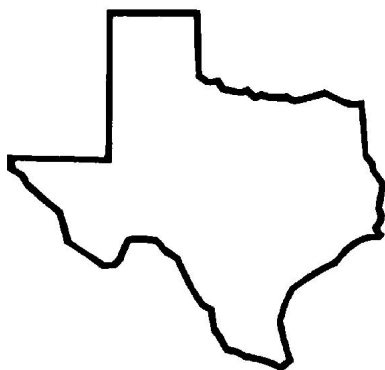


# The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for Online Quilters

Issue 16 • May, 1997



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## Three San Antonio Quilt Shops

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- [Quilter Profile: Gloria Hansen](#)
- [Charms & Schnibbles: News Notes from All Over](#)

# THE TRAVELING QUILTER: THREE SAN ANTONIO QUILT SHOPS

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By Lynn Holland

Like many of the rest of you, the first thing I do when I arrive in a new town is to check the Yellow Pages for the Quilts and Quilting Materials section. This was the case when I visited my parents' new residence in San Antonio for the first time last month. The places I enjoy the most are the ones that exhibit a sense of regionality and offer both in atmosphere and wares something I can't find at home or in the mailorder catalogs. The three stores I visited in San Antonio all get As in my tourist book. Las Colchas is located in a quaint house in the shadow of several office buildings. Stepping onto the wooden front porch, you feel as though you have been welcomed into a residence rather than a business. Lots of lovely antique pieces serve as display cabinets and tables, and this shop shows many personal touches in displaying a style of its own. Recognizing us as non-regulars, the salesclerk invited my daughter to place a pin to indicate her hometown on a well-studded visitors map that hangs in the hallway.

In what appeared to be an informal classroom, a stitcher was working on applique blocks with assistance from store personnel. Fabric selection was good, although not as comprehensive as many stores we routinely visit. Surprisingly, everything was color grouped, as opposed to grouped according to manufacturers' lines. Since we were specifically looking for Aunt Grace's fabric, this complicated our search, but did give us the opportunity to examine lots of other beautiful fabrics in the process.

Plenty of display quilts and many lovely samples adorned the walls and furniture. Additionally, there are original designs exclusive to Las Colchas. I purchased the pattern for a San Antonio wall-hanging, which was also available in kit form. Since I have many NSPs (never started projects) in addition to the usual UFOs, I resisted the strong temptation to purchase the fabric kit. I did, however, fall in love with the Texas silk ribbon embroidery that is a Las Colchas original. This design features a Texas map with lovely wildflowers all over the sur-



face. I was so inspired by their gorgeous embroidery samples that the minute I returned to Atlanta I signed up for a class at my local shop. Once I become proficient, I'm calling Las Colchas for the kit. One of the strengths of Las Colchas from my color-impaired perspective is the availability of many kits. This saves the novice or perhaps the hurried quilter from the pain and time of fabric selection, particularly for those of us who do not have mega-stashes and/or suffer from the pain of even the smallest decision-making process.

I also am particularly fond of their charming newsletter. Although it folds down to the size of a postcard, the newsletter is hand written, hand illustrated and very visually appealing. Another "little difference" that distinguishes Las Colchas from your other quilt shops is that many of their classes are available by appointment, so that you won't have to miss the chance to make the quilt of your dreams due to work or family conflicts! Our only disappointment was that there was no Texas bluebonnet fabric in stock, but we were assured that it would be available soon.

With a name like Plain Jane's, I wasn't expecting metallic embroidery or serious art quilts. Nestled in a group of must-visit shops dubbed Artisan's Alley, Jane's features folk art, primitive pieces and just generally down-home handcrafts that you have to love. The store

itself is very roughhewn and looks like someone's grandmother's log cabin inside. They sell (no surprise) mostly homespun, flannels, feedsacks, and 30s reproductions as would befit the store name. They sell rughooking supplies, darling stuffed dolls, and unusual country items. Their strong suit from my perspective is a super collection of regional patterns. The "I Done My Best" samplers by Sandra White of Provo, Utah and the Hand Dids dolls were patterns I had not previously seen. Drawn to the I Done My Best Texas bluebonnet sampler, I felt this tea-dyed pattern would make a better souvenir of my visit than a Riverwalk thimble. (Although I bought one of those, too, at La Villita.) The feature that sticks in my mind about Jane's (besides its location next to the other super stores and terrific tearoom that make up the Artisans Alley complex) is their classroom. More like a neighbor's sewing room than the usual shop classroom, Jane's teaching area has a long narrow counter studded with sewing machines and a simple wooden chair at each station. No one could possibly be intimidated working here!

My final fabric foray in the San Antonio area was to Mission Valley Mill Outlet, whose praise I had read online. Actually, I had neglected to take directions with me and happened to see their billboard along the Interstate on our way to Gruene. At the risk of getting my truly patient father lost on the access roads, we turned off and started to hunt. If you happen to miss the wording on the sign yourself, the outlet is sort of back behind the Tanger Outlet Mall in . This outlet had so many beautiful homespun plaids and novelty wovens at such bargain prices that I could hardly decide what I wanted/needed. There were a few fat quarter and half yard cuts,



but mostly bolts and bolts of fabric. One temptation was the huge wads of about 4-inch homespun charm squares at a bargain price.

I did not have a clear idea of what I wanted this fabric for since I'm not primarily into homespun stuff, so I was able to hold down my expenditure due to indecision. But at about \$4.50 per yard for super homespun, this place is a true treasure. They have some other quilting stuff, real pillow ticking and many other basic fiber commodities that you would expect to find in a fabric store. Add charm squares.

All in all, the stores in the San Antonio vicinity get high marks for distinctiveness and regional flavor. I'm already planning my next trip, hoping to make it to "Seventh Heaven," one store I missed. Oh, and yes, Las Colchas does mean "The Quilts" in Spanish.

