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AMERICANStyle

FEBRUARY 2009

TOP 10

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

Not Your Grandmother's Bedcovers

New Takes on Design and Technique

8 Quilt Artists to Watch

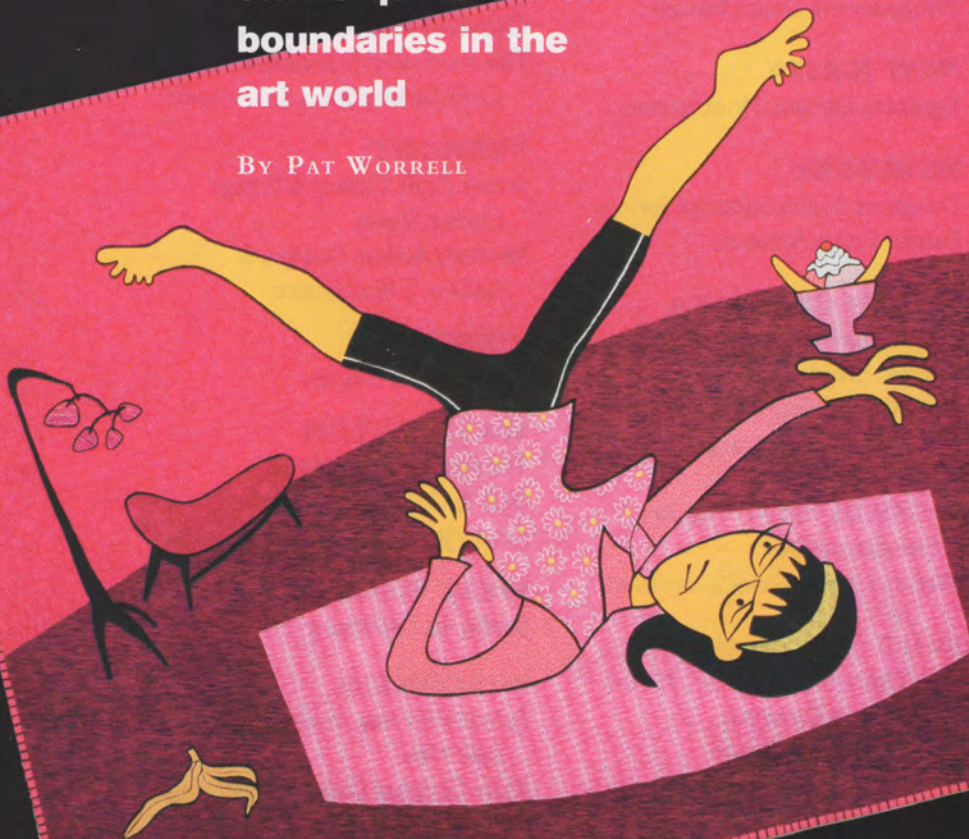
ARTS WALK
Jerome, Arizona

ARTS FOCUS
Master Jewelers
Capture 'Brilliance!'

Painting WITH Thread

From funky to sophisticated to unexpected, contemporary studio quilters break boundaries in the art world

BY PAT WORRELL



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Armed only with fabric and thread, contemporary quilt artists come back with remarkable results, like Pam RuBert's "Yoga 101: The Banana Split Pose," and Linda Gass's "Fields of Salt."

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“In the hands of a skilled artist ... fabric and thread can become a piece of fine art.”

—Caryl Bryer Fallert, quilt artist

Quilts are out from under cover.

They first moved from the bed to the wall more than a quarter century ago, when artists became dissatisfied with simply re-interpreting traditional patterns. Classically trained as painters or sculptors in fine arts programs, they began to look at fiber constructions, or quilts, as a new way to express their ideas. The best of today’s studio quilts blend fine craftsmanship with fine art.

“People always comment that they didn’t know a quilt could be something other than a bedcover,” says Michele Hardman, who has been collecting studio quilts in her Illinois home since 2004. “They are surprised that they can be art, just as much as any painting.”

“Quilting is practiced as a craft by millions of people, simply for the fun and satisfaction of making something with their hands,” explains quilt artist Caryl Bryer Fallert. “In the hands of a skilled artist, however, the same fabric and thread can become a piece of fine art.”

