

# SAQQA *Journal*

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## **Lake Tahoe**

by Merle Axelrad Serlin

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## Thoughts from the SAQA president

by Judith Content



**D**escriptions of SOFA Chicago — the International Exposition of Sculpture Objects & Functional Art — have intrigued me for years. Celebrating its fourteenth

year, the 2007 event featured 100 galleries from 18 countries and exhibited the masterworks of 1300+ artists working in textiles, glass, wood, metal, and ceramics. Located in downtown Chicago, SOFA attracts the world's finest gallery owners as well as collectors, curators, authors, and arts professionals from around the globe.

In addition to the beautiful gallery exhibitions, SOFA sponsors a popular lecture series, book signings, special exhibits, craft demonstrations, and a comprehensive resource center. The resource center is a destination in its own right and has representatives from many different arts organizations. This year, for the first time, SAQA was represented as well.

Cheryl Dineen Ferrin had recommended in 2006 that SAQA seriously consider having an official presence at SOFA. Martha Sielman researched the idea and found that SAQA could have a table in the resource center, and with no fee if SOFA was given advertising space in the *SAQA Journal*. She recruited volunteers Desiree Vaughn and Kathie Briggs to coordinate all the details.

As plans for SOFA were being made, I began to consider my own options for the weekend of November 2-4. It seemed like everyone I knew was heading to Houston for the International Quilt Festival, and I fully expected to attend as well. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Janome America, SAQA was again exhibiting, and I really wanted to see *Creative*

*Force '07* and *A Sense of Place*. Karey Bresnenhan later confirmed that "The two exhibits — one inside the gallery and one on the outside walls — were both stunning. The exhibits themselves reflected imagination in their concept, and the quilts were just breathtaking." Regrettably, I couldn't attend both SOFA and Festival because, as luck would have it, they are held the same weekend, 948.5 miles apart. In the end I decided — with encouragement from the board — to try something new and attend SOFA as ambassador for Studio Art Quilt Associates.

With this role in mind, I upgraded my Friends of Fiber Art International membership to the sponsor level, and thus received a free weekend pass and complimentary tickets to SOFA's opening night gala. That evening, after mingling with the standing-room-only crowd of serious collectors, I found Desiree and Kathie already set up: organized and attracting interest in the resource center. Our table was in a fabulous location, identified by a dramatic banner, compliments of Cheryl Dineen Ferrin. We were located near *Fiberarts Magazine*, *Interweave Press*, *Ornament Magazine*, *Selvedge*, and right next to the Surface Design Association. One didn't have to go far to strike up an interesting conversation!

Over the course of the weekend, I spoke with a fascinating mix of art professionals including gallery owners and museum personnel, writers and editors, artists and collectors. We all passed out many SAQA membership brochures designed especially for collectors — inviting further inquiry on our web site. I attended the lectures sponsored by Friends of Fiber Art International and the Surface Design Association and enjoyed hearing SAQA members Regina Benson, Laurie Swim, and Kathy Weaver, as

well as SDA President Jason Pollen, speak about their artwork. Desiree attended a lecture by Kyoto's internationally renowned artist Fukumoto Shigeki and learned about the unique evolution of resist-dyed textiles in contemporary Japan and its 20th century ascent to the avant-garde.

A highlight of the weekend was the annual Friends of Fiber Art International lunch. I had the good fortune to sit next to Camille Cook and could personally thank her for the generous grant SAQA received this year from FoFA in support of the *Twelve Voices* catalog. Another highlight was visiting the gallery space of board member Jane Sauer. Her namesake gallery, along with browngrotta arts, Snyderman/Works, Duane Reed, Katie Gingrass, Perimeter, Translations, and del Mano Gallery, were all exhibiting truly astounding artwork in textiles.

In the past, ceramics and glass have dominated the SOFA exposition. However, I gathered from various conversations that textiles are increasing their visibility and prestige. Renowned collector Dorothy Saxe confirmed that in her estimation '07 was an especially strong year for innovative fiber art and textile design. This is welcome news, and I trust that SOFA galleries such as Jane Sauer's will continue their dedication to exhibiting such compelling, significant and inspiring works of art.

To all Studio Art Quilt Associates members — if you are considering a trip to SOFA Chicago in 2008, please consider volunteering an hour or two of your time at the SAQA table. I think this year's volunteers — Clairan Ferrano, Cheryl Dineen Ferrin, Gwen Jones, Laurie Swim, Kathie Briggs, and coordinator Desiree Vaughn would all agree it was a rewarding experience and a great way to raise awareness of the art quilt while supporting SAQA.

# Report from the SAQA executive director

by Martha Sielman



I've been thinking about what I want to create for my One-Foot Square donation for SAQA Auction 2008. I know that I have until August 15 to get

it done, but if I don't start planning now, it won't get done at all.

I really enjoyed making last year's take-off on Andy Warhol's screen-print series, though since I'm not a screenprinter, each of my vividly-hued self-portraits was traced individually using gutta and colored in with Dynaflow paints. So I've been thinking about a riff on a different artist.

I've been fascinated by the work of Salvador Dali ever since I was a child and my mother was given a book for Christmas. "Oh, Dali!" she exclaimed, and I thought that she had been given a book on dolls. When I discovered my mistake, I became fascinated by his weird and wonderful landscapes. So I've been thinking about Dali's melting watches and what he might have done with that image if he'd been an art quilter. Pleats? Melted Tyvek? Reverse appliqué? I found an image of a pocket watch and printed it out onto some fabric sheets to experiment with, but now I'm not sure if it's what I want. It seems too static.

So I've been thinking about Magritte and his apples or Chagall and his dreamy floating people. But again, I'm not sure. Perhaps I'm trying too hard to fit into a theme and need to come at it from a fresh angle. I could fall back on the tried and true and make a three-dimensional jellyfish. I've done several pieces that feature jellies, and I like the method which I developed, placing silk over a wire armature to create the body and

loosely pleating strips of silk for the tentacles. But I feel like I've "been there; done that" at the moment. So while I may go back to jellies at some point, I'm not inspired by them just now.

All of which doesn't get me very far. I suspect that I just need to go into the studio and start playing with fabrics. Sometimes overthinking a project kills it, and it's better just to plunge in and let the other side of my brain take over — let my fingers do the thinking for a while.

All of us approach the process of creation a little differently. But however you approach it, I hope that you will consider making a One-Foot Square for SAQA Auction 2008. The deadline is August 15. Please include a label with your name, the title of the piece, the date, and your web site address. Mail it to: SAQA, PO Box 572, Storrs, CT 06268. All pieces will be photographed and posted on the SAQA site with a link to your web site. The auction will start on November 10. It will again be a

reverse auction, but this time the lowest price will be \$100, so it will decrease \$750, \$650, \$550, \$450, \$350, \$250, \$150, \$100.

The proceeds of SAQA Auction 2007 are paying for quarterly mailings to over 135 university fiber art programs, sending them information about SAQA, copies of the SAQA Journal, and membership brochures. The proceeds also paid for the mailings which sent copies of the *Creative Force '07/A Sense of Place* catalogs to our VIP list of collectors, galleries, and museums, and for the placement of ads in *Fiberarts*, *American Craft*, *AmericanStyle*, and *Art & Antiques* magazines to promote SAQA and the *Transformations '07: Reverberations* exhibit.

The proceeds from SAQA Auction 2008 are needed to continue to support these and other exhibitions and outreach programs, to continue to fulfill SAQA's mission to promote the art quilt. Send in your donation to help us to make SAQA Auction 2008 a great success.



Self Portrait  
©2007 Martha Sielman

## From the editor

by Carolyn Lee Vehslage, [www.clvquilts.com](http://www.clvquilts.com)



Once again our members have overwhelmed me with their artistic talent and writing skills, and their generosity in donating their articles not only to the SAQA

*Journal* but also to SAQA University so that we will be able to search for articles by keywords instead of browsing through the huge *Journal* PDF's on the web site.

In our technical advice column, Elizabeth Van Shaick gives suggestions on how to mount and mat your art quilts for an alternative presentation method to the traditional rod and sleeve.

It's always a pleasure to learn how other artists approach their artwork. Beth Carney and Rayna Gillman share their methods of working in our articles on artistic advice.

Kim Ritter gives straightforward

steps on how to become a professional artist. Karen Maru shares her intriguing experiences as an artist traveling through Thailand in search of textiles.

For those of you who are taking on the challenges of organizing an exhibition, Cindy Friedman gives you a peek behind the scenes of the *ArtQuilt Elements* digital jury selection, and Cindi Huss has great tips if you're thinking of taking a show on the road.

Nancy G. Cook gives us pointers on organizing a regional conference, and Jill Jensen reports on two of the lectures at the recent VA/NC/SC regional conference. They are "Artists and Collections" and "Public and Private Collections: the Curator's Perspective" and were presented by a very knowledgeable art agent and a respected gallery owner.

We're going to continue with the popular gallery pages. The upcoming themes are Summer: abstracts, Fall: spiritual/religious, and Winter:

political. SAQA members are so talented, we receive many more images of beautiful quilts than space allows. If you've submitted photos in the past and they haven't been published, don't be discouraged.

Continue to send in your very best work and remember that you can increase your chances of being included in the gallery by sending in high-quality photographs (sharp focus, evenly lit) with a minimum resolution of 1800 pixels on the longest side, saved in jpeg format.

Our feature artist in this issue is Merle Axelrad Serlin from Sacramento, California. She has a fascinating tale of how she's earned several large-scale public commissions. She budgets \$30K in expenses every year to professionally support the creation of her artwork! If you know of a SAQA member who is on the verge of 'making it big,' please contact me at [clvquilts@yahoo.com](mailto:clvquilts@yahoo.com) so we can consider him or her for our highlighted artist series.

## Board report

By Penny McMorris, secretary

It was wonderful seeing SAQA represented so beautifully (on hard gallery walls) at the International Quilt Festival in Houston last November. As I helped hand out brochures to potential new members in front of the combined *Creative Force '07* and *A Sense of Place*, I overheard many viewers declaring the SAQA shows their favorites of all the exhibitions. Congratulations to show curators Kim Ritter and Peg Keeney, and to Deidre Adams for the beautiful catalog cleverly combining both shows.

*Portfolio 14* is now out, edited by Cheryl Dineen Ferrin. Thanks Cheryl, for once again doing such a beautiful job — and what a job, with 215 professional artist members represented! Just a reminder, you can purchase the combined *Creative Force 07 / A Sense of Place* catalog as well as *Portfolio 14*. Just go to the SAQA Store section of the SAQA web site.

The board now has two new officers: We unanimously voted in and welcomed Lisa Chipetine as vice president, and Nelda Warkentin as assistant treasurer.

We've been very successful bringing in new members lately, so if you're new to SAQA, I'd like to invite you to take part in our fall online auction to raise money for SAQA, which allows us to take on special projects. If you'd like to join in on this auction action, create a 12-inch square quilt, and include a label with your name and the title. Send your finished quilt to SAQA, P.O. Box 572, Storrs, CT 06268. The submission deadline is August 15, 2008. The auction will begin on November 10, 2008.

By now, I hope you've had a

See "Board report" on page 31

# Digital jurying – behind the scenes

By Cindy Friedman

In mid October, the *ArtQuilt Elements 2008* committee spent two days with our jurors, BJ Adams, Mi-Kyoung Lee, and Robert Shaw, reviewing the artwork of 287 artists who had applied for possible inclusion in the *AQE 2008* exhibition. This show, which was formerly known as *ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick*, has found a beautiful new home at the Wayne Art Center (WAC) in Wayne, Pennsylvania, and along with the new name and home came the specific request of WAC Director Nancy Campbell to take the plunge and enter the world of digital image review.

Towards that end, we published a prospectus requesting that the images be submitted on a disc and that they be of a size and resolution (6-inch wide, 300-dpi jpegs) which could easily be used in the later print production of all promotional materials, including a planned catalog of the exhibition. Recognizing that not all artists have adapted to the digital world, we also allowed for slide submission but charged a higher fee for slide entry, as the slides had to be scanned and digitized.

