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THE CALIFORNIA ART QUILT REVOLUTION

by

Nancy Curry Bavor

A THESIS

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THE CALIFORNIA ART QUILT REVOLUTION

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The American studio art quilt movement that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century had its primary origins in Ohio and California, and to a lesser degree, Massachusetts. There is no study that considers the early quilt artists in California as a group nor are there studies that consider their work from an art historical viewpoint. Many of the artists who began making quilts in the 1960s and 1970s are now in their seventies and eighties and there is some urgency to capturing their oral histories and documenting their work. This paper examines the lives of nine female artists who were making quilts in California between 1966 and 1986, the twentieth century culture that inspired them to become quilt artists, and the work they created. Based on artist interviews conducted by the author in late 2009, the narratives provide insight into the birth of new art *and* quilt movements and a glimpse of the pioneers who charted the new territory. Seeking a multi-discipline approach to the subject, this paper combines cultural, oral and art histories

The decades leading up to the emergence of art quilts in the 1960s portray a complex picture involving the intersection of art, craft, universities and the traditional American quilt. Three national cultural developments resulted in the reevaluation of quilts as a suitable art medium and increased artists' awareness of quilts: the art museum's legitimization of the quilt as art, the junction of art and craft at the university level, and social, political and fashion trends that brought quilts to national prominence. Compelling personal motivations also played a significant role in an individual's choice to combine art practice with quilt making. Examples of the artists' work reflect the dual heritage of quilt history and art history, one that blends quilt making techniques and implicit historic cultural associations with principles of contemporary art.

For Clayton

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Sometimes when I read author's acknowledgements that list dozens relatives, friends and colleagues, I am skeptical that it really took that much support to write a book, dissertation or thesis.

I now know differently.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE. Challenging Hierarchies: Art, Craft and Quilts Collide	
Part One. Art and Quilts Collide	10
Part Two. Art Craft and Universities Collide	17
Part Three. Politics and Quilts Collide	27
CHAPTER TWO. Common Threads	
Part One. An Artist is Born	41
Part Two. Discovering Quilts	43
Part Three. Women's Work	47
Part Four. The Economics of Being an Artist	50
CHAPTER THREE.	
Part One. Introduction	61
Part Two. The Artists	
Jean Ray Laury	66
Yvonne Porcella	71
Joan Schulze	74
Jean Hewes	78
Miriam Nathan-Roberts	83
Therese May	86
Linda MacDonald	90
Ellen Oppenheimer	98
Judith Content	99
CONCLUSION	103
ILLUSTRATIONS	107
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

Introduction

The studio art quilt movement that began in the last decades of the twentieth century had its primary origins in Ohio and California, and to a lesser degree, Massachusetts. Each state represents a unique combination of social and historical circumstances that led to the emergence of quilt artists in those states. This paper examines the lives of nine female artists who were making quilts in California between 1966 and 1986,¹ the twentieth century culture that inspired them to become quilt artists, and the work they created. The project is not an exhaustive historical study of the first decades of the art quilt movement in California; a complete history of the art quilt movement and study of the artists working in California is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather this paper is a reflection of what a specific group of quilt artists describe as the cultural and personal forces that led them to quilt making and some of the work they created between 1966 and 1986. Their narratives provide insight into the birth of new art *and* quilt movements and a glimpse of the pioneers who charted the new territory.

The significance of the research to quilt and art history is twofold. First, there is no study that considers California quilt artists as a group nor are there studies that consider their work from an art historical viewpoint. Second, many of the artists who began making quilts in the 1960s and 1970s are now in their seventies and eighties and there is some urgency to capturing their oral histories and documenting their work. They all have an important story to tell, not only about their lives but also about the development of the art quilt movement in California.

To fully understand the significance of the art quilts, we need to understand more about the cultural background of their production and their makers. “What was happening in California during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the emergence of the art quilt? What personal aspects significantly affected the artists’ work? Does their work reflect what was taking place in the California and/or national art world? How do their quilts fit into the continuum of art and quilt history? Seeking a multi-disciplinary approach to these questions, this paper combines cultural, oral and art histories.

¹ In order to create a more complete picture, some quilts and events before and after these dates are discussed.

Between 1966 and 1986 in California, a number of primarily middle class, white women with university art training, began making quilts. (Although women dominated the field in California and nationally, a few men and minority artists in other states gained international prominence during this period.) Their quilts were easily distinguished from traditional or historic quilts;² although some works referred to traditional quilt forms, patterns or techniques, this new group of quilt makers embraced innovation and experimentation. They strove to create original designs and develop new or adapt familiar techniques to serve their creative purposes. In doing so, these artists transformed quilts from a functional bedcover, produced at home for domestic use, to an aesthetic art object. As such, the art quilt represents a continuum of both quilt history and art history.

These hybrid objects, at first called wall, contemporary, modern, new or innovative quilts³ were by 1986 generally referred to as “art quilts.”⁴ Although the moniker no longer serves to describe the work currently made and is disliked by most artists working in the medium,⁵ it is used here to describe the work produced between 1966 and 1986. Similarly, the women interviewed for this study consider themselves artists who adopted the quilt as a form of artistic expression. Paralleling art historical practice, they are referred to interchangeably as “interviewee,” “quilt maker,” “quilt artist,” or simply, “artist.”

In the introduction of her pivotal book *Appliqué Stitchery*, published in 1966, Jean Ray Laury states what will become the credo for quilt artists. She challenged the reader to forget any perceived separation between fine art and functional craft, and embrace all types of needlework as appropriate creative media.

Art has less to do with the material used than with the perceptive and expressive

² When referring to quilts that derive their patterns from nineteenth quilt designs, I use the term “traditional quilt.” I use “historic quilt” to refer to quilts made before 1930.

³ Gayle Pritchard, *Uncommon Threads: Ohio’s Art Quilt Revolution* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 108.

⁴ Penny McMorris and Michael Kile, *The Art Quilt* (San Francisco: Quilt Digest Press, 1996).

⁵ Pritchard, 108.

*abilities of the individual. Any difference between the “fine” and the “decorative” arts is not a matter of material, but rather what the artist brings to the material. Any media may successfully be used at any level for any purpose. Just as artists’ oils can become highly decorative, stitchery too can be adapted to the artist’s individual needs.*⁶

Twenty years after Laury’s proclamation, *The Art Quilt* exhibition opened at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery on October 1, 1986. The traveling exhibit, sponsored by the Art Museum Association of America, featured twenty-five quilts created specifically for the show by sixteen artists. Penny McMorris and Michael Kile curated the exhibition and wrote a catalogue that was the first fully comprehensive publication about the art quilt, a term they are credited with coining. They carefully selected artists for the show, featuring both leading innovators and emerging artists. Invitational letters sent to artists described McMorris and Kile’s goals for the book and exhibition:

*There have been no exhibitions or books that have documented the role played by the ‘trailblazers,’ those quilt artists whose work challenges, demanding that those who view it look at quilts in new ways. Yes, these trailblazers have had their quilts included in many exhibitions, including all Quilt Nationals. But no curator or publishers have focused their undivided attention upon this small group. That is, until now.*⁷

The Art Quilt also illustrates California’s significant role in the art quilt movement; five of the sixteen artists included in the exhibition are from California⁸ and four are included in this study.

McMorris and Kile provide a brief overview of 20th century quilt making, showing that the renewed interest in quilts in the 1960s was just that, a renewal and part of a broader continuum. Unlike earlier quilt revivals, such as the one that was part of the general Colonial Revival at the end of the nineteenth century, this one went beyond just

⁶ Jean Ray Laury, *Applique Stitchery* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1966), 12.

⁷ McMorris and Kile, 14.

⁸ The author was unable to locate the fifth California participant, Deborah J. Felix.

an interest in making more quilts for beds. Although there was renewed interest in traditional quilt making, the quilt was now also considered an art medium. McMorris and Kile note, “By 1973, modern art galleries far from the borders of Manhattan were displaying antique quilts where Stellas or Vasarelys had been hanging just days before. The John Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco and the James Corcoran Gallery in Los Angeles were among the galleries to join in the quilt renaissance.”⁹

After its premiere in Los Angeles, the groundbreaking *Art Quilt* exhibition traveled across the country to seven other locations over the next three years.¹⁰ The exhibition generated wide exposure and interest in art quilts and resulted in a significant shift in public perception of quilts in general. “When the show finally closed, times had changed and the once firm boundaries between ‘art quilt’ and ‘traditional quilts’ had softened. Many more quilt artists were by then teaching classes and writing books that were reaching mainstream quilt makers. And traditional quilt makers were making increasingly innovative designs based on traditional themes.”¹¹

Laury’s pivotal 1966 book and the opening of *The Art Quilt* exhibition in 1986 symbolically bracket the beginnings of the art quilt movement and its subsequent growth into an international industry. One event defines the early years when many artists worked in isolation and were often unaware they were part of a larger movement. The latter event signifies the maturation of the art quilt. Laury’s writing from 1966 seems prescient; not only had lines between traditional and art quilts softened but lines between “decorative” and “fine” art had blurred.

Laury also touched on two of the most significant factors that contributed to the emergence of the art quilt in the late twentieth century; the art world’s reevaluation of what type of object could be considered art and the breakdown of the art-craft hierarchy. These two themes became inextricably linked at the university level, where trained artists frequently taught craft media courses. When the new approach to art was combined with the revival of interest in historic quilts and their eventual consideration as art objects, the result was a complex historical backdrop for the emergence of quilt artists.

⁹ McMorris and Kile, 47.

¹⁰ McMorris and Kile, 15.

¹¹ McMorris and Kile, 15.

The Artists

Interviewees for this project were selected based on several criteria—university art training, exhibition record, creative activities between 1966 and 1986, and the quality of work they produced during these years. Seven of the nine interviewees have either undergraduate or graduate degrees in art or an art related field. Most were accepted to one or all Quilt National exhibitions between 1979 (the first QN exhibition) and 1986. Four of the nine interviewees were invited to participate in the 1986 exhibition *The Art Quilt*. All of the artists were living and making art quilts in California some or all of the years between 1966 and 1986; most lived in California when they began making quilts. Although artists were making quilts throughout the state of California, all interviewees have strong San Francisco Bay Area ties.¹² Lastly, each artist has developed a significant body of work, working in a clearly identifiable innovative style.

The artist biographies reveal a complex interrelationship between the social and cultural forces that shaped their choice of medium. The oral interviews also elucidate the personal motivations that inspired them, other common themes relating to their work and provide additional insight into the quilts they created. To help unify the multiple facets of each of these aspects, I will focus on artist Linda MacDonald's life as representative of these various dimensions. After considering aspects of her biography we will see how the other artists, to greater or lesser degrees, share similarities and differences.

Linda MacDonald, an acknowledged innovator in the art quilt movement, is in many ways emblematic of other university-trained female artists living in northern California between the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s who adopted the quilt as their major form of expression. A member of the post war "Baby Boom" generation, MacDonald was born in 1946 in Berkeley, California, into a middle class family.¹³

¹² The only southern California artist who achieved a similar level of recognition as those in this study is the late Esther Parkhurst from Los Angeles.

