

The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for Online Quilters

Issue22 • February, 1998



Serendipity

**Quilting
with Paula
Nadelstern**

&



Symmetry

Also inside:

**Dreams Come True: The *Mary Frances* Knitting Book
Good Manners, Freezer Paper, and Subterranean Wars
Quilting In Chile • Charms & Schnibbles**

BOOK REVIEW: THE STATE OF KNITTING: MARY FRANCES AND THE RED CROSS



The Mary Frances Knitting and Crocheting Book

By Jane Eayre Fryer

Originally Published in 1918 by

The John C. Winston, Co. Philadelphia

Reprinted 1997 by Lacis, Berkeley, California

Reviewed by Lynn Holland

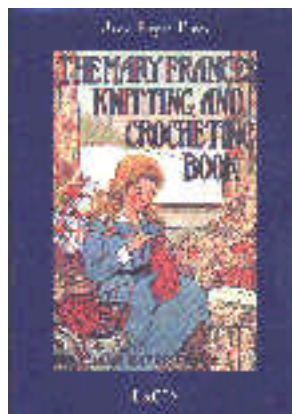
If my belief in Santa had ever faltered, you can be sure that my faith in the fabled elf was restored this Christmas when under the toe of my Christmas stocking was a reprint of the *Mary Frances Knitting and Crocheting Book*. Some of you may have read in [TVQ #17](#) of my thirty-year quest to locate this long-lost favorite book and of my partial victory when a company named Lacis (<http://www.lacis.com>) reprinted a companion volume (*The Mary Francis Sewing Book*) earlier this year. In this latest volume, Mary Frances has matured, and the accompanying illustrations seem more "grown-up" too.

The book was designed to instruct WWI - era children in basic knitting and crocheting with an amusing story format. As in the previous title, Mary Frances is about to embark on a series of lessons with an adult human, but is really schooled by tools who come to life to assist her with her efforts. This time it is CrowShay, the arrogant crochet hook who speaks in rhyme and is fond of word play; Knit and Knack, the knitting needles who always echo each other's words; Wooley Ball, the long-winded yarn authority and Yarn Baby, who oversees this sometimes unruly though good-natured bunch of characters.

There is also Fairly Flew, a fairy whose magic silver needle finishes work in a flash and Mary Marie, the doll who is featured in the *Sewing Book*. Although the book is intended for children, many of the exchanges in the book will entertain adults as well. The characters in

this story display sharp wit, and the author is loath to pass up a good pun. Yarn Baby's scream is likened to a zephyr wind, and all the needles tell Wooley Ball that they "don't want to hear any more yarns." In this story, the doll Mary Marie comes to life as part of Mary Frances' lessons and provides commentary on the garments Mary Frances learns to make for her. For some reason, however, the incessant baby talk of the doll-brought-to-life got irritating after the first few times. If she's supposed to be in kindergarten, can't someone refer her to the speech pathologist or at the very least tell her it's no longer cute?

As in the *Sewing Book*, the projects Mary Frances makes are very specific to the World War I time frame and would no longer be seen as part of a stylish kindergartener's wardrobe. As my daughter says of hokey attire, "They would beat me up if I wore that." Nevertheless, for those of us who love dolls of bygone eras,



Finally finding *The Mary Frances Knitting and Crocheting Book* reassured me that dreams can come true.

(and divest ourselves of many adult dollars at Pleasant Company), Lacis now offers a Mary Marie doll for whom the clothing and knitware may be fashioned.

From my knowledge of children's literature, knitting was a part of the lives of many school children during that time, as those of you who read *Rufus M.*, one of Eleanor Estes' *Moffett* series, may recall. Children in first and second grade were encouraged to knit wash cloths,

and older children made scarves, socks and helmets as their part of the war effort. It is no surprise that the *Mary Frances* book contains the official Red Cross instructions for those children who wished to extend knitting doll clothes to helping the soldiers overseas. Aunt Maria's declaration that Mary Frances' mother was improperly raised because she doesn't know plain knitting from purling or "a star stitch from a coffee bean stitch" has appli-

cation to our overall societal change. How many little girls of today are brought up to master basic needlearts as part of their home training?

Philosophical issues aside, this book is a beautiful and accurate reprint of a charming little book I have loved for most of my life, and finally finding it reassured me that dreams can come true. Thanks, Laci.



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TVQ ESSAY:

GOOD MANNERS, FREEZER PAPER, AND SUBTERRANEAN WARS

By Catherine Jones

In the border zones where art, craft, hobby, and industry meet there are no neutrals and few innocent bystanders. Describe any object to be made -- a quilt, a painting, a piece of clothing -- and everyone has an opinion on how the work should be done. We may try, of course, to practice good manners and mutual tolerance. We may try to look beyond our personal mode of working and say something hopeful about the multiplicity of approaches, about, for example, the cross-fertilization of art and craft. But underneath our public open-mindedness there usually lurks some private conviction about the most effective or appropriate or satisfying way to design and make the item in question.