As the discs, slides, and paper applications came in by mail, they had to be opened and assigned an entry number. Then the artist and quilt information was entered into a digital spreadsheet (Excel) database. The paperwork was filed into a master catalog, and the images were collated into a master file for the review process.

In order to create the master file, every disc had to be inserted into a computer, opened, copied from the disc onto the desktop, and renamed using the artist entry number, along with an A, B, or C to designate how many entries the artist submitted and also whether it was a full or detail image. So for example, a file might be named: 153AF "title of the quilt," meaning artist number 153, first

image, full view. Then the images were sorted into two submaster files: one of all the full images and a second of all the detail images. Because we had requested high-resolution images, the size of the file was usually in the range of 6MB or more. Do the math — when there are hundreds of images compiled, the size of the master files grow to enormous numbers!

To organize them for PowerPoint® presentation for the actual review on the digital projectors, the files were again subdivided into groups of ten artists to a PowerPoint file. We ended up with 28 subfiles for full images and a second parallel 28 subfiles for detail images. Each image was dragged into a slide frame in PowerPoint, sized to the frame opening for maximum projection size, and numbered in the frame. In addition, the slides had to be individually scanned and digitized, named, and sorted into

the appropriate digital file. Overall, we received about 15% of the applications in slide form. When you consider that we were dealing with almost 1400 images going through the entire handling process, that's a lot of hours spent at a computer just to prepare the master electronic files for the jury day.

Because we were novices in the art of digital jurying, we scheduled a dry run day several days prior to the arrival of the jurors, where we had all the equipment as well as the files in place to do a preview to be certain of the projection quality. We needed two computers to run the parallel PowerPoint files for the full and detail images, as well as two projectors to project the images onto the white wall in the conference room. Making sure we had all the necessary cables, extension cords and technical expertise was

See "Digital jurying" on page 6



***Sliding Edge***

32" x 54"

© Elizabeth Barton

Quilts featured in this article were made by SAQA members and juried into the ArtQuilt Elements 2008 exhibition.

## Digital jurying from page 5

Carl Weiss, a free-lance communications advisor hired by the WAC. We had borrowed one projector from a local university and the second one is owned by the WAC, but as we viewed the images we quickly realized we had a very large problem — one projector allowed for minimal color correction of the projected image while the other one had *no* color correction capability at all. So the images projected with vastly different colors, and neither projector was accurately depicting the images we could see on the monitors of the computers.

The solution was to rent two sophisticated digital projectors from a video house (Projector: LCD NEC MT1065 from Visual Sound in Broomall, PA) and then to calibrate both computer monitors as well. The operator running the projection had to prompt the two computers manually to move from one image to the next, but because the original images were already high resolution, they projected beautifully, with each image at five feet wide and three feet high, and the full and detail images projected side by side. This visually duplicated the slide review procedures we had followed in the past.

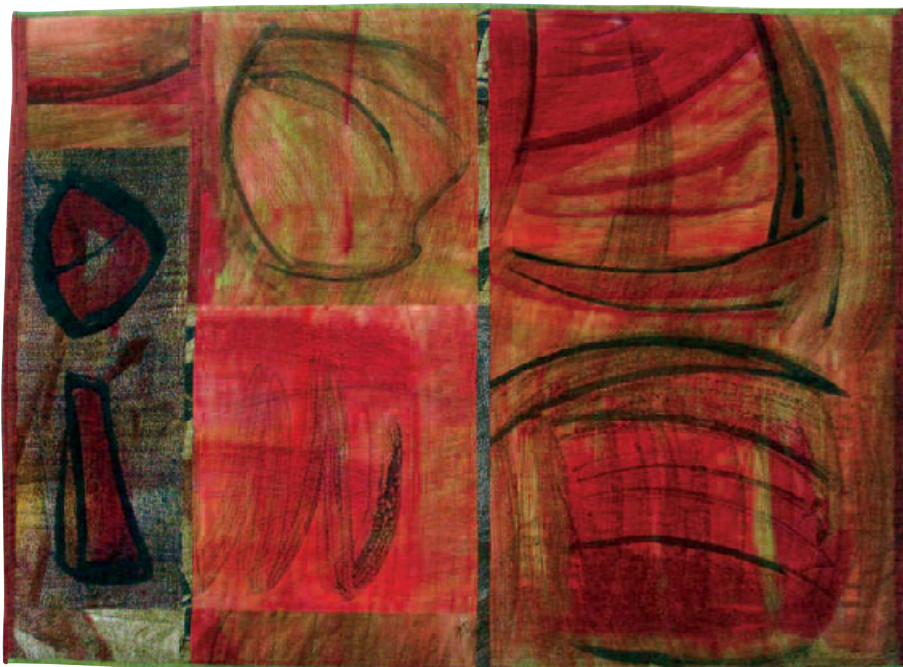


**Motorcyclist Portrait Project: Kari and Jim**  
72" x 64", © Cheryl Dineen Ferrin

The first day of the jury sessions began early in the morning with a complete but quick overview of every quilt in the application pool, and then a second longer review of every image (full and detail side by side) with each juror silently scoring the quilt images on prepared printed paper ballots which correlated to the

artists by number and image. Next we totaled the scores of the three jurors for every quilt. With those numbers in hand, the electronic files were reshuffled to show them the group they scored highest, which were automatically placed in the final review file, and to eliminate the lowest scoring images while allowing the jurors to refine their other choices. In dealing with slides, this used to involve reshuffling approximately 18 carousels of slides, keeping the details and the full images sorted simultaneously. In dealing with PowerPoint files, it still meant several hours of electronic reshuffling to regroup the files for the next and final part of the jury process.

The new files were grouped into two sections, those with the highest total points and those in the middle range of the total. Those with the lowest scores were eliminated. The highest-scoring group was automatically considered for the final list of quilts included. That file was about 50% of the final number of quilts selected by the jurors. The jurors then started discussing each image in the middle range and verbally voted for inclusion, rejection, or to abstain



**Shostakovich Series, 57" x 42", © Astrid Hilger Bennett**

# AQE jurors talk about the jurying process

## What were your thoughts on the PowerPoint jurying process for ArtQuilt Elements?

I thought the process was convenient. – *Mi-Kyoung Lee, Head of Fibers, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

The committee did a good job. It was a long, hard process to put the images into that presentation with the full image on one screen and the detail on another. – *BJ Adams, fiber artist*

I thought it worked well. I have given up slides myself, so I am very comfortable with PowerPoint. – *Bob Shaw, author and curator*

## How does it compare to jurying from slides?

When I was jurying with slides, I wasn't able to select finalized images together to review further. PowerPoint allowed us to review the full scope of the exhibition and easily edit our jury [selection.] – *Mi-Kyoung Lee*

This [jury selection] was much improved over the last PowerPoint presentation I saw where both size (shape) and color were different on the computer monitor compared to the projected image on the screen. It may have been faster in the end for the committee, but there had to be much more work beforehand. – *BJ Adams*

You might lose a little depth if the original photo is really good, but not enough to affect judging. Publishers are now using digital files as well as transparencies, which tells me that the quality is there. – *Bob Shaw*

## What can artists do to improve their images for digital jurying?

Please use a professional photographer and [have] the photographer scan great images for you. – *Mi-Kyoung Lee*

I'd like to see much closer detail images. I could not see stitching/quilting/embroidery in many of the details. There should always be professionally photographed images sent for jurying. – *BJ Adams*

Make sure the photo is professional, shot by someone who understands quilts and can light them well to get surface detail and dimension. Make sure the image you send is at least 300 dpi and BIG so it shows up well. – *Bob Shaw*

## Should the artist show artwork from a series, or their very best artwork even if it is of divergent styles?

If they are being juried for a one-person show, then a series looks best but for a single piece to be chosen divergent styles are fine. – *BJ Adams*

The very best, no matter what. – *Bob Shaw*

## What was your criteria to select individual artwork?

Visual sensibility, craftsmanship, content, the harmony of the material and process. – *Mi-Kyoung Lee*

I am drawn to unusual work – something different, out of the ordinary. Next I look for a balanced composition with both form and color becoming very important. – *BJ Adams*

Quality of the image. Period. Cream rises. – *Bob Shaw*

## Did quilting techniques come into the equation when selecting artwork?

The quilting techniques were an important component for the art quilt, but the technique is only a part of the work of art. – *Mi-Kyoung Lee*

Yes and no. In the beginning we were simply looking at the artwork to see what stood out. Toward the end we were looking at various techniques. – *BJ Adams*

Only if they served the quality of the image. I have no interest in novelty or technique for its own sake. – *Bob Shaw*

## What was your criteria for balancing the show?

I was carefully watching the balance of abstract and realistic images, monotone and bright color, and the traditional quilting process and the inventive process. – *Mi-Kyoung Lee*

Only toward the end were we looking to go back over what was already chosen to see if there was a balance. We then saw that there were abstract, figurative, simple, and chaotic designs so there appeared to be a balance. There seemed to be a lot of surface design with whole cloth as well as painted whole cloth quilts. There was piecing and appliqué but not a lot of embroidery, or perhaps we just couldn't see it in the details. – *BJ Adams*

Diversity of styles and images without sacrificing quality. We picked the best work and happily it gave us the diversity we were looking for as well. – *Bob Shaw*

their vote until later. That process occupied the entire second day of the jury session, and that's how the final 68 pieces were chosen for the AQE 2008 exhibition.

There are pros and cons to the slide-versus-digital jury process. The pre-jury prep time using digital images was longer and more involved. But we know that slides are becoming more difficult and more expensive to use as photographers move into the digital realm and as companies like Kodak stop producing slide film and processing and viewing equipment. With the slide reshuffle process, it was easier to make a mistake in slide order

or to turn it around or upside down in the carousel. And to go back and revisit an image that had been removed from the carousel and re-filed was not quick. With the digital shuffle, the earlier file versions were saved to the desktop, and to pull up any image was almost instantaneous.

Another advantage of digital applications is that most print processes require digital format, and having digital images greatly facilitates production of postcards, posters and catalogs. In addition, using a high-quality digital image can result in much better print quality in terms of color accuracy, details, and surface

reproduction. A final advantage was the ease of reviewing the chosen images and seeing them in groups of fifteen at a single view (using the slide format screen of PowerPoint), which allowed the jurors more of an immediate overview to evaluate the show for balance and cohesion.

Getting up the tech curve of digital jurying can be a hard climb, but the end result is very worthwhile. ▼

*SAQA active member Cindy Friedman is a quilt artist and fashion designer. She is the co-director of ArtQuilt Elements with Deborah Schwartzman. Cindy lives in Merion Station, Pennsylvania, and her web site is [www.cindyfriedman.com](http://www.cindyfriedman.com).*

## Working in a series

Rayna Gillman

**W**hat does it mean to work in a series? I had always envied people who worked that way, without being sure what “that way” actually meant. So, when I made a recent piece I liked, I dubbed it #1 and decided to keep going. Up on the design wall went fabrics for #2. I arranged and rearranged them, substituted, reversed, added, subtracted, contemplated. And finally, put them away.

I simply couldn't snap my fingers and make a series. My artwork evolves organically and only in retrospect do I see that I have, indeed, made a series. My *Poland Series* began as a way to process what I had seen and felt, but I didn't think “Oh, I'm going to do a series.” I just began to work. For me, a series evolves with an underlying theme, but not always sequentially or consciously.

Curious about how others approach it, I posed some questions on my blog. The deluge of responses made it clear that I had touched a chord, and passions ran high in both directions.

### For those of you who choose to work in a series, why do you? What do you hope to accomplish?

**Emmie Seaman:** “I usually work in a series when I can't get everything said in one piece. Right now I'm working on a series of domestic icons or kitchen icons. After half a century of housekeeping, I have a lot to say!”

**Kim Ritter:** “I always work in series. One piece naturally leads to the next and the series tend to overlap as well. One piece may fit in more than one series. Part of the process is the research that adds to the need to do more than one quilt in every series.”