¹³ Linda MacDonald, unpublished interview by author, Willits, CA, October 29, 2009.

MacDonald showed an interest in art while attending public elementary and high schools and continued studying art at San Francisco State University. There was a Textile Department located near her art classes and, intrigued by the looms she saw, she took several textile classes—surface design and weaving. Inspired by her teacher Marjorie Livingston,¹⁴ MacDonald purchased a loom and began weaving, in addition to painting and drawing.

Student demonstrations and strikes punctuated MacDonald's college education. In 1970 MacDonald, who needed just a few credits to graduate, and her husband Bob, both weary of the city and student protests, dropped out of school and moved to the sparsely populated Mendocino County. They were intrigued by the idea of rural living, getting “back to the land,” and growing their own food.

Isolated in the Mendocino forest and miles from the closest town, MacDonald joined a feminist consciousness-raising group in 1974. Feeling the initial group of thirty women was too large, they broke into smaller special-interest groups. MacDonald joined two—one in life drawing and the other that was making a quilt. She was only moderately interested in making a quilt; the quilts that she grew up with, traditional patterns such as Ohio Star and Rose of Sharon from her mother's family,¹⁵ didn't seem very exciting. Someone in the feminist rap group had already made a crazy quilt, so the group decided to make another one. When it was finished the women drew lots to see who would get it; MacDonald won. The quilt sparked her interest in making another quilt; she

¹⁴ Candace Crockett, ed., *The Fabric of Life: 150 Years of Northern California Fiber Art History* (exhibition catalogue) (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1997), 4. Canadian born Livingston (1918-1997) moved to San Francisco in 1934, received her BA from Scripps College and continued her studies at the Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design in San Francisco. In the 1940s, she was a director of the WPA Weaving Project and proprietor of Weavers' Alley (1946-1960) where she taught weaving and sold related supplies. She began teaching at San Francisco State University in 1949 and joined the Art Department faculty full time in 1962. She taught until her retirement in 1985, chairing the Department from 1979 until 1984. Candace Crockett, ed., *The Fabric of Life: 150 Years of Northern California Fiber Art History* (exhibition catalogue) San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 1997, 4.

¹⁵ MacDonald, interview.

quickly realized that instead of reproducing traditional patterns, she could apply art principles to fabric and quilts.¹⁶

MacDonald's biography is characteristic of many academically trained artists in California who between the late 1960s and the early 1980s adopted the quilt as a means of artistic expression. She grew up in a comfortable suburban middle class family and showed a talent for art while in elementary school. Expected to attend university after high school, MacDonald studied art at San Francisco State University. During her undergraduate years she also explored craft media, in this case weaving. MacDonald made her first quilt while she was at home with young children, finding the work easy to stop and restart. Quickly bored with reproducing traditional patterns she began creating her own designs, applying art principles to quilt making. Once she discovered the creative possibilities of quilts, she stopped weaving and focused on quilt making. After leaving the university, she continued to follow trends in the larger contemporary art scene both nationally and in California.¹⁷ Other artists include:

Jean Ray Laury (1928-2011) made her first quilt in 1956 for her young son Tom to fulfill a requirement for her Master of Arts degree in design at Stanford University. After success designing and writing for women's magazines in the 1960s, she began to focus on quilt making in the early 1970s.

Yvonne Porcella (b. 1936) transitioned to making quilts after more than a decade weaving and creating wearable art. She is one of two self-taught artists in the group.

Joan Schulze (b. 1938) received her Bachelor of Science in Education at the University of Illinois and is the other self-taught artist. After moving to California in the mid-1960s with her husband and children, she joined the Peninsula Stitchery Guild in Los Altos. Her

¹⁶ MacDonald, interview and Sandra J. Metzler, ed., *Behind the Stitches: Portrait of Four Mendocino Quiltmakers* (Willits, California: Mendocino County Museum, 1984), 36.

¹⁷ MacDonald, interview.

initial creative endeavors were in stitchery but by the mid-1970s she worked exclusively in the quilt format.

Jean Hewes (b. 1941) received her Master of Fine Arts degree in ceramics at University of Wisconsin. Unable to continue making ceramics while tending her two young sons, she was inspired by a Chicago *Herald* newspaper article to try quilt making, using scraps from clothes she had made. One of the few exceptions to the pattern, Hewes was already making quilts when she came to California in 1977.

Miriam Nathan-Roberts (b. 1942) studied textile arts at Cornell University and received her Master of Arts degree in art education at the University of California, Berkeley. She designed and made many of her own clothes in high school and college, and experimented with other forms of needlework, before focusing on quilts in the late 1970s.

Therese May (b. 1943) studied art at the University of Wisconsin and received her Bachelor of Arts degree in painting in 1966. As a young bride and mother in California, she made traditional quilts for her family's beds but quickly realized she could apply two of her favorite art techniques, photo collage and painting, to fabric and quilts.

Ellen Oppenheimer (b. 1952) grew up in a house filled with fabric; her father worked in the textile industry. She studied glass blowing while an undergraduate at Goddard College and added ceramics and wood working to her craft repertoire while a graduate student at Alfred University in New York. Amish quilts from Lancaster County inspired her to make her first quilt 1970s; she quickly realized the medium's possibility for personal artistic expression.

Judith Content (b. 1957) studied art, including painting, sculpture and ceramics, at San Francisco State University, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1979. On a whim she took a textile class in her junior year. She found the medium so inspiring that since graduation she has worked exclusively with textiles, creating wearable art and eventually focused on kimono-shaped wall pieces.

From the biographies of these nine artists, themes emerge that help answer the questions: What was happening in California during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the emergence of the art quilt movement? What personal aspects significantly affected the artists' work? How do their quilts fit into the continuum of quilt history? These three questions form the structure for this thesis.

Chapter One focuses on the complex relationship between art, craft, and quilts in the mid-twentieth century and considers how the changing perceptions these arenas resulted in the quilt's rise to art status.

Chapter Two explores personal motivations that led these artists to make art quilts and considers common themes that relate to their lives as artists.

Chapter Three discusses their work and seeks to place the artists and their quilts into the broader context of art and quilt history.

Chapter One

Challenging Hierarchies: Art, Craft, and Quilts Collide

Introduction

The decades leading up to the emergence of art quilts portray a complex picture involving the intersection of art, craft, universities and the traditional American quilt. All these elements collide in the early 1960s when three constituencies emerged that embraced quilts, each for different reasons and each with its own message.¹⁸

Part One of this chapter will explore the mainstream art world's changing perception of the object and subsequent reevaluation of what objects could be considered art. These developments ultimately led to the promotion of quilts to art status.

Part Two looks at California's long craft tradition and its merger with art, especially at the university, and how the new status of craft extended to the quilt.

Part Three will consider the various communities that appropriated the quilt for social, political or economic purposes, and in doing so increased its profile in the media.

Part One--Art and Quilts Collide

The American art quilt movement that began in the late 1960s is firmly rooted in the early years of the twentieth century, not in quilt making traditions but in Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. The dialogue about art that Duchamp began with his Readymades,

¹⁸ In her recent book, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in America*, Elissa Auther defines three constituencies that attempted to alter the hierarchy of art media and elevate the status of fiber art. Although she bases her theories on fiber art in general, there are parallels to the narrower world of quilts, and I am indebted to her for helping me clarify a similar trio of communities that helped alter the status of quilts.

the Surrealists expanded, Abstract Expressionists reinterpreted and Pop Artists critiqued, helped make it possible for the quilt to emerge as a new art medium in the last decades of the twentieth century. Duchamp's manufactured ceramic *Fountain* from 1917 and late twentieth century art quilts may seem to have little in common but the two are part of an art historical continuum that leads from the early years of modern art to a pluralistic postmodernism.

In exhibiting his Readymades like *Fountain* and *Bicycle Wheel* as art, Duchamp challenged the viewer to reconsider what was acceptable as a work of art and to look for new methods of interpretation. He asked the viewer to consider everyday manufactured objects as art, items not historically thought to be art. In calling common mass-produced goods art, Duchamp changed their status from lowly invisible manufactured goods to important cultural objects and in so doing gave the object new meaning(s). Using mass-produced goods for his Readymades, Duchamp questioned the unique quality of a work of art and significantly elevated the role of the artist who selects the object and the viewer who interprets it.¹⁹ Taken out of context and placed in a museum or gallery, the formerly functional objects were rendered useless; simultaneously removing function and conferring art status transformed the object's connotations from 'low culture' to 'high culture.'

When Surrealist artists expanded on the concept of Duchamp's Readymades and altered the appearance of manufactured objects, they further challenged the viewer's preconceptions of art and beauty. Strongly influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories about the unconscious, Surrealists considered objects as symbols, capable of nonverbal communication and multiple associations. Meaning could vary widely depending on both the maker's and the viewer's unconscious minds and the object's relationship to other objects. The result was often hybrid works like Meret Oppenheim's fur covered cup, saucer and spoon, "Luncheon in Fur." Surrealists also used collage techniques, intuitively assembling objects or images; their reliance on free association often lends a dream-like quality to their work.

¹⁹ James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 12-13.

With his Combines, made between 1954 and 1962, Robert Rauschenberg expanded upon Duchamp's dialogue between art and the everyday object. By 'combining' painting with materials like tires, clothing, and a purloined quilt, the artist began breaking down barriers between sculpture and painting, producing something that was neither purely painting nor sculpture. These hybrid works contrasted painterly areas of fine art with ordinary everyday objects, continued the breakdown of traditional art genres, and highlighted the slippage between high and low art.²⁰

In contrast to the deeply cerebral work of the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists, Pop Artists focused on shiny and new products to both celebrate and critique popular culture in their work.²¹ Pop Art personified the new reality of the consumer culture and the public's fascination with mass-produced icons and iconography. Any evidence of the artist's hand disappeared as they used modern methods of real or simulated mechanical reproduction (non-art process) to produce images of popular culture. By reproducing images of common commodities, human and manufactured, they effectively ended the high art versus low art debate by collapsing all art into low.²² The everyday manufactured object is the prime focus of their work.

By the early 1970s, commodity-resistant Process artists like Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude rejected the Pop Art component that celebrated popular culture and commodities. Their works, ephemeral and temporary, resist commodification. The artists themselves become the commodity and the creative process is as important as the art. In their *Running Fence*, installed in Sonoma and Marin Counties in 1976, the rolling northern California hills become their museum. Artists like Christo and Jeanne-Claude erased the boundaries between non-art and art, using the non-art everyday fabric²³ to create something of value in the art world. Fiber was an ordinary material, not a material

²⁰ Online essay by Helen Molesworth, Baltimore Museum of Art, Curator of Contemporary Art, "Robert Rauschenberg Combines: Paintings + Sculpture," <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa398.htm> (Accessed December 3, 2010.) and Paul Schimmel essay in *Robert Rauschenberg's Combines*, "Autobiography and Self-Portraiture in Rauschenberg's Combines" (Steidl/The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2005), 225.

²¹ David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 98.