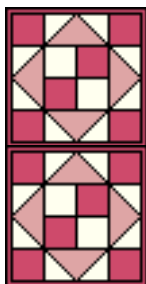
Privately we hold some favored model or models of the right way to make a quilt. We believe in a certain balance of mental and physical labor, a certain balance

lots of technical advice on how to achieve particular effects, but not much talk about the aesthetic, philosophical, or political issues that make people prefer one method of working over another. Given the energy expended on these issues in connection with other art forms -- given the manifestos, ranting, and general debate historically associated with fields like painting or even pottery or architectural ornament -- the upbeat, non-ideological tone of quilting discussion strikes me as unnatural. I always suspect that fierce arguments rage just below the surface.

Sometimes I've caught a glimpse of these arguments when people have written to me in indignation over the things I haven't said. I remember, for example, after doing one of these essays, getting a polite but angry e-mail pointing out the therapeutic value of quilting. The writer described an apparently hectic life, protested against the "competitiveness" of modern quilting, and mentioned a decision never to use the computer as a tool for quilt design. Elements in the letter linked computer use to economic privilege and to the business world, so that rejection of the computer became a kind of statement in favor of what the writer called "the simple life."

Since the message was unsigned and didn't seem intended to invite any real dialog, I didn't try to respond to the writer's feelings. Instead I wrote back in a purely rhetorical way, noting that computers function in many different milieus and that one person's making quilts for exhibition doesn't prevent another from making quilts as therapy. In other words, I sidestepped the whole argument and did my best to sound high-minded and reasonable. Yet, even as I was making my commonsense points, I felt dishonest.

Because, in fact, I believe that a conflict does exist between the artist and the hobbyist. However absurd it may sound to talk about the artist in general or the hobbyist in general (not to mention other categories like the craftsperson in general or the industrial designer in general), I think these categories do make sense and that



Underneath our public open-mindedness there usually lurks some private conviction about the most effective or appropriate or satisfying way to design and make the item in question.

of tradition and innovation, and a certain relationship between the human hand, the machine, and (maybe) the computer. And we also assign a certain relative importance to the end product and the process that produces it. But -- unless I've missed something -- few of these privately held opinions ever make it into the public discussion of quilts.

I come across lots of praise for particular quilts and

they correspond to real differences in values and methods of working. Ignoring these differences or pretending they don't exist drives any real debate underground and results in an overly bland public discussion. The issues that divide us then vanish from view; the passion and convictions that could fuel a productive argument come out instead in occasional catty remarks.

One benefit of facing up to our differences is that all the wise and foolish talk about such differences that goes on all the time in other fields of art then becomes relevant to quilting. We can learn from this talk, play with it, pick out clever quotes or insults from it, or use it for more serious soul-searching. Once it becomes fully acceptable to speak about art versus craft or commercial art versus fine art or design for production versus one-of-a-kind design or quilting-as-therapy versus quilting-as-art -- once we can broach these distinctions without fear that the very mention of them will be seen as divisive or elitist or rude -- once this happens in the quilting milieu we will have at our disposal a wealth of writing from other areas of art to use in clarifying our own goals and beliefs.

Recently, for example, I read Elaine Hochman's new book on the famous, ill-fated, and still influential Bauhaus -- the German school of art, craft, and industrial design that came into being shortly after World War I, survived countless internal and external artistic and political struggles, and succumbed finally to a raid by the Gestapo in 1933. Hochman writes well, but her book (*Bauhaus: crucible of modernism*) wasn't easy for me to read. Partly because I found it painful, agonizing even, to read about the difficulties artists faced and about the self-destructive infighting among artists and among political activists during the critical years when there might still have been time to avert the Nazi debacle. And partly because the parade of personalities and organizations connected with the Bauhaus was so complex; Hochman's book is full of names, dates and acronyms. One of the reasons I continued and picked my way through all the acronyms was that hardly a paragraph in the book didn't relate in some way to the issues I've sensed lying just under the surface of our present-day talk about quilts.

For example, there's a section on the conflicting ideas of two abstract painters, Johannes Itten and Theo van Doesburg, who competed for the loyalties of the Bauhaus students. Itten -- probably best known to quilters for a book about color theory (*The Elements of Color*) -- advocated an emotional and spiritual ap-

proach to painting and drawing. His students, Hochman says, were to be "purged . . . of what Itten considered the rational, materialistic, and technological biases of his Western culture . . ." Van Doesburg, on the other hand, "claimed that art should reflect technology The machine, he declared, would replace handicraft." Furthermore, Hochman says, "Itten proclaimed that truth lay within; van Doesburg that it lay without, that it was universal and collaborative." Nearly eighty years have passed since Itten and van Doesburg held forth on the right way to make art, but Hochman's summary of this old argument still seems relevant to quilting today.