This article explores contemporary studio quilts, one of many distinct fiber mediums. Additional fiber art mediums will be featured in the October 2009 issue of *AMERICANSTYLE*.

The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York started the contemporary revolution in 1971 when it mounted quilts on the wall. The exhibition, “Abstract Design in American Quilts,” showed pieced quilts from the 19th and 20th centuries. “Some antique quilts are very modern in their use of color and design principles,” says Hardman, whose contemporary collection includes two traditional quilts with sentimental value.

The country’s bicentennial ignited a new enthusiasm for quilting. The feminist movement also spurred women,



JAMES PRINZ



and men, to express themselves with nontraditional quilts, and pressured galleries to show what was previously viewed as “women’s work.”

Nancy Crow, who has been making studio quilts for close to 30 years, and whose work appears in the collections of New York’s Museum of Arts and Design and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., has been a major player in the quilt revolution. Crow was one of the founders of Quilt National in 1979, the first juried exhibition of quilts intended for the wall. The biennial exhibit is still going strong. (See page 63 for this year’s dates.)

The term “art quilt” was coined with the traveling exhibit and book of the same name by Penny McMorris and Michael Kile in 1986, but some artists today prefer not to use it. “You wouldn’t say art painting, so I don’t use the term art quilt. I am a contemporary quiltmaker,” says Crow. The International Quilt Study Center & Museum in Lincoln, Neb., upon the recommendation of famed Lincoln, Neb., quilt artist Michael James, has adopted the term “studio quilt.”

In the past 20 years, studio quilts have entered the collections of many major museums. Anchoring the revival of

OPPOSITE: Caryl Bryer Fallert uses hand-dyeing and surface design techniques to create quilts like “In the Marsh,” top. Michael James’s quilts, including “Four Stages in Picturing Imagination,” bottom, are digitally developed and printed.

Michele Hardman’s studio quilt collection includes contemporary pieces like “The Food Scales/Justice: Card #11 in the Kitchen Tarot” by Susan Shie, above, left on wall, and “Will Quilt for Food” by Thelma Smith, above, right on wall.

A Note on Terminology

Just what exactly should we call these quilts? That’s been a recent matter of contention for contemporary quilt artists, and the jury is still out. You’ll hear many people refer to contemporary handmade quilts as “art quilts.” For the purposes of this feature, we’ve decided to go with “studio quilts,” a term adopted by the International Quilt Study Center & Museum in Lincoln, Neb., upon the recommendation of well-known quilt artist Michael James.



"In His Shadow" by Kathleen McCabe will be featured at Quilt National '09.

Gee's Bend, Ala., quilt artists. *The exhibition will also be shown at the Missouri Historical Society Museum in St. Louis, Mo., April 11-Sept. 13.*

"Recycling and Resourcefulness: Quilts of the 1930s"

**Through March 15
American Folk Art Museum
New York, N.Y.**

www.folkartmuseum.org

Features quilts made by women who lived by the saying, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without" during the Great Depression.

"Partisan Pieces: Quilts of Political and Patriotic Persuasion"

**Through April 17
The Women's Museum
Dallas, Texas**

www.thewomensmuseum.org

This group of 19th- and 20th-century quilts explores the ways that women cast their votes in the years before suffrage.

"Form, Not Function: Quilt Art at the Carnegie"

**Jan. 9-March 7
Carnegie Center for Art & History
New Albany, Ind.**

www.carnegiecenter.org

A juried show of contemporary quilt art.

"Quilts of the Mid-Atlantic"

**Jan. 16-March 10
Museum of the American Quilter's Society**

Quilts by guild members in Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

"Personal Visions"

**Jan. 16-March 22
Visions Art Quilt Gallery
San Diego, Calif.**

www.quiltvisions.org

Features work by past jurors of the Quilt Visions biennial show.

"Yikes, Stripes!"

**Jan. 16-April 5
International Quilt Study Center & Museum
Lincoln, Neb.**

www.quiltstudy.org

An eclectic assortment of striped quilts.

"Fabric Connection: Seven Swiss Contemporary Quilt Artists"

**Jan. 22-April 18
New England Quilt Museum
Lowell, Mass.**

www.nequiltmuseum.org

Features the work of a seven-member Swiss quilt group founded in 2005.

"Kaleidoscopic XXVIII: The Great Round-Up" by Paula Nadelstern is from an upcoming exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum.