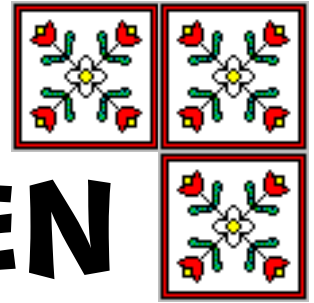


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## QUILTER PROFILE



# GLORIA HANSEN

Gloria Hansen has a family tradition of sewing, but at least in the beginning it was a detriment. “Both my mother and older sister did lots of machine sewing when I was growing up,” Gloria says. “At that time, any attempt I made at learning how to sew was lovingly taken by one of them and finished for me. When I started to take sewing classes in school, it wasn’t much different. I’d cut out a pattern, and, despite my best efforts, the teacher or one of her assistants would end up doing the difficult stuff. So I didn’t learn. Then I asked about embroidery. Could an embroidered project be counted as a finished project? Yes. So it was back in junior high that I learned crewel embroidery.

“I found I enjoyed it, maybe because no one finished it for me! In high school I’d dabble around with other crafts—macrame, rug making, stained glass, silversmithing—but also continued to embroider. I also studied photography and graphic arts while in school. Right after high school I joined a New Jersey chapter of the Embroiderer’s Guild. I took lots of classes from a talented group of instructors, striving for the best workmanship I was capable of. I created blackwork, pulled thread work, counted thread work, silk and metal thread work (even learning how to twist my own silk), and crewel embroidery.”

Gloria eventually discovered quilting, literally by accident. “After marrying and moving to area in which I now live, I was driving and made a wrong turn. I found a store called The Quilter’s Barn in Allentown, New Jersey. Intrigued, I went inside. The quilts were beautiful, and I had a strong urge to learn how to make one. The then owner of the shop, Jeanne Fraser, suggested I sign up for her 6-week beginner’s class. So I did. Jeanne taught hand piecing, which was fine by me. Afterwards I took a log cabin class, in which I hand pieced the strips!”

This was the beginning of an artistic journey for Gloria that has brought her to where she is today — an accomplished art quilter and competitor in major shows,



as well as an author and designer. Like so many quilters who began their apprenticeship in a traditional mode, she eventually began to question the practice of reproducing others’ designs through the use of patterns. “It was during an applique class a year or two later that I found myself looking around. Suddenly I felt like I was right back to making lovely copies of work — much like I did in the Embroiderer’s Guild. I realized I didn’t want to do this. As much as I respected and admired the work, I wanted to create designs that would be my own. At break, I explained this to Jeanne. She smiled and said, ‘Good. I want you to do just that.’ I will always remember her support at that critical moment. It was then I started exploring all types of books on design, color, geometry — anything I could find. I also took classes on design and/or color whenever I could (including taking art history and design classes as electives while in college). One in particular, an extensive class with Michael James several years ago, was a wonderful experience for me. I still have my notes and samples from that class, and there are several that I’d still like to make



into a quilt one day.”

Gloria also branched out in other ways. For one thing, she learned how to use a sewing machine. “I was given an old treadle machine which I felt very comfortable with. I treated machine sewing like hand sewing — I drew the stitching line. That allowed me to make all types of strange set-in seams with ease. Now I have a method of cutting strips to accommodate templates and marking match points and corner points. It greatly helps me to keep things accurate. I also like to stitch directly on paper. The treadle has since been replaced with a couple of Berninas.

“In 1990 I created a design that I thought would make a good commercial pattern. I put together my various skills, and Gloria Hansen Designs was born. I created two patterns which I am still very proud of. I met wonderful people at Quilt Markets and learned a great deal. But I also learned that it wasn’t something I wanted to continue with. Instead, I started doing more freelance writing, designing, and photography for various magazines. (Currently I write for *Art/Quilt Magazine*, my favorite piece being an interview conducted with John Walsh, III, a collector of contemporary quilts, am a columnist for *The Professional Quilter*, and I continue to submit articles to other publications when time permits.)”

If Gloria has moved into original design, it doesn’t mean she has abandoned traditional patchwork. Asked to characterize her style, she says: “The style is geometric. I get such a kick out of developing geometric pat-

terns. I do all types of things to them — overlapping elements, stretching, distorting, taking away lines, adding lines. I have hundreds of designs in file drawers. Even before using a computer, I was big with a photocopier. I’d take blocks I drew on graph paper, photocopy them bunches of times, enlarge them, shrink them, and start cutting things apart and arranging them into new designs. Many of designs that I created on graph paper ended up in my computer as the basis of yet a new series of designs.”

Gloria’s fondness for the geometric grid has served as a foil for her experiments with free-flowing surface design. “In 1991 a good friend introduced me to dyeing fabric with Procion MX dyes. We also took fabric painting at a local YWCA. The moment we learned acrylic paint could be watered down, applied to fabric, and heat set, we left the class early so we could head to an art store for more supplies. I did so much experimenting with different types of fabrics, paints, and brushes. I then took more on dye painting and airbrushing at the Quilt Surface Design Symposium.

“It’s so satisfying to simply paint, to cover fabric in random textures and swirls in whatever color I’m in the mood to work with. I just love it. There are some pieces that I’ve painted with thin glazes of color. I allow it to dry, and I repaint. I can repeat this process sometimes five times. It’s very labor intensive, but the results are often wonderful.

“It is the combination of taking fabric that I’ve created, fabric that is so spontaneous and flowing, and capturing it into a geometric grid that I find very satisfying. Currently my work is machine-pieced and hand-quilted. I do some machine quilting, but it’s generally for quilts that I sleep under. I very much enjoy hand quilting. There’s something so calming and satisfying about it.”

Asked about inspiration for her work, Gloria says she finds it both inside and outside herself. “Everything going on in and around my life inspires me. External things, such as the line of a building or colors of a flower, and internal things, such as my feelings or moods, tend to creep into my work.