The person who wrote to me about quilting as therapy, as a way of transforming the quilter's inner



We can't connect with each other until some cracks appear in the smooth pseudo-tolerant surface of quilting discussion.

life, and who found the computer repugnant as a tool for this purpose, may hold a number of opinions parallel to Itten's. In fact, from that person's point of view my own approach to the quilt may look soulless and perverse -- possibly the way van Doesburg's ideas looked to followers of Itten.

(To clarify how I may have appeared I should say that I'm less interested in the quilt as a physical object than in the abstract decorative patterns characteristic of patchwork. And that my main quilt-related activity lately has been writing software to generate such patterns and painting them onto paper or canvas, with or without little touches of realism. I'm not sure I'd call this activity rational, but it's certainly technological, product-oriented, and logic-ridden. I'm not trying to heal myself or discover an inner truth or even to experience the sensual pleasure of fabric; I'm trying -- with all the technology I can grasp -- to capture certain ideas and images in a form that will reach other people.)

Communication is hard across the divide that separates me from the writer of the unsigned e-mail mes-

sage. We could probably have a good argument about Itten and van Doesburg. Or about many of the other outspoken characters who populate the history of art and craft. But we can't have this argument and can't connect with each other until some cracks appear in the smooth pseudo-tolerant surface of quilting discussion. Until that happens it's all too tempting to phrase all dissent in personal terms, argue by innuendo, or take refuge (as I did) in a meaningless high-minded stance of live-and-let-live.

I think the dangers of argument by innuendo are especially great in subterranean conflict between artists and hobbyists. Because of the defensiveness and pain on both sides. And because the issues that don't get openly discussed -- issues having to do with the efficient use of time, energy, and materials, with the balancing of societal and artistic obligations, and with the boundaries and uses of so-called "outsider art" -- are inherently interesting and worth talking about.

Rather than speculate on the artist/hobbyist conflict in general, I want to run briefly through some ex-

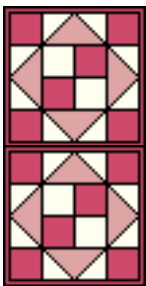
amples of what I've encountered over the last few years in Internet-based quilting discussions. Having cast my own lot with the artists (whether or not I belong in that group by any given standard), I'll try to explain how things look from that perspective and what I mean by innuendo, defensiveness, and pain.

be that physical labor confers more honor than mental labor, that mistakes are shameful and should be paid for by throwing good effort after bad, and that the quiltmaker's time counts for very little since it's virtuous to spend this time finishing up doomed projects that can't any longer sustain the quiltmaker's serious interest. Finally there's the exhausting list of socially useful work that quiltmakers claim to be doing: the regular job, the family responsibilities, the voluntary and charitable activities. Quilting discussions, in my experience, contain a lot of moral and social innuendo.

If I spend too long reading a quilting discussion I come away feeling like a fraud (for calling myself by that questionable term "artist"), like a slacker (for spending so much time designing, looking, reading, and experimenting, rather than physically making things), and like a fugitive from social responsibility (for avoiding a steady job and various other time-eating commitments). No matter that I may be living within my means, making reasonable use of my time, and trying generally to lead an honest life; artist and hobbyist values don't always coincide, and I come away from the discussion feeling diminished or at least on the defensive.

I think that if artists and hobbyists could talk more frankly, if we could acknowledge our different choices and beliefs and the range of possible positions and ways of working that lie between the two extremes, we'd have more interesting discussions. I also think that the moral and social subtext of these discussions -- all the implications about time, labor, waste, responsibility, and social connection that I, as an artist, find so menacing -- might turn into a good subject for debate, once dragged out into the light of day and removed from the realm of innuendo and the personal anecdote.

I can't compete with someone who's raising 517 children, working 618 hours a week, and turning out 352 quilts a month for a global waiting list of friends, relatives, and charitable organizations. Or even with someone who makes good-natured jokes about not living up to this ideal. But I do have reasons for reading the quilting discussion when I could instead be struggling through the fifty-odd footnotes at the end of some art-critical essay. I do value the quilting tradition, I don't despise decoration, and I do want to see art and artists connect in useful ways with everyday life. If quilt-related discussion opened up a bit and became less relentlessly personal, there might be room in it for a reexamination of the whole raucous, politically tinged debate



The implication seems to be that physical labor confers more honor than mental labor, that mistakes are shameful and should be paid for by throwing good effort after bad.

that has gone on at least since Victorian times over the concept of socially useful art and the proper role of the artist, designer, or craftsman. (That book on the Bauhaus might be a good starting point; the school brought together all these different constituencies, and the struggles that followed were raucous indeed.)

Border zones can be dangerous places. This essay is already a day overdue, and I'm sitting here in pure dread of sending it off. I know I've spoken in outrageous generalities and failed to mention the many capable writers who argue against classifying quilts or any other artifact into categories like "art," "craft," and "hobby." But

I see some value in dredging up these dangerous words, cleaning them off, and putting them into the public debate. At least if the words are out there people who find them offensive will have something definite to argue against. Argument is inevitable, I think, and more enlightening when carried out openly. Because quilting isn't just about fabric and pins and freezer paper; it's also about ideas.

