wonderful presentation she has ever seen. I, of course, thanked her.

Thanks go to all the PAMs who participated as well as to Dominie Nash, for assembling them, to the Sullivan Santamaria Design firm who designed the covers, and to Darcy Falk who stitched the covers together.

Most recently, portfolios went to the following places (see box at right). Dominie states, "Most of the names were personally familiar to me or suggested by members. I think this approach is most likely to get a responses, so please pass along any suggestions you have for likely recipients. I am going to SOFA in Chicago and will check out the galleries there. There are some portfolios left from the first binding, so I can send them out fairly promptly."

Congratulations to all the PAMs who are in the portfolio!

Portfolio Issued

The University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE
Coos Bay Museum of Art, Coos Bay, OR
Houston Center for Contemporary Craft,
Houston, TX
Contemporary Craft Gallery, Portland, OR
SKH Gallery, Great Barrington, MA
LewAllen Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM
John Villani, Arts Reporter, Phoenix, AZ
Fiber Art Center, Amherst, MA
The Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY
The Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY
The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art,
Ridgefield, CT
Victoria Boyce Galleries, Scottsdale, AZ

Curious by Nature

Wendy C. Huhn



Once again, my curious nature has put pressure on our peers to satisfy my curiosity. I have poised the following questions.

One question that continues to surface is the term "Art Quilt." Is this really the ultimate description or is it confusing? Also, how do you describe your work? Rants and rampages are welcome.

The term "Art Quilt," wow, I guess it's as good as it needs to be. "Art book" is used frequently and successfully to describe art in the form of a book. The problem for us is that art quilt is a new word, so to speak, and when we use it to describe our work, we invariably follow up with an explanation, but then most of our work requires just that. Some day art quilt may have the same name recognition with the general public as the word quilt.

My work has many names. When I'm talking about it off the record it's my "stuff," when I'm promoting it or speaking about it professionally, it's clothwork, collage painting, fabric art, art quilt, and/or fabric collage. I sometimes tailor the definition to fit the audience. Deep down I think my work is collage, period. Generally I don't start a project with the intention of making it into a quilt. It's a basic collage at the start and could end up in any number of these categories.

- Fran Skiles, Plantations, FL



I think it is a good description for quilts that address, and are about the essence that makes up, a work of art. I think the term is often inappropriately used thus creating confusion.

I use the term art quilt, art textile, or textile collage depending on the nature of the work.

- Heather Allen Asheville, NC



I resent having to say anything besides "I make quilts." They ARE quilts, most of mine are huge, and I make them out of the long American tradition of quilt making, women's art, and the connection it gives me to my ancestors and scores of other women. I much prefer these traditions and connections to those of the "fine art" world. However,

I have seen too many eyes go dead in galleries and other venues when I use that term not to appreciate that it carries other assumptions to many artists, even women, in our society. My daughter and I visited a truly terrible exhibit of embroideries (kits, poorly done) and her comment was that she was afraid to tell people what I did because they would think it was like that show.

As a consequence, I now use something else to describe my work, "art quilt," most often, "quilt" to the educated, "textile art" or "assemblage art" to the bigoted or narrow. I am not sure that any single term can describe an art form. Even "oil paint" leaves out so much. The solution is to have the work shown as much and as often as possible, in as many different venues as we can reach. The college gallery director here (MFA and collage artist), who spearheaded the quilt show that I juried, had never heard of art quilts until a student did a presentation on the form. Having now done the show, and seen the work, she is a huge fan. As with so many things, education is the key.

- Eleanor McCain, Shalimar, FL



It is certainly confusing as evidenced by the *Wall Street Journal* article! If the art critics are confused, then you can bet the public can't distinguish between art and bed coverings! One doesn't refer to paintings as "art paintings." I think the word quilt is simply inappropriate for my work. Although I use techniques and materials that originated in a traditional craft, they are not quilts, and I am not a quilter!

I currently use the term "stitched constructions" when referring to my work.

- Marilyn Henrion, New York, NY



In 1985, the term art quilt was connected with the exhibition, *The Art Quilt*, curated by Michael Kile and Penny McMorris. It was a useful title but I didn't think it was intended to be the term for any quilt that had artistic aspirations.

I personally have never attached that description to my quilts although curators have. Think about it. If you were a painter or sculptor, would you say "art painter," "art sculptor"? The term has no useful meaning in 2002.

Then came "studio art quilt" another description that is meaningless. What if

people were making wonderful quilts in their kitchen or bedroom? Would we say "kitchen art quilt" or "bedroom studio art quilt except when I am sleeping"?

When people ask me what I do, I say mixed media collage quilts. Then I have a chance to further describe the work and always bring in the word, quilt. I have had many galleries and curators who want me to say anything but "quilt." Quilt, to most uninitiated people, will always be associated with a rocking chair, a grandmother, a pioneer woman, and/or women's work. We can't throw out the history nor should we want to.

In China, and many places in Europe, curators call my work "tapestry." Then we go down the trail of patchwork, patchworker, fiber art, textile art, fabric painting, etc. We are not the only medium that is trying to find a definitive term. I don't care what people call my work, just as long as they look and decide for themselves. My favorite comments are usually from people who haven't seen my quilts and are seeing them for the first time in person. "These aren't quilts, they are art!" Or the husband of a collector, who after twelve years of his wife saying that he should look at my quilts, "Honey, why didn't you tell me that Joan made art?"