Where to Go, What to See

Quilts are a symbol of our nation's history, and continue to be an inspiration for highly regarded contemporary artists. No matter what corner of the country you live in, or what time of the year it is, there's probably a venue close by where you can view world-class studio quilts. Here's a look at some of the exhibitions and shows planned for this year.

"By Chance/By Design: Mary Anne Jordan"

"Variations2: Eleanor McCain"
Through Jan. 25, 2009
San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles
San Jose, Calif.

www.sjqm.org

Jordan's quilts use simple designs with soft-focus lines and dots. McCain uses a square and grid to create sophisticated statements in quilt form [see page 70].

"Speaking in Cloth: 6 Quilters, 6 Voices"

Through Jan. 31
Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum
Golden, Colo.

www.rmqm.org

This traveling exhibit offers entry into the worlds of six Northwest quilt artists.

"Quilts by Suzanne Marshall and Linda Roy"

Through Feb. 3
Museum of the American Quilter's Society
Paducah, Ky.

www.quiltmuseum.org

Celebrating the art of hand technique through the eyes of these award-winning artists.

"Mary Lee Bendolph, Gee's Bend Quilts, and Beyond"

Through Feb. 8
Loveland Museum
Loveland, Colo.

www.ci.loveland.co.us

Bendolph's talent first gained national attention when it was featured in the 2002 blockbuster exhibition of



AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM, NEW YORK

"The Global Quilt: Cultural Contexts"

April 2-4

International Quilt Study Center & Museum

The 2009 biennial symposium will explore the ways in which a quiltmaker's art is expressed and transmitted across cultures.

"Kaleidoscope Quilts: The Art of Paula Nadelstern"

April 21-Sept. 6

American Folk Art Museum

This is the museum's first one-person exhibition highlighting the work of a contemporary quilt artist.

Quilt National '09

May 23-Sept. 7

Dairy Barn Cultural Arts Center

Athens, Ohio

www.quiltnational.com

This biennial international juried competition will feature more than 80 works that represent unique approaches to the medium.

"Seeing Green: Visions of a Changing Planet"

June 20-Aug. 16

Visions Art Quilt Gallery

An invitational exhibition of environmentally themed work.

Lowell Quilt Festival

Aug. 6-9

Lowell, Mass.

www.lowellquiltfestival.org

An annual citywide celebration of quilts, including a juried show, live auctions, gallery talks, workshops and more.

"Masters: Art Quilt"

Aug. 13-Nov. 10

Museum of the American Quilter's Society

Featuring the recognized masters of the medium.

Fine Art of Fiber

Nov. 6-8

**Chicago Botanic Garden
Glencoe, Ill.**

www.fineartoffiber.org

The area's oldest and largest fiber event includes quilts, as well as art-to-wear, weavings and beadwork.

► Log on to www.americanstyle.com for more information on some of the major museums and galleries across the country that feature studio quilts on a regular basis.



JOHN BONNATH

Regina Benson's "Verdant Mesa" is a dimensional quilt, pieced and appliquéed, then overlaid with sheer fabrics and stitched.

Paducah, Ky., the Museum of the American Quilter's Society opened as a quilt showcase in 1991. American folk art expert Robert Shaw writes in his 1997 book, *The Art Quilt*, "after nearly 30 years of growth, the art quilt has proved its staying power."

"Contemporary quilt artists use fabric as their palette instead of paint," says Martha Sielman, executive director of Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA), founded in 1989 by quilter Yvonne Porcella to advance awareness of the medium. Sielman notes that creating "art out of cloth" is generating an increased acceptance in museums and record attendance at exhibits. One of those exhibits is "The Quilts of Gee's Bend." The boldly patterned, spontaneous quilts from the isolated Alabama community, a former plantation, opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 2002. The wildly popular exhibit continues to travel to this day.