Catherine Jones, a regular contributor to TVQ, lives with her daughter in Berkeley, California. She can be reached at cathjone@netcom.com 



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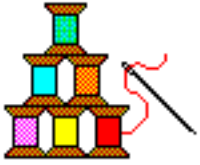
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Heidi Wurst, owner lv2quilt@frii.com



CHARMS & SCHNIBBLES: NEWS NOTES FROM ALL OVER

JAPAN-U.S. CONNECTION CONTINUES.

Long-time subscribers to TVQ will recall our profile of Japan back in 1996. This article (you can read it at Planet Patchwork at <http://planetpatchwork.com/japan.htm>) resulted in a number of connections between quilters in Japan and the U.S. One of the most long-lived of these is a challenge project between quilters in Santa Cruz, California and in Japan. We received the following message from Tracey Brookshier, the coordinator of this project on the Santa Cruz end, who has worked on this project with Sumie Manabe in Japan:

"Twenty-four quilters from each country participated, and it looks like we have forty-eight quilts to show for it. Eight fabrics were chosen, four by the Americans and four by the Japanese, and both sides had a fat quarter of each of the eight. Rules were pretty broad - must use six of the eight fabrics, can add your own fabrics, no theme, and a size limitation between 900 and 1600 square inches (or 30" x 30" to 40" by 40"). Shape could be whatever you want within the area limitations.

"The quilts will be shown at the Pajaro Valley Quilt Association's 20th Annual Quilt Fair on February 21 and 22, 1998, at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds in Watsonville, CA. These quilts will be hung together, with the nationalities mixed up, so that viewers will be encouraged to look closer to ascertain which are Japanese and which American.

"Yesterday Sumie informed me via e-mail that she will be flying with a friend to San Jose for a long weekend to visit the show. I am very excited to be meeting her and hopefully cementing a friendship begun on the Internet with your assistance. I hope you find this message an encouragement for your Internet quilting endeavors!

"Thank you for your help in this project!

Tracey"

Thank you, Tracey, for keeping us up to date!

QUILTING ACADEMY FOUNDED IN SWEDEN.

The Quilt Academy of Sweden is a new independent forum operating in Sweden and founded by quiltartist, teacher/educator, writer Katriina Flensburg. Katriina is a founder member and a former first president of the Swedish guild. She is also a founder member of the Scandinavia Art Quilt Group. The Quilt Academy was started in September 1997 and it already has gained members all over Sweden and also in other Scandinavian countries. The Quilt Academy publishes a newsletter (in Swedish) 6 times a year.

"The Quilt Academy was born out of necessity," says Katriina "for providing a free forum for debate, discussion and critical writing on quilt-related matters and for spreading information about quilting outside the quilting community of Sweden. Even though the national quild already has existed for a decade, public knowledge about quilting - and especially about its many different forms of expression - is still poor in Sweden. The public knows about traditional quilts - mostly only of the kinds of quilts that have been made in Sweden through history - but other forms of quilting, and especially quilting as an art form, are still a fairly unknown and little exposed area."

The Quilt Academy wishes to spread knowledge about quilting and its various methods among those interested in crafts and art. It wants to reach the schools and the higher education running the textile programs. One of the goals is to encourage making quilting/quilt design a natural part of those teaching programs.

But the Quilt Academy will not be all work! The Academy aims to provide a meeting place for socializing around a mutual interest. And, since the Sweden of today is a very multi-cultural country, Katriina hopes to be able to spread the interest in quilting among the representatives of the different cultures as well.

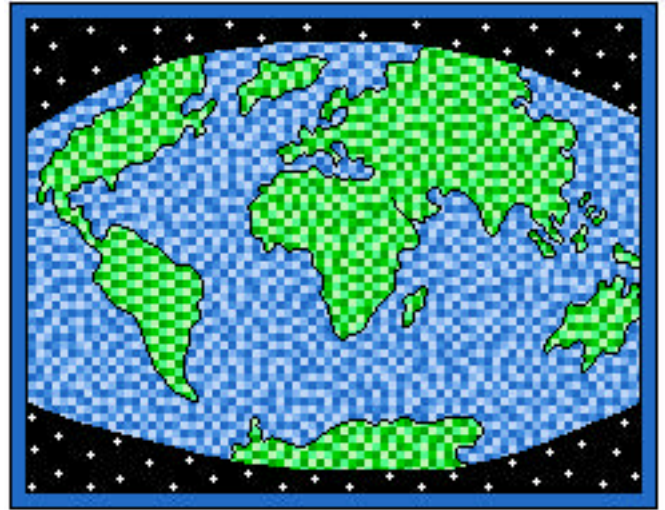
You are welcome to send mail to Katriina to exchange ideas, activities, etc.

Mail: quiltakademin@swipnet.se Homepage: <http://home5.swipnet.se/~w-58758>



THE PATCHWORK PLANET

QUILTING IN CHILE



Pilar Donoso is a woman with a mission: to bring quilting to Chile.