“1996 was a very difficult year for me. I had two unexpected back surgeries. Prior to that, I was very physically active. I did things like rollerblade regularly, even participating in 10-mile skates in Philadelphia every chance I could. It was extremely humbling to find I no longer could do such things. I was unable to work for several months, returned a short time, only to learn I

needed more surgery and another five months at home to heal. I had to stand or lie on my back most of the time. Sitting was out of the question. My husband elevated our dining room table by putting a pvc pipe on each leg. He then put some of my computer equipment on the table allowing me to work standing. I also had a Powerbook that I used while on my back. I had accepted an invitation to create a quilt with a Shakespearian theme. I selected 'Measure For Measure' — 'The miserable have no medicine, but only hope.' I called the quilt, 'Petals of Hope.' So, no question about it, life inspires me. "

In Gloria's studio there is a fistful of ribbons tacked on a bulletin board. Over the years, competitions have become a part of her artistic life. "My then boyfriend, now husband, and I went to a New Jersey State Fair back in the late '70s when I just finished high school. While there we visited the needlework display. He said, 'Why don't you enter some of your embroidery next year.' So the following year I did. It was lots of fun — eating junk food, going on rides, visiting various displays, and eventually making our way to the needlework display where we'd hold our breath and look for my things. That first year I remember winning a couple ribbons. We were thrilled! Then each year I'd enter the State Fair and a few other local large fairs. It was lots of fun having my work displayed. It was exciting seeing what others were making, to talk with others, share tips and stories. I've since stopped entering the local shows, but I have a box full of ribbons, awards, and lots of fond memories of those years.

"I continue to enter national quilt shows in which there is an amazing amount of jaw-dropping, beautiful work. It just thrills me to have my work included in these shows. Of course it's disappointing to have a piece rejected, but it's part of how things work. I learned years ago that judging and jurying are very subjective — de-

pendent on the whims of the judges, their moods, their tastes, or what a particular show is trying to convey. I have pieces that won lovely awards at some prestigious shows while not even being accepted into others. I just accept it. I look at my comment sheets objectively, ignoring comments that are pure opinion. Things like, 'You should have used a brighter color in the border' just aren't important. But something like, 'There are waves in your binding' could be significant.



"Entering shows certainly isn't for everyone. But I enjoy it, plus I keep it all in perspective. I am just one person of many who makes quilts."

In addition to the influence and excitement of competition, another large factor has changed Gloria's professional life — the computer. "Computers have had a very positive effect on my life. I became a computer 'nerd' early on, reading everything I could get my hands on and working on any system available to

me. I am proficient in DOS and Windows, but it is the Macintosh platform that I absolutely love.

"Several years ago I convinced the senior partners at the law firm where I work (as a paralegal) to convert to Macintoshes (no easy thing!).

"Thus far, it's been successful because everyone is very productive with them. I provide all of the training, tech support, and servicing of the machines, and I enjoy every moment of it. I enjoy exploring the potential benefits of any piece of software that comes across my desk as much as I enjoy popping a machine open and upgrading, repairing, or swapping parts around.

"For the past year, I've taken over the High Tech Quilting column for The Professional Quilter. I just love researching and writing about how computers can benefit quilters.

"In 1991 I went 'online.' I met so many wonderful people, many of whom are still my friends today. I met Janet Wickell and began to write articles for her publi-

cation, Miniworks. I've been honored to win two Best of Show awards at GENie online shows. And a few years back, I met Judy Heim. Judy is the author of 'The Needleworker's Computer Companion.' When she posted a note looking for someone to assist her with Macintosh information, I jumped at the opportunity. I was thrilled she selected me to help her in this area and to provide some tutorials for her book. We have since become friends.

"To my delight, we embarked on a new project, 'The Quilter's Computer Companion.' It's a great union. She covers the PC-related information; I cover the Macintosh-related information; we collaborate on information that is not platform-specific. My heart and soul are in this publication, as I am so passionate about both topics — quilting and computers. The book grew and now includes all types of tutorials on an assortment of programs. The most difficult decision about the book has been where to draw the line, when to say it is complete. Even now, while the book's layout is being completed, we'll come across something that we'll have to include. No Starch Press is publishing the book, which should be available in late summer or fall.

"I love designing with computer software. I've tried all kinds — MacDraw, MacPaint, ClarisDraw, SuperPaint, Artworks, several versions of Canvas; Freehand, Illustrator, CorelDraw, Streamline, SmartSketch, Fractal Design Expression, and others. My favorites depend on what I'm doing, but I frequently use Canvas

3.5. (The illustrations used in one of my patterns were created on a old PC using Harvard Graphics!) I've also tried lots of quilt-specific software, my favorites of those being Quilt-Pro and ColorDesign.

"I use my printers for all types of things — labels, photo transfers (which make great family gifts!), stencils for using with an airbrush or sunpainting or quilting designs, printing templates and patterns to stitch onto. I've printed designs which I've enlarged with a projector; I've printed designs which I've taped together. I'm game to try just about anything. I've a Umax scanner and Wacom drawing tablet for getting images into my computer and a ZIP Drive and external harddrive for storing things outside of my computer."

"My current home system is a Power Macintosh 8500/180. One of the drawbacks of this particular system is that it's a pain to perform upgrades. For me, that made it a selling point. I like to collect older Macintoshes too. It makes for yet another mess in my home, but it's a happy mess. Recently I gave my parents my old Quadra system. My mom said, 'Now I understand why you are on that computer so much. This is fun.'"

Even though she's had to give up rollerblading, Gloria brings a great deal of energy and a sense of fun to everything she approaches. Her willingness to experiment combined with discipline make her quilts highly original even as they play off traditional themes. And she's a leader and innovator in the growing movement of computer-literate quilters.



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## TVQ ESSAY

# TRIMMING DOWN REAL LIFE: THE ISSUE OF ARTISTIC IDENTITY

By Catherine Jones

Four years ago I stayed up all night to read what seemed at the time an utterly thrilling book: a guide to the then difficult process of using the Internet. What held me enthralled through all the technicalities was the hunch that somewhere at the other end of the silicon and cables and cryptic UNIX commands there might exist the makings of a new kind of artistic community. A community more supportive of the work I wanted to do than anyone I knew personally or any institution in my immediate environment.