**Liz Berg:** “I think working in a series is about exploring an idea, a color combination, a technique, or whatever, and following it where it will go. I had to work hard on my life circles

pieces. I had feelings of ‘Oh, what am I going to do now?’ and ‘Are they all looking alike?’ But by following through, I learned a lot about composition and balance.”

**Linda Colsh:** “I work in series because once is never enough. Once I start into an idea, there are multiple nooks and crannies to delve into and divergent choices to make. If both paths sound intriguing, I note the one not chosen and come back to it in a future exploration.

“Sometimes it's a simple design decision or a color choice, value selection, how much contrast, composition? What if? Other times, it's subjects to pursue or themes and variations.

“Finally there are overarching ideas that cut across the specific themes. These basic ideas are the things I think about when I'm away from the studio — kind of like a framework that underpins all of my artwork —

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*My artwork evolves organically and only in retrospect do I see that I have, indeed, made a series.*

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the individual subjects that fall into categories, big ideas that hold my interest. Stuff grabs hold of my thoughts and won't let go.”

**Susie Monday:** “My solution to any real or perceived boredom is to work on several series all at the same time, or rather out of sequence. I have

series that I have worked on for 10 years now — saints and angels; some for 6 or so — my kitchen altars; the newer El Cielo nature altars, and the newest, the desert series.

“I come and go among all of these, but it's important to me to develop a body of work that has a visual and a content relationship. I just don't feel like I am getting anywhere unless I revisit the same images, themes, forms, and content, with each pass being a spiral into something a bit deeper, a bit riskier, or maybe sometimes, for comfort, even somewhat meditatively repetitive.”

**Jane Dávila:** “I almost always work in series, though usually on more than one at a time. I think when a thought or an idea gets into your head, the only way to get it out is to follow it and see where it leads you. When you run out of questions to ask yourself, you're done (although I find myself revisiting a series years later as new questions or avenues occur to me). Working in a series helps me to develop a concept more fully, to gain a deeper understanding of why I was obsessed with an idea in the first place. The underlying thought is what holds it together as a series.”

**Clairan Ferrono:** “Yes, exactly! You don't always know what you want to say until you're working on it (or thinking about what you've done). But if you don't work in a series, because that's ‘so dull,’ you'll never say it. And that's exactly why you should try working on a series about something you care a lot about — so you can find out what you really care about and why.”

**Linda Branch Dunn:** “I find that ideas are like branching vines: they sprout everywhere, and the challenge is to choose the best to pursue. There will never be enough time to explore them all. One idea gets richer as you turn away from the others. It reveals





Above: **Early Frost**, 32" x 35"; right: **Lost**, 23" x 18"; both © 2006; two works in Rayna Gillman's series about her mother's gradual memory loss.

itself as you explore the subject and hone your vocabulary of marks and colors."

**Claire Fenton:** "For me anyway, working in a series goes back to the whole issue of what we're communicating with our art. If you've got an underlying idea that you're working with (consciously or not), then working in a series just becomes an extended conversation, a continuous dialogue. This is why I make visual art. I'm not as articulate with words."

**Russ Little:** "I feel like I'm only now getting to the point where I want to intentionally produce a series. I feel strongly that a series should be about giving myself permission to explore a theme or a form to which I'm strongly attracted without feeling that every piece I produce has to be completely unlike everything that preceded it."

### Do you ever feel you are forcing the issue, or does everything flow naturally?

**Laura Cater-Woods:** "My series tend to develop on their own; one idea leads to another. A theme might be carried forward and sometimes the compositional devices are too. I don't think consciously about this, it just happens. When I see artwork by

other artists where one piece greatly resembles lots of others, my first thought is 'Why are they repeating themselves?' Then I look again to see if there's a subtle shift I missed. Sometimes there are changes from one piece to the next, and sometimes I think the artist found something that worked and is sticking with it."

**Sandy Donabed:** "My stuff turns out to be in a series, but I never consciously work in a series. When a piece is done, I'm always surprised to see all the connections to my previous artwork. In classes I always told students to get snapshots of all their artwork and then find the connections — how many series does each piece fit into? What is the next piece in each to explore? How do some pieces bridge different series? Do any directions still need to be explored or is it time to close one road off?"

**Terry Grant:** "Series happen. Sometimes I think I will do a series of some kind but run out of interest after the 2nd one; sometimes it isn't until I have finished the 4th in a series that I recognize the series as a series."

**Alison Schwabe:** Each of my series develops as an exploration of some theme or idea, one leading on to the next. Far from being a matter of convenience, a series is a record of devel-

opment, of ideas or techniques, or both. If you have something to say and the techniques in which to embody that idea, a series will develop."

### For those who don't work in a series, why not?

**Gerrie Congdon:** "I find it very boring to work in a series. I just want to move on to something else. I have sort of tried. I took a class on working in a series, and I actually made four pieces that were related."

**Carol Larson:** "I'm with Gerrie about working in a series. It bores me to tears! If I wanted all my artwork to look the same, I would go back to my day job."

**Juanita Yeager:** "I have worked in a series that was a conscious effort on my part and find I do not like working this way. There is too much thought on my part about how to be different yet retain some cohesiveness."

**Sarah Ann Smith:** "I am so relieved that I'm not the only one who finds deliberately working in a series boring beyond belief! I may have certain themes that I revisit, like my quilts that stem from mythology, or from nature, but egad! the tedium."

See "Working in a series" on page 30

# Dancing into design

by Beth Carney

As I sat down to create an artist's statement about my artwork, it became clear to me how much dance has influenced my fiber art compositions. My journey as a dancer began with studying the classic technical forms of dance and then branching out into improvisation and dance composition. Around the time I received a BFA in fine arts at Ohio University in 1973, I also began quilting, using traditional styles and techniques. The traditional study of both art forms gave me the tools of the craft necessary for discovery, allowing my art to grow in whichever media I chose. Many painters followed a similar path, beginning their careers by studying and copying the masters, thus learning the basic art form before branching out on their own. My frustration with conventional quilting grew out of the need to go beyond the orderly repetition of the traditional forms. I began to realize it was time to start viewing my quilt art from a different perspective.

In the summer of 2001, I signed up for Nancy Crow's improvisation class. As I struggled to master the different techniques, keep up with the workload and understand what makes a composition strong, a lightbulb went off in my brain. I was doing exactly what I have done as a dancer and choreographer: improvisation. This involves working to such exhaustion that the body takes over from the mind in order to explore a given idea and move beyond the comfort zone of your natural movement. I saw the need to stop thinking and just do! Thus began my journey to join the concept of orderly repetition with freedom of movement, and I began to work on a series entitled *Structured Chaos*.

I see my design wall as an empty stage waiting for the dancers to begin, creating a new exciting piece that draws the audience in. It is a stage in

## Beth Carney – Artist's statement

I take my life experiences as a dancer, choreographer, and director, melding them together in my art, constantly looking at the world with an openness to see different perspectives with focus and discipline. Each piece of me creates an essential element in my artwork. The dancer explores the movement, flow, and paths that your eyes follow as they dance around the artwork. The choreographer uses the line, spatial relationships between the parts and the play of color to create an image for the audience. The director creates the structure and controls the chaos.

which the relationship between the dancers is an important element. How and when they move help create a work of art.

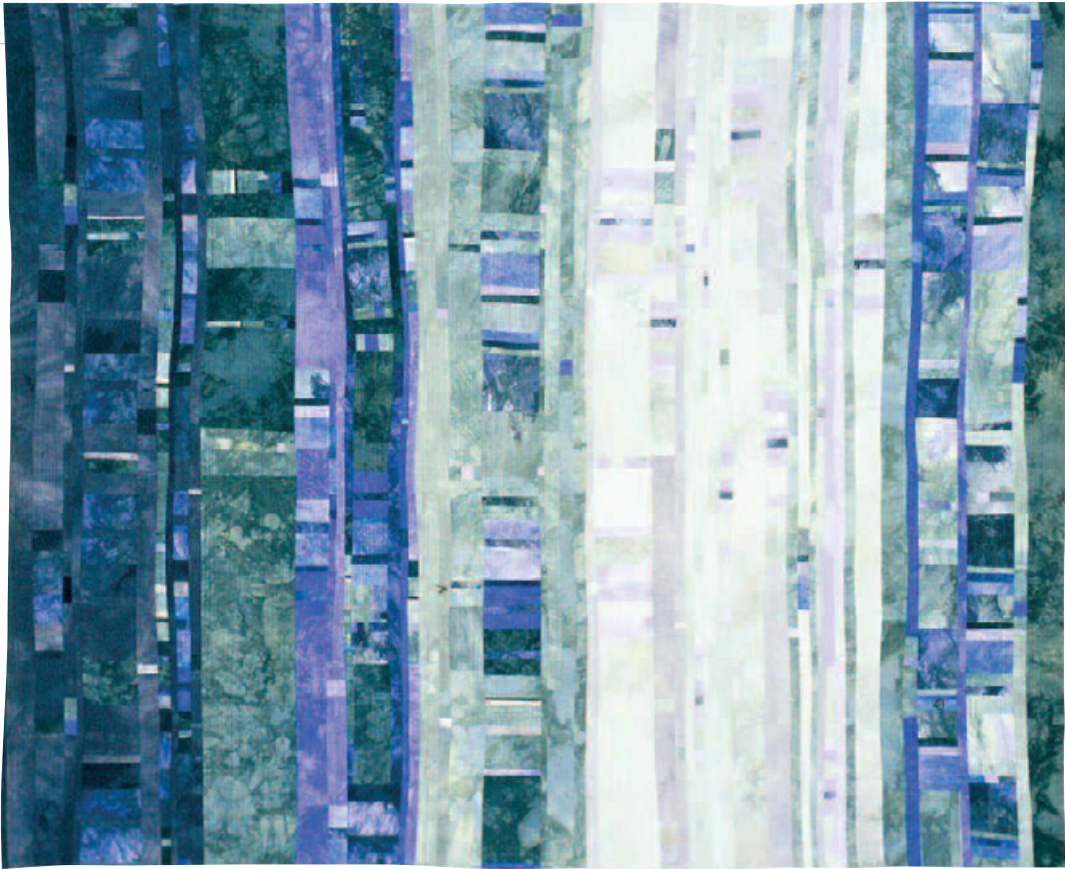
Once I have improvised on the wall with line, shape, and color, just as a dancer explores the possibilities of the human body and what it can

express, I become aware of what's working and what's not. That's when I truly begin to work with intent and focus. As a dancer, I am thinking in terms of space, timing, and energy; as a textile artist, I begin to focus on unity, repetition, and balance in my quilt composition.



photo by Karen Bell

*Structured Chaos 10*, 36" x 34", © 2007 Beth Carney



### ***Structured Chaos 14***

53" x 64"

© 2006 Beth Carney

Space is the where the dancer goes. It is about path, direction, height, size, line, shape, and the relationship between these parts. I take one shape that becomes a dominant feature and play with various elements of space. The level and size begin to give the piece depth, motion, and rhythm, as well as a path for the eye to follow. As I add value, I begin to be aware of foreground and background. I then think about the elements of art and design, constantly asking myself "what if?" questions.

Timing is about speed and how it affects motion. Thinking in dance terms, my focus moves to accents, rhythms, and the dynamics of the piece. Color, size, and repetition can be part of the accent making certain shapes pop out, creating motion in the piece. Varying the size and placement creates a rhythm that resembles different notes on a page, forming a melody that is beginning to make my piece dance.

Energy is what gives the artwork life. It is how the movement is performed. Is my movement free-flowing

or bound, heavy or light, filled with emotion or devoid of it? Ordinary gestures or shapes become art by extending the energy beyond the natural boundaries of the human body, or canvas. Color, including black and white, becomes the energy and emotion behind the piece. I also use color as a way to abstract reality, drawing from nature, creating a visual memory of a place or a time.

A performance is viewed and then gone, seen as a fleeting moment. Visual art is something concrete you can revisit; however, both leave the viewer with a visual trigger that evokes something within.