"The enthusiastic national circulation of the Gee's Bend quilts has certainly given quilts a boost, both elevating visibility and adding validation to the art of quilting as a whole," comments Camille Cook, president of Friends of



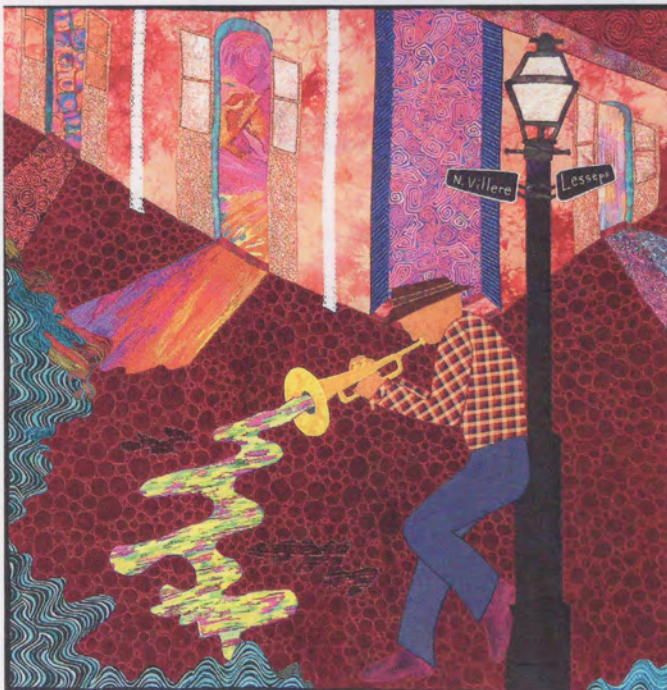
JIM BURGER

"Contemporary quilt artists use fabric as their palette instead of paint."

—Martha Sielman, executive director, Studio Art Quilt Associates



John Lefelhocz, above, is known for his unconventional use of materials in quilts. Gwendolyn Magee's recent piece, "Requiem," is pictured below.



Fiber Art International, founded in 1991 to educate potential and current fiber art collectors.

"The women [of Gee's Bend] have taken traditional African culture and filtered it through their experiences in this country," says Rick Snyderman, owner of Snyderman-Works Galleries in Philadelphia. The gallery represents a number of established quilt artists and organizes an impressive International Fiber Biennial show.

Many contemporary artists have worked to advance the studio quilt movement to where it is today. Sielman lists Nancy Crow, Michael James, Katie Pasquini Masopust, Caryl Bryer Fallert and Hollis Chatelain as the established leaders in the field, adding Faith Ringgold, "an important vanguard for acceptance of fiber in museums." Snyderman cites Elizabeth Talford Scott, mother of renowned mixed-media artist Joyce Scott, as one of the groundbreaking artists who looked at quilts as a vehicle for social commentary and racial healing.

Studio quilts have come a long way over the last 30 years, but where are they going? Today, new technology, including digital manipulation and fabric printing, offers endless possibilities. James embraces technological advancements in fabric printing while valuing the drape and feel of the fabric itself, asking viewers to approach his constructions with the same intellectual inquisitiveness they would have for a painting.

And it's not all about fabric anymore—anything goes when it comes to materials. "It is now acceptable to really stretch the limits by using unusual materials. There are wood quilts and completely thread quilts, painted and dyed, wire and metal. If you can stitch through it or stitch with it, all is fair game," says Santa Fe, N.M., artist Katie Pasquini Masopust. "I love to see quilts with unusual subject matter

Up Close and Personal

Appreciation for studio quilts is growing, largely due to the hard work of organizations nationwide. Here is a short list of events these groups have in the works.

“Transformations 08: Icons and Imagery”

Through Feb. 21, 2009

Coos Art Museum
Coos Bay, Ore.

www.coosart.org

This international traveling exhibition, organized by Studio Art Quilt Associates, explores the ability of icons to elicit meaning beyond the objects represented.

Quilt Visions 2008

Through March 1

Oceanside Museum of Art
Oceanside, Calif.

www.quiltvisions.org

This major international juried biennial, organized by Quilt San Diego/Quilt Visions, presents contemporary work from around the world.

“Alzheimer’s: Forgetting Piece by Piece”

Traveling through 2010

Alzheimer’s Art Quilt Initiative
www.alzquilts.org

More than 50 quilt artists, many internationally renowned, offer interpretations of the Alzheimer’s experience in fiber.

To view the travel schedule, which includes *Maine Quilts 2009* in Augusta, Maine, July 24-26, and the *Upper Cumberland Quilt Festival* in Algood, Tenn., Sept. 18-19, visit the website.

“Counterpoint” by Deidre Adams is from Quilt Visions 2008.