Chile is about twice the size of Montana at 750,000 square kilometers, but looks nothing like it. A long finger of a country that stretches half the length of South America along the South Pacific coast, it has a population of about 15 million who live in a vibrant economy and relatively free political climate. About a third of these folks reside in the capitol, Santiago, which is where Pilar returned about two years ago after living most of her adult life in California.

"I am 44 years old," Pilar says. "I graduated from the Catholic University in Chile, as a History, Geography and Economics and Political Science teacher. After I graduated, I met my sister-in-law's brother (Chilean too). I married him, and we went to live in California (close to San Francisco). I worked at the Horse Racetrack for 11 years, and I did some knitting, and a little embroidery as a hobby. We moved around the Bay Area, following the horses, where my husband worked, so I decided not to teach, and found a job at the track. At the racetrack I met 2 sisters who introduced me to quilting. I had never been exposed to quilting before, and my first reaction was: How boring!!! After I did my first quilt (a Log Cabin of course), I never went back to knitting, and I have become addicted to quilting.

"Before I came back to Chile, after living in California for 20 years, I was teaching a lot of classes in Berkeley (New Pieces) and in Walnut Creek (Thimble Creek). I love teaching and I love quiltmaking, so the natural thing for me to do, is to teach Quiltmaking."

In her years as a quiltmaker and teacher in Califor-

nia, Pilar developed a reputation and a lengthy resume of exhibitions in which her quilts appeared. She exhibited to both American and Chilean audiences at the Pacific International Quilt Festival and in gallery shows in the bay area. One turning point for her was an exhibition of her work at the Instituto Chileno Norteamericano de Cultura in Santiago in 1995.

"In that show I met some people, most of them from the States, that belonged to a group that they had formed a year before. After I went back to California, I kept in touch with them, and after my marriage of 20 years fell apart, they were my support group. I moved back to Chile in September 1996, and I have been teaching a lot of classes, in different stores, private homes, and at Air Force facilities."

But Pilar was frustrated. "The lack of supplies and good fabric limited the creativity of my students, and that was frustrating enough to make me take the decision to open a store. Unfortunately, in Chile there isn't good cotton. Most of the cotton is imported from the States, but because customs duties are so expensive (about 60% of the value of the fabric), and we are physically so far from the rest of the world, fabric is very expensive.

"I hope to open the store in the beginning of March, when people come back from summer vacations. Santiago dies during January and February. Everybody goes to the beach. In the meantime, I am giving workshops, teaching classes, sewing jackets, quilts, and I meet every Friday with my quilting group, the same that I met in 1995. The guild's name is Santiago Quilter's Guild, and we limited the number to 20, with a waiting list, so

we could fit in someone's living room. We have a President, Secretary, a Treasurer, and we do lots of events to support charities, most of them supported by the American Embassy. Our meetings are in English, since most of them are Americans, but we have women from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Argentina, England, and a few Chileans. Most of them bring their hand quilting to the meetings, and we share information, magazines, and every kind of information that we can get related to quilting."

This island of quilters in Santiago is not completely surrounded by a quilting wasteland, but the state of the art there is not advanced. "In Chile there are probably 2 or 3 quilt teachers, and they teach the old-fashioned way, with templates and scissors, as well as hand quilting only. To show you the limited knowledge about new techniques, a few days ago I had to convince the representative of Singer in Chile (the most popular sewing machine here), about the existence of the 'walking foot.' Paper piecing it is not known here yet, but I am teaching a lot of classes about the subject. The cottons we find in the market are all calicoes and 'Country'. I think they will die when they see what I am bringing. My fabric arrived last night, so we will see!!

"There are a few fabric stores in Santiago where you can find cotton (all imported), but there is only one that concentrates a little bit more on quilting. This place has some magazines, some rulers, and a few spools of hand-quilting thread, that a National/American? company, (Coats/Cadena) just put on the market. The quality of this thread is good, and competes with Gutterman. This store is very 'country,' and they concentrate mainly on patchwork."

While there are not yet a great many quilters, there appears to be fertile ground for developing a passion among Chileans for the art. "Women are a lot into mak-

ing rugs, or ceramics, or needlepoint. You still find a good number of women who are primarily at home taking care of the kids, and taking classes of different kinds. This seems to appeal to them, as sanity therapy.

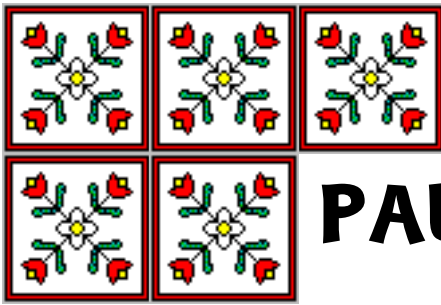
"The access to maids is relatively easy, and that helps them to keep going. Traditionally we have some weaving textiles, made out of llama and alpaca wool in the north, and some sheep wool in the south, but Santiago seems to far from that (unfortunately). Santiago it is a center of everything in Chile. It has high technology and a big variety of cultural events. In 1997 alone I was able to see shows from Dali, Miro, Picasso, Matisse, Renoir. Every month there are some well-known artists showing their pieces, and there are a lot of good Chilean artists too.