My *Structured Chaos* series reflects my journey with the relationship between the visual and the performing arts. *Structured Chaos 10* evokes a rainy day with the trees surrounded by a foggy mist. Glimpses of spring greens and browns peek through windows. The long thin vertical lines represent rain, making orientation of the composition another important design factor. I am trying to capture that fleeting moment in time when

you feel that winter is beginning to melt away and spring is beginning to emerge.

As *Structured Chaos 14* evolved, I discovered that its textures and colors evoked memories — the light, crisp snow against the blue sky, the muddy melting into spring. I thought of the dark blur of the rain, gloomy yet comforting, contrasting with the clear vivid colors of emerging growth.

Looking at art with a dancer's eye also confirms the importance of good technique and a strong understanding of the elements of art and design. Connecting dance with quilting is more than creating a dancer on the fabric. It goes beyond the movement of the rotary cutter as it glides across the fabric, even if you are dancing in front of the design wall to the pure voice of Andrea Bocelli. It is a joyful dance between the blending of art forms that I love, allowing me to grow and explore as an artist. ▼

*SAQA active member Beth Carney is a quilt artist. She lives in Yonkers, New York, and is a member of The Salon Seven. Their web site is [www.thesalonseven.com](http://www.thesalonseven.com).*

# Working with artist agents and art galleries

## Notes from a SAQA regional conference

By Jill Jensen

The Virginia/North Carolina/South Carolina region has an annual fall meeting in conjunction with a workshop or conference. *Taking the next step: corporate and public collections and artists' residencies* was organized by regional members Nancy G. Cook and Susan Brubaker Knapp and took place in Charlotte, North Carolina, in October 2007. All of the presentations were filled with helpful insights and information. I want to share information from two of the speakers, Dorothy Moyer and Christie Taylor.

"Artists and Collections" was presented by Dorothy Moyer, executive director of Davis-Moyer & Associates in Georgia. Moyer has been an artist's agent and art consultant since 1987. She began as a representative for fiber artists and has expanded to include additional media. Most of her work involves placing art into corporate environments and collections. As an artist's agent, she represents specific artists and presents their artwork to

potential collectors. When acting as an art consultant she chooses art for a specific space or client. Moyer said that there are no sure-fire methods for getting your artwork purchased or accepted into a collection. She stated that how your artwork is presented is as important as the artwork itself. Your artwork must be of a professional level and ready for presentation.

When presenting your artwork, you need to choose a target market, have good visual materials. Remember that you are competing against artists from all media and styles.

There has been a shift from slides to digital presentations. Moyer generally does PowerPoint® presentations for clients or uses a book of photographs. Of critical importance is to be accessible to the agent (e-mail, voice mail, business card, website) and be pleasant to work with. Don't make unreasonable demands, and don't be a prima donna or a whiner. When talking about pricing, you should be

consistent regardless of where the artwork is sold. Since she is dealing with architects and interior designers, Moyer often quotes prices in terms of dollars per square foot. The price should reflect the artist's expenses and fame or market position. The artwork must be able to stand on its own without the aid of statements — it is selected based on its visual impact.

When working with interior designers, Moyer determines the parameters of the space (size, location, budget, style of décor, and the room's finishes, including fabric, carpet, paint colors, etc.). She then selects artists who fit those specific parameters and sends the images to the designer, who further narrows the selection of artists to present to the client. In Moyer's experience, it is the person at the top of the organization who determines whether or not art is an important part of the environment. If he or she isn't interested in art, it won't happen.

## Planning is key for a successful regional conference

by Nancy G. Cook

Several key elements made the Fall 2007 Virginia/North Carolina/South Carolina regional conference a success. One, we formed a coalition with our area arts council; two, we had good input on the conference theme; three, we had excellent, professionally-designed promotional materials; fourth, we kept in close contact with speakers and location contacts, fifth, we capitalized on local resources, and sixth, we had sponsors.

An informal brainstorming session at the SAQA regional meeting during the SAQA conference in Athens, Ohio, led to lots of excitement on the topic of getting

into public and corporate collections. Later, our regional reps, Jill Jensen and Martha Degen, and my co-chair, Susan Brubaker Knapp, and I narrowed down the dates for a fall conference.

For help getting the conference underway, I met with two key staff members of the regional Arts and Science Council (ASC) to discuss options for locations, speakers and format. We also brainstormed how the ASC could help. The ASC staff members made the initial contacts we needed for location options. They knew the right people to approach and how to present our needs within the scope of the missions of the organizations we approached.

As a result, we found a convenient location at a community college. The venue was free because our conference fell within the mission of the organization. We would never have known this without the ASC connections. Additionally, the room was large enough to open the conference up to nonmembers, which helped our budget substantially.

As we approached speakers who had been suggested by the ASC staff, we were able to reach out to the larger arts community, and we had more credibility because the ASC was involved and recommended them. Our speakers, coming from as far as two states away, were willing to speak in return for having their



Conference attendees touring McColl Center for Visual Arts during the VA/NC/SC regional SAQA conference.

Moye maintains files of artists whose artwork she has used in the past and finds new artists by searching the web, going to exhibitions, and receiving information from artists. Moye stressed that just because she believes in an artist's work, this does not mean that she will find a client who believes in it as well. In summary, she stressed that you should create strong artwork, be accessible and understandable, and realize that your artwork must be appropriate for the specific location in order to be purchased.

"Public and Private Collections: the Curator's Perspective" was the topic of Christie Taylor's presentation. Taylor is the owner and managing

partner of Hodges Taylor Galleries in Charlotte, North Carolina, which has been in existence for 27 years. Taylor's work involves placing art into business locations. She believes that it humanizes a space, makes the workspace more creative, and builds an audience for art.

Taylor said that the needs of the collecting organization must be considered. Generally the first consideration is art as decoration for the space, and then it must also represent how the company views itself (vision, mission, branding, good corporate citizen). Taylor also repeated the message that it is key for someone in a leadership position in the business to believe in art and its importance in

the business environment.

Placing strong artwork is Taylor's goal once a company has decided to purchase art. She stated that this is a visual industry, and you need to have a quality presentation that shows respect for yourself and your art. When dealing with pricing, she suggests that artists think in terms of retail, keep your prices consistent (do not vary the price for "quality" of the piece or the location of the sale). If you are being considered for a commission, it is possible to charge a non-refundable design fee for creating a maquette or design proposal (usually in the \$200 to \$500 range).

Taylor stressed the need to do "honest" artwork rather than focusing on trends. She also stated that corporate collections are a public, not a private, conversation, so personal or narrative artwork generally doesn't get placed in corporate or public locations. The work selected tends to be more abstract because a company usually cannot risk taking a

See "Artist agents" on page 29

expenses covered, along with the potential of an honorarium.

Since the SAQA regional membership was unlikely to fill up the available space, we opened the conference to regional artists both to publicize art quilts and SAQA and to defray some of the costs. This worked out really well, and we were able to better than break even because of the number of participants who were local but not members.

To capitalize on regional offerings, we had tours of the **2007 Fiber Arts International Exhibition** at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design and the McColl Center for Visual Arts artists' residency program.

Once the conference details were in place, marketing was of utmost importance. Susan Brubaker Knapp, a graphic arts professional, designed our promotional materials. With a visual group like quilters and artists, high-quality visual materials are essential.

We charged a modest fee (\$30) for participating, with a somewhat increased fee for nonmembers (\$35) and a reduced fee for students (\$20).

A couple of extra touches made the conference special. Susan provided a digital slide show of participants' artwork the first night of the conference. She also incorporated the artists' images onto their name badges for the confer-

ence so their artwork could be connected with their faces.

When we put the budget together, we included \$400 for sponsorship money and were able to raise \$500 from a couple of generous donors. Area quilt shops provided door prizes and discounts. The sponsorships allowed us to give honorariums to our presenting artists. After all expenses were paid and speakers given honorariums, we were able to donate money to our SAQA region to add to the award money for an upcoming exhibition.

*SAQA professional artist member Nancy G. Cook is a quilt artist living in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her web site is [www.nancycook.com](http://www.nancycook.com).*

# How to make the leap to professional artist

Without tripping over your own feet

By Kim Ritter

**A**re you an artist at the point of making the leap to professional artist? Do you want to turn your hobby into a profession? Are you beyond the sampling phase of artistic growth, no longer flitting from technique to technique, from workshop to workshop, from style to style? Are you beginning to see that you have a personal, unique style evident in your artwork? Have you made it a goal to work towards a cohesive body of original artwork? Do you have some exhibitions or publications to put on your résumé? Now what?

The first pitfall is thinking the art world will come to you and discover you if you just do the work. Not likely! As a professional artist, you will have to commit to time out of the studio to have a chance of competing in the art world.

The first thing you must do is start to document your artwork: have your best pieces professionally photographed or learn to do the photography at a professional level yourself. Barter your services for photography if you can't afford equipment. Many artists balk at the cost of photography, but think of how much money you spent on materials, classes, and sewing machines and how much of your time has gone into the creation of this work. It deserves to be photographed well and documented with the date created, size, materials, techniques, and inspirations all noted somewhere for your reference. Good photos and good accompanying documentation are a must for entering juried shows, for gaining booth space at fairs, for publicity, and for all the other things an emerging artist does to create a name and develop a résumé.

At this point, you will most likely begin to enter shows, and it is important to read and understand the

rules of every show you enter. Deadlines can sometimes be hard for emerging artists to understand. "Received by" or "submission deadline" both mean the entry form must arrive at the specified address by that date. "Postmark by" means you must mail it by that day. Some shows have both a postmark by and receive by date. In that case, you must meet *both* criteria.

Keep good records when scheduling entries. Never submit the same artwork to exhibitions that have overlapping time frames. Remember to include the time the artwork will need to be at the exhibition and add on travel time to both the beginning and end. Don't cut it too short between exhibitions and never ask for special treatment from the organizers, like asking to send your artwork after the deadline or asking them to let you substitute another piece for the accepted piece. Always track your artwork to the door of the exhibition. Don't rely on the organizers to notify you if it goes astray in shipping. They may be so busy that by the time they notify you, it is too late to rectify the problem. Stay on top of it and make sure it arrives on time.

Good recordkeeping also means keeping track of when your artwork was created. Many juried exhibitions have date as well as size constraints. Finding out after you have been accepted into an important show that your artwork is not eligible is an embarrassment for you and a hassle for the organizers. It also means that some other artist misses out on an opportunity because you are taking up one of the spots and you can't fill it. Most organizers don't have a pool of alternates. They expect those accepted to follow through and get their artwork to the venue on time.

Now that you have something to

crow about, you will need to commit to creating and maintaining a portfolio. A portfolio can serve many purposes: to shop for gallery representation or entry into a co-op gallery, for applying to shows and to publications for media coverage, to show credentials for teaching or writing articles. A portfolio consists of a résumé, an artist's biography, an artist's statement, and 10 or more professional images of your artwork. Today, with standards changing constantly, this can be a little bewildering, but the most important thing is that a great portfolio is a great representation of you. The résumé should be correct in all details, the artist bio should be interesting, and the artist statement should be authentic. The images should be great but honest representations of your artwork.

While you are at it, get a good headshot for your artist bio and maybe some shots of you working as an artist. Learn to write a compelling press release, gather up those headshots and pictures in your studio, and now you also have a press package to go along with the portfolio.

Simply creating the portfolio is not enough. You must send it out into the world, either as a printed portfolio or as a CD or DVD for galleries and museums, or as a blog or a web site for your clients and students. Be ready for opportunity. When my mother called to tell me the quilt shop in Santa Fe was closing and someone was opening a quilt gallery instead, I had my portfolio out the door that day. Thirteen Moons Gallery became my first exposure to the gallery scene because I was prepared. I wasn't a well-known artist, but I had a unique style and a portfolio to support it.

Get involved on a local level. Meet and get to know the directors of local

### ***Paved with Good Intentions***

38" x 21" © 2007 Kim Ritter



art centers and galleries. Attend local art events and openings and get to know the local scene. The director of my local art center recently recommended me for a solo show at a local college.