What I wanted to do seemed both simple and oddly difficult. I'd been painting and dabbling with textile techniques (patchwork, dyeing, embroidery, etc.) for enough years to feel that the time had come to put these efforts together in a coherent series of objects that might or might not be called quilts. I'd made quilts before, but strictly for bedding or as exercises in design, not with the intent of commenting on life or portraying the visible world. If pressed for an example of what I had in mind to do, I might have mumbled something about [Faith Ringgold](#), a painter known for her "story quilts": big loosely quilted rectangles that combine pictures painted in acrylic on canvas with panels of hand-lettered text and patchwork borders.

What fascinated me about Faith Ringgold's work was not so much the quality of her painting or writing or patchwork as the way she'd brought all these elements together and used them to cross the boundaries that separate different audiences for art. Her quilts had appeared in museums and a respected New York gallery, but they'd also served as illustrations in her picture books for chil-

dren. The stories on Ringgold's quilts contained political messages, but the disarming physical context of the stories — stitched into place between big floral prints and paintings reminiscent of folk art — allowed them to reach people who might not have welcomed overtly political art. Somehow Ringgold had arrived at a format for saying what she had to say without alienating half of her natural audience or denying the complexity of her own artistic identity.



Faith Ringgold.

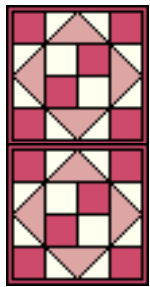
I wouldn't presume to sum up Ringgold's artistic identity, but it certainly has something to do with growing up as an African-American woman in Harlem in the thirties and forties, with her early marriage to a jazz musician, with her experience as an art teacher working in the New York City public school system, and with her mother's lifelong involvement with fabric and career as a fashion designer. In 1995 Ringgold published an autobiography (*We Flew Over the Bridge*) that sheds some light on the sources of her story quilts. Back in 1993, however, when I was digging through books on the Internet

and hoping to find people there who might share my interests, I could only guess at the woman behind the quilts. They mattered to me because I liked how they looked and because they suggested a way of making art that didn't require suppressing or ignoring big parts of the artist's natural identity.

We hear so much about art as a means of self-expression that it's easy to overlook the adjustments, conscious or unconscious, and the self-censorship that enter into the process of forming an artistic identity. It's easy to picture an artist acquiring technical skills so that

some pre-existing fountain of feeling and personal meaning can come gushing forth. But harder to imagine the artist surveying potential audiences and wondering just which part of that inner fountain might possibly interest them. I'm not talking here about a cynical effort to please crowds and follow fads. I'm talking about the normal human need to belong to a community, to model oneself after a known social type (even if, in some cases, a deviant or bohemian type), and to produce work that other people value.

In her autobiography Faith Ringgold talks about two different efforts she made during the 1960s to find



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**"Trying to maneuver around the expectations that go with the categories of hobby, profession, and calling hasn't been easy for me."**

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some kind of artistic community. She approached two different groups of black artists and didn't quite fit into either one. Fortunately, she didn't choose to lop off parts of herself in pursuit of a better fit.

The first group, Spiral, consisted of one young woman and thirteen men from an older generation, more influenced, perhaps, than Ringgold by painters in Europe. The leadership of Spiral included Romare Bearden, an important painter and collage-maker whose work Ringgold admired. She wrote to him, sending some slides and hoping for an invitation to join. He sent back a courteous but discouraging reply urging her to study certain German painters that he thought might improve her sense of composition. This advice, Ringgold says, "didn't apply to what I was doing"; she "was trying to forget all those theories about composition..."

Her second foray in search of what she calls "meaningful dialog with other black artists" involved a traveling exhibition sponsored by the Black Arts Theater that was supposed to tour the New York City parks and the streets of Harlem. Ringgold's work did get into the show, but her encounter with Leroi Jones, founder of the Black Arts Theater, turned out to be something less than a

meaningful dialog. She writes about the way his eyes "took in my straightened hair" and looked over a polished cotton dress that was far from "the 1960s hip uniform of dungarees."

Over the years Ringgold did make a place for herself and did find enough encouragement here and there to go on working and developing her style. She didn't submit to an alien way of composing her pictures or an alien style of dress. She even managed to smuggle echoes of her mother's sewing into a fine-art context. Romare Bearden used fabric in his collages, but Ringgold took the canvas off its stretchers, quilted it and framed it with patchwork. When I first saw her quilts, without knowing much about her, I thought that wherever she showed them they'd look impressive but also, for better or worse, a little eccentric. I figured that if she could get away with such a peculiar mix of elements (a touch of social realism and political protest, a lot of frankly decorative fabric and color, legible words on the quilts that tell coherent stories, and a painting style that looks more naive than it is), then I too I might eventually piece together a viable artistic identity.

Why this process has given me so much trouble — to the point where the Internet has sometimes seemed a more promising source of community than various face-to-face artists' groups — has to do partly with my own background and partly with the ways that art-making activity tends to get categorized. In popular imagination there's one place for the hobbyist, another for the professional, and a third place, sometimes romanticized, sometimes barely acknowledged, for the person who approaches art more as a calling than as a way of making money or achieving recognition. Cutting across all these categories of artistic activity is the concept of virtuosity. And, overlapping the idea of art as a calling, is the notion of the "peintre maudit." This expression, French for "accursed painter," refers to those extremes of poverty, emotion, social alienation, and, sometimes, drug and alcohol use that have afflicted some famous artists. Whatever the actual proportion of peintres maudits among those who've pursued art as a calling, they loom large in modern stereotypes of the artist and complicate the business of claiming an artistic identity.

Trying to maneuver around the expectations that go with the categories of hobby, profession, and calling hasn't been easy for me. My own background and struggles are odd and sometimes funny, but maybe relevant to the problems of other would-be artists wres-

ting with the issue of identity.