²² Joselit, 65.

²³ The material they used was actually not everyday fabric but a special nylon manufactured specifically for each of their projects.

considered suitable for high art. By using such a lowly material, the artists challenged the exclusivity of art and therefore contested art critic Clement Greenberg's prevailing modernist conception of pure form.²⁴

Throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century, Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Warhol and others, encouraged the reevaluation of what could be considered art, expanded what type of objects could be used in art making, and challenged the categories of "low" and "high" art. In the mid 1960s, the quilt entered that dialogue. Until then, most Americans viewed the homemade quilt as a lowly utilitarian household object, usually made by mothers, aunts or grandmothers. The general public (and most artists) did not consider historic quilts objects of art nor was the medium thought appropriate for making art. Beginning in the 1960s, the quilt went through an accelerated transformation from a humble bedcover into an art form, a change made possible by artists like Duchamp and Rauschenberg. These artists paved the way for quilts to be hung in an art museum in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the revolutionary new practice can be viewed as a continuation of what they started.

When in the 1960s, *art* museums exhibited quilts vertically on walls like paintings, not horizontally as functional bedcovers, curators challenged the viewer to reconsider what was acceptable as a work of art, just as Duchamp had done over forty years before. (Quilts were hung vertically at rural quilt competitions and state fairs; these displays did not confer art status on quilts.) In 1965 the Newark Museum of Art mounted an exhibition from their collection of historic quilts, *Optical Quilts*, displaying works that relied on value and color contrast to create optical illusions. Although the curators did not overtly refer to the quilts as art, they elicited the obvious comparisons between quilts and contemporary Op Art paintings.

The 1971 exhibition *Abstract Design in American Quilts* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York is usually considered by most quilt scholars to have had the most significant effect on elevating the status of the quilt to art. Three factors contributed to its long-lasting prominence: First, the exhibition received extensive press coverage,

²⁴ Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxii.

especially in the *art* world. Second, the museum published a small catalogue to accompany the exhibition and in 1991 Jonathan Holstein reprinted the catalogue in his book *Abstract Design in American Quilts: A Biography of an Exhibition*. Lastly, the exhibition was very popular in New York and afterward traveled for four years nationally and internationally.²⁵

The Whitney exhibition initiated a debate about historic quilts and Clement Greenberg's theories on art; the exhibit both acknowledged the validity of some of the critic's principles and at the same time challenged his critical authority. In acknowledgement of Greenberg's accepted theories, quilts were selected for the exhibition based "simply on a high regard for the visual content of pieced quilts, regardless of craftsmanship, age, condition, area or history,"²⁶ To further distance the object from any cultural associations, the maker's name was omitted from the museum label. Separating quilts from their historical context, assessing them only for their formalist qualities, erased much of the quilt's meaning and denied any sociological implications.²⁷ Curators and critics further distanced the object from its humble origins and emphasized the preeminence of form when they discussed the quilt using art historical terms such as "visual significance," "innovative form," and "painterly."²⁸

On the other hand, the exhibition also contested some of Greenberg's notions about what should be called art. By describing and exhibiting quilts using the same language and locations used for "high" art, the exhibition challenged the hierarchy of art and craft and elevated the quilt from 'low' to 'high' art. About the Whitney show, *New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer noted, "it is the kind of exhibition that prompts us to rethink the relation of high art to what are customarily regarded as the lesser forms of visual expression."²⁹ Greenbergian principles denigrated quilts in particular, a traditional form that often relied on repeated forms and patterns for their bold designs, or whose designs may have been copied or adapted from others. Many of the quilts used a common quilt

²⁵ *Abstract Design in American Quilts: A Biography of an Exhibition* lists no California venue on its national tour.

²⁶ Jonathan Holstein, *Abstract Design in American Quilts: A Biography of an Exhibition*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Kentucky Quilt Project, 1991), 214.

²⁷ Auther, xvi-xviii.

²⁸ Holstein, 30, 188.

²⁹ Holstein, Kramer article reproduced, 44.

format, a single block repeated throughout the quilt. In addition, more than one quilt used the same block design. Both of these design elements, common to quilts, smacked of Greenberg's notion of replica, which he associated with craftsmanship not art. With the craft designation came the association of *decorative* rather than the terms Greenberg associated with art: *conception, inspiration* and *the idea*. Further, any element of replication ruled out pure "inspiration, vision or intuitive decision."³⁰

In the context of postmodernism, *Abstract Design in American Quilts* can be viewed as a transitional exhibition. The exhibit may not have fully contested Greenberg's notion of pure form but it did elucidate two important components of postmodernism: the collapsing boundaries between high culture and popular culture; and the blurring distinctions between art and the everyday life. Seeing quilts in a New York art museum confused the definition of what art should be and challenged prevailing modernist authority.³¹

In addition to bolstering the quilt's aesthetic value, the mainstream art world also helped bolster the quilt's monetary value. At the same time Pop Artists were celebrating everyday commodities in their work, the art market in general became increasingly commodified. The commodification in the art world had a significant impact on the quilt world, an arena until now relatively unaffected by market trends. Before the mid 1960s, the quilt existed almost solely in the domestic sphere; it was made by women primarily to use in their homes. (Occasionally quilts were made as gifts for friends or relatives but such products remained part of a gift economy.) The quilt was considered a family heirloom, a group of objects that had never entered the market place. However, when quilts were elevated to art status, primarily the result of art museum exhibitions like the Whitney's, they were also swept up in the general commodification of art. American demand for quilts accelerated; collectors sought the most unusual examples, interior designers demanded bold designs for home decorating, and fashion designers like Ralph Lauren bought up quilts "in the right colors" to cut up and make into clothing. No longer

³⁰ Author, xvi.

³¹ Simon Wilson and Jessica Lack, *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 270.

simply “something they had at home growing up” the quilt became a valuable commodity, a significant shift in meaning that distanced it from the primarily domestic sphere.

Four significant aspects contributed to the re-definition of the quilt. First, it was removed from its context in the domestic sphere and placed in art museums. Second, by taking it from the intended use in the bedroom and rendering it useless in the museum, it lost functionality and acquired new meaning. Third, the viewer who was now given the authority to interpret the quilt-now-art work, attained new importance and levels of engagement with the object. Lastly, as the family heirloom becomes art, it lost *use* value and *gained* market value.

At the same time the quilt transformed into an art object and was separated from its cultural and sociological associations, it also retained old and acquired new symbolic cultural associations. Perhaps it was this ambiguous nature that initially attracted artists to quilts. As they began making quilts, quilts *intended* by their makers to be art, a hybrid object emerges, comparable to Rauschenberg’s Combines. As such, the art quilt is the epitome of postmodern culture, collapsing boundaries between high and low art and merging art and everyday life.

Part Two--Art, Craft and Universities Collide

As the mainstream art world wrestled with postmodernism, many university art departments in the 1950s and 1960s espoused a cross-disciplinary approach, blending art and craft. Artist interviews consistently emphasize the accessibility of both craft and art training at the university level; over half studied both ‘fine’ arts such as painting or sculpture in addition to a craft-based media like weaving or ceramics. The blend of art and craft achieved new levels of originality when placed in the university setting where free expression was rewarded and there was little need to satisfy commercial applications. Graduates of these university programs often stayed in the San Francisco Bay Area and continued to espouse the concepts they learned in college, both through their work and teaching. This section will consider these three important elements; a brief history of craft in California, especially textiles, art and craft training at the state’s universities, and other organizations offering training in craft media.

California Craft—History

The mid-twentieth century craft movement in which the art quilt is rooted was part of a national and California craft continuum that began in the late nineteenth century. During the 1880s, the U.S and California embraced the ideals of the English Arts and Crafts Movement, ideals that rejected mass-produced goods in favor of more aesthetic hand crafted ones. To help satisfy American interest in beautiful hand made objects there was a rapid increase of arts and crafts institutions across the entire country. American culture and design were profoundly influenced by the proliferation of these organizations whose activities included giving workshops, establishing industrial art museums and libraries, and promoting arts and crafts through publications and exhibitions.³²

California experienced its own Arts and Crafts Movement. The distinctive California Craftsman style architecture is epitomized in houses designed by Ernest Coxhead and Bernard Maybeck in the San Francisco Bay Area and Charles and Henry Green in

³² Barbara Mayer, *Contemporary American Craft Art: A Collector's Guide* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1988), 42-43.

southern California. Numerous firms designed hand crafted furniture, ceramics, textiles and glass to complement the spare Craftsman architecture. Hand made California crafts were exhibited in 1894 at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park's California Midwinter Exposition; on the national scene, the state showcased hand made objects made from California redwood in the state's pavilion at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Educational institutions emerged throughout the state; in northern California, the forerunner of the San Francisco Art Institute was founded in 1874 and the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) was established in 1907.³³

Although the aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts Movement faded from fashion after 1916, an undercurrent of interest remained and was rekindled in the late 1930s and early 1940s when important German Bauhaus artists fled Europe for the U.S where they established studios and arts programs.³⁴ Several prominent Bauhaus members settled in northern California, notably the ceramicists Marguerite and Frans Wildenhain and Otto and Gertrud Natzler, and weaver Trude Guermonprez.

In the aftermath of World War II, there was a renewed national interest in art and craft training. Across the United States, men and women in their early twenties reassessed their values and goals after the carnage of the war. Searching for spirituality and meaning in their lives, many creative young people turned to working in craft media. Perhaps they felt that in creating an object from start to finish by hand—a privilege usually reserved for an artist—they could hope to integrate the meaning of their labor with the needs of the spirit.³⁵ In addition, creating hand crafted objects symbolized a dual rebellion—embracing an alternative lifestyle while rejecting impersonally mass produced goods.

In the Oakland Museum exhibition catalogue, *The Art of California*, Hazel Bray, Associate Curator Emeritus of Crafts at the Oakland Museum, discusses the mid-twentieth century craft revival in California.

³³Mayer, 44.

³⁴Mayer, 44.

³⁵Mayer, 44.

*Between 1945 and 1955, California developed into one of the country's most active and populous craft regions. These years soon brought definition to a field that was no longer composed of regionally isolated artists . . . The 1960s became a decade of change in the crafts, spearheaded by the appearance of an avant-garde that was at first stronger in California than in most other parts of the country. Experimentation and search for new modes of expression brought significant change to all the crafts.*³⁶

To comprehend the “significant change to all the crafts” Bray refers to, it is helpful to see how weaving was transformed in the years between 1890 and 1960. Weaving was the most common textile or craft course offered at the university, primarily because of its associations with industry and potential for commercial application. Under the influences of the Arts and Crafts Movement, traditional hand weaving techniques were revived in the last decades of the nineteenth century. When interest in aesthetic textiles waned in the 1920s, focus shifted to producing textiles and textile designs for industrial power looms.