"I know of another quilting guild in Antofagasta about 12 hours north of Santiago, formed by one on our members, who had to move there, because of her husband's job (there are a lot of copper mine related jobs there). I heard that they are doing great. To my knowledge there is not a National organization yet."

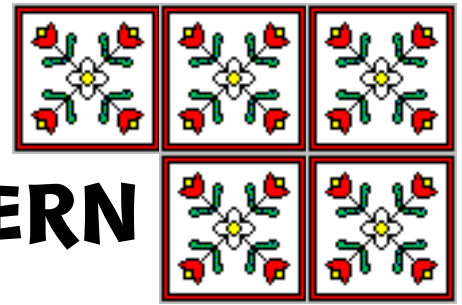
Asked about computer use in Chile, Pilar says "Computers are very commonly used in this country, but they are considered more like a business tool, and I don't think anyone would relate a computer to quilting. I personally have Quilt Studio, Quilt Soft, Quilt Pro, and EQ3. I use Corel Draw a lot for quilting too. I think they are a great tool for teaching classes, but I also use them for making quilts. I design them, and print the pieces for paper piecing. It is the way to go."

Pilar is a member of Planet Patchwork's Quiltopia maillist, where she brings her unique perspective and news of quilting in one of its newest and most exotic frontiers. She can be reached at quiltpd@entelchile.net.





QUILTER PROFILE



PAULA NADELSTERN

In this month's *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* (March 1998), on page 40, there is a picture of Paula Nadelstern's first quilt. It is a full bed-sized quilt made of 10-inch scrap squares. At first glance it appears to be the rudest of rude patchwork, in the American tradition of making the most of leftovers, showing little sign of the amazing artist that Paula, 30 years later, would become.

But if you look in the lower left-hand corner (3 rows up and 3 columns over), you see one patch that displays a fussy cut of a cartoon fish with a Mona Lisa smile. This fussy fish may be the first glimmer of Paula's vision, which would eventually overflow the bounds of traditional quilting into the luxuriant, exuberant, yet highly controlled kaleidoscopes of her mature style.

Paula describes herself as "a first-generation American with no tradition of quilting in my family." In her 1997 book, *"Kaleidoscopes & Quilts,"* she writes that she lives "on the same block in the Bronx where I grew up. . . . My daughter Ariel is the third generation of my family to live in this same neighborhood that prides itself on a sense of community and cooperative spirit."

The first quilt with the smiling fish was made when she was a freshman in college, in 1968, on a \$25 Featherweight machine that she continues to use to this day. "Little did I know when I pieced my first patchwork . . . in my college dorm that I was sewing the seeds of a

career!" Paula says. "At the time, I sensed I was on my way to a helping profession rather than an art degree. Four years earlier, at the last minute, I rescinded acceptance to New York City's prestigious High School of Music and Art because I thought I couldn't compete as an artist."

Ten years later she found herself a stay-at-home, park-bench-sitting mom looking for ways to benefit the local cooperative nursery school her daughter attended. "I suggested a fund-raising route never traveled before

by the New York apartment dwelling moms: the raffle quilt. A dozen group quilts later, I asked LynNell Hancock, a mom whose writing I admired in the nursery newsletter, if she wanted to collaborate on a book about group quilts." In 1988 their book, *"Quilting Together,"* was published by Crown Publishers.

Paula's distinctive style formed itself around a quarter-yard of expensive Liberty of London fabric that caught her eye and

tempted her to violate the family budget. "I literally circled it for over an hour," she says. "After years of sweet images created through applique and embroidery, I was drawn to the identical and bilaterally symmetrical motifs" of the Liberty of London cloth. "My first kaleidoscope blocks were inspired by this bolt of fabric. Finding interesting relationships between this fabric and lots (and lots) of other fabrics became a passion. I devel-



oped a way to 'fussy cut' fabric easily using see-through template material to trace hints from the fabric, and a way to strip fabrics together in order to use tiny irregularly shaped pieces and still have a life. Each kaleidoscope led to the next, just as now each kaleidoscope quilt leads to the next quilt. Working in a series pushes one's creativity way beyond one's original insights."

The series of kaleidoscope quilts Paula has produced (they now number 18, with the latest featured on the "Photo Finish" page at the end of the latest QNM) have simultaneously defined both a visual style and a technique. "My techniques are based on traditional methods," she says, "with a twist. Every all-over fabric is added via strip-piecing and, except for the patch that ends up in the center of the kaleidoscope, I ignore grain completely. What is not traditional is my sense of fabric. I enjoy finding relationships between commercially produced fabrics. I try to free myself from a conventional sense of fabric orderliness, seeking a random quality to emulate the succession of chance interlinkings synonymous with kaleidoscopes. Although the pieced kaleidoscope consists of many unusually shaped patches, I want the viewer to see the whole, not the individual patches. I try to camouflage the seams with 'seamless' transitions from patch to patch.