The job of the artist in any medium should be placed on making the work in an honest way, to show it to as many audiences as possible, and place it with and next to all forms of expression.

- Joan Schulze, Sunnyvale, CA



I think it's a fairly accurate description of the medium. The "purists" out there, those that still want to debate fine art vs. craft, probably would disagree. Interesting, though, how many people still aren't aware of art quilting. They still think of the old traditional quilts when you mention the term. I don't know of a better terminology, it is art, it is a quilt.

However, it also is mixed media, in my book. That's why I have always entered more traditional juried shows rather than "quilt" shows. So many "fine artists" today are adding fiber, stitching, etc., to their work, and they still define themselves as painters, print-makers, etc.

Well, I would describe my work as mixed-media, especially in light of the fact that

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Curious by Nature

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I use so many different methods and techniques. Computer, printmaking, weaving, sewing, quilting, bookmaking, design (home, interior, graphic), papermaking, painting, collage, 3-D. I really don't want to be key-holed into one "group." Guess I couldn't be anyway, with all that going on!

I'm going to have to come up with a new definition for myself. A.D.D. fine/craft artist, that's it. I don't know if I would ever be satisfied sticking with one medium. I have purposely avoided taking ceramics, because I know that would just scatter me more in another direction that I don't need, obviously. (Except there is a local eight-week course being taught here in Raku. I would just love to be able to do that out here on my land. Too cool. VERY tempting.)

I, personally, am really tired of all the look-alike, copycat quilters out there. The artists that are the true originals, all become the inspiration for those that have some artistic ability, but not a true artistic soul. The "soul" types are the true originals. Their work is always new, fresh, comes from their psyche and connection with the universal subconscious floating around there somewhere in the abyss. It seems so many people just aren't that original anymore, in my very not-so-humble opinion. Maybe that attitude is why I was never a very good girl scout.

- Brenda Kopmeyer-Kaspar, Linwood, KS



I call my work art quilts to distinguish them from traditional quilts because I no longer feel the need to hide the word "quilt." Any other terms I've heard tossed about are too clumsy for my taste, and I'm too lazy to argue about it.

When I was soliciting advice about the Hive Project proposal, I referred to the twelve-inch quilted squares as "units" to avoid the prejudice against quilts, and a contemporary art curator of a museum was confused. She asked me what the units were, human heads, for example? From a simple information standpoint, curators and dealers just want to know what the medium is, and I decided then it was time to quit sweating it. The quilt is my chosen medium and I don't have to apologize for it.

As for the kinds of connotations we want the medium to convey, I go for simple.

After 20-odd years of teaching, I know that there will always be people who will be confused, won't understand, or think I'm all wet. I'm learning to live with it."

- Pat Autenrieth, Hyattsville, MD



Absolutely NOT the best title or description for what we "do"! No one ever hears of "art painting" or "art printing" and "art photography" means you're taking some questionable nude photos! Seems to me that "art" is so subjective that it negates the "quilt" part. On the other hand, I guess I really don't do quilts either, even though my stuff is derived from a quilt tradition. But those people who also derive their patterns from a quilt tradition and make embossed paper miniatures don't call their work "quilts" so it's really no different than the monkey-ape-human branches on the evolutionary tree, is it? The simple term "art quilt" seemed so inclusive 25 years ago when we started - a description that fit for the work being done in a less traditional way.

But things change and not always in ways anticipated. Now "art quilts" encompass so many different techniques and processes. Even my own work runs the gamut between slicing up vintage linens to computer generated images, from careful hand appliqué to liberal applications of gel medium, from calico prints to monoprinting. And the addition of "studio" in front of "art quilts" doesn't serve to clarify much other than I am supposed to be serious enough to not work on my kitchen counters. Which I do!

Having recently seen too many slides of quilts in a jurying process, I was struck with how the only thing these pieces have in common is a hunk o' batting in the center which, by current definitions, with a few stitches to hold it together, makes them all quilts. But why? Just because something is stretched on stretcher bars doesn't make it a painting. Why do we have to categorize something with batting a quilt? Lord knows I haven't used a quilt stitch in a decade!

Fabric collage. I really like yours, Wendy, mixed media fiber art, for awhile but got tired of the blank stares when I would say it. A conversation killer, for sure. I've searched for years for a descriptive title of "what I do" that doesn't get people going on the "Aunt-Essie's-Double-Wedding-Ring-Whatever-Happened-To-That-Quilt"

topic. And what I really do is collage with all that layering, so needed to put that into the title. I tried "fiber" but found "fabric" to be more friendly and understandable when they saw the actual work. And with "fabric collage" as my descriptive title, I don't have any expectations to meet!

- Sandy Donabed, Newton, MA



As I sit here, trying to answer the question, "Is the term Art Quilt the ultimate description or is it confusing?" I find myself going in circles. I'm reluctant to claim that it's confusing because I honestly can't come up with a better term. However, the term frustrates me at times because people oftentimes don't hear the word "art" in front of the word "quilt" and they are off thinking about crafty bedcovers. The strength of the term "Art Quilt" is that it draws on the rich history of quilting. Art quilts share the quality of being someone's personal and artistic expression with their bedcover quilt ancestors and commonly share the qualities of being inviting and conveying love, comfort, warmth, and protection. However, these objects have evolved far beyond the traditional notion of quilts, both in terms of design and materials used and in terms of venue, having moved from the bed to the wall.