The focus on industrial application often correlated to a lack of originality. However, between the years 1920 and 1950, a few notable hand weavers and imaginative designers kept the artistic traditions of weaving alive. Bauhaus trained weavers like Anni Albers and Trude Guermonprez rejected the practice common among most American weavers to faithfully reproduce historical patterns. Instead they promoted fiber's elevation to the field of modern art and encouraged innovative industrial design.³⁷ American weaver Dorothy Liebes, who maintained a studio in San Francisco from 1930 until 1948,³⁸ had tremendous influence by introducing new materials (synthetics and metallics) and unexpected color combinations.³⁹ Both nationally and in California, this

³⁶ Oakland Museum, *The Art of California: Selected Works from The Collection of the Oakland Museum* (Oakland: The Oakland Museum Art Department and Chronicle Books, 1984), 30.

³⁷ Auther, 18.

³⁸ Ira Jacknis, “The Lure of the Exotic: Ethnic Arts and the Design Department at UC Berkeley,” *Chronicle of the University of California*, (Spring, 2004), 60.

³⁹ Lee Nordness, *Objects U.S.A.: Works by Artist-Craftsmen in Ceramic, Enamel, Glass, Metal, Plastic, Mosaic, Wood and Fiber* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 292.

small group of talented artisans provided a vital link between the late nineteenth century Arts and Crafts Movement and the mid-twentieth century craft revival.

California Craft—University Training

The U.S., having no guild or apprentice craft training system like Europe, looked to universities for craft-based instruction. As demand for this type of schooling grew in the late 1940s and early 1950s there were not enough university-based craft programs to fulfill the need. Initially, students found few gifted college craft teachers and frequently augmented their studies through summer workshops with noted masters. Nonetheless, these students continued their university educations, learning not only about craft-making but also receiving a broader education in other cultural and art fields.⁴⁰ The most talented graduates among this early group were to form the foundation of university-based craft teachers for the next several decades.

The national trend toward the study of craft was not an overnight transition. Rather

one hears from one artist after another that he or she ‘accidentally’ started weaving or making mosaics or jewelry in the sense that the person had not realized that one could study in this field. These people searching for a new way of life found a suitable solution through a chance article in a magazine, through conversation, through wandering down a hallway in an art department and stumbling into a ceramics class . . .”⁴¹

Both Linda MacDonald and Judith Content recount similar experiences. The former “happened to see some weaving looms down the hall from the painting studio.” Curious, she took a few classes in weaving and textile design, in addition to painting and drawing. On a whim, Content took her first textile class at San Francisco State in her junior year,

⁴⁰ Nordness 13.

⁴¹ Nordness, 11.

just because she had heard good comments about the teacher. By graduation, Content had given up most other art media and focused almost exclusively on textiles.⁴²

Universities came to play an enormous role in not only addressing the demand for craft based education but also reinvigorating the craft field. In California, the rapid growth of university-based craft courses and design departments paralleled that of the rest of the country. By the 1960s, California and Wisconsin had the strongest craft movements and not surprisingly, those with the largest number of universities teaching craft media.⁴³ The artists' biographies support these statistics: of the nine artists, two received art degrees from University of Wisconsin and four from California universities.

A *Craft Horizons* listing in the April 1971 "Travel and Study Directory" gives an indication of the large number of craft classes offered at universities. The national listings cover a half dozen tightly packed pages; the California state entry is by far the longest one in that issue. At University of California, Berkeley, classes were offered in metal arts (silversmithing, jewelry and metal sculpture), printed and woven textiles, metal design, and glass design. California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland offered ceramics, metal arts and a glass workshop. San Jose State University offered summer sessions in textile design, weaving, embroidery, and ceramics. Richmond Art Center offered eight week summer sessions in loom weaving, creative stitchery, primitive weaving techniques, batik and textile design, as well as jewelry and lapidary. These San Francisco area entries are only four of the nineteen statewide class listings, by far the longest state entry in that issue.

There were exciting new developments in fiber art in the U.S. but this was especially true in California where there was a confluence of talented university trained weavers and fiber artists who valued originality of expression over industrial production. In northern California, a prime locus of the growing fiber art movement was the Department of Decorative Art at the University of California, Berkeley.⁴⁴ When the department expanded after World War II they hired Ed Rossbach, one of the immediate post war

⁴² Judith Content, unpublished interview with the author, December 16, 2009.

⁴³ Nordness, 14

⁴⁴ Although only one artist attended UC Berkeley, the institution is representative of other Bay Area universities like San Francisco State and San Jose State Universities.

students of craft. (He graduated from Cranbrook Academy with a Master of Fine Arts in ceramics and textiles in 1947.) Rossbach arrived at the university in 1952 and for the next 25 years was a considerable force in the Department of Decorative Art. (The department became the Department of Design in 1965.) He recognized that the postwar art world had begun to accept the use of traditional craft materials to create nonfunctional objects, a new direction that blurred the boundaries between fine art and craft.⁴⁵ Rossbach encouraged his students to create works that combined art principles with materials usually associated with utilitarian crafts.

Rossbach was an advocate for all craft media and urged ceramicist Peter Voulkos to take a position in the Department of Decorative Art at Berkeley. Voulkos had a similar open-minded attitude toward crafts; he approached his chosen medium of clay as a sculptural rather than functional medium. Marvin Lipofsky also joined the faculty, bringing the modern glass sculpture movement to the West Coast. Under Rossbach's direction, the Berkeley department boasted three of the national leaders of the studio craft movement.⁴⁶

Another aspect of Berkeley's craft program, especially in textile study, was the accessibility of the university's anthropologic textile collection, housed in its Lowie Museum. Students were encouraged to study design motifs of non-Western textiles as well as the techniques used to create them. By the early 1960s students frequently incorporated these forms into their art. Like their hippie counterparts, they were also intrigued with non-Western ideas and beliefs.⁴⁷

Innovative fiber arts programs were not limited to Berkeley. At the Oakland California College of Arts and Crafts. (CCAC now California College of the Arts) German-born and Bauhaus trained artist Trude Guermonprez applied principles of art to her weaving classes, encouraging students to new levels of experimentation. Like the faculty in Berkeley's Department of Design, she helped move textiles from functional craft to fine art, although her work never exhibited influences of ethnic textiles.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Jacknis, 38-39.

⁴⁶Jacknis, 38.

⁴⁷Jacknis, 21.

⁴⁸Jacknis, 59.

Across the San Francisco Bay from Berkeley, textile artist and weaver Marjorie Livingston taught at San Francisco State University in the 1960s and early 1970s. Linda MacDonald credits Livingston with inspiring her to take up weaving and took several of the professor's weaving and textile surface design classes while at the university. Candace Crockett, who received her Masters degree in design and textiles from San Jose State University in 1970, joined the San Francisco State faculty in 1974. Crockett eventually became a Professor of Art at the university and taught textiles, especially weaving and surface design.⁴⁹ In her junior year at San Francisco State, Judith Content took her first textile class from Crockett. The professor arrived at the first class clutching a giant basket; she spilled out its contents to reveal woven and embroidered textiles from around the world. Content was immediately smitten by the profusion of color and texture.⁵⁰

University of California, Davis also boasted an innovative textile design department. Katherine Westphal, Ed Rossbach's wife, taught there from 1966 until 1979. She encouraged her students to experiment with all forms of surface design, such as dyeing—either direct or resist methods such as batik and shibori--screen printing, photo transfer, painting, and embellishments of all materials. Textiles from Asia further inspired Westphal's work and she frequently incorporated Asian textile techniques and motifs into her work.⁵¹

Westphal does not consider herself a quilt maker, although she made quilts:

Early in her career Westphal was designing fabric for industrial reproduction. Rather than render a design on paper with paint, she preferred to design directly on cloth, using a variety of techniques. When the textile agent who took her work retired in 1958, he returned a box of unsold designs to her. She began cutting up

⁴⁹ Candace Crockett, resume dated November 2009.

⁵⁰ Judith Content, interviewed by Le Rowell, February 18, 2008, interview #CA95306-001, transcript, Alliance for American Quilts/Quilters' Save Our Stories, <http://www.allianceforamericanquilts.org/qsos/> (accessed August, 18, 2010).

⁵¹ Katherine Westphal, *The Surface Designer's Art: Contemporary, Fabric, Printers, Painters and Dyers* (Ashville, North Carolina: Lark Books, 1993).

*the samples and using them in collage, making ten or twelve wall quilts in as many years, dating from 1959.*⁵²

Her works are “unique examples of the unexpected possibilities of invention to be found in traditional techniques.”⁵³

Jo Ann Stabb, who received her Masters degree in design from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1967, joined the Davis faculty in 1968. Until her retirement in 2002, she continued to develop the undergraduate and graduate curriculum in wearable textile design, eventually becoming Chair of the Department. Her own work includes wearable art pieces.⁵⁴

In 1973 Gyongy Laky, a graduate of the textile program at Berkeley’s Department of Design (BA 1970, MA 1971) founded the Fiberworks Center for Textile Arts, a non-degree granting institution. Fiberworks maintained the ideals of Berkeley’s textile program, offering instruction and acting as a meeting place for local fiber artists. Fiberworks students frequently took advantage of the historic and ethnologic textiles collection at the university’s Lowie Museum.⁵⁵

Textile designers often branched out to baskets and wearable art, the latter combining the “funk” look of the hippie counterculture with the ethnic textiles that had begun appearing in San Francisco shops. Exhibitions and gallery shows documented many of these new developments and a number of Bay Area dealers showcased fiber art, including Margery Annenberg and Louise Allrich in San Francisco, Fiberworks and Kasuri Dye Works in Berkeley, and Straw Into Gold in Oakland.⁵⁶

Berkeley’s influence on innovation in crafts—especially ceramics, glass and textiles—cannot be overstated. The department was a focal point for the new craft movement that strove to combine art principles and craft media. Many of the faculty led

⁵² Personal interview with Katherine Westphal cited in Bets Ramsey, “Art and Quilts: 1950-1970,” *Uncoverings 1993*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco, American Quilt Study Group, 1994), 18.

⁵³ Ramsey, *Uncoverings*, 18.

⁵⁴ Jo Ann Stabb resume, dated November 2009.

⁵⁵ Jacknis, 59.

⁵⁶ Mayer, 159.

by example and were groundbreaking artists as well as teachers. The textile program expanded dramatically to include off and on loom weaving, basketry, surface design and to incorporate designs and techniques from ethnological textiles. Lastly, many Berkeley graduates remained in the Bay Area and further spread the doctrine they learned at the university.

California Craft—California Design Exhibitions

The *California Design* exhibitions, a series of thirteen triennial juried shows presented primarily at the Pasadena Art Museum between 1954 and 1976, drew visitors from all over the U.S. and put California design at the forefront of the national scene. The exhibitions, accompanied by well-written and amply illustrated catalogues, gave wide exposure to California's design and craft aesthetic.