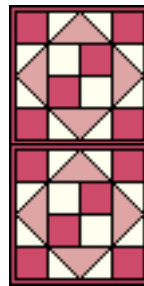
I come from a family where the women painted and sewed. Skill at drawing and making clothes was expected and taken for granted, along with a general tendency to improvise, decorate, and make things rather than buy them. I grew up assuming I'd draw for the rest of my life, but not really thinking of this as a means of self-expression, let alone as a possible profession or calling. All the ambition and idealism that go into the making of an artist I put instead into the dream of becoming a great mathematician. How I came up with this plan and how I avoided noticing the nearly total absence of women in the field I won't even try to explain. At any rate, I'd gone through my freshman year of college and deep into the math curriculum before I noticed any problems.

The most immediate problem I noticed then (in 1966) was the war in Vietnam and the rift it was causing within American society. My parents had taken sides in the general social conflict and had grown extremely angry — so angry that they denounced most of my generation, all university campuses involved in political protests, and just about all academic endeavors except the training of specialists like engineers. Pure mathematics is a far cry from engineering; it's more like art for art's sake than anything practical. Knowing this and being in many ways at odds with my parents, I found it finally impossible to go on taking their money. On the other hand, since they were still nominally willing to support me, I couldn't get any financial aid for school. Thus I wound up practicing a kind of frugality more appropriate to a *peintre maudit* than to a hopeful young math student. It took me a lot of jobs and an extra year or so to graduate from college. But by then I had two new problems.

The first and most serious was what I'd seen in the process of earning the money for school. I'd left the university, traveled to other cities and lived and worked in places well beyond the student milieu. All this new experience required processing and gave me ideas that I wanted somehow to express. Had I been studying art or literature, this situation wouldn't have posed a problem. People in those fields take time to mature and use their life experience as raw material. But I'd got myself started on a narrow path that led to early achievement in pure mathematics or else nowhere at all. I had a fellowship and a place in a doctoral program, but these promising signs were meaningless unless I could muster the single-

minded devotion to abstractions needed for creative mathematical work.

The second problem, which might have proved temporary, had to do with the state of mathematics itself. Pure mathematics back then was not unlike abstract painting just before the re-emergence of realism. No longer so closely linked to physics, mathematics had taken off in directions of its own. Within a few years the growth of computer science would reconnect the subject with daily life, just as new kinds of figurative paint-



**“It took me a lot of jobs and an extra year or so to graduate from college. But by then I had two new problems.”**

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ing reconnected fine art with the visible world. But I didn't understand this at the time. Fleeing >from what seemed a waste of energy in elegant but arbitrary intellectual games, I left school at the start of 1972 and put a lot of my free time into the newly revitalized women's movement.

I wasn't interested in, let alone prepared for, any profession. What I needed was time to sort out my life and read, time to fill in gaps in an education devoted too exclusively to mathematics. So I took a series of make-shift jobs, lived cheaply, and moved to New York City, for me a beckoning center of politics, art, and ideas. By the time I'd decided I wanted to be an artist, preferably a photographer with a social-realist bent, I'd also decided that I wanted to have a child. I was several months pregnant when I hauled my first photo enlarger up to my sixth-floor walkup apartment. In retrospect I see that I must have been living out some comically strenuous feminine variant of the old myth of the *peintre maudit*. The myth ended for me when, unexpectedly, I gave birth to twins. A lone struggling artist with one child to raise fell within the realm of romantic possibility. The same scenario with two needy infants went beyond anything I could imagine. I made my peace with their father and, in short order, found myself installed in a family situa-

tion for which I had no preparation at all.

I think I spent the next year at the kitchen sink. Cooking. Mixing up darkroom chemicals. Sterilizing baby bottles and washing clothes. I photographed the babies and everything in the kitchen, trying to document the unfamiliar world into which I'd suddenly plunged. Few photos survive from then; obsessed with dust specks and my poor darkroom technique, I wound up destroying most of the prints I made. I could go on and on about my struggles in the darkroom and how they eventually led me back to drawing and painting, which seemed by comparison rapid and manageable. I could also detail subsequent efforts I made, after getting transplanted to California, to piece together at the free community col-



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“I think I spent  
the next year at  
the kitchen sink.”

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leges something resembling an art education. And I could explain the way that images of fabric, and then fabric itself, crept gradually into my work. But from here on my life follows a well-known pattern, a pattern I've met again and again in the writing of women who've made a commitment to art after getting enmeshed in family life.

What's funny and maybe instructive about my particular history is the grandiose and unworldly ambition that I brought to various classes, groups, and publications while searching for an artistic identity. I hadn't come of age thinking of marriage and motherhood or art as a hobby to be pursued on the side. Nor had I ever seen art as a career, a profession like any other. I'd grown up hoping for something more like a crack at proving Fermat's Last Theorem. And I'd transferred a bit of that crazy, romantic hope over to the field of art. I didn't expect to get famous or rich, but I did believe that sometime before I died I might make some images that held some people's attention and said something new about the world.

Art classes sometimes fed this ambition, but artists' groups generally didn't. Too often their talk ran to

drearily practical matters: studio spaces, places to exhibit, and who knew whom from what art school. I'd come away bored and feeling altogether uncredentialed and unprofessional. Art magazines helped, even though by this time I was living in California far away from most of the exhibits they reviewed. Usually I didn't like what I saw, but drew encouragement anyway from the writing, which implied that making art was important and a reasonable occupation for adults. Art-oriented craft magazines (Fiberarts, Surface Design Journal, American Craft, Ornament, etc.) offered a feast for the eyes, though the writing in them focused mainly on art as a profession. Books sustained me too, of course, the only drawback being that most of the artists in them had already died.