The definition of what constitutes an art quilt isn't entirely clear. From my view of the world, I see three organizations working to promote the concept of an art quilt and seeking to define what an art quilt is - SAQA, Quilt National, and Quilt Visions. The SAQA definition of an art quilt is the broadest and leaves a lot to the interpretation of the artist and the viewer. The art quilt is a contemporary artwork exploring aesthetic concerns common to the visual arts while retaining some relationship to the quilt from which it descends. Quilt National puts more constraints on what constitutes an art quilt by requiring the quilt to be composed of two full and distinct layers and that these layers must be held together by hand- or machine-made functional quilting stitches or other elements that pierce all layers and are distributed throughout the surface of the work. Quilt Visions adds a further constraint by stating that the two layers must be filled with "batting material" in addition to the layers being stitched together. I started musing about what the common denominator between these definitions is and it got me thinking about the English language, that

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Curious by Nature

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source of all great confusion when it comes to the meaning of words.

I resorted to my Webster's dictionary and found that the word quilt, as a noun, is defined as a bedcover made of two layers of cloth filled with batting and stitched together in lines or patterns. The word quilt, as a verb, is defined as stitching together. If I have any dissatisfaction with the term "Art Quilt," it's that people often interpret it to mean a craft found on beds, not a fine art found on walls. I started musing about coming up with a new term that uses the verb form of quilt rather than the noun form which is quite clearly associated with bedcovers, and all I could come up with was "Quilting Art." No, that isn't really any better. Maybe "Art Quilt" is really pretty good after all. It reflects such a rich history and suggests something familiar and appealing. Perhaps we just need to put our energy into continuing to promote the art quilt as a fine art and getting more shows of art quilts into mainstream museums and galleries and let the term, "Art Quilt" grow into meaning what it really should mean.

I describe my work as fiber art and mixed media. I consider my work to be fine art and I want to avoid the "craft" label. My experience has been that if I begin by telling people that I make art quilts, most people think of bedcovers. A few curious attentive people will catch the fact that I mentioned the word "art" in conjunction with "quilt" and will ask what an art quilt is but it's really too few to make it be the first description I offer. Most people have no idea what "fiber art" is and they always ask what that means and then I get an opportunity to explain what my work is and what it's about. I primarily paint on silk and turn that painted silk into wall hangings, art quilts, and wearable art. I arrived at quilting through silk painting. There was something about the linear design of silk painting that was calling out to be filled with batting and quilted. Most of my art quilts are made from whole cloth rather than being pieced and they all incorporate hand-painted silk. I use a variety of surface design techniques in my art quilts and I also create works which I refer to as wall hangings rather than art quilts, simply because they don't have very much stitching holding the layers together.

Linda Gass, Los Altos, CA

"Wild by Design" Symposium

Michael James

Come and join us at the International Quilt Study Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, Feb 27 - Mar 1, 2003, for two days of stimulating paper presentations, provocative panel discussions, dynamic quilt exhibitions, and interesting dialogue focusing on the innovative, creative and unique elements of quilt design in historic and contemporary quilts. You won't want to miss this unique forum for dialogue among a broad spectrum of individuals interested in quilt design, the social and cultural history of quilt-making traditions, and related textile traditions worldwide.

Pre- and post-conference tours include a behind-the-scenes tour of the International Quilt Study Center's state-of-the-art storage facility, a special demonstration of the Center's searchable image database for the management of its collection of more than 1,250 quilts, as well as curator-led tours of five outstanding exhibitions conveniently located on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

Invited speakers for the symposium:

Miriam Schapiro embraces the use of textiles as symbolic of feminine labor. Influenced by the feminist movement, she is credited with establishing the movement called "Pattern and Decoration." This art movement challenged traditional Western European art by foregrounding decorative patterns and textiles from other cultures such as Chinese, Indian, Islamic and Mexican. Schapiro coined the term "femmage," which stands for the female laborer's hand-sewn work (such as embroidery, quilting, etc.) that rivals and precedes the "high-art" collage. In recognition of her important contributions, the College Art Association (CAA) recently named Schapiro recipient of its Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Ellen Dissanayake is an independent scholar, writer, and lecturer, whose approach to the arts synthesizes many disciplines, but is underpinned by the viewpoint of evolutionary biology. She is the author of three books, *What Is Art For?* (1988); *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (1992), and *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began* (2000), all published by the University of Washington Press.

Campus Exhibitions:

✓ "Wild by Design: Innovation and Artistry in American Quilts," Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery

✓ "At the Crossing: Midwestern Amish Crib Quilts and the Intersection of Cultures," Great Plains Art Collection Gallery

✓ "The Reconciliation Quilt," International Quilt Study Center. A Civil War-era pictorial album quilt on view for a limited time during the conference. Declared by Nancy Druckman of Sotheby's to be "one of the finest pieces of Americana to come across my desk," it holds the world's record price for a quilt sold at auction.