A study of the textiles displayed in the exhibitions reflects the changes taking place in the larger textile world. Between 1954 and 1962, works chosen were primarily for interior design and included traditional tapestries as well as fabric for upholstery, curtains, rugs or table linens. After 1962 works trended toward wall hangings and included more abstract and experimental two and three-dimensional works. By the last years of the exhibitions in the 1970s, the influence of ethnic textiles was apparent in the hand woven experimental and often abstract designs. Based on artist representation, the *California Design* exhibitions further reflect that this revolution in fiber art was centered in Berkeley and Los Angeles.⁵⁷ Artist Jean Ray Laury was accepted into *California Design* exhibitions 8, 9, and 10 (1962, 1965 and 1968.) According to her, "They were very prestigious. Everyone wanted to be in them. "⁵⁸

By the early 1960s, art, craft, and universities were inextricably linked; aspects of this new phenomenon were critical to the development of art quilts. For many California quilt artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the presence of experimental textile programs in or near university art departments was vital in generating awareness of

⁵⁷ Suzanne Baizerman, Jo Lauria, and Toni Greenbaum, *California Design: The Legacy of West Coast Craft and Style* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 97.

⁵⁸ Jean Ray Laury, unpublished interview by author, Clovis, CA, November 30, 2009.

creative possibilities with textiles. Some artists in this study entered the quilt arena after first becoming accomplished weavers or successful wearable artists using skills they learned at universities.

University professors regarded themselves as artists and they trained their students to see themselves as artists working with craft media.⁵⁹ For the quilt artists, applying art principles they learned in college to fabric and quilts was a logical process. For most of the professors, their primary source of income came from teaching; freed from the financial need to create textiles for industry or to appeal to any market place, they could experiment with radical forms of expression. We will see in the next chapter how most of the quilt artists were similarly free of economic pressures, although for entirely different reasons, and so could adopt a form of expression for which there was not yet a market.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Baizerman, Lauria, and Greenbaum, 94.

⁶⁰ McMorris and Kile, 62.

Part Three--Politics and Quilts Collide

Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories—for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result.

-- Marshall McLuhan ⁶¹

About the same time the art world elevated the quilt to art status, as symbolized by the Whitney exhibition in 1971, and the hierarchy of media was challenged as evidenced by the art-craft merger at universities, several constituencies appropriated the quilt for their own social, political or economic purposes. Three separate communities, social and cultural historians, feminists and feminist artists, and the youth counterculture, all addressed issues surrounding the quilt's cultural context and continued to raise public awareness of the medium. Sometimes at odds with each other and at times espousing similar ideals, these loosely related groups had the combined effect of establishing a noisy dialogue about quilts on topics that included their history, place in the art-craft hierarchy, and their role in women's and art histories. Americans became increasingly aware of quilts on an academic and popular level through widespread publications and quilt-related events; quilt fever reached a nationwide high in the years leading up to the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial.

Artist interviews reveal that these three communities— counterculture, feminists and historians—played small but pivotal roles in their choice to make quilts. Similar to the university student who 'accidentally' discovered a weaving or ceramics studio in the Art Department, often a 'chance'⁶² encounter with one of these communities transformed their artistic lives. Collectively, the groups provided a fertile ground for anyone remotely interested in politics, history, art, textiles or contemporary culture. We will consider briefly how each group's political or social message influenced the artists.

⁶¹ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (Corte Madera, California: Ginko Press, 2005), 10.

⁶² Nordness, 11.

Counterculture

In the initial phases of research on the emergence of the art quilt in California and before more closely examining the artist interviews, it seemed that the counterculture movement that began in California and spread to the rest of the country played a *significant* role in the emergence of art quilts in the state. The youth who embraced going ‘back to the land,’ revered hand made objects and found hand embellished clothing more in keeping with their alternative lifestyle, surely associated patchwork with simpler times and thrifty ancestors. Wearing patchwork clothing and adorning houses or apartments with handmade quilts symbolized the rejection of their parents’ values and denounced the country’s industrialization, materialism, and technological dehumanization.

The counterculture’s intrigue with Eastern religion and associated cultural traditions was fueled by young people’s travels; from these far off and mysterious countries, young travelers brought back unusual textiles like *molas* from the San Blas Islands and *kimono* from Japan. The exposure to and availability of these new textiles and techniques must have inspired further interest in fiber art and clothing styles.

All of these assumptions turn out to be mostly true; however, they played only circumstantial roles in inspiring this particular group of artists to begin making quilts. Four of the artists--Jean Ray Laury, Joan Schulze, Yvonne Porcella, and Therese May--were already wives and young mothers during the Summer of Love (1967); “dropping out” was not an option and their lives and work were relatively unaffected by the extremes of the counterculture movement. Although Miriam Nathan-Roberts moved to Berkeley in time to witness the Free Speech Movement firsthand in 1964, she was not derailed from completing her Masters degree studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

By the time Judith Content arrived on the San Francisco State campus in 1975, the student protests and strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s had ended. Neither Jean Hewes nor Ellen Oppenheimer moved to California until 1977 or 1978 respectively, so were unaffected by the social, political and cultural turmoil in the Bay Area during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Jean Ray Laury and Linda MacDonald are the two exceptions to the group. Although Laury didn't adopt a counterculture lifestyle, like many young people she recognized the spiritual hazards of mass production and materialism. Through her writings she encouraged others to temper the effects of modern culture:

*So many of the manufactured items we use repeatedly are identical to thousands of others. They are impersonal, anonymous, and without variation. Because of this, we especially enjoy and appreciate articles which are handmade. A quilt offers the opportunity to produce an article of personal value, both practical in nature and aesthetic in design.*⁶³

Her books encouraged the use of old materials: *Handmade Rugs from Practically Anything* (with Joyce Aiken, 1971), *New Uses for Old Laces* (with Gayle Smalley 1974) and the *Pantyhose Craft book* (with Joyce Aiken, 1978) provide a humorous look at creative possibilities from leftovers. Recycle, reuse.

Only Linda MacDonald was part of the counterculture who did “turn on, tune in and drop out.” She left San Francisco State University in the midst of student strikes in 1970, lived for seven years in a northern California cabin with no electricity, and in 1974 joined a feminist rap group where she made her first quilt. She frequently reflects on the coincidental chain of events-- moving to the country, joining the feminist group, choosing to join a smaller group that was making a quilt—wondering if she would have spent her life as a quilt artist had she not moved to rural Mendocino County.⁶⁴

The influence of ethnographic textiles on the artists is apparent in Yvonne Porcella and Judith Content's work. Before turning to quilt making both first made wearable art, often based on Asian clothing designs. Knowledge of the ethnic dress styles could just as easily have come from Berkeley's Lowie Museum collection as from newly imported textiles. However, the practice of transforming everyday clothing into “wearable art” seems to relate directly to the hippie fashion aesthetic.

⁶³ Jean Ray Laury, *Quilts & Coverlets: a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Nostrand, 1970), 15.

⁶⁴ MacDonald, interview

Feminism and Feminist Art

If museums and galleries conferred art status on historic quilts, the women's movement designated the quilt as "The Great American Art."⁶⁵ The 1973 publication of art historian Patricia Mainardi's article, "Quilts: The Great American Art" in the *Feminist Art Journal* (and its additional publication in *Ms. Magazine* the same year⁶⁶) alerted the feminist community to the significance of quilts as women's "cultural heritage"⁶⁷ in much the same way *Abstract Design in American Quilts* had opened the art world's eyes to the aesthetic qualities of quilts. Mainardi positioned quilts as the legitimate feminist ancestry sought so desperately by those interested in women's arts in the 1970s. She declared quilts the Great American Art, but an art that must not and could not be separated from its gendered social and cultural history. Feminists celebrated "women's work," in particular the quilt, as an historical representation of women's political voice and creative outlet. The medium itself (as opposed to the subject matter) became politicized.

Like the Whitney exhibition, Mainardi also took on the "low art" v. "high art" debate that had equated needlework with craft and therefore low art. However, she denounced the Whitney curators who, in an attempt to challenge the same hierarchies, appropriated quilts to legitimize male-dominated contemporary formalist painting. In doing so, the curators also denied the object's true cultural significance as gendered art.⁶⁸

Mainardi suggested that since quilt making was so indisputably women's art, many of the issues facing women artists at the time could be addressed through the study of quilts.

. . . questions of female sensibility, of originality and tradition, of individuality and collectivity, of content and values in art—can be illuminated

⁶⁵ Patricia Mainardi, *Quilts: The Great American Art* (Miles & Weir, Ltd., San Pedro, California, 1978).

⁶⁶ Jane Przybysz, "Bay Area Beginnings: The American Quilt Study Group and the Twentieth-Century California Fiber Art Movement," *Uncoverings 2010*, ed. Laurel Horton (Lincoln, Nebraska: American Quilt Study Group, 2010), 215.

⁶⁷ Mainardi, 2.

⁶⁸ Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology" 318. <http://arth.sjsu.edu/courses/277/index.html>. Accessed November 1, 2009

by a study of this form, its relation to the lives of the artists and how it has been dealt with in art history. . . Needlework is the one art in which women controlled the education of their daughters, the production of the art, and were also the audience of critics . . .—it is our cultural heritage.⁶⁹

Feminist artists were drawn to quilts, not only because they were attracted to fabric as a medium, but also for the historical associations of home, security, creativity, feminine arts, and as a voice for women when they had no voice. For the burgeoning feminist movement, the American quilt was a symbolic link with the past, representing the primary social, political and creative outlet for women, the power of property ownership and the strength provided by a community of women. For all the same reasons, the quilt also represented hope for the future, and the possibility of creating new paradigms for women and women's art.

Similar to the counterculture movement, the influence of feminism on California's quilt artists seems to be more indirect than direct.⁷⁰ While the artists themselves may have been feminists or attracted to quilts because of women's issues,⁷¹ with one notable exception, feminism was not an element of their work. Only two artists, Linda MacDonald and Jean Ray Laury, mention feminism in their interviews; for MacDonald, feminism played a circumstantial role in her quilt making; for Jean Ray Laury, it was a significant component of her life and work.

As discussed in an earlier section, Linda MacDonald made her first quilt in 1974 after joining a feminist consciousness-raising group. Isolated from her nearest neighbors, she joined a feminist "rap group" as much for social connections as for political reasons, much like her nineteenth century counterpart who sought social interaction at quilting bees. ". . . it [the feminist group] was also a way to network and to meet different people . . . so many people were living out in the woods and were isolated; so was I."⁷² MacDonald appreciated the dichotomy of the group's message; on the one hand they met

⁶⁹ Mainardi, 2.

⁷⁰ Przybysz, 217

⁷¹ Michael James, "Beyond Tradition: The Art of the Studio Quilt," *American Craft* (February/March 1985): 18.