Join organizations that fit your vision and volunteer when you can. As a volunteer, you will gain so much knowledge you would otherwise miss out on. I was the volunteer coordinator for *America: From the Heart*, where I was introduced to Karey Bresnahan, whose example of excellence has inspired me to be a professional. I have volunteered for my local fiber group, served on the board of the International Quilt Association and volunteered extensively for SAQA. All of these activities have been free education for me. It is also important to realize when to pull back from volunteering and get back into the studio. Learning to say "no" can be as important as learning to get involved.

Networking is an important part of the time artists spend outside the studio. Join online art or art quilt discussions and participate. Believe it or not, people important to your career are also lurking, so remember to be polite. I know of several talented artists who have ruined potential careers by forgetting this basic rule. When the web was first created, many of us did not realize its power and made mistakes because of it. There is no excuse for it now.

One thing that helped me whenever I stumbled was my critique group. Started at a SAQA meeting in Houston, our group consisted of Judy Dales, Susan Ennis, Darcy Young, Sabrina Zarcos, Jane Damico, and me. We met once a month for many years. We critiqued each other's work, helped each other when we struggled over an artist statement or what shows to enter, or how to handle a

mistake we had made. Without this group, I would have missed out on a lot that enriched my art and on a lot that helped me make that leap to professional. Today Susan Ennis, Ginny Eckley, Darcy Young, Ann Eckley and I meet four or more times a year to carry on the tradition and the support. Find supportive people to share your work and struggles.

A collaborative project "Women of Influence," which was created and curated by Lesley Riley and Christine Adams, had a similar effect of helping me move to the next level with my artwork. Much of the new work I am doing was inspired by that collaborative effort. Art quilters Susan Shie, Sue Pierce, and Jean Ray Laury were participants, but Lesley and Christine also chose artists from other mediums to work on the project, which was later featured in *Quilting Arts Magazine* and serialized by *Cloth Paper Scissors Magazine*. The project culminated in an exhibition at the Fresno Museum of Art.

I participated in the project because I admired many of the people involved, and I knew I would gain inspiration from it. The publicity and exhibition were unforeseen benefits. Don't sit by, waiting to be invited. Creating your own collaborative project and inviting people to join you can have lots of benefits.

There are so many elements involved in creating a career as an artist that sometimes it can be overwhelming. Don't get so caught up in the rush to do all of these things that you neglect your artwork. Being a professional is a balancing act. The creative work compels you to get it out there in the public, and the

paperwork and other out-of-studio experiences lead to new reasons to do the artwork.

Don't be disappointed if everything doesn't happen all at once. So many artists I know are discouraged by one judge's comment or one bad review. Many of the opportunities I am offered are the result of groundwork from two years ago or more. Keep at it. Do the artwork and get it out there!

Now, time to follow my own advice and get the next quilt ready to quilt, update my portfolio, and get photos of my studio! ▼

*SAQA professional artist member Kim Ritter is an artist, author, and curator. She holds a City and Guilds Certificate in Patchwork and Quilting and in Design from the London Institute of Arts. She lives in Houston, Texas, and her web site is [www.kimritter.com](http://www.kimritter.com).*

Lura Schwarz Smith

*Sikiel: Angel of the Sirocco*

48" x 36" © 2006

[www.lura-art.com](http://www.lura-art.com)

Driving across Nevada, a hot wind sent clouds scudding above, and buffeted us with an almost physical presence. My husband photographed the clouds as I drove. Later, I found the name Sikiel, Angel of the Sirocco. This is what I imagined that day – a vast figure striding along just out of sight in the empty desert spaces. Cottons, silks, digital fabrics, cheesecloth. Machine pieced, hand appliqué and quilting.



Carol Watkins

*Heart and Home*

21" x 24"

[carolwatkins.com](http://carolwatkins.com)

Memories of settlers are so much a part of our history. This is for the women who toiled, bore children and passed their dreams on. Photos, digitally adjusted, layered, printed on InkAid treated cloth, free-motion machine stitched, appliqué.







## Randall Cook

### *I Remain*

55" x 81" © 2007

[www.randallcookstudios.com](http://www.randallcookstudios.com)

I lost my full-time job a few months before this piece was started. As I had the time on my hands, I decided to take a class from Hollis Chatelain to learn the technique of painting using dyes. This piece is my first painted piece using thickened Procion dyes. It is about finding the strength to move forward despite the rocky road we all walk. We have help if we reach for it and there are always new beginnings if we look for them. Despite the injustices and hardships involved with losing my full-time employment, I found my way through and "I Remain."

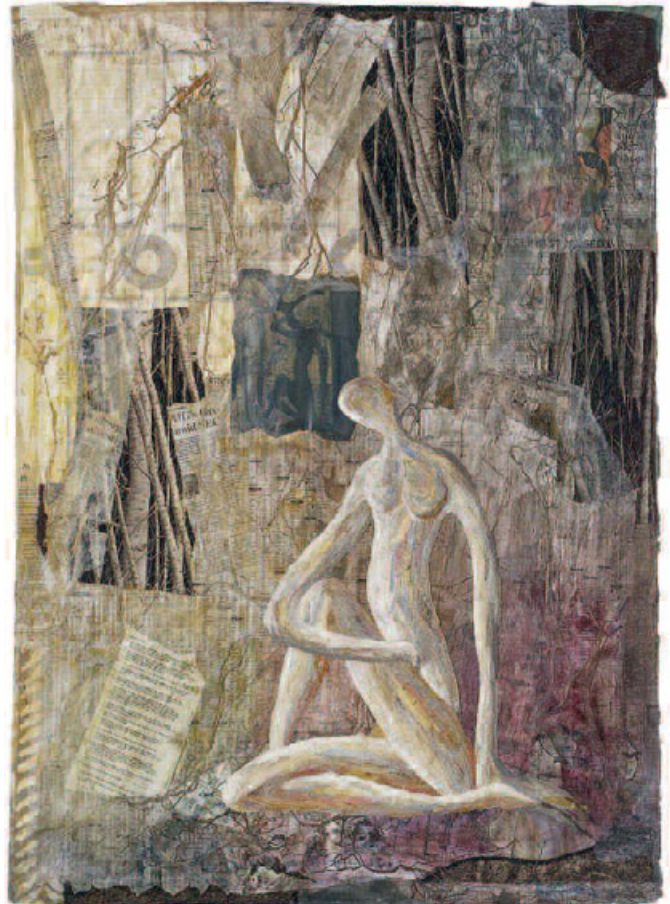
## Maya Schonenberger

### *Stretched to the Limit 5*

49" x 35" © 2005

[mayaschonenberger.com](http://mayaschonenberger.com)

*Stretched to the Limit 5* is the first of the 'Stretched' series that has the human body as a main subject. The whole series expresses my concerns about 'stretching' nature and humans to or sometimes beyond their limits.



## Terri Haugen

### *Let Thy Loveliness Fade as it Will*

36" x 43" © 2005

[www.lessirenes.com](http://www.lessirenes.com)

My first art quilt, all hand-quilted and stitched mostly while waiting for my best friend during her 12-hour breast cancer surgery and reconstruction. This is a layered batik done on raw silk and organza, embellished with vintage buttons and beads. Inspired by T. Moore's poem "Believe Me if all those Endearing Young Charms."

## Merle Axelrad Serlin

I completed my very first quilt in 1991. It was quite traditional and definitely not a work of art! I had started the quilt several years prior to its completion — long before I had even met my husband, let alone started thinking about babies. At the time, I was working in San Francisco as an architect. Buildings are long-term projects, and I thought it would be fun to create something with a little more immediate gratification and more of a hands-on approach. I signed up for a quilting class. We were taught to cut each piece individually with scissors (no rotary cutters here!) and piece them by hand. I eventually tired of the project and put it in a drawer. Years later, when pregnant, I wondered if I might have enough blocks for a baby quilt. Now living in Sacramento and eight months pregnant, I took my quilt-top into a fabric store to pick out backing fabric. The salesperson looked at my sad little hand-pieced nine-patch and gently suggested I might like to take a quilting class.

I took a beginning quilting class and discovered the joys of the rotary cutter. Talk about immediate gratification! Although I continued piecing in a fairly traditional manner, with fabric choice and pattern manipulation my quilts looked non-traditional fairly quickly. They were all about color and movement; I had discovered the world of the “art quilt.” In 1994 I entered my first pieces in a quilt show. With three quilts I won seven ribbons, including “Best of Show”, “Best Use of Color” and two of the three “Judge’s Choice” ribbons. I was ecstatic! It wasn’t long before I was showing my portfolio to art consultants and selling art quilts, mainly to health care facilities.

In the late 1990s I learned about public art. Sacramento has a policy that 2% of the cost of construction of public buildings must go towards art. Typically, the selection process is

open to the public, so you can hear what the panelists say about the applicants’ artwork. I felt I had proven myself in the local quilting world, but I was very curious to hear what artists (not quilters) would have to say about my quilts. There was a fairly large commission coming up, eight artworks for the California Environmental Protection Agency’s new headquarters building. I knew I didn’t have a chance of getting that commission; it was a six-figure project. But I thought if I could sit and listen to the judges’ comments, I’d have a better chance of getting a smaller commission when it became available. That afternoon my life changed — I got the commission. I was dumbstruck!

My proposal was to create eight large quilts, each depicting an environmentally fragile geographic feature of California. I had presented drawings of the eight sites, but to be honest, I was not sure how I was going to execute them. Up to that point I had made one very small landscape quilt — an aerial view of

the Sacramento Delta. Needless to say, it was a whirlwind of a year with a very steep learning curve. Over the course of that year, I developed my current process of fabric collage.

At that same time I started renting a studio from an art gallery. This worked well for me in a number of ways. It got all of my fabric out of the house; I had not realized just how far-flung my fabric empire had become until I had to pack it all up. Also, it helped me approach this as a job — something I needed to do if I was going to complete eight large artworks in one year. Finally, it introduced me to the city as an artist. In Sacramento, all of the art galleries have their openings on the second Saturday of each month. It’s become quite a scene, and I got to take advantage of it. Every month I had 200-400 people come through my studio. As I would finish a piece, I’d pin it up on my design walls. It was a perfect environment for an emerging artist. Nothing was for sale, but for a year people could see my progress. At the end of the year, I had a show with all



Left to right: **Monterey Bay Canyon** (partial), **Lake Tahoe**, **Delta** and **Headwater Redwoods** (partial). 50" X 50" each. Part of the eight-piece commission for the California EPA's headquarters building completed in 2000.



**Tree Part 4**, 48" x 33", full and detail (below)

Part of a five-piece series commissioned by the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission for Sacramento's new City Hall, completed in 2005.



eight pieces in frames and on the main gallery's walls. Folks couldn't buy the originals, but I had prints made and sold those. I also had a lot of new commissions to get started on.

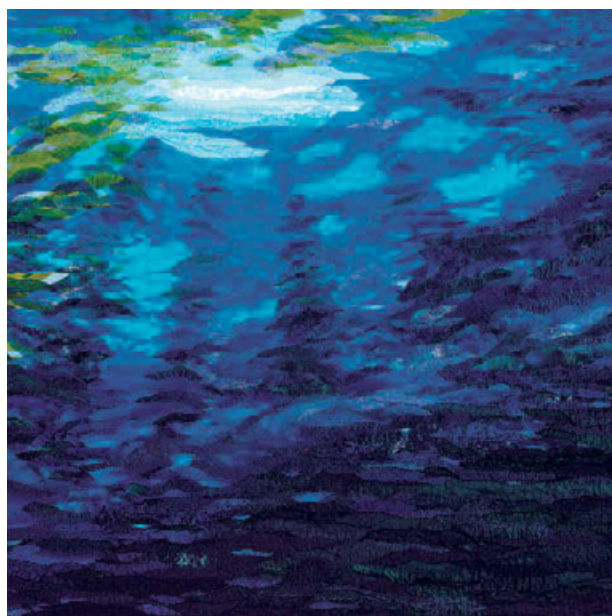
I've found that my background as an architect has helped me a great deal in my work as an artist. Many artists shy away from commission work, preferring the freedom of creating studio art. As an architect, I had to listen to a lot of input before beginning design. I had to deal with the site, the budget, the schedule, the client's desires — not to mention keeping the rain out. I often thought of it as a very complicated puzzle. My artwork is much the same, but there are far fewer constraints. I have to like it, and the client has to like it. I figure I can do that much! As an artist and an architect, I believe I bring a unique mix of talents and experiences to any project team. I am very comfortable working with other architects, interior designers, art consultants and contractors. Over two thirds of my artwork is done on a commission basis, either as public art or for private clients. I enjoy the

challenge of creating something that will satisfy my own artistic requirements as well as my client's needs and desires.