✓ "Radka Donnell: The Work of Touch," Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery

✓ "New Design/New Dynamics: Quilt Concepts for the 21st Century," Rotunda Gallery in the UNL Student Union.

✓ A juried, multimedia exhibition of work created by college students from around the nation.

For registration questions, email: Beverly Teche at bteche2@unl.edu and for program questions, email Michael James at mjames2@unl.edu.

The Wild by Design registration form and preliminary schedule are on the web at <http://quiltstudy.unl.edu> along with other symposium-related information. Go to the International Quilt Study Center's (IQSC) website listed above and click on the "Wild by Design" portal page, then click on the "Wild by Design" button to find the information you want.

See you at the Symposium!

Schools Offer Valuable Training

Sharon Heidingsfelder

In one of the last newsletters, Katie Pasquini-Masopust wrote an article regarding taking classes outside her medium. Katie believes it is important to continue to take creative classes throughout your career. Some people don't have the opportunity to take classes in their area, others have many opportunities. However, there are many nationally-recognized schools in the United States that can offer you training in the latest techniques and gain invaluable experience from nationally-recognized teachers. Here are a few that you might want to attend.

Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, located in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, offers art classes and craft classes for everyone from the novice to the professional. Craft education is the reason and being for Arrowmont, and for over 55 years the school has dedicated its resources to nurturing the creative talents of individuals. In 1945, 50 students attended the first summer craft workshops at Arrowmont, taught by faculty from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Each summer, as the craft movement grew, the program offered more media choices and began to focus its mission on a comprehensive art and craft school that would reach an even larger number of students. In the new millennium, Arrowmont is committed to remaining one of the leading international craft schools.

In addition to its well-known spring and summer one- and two-week workshops, Arrowmont sponsors/co-sponsors art-related conference/workshops throughout the year. The school has several large multi-purpose studios in addition to its well-equipped studios. With on-campus housing and food service facilities, a large auditorium, gallery, resource center and book/supply store, Arrowmont serves as a cultural/educational center for visitors and students of all ages and varied practical and academic backgrounds. The school offers a variety of support programs including assistantships, work study, scholarships, and artist-in-residents. College credit for the spring/summer courses may be obtained through the University of Tennessee, Department of Art. Contact

Arrowmont at PO Box 567, Gatlinburg, TN 37738; 865-436-5860; 865-430-4101 (FAX); or visit them on the web at www.arrowmont.org.

Penland School of Crafts is a national center for craft education located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina. Penland offers one-, two-, and eight-week workshops. The school also sponsors artists' residencies, educational outreach programs, and a craft gallery open to the public.

Since 1923, Penland has grown to encompass about 400 acres and 41 structures. Today, over 1,200 people come each year seeking instruction in ten craft media. The school offers one- and two-week classes in the summer and eight-week sessions in the spring and fall. Each class is structured by the teacher, but most are a mix of demonstrations, lectures, individual studio work, and field trips. A stay at Penland also offers daily movement classes, evening slide shows, visits to nearby studios, a library, volleyball games, dances, walks in the beautiful countryside, or a swim in the Toe River.

What can you expect from a sojourn at Penland? You can expect to work hard, learn a lot, make friends, and forget about the rest of the world in an isolated setting without the distraction of phones, television, or daily newspapers. You can expect to have fun, eat a lot, and get the kind of rest that comes from total immersion in something you love. Contact them at Penland School of Crafts, PO Box 37, Penland, NC 28765; 828-765-2359; 828-765-7389 (FAX); office@penland.org; or visit them on the web at www.penland.org.

"Peters Valley Craft Center shares the experience of the American Craft Movement through interactive workshop learning. We nurture both those who learn and those who teach to assure the continuation of the movement. All are welcome!" states Ken Pierson, Executive Director.

Peters Valley is a nationally recognized education center for fine craft. Founded in 1970, Peters Valley is located in rural northwest New Jersey in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Peters Valley's mission

is to dedicate quality education through the cultivation of the individual's artistic appreciation, exploration and participation in the evolving tradition of craft. Peters Valley employs nationally recognized instructors to teach intensive workshops for beginner to advanced students. Peters Valley currently focuses on eight disciplines: blacksmithing, ceramics, fine metals, photography, special topics, surface design, weaving, and woodworking. A full workshop schedule in all media is offered throughout the spring, summer, and fall.

College credit courses are offered at Peters Valley through Sussex County Community College. There are fall and spring semester courses in photography and ceramics. Students desiring college credit must contact their school and the Valley to facilitate transfer of credits. Contact Peters Valley Craft Center at 19 Kuhn Road, Layton, NJ 07851; 973-948-5200; 973-948-0011 (FAX); pv@warwick.net; or visit them on the web at www.pvcrafts.org.

The **John C. Campbell Folk School** was founded in 1925, a collaboration of two progressive educators and an Appalachian community. Olive Dame Campbell, Marguerite Butler, and the people of Brasstown created a unique institution that seeks to bring out the best in people.

As in the beginning, the Folk School seeks to bring people toward two kinds of development: inner growth as creative, thoughtful individuals, and social development as tolerant, caring members of a community. Throughout its history, the Folk School has worked toward these goals through performing arts, agriculture, and crafts rooted in the traditions of Southern Appalachia and other cultures of the world.