And then, after a night of reading up on UNIX commands, I suddenly found myself loose on the Internet. I joined the ceramics mailing list and the art criticism list and every quilt-related list that I could find. (There weren't, of course, so many back then.) I visited every newsgroup related to art or writing or quilts and some dealing with subjects I knew almost nothing about. I read newsgroups frequented by graphic designers, typographers, scientists, engineers, and various sorts of computer programmer. The technical talk went way over my head, but I read between the lines and gained a kind of sustenance simply from listening in on the informal chatter of people engaged in creative work. I was searching, of course, for additional role models, additional insights into what it meant to function as a creative person.

While I haven't yet found on the Internet that elusive artistic community that I originally went looking for, the whole experience of Internet access has changed my sense of what art and quilts can be and of where the tattered boundaries lie between art as a hobby, a calling, and a profession. I no longer feel sure that these distinctions will matter in the future quite the way they have in the past. With the growth of the World Wide Web and the low cost of web-server access, a lot of new art — good, bad, and ridiculous — will come pouring into cyberspace. What gets seen, responded to, and eventually preserved may depend more on the art and its presentation than on the appearance, academic degrees, or life history of the artist.

The real person still matters, of course, as does the physical object. But once the object yields up a digitized image, the artist who places the image out on the Web becomes for a moment that neutral entity known in

Web-speak as a "content provider." I don't know whether this situation is good or bad, but it does offer some flexibility to artists whose identity doesn't fit into some expected mold. Nobody asks whether a "content provider" wears an Afro and dungarees or straightened hair and a dress.

I'm still struggling with that series of quilts that I thought the Internet and its new artistic community might encourage me to complete. On the other hand, I've learned to program a bit in C++ and Java — an under-

taking I never would have considered before getting Internet access. I've written a program that helps design fabrics and patchwork and used it to churn out a big pile of drawings that may or may not eventually turn into something I'd call art. And mostly I've learned that we live in interesting times, that artistic identity develops in strange ways, and that there's now less reason than ever to force it into some preconceived mold. Faith Ringgold and her quilts are still very much an inspiration to me.



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# TWO BOOK REVIEWS: FRANCE AND VERMONT

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## Quilts of Provence: The Art and Craft of French Quiltmaking.

By Kathryn Berenson

New York: Henry Holt, 1996

192p. 8 1/2 x 11

\$45.00US, \$63.00 in Canada

French language edition, Boutis de Provence, from Flammarion, Paris.

In January, as I had not received a requested review copy, on the basis of the recognized expertise of Berenson (an American Quilt Study Group member and author of a paper on the topic, textile dealer, and sometime lecturer at the Museum of American Folk Art and the Smithsonian) and the limited coverage of the subject in other publications I made this entry from the publicity: "This lavishly illustrated history of the art of Provençal quilted needlework pays tribute to the 600-year-old tradition in all its varied beauty - from intricate corded bedcovers and toilette towels to marvelous garments stitched with elaborate floral and figurative motifs ... ." I invited members of the Canadian Quilt Study Group to send a review.

Rosalind Webster Perry wrote: "I received *Quilts of Provence* ... for Christmas. So far I have only browsed through it and therefore am not qualified to review it. I would, however, like to comment on the photography. It is a lush production, but unfortunately uses the worst decorator magazine tricks. Two photos in particular distressed me greatly: on page 10 an exquisite 'white corded 18th century broderie de Marseille bedcover' is shown under a glass of white wine, and with what appear to be 9 white sugar coated almonds sprinkled across its surface! Then on pages 22-23, we see a gorgeously quilted 'honey-colored cotton bedcover, circa 1850' used as a breakfast cloth, complete with bread, butter and a container of jam! There are other horrors, too. I was truly shocked, as I imagine Kathryn Berenson must have been.

From the table of contents: Foreword by Michel Biehn ('a noted interior designer and dealer in French quilts') ...How to Care for and Display Quilts (a section

obviously not consulted by the editors) ... and Photograph Credits (revealing the worst culprit to be one Erik Kvalsvik)."

January 27, the review copy I requested October 15 finally arrived. Now, book in hand, what do I think? Well, first I want to say that Kvalsvik did not commit the only indecencies. Berenson's author photo has a Provençal quilt draped around her shoulder as a "shawl" and her own large number of photo credits include: a vanne (a small quilt "that rests on top of the bed for decorative effect") resting "decoratively" on pots of fuchsias and ivy, a 1790 petticoat turned into a bedcover in



*"Quilts of Provence* is a lush production, but unfortunately uses the worst decorator magazine tricks."

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the 19th century lying on yet another potted plant, an exquisite petassoun ("a small infant lap piece" used to protect clothing in the 19th century) draped artistically over a fishing boat as "women from fishing villages made such pieces for sale," and perhaps oddest of all a circa 1830 silk quilt which "evokes a sense of prosperity" draped in an arch in a mossy stone wall and hanging down to touch the grass below. In the Acknowledgments Berenson thanks Kvalsvik for "his beautiful photographs" and others such as Bernard Touillon who photographed a bedcover laying on a table under the direct sun to emphasize "the play of light and shadow" on the cording. Such a shame, for Rosalind is quite correct the reproduction quality is impeccable and the printing is on my favorite - good quality matte paper.

Enough, and maybe too much ... perhaps it is primarily a matter of taste, and more importantly **the in-**

**tended market.** Now... what good is offered here for quilt history? Much, since there are also marvelous, clear, detailed color photographs of full quilts and close views of highly magnified details. There are also many examples of Provençal nineteenth century costumes and 18th century Marseilles produced petticoats and corsets on mannequins, as well as several vintage paintings which help to document dates of needlework styles. It is about these costumes, and not the quilts, that more publications have previously appeared. This text, as did Berenson's AQSG Uncovering 1995 paper "Origins and Traditions of Marseilles Needlework," focusses on the quilts.

