

# Using SAQA's 20th anniversary trunk show as a teaching tool

by Kris Sazaki and Deb Cashatt

SAQA is having one heck of a 20th birthday! Part of its celebration is the traveling trunk show, designed to help showcase SAQA and its mission to “promote the art quilt through education, exhibitions, professional development, and documentation.” So, you might ask, what is the trunk show and why would my region want it? There are a total of three trunk shows, each consisting of 61 8-inch square art quilts matted and mounted on foam core. SAQA's 20th anniversary trunk show is a testament to the vibrant and diverse group of quilt artists who make up SAQA today.

## Benefits of the trunk show

There are many reasons to bring the trunk show to your area. For one, it's a great way to view the work of a large number of SAQA artists all in one place. Because of the way the quilts have been prepared, you can analyze each quilt up close and read the artist statement. The size of the quilts makes it easy to look at several quilts at a time to invite lively discussion. You can conduct quilt critiques among your members, hold a mini art appreciation class, or use some quilts as models in a hands-on workshop. At the very least, viewing such diversity of style, technique, and composition will inspire your regional members to broaden their own artistic expression.

## The trunk show in your region

Jamie Fingal (Southern California co-rep) hosted an open house at her studio this past June. SAQA members had the opportunity to leisurely view the art included in the trunk show. Jamie was fascinated by the different ways people approached the art: “Some just looked at all the pieces without even turning them over to

see who created them. Others flipped them over to identify the artist.” An open house works well with members who want to view art at their own pace. You can also work with local galleries and associations to hang the trunk show at their respective venues.

Charlotte Bird brought trunk show B to the *Quilt Visions* annual meeting in San Diego, California, in September 2009. Artist members facilitated a discussion about the various techniques presented in the trunk show and then demonstrated a couple of them. This type of activity helps bring the SAQA name to a wider audience.

As the representatives of the northern California – Nevada region, we brought trunk show B to our May 2009 quarterly meeting to use as a teaching tool. We first arranged the quilts on long tables and allowed about 30-45 minutes for the members to peruse the collection. We then facilitated a quilt critique. This exercise was designed to promote our members' critical viewing of quilts

as art. It proved so popular that we brought trunk show C to our August 2009 meeting, where we repeated the quilt critique format. An added benefit was that some of our members brought guests who joined SAQA after seeing these incredible works of art. If your region does not hold regular meetings, this might provide a special opportunity.

## The trunk show used as quilt critique

The trunk show serves as a wonderful tool to sharpen your members' critiquing skills and to encourage their growth as artists. The quilts are easy to handle, allowing for flexibility in conducting a critique. Since we held two critiques, we were able to experiment with different formats. We divided the members randomly into groups of five during the first meeting and then groups of eight during the second and gave each group a batch of quilts to work with. We noticed that when the members were in smaller groups, more members participated in the discussion.



Although we encouraged the groups to look at the art quilts in whatever manner they saw fit, we distributed a viewing guide we had adapted from the Incredible Art Department at [www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/Files/crit3.htm](http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/Files/crit3.htm). When viewing the art quilts, we asked the members to consider their first impression, a detailed description of the piece, an analysis of the piece based on the elements of design (color, shape, line, texture, space, form, value) and principles of design (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement/rhythm, unity, variety), their interpretation of the quilt, and their conclusions about the work.

The dynamics of the groups were as varied as the number, but each one quickly found its own way through the quilts. Some groups viewed one quilt at a time, following the viewing guide. Others viewed all the quilts at the same time, comparing and contrasting individual pieces.

One group of eight found itself breaking up into pairs to discuss one quilt and then coming together to discuss all the quilts again as a group. Some people approached quilts as fiber artists, analyzing the different techniques, while others chose to be art viewers, focusing on the piece in its entirety. One group even had a spirited discussion of the attached artist statements and whether or not they found them valuable. At the second meeting, we quickly divided the quilts by color to see if that would influence how the groups viewed them. Sometimes it did (especially when the mauve-gray group was discussed), but we could not always say it made a difference.

### Reactions

It's difficult to look at these trunk show quilts and not be awed at the



immense talent within SAQA. Jamie Fingal said she appreciated how artists created pieces that represented who they are as artists: their style, their colors, their identity. Eva Cooper felt the unanimity of format kept the focus on various techniques, textures, and details. Joyce Compton expressed the views of many critique participants when she asked, "Isn't it wonderful that art allows us to see different things in one piece?"

The SAQA trunk show also lets us consider what sets art quilts apart from other art. Alice Conn remarked that a couple of pieces looked as if they had been executed in a different medium (painting) and wanted to see "the fiber." For Winifred Dell'Ario, the "quilt" element was what she was looking for in each piece: "Something should draw one's hand to the piece." No matter what direction your viewing of the SAQA 20th anniversary trunk show takes, you will come away with a new appreciation of the interplay between artist and viewer.

### Trunk show details

Each show comes packed in a plastic trunk with wheels for easy transport. The trunk contains the quilts, a comment book, quilt index, return shipping label, and Velcro® straps to aid in displaying the quilts. Curator Vou

Best and her cadre of volunteers mated and prepared the quilts so that viewers can hold each quilt without damaging it.

### PLEASE NOTE:

This article is about a previous trunk show and some details are no longer applicable.

For more details about the current Trunk Show, visit [www.saqa.com/trunkshow](http://www.saqa.com/trunkshow).

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