New Mexico Fiber Arts Trails Ongoing

New Mexico Arts
North Central, Northwest and Southern regions

www.nmfiberarts.org

More than 200 vetted New Mexico fiber artists await you on these regional arts trails. Download a trail guide from the website.

“Quilted Fashions: 400 Years of Quilting”

Feb. 22-25

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Williamsburg, Va.

www.history.org/conted

This symposium gathers national experts to provide lectures on quilts from the year 1600 to the present. Optional workshops and tours are also available.

The Price Is Right

“I think quilts are a bargain compared to other kinds of contemporary art, especially paintings,” notes Illinois collector Michele Hardman. “There are price points for everyone.”

Prices can range from \$100 for a small piece to \$50,000 for works by established leaders. “In general, fiber is very affordable compared to other types of art,” says Martha Sielman, executive director of Studio Art Quilt Associates, but “prices are starting to climb, so this is a good time to start a collection.” —P.W.



STUDIO ART QUILT ASSOCIATES

“Trane Ride” by Jette Clover is part of SAQA’s “Transformations 08.”

25th Annual Quilt Show and Contest

April 22-25

American Quilter’s Society
Paducah, Ky.

www.americanquilter.com

This international event attracts 37,000 attendees, and awards almost \$130,000 in cash prizes.

“Off the Grid”: 2009 International Textile Conference

May 28-31

Surface Design Association
Kansas City, Mo.

www surfacedesign.org

The association’s conference includes a members’ trunk show on May 29 that is open to the public.

40th Annual NQA Quilt Show

June 18-20

The National Quilting Association
Columbus, Ohio

www.nqaquilts.org

Features 400 vetted quilts, special exhibitions, vendors and classes.

International Quilt Festival

April 17-19

International Quilt Association
Rosemont, Ill.

www.quilts.com

Dubbed “the world’s fair of quilts,” this show and sale offers classes, lectures and exhibitions. Other locations this year include Long Beach, Calif., July 24-26, and Houston, Texas, Oct. 15-18.

► Check out www.americanstyle.com for an extended list of advocacy groups and organizations across the country that are spreading the word about studio quilts and quilt artists.



JACK YONQUILT VISIONS



“If you can stitch through it or stitch with it, all is fair game.”

—Katie Pasquini Masopust, quilt artist

“Cheers,” left, is by Katie Pasquini Masopust. Pam RuBert works in her studio, below.



RUSS RUBERT

and quilts that include unusual materials,” adds Fallert, “but originality needs to be combined with good design and technical skills to make a good art quilt.”

Sielman highlights John Lefelhocz, an Athens, Ohio, artist who uses everything from matchsticks and bicycle chain links to aluminum sheeting sewn with weed wacker line to produce his quilts. Often involving some kind of word play, his work is “an incredible act of imagination that appeals visually and also intellectually,” she says. Sielman is also inspired

► For much more information about studio quilts, including extended lists of nationwide museums and organizations focused on the medium, quilt books and magazines, and expert tips for proper quilt care, check out the online February issue of **AMERICANSTYLE** at www.americanstyle.com.

by Springfield, Mo., artist Pam RuBert’s stitched cartoon quilts; Golden, Colo., artist Regina Benson’s unique surface designs and fabric manipulations; Los Altos, Calif., artist Linda Gass’s silk landscapes; and Jackson, Miss., artist Gwendolyn Magee’s narrative and abstract representations of the African-American experience.

There is no shortage of new artists breaking into the scene. “The art quilt is gaining power,” says Masopust. As a juror for Quilt National 2009, she noticed a lot of fresh talent in the field. “Almost half of the 1,200 pieces entered were from artists who had never entered Quilt National before,” she says.

But even as artists experiment with cutting-edge techniques and materials, quilts remain a medium grounded in tradition. While the popularity of traditional quilts is both a bane and a boost to contemporary designs, James notes that “what quilts have going for them is exactly that popular base. As nontraditional makers continue to develop original bodies of work, and especially as they work to bring rigorous critical dialogue to the appreciation of what they do, the field will grow and expand.” ●

AMERICANSTYLE contributing editor **PAT WORRELL** is a member of the Florida Tropical Weavers Guild and the Textile Arts Guild in her hometown of St. Augustine, Fla.