The contents: setting of Provence, history of Provence and Provençal needlework including terminology and fabrics, methodology, quilts, garments, exports to the colonies and elsewhere, and the domestic use of quilts and garments. She also covers in more detail much of the same ground covered by Janine Janniere in "The 'Hand Quilting' of Marseille" in *The Quilt Journal* 2, no. 1 (1993), and includes a far more extensive bibliography. Not unlike Janniere's article, Berenson continues to raise questions that remain unanswered definitively. However, she does build a reasoned argument for "the French connection" to British and American needlework. As she carefully states it ... "the comparison of surviving, quilted articles in all three countries allow the possibility of direct - and the probability of at least indirect - influence of broderies de Marseille on quilted, corded, and stuffed textiles stitched in Britain and America." Also included: directions for making a vanne, a petassoun, and a reversible couvre-lit (queen size); "How to Care for and Display Quilts"; "Where to See and Buy French Quilts": and an extensive "Glossary." Recommended with noted reservations.

### **Enduring Grace: Quilts from the Shelburne Museum Collection With Instructions for Five Heirloom Quilts.**

By Celia Y. Oliver

Lafayette, CA: C&T, 1997

112p. 8 1/2 x 11 \$24.95US Softcover.

For The Shelburne Museum's 50th anniversary Oliver, its Curator of Textiles, has created not only a story of the museum from 1947 on and its founder Electra Havemeyer Webb, but a brief 26- page history of "American Quilts in the Home" - an "overview of quilt history"

that Barbara Brackman says on the jacket cover "is sure to become a classic."

With the excellent and inexpensive (Dover, 1990:\$9.95) 55 Famous Quilts from the Shelburne Museum in Full Color (for which Oliver also wrote the text) still in print, it was essential that this new publication offer something more. It certainly delivers. The Shelburne bedcover collection of over 700 items, "recognized as one of the largest, broadest and most diverse" in the US, has been widely publicized and as one's collection of quilt books grows one hopes there will be quilts not already in print in any new publications that come along.

There are some lovely "new ones" here, as well as the first ever patterns for five quilts from the Shelburne collection: from the 3rd quarter 19th century Wild Goose and Sunflower, Florence Peto's 1951 prize-winning Calico Garden, an 1826 Stars & Pinwheel Medallion, and a c1850 Pincushion. Even if one has no interest in actually replicating quilts, Froncie Hoffine Quinn's detailed construction analysis and instructions provide a more thorough understanding of their complexity than the brief text that typically accompanies illustrations.

The book design is outstanding - both attractive and effective for cross-referencing text to illustrations. Many pages have one of the quilt blocks in color with a screen under approximately half the text. The result of the screen is a VERY pale version of the block and an elegant layout. Whenever there is a specific reference to a quilt a small (7/8") detail appears next to the text with a page reference to the full quilt. **Excellent** practice! However, one picky comment ... as a result of this easy cross referencing it was not difficult to spot an unfortunate editing error that involves pages 12, 41, 73, and 74 and the five, or is it six? quilts made by Anna Baker (who does not appear in the index), or is it Olga Six Baker, or ... Vera Bryant Woodward? Another picky, picky ... note 56 on page 107 refers to Sandy (not Sandi) Fox. Highly recommended.



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# CHARMS & SCHNIBBLES

## NEWS NOTES FROM ALL OVER

### HELP FOR WET QUILTERS!

If your sewing room or studio is in the basement of your home or other building, please raise your hand! If nearly 80,000 people lost their sewing rooms and studios in a 48-hour period, how many yards of fabric, how many rotary cutters, how many sewing machines, how many quilts were lost? If you had to spend the next three months (your ONLY summer vacation until mid-1998) cleaning sludge from your basement, pulling smelly carpeting, disinfecting EVERYTHING, repainting, rebuilding dreams, how would you prefer to cope with the stress?

These are some of the many questions which have occurred to me since the flooding disaster in the Grand Forks, ND, and East Grand Forks, MN, area. Mind you--I have a very personal and warm attachment to that neck of the woods. My husband and I met there while attending the University of North Dakota. I spent five years in Grand Forks going to undergraduate and graduate school. I loved Whitey's in East Grand (rumor was they had SEVERAL layers of basements dating back to Prohibition); I thought downtown Grand Forks was a great place to hang out--even had an apartment downtown. I learned to know, to admire, to respect and to love the hardworking people who tend the crops, harvest the sugar beets and potatoes, clean the streets, act as foster parents and keep the community running. In short, when one attends UND, one becomes not just part of the UND community but of the entire area.

I am only one person. But I am hoping that there are lots of people "out there" who would like to do something to help our quilting brothers and sisters of the Red River Valley. I know that what they need right now is REAL basic: toilet paper, cleaning supplies, brooms, mops, clean water. If you have a desire to contribute right now, what they really need is cash. Governor Ed Schafer asks that cash donations be made, if not to your local Red Cross or Salvation Army in the name of "Flood Relief", then to the North Dakota Community Foundation, Box 387, Bismarck, North Dakota 58502-0387.

I am looking just a little further down the road. Thanks to the wonderful responses I have received from many of you on the Internet, I would like to propose that we prepare to help get quilters back on their feet. Please help!

First, let's collect quilting supplies. What kind of supplies? Think of what you would like to receive. Fabric should be 100% cotton and clean. If your scraps are too small and too tangled for you to want to sort them, then they probably are too small and tangled for a Grand Forks quilter, too. Do you have a second rotary mat you no longer use but is servicable? An extra rotary cutter or pair of scissors? Did you go crazy buying thread at the latest thread sale and is it thread you would use?



Supplies can be sent NOW to my home where I will store them. Or, you may choose to hold them until sometime in late June. By that time, I will have and will post the address in Grand Forks where such items can be sent for distribution. If you want to send them now, please e-mail and I will give you my address and shipping instructions. What happens if I get a truckload or several at my home? I am in contact with both a regional bank and a regional furniture company and have reason to hope they will agree to provide transportation free of charge when the Grand Forks quilters are ready to receive goodies.