"My goal is to harmoniously integrate the 'idea' of a kaleidoscope with the techniques and materials of quiltmaking. Becoming a kaleidoscope aficionado has made me more adaptable and creative both artistically and intellectually. The notion that there is no absolute, correct, best selection -- that my fabric choices today will be different from ones made tomorrow -- is very liberating. After all, a breathtaking collision of color in a scope will maneuver into something different, something slightly new, during even the instant it takes me to hand it to you."

Paula has other interesting ideas about the origins and enablers of creativity. "Another factor played strongly in the development of my personal approach to design and technique," she writes in "Kaleidoscopes & Quilts." "Historians have suggested that the block-style method of quiltmaking evolved in response to the cramped quarters of early American life. My family's living arrangement in an urban environment creates similar considerations that, unwittingly, I resolved in much



the same way.

"My workspace in our two-bedroom apartment is the forty-two-inch round kitchen table. My fastidious husband shares the living room with the ironing board, and dinner shares the kitchen table with a forty-five-year-old Singer Featherweight. Fabrics find shelter everywhere: novelty fabrics sleep under the bed; luxury imports reside in the living room wall unit; Ultrasuede scraps hide in an elaborate Indian treasure chest on the window sill. A foolishly narrow closet next to the bed hoards a hodge-podge of see-through boxes jumbled with fabric sorted by color, along with an arsenal of beads and threads. There's a file cabinet full of paperwork behind the door to Ariel's room, and art supplies are camouflaged in the linen closet.

"At the beginning of a sewing frenzy I pour this reservoir of goodies onto the bed, sorting and sifting and following tangents until I uncover my palette. I haul my finds around the bend and into the kitchen, where they collect in an unruly pile. I believe in the artistic contribution of a tangled mishmash of cloth. The chance combinations that catch my eye result in unconventional but intriguing relationships between textiles I might not have discovered on my own.

"I think the reality of limited space merged with my personality and passion for fabric in shaping the direction of my kaleidoscopic piecework, causing me to rely on intricate detail and inherent symmetry, and to invent a shape that makes the most of limited space."

To look at her quilts you would conclude that Paula

was a born precision seamstress with a passion for perfectly matched points. Actually, she says, "I don't really sew very well. . . . No matter how hard I tried, my points never matched, a crucial fabric inevitably lacked a critical amount, and one edge of every quilt wiggled past its significant other. In spite of these indignities, I couldn't wait to start another quilt. There is something optimistic about a palette of portable, colorful, tactile fabrics that represses any unpleasant memories left over from a previous project."

Over time Paula has learned that her compensations for her shortcomings as a seamstress, which she long viewed as "cheating," are actually the origins of her personal and innovative style. It took her a long time to overcome her self-consciousness and the "quilt police who point their collective, thimble-encrusted fingers at those of us who sometimes color outside the lines."

Paula says she would rather quilt than write, but she is quite an accomplished writer with a highly developed style, and "Kaleidoscopes & Quilts" is a delight to read even though it's full of lots of technical quilting information. "I love to read," she says, "I hate to write, and I wanted to write a book that someone who likes to read would enjoy reading. I don't want to be facetious but I didn't want to write a 'Making kaleidoscope quilts is fun' kind of book. The response has been gratifying, confirming my suspicion that many quilters like to read as well as look at pictures. However, once again I reaffirmed the notion that I would much rather make a quilt than write about making it."

Writing the book added another dimension of clutter and stress to the small two-bedroom apartment in which Paula and her family live. "A two-bedroom apartment means 2 bedrooms, a living room, bathroom, and

kitchen," she says. "There isn't a dining room and attaching a garage to the ninth floor is not a viable option! The computer is on a crowded desk in the living room. I'm beginning to think a door of one's own is a luxury I may never know. Keep this scene and a December 15th book deadline in mind while I report the curve ball life threw me on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. My husband

broke his ankle in three places. An unwieldy full-length cast glued this never-takes-a-day-off-from-work man to the bed straight through the New Year and my book deadline. Throw the torture of college applications for a very 'teen-age' daughter into the apartment and record-breaking accumulations of snow outside the apartment and you've got three very stressed-out people."

Although she owns a computer and has an account at America Online, Paula doesn't spend much time online. While interested in what the internet has to offer, she describes it as an "incredible time-sink" for which she has little room in her hectic schedule of quilting, book-writing, and travel for workshops around the

country.

She does have a quilting support group in the Manhattan Quilters Guild, a group of twenty-one professional-level quiltmakers. "We meet once a month around a conference table in a room we rent at the National Arts Club. The primary goal has been as a resource group, sharing professional and technical expertise and encouraging each other's artistic growth. Many of the members are nationally and internationally known artists, teachers, authors and other professionals.