⁷² MacDonald, interview

to encourage “women to *do* things in the world” and on the other hand they chose to create something that was “a part of homemaking, so much about understanding the source of life and how to make things.”⁷³

As one of the two exceptions, the role that feminism and feminist art played in Jean Ray Laury’s life and work is so notable that it is worthy of further discussion. Laury’s life is intertwined with the California Feminist Art Movement; her husband Frank was head of the Department of Art at Fresno State University and hired Judy Chicago to form the Feminist Art Program there in 1970.⁷⁴ Although both Jean Ray Laury and Chicago lived and worked in Fresno at the same time, their lives were parallel rather than intersecting.⁷⁵

By the time Judy Chicago arrived in Fresno in 1970, Jean Ray Laury had been practicing her own form of feminism for almost fifteen years, writing magazine articles, publishing books, teaching, *and* raising a family and running a household. She cherished her role as wife and mother but also realized her spiritual need to create. “It takes a little madness and a lot of passion to spend as many hours working in the studio as I do. I couldn’t live without it. But I couldn’t live without my family either.”⁷⁶

Laury lived the feminist philosophy she expounded in her art, teaching and writing, and through her work she encouraged other women to find balance in their personal lives. She spoke eloquently and convincingly to the audience that was still following the tradition of the stay-at-home housewife and mother, like many of the artists in this study. She mentored women for whom radical or drastic changes in lifestyle were neither practical nor desirable by acknowledging their frustrations and unrealized personal ambition.⁷⁷ Laury rejected the strident essentialist form of feminism inherent in the Feminist Art Program. Instead she offered women an alternative to the all or nothing approach and encouraged them to find their particular balance between home and creative personal fulfillment. She addressed the same subjects as artists in the Feminist Art

⁷³ MacDonald, interview

⁷⁴ Frank Laury, interview by author, Clovis, CA, November 30, 2009.

⁷⁵ Przybysz, 217.

⁷⁶ Jean Ray Laury, *The Creative Woman's Getting-It-All-Together Handbook*. (New York: Hot Fudge Press, 1977), 8.

⁷⁷ Treen, Robin, ed., *Jean Ray Laury: A Life by Design* (San Jose, California: San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, 2005), 7.

Movement--women's bodies, sexuality and the right to choose, housework, and the art world—but in a non-confrontational way. She combined the familiar, comforting, non-threatening nature of the quilt with humor, presenting a format accessible to a broader constituency, male and female. She harnessed the medium *and* the message to effect cultural change.

Quilt Historians

The widespread popularity of the 1971 Whitney exhibition and growing interest in quilts and quilt making leading up to the Bicentennial spawned dozens of historic quilt exhibitions across the country. Some curators followed Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof's lead, focusing solely on the quilt's visual qualities and ignoring any social or historical context. However, many historians rejected that approach and instead spoke eloquently about the cultural implications of quilt making. These exhibitions celebrated the quilt's diverse patterns and styles, venerated it as a meaningful cultural object and honored the role quilts played in the social and creative lives of their makers and American history.⁷⁸ In stark contrast to the Whitney exhibition that sought to remove all cultural context, quilt historians sought to reclaim it.

Events in the San Francisco Bay Area echoed national interest in historic quilts. Frequent exhibitions in northern California showcased both historic and contemporary quilts and fed artists' interest in the medium. Several key people figured prominently in promoting historic and contemporary quilts and celebrating them not only as aesthetic objects but also as “visual anthropology.”⁷⁹ A sampling of key figures in the 1970s quilt revival:

Julie Silber arrived in San Francisco in 1966 and a few years later opened Mary Strickler's Quilt, a store that sold antique quilts and other American folk art. Not content to simply buy and sell quilts, Silber devoted considerable energies to researching and writing about them. “I appreciate quilts with my eye, but I am most interested in their

⁷⁸ Auther, 129

⁷⁹ FolkStreams, “Quilts in Women's Lives,” quote from Charles Shere for the *Oakland Tribune*, undated, <http://www.folkstreams.net/pub/FilmPage.php?title=37> (Accessed November 25, 2010).

historical and cultural context, specifically in the women behind them.”⁸⁰ Her landmark 1976 *Quilts in Women’s Lives* exhibition at the San Francisco Art Institute co-curated with Pat Ferrero brought quilts to life through merging stories of quilt makers and their fabric creations.⁸¹ By the end of the 1970s, Silber was a nationally recognized quilt historian.

With four women from community activist days (local PTAs, School Board and Planning Commission) **Joyce Gross**, Sally Garoutte, Ellen Binkley and Lou Norton, formed the Mill Valley Quilting Authority in 1969. They met once a week, ostensibly to talk about quilts, and with their official sounding title, they were soon demonstrating quilt making techniques, lecturing about quilts, and organizing quilt shows. The second “Patch in Time” exhibition in 1973 showcased old and new quilts, including innovative art quilts by three California artists. (None are included in this study.)⁸² By the late 1970s, Gross organized larger shows for the Santa Rosa Quilt Guild, a guild she helped found. Gross also began publishing the *Quilters’ Journal* in 1977, a vehicle for Gross and others to publish their scholarly studies and historical information about quilts.⁸³

In the early 1980s there were few opportunities for national gatherings of quilt makers and quilt historians; in response, Gross organized the first *Quilt Retreat—California Style* in 1981 at Point Bonita. The annual event became an important sharing and support session, allowing women to spend the week making quilts or conducting research. The early retreats included teachers and an organized program. Eventually the retreat evolved and became less structured, allowing everyone to work on individual projects in a nurturing and supportive environment. The Point Bonita Getaway continues to be an important force in the attendees’ lives and celebrated its 30th year in January

⁸⁰ Jennifer Scarborough. “Julie Silber: Exploring the Art and History of Quilts.” *Fiberarts*. November/December 1985, 14.

⁸¹ Scarborough, 14.

⁸² Joyce Gross, *A Patch in Time* (exhibition catalogue) (San Rafael: The Mill Valley Quilt Authority, 1973). The three artists were Karen Johnson, Mendocino County, California and Pam Carvalho and Carol Hurst from Lawrence, Kansas. Hurst was an art major at Stanford University and saw Jean Ray Laury’s 1956 Masters project, *Tom’s Quilt*.

⁸³ Nancy Bavor, *The World According to Joyce Gross* (exhibition catalogue) (San Jose: San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, 2009), 26.

2010.⁸⁴ Miriam Nathan-Roberts attended the Point Bonita Getaway in the 1980s where she met other artists who were making non-traditional quilts. She found reaffirmation and support among like-minded colleagues in the early years of the art quilt movement.⁸⁵

Gross's fellow Mill Valley Quilt Authority member **Sally Garoutte** formed the **American Quilt Study Group** in 1980, an organization dedicated to scholarly quilt research. The formation marked beginning of what would later in the century become a new academic discipline: Quilt Studies.

Noted quilt historian **Roderick Kirakofe** recounts how he and **Michael Kile** filled their car with old quilts and drove from New York to San Francisco in 1976 to begin their business selling antique quilts.⁸⁶ In 1983 they published the first *Quilt Digest*, a scholarly collection of essays about quilts. The first issue reflected California's dual quilt legacy and contained articles on historic quilts by Julie Silber, Jonathan Holstein and Michael Kile as well as an article on art quilts by Michael James.⁸⁷

Paul Pilgrim and Gerald Roy, both with Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees from California College of Arts & Crafts and Master of Fine Arts degrees from Mills College in Oakland, began collecting quilts in 1969 and in 1971 opened the 5821 College Gallery in Oakland devoted to Fine and Decorative American Arts. (In 1971 it was renamed the Pilgrim/Roy Gallery.) They specialized in quilts and frequently used them to teach art, design and color classes at schools and quilt stores in the area.⁸⁸ They epitomize the 1970s intersection of art, craft, universities and quilts.

Even the small town of Willits, where Linda MacDonald lived, participated in the quilt culture described above. The Mendocino County Museum had a small collection of

⁸⁴ Bavor, 26, 38.

⁸⁵ Miriam Nathan-Roberts, interview by author, Berkeley, CA, December 2, 2009.

⁸⁶ Roderick Kirakofe, "Collecting Quilts," (lecture, San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, May 5, 2009).

⁸⁷ Michael Kile and Roderick Kirakofe, eds., *The Quilt Digest 1*, San Francisco: Kirakofe and Kile, 1983.

⁸⁸ Gerald Roy, e-mail messages to the author, November 25-26, 2010.

quilts and curator Sandy Metzler exhibited them frequently. She also started an annual quilt show in the museum; MacDonald frequently helped her with the exhibitions. The shows were mostly historic quilts but Metzler “did once have some of Michael James’ work there, and that was nice, because she [Metzler] had heard about him, and she just wrote him and he let her borrow some quilts. So that was fun.” Together MacDonald and Metzler went to several of the Santa Rosa Quilt Guild shows in the 1970s as well as the early AQSG symposia. Metzler also showed MacDonald an early copy of *Quilter’s Newsletter* that was still printed in black and white. Although MacDonald frequently felt isolated in Willits, all these activities made her realize that lots of others were interested in making quilts and some artists were attempting to do what she was, applying art principles to the medium.⁸⁹

For most of the key Bay Area players in the quilt revival, their activities were an unusual mix of scholarship, showmanship and capitalism. Although these quilt historians were frequently lauded for creating public appreciation of quilts and quilt history, there was also a significant component of self-interest in their activities. In addition to her admirable work in the curatorial field, Silber also sold quilts to prominent San Francisco and national collectors, and wrote and lectured on the subject. Gross’s *Patch in Time* exhibitions were planned with money making in mind. She proudly claimed that the first *Patch in Time* netted over \$650, a substantial amount at the time for a “little quilt show.”⁹⁰ Likewise, her Point Bonita retreats were designed to be profitable. Kirakofe, Kile, Pilgrim and Roy, all bought and sold quilts, in addition to researching and writing on the subject.

When curators and museums promoted the quilt as art it became a new commodity; similarly, quilt historians and dealers converted the quilt’s heritage and tradition into monetary value.⁹¹ In a society that valued commodities, the effect was to further raise the status of the quilt as an object of intrinsic and market value. Undoubtedly, this had an influence on the artists who had earlier dismissed the quilt as unworthy of their artistic

⁸⁹ MacDonald, interview.

⁹⁰ Joyce Gross, interview by author, San Rafael, CA, June 2009.

⁹¹ Auther, 133

attentions. As the quilt gained in market value, the object also attained a certain credibility with the public that likely trickled down to the artistic community.

The Bicentennial Celebration

In the years leading up to the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration, the country was rife with bicentennial mania. There was bicentennial everything—home furnishings, fabrics, cars, trains and planes, stamps, coins and even Saturday morning cartoons. Quilts were part of this craze and local community colleges and Adult Education programs looked for teachers to teach quilt making. A friend mentioned to Joan Schulze in 1974 that the local Sunnyvale Adult Education Department was looking for a quilt making teacher, that the job paid well and the classes were at night. Schulze jumped at the opportunity to teach even though she knew nothing about quilt making. For the next six months she taught herself quilt making techniques, staying one step ahead of her students.⁹²

This ‘chance’ encounter that led Schulze to teach quilt making was typical of many of the artists. Before 1974, Schulze had little or no interest in quilts and didn’t see any creative potential in the medium. Once she realized the quilt’s possibilities, she gave up the ‘stitchery’ she was then creating and continued quilt making. In 1976 she entered the Bicentennial National Quilt Contest sponsored by *Good Housekeeping* magazine. She competed against over 10,000 entries, two thousand from California, and was one of the 50 finalists.⁹³

Jean Hewes was living in Chicago in 1974, with two infant sons, when she made her first quilt. She saw an article in the *Chicago Herald* about a woman who made a quilt using fabric store remnants.⁹⁴ Although her interview doesn’t confirm the fact, it is possible that the article was related to the nationwide enthusiasm for quilts fostered by the Bicentennial.