Today, the school has changed as our nations' relationship to tradition has changed. Students come from all over the United State for one-week, two-week, and weekend workshops. The school offers both tradition and contemporary crafts, music, and advance classes, such as black smithing, basketry, book arts, quilting and other topics. Contact them at John C. Campbell Folk School, One Folk School Road, Brasstown, NC 28902; 1-800-FOLK SCH; 828-837-2775; 828-837-8637 (FAX); or visit them on the web at www.folkschool.org.

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Schools Offer Valuable Training

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Every summer since 1947, the Fletcher Farm School campus bustles with activity in over 100 different course offerings. Under the guidance and encouragement of accomplished instructors, students immerse themselves, for a time, in the learning of a new craft, or in the refinement of skills they brought with them. This school is sponsored by the Society of Vermont Craftsmen, Inc., whose commitment is to quality arts and crafts education. The school is open from June through early September with classes ranging from two- and three-day workshops to five-day courses. Contact them 611 Route 103, Ludlow, VT 05149; 802-228-8770; info@FletcherFarm.com; or visit them on the web at www.fletcherfarm.com.

Sievers School of Fiber Arts offers weekend and week-long classes in a wide variety of subjects, including basketry, weaving, quilting, surface design, spinning and felt making. An 1895-built schoolhouse is a good setting for their shop, featuring original work and fine crafts made by over 100 of the teachers and students from the Sievers School of Fiber Arts, including a number of Washington Island residents. Contact them at Jackson Harbor Road, Washington Island, WI 54246-9273; 920-847-2264; 920-847-2676 (FAX); sievers@itol.com; or visit them on the web at www.washingtonislandwi.org/members/1sievers.htm



The C.A. Vine Arkansas 4-H Center

Savoring Little Rock

Yvonne Porcella

I had never visited Arkansas and my knowledge of the state was limited to what I learned on television through the years. I was excited about seeing the city that will host the 2004 SAQA conference. Let me tell you what awaits us there.

Arkansas has a strong pride in their history. While visiting Little Rock, I presented programs at the Historic Arkansas Museum (HAM), home to artifacts and beautifully preserved early settlers homes. The museum has living history programs and I witnessed people in historical costumes walking around the museum. They were filming a documentary at the museum's authentic buildings of the restoration period.

In 2002, this museum hosted a statewide quilt exhibit. Robert Shaw judged the exhibit and awarded ribbons. The museum hung quilts from the rafters of the open beam top floor that were visible to everyone entering the building. Posters of quilts were on the walls, the book store was full of quilt-related materials, and other galleries showed contemporary quilts. This facility will house the PAM exhibit in 2004.

HAM is located in the revived River Market District and was the first territorial capital building before Arkansas became a state. It is near the colonial-style Old State House Museum which was the second capitol building of Arkansas. Tours are available to see the gowns of former First Ladies of Arkansas. The River Market District will be home to the President Clinton Library that is currently under construction, an easy walk from HAM. It will be completed by 2004.

The Decorative Arts Museum (DAM) is housed in a historical home in another part of town. This facility is part of the Arkansas Art Center. We visited a contemporary basket collection, part of the largest contemporary basket collection in the United States. In the main galleries we saw a comprehensive touring exhibit of Outsider Art. This museum will exhibit the show of art quilts juried from the membership at large.

The highlight of the day was visiting the Arkansas Art Center. This beautiful building has just undergone a major expansion. The former director is famous in museum circles for acquiring the largest collection of works on paper in the United States. Many of these are on display in the galleries. Monet, Cezanne, Picasso, Motherwell, Frankenthaler, Pollack, Hofmann, O'Keeffe, are all represented in the collection.

Little Rock has many historical homes that are architectural gems. Lovingly restored, with designated markers, you can drive by and enjoy the unique style of bygone years. The current Capitol building is impressive and during the month of October, they hang a very large pink ribbon sculpture from the front portico to honor Breast Cancer Month. A lovely sentiment.

Sharon Heidingsfelder took me on a tour of the site of the SAQA conference. About 15 minutes drive from Little Rock the drive leads you to a heavily wooded area to the C. A. Vine Arkansas 4-H Center. This facility has 92 well-equipped rooms. Each room has bathroom facilities with linens, towels, and toiletries. The classrooms are well lit and the general assembly room is very large. The kitchen serves three meals a day to guests. Understandably, this is a retreat center and not as luxurious as a big city hotel. The meals at the Center are nutritious but not fancy. The setting more than makes up for the shortcoming of being away from a city. The facility buildings are positioned around a lake and several other meeting areas are tucked among the trees. The director pointed to a lake side area where we could have a bonfire and roast marshmallows! My mind reached back to my girl scout days and I wondered if I could remember any of the old campfire songs. Not to worry, singing is no longer one of my skills.

The Little Rock airport is small and easy to navigate and there will be arranged transportation to the conference center. Many of the local quilt artists are planning to help us find our way and give us a personal touch of Arkansas. During the SAQA conference participants will be bused into the art community of Little Rock for receptions and exhibits. Registrants will be able to enjoy the beautiful art collections and atmosphere of downtown Little Rock.