"I'm making quilts on the block where I grew up; other members' roots are miles west of the Hudson River, and our Japanese, Australian and Russian members each



bring a rich cultural legacy to our table. Now we're all New Yorkers wrapped up in the fabric of city life. For each of us, a New York neighborhood serves as a point of reference. We try to accept the city's faults and enjoy its gifts including the ethnic multitude of color, texture, language and smells."

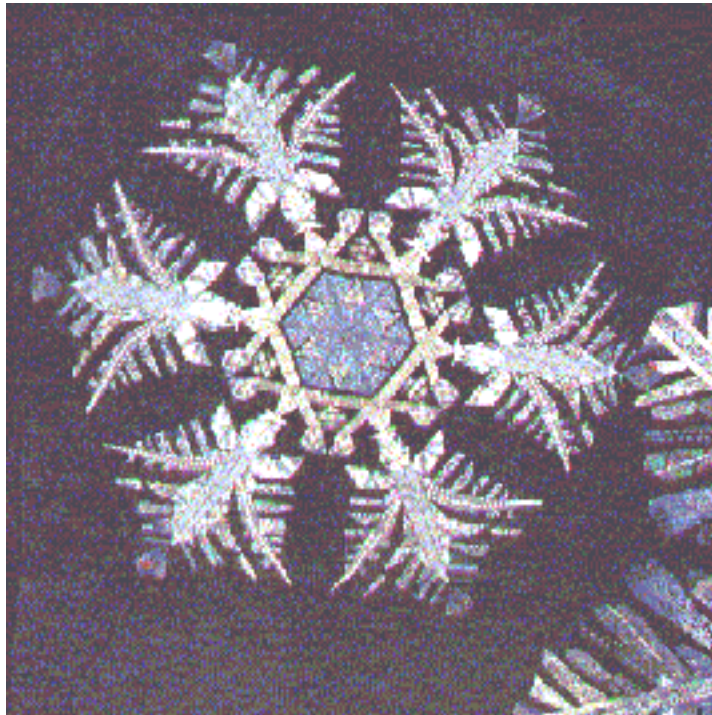
About the time I contacted Paula to do this profile, her professional life was taking another turn as she received samples of her new fabric line. "The UPS man just delivered the goods: my new line of fabric for Benartex called SERENDIPITY. This word succinctly defines my love affair with quilting: the merging of control and spontaneity to spark something unexpected."

Still, she approached this new endeavor with some trepidation. "Since I concentrate on the details in a fabric's interior and ignore its total effect, I wasn't sure I could style appealing, marketable fabric," she says. "I brought actual state-of-the-art kaleidoscopes, quilts, and leftover snippets of my favorite fabrics to the Benartex offices in New York's garment district and gave the stylists a mini-workshop so they'd understand the importance of motifs with bilateral symmetry set in stripes. They had to believe in their hearts that creating [only] the illusion of symmetry wasn't acceptable. In order to create a truly elegant kaleidoscopic effect, the motifs need to mirror images flawlessly."

"Not every fabric in the line had to be symmetrical. The industry does not consider symmetrical fabrics very marketable, and Benartex was going out on a limb

accepting my word that these would be quilter-friendly fabrics. In the end, there's a fabric reminiscent of a Persian rug, a multicolored stripe that suggests Chenille, a pretty big 'folksy' paisley, a frenetic starburst/fireworks with flickers of glowing light, and a small multicolored pebble/dot printed on a black background. Each print is colored six ways, including a blue-white-silvery combo, useful for piecing snowflakes."

Paula is fond of pointing out that one of the wonders of a kaleidoscope is the change in the design inside that happens even as the glass is handed from one person to another. This constant, evolving change has characterized Paula's career since that first fussy-cut fish hinted at the wonders her imagination would spin from the ideas contained in a slip of Liberty of London cotton. Now designing fabric of her own, she has come full circle. We can only await impatiently the next twist of her fabric kaleidoscope.



Paula is available for classes and workshops. For more information she can be contacted at Needlestar@aol.com. Online inquiries about her SERENDIPITY fabric line can be made at The Cotton Club, <http://www.cottonclub.com>

"Kaleidoscopes & Quilts" can be purchased from the Planet Patchwork bookstore at:

<http://www.amazon.com/obidos/exec/ISBN=1571200185/planetpatchworkA/>

Planet Patchwork's review of this book can be found at: <http://planetpatchwork.com/starskal.htm>



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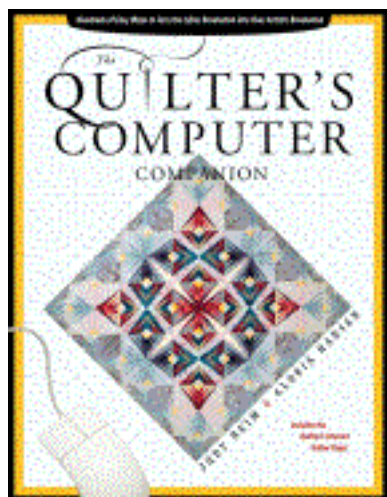
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The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for
Computing Quilters

Editor and Publisher: Robert Holland, Decatur, GA

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