Ironically, given my background with buildings, my inspiration comes from elements found in nature — trees, rocks, water. My focus is to distill a place or feeling to its essence. I see landscapes in an almost abstract

way, looking at them as overlapping planes, shapes, and lights and darks. I strive to combine these elements in such a way that they evoke something of the essence of that place, not just the physical reality. I work to convey a sense of depth and a quality of light in my collages. Every individual piece of fabric is carefully chosen

See "Merle Axelrad Serlin" on page 28



**Monterey Bay Canyon**  
50 x 50, © 2000.

# Mounting and matting art quilts

## Presentation is critical for small works

by Elizabeth Van Schaick

**A**fter completing an art quilt, the artist must consider the presentation of the piece. While other established fine art forms have conventions for presentation, the fabric medium brings specific challenges for presenting the artwork. While the variety of choices for the display of art quilts may create some confusion, it is important to consider different approaches to presenting small or unusually shaped art quilts that can enhance their physical presence and impact. Each artist must strike a balance between the purely practical aspects and the aesthetic effects of mounting an art quilt. Some artists feel that the two go hand in hand.

Attention to mounting or matting can bring a level of professionalism to exhibiting artwork. Artist and curator Lyric Kinard notes, "A well-framed or presented piece shows that you care for and respect your work." While a small scale may be the perfect format for an individual artist's technique and vision, such pieces may benefit from an extra level of treatment, depending on the artist's intentions and the exhibition conditions.

Context is vital. In contrast to their life in the artist's studio space, small works may become lost or simply not gain sufficient attention in an exhibition hall or even a reasonably sized gallery if presentation has not been addressed. Adding a mat or mounting of some sort grounds the art piece and provides another level of dimension.

One popular treatment for the small art quilt is to attach it to a gallery-wrapped canvas. This is a stretched artist canvas, 1½ inches thick (instead of the ½-inch deep inexpensive canvas), that has the fabric pulled all the way around to the back so that the edges are covered. The artist can make her own decision about how

wide a border the canvas should create and can paint the canvas, apply texture, or cover it with a background fabric. Some artists use one or more layers of felt along with other elements.

Marilyn Gillis explains the advantage of her method of pulling layers together: "I usually choose a canvas size that gives about a 2-inch border beyond the quilt. I paint the canvas a color that brings out the best in the quilt. Next, I sew several layers of commercial felt together around the edges and in an "X" through the middle, from corner to corner. I size the felt to be ½- to 1-inch smaller all around than the quilt. I stitch the quilt invisibly to the felt piece, and then glue the felt with the quilt attached to the canvas. Because the quilt is stitched to the felt, and only the felt is glued to the canvas, the quilt can be removed easily if someone doesn't like the mounting and wants to change it."

Similarly, Margaret Cooter paints a canvas, especially around the edges, and mounts the quilt separately onto one or more layers of felt that are sewn securely with stab stitches, and then glues the felt surface to the canvas. "Probably there is a size limit for this method, but it seems to work well for journal quilts."

Along the same lines, some artists find hook-and-loop tape an easy, strong and safe, but non-permanent, option for securing fabric art to a backing.

"I strongly favor mounting small art quilts," says Lyric Kinard. "The space between the piece and the wall keeps it from looking like a potholder and turns it into a piece of art. My current presentation method is to sew a small piece onto a 1-inch gallery-wrapped canvas that I've painted in such a way as to complement the

piece. I've also seen a very nice presentation on a plainly painted gallery-wrap canvas that was also collaged with handmade paper and fabric, with the piece mounted in the center. The canvas becomes the frame for the fiber piece." The quilt can be stitched to the canvas or to the center of a piece of background fabric, which is then stretched and stapled to the canvas or frame. Kinard has also mounted small art quilts to watercolor paper that she has machine-stitched around the edges.

For Brooklyn artist Niradhara Lynne Marie, an existing interest in recycled and reclaimed textiles and objects and a lucky find in her neighborhood led to the mounting technique for her *Vespers* series. She salvaged some discarded wood floor planks, sawed them into small lengths, and attached her digital-collage art quilts to them with a nail in each corner. The thickness of the pieces of wood and their patina give the small pieces the feel of antique religious icons. For works like these, most of which are approximately nine inches high by five inches wide, the wood mount adds a sense of the naïf and of purpose.

Another choice is to attach the art quilt to the top of or behind mat board. Putting the quilt in front of a solid piece of mat board is a very workable technique, while using the mat in a traditional way, in front of the piece, may or may not be the right choice. This depends on the thickness of the finished quilt and how the artist feels about covering its edges.

Holly Knott often uses both layers: "First I cut a piece of acid-free mat board to use as a backing piece. I place the quilt over it, position/center the quilt over that backing board, then lift up the corners in order to



**Autumn Morning**, 8" x 20" (framed), © 2006 Holly Knott

mark them on the mat. Then I poke holes just inside the outer edge of the quilt, about ½-inch or so. From the back, I stitch the quilt to the mat through the holes. I use acid-free tape over the knots on the back as added security. Then, for some pieces, though it is not always necessary, I place a mat with the opening over the front of the quilt/backing mat. No glue, tape or stitching is necessary." She then frames the pieces, finishing the back of the frame carefully.

Mounting art quilts onto plexiglass (either the same size or larger than the quilt) creates a lift between the quilt and the wall plane. One advantage, particularly in humid climates, is that plexiglass or acrylic is impervious to moisture, and therefore will resist damage in varying conditions of shipping and display.

Questions frequently come up concerning how to support round or unusually shaped art quilts. The best options for support are foamcore, masonite, or some type of strong art board. All of these materials can have holes drilled into them fairly easily, allowing the quilt to be mounted by stitching through to the back side. Pins can be used easily with foam core to tack the quilt and/or backing fabric to the surface while working on securing it. To protect the integrity and longevity of the art, it is essential that any backing or matting be acid free. If the materials are not acid free or archival, thoroughly coating them with a primer/sealer will help protect the fabric from damage over time.

Some designs may require creating a

custom-built wood frame in the appropriate shape, as Susie Monday found after creating pieces that were not square or rectangular. The artist leaves at least a few inches of extra fabric around the whole piece so that it can be stretched around the frame and secured on the edges or the back. Mounting or matting also solves

issues of unintended waviness on medium to medium-large art quilts. ▼

*The next article in this series will follow this discussion from matting to framing.*

*SAQA active member Elizabeth Van Shaick is a fiber artist and jeweler. She lives in Wayne, Pennsylvania, and her web site is [www.elizabethvs.com](http://www.elizabethvs.com).*



**Three**, 4" x 6", © Lyric Kinard, along with the back of the piece showing stitching and label



Left: **Guadalupe de los Niños**, 18" x 12" x 3.5", © 2007 Susie Monday



Right: Mounting under construction

# Lessons learned from curating a regional exhibition

By Cindi Huss

**U**nbound: *Contemporary Quilted Art in New England* was intended to be a traveling exhibition of artwork by 17 quilt artists from the northeast area. We created *Unbound* to introduce the quilt as a fine art form to quality venues that do not generally exhibit fiber art. *Unbound* hung at the entrance of Mancuso's World Quilt Expo in Manchester, New Hampshire, in August 2007. Although the Mancuso exhibition was our only booking, we hoped to develop more fine art contacts and opportunities in our region, and I believe we have begun the job.

Work on the exhibit began before I even joined SAQA and was done by many members, including:

- Amy Robertson, who conducted the SAQA Massachusetts/Rhode Island membership survey (Summer 2005) that indicated 90% of Massachusetts and Rhode Island respondents were interested in some sort of regional exhibit.
- Jeanne Williamson, who offered loads of critical feedback on the prospectus and forms as well as valuable information about what she looks for in an exhibit.
- Susan McCraw and Dot Bergen, who helped draft a list of possible corporate sponsors.
- Gwyned Trefethen, who offered cheerleading, a voice of reason, fabulous editing, and tactical support for everything from working within the organization to information dissemination.
- Diane Bielak, who kindly introduced me to Mary Claire Moyer at Mancuso.
- Martha Sielman, who answered many questions and provided account management and fiscal checks and balances — which is, as

far as I'm concerned, one of the biggest benefits of running a show under the auspices of SAQA.

- Judith Content and the members of the SAQA exhibits committee who helped me navigate past my Catch-22s.
- Ann Brauer, Marilyn Gillis, Karen Kamenetzky, Mary-Ellen Latino, Denise Linet, Wen Redmond, and Gwyned Trefethen, the PAMs who, along with me, committed to be involved in this exhibition before we had a venue so we could prepare a proposal.
- Mary Allen Chaisson, Barb Corrigan, Judy B. Dales, Melissa K. Frankel, Mary Gattis, Rosemary Hoffenberg, Susan McCraw, Gladys Perkins, Bobbie Sullivan, the other New England members who exhibited in *Unbound*, as well as all those who submitted artwork.
- Many, many other members from all NE states who suggested exhibition titles, focuses, venues, and ideas on how to overcome problems as they arose. They offered (and delivered) help if needed, and, perhaps even more important, regularly expressed their appreciation, which was key to keeping me motivated.

One lesson was driven home time and again during this process, and it might not be what you'd expect: Everything takes longer than you think it will.

## What *Unbound* taught us:

The timeframe when our exhibition was available was too short for many venues, some of which plan 2½–3 years out. It was burdensome for participants to be without a piece for a long time, which might have affected participation.

Museums, in particular, want to choose which artists to include in an exhibit, and they want to have some say about which works that artist includes.

Making personal contacts is a great way to go. Most of the people I spoke with seem more than willing, when they see truly fine quilt art, hear you speak and can ask questions, to accept quilt art as fine art.

Conversely, if we want quilt art to be accepted as fine art, we should present only the finest artwork by the most talented artists.

Small, prepackaged group exhibitions may not be the way to go — see the first two points above.

For museums, the funding we can bring to an exhibition is important. We were able to obtain only minimal funding, which subsidized our insurance and proposal distribution.

A point in our favor at many institutions was a list of potential educational programming and merchandising opportunities.

## Knowing what we know now, we would:

- Create a rigorously juried portfolio of artists from New England that could be proposed to various museums and galleries for a specified period of time. A small fee (\$25–\$30) from each artist represented should cover the costs of producing and mailing the portfolios.
- Create a list of fine art venues to target.
- In addition to the juried artwork, develop a list of instructors. This listing could be used independently as well as in combination with the portfolio. Determine whether there would be a separate fee and application process to be included.