The main focus of the 2004 conference will be the business of making art quilts. A remote setting among nature is the perfect site for making friends and improving our business art skills.

How to Get Great Press Coverage

Carolyn Lee Vehslage

In June, 2001, when Debbie Schwartzman asked me to do the volunteer publicity for *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick*, www.AQatS.com, I decided to approach the task in the same way as I do with my own art quilt business. In the year and a half that I've been doing the committee job, I have found that it is far easier to promote an event than it is to promote myself individually.

The best advice I can offer an emerging art quilter is to make opportunities to show your artwork. Establish a small group of artists who either work in the same medium as you do but with differing styles, or a group that work in different mediums but with the same theme.

Put together a group portfolio and offer it to art centers and retail galleries as a pre-packaged exhibition. Look into non-traditional, but highly-trafficked spaces such as corporate lobbies, libraries, government buildings, and bank lobbies.

Then actively promote the exhibition before, during, and after.

Create A Publicity Plan

The very first thing I did regarding publicity for *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick* was to write down a series of goals for the types of publications that needed to become aware of art quilts as a valid collectable art form. I started with magazines and newsletters in the quilt world, moved on to the fine craft publications, followed up with quilt magazines in foreign countries, and I am now pursuing those in the "contemporary art" category.

ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick is an annual event. Although most of the year I focus on magazine placements, the same plan works for local newspaper coverage. In Philadelphia, there are multiple city-wide newspapers and at least two dozen local community weekly papers; all of whom need to be contacted again and again.

Know Who to Contact

Once you've established your categories, you need to start making lists of key contacts. The masthead in the newspaper will tell you who the senior editor is along with the various departments. Arts & Entertainment is the obvious, but don't overlook the

Lifestyles, Community, or even the Home Décor sections. Since *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick* is located in the city, I also send press releases to the Getaway Weekend columns for other cities.

You want to get your exhibition listed in as many calendars as possible. The Internet will go a long way toward helping you out. Most local newspapers and communities now have web sites where you can submit the "What, Where, When" information.

Libraries, schools, and even church bulletins are more than happy to add your event. Don't forget to contact alumni newsletters for each of the participating artists. If any have a "day job" in a major corporation, find out if the company has an internal communication.

Most quilt and fine craft magazines will list your event for free if you send them the information three or four months in advance. The next time you're in Borders or Barnes & Noble, check the publisher's page for these magazines and jot down the information. It's usually on the page right after the table of contents. Many now print the key email addresses or at least the magazine's web site.

Work The Plan

Most newspapers need a ten-day lead-time to print a blurb in their upcoming events section. Full articles with pictures often take longer to arrange, sometimes as much as six weeks in advance.

Be prepared to provide all the necessary and ancillary information when the publication calls - the press release, high resolution .jpg images of the artwork, background information on each artist, and a written explanation of what an art quilt is and even isn't. Often the staff writer assigned doesn't know about our medium.

Keep a file on each publication and record what you have sent to whom (writers often shift jobs within a newspaper) and what you plan to send in the future. For the area Philly papers I send out pre-event press releases, photos of the artists by their artwork from opening night, and post-opening press releases on the award winners.

Follow Up Early and Often

It often takes a number of your patient and persistent contacts before a newspaper editor or staff writer will realize that your exhibition deserves an article. Send out the press release with

a different headline every few weeks. A few days after each one, place the call to see if they've received it. And don't worry about being a pest - the newspapers need our news to fill their pages.

Co-Marketing of Art Exhibitions

Are there other events in the surrounding communities scheduled for the same time frame as yours? This approach was tremendously successful for *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick*. Since *Fiberarts* magazine focuses on different areas of the country, I called up the editor and offered to put together an article. Collectors made a special point of attending our opening to meet the artists who had flown in from all over the country. The owner of Snyderman-Works told me that people came to his gallery from Washington, D.C. and New York with the issue in hand because it was mentioned as a Philly fiber exhibition.

Marion Haslam, the editor of *Popular Patchwork*, made the trip from England specifically to review *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick* for the August, 2002, issue after seeing the write-up. While in town, she visited with some of the local quilt artists and will be featuring them in upcoming editions.

The Perks of Volunteering to do the Group's Publicity

Each article I write for *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick* ends with a byline that refers readers to my web site. *Fiberarts* and *The Crafts Report* both featured my site in recent articles as a thank you for providing them content without payment for other issues.

Next SAQA Newsletter issue: "How to Write a Press Release"

Carolyn Lee Vehslage maintains an onboard studio on her mariner yacht, "Fandango." Several of her quilted wall hangings that were created while cruising, are viewable online at www.clvquilts.com. Her "Half-Mast at Anchor" is currently touring the USA with America: From the Heart while "Valentine Bouquet" is touring the UK.

I have always felt that the details, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, are more than just nice things to notice.

- Fay Jones, Architect

Comments on the Wall Street Journal Article

Many people have been upset about the article in the Aug 23, 2002, *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), entitled, "Museums Cozy Up to Quilts; It's High Season for Blankets, But Patrons Ask: Is it Art? Competing With El Greco" by Brooks Barnes. Although I tried to reprint the article in this newsletter, it was too costly to do so. However, following are some of the responses that you might find interesting.