At the time they began making art quilts, many of the artists in this study were aware of traditional quilts, usually because of family quilts they had while growing up. Seeing

⁹² Joan Schulze, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, December 17, 2009.

⁹³ Przybysz, 215.

⁹⁴ Hewes, telephone interview by author, Ft. Worth, TX and Los Altos, CA, November 9, 2009.

antique quilts in one of the numerous California or national exhibitions not only reinforced their childhood associations with comfort and warmth but also opened their eyes to the creative possibilities of quilts. When quilts became a desirable object in the art world, a fashionable object in home decorating and collecting spheres, and a worthy subject for cultural historians, they also attained clear monetary value. No longer simply “something they had at home growing up” the quilt became a commodity, a significant shift in meaning that distanced it from the primarily domestic sphere. Although most artists in this study were attracted to the traditional associations a quilt embodies, extricating it from the entirely domestic realm also allowed them to approach it as a purely artistic medium.

Chapter Two

Common Threads

Introduction

Chapter One explored cultural events that increased artists' awareness of quilts: the art museum's legitimization of the quilt as art; the junction of art and craft at the university level; and social, political and fashion trends that brought quilts to national prominence. These developments can be considered external forces affecting the artists' perception of quilts as an art medium and sociopolitical statement. However, equally compelling personal motivations also played a significant roles in an individual's choice to combine art practice with quilt making.

Again, a look at Linda MacDonald's biography highlights several themes common to other artists:

Like many young girls of her generation, MacDonald learned to sew from her mother. Clothing was expensive so she and her mother made their own clothes. Although her mother and aunts made quilts and MacDonald knew how to sew, she did not participate in the activity while growing up.

Drawing pictures came naturally to her as a child; throughout elementary and high school MacDonald enjoyed art and showed innate talent. She chose to study art at university even though she was uncertain as to where an art education might lead. While at San Francisco State, she was intrigued by the weaving looms she saw in classrooms near the painting studios. She took a few weaving and textile surface design classes, bought a loom and began weaving, in addition to painting and drawing.

MacDonald made her first quilts while she was at home with young children, finding the work easy to stop and restart, unlike painting and weaving. For the next several years, she worked in relative isolation, not realizing other artists were making quilts. Like many artists working in other media,

MacDonald didn't support herself through the sales of her work. She began teaching at a local continuation high school in the mid 1980s, received her California teaching certificate in 1985, and combined art making with public school teaching (art and other subjects.)⁹⁵

All the artists share remarkably similar stories. As children, they liked art and were good at it. Many learned to sew at home or in home economics classes in school, acquired at least fundamental dressmaking skills and enjoyed working with fabric. Some had quilts growing up; others saw their first quilts as young adults. Most artists began making quilts as bed coverings, learned basic quilt making skills, and quickly moved beyond reproducing traditional patterns. The women also recognized that quilt making was compatible with childrearing and frequently gave up working in a less adaptable art media, such as painting, ceramics or weaving. Lastly, each individual had a personal approach to the economics of being an artist; some pursued art full time while for others quilt making was an avocation.

⁹⁵ MacDonald, interview and Sandra J. Metzler, ed., *Behind the Stitches: Portrait of Four Mendocino Quilters* (Willits, California: Mendocino County Museum, 1984), 36.

Part One: An Artist is Born

Of all the personal information shared by the artists, perhaps the most poignant is their fierce urge to make art and how they negotiated their lives in order to do so. “The need to do art, which I think is universal, is one of the main reasons for being alive—for me. When I do drawings or work on drawings that are going to be the quilt, or work on the quilt, I’m working toward that feeling—that aesthetic experience, that excitement.”⁹⁶

As young children, their artistic talent was readily apparent and their desire to pursue art was strong. Both Jean Ray Laury and Judith Content always knew they wanted to be artists. Although no one in Laury’s family was an artist, her mother encouraged her to “do what you want to do, and don't do what everybody else does, and not to feel you need to.”⁹⁷ As a child, Content always had a mini studio filled with colored pencils and paints next to her mother’s, who was a professional artist.⁹⁸

For most of the interviewees, being an accomplished artist often became their family or school identity. While still in kindergarten, Therese May discovered that she not only liked drawing but also was good at it. Her self-identity as an artist was established early when she brought home a drawing she’d made in kindergarten and received praise from both parents. After this incident, “I was the artist. That was the role I played in school and at home, and everywhere.”⁹⁹

Some of Linda MacDonald’s early successes in life were art related. In elementary school, she competed with a fellow fifth grader for the most stars on the classroom chart, one awarded for each drawing they completed. The two produced fifty or sixty drawings each before they were both declared the class winners. Throughout her school years classmates considered MacDonald the “class artist” and teachers called on her when they needed drawings for their classroom.¹⁰⁰

When Joan Schulze was seven, she entered a drawing competition sponsored by Red Goose Shoes and won \$5 for drawing the Red Goose. In addition, she always included

⁹⁶ MacDonald interview from Metzler, 39.

⁹⁷ Jean Ray Laury, interview by author, Clovis, CA, November 30, 2009.

⁹⁸ Judith Content, interview by author, Palo Alto, CA, December 16, 2009.

⁹⁹ Therese May, interview by author, San Jose, CA, October 15, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, interview; Metzler, 34-35.

colorful maps and drawings on school reports to be sure she got a good grade. Art also became an escape for her and she would ride her bike to the Art Institute of Chicago; as the oldest girl of six children she was frequently expected to be a second mother to her younger siblings. Her limited freedom became especially important after her younger brother contracted polio and family attention focused on his recovery.

The childhood memories of art-related failures are just as vivid as the successes. The Art Institute was also connected to one of Joan Schulze's biggest disappointments as a child; she applied twice to win a coveted place in the children's Saturday program at the School of the Art Institute and twice she came in second. Schulze attributes her fierce determination as an artist to this denied opportunity. She went once with the classmate who had been chosen to attend. "I just wandered up and down the halls and smelled all the chemicals and paint . . . It was huge disappointment not to be chosen, always to be second. But that made me hungry. Because to be an artist, one thing you have to be is hungry. . . not getting to go to the Art Institute just made me want it more."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Schulze, interview.

Part Two: Discovering Quilts

Five of the artists had family quilts at home or learned something about traditional quilts while growing up. (The four other artists, Jean Hewes, Judith Content, Ellen Oppenheimer, and Miriam Nathan-Roberts didn't have quilts at home while growing up and weren't aware of the American tradition until the mid 1970s or later.) One of Jean Ray Laury's earliest memories of quilts was lying under the quilting frame while her mother and friends were quilting. Looking up, the light filtered through the hexagons and the outline of the double seams contrasted with the lighter centers.¹⁰² Yvonne Porcella and her sister had matching Sunbonnet Sue quilts that her mother made but quilt making was not a regular household activity.¹⁰³

For the other three artists, quilts were associated with grandmothers rather than mothers. Linda MacDonald lived with her maternal grandmother's quilts, an Ohio Star and Rose of Sharon. She took their presence for granted and considered them just a part of her family's sewing tradition, which also included knitting, crochet and dressmaking.¹⁰⁴ Therese May grew up with quilts her grandmother made but the artist never saw her making them. ". . .we always had quilts on the beds. I mean, we *used* them. I don't think anybody ever thought of them and said, 'Oh, isn't this cool! I love this quilt. Look at all the colors.' They were just to keep warm." When they became ragged, they were thrown away.¹⁰⁵ Joan Schulze first learned about quilts from a children's book called "The Patchwork Quilt." The book's attraction for Schulze was not the patchwork quilt--she wasn't even sure what one was—but with the main character. The book featured a sick grandmother who each day told stories about the various blocks in her quilt to her grandchild. Schulze didn't have a grandmother so the one in the book became her "make believe grandmother."¹⁰⁶

Like most young women born before 1960, most of these artists acquired competent sewing skills either at home, from a relative or neighbor, or in a home economics class at

¹⁰² Laury, interview.

¹⁰³ Yvonne Porcella, interview by author, Arnold, CA, October 24, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ MacDonald, interview.

¹⁰⁵ May, interview.

¹⁰⁶ Schulze, interview.

school. Because clothing was expensive, they frequently made their own clothes but surprisingly, none of them made quilts growing up, even though others in their homes were making them. However, most already had the necessary sewing skills and equipment when they decided to make their first quilt.

When asked why they made their first quilt, their answers hark back to Lee Nordness's description of how artists discovered craft media. "These people searching for a new way of life found a suitable solution through a *chance* article in a magazine, through conversation, through *wandering* down a hallway in an art department and *stumbling* into a ceramics class . . ." (my italics)¹⁰⁷ Just as some of these artists had "stumbled into textiles" at the university, many of these women "stumbled into quilts"--because they were there.

Linda MacDonald's first quilt making experience was making the crazy quilt with her women's consciousness raising group. She muses about the serendipity of leaving San Francisco for the country, joining the women's group and connecting with the quilt making group. "I often wonder if I had stayed in the Bay Area, and my husband and I hadn't come up here, and I hadn't taken the consciousness raising or hadn't gone to it in the first place, would I have ever even thought about making quilts?"¹⁰⁸

Jean Hewes' interest in quilts was piqued by a similar "*chance*" encounter. She saw an article in the *Chicago Herald* about a woman who used remnants from a fabric store to make a quilt. Hewes didn't know anything about traditional quilt making and had no preconceived idea of what a quilt should look like. However, since she had always sewn most of her own clothes and was well supplied with scraps, Hewes decided to make a quilt, too. Joan Schulze was already teaching embroidery classes when someone told her the local Adult Education Department was looking for a quilt making teacher. Although she didn't think she had time to teach more classes and knew nothing about quilts, when Schulze learned the classes were in the evening and paid well, she quickly taught herself basic quilt making techniques.

Whether they had quilts growing up or later discovered the medium through a chance encounter, most artists initially didn't consider quilts an appropriate medium for art. (The

¹⁰⁷ Nordness, 11.

¹⁰⁸ MacDonald, interview.

exceptions are Jean Ray Laury, whose first quilt was an innovative and original design for her Masters degree project and Judith Content, who didn't refer to her kimono shaped wall pieces as quilts until the mid 1990s.) MacDonald "never thought anything about them"¹⁰⁹ and Schulze "had a very poor opinion of quilts."¹¹⁰ Hewes didn't know anything about traditional quilts. "I thought of quilts as fabric puzzles to be used as bedcovers."¹¹¹

Most women made a traditional style quilt before attempting original designs, usually as an exercise to gain technical skill. Therese May called herself just a housewife who started making quilts. She began making them in 1965 while still living in Wisconsin explaining, "It was kind of part of being a housewife, putting quilts on beds." After moving to California ". . . I decided that I was going to go back to school and get my Masters degree. But in the meantime I kept on sewing. Pretty soon I was making pictures with cloth."¹¹² After making a traditional crazy quilt with the feminist consciousness raising group, MacDonald made a few more quilts but began designing her own repeat blocks rather than copying old ones.¹¹³

Some artists turned to quilt making after first creating wearable art. Yvonne Porcella's first four books¹¹⁴ were devoted to clothing and even her 1986 entry to *The Art Quilt* exhibition was a gigantic kimono. Content ran a successful wearable art business that employed several seamstresses and enjoyed extensive gallery representation.¹¹⁵ Jean Ray Laury was already making quilts when she published *Quilted Clothing*, a book that showed readers how to make vests, jackets and dresses using a variety of quilt making techniques.¹¹⁶

However, once these women each made a few traditional quilts, they quickly realized the quilt's potential for artistic expression. Several elements contributed to the

¹⁰⁹ MacDonald, interview.