# Checklist for a successful exhibition

If you decide to organize a regional exhibition, here's a list of the things you'll need to develop and propose the exhibition:

- First and foremost, **money**. Money for copies, postage, insurance, presentation binders, paper, and ink. Money for proposal review fees (occasionally), juror honoraria (we were lucky and the jurors kindly worked gratis), and scanning slides. In short, lots of money.
- Willing **exhibitors** who create exceptional art.
- A list of potential **venues**. I found state-sponsored web sites were very helpful.
- A list of potential **sponsors**.
- Unbiased, knowledgeable **jurors**.
- **Prospectus**, including a list of important dates and the terms of inclusion (Prepaid return shipping labels are a must. Checks for shipping are too confusing and time consuming.)
- **Call for entry form**, including artist's name, address, phone, e-mail, web site, title, year of artwork, photo credit, retail value, insurance value, whether it's for sale, and materials and techniques.
- **Acceptance** and **rejection** letters.
- Artist **contract** including all the terms of the exhibition.
- **Inventory form** for each quilt that includes all the information about that quilt: artist's name, address, phone, e-mail, web site, title, year of artwork, photo credit, retail value, insurance value, whether it's for sale, materials and techniques, and whether return shipping was included in the package.
- **Boxes** for shipping the quilts to the venues (many venues prefer/require them to be shipped together).
- **Storage** for the quilts in your care between exhibitions. Space in my house is limited, but the Fiber Art Center in Amherst, MA, was willing to house the quilts when they weren't being exhibited.
- **Insurance**. We used HUB International Milne of AZ (Christine L. Johnston was our contact). Our rate was \$112 premium per \$10,000 value. Artists were responsible for documenting the value of their artwork if there was a claim.
- An excellent **proposal**, customized for each potential venue or sponsor.
- A **CD** with quality high-resolution full and detail images and a CD Index with thumbnails and information about each image.
- A **master list** of artwork, including all the information in the inventory form, to travel with the exhibition.
- Exhibition **signage** for each quilt and to recognize our sponsors.
- **Support**. Lots of wonderful, solicited, and unsolicited support. Nothing could motivate me more than hearing a kind word of appreciation.

Don't be surprised to find yourself in a Catch-22 situation—maybe more than once. For example, you need a venue to lure great artists with a call for entry, but you need great art to land a venue. Similarly, you need a venue to get funding from your sponsors—so you can tempt the venue. You might notice that “venue” is a common theme—so if you have a great relationship with a venue, capitalize on it! Otherwise, be creative, and be receptive and outgoing.

*Editor's note: Many sample forms are available from the exhibits committee. Contact Arlene Blackburn, the regional exhibits mentor, [arleneblackburn@comcast.net](mailto:arleneblackburn@comcast.net), for more information.*

- Develop a list of regional artists who produce items for sale in addition to their quilted art, such as wearable art, giclée prints, books, and note cards. Determine whether to use a jurying process or assume a professionalism that requires no filtering, and whether there would be a separate fee to be included.
- Although they would accompany the portfolio, the teaching and merchandising lists could be free-standing items as well. Send them to venues such as the NEQM (New England Quilt Museum), MAQS (Museum of the American Quilter's Society), large quilt show producers such as Mancuso and Quilts, Inc., and gift shops at regional venues

for the **Quilt National** exhibits such as the Quadrangle in Springfield, Massachusetts.

All of us should be out there talking about our artwork, not apologizing for the quilt medium, not reminding folks of the past, but speaking about the now and the future and quilt art's relation to other fine art media.

There is so much tremendous artwork out there, and I am confident that if we contact venues, the shows will come. On the other hand, as in any medium, there is enough mediocre artwork out there that we need to be rigorous in our selection process so we can present the best artwork to the best institutions. That includes enticing some of our most

well-known and talented members to join us in our endeavor.

Our jurors should include experts in the fields of painting, mixed media, sculpture, and/or general fine art, since these elements frequently are key to our artwork. We also need an expert in quilt art to be present, either as a juror or as a consultant to answer questions the jurors might have about the techniques, likely differences of the artwork in person, etc. ▼

*SAQA professional artist member Cindi Huss is a fiber artist. She lives in Belchertown, Massachusetts, and her web site is [www.cindihuss.com](http://www.cindihuss.com)*

## Fiber art and Thailand's handwoven textiles

By Karen Maru

Some artists are drawn to nature, some to portraits. Some get their inspiration from a color or a technique. Two things that make me gasp with delight are the edges between cultures and traditional handwoven textiles produced by women.

My father was in the foreign service, so we went overseas when I was three and lived in various countries in Asia as I was growing up. As a child I had one foot in U.S. culture and the other in Asian culture. I had to mediate between the two from a young age. I loved it. As an adult, I live in the U.S. but travel as much as I can.

Since I became an artist ten years ago, I have become aware that many other artists feel this pull of two cultures. Quite a few are first-generation immigrants; others feeling the pull of international/western culture see the effect it's having on the traditional values of their home culture. I see this a lot among contemporary artists from India and China.

Last January, I went to back to Thailand to learn more about fabric and textile traditions. I didn't have a clear idea of what I would find, but I thought the process of discovery would be wonderful.

While still at home, I prepared by researching on line and emailing people as I found addresses. I also looked up authors who had written books on the subject. In the end, I got positive responses from five who were open to a meeting once I got to Thailand.

In Thailand, I met Jane Puranananda, who works with the Jim Thompson Foundation. Thompson came to Thailand during World War II, fell in love with the Thai silk being produced, and got involved in creating international markets for it. Jim

Thompson products and fabrics are now sold internationally, and he is credited with revitalizing the Thai silk industry. The foundation sponsors research into traditional Thai textiles, holds conferences, and publishes books on the subject. Through the foundation, Jane Puranananda has just published *The Secrets of Southeast Asian Textiles: Myth, Status, and the Supernatural*, a companion volume to her *Through the Thread of Time: Southeast Asian Textiles*.

Jane was an incredible source of information and networking. She made some calls, getting me an introduction to Keo Siri Everingham, a well-known collector and textile expert. Keo Siri invited me to her home to see some of her incredible antique and vintage textiles. The house was full of chests and cabinets, and every one of them was stuffed with fabulous fabrics. At this point, I became overwhelmed, but with her help, I decided to narrow my focus to cotton, specifically the cotton dyed in a process like Indonesian ikat. In Thailand, this cloth is called *matt mii*. "Come along," she said, and on a second-floor landing stood the large closet full of *matt mii*. I was weak at the knees.

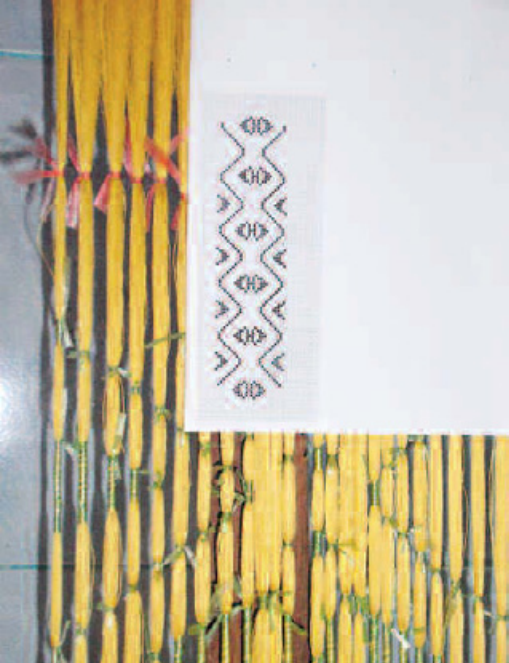
Keo Siri and Jane agreed that if I wanted to see even more *matt mii*, I should get in touch with Linda McIntosh, textile curator for the collection of Tilleke and Gibbins, a law firm. The collection was started when the partners decided they wanted something that represented Thailand on their walls instead of the usual corporate art, and they had the idea of vintage Thai textiles. From that beginning grew one of the largest and best collections of antique Thai textiles.

A special room at the firm has been constructed with textile conservation in mind. Walking into this room, I truly felt like a kid in a candy shop. I was glad of my decision to narrow my interest to cotton *matt mii* only, as that gave me a place to focus. Linda was an incredible teacher, pulling out piece after piece of *matt mii*, showing me the differences in the weaving from various regions. She also trained my eye to see patterns in the weaving, and my imagination was caught by the *naga* motif. So we explored this motif more thoroughly by pulling out additional examples. The table in the middle of the room became heaped with these invaluable textiles, no longer being woven because of their complexity.



**Pink: In Which Karen Appreciates (With a Post-Colonial and Feminist Sensibility) Women's Hand Dyeing (Mat Mii or Ikat) and Weaving of the Isan Region of Thailand and the Naga (Snake) Motif, 43" x 54" © 2007 Karen Maru.**





The zigzag naga motif is in each stripe of this vintage textile.



Hanks of silk with sections tied off (for resist) prepared for the next dye bath. The paper shows the pattern the women follow in tying the threads.



Most weaving is done by women working from their homes. Setting up the looms under the houses provides space and shade.

The naga motif represents a snake, but much more. The naga is earth energy, appearing through the soil and into the rice harvest, nurturing all Thai people. The naga is also primal energy, stirring the ocean of milk to bring creation into being. The naga protects people on a day-to-day basis, and so is ideal for weaving into fabric that will be used as clothing. Compositionally, the naga is usually represented in fabric as a diagonal, and so adds motion and tension to other woven designs in warp and weft. Because the symbol is so well known and has been used for so long in the Thai textile tradition, women have done some intricate and subtle treatments of the naga motif. As a feminist, I am fascinated by the meanings women create in their traditional art. Under Linda's tutoring, I got better at seeing the motif in a wide range of handwoven textiles.

Mat mii is woven in the Isan province of Thailand's northeast, so I made a trip up there. I had been gathering names of towns where mat mii was produced and targeted them. I rented a car and driver (not expensive in Thailand, but essential when going from town to town). Drivers tend not to speak English (and my driver was

no exception), so I got the phonetic pronunciation for the towns we were interested in, as well as useful phrases like "people who do weaving," "cotton," and "bathroom" written out in Thai.

Just following our noses like this led to some great adventures. In Chonabot, we came across a terrific textile museum established as part of a technical college (and not mentioned in any guidebook I had checked). Downstairs, contemporary handwoven silk and cotton textiles were draped on ceilings and walls. Upstairs was a carefully maintained collection of vintage textiles we were allowed to examine. Outside were arranged all the tools and techniques for matt mii production, baskets for raising silk cocoons, spinning devices, hanks of fiber prepared for resist dyeing, dye baths, and looms. The town had weavers working from their homes and many stores featuring handwovens.

The next town, Chaiyaphon, is also home to many weavers and any number of great stores featuring cotton and silk handwoven fabric. These towns have benefited from the interest of Her Majesty, Queen Sirikit, who has taken a special interest in traditional Thai

textiles. She has sponsored a number of projects designed to keep the industry alive.

In my artwork, I like to work on the edge between cultures by using contemporary handwovens from a specific culture and combining them with western commercial fabrics. I like to use traditional motifs but adapt them to my own ideas and sensibilities. Abstracting traditional culture lets me ground myself in research about the culture without claiming it as my own, which it clearly is not. I also work only with contemporary fabric that is intended for use either by local people or by tourists. I am uncomfortable cutting into vintage textiles or textiles made by someone else as art.

Since that trip, I have completed seven pieces in my *Naga* series. They can be seen on my web site at [www.karenmaru.com](http://www.karenmaru.com). It has been wonderful to work with the cotton handwoven fabrics I collected in Thailand and to use my reference photographs of naga motifs to create my own designs. ▼

*SAQA professional artist member Karen Maru is a textile artist. She lives in Fairfield, Connecticut, and her web site is [www.karenmaru.com](http://www.karenmaru.com).*

# Meet your regional representatives

## Aryana B. Londir

Arizona Co-Representative  
www.aryana2.com



I honestly can't say when I realized I had a connection to textiles. I learned to sew in my teens, as many women did, in home economics class

in the seventh grade. Who knew I was opening a door which would change my life and my sensibilities forever?

I have been extremely fortunate to be a working studio artist for many years, moving from one medium to another. The connecting force in my artwork, regardless of the media, has been a strong use of color, bold designs, and clean lines. If it's pastel, I have great difficulty working — but if it's bright color and strong lines, clean and clear, watch out!

I created my very first quilt when I was recovering from knee surgery in my early twenties, although I had been sewing my own clothes since my teens. I vividly remember sewing a royal blue wide-wale corduroy two-piece skirt suit, feeling the fabric beneath my fingers, watching the light play along the wales when I was in high school. Fabric — cottons, silks, velvets — the texture, hand, and movement all come into play. Art quilts are the perfect way to use all my previous experiences of design, painting, color, and form. Prior to my recent return to fiber, I worked in kiln-formed glass and hand-embroidered beadwork, which I still love.