Written by Hilary Morrow Fletcher, Quilt National Project Director, The Dairy Barn Southeastern Ohio Cultural Arts Center, Athens, OH. Reprinted with permission.

Mr. Barnes' assertion that quilts belong on beds rather than museum walls is no different than the belief that all dark-skinned 20-something males are terrorists. Both concepts are offensive. They are born of ignorance and bigotry. The first amendment notwithstanding, neither belongs on the pages of the WSJ.

Mr. Barnes echoes opinions of a few everyday museum goers and others whose "expert" status might be questioned: quilts and objects created with non-traditional materials are not worthy of the designation ART - a term that should apparently be reserved for enormous, irreplaceable paintings by dead men.

He acknowledges that museums face financial challenges. Nevertheless, he criticizes curators who seek to broaden their audience with "blockbuster exhibits" that demonstrate the very same uses of color, line, texture, composition, emotion, humor, and social commentary that are found in every other artistic medium. That this can be accomplished while the institution is also saving money speaks to the wisdom of such decisions. One would expect the WSJ to offer only praise for such fiscal responsibility.

Apparently without seeing a single example, Mr. Barnes suggests that "The Quilted Surface" and "The Six Continents of Quilts" exhibitions are "blankies." Nothing could be further from the truth. These works belong on beds like wax fruit belongs in a pie.

Art quilts have evolved from classic bedcovers. They are the work of seri-

ous, well-respected artists who have chosen the medium of layered and stitched fabric to express the same concepts and ideas that are found in every other medium. The works provide conclusive evidence that not all 'masters' are dead men.

Mr. Barnes suggests that art quilt exhibitions are new phenomena and popular only because they are less expensive. Here, too, he is wrong.

Quilt National, which began in 1979, has provided twelve biennial international juried exhibitions of quilted works that were never intended for beds. These collections have been circulating to museums and galleries since 1983. They consistently draw record-numbers of visitors. Perhaps that is why numerous host venues have shown multiple exhibitions.

As Quilt National's Project Director since 1982, I invite everyone to learn about QN by visiting the Internet site (www.quiltnational.com) or by looking at the beautiful books that document the collections.

The 13th Quilt National exhibition will make its debut in May, 2003. Our exhibitors and our visitors will come from all over the world. They will not be "just" quilt makers. They will be open-minded people who understand that a wide variety of objects deserve to be called ART.

Bigotry, be it artistic or otherwise, must be eradicated. This can only be accomplished through exposure and eventual understanding. Three cheers for the museum personnel who are doing just that.

Written by Robert Shaw, Shelburne, VT, Author, Quilts: A Living Tradition and The Art Quilt. Reprinted with permission.

Brooks Barnes' patronizing and one-sided article "Museums Cozy Up to Quilts" effectively proves that quilts are not, as he puts it, "an easy sell."

The art vs. craft debate he attempts to resuscitate is old, tired, and ultimately pointless. Not all paintings are "art," neither are all quilts. It is way past time to debate the quality of individual objects, rather than to categorically refuse to consider them because of the materials from which they are made. Mr. Barnes also conveniently neglects to mention that many of the quilts being shown in museums are not bedcovers at all, but rather studio works made by MFA's who have cho-

sen the quilt medium because of its unique qualities and expressive possibilities. All of the pieces in *Six Continents of Quilts*, for example, are intended to be viewed as works of visual art, not used to warm and decorate a bed. None of them look much like "something from Aunt Edna's boudoir."

As for "the folks in the art world," some major critics have disagreed strongly with the opinions chosen by Mr. Barnes. To cite just one prominent dissenter, Robert Hughes, the author of *The Shock of the New and American Visions*, has written of early 20th century Amish quilts, "In their complexity, visual intensity, and quality of craftsmanship, such works simply dispel the notion that folk art is innocent social birdsong. They are as much a part of the story of high aesthetic effort in America as any painting or sculpture. They deserve our attention and abundantly repay it."

So do many of the works so casually dismissed in Mr. Barnes's article.

Written by Marilyn Henrion, Quilt Artist, New York, NY. Reprinted with permission.

Here is your chance to redeem your credibility after that unfortunately uninformed article, "Museums Cozy Up To Quilts. . ." recently published in the *Wall Street Journal*. Referring to works in the medium as "blankets" that "might hurt someone if put on a bed" demonstrates a surprising degree of ignorance as to this contemporary manifestation of a traditional art form. I suppose one shouldn't be so surprised however, when one takes into account the vast number of "amateur" practitioners, which may confuse the lay person, but, hopefully, not the informed viewer. However, this disparity between amateur and serious art has always been present in all visual arts media, and has not deterred critics from distinguishing the "real thing."

I hope you will have a chance to see my upcoming exhibition at the Noho Gallery in Chelsea and judge it fairly, as art. I do not shy away from honest criticism. It is the prejudicial view of the medium that I find unfortunate. These works were never meant for the bed, nor for any other utilitarian purpose. Textiles just happens to be my favored medium, as painting once was earlier in my life.

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Comments on the Wall Street Journal Article

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In any case, I hope that this rather blunt communiqué does not deter you from learning more about (and perhaps appreciating) the genre. I look forward to meeting you if you do make it to the exhibit.

Written by Gayle Bryan, President of the Contemporary Quiltart Association. Used and edited with permission.