Second, let's make quilts! With your help, we can coax quilters everywhere to make a quilt for charity in June, a national "Sew-In" with quilters everywhere participating in their own way. Some quilt groups might say, wait a minute, we have our own charitable causes in our backyards. That's fine! But, if quilters want to make quilts for flood relief, I'll accept those at my home for now (e-mail for an address and instructions) and by late June or early July we should have an address at Grand Forks to which to send the quilts.

If you live in Montana, three shops have agreed to receive donations: Quilt Garden (formerly Bear Mountain Quilt Co.) and Quilting in the Country in Bozeman and Fiberworks in Billings.

What can you do to help? Let me remind you, I am only one person; I need your help! I am hoping that each of you who reads this might print it and send it to the guilds in your area or state. I am hoping copies of it will show up all over the Internet. I am hoping that each of you who reads this will deliver a copy of this to your guild or church newsletter editor. Maybe copies of this letter will be posted in tons of quilt shops? I am praying that some of us reading this will be figures of authority with major magazines for quilters or with major manufacturers of quilting supplies. (Wouldn't a big load of brand new rotary cutting supplies, for example, be great?) I would be delighted if someone knows Kaye Wood, Nancy Zeiman, Eleanor Burns--anyone who can get out the word. Are you going to Minneapolis this coming week? GREAT--don't be shy--please spread the word at Market.

My intention here is merely to provide those of us with the desire to help with a means of doing so. If you have any comments, please don't hesitate to e-mail me. Thank you so much for your help!

Dorie Benesh Refling [drefling@imt.net](mailto:drefling@imt.net)



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## NEW MAILLIST

Recently we received the following e-mail from Bona Robinson:

I have started a mail list sponsored by Quiltropolis (<http://www.quiltropolis.com>) called Long-Arm Quilting. It is to be a support group for those that own the stand-up quilting machines (or would like to own one). The Mail List is free and individuals interested in joining can go to the Quiltropolis home page (address above), click on Mail Lists, enter their email address in the little white box, put a checkmark beside Long-Arm Quilting and click on Join (individual postings) or on Digest (get all the posts for a 24 hours period in ONE email).

Topics covered will be maintenance, problems/solutions in daily operation, features, upcoming events, bio's of other users, new products, etc.



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PineTree will send you a hard copy of the catalog if you e-mail your name/address/city/state/zip to [pinetree@quiltworks.com](mailto:pinetree@quiltworks.com)! If you are on AOL and prefer to contact someone on AOL, Donna, whose e-mail address is [QuiltQtrs](mailto:QuiltQtrs), has joined the PineTree team!

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We'd like news of new classes starting up to teach quilt design on computers, or new approaches to that teaching. New products, maillists, World Wide Web pages, etc., are all fair game, and we'd appreciate any tips you can provide. Send your tips by e-mail to [rholland@atlanta.com](mailto:rholland@atlanta.com).

If you have a comment about an article, a complaint or a correction, we're glad to hear that, too, and may publish some comments as letters to the editor. Again, these may be sent to [rholland@atlanta.com](mailto:rholland@atlanta.com).



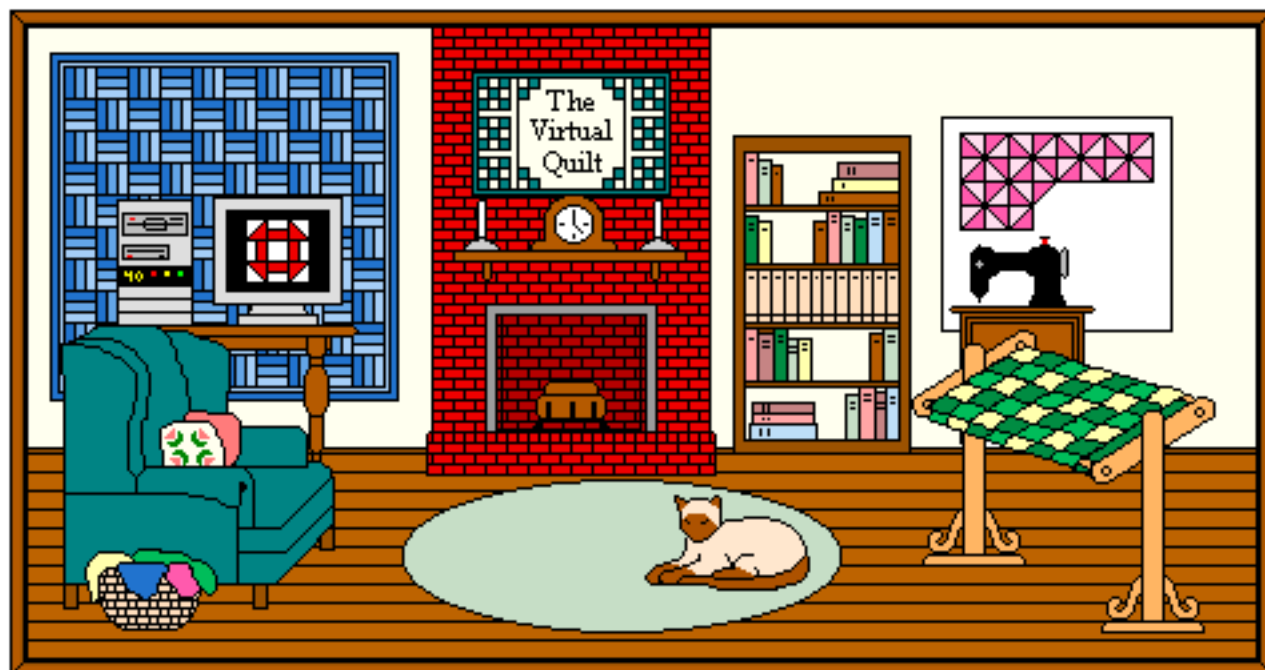
## The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for  
Computing Quilters

Editor and Publisher: Robert Holland, Decatur, GA

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Planet Patchwork now offers a mailing list for computing quilters! Join the Quiltopia mailing list by surfing to <http://planetpatchwork.com/quiltop.htm>!



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