My first entry into the juried show at IQA was accepted and shown in Houston just this year. Although I have much to do to develop my artwork as an art quilter, every day is a fresh opportunity to play, grow and push myself further. I thank SAQA for the opportunity to do just that.



**Sunset**, 47" x 23"  
© 2007 Aryana B. Londir

## Diane Lochala

Alabama/Arkansas/Louisiana/  
Mississippi Representative



The most important characteristic about me that I want to share with everyone is my laughter ... I love to laugh!

I grew up in the southern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. During childhood, I

thrived in various country settings of the peaceful rural farm areas, the warm, lazy beaches, and in locations filled with cypress knees and old oak trees draped in Spanish moss.

I learned to sew at age nine with my great-aunt's treadle machine. She was the family quilter. My grandmother



**Southwest Sunrise**  
12" x 55"  
© 2007 Diane Lochala

was a professional seamstress. I watched as she tailor-made clothing for the affluent, fitted many brides, and dressed pageant contestants. She was happy to give me the leftover fabrics to use and create my own designs for my dolls and pets. Have you ever tried to dress a cat?

Later, my professional career as an accountant and vice president of a large financial institution for many years was shortened due to the chronic illnesses associated with fibromyalgia. Parts of my life were stolen from me as I suffered from memory loss due to medications and treatments. Can you imagine the problems of an accountant transposing numbers for financial reports?

As soon as I was able, I decided to change direction in my life and reclaim that creative and fun part of myself. I began to enjoy sewing, quilting, and touching gorgeous fabrics and textiles again. I made smaller art quilts but was embarrassed to show them to local quilters because they did not fit the traditional rules of quilts. I was frequently asked, "What is that?"

Through creative imagery, I have learned to displace pain, and also to replace my grief and sense of loss with the therapy of letting my dreams run free and then putting those colorful dreams into quilt form. As a fiber artist, I feel my spirit fly with happiness and freedom as I make original tangible art from the inner dreams and energies I want to express.



*Segregated*, 12" h x 36" w x 26" d, © 2007 Jill Rumoshosky Werner

## Jill Rumoshosky Werner

Missouri/Kansas/Oklahoma  
Co-Representative  
[www.wernerstudio.com](http://www.wernerstudio.com)



I grew up near New York City and moved to Wichita, Kansas, 30 years ago. I enjoyed a long career in scientific and technical fields before I started quilting

in 1993. Over the next few years, I began teaching and lecturing about traditional quilting, plus I won several national and international awards.

However, I wanted to pursue the artistic aspects further and left the traditional quilt world behind me in 1999. Since then, my artwork has evolved, and I am now a conceptual

artist who uses quilted forms and other materials in my artwork. My studio is located in my home, where I have taken over the entire finished basement. However, I fully intend to expand into other areas of the house when my husband isn't looking.

I have been very active in SAQA, volunteering my time for special projects and frequently offering my biased opinions on the SAQA Yahoo® list. I have attended three national conferences so far and highly recommend them, as I learned a lot at each one, as well as making many wonderful friends. In 2001, I was one of the founders of Kansas Art Quilters, which is now a national organization. As co-rep for the SAQA region, I hope to increase the regional presence of art quilters even further through exhibitions and education.

## Merle Axelrad Serlin

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to make its contribution toward that goal.

My collages are made of thousands of tiny pieces of fabric, sometimes no larger than a quarter-inch across. These fragments of woven color and texture are carefully arranged, layered, pinned and sewn together. My artwork has often been described as “painting with fabric.” But my work also has dimension, like a sculpture.

I especially like using recycled fabrics. Sometimes this means cutting up discarded clothing. I haunt the used-clothing stores, and folks sometimes leave bags of discards at my studio. Or it can mean using commercial fabric samples after those fabric lines have been discontinued. I have a number of architects and interior designers who call me when they are cleaning out their samples library. I’ve also had representatives of fabric companies send me boxes of outdated samples. In this way the material almost works as a timeline. I’ve taken that concept to the next level, intentionally inserting time-specific fabrics into a piece. One of my collages, completed in 2005, includes scraps from Christo’s Central Park gates among the other fabrics.

In the eight years since I received

my first big commission, my artwork has continued to evolve. The collages created for the California EPA were more about the big idea, almost a diagram. As I’ve continued to develop my collage process I’ve learned I can convey much more detail and depth than I originally thought possible. I’m constantly surprised at the results. Rather than limiting me, the fabric has a richness and depth that I could not achieve with any other material. If it is like painting, then I’m the lucky one who gets to use plaid paint, fuzzy paint, and shimmering paint.

I always wanted to be an artist. But I also had the desire to be a professional and have a regular paycheck — hence the field of architecture. But after twelve years practicing architecture, I was feeling the burden of schedules, budgets, and liabilities. I missed Design with a capital “D.” With my fabric collages, I can focus on just the design. Once I began making art quilts, my major goal was to be seen as an artist. I did not want to show my artwork in quilt shows; I wanted to show in art galleries. On one occasion I was invited to an event at the local art museum. Name tags were made in advance with one’s

title below the name. Most artists simply had the word “artist” under their name. Mine said “fabric artist.” Why didn’t the painters have “paint artist” or “clay artist” on their name tags? Why put fabric into a separate category?

When I first took my portfolio to galleries I had little success; most galleries heard the word “quilt” and tuned out. Instead I found alternate venues — hospitals, retail stores, and even a public utilities building. Now that I have a studio that is part of a gallery, I host an open studio every month. That gives me the luxury of showing my artwork to the public without putting together a show. In my studio, I display finished artwork as well as whatever project is currently under construction. In addition, I sell giclée prints of my artwork. I’ve had my studio for eight years now, and it’s been serving me very well. I’ve had pretty steady commissioned work, and the print sales pay for my studio.

I treat my art as my job, and I keep detailed records. I clock in and out of my studio, recording how long each piece takes to construct. This helps me make informed estimates for scheduling commissions. I invest between \$25,000 and \$30,000 into my business each year. This takes care of all my expenses — rent, framing, installation, insurance, taxes, travel, materials, car, postcards, prints, etc.

Most of my artwork is currently in northern California. I’ve recently felt the desire to expand that audience. To that end, I’ve turned back to the world of fabric. This summer I applied to be one of the *12 Voices* in the show juried by Penny McMorris. I was very happy to be accepted into that show and am looking forward to showing my collages in new venues. I feel I have a solid body of work and a unique style, and I’m ready to take it on the road. ▼

SAQA active member Merle Axelrad Serlin lives in Sacramento, CA. Her web site is [www.axelradart.com](http://www.axelradart.com).



**River** in process  
in the studio.

## Artist agents

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particular point of view.

On the gallery side of the business, Taylor looks for visual integrity and a commitment to excellence. The artist should have a specific voice and a body of work to back it up. A gallery owner is investing in the artist, not a specific piece of art. Taylor promotes the artist, and visual materials are critical. The résumé and artist statement are secondary in importance. Taylor says artists who don't do their homework are a turn-off. The artist should check out a gallery to see if it is a fit for their artwork before sending any information. Her strongest advice is to be true to yourself.

After both speakers gave their presentations, there was a question-and-answer period in which specific issues were addressed. When dealing with fiber art, you must address the fiber issues (cleaning, fire risk) when

making a presentation and realize that fiber is not appropriate for all locations. Both speakers like to see prices on web sites because they can determine if the artist fits into the budget constraints for a particular project. If prices are listed on the web site, then the artist must be consistent in pricing for all locations.

The speakers were both enthusiastic about what they do for a living and about fiber art in general. They both stated that they have great respect for artists and their willingness to be daring in creating new artwork while at the same time being vulnerable as they share themselves and their work. ▼

*SAQA regional co-rep for Virginia, North Carolina & South Carolina and professional artist member Jill Jensen is a quilt artist living in Forest, Virginia. Her web site is [www.jilljensenart.com](http://www.jilljensenart.com).*

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## Working in a series

from page 9

During the conversation, Russ Little posed this question to the group:

### What makes a series a series?

- (a) A consistent subject;
- (b) A consistent theme;
- (c) A consistent design element (e.g., color);
- (d) An intentional exercise; or
- (e) Some combination of the above?

**Del Thomas:** "All of these possibilities can constitute a series. I think of the bird quilts I started about 25 years ago as a series, although the only commonality is the bird image. The styles range from traditional to innovative and the colors are all over the spectrum."

**Pam RuBert:** "I think a series means different things to everyone. In my case, I can't seem to get off it. One thing leads to another — it's not really a path I chose; it's more like it chose me."

**Liz Berg:** "I don't feel that the work in a series needs to look a lot alike. Following an idea all the way is quite a challenge for an artist ... it is so easy for us to jump around from one thing to another. Look at the wonderful art that captures a tree throughout the year ... a chance to really look at the changes it goes through."

**Karen Miller:** "I think there are two kinds of series. First, where the visual appearance is very similar. In that case, one wonders whether the artist only ever had one really sensational idea and is coasting on that, or alternatively, that galleries found it so successful that customers all have to have one just like that. As wonderful as this artwork may be on an individual level, when I see it in shows or catalogs I tend to say 'Oh, that again' and not give it the attention it deserves."

"Second, where the artist has a theme they revisit often in many different ways, because it is has just

taken up residence in their mind and there is nothing to be done but work it through. This can be somewhat more varied, and although there is some overlap between the two kinds of series, I am fascinated to see each new development."

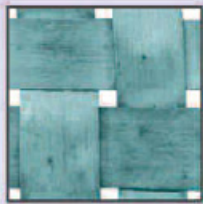
**Sonji Hunt:** "I'm up to number 149 in my bundle series over a three-year period. They sometimes explore color, sometimes texture, simplicity or excess, structure. I love working in series — exploring the options of one thing until I'm finished and there is nothing left. That, of course, has never happened. There's always something left to go back and explore and develop into another series. All my artwork is very linked together."

There were more responses than we have room for here, but based on the responses, we can all feel confident that no matter where we fall on the series spectrum, we have company.

Are there recurring themes in my own work? Yes. Ditto for recurring design elements, and there are parallel tracks for groupings of colors. And there are probably underlying currents of which I am not aware. I just get tired of doing the same old, same old, and I get tired of *seeing* same old, same old from artists who work in series. With all respect for them and what works for them, for me as a viewer, the works tend to be repetitions, not something new to say. Clearly there are instances where there is a lot of exploring going on, but they seem to be the exception.

I was gratified to discover I am not alone, and that, in fact, most artists' series seem to evolve, as mine do. Ironically, while I was writing this article, I was asked to make a series of small pieces with a theme for a particular project. I grabbed the challenge and ran with it, discovering it was easier than I had thought it would be. So, it's back to work on piece #2 that I had taken off the wall and put away. Maybe I can do it again! ▼

SAQA member Rayna Gillman's artwork is on her website at [www.studio78.net](http://www.studio78.net) and on her blog at [studio78notes.blogspot.com](http://studio78notes.blogspot.com).



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chance to experience the wonder of the online SAQA University site. Lisa Chipetine could not be more passionate about the potential of SAQA-U to provide the best art quilt resource possible. And her committee has been brainstorming and working full-tilt for months. Don't forget, if you missed some or all of the wonderful telephone conference mentoring sessions Lisa has organized, you can download the audio files from the SAQA-U section of the SAQA site. For upcoming sessions, be sure to read the most recent e.Bulletin (on the SAQA site) for the call-in number and conference code. No special telephone equipment is needed.

As I write this, I'm looking forward to seeing many of you in early April at the Breaking New Ground conference in Wayne, Pennsylvania, which is sold out. We'll want feedback on the conference which we can carry forward for planning future conferences. We're always trying to improve, and we rely on you to tell us what you liked, what you'd like more of, and what could be changed.

Speaking of feedback, we'll be looking closely at your responses to our survey in which we asked your preferences concerning all aspects of SAQA's future exhibitions. Patricia Gould and Judith Content created the survey with assistance from the exhibits committee at the request of the board. Thanks to all of you who responded.

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