As everyone on CQATalk has seen, the latest piece of heart pounding rhetoric floating through cyber space is Brooks Barnes article on the inappropriateness of displaying quilts in museums. The title, "Museums Cozy Up to Quilts; It's High Season for Blankets, But Patrons Ask: Is it Art? Competing With El Greco" pretty well sums up the argument against including quilts in museum venues, but only hints at the inflammatory verbiage in the article.

The contention is that, unlike the paintings of Vermeer and van Gogh, quilts are craft, not art, and that museums mount exhibits of quilts because the shows are cheap, popular, and uncontroversial. Curators who support such exhibits are "essentially lazy" and the audiences who attend are "a lot of people who wouldn't otherwise set foot in a museum" displacing the disappointed "everyday museum-goers."

It is instantly obvious to anyone who has tried to convince a museum to display quilts, or indeed to anyone who has ever even seen a contemporary art quilt, that this author is wallowing in unsupported conclusions. Museums are not, unfortunately, beating the bushes in search of quilts to hang on their walls. Contemporary art quilts are producing work that is often controversial, in terms of both content and construction. A dispassionate reading of the article would support this conclusion.

The sources cited as endorsing quilts as suitable for museums include the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the UBS PaineWebber Art Gallery, the Yale University Art Museum, Shelly Zegart, as curator of a show of quilts made by rural African-American women, Nancy Druckman of Sotheby, and the 110,000 visitors expected to view quilts in a 54-day exhibit in Houston. Add to these unnamed institutions "from Colorado to

Connecticut" and the author has presented quite an arsenal of experts testifying to the art-worthiness of quilted textiles.

In opposition, a New York actress is quoted as being disappointed to find that Tibetan artifacts (which, it could be argued, might also fail the art verses craft test) had been replaced by quilts. She was, she says, glad that two of the quilts were hanging on the wall, because they would "hurt somebody on the bed." A Dallas junior high teacher canceled a field trip to the Houston museum, feeling that by showing quilts "I'd lose all my credibility." According to the paper, "the folks in the art world" concur. A municipal official in Pasadena says, "No more quilts!" A museum-studies professor at New York University adds, "Just because something is popular doesn't mean it belongs in a museum."

That is hardly an impressive showing. It is hard to imagine that the author has ever even seen a quilt that was not tucked under his/her chin.

So why are we so upset? Well, first of all, there is the language of the piece. Yes, it does suggest that museum curators might find themselves fighting off an infestation of bedbugs, presumably scurrying from the "beaux-arts blankies" on the walls. And it does refer to quilts as "the kind of bed covers that look like something from Aunt Edna's boudoir." (At the same time it also describes a piece woven with yellow police tape and another incorporating computer circuitry, which brings up several interesting questions about Aunt Edna and her boudoir.) Over all, the tone of the article was goofy, and certainly not serious or well-considered art criticism. It was lazy reporting and it was a big joke. Unfortunately, the joke was on us.

So what do we do about it? Calm, insightful, serious letters to the paper and the author are a good start, and undoubtedly have already been written. Beyond that, there are more basic ideas to ponder.

We work in an environment where most people, including those considered experts, are ignorant about our medium. The *Wall Street Journal* points out that quilts have nothing to do with van Gogh, an odd statement considering that van Gogh is the ultimate poster boy for the artist unappreciated in his own time. They argue that quilt making is domestic work, craft not art, and out of place in the museum context.

In response we put our work in

every venue we can find, looking for that crack in the concrete wall protecting capital-A ART from the likes of us. We apply to multi-media shows, arguing, rightfully, that they are more appropriate to the fiber-paint-bead-mylar-who-knows-what covered quilts we make than are traditional quilt shows. We approach everything we do as an attempt to educate jurors, viewers, and critics. And we have made steady progress. It is no longer astonishing when one of our members announces her inclusion in a non-fiber exhibit, or even when she takes an award in that show. The most successful quilt makers are finding themselves attracting the kudos that come to mid-career non-quilt artists - retrospectives of their work, regular publication, public commissions, invitations to exhibit.

In the common view, quilts are quilts. We may see differences so immense that all they share is a name, but in the popular culture, an art quilt is just a bedspread nailed to the wall. We can argue that quilting is a technique, that cloth is our artistic medium, and that we have amongst us fine artists. Until people actually experience quilted art, they will not understand. In a very real sense, it must be seen to be believed.

Warren Brakensiek, SAQA Board member, took the liberty of forwarding the recent WSJ article to his friend, Maggie Kilgore. Maggie has taught journalism both here and abroad, was a reporter for the Los Angeles Times and covered the Vietnam War for UPI. She also wrote for Dear Abby for a number of years. He asked Maggie for her thoughts on the article and thought you might be interested in them. Warren tends to agree with her. The writer might be wrong and in some parts supercilious, but overall he thinks it helps to further the view that quilts are art.

Maggie Kilgore's reply to Warren:

Just got around to reading the WSJ piece on the quilts. I thought it was quite an interesting piece, actually. I had to be impressed that there are 20 million quilters in this country. You can complain to the writer if you want - I'm sure others have - but it certainly won't cause him to write another piece saying, "I was wrong; quilts ARE art." I think some of the prejudice may lie in

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