¹¹⁰ MacDonald and Schulze interviews.

¹¹¹ Joanne Mattera, *The Quiltmaker's Art: Contemporary Quilts and Their Makers* (Asheville, North Carolina: Lark Books, 1982), 40.

¹¹² May, interview.

¹¹³ MacDonald, interview; Metzler, 38

¹¹⁴ *Five—Ethnic Patterns*, 1977; *Plus Five*, 1978; *Pieced Clothing*, 1980; *Pieced Clothing Variations*, 1981 (Modesto: Porcella Studio).

¹¹⁵ Judith Content, conversation with the author, Palo Alto, CA, January 19, 2011.

¹¹⁶ Jean Ray Laury, *Quilted Clothing* (Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 1981).

quick transition. First, as artists they were receptive to new art media; the quilt was relatively uncharted territory for artists. Second, several women were already applying art principles to other craft media (MacDonald to weaving, Hewes to ceramics, and Oppenheimer to ceramics and glass) so it was a small step to incorporate quilts into their art practice. Third, since these artists were not steeped in traditional quilt designs it was easier for them to see new and innovative possibilities for quilts. Finally, quilts had been acknowledged by a New York art museum as art and in the late 1960s and early 1970s received wide recognition in the national media.

In addition to the creative possibilities quilts offered, artists were also drawn to the aesthetic qualities of the medium and format.¹¹⁷ They expressed a love of fabric—its tactile qualities, color, and pattern. It was often their attraction to textiles that led them to begin working in other fiber media before focusing on quilts. The artists readily acknowledged the complex historical connotations inherent in quilts and appreciated the nonverbal messages they conveyed. For Laury, the quilt offered “an opportunity to produce an article of personal value, practical in nature and aesthetic in design.” Quilts were the perfect antidote to mass-produced, impersonal objects common in everyday lives.¹¹⁸ MacDonald appreciated the immediacy of fabric and quilts both for the artist and the viewer. “There is no distance between a person and fabric, especially when it has all these romantic and nostalgic feelings. Already, you have an incredible attraction.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ James, 16-22.

¹¹⁸ Laury, *Quilts and Coverlets*, 15

¹¹⁹ Metzler, 38

Part Three: Women's Work

Most women were married and at home with young children when they began making quilts; their husbands provided the main family economic support. Freed from a pressing need to earn a living either in a profession they had trained for or with domestic textile production, women were able to pursue quilt making as a creative outlet or as a means of producing a modest additional income.

Perhaps one of the most striking reasons these women began AND continued making quilts was the strictly pragmatic nature of quilt production. Unable to paint, make ceramics or warp a loom with young children underfoot, they found needlework, especially quilt making, to be portable, interruptible and easily resumed. As the artists transitioned into quilt making they often gave up working in another less accommodating medium. The design, cutting, and sewing elements could be compartmentalized and construction completed in small, portable sections. Equipment wasn't dangerous (for the most part) or toxic. They could begin a project in the corner of a room, fold it up and store it in a drawer, or transport quilt pieces in a small bag.¹²⁰

When asked how having young children affected their work, the artists uniformly appreciated the interruptible and resumable nature of quilt making and realized its compatibility with the stay at home mother lifestyle they chose. For Jean Ray Laury it "was the kind of work I could do at home with small children; it didn't take a lot of space and it was kind of immediate."¹²¹ Although Yvonne Porcella was trained as a nurse and

¹²⁰ Judith K. Brown, "A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex," *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 5 (October 1970): 1073-1078 and Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).

About the same time these artists were turning to quilt making, anthropologist Judith Brown published her 1970 article "Note on the Division of Labor by Sex," observing some of the reasons women had historically been assigned to domestic textile production. Brown theorized that women's work was inextricably linked to the biology of reproduction, not simply that women have babies but that they have the physiological capability to feed and nourish the child (e.g. breast feeding,) something men can't do. So that a woman's productive labor is not lost to society while she is raising children, jobs culturally and historically assigned to women were compatible with childrearing. To maximize a mother's time, the jobs were located in places that were safe for young children, usually close to or in the home. The tasks required little concentration, were usually dull and repetitive, and easily interrupted and resumed. Textile production fit all these requirements. The majority of the artists represented illustrate that Brown and Barber's theories held true even in the late 20th century.

Elizabeth Barber expanded significantly on Brown's theories in her later publication.

¹²¹ Laury, interview.

worked in the operating room, she too appreciated the nature of sewing and quilt making, “What I learned was that I could do sewing piecemeal. I could do little bits at a time.”¹²²

Jean Hewes recounts, “I used to work in the living room and I would sew my quilts in the bedroom. I had the cloth pinned up in the living room and they [the children] would be running in and out with their friends and I would just be working. I could stop and give them a sandwich or whatever. But I actually was right there practically where they were.”¹²³

Unlike the oil painting she currently focuses on, Linda MacDonald now realizes that the nature of quilt making may have also been part of its early attraction for her. “It was something I could do with children around. I didn't consciously realize that until now when I've been oil painting. It was a lot easier to have so many things around that you could put down and pick up and work on.”¹²⁴

Joan Schulze and Judith Content, both working as full time artists in their home studios, accommodated their young children by setting boundaries or including them in the creative process. Judith, the mother of one daughter, felt having a home studio gave her a lot of flexibility. “I could be home and she could be with me and she really enjoyed playing in the studio . . . I had a great babysitter. And she [her daughter] was a good napper. I got very efficient with my time . . . I got very good at doing a lot in short, small periods of time.” Also, her preferred technique of *shibori* dyeing meant she could compartmentalize wrapping, dyeing, unwrapping and washing the fabric, designing, sewing and quilting and plan a particular activity for the time available. Content included her daughter in her work, inside and outside the studio. “. . . I love [gallery] openings, so we went to a lot. My daughter's first sentence was, "Go something else.”¹²⁵

Schulze realized in the late 1960s that she was doing stitchery full time, carrying a project with her wherever she went. Stitchery work was not only portable but “it's something you could do when you've got four kids . . .” She was prepared to return to her

¹²² Porcella, interview.

¹²³ Hewes, interview.

¹²⁴ MacDonald, interview.

¹²⁵ Content, interview.

profession teaching elementary school when her children were older, but instead chose to pursue art full time. One day in the spring of 1970, after the children left for school,

*I decided that I was going to announce to everybody that I was now a full time artist . . . I told them I'd still be their mother, that I'd work at night, and that things were going to change. I needed to take the laundry room as my studio. I set up ground rules that when the door was closed, that meant I was working. I announced that now I am a professional artist and this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.*¹²⁶

Miriam Nathan-Roberts was reluctant to have children, fearing that one couldn't make art and have children. She was forty years old and had already begun making quilts when her son was born. "Of course, the best thing I ever did was to have a child."¹²⁷ Similar to Nathan-Roberts, Ellen Oppenheimer was well established as a quilt artist before her son was born in the mid 1990s. When he was an infant she found it hard to concentrate, and now he is a teenager she feels a similar distraction, but feels being a mother has enriched her art.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Schulze, interview.

¹²⁷ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

¹²⁸ Ellen Oppenheimer, interview by author, Oakland, CA, December 3, 2009.

Part Four: The Economics of Being an Artist

Most of the artists in this study grew up in college-educated families. Even if both parents had not gone to university, the parents usually expected or encouraged their daughters to seek higher education. However, the encouragement was often with the admonition, "Learn something useful. Study something so you can get a job and support yourself if you have to." Most artists studied to be teachers or nurses, two of the main professions open to women in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and often combined teaching with degrees in art related fields. For example, after Laury's father asked her "What do you think you are going to do with an art degree?" she got a teaching degree so she could teach art. "It was a way of staying in art and being able to support myself."¹²⁹

Because MacDonald had a Bachelors degree in art, she was asked to teach art at the local Continuation High School; she eventually obtained a teaching certificate and taught high school for the next twenty years. Nathan-Roberts earned her Masters in Educational Psychology and teaching credential in arts education at University of California, Berkeley; she also taught in the public school system. Schulze received a Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) and taught elementary school for several years. Porcella, who became a nurse rather than a teacher, and Schulze, are the only interviewees who received no formal art training at the university.

These women were largely freed from the necessity of earning a living by selling their work. When they began making quilts, it was not with the intention of supporting themselves through sales, and most had other income or husbands who provided the primary means of support. Much like their university art professors who didn't need to support themselves through art sales, a similar economic freedom gave quilt artists license to pursue radical forms of expression.

Although none of the artists sought to become the major family wage earner, it was a point of pride to have their own income or meant a higher standard of living for the family. "I never *had* to work; I worked as a nurse out of pride so I could have an income. That sense of pride has driven me but also, I am grateful that everybody in my family has

¹²⁹ Laury, interview.

accepted that.”¹³⁰ Judith Content always took her earnings very seriously; her income was a large part of the household budget.¹³¹

Although each artist approached the economics of being an artist differently, sometimes trailblazing in uncharted territory of the burgeoning art, craft and quilt worlds, two main approaches to income generation emerge. Five women, Judith Content, Jean Ray Laury, Therese May, Yvonne Porcella and Joan Schulze, worked as full time professional artists and derived the bulk of their income from sales of work, or quilt-related teaching, lecturing or writing. The second group, Linda MacDonald, Ellen Oppenheimer, and Miriam Nathan-Roberts, continued to make quilts, perhaps fewer in number than those in the first group, only occasionally lectured or taught, and derived their main income from other employment, often in an art related profession like teaching art. Jean Hewes is the one exception and falls outside even these broad categories. She neither taught nor lectured, nor was she employed outside the home.

Teaching, lecturing, writing

Eight out of nine artists taught classes, mostly to traditional quilt makers who wanted to explore alternative techniques, or lectured to various women’s and quilt groups. Why did some artists choose to teach and lecture regularly and others only infrequently? The level of participation in these activities depended on three factors: the artist’s technique and working style, their inclination for self-promotion, and whether or not they were employed outside the home.

Yvonne Porcella and Jean Ray Laury, the two most active teachers and prolific writers, reflect the technique dependent and self-promotional nature of teaching. As Porcella learned early in her career, “I always thought promotion was important—self promotion . . . I was selling a technique as well as myself.” She printed her first book in 1977, a garment making book, to accompany the class she taught. After it was published, she realized that her name was in very small print, and when the book was stacked on bookracks in stores, no one could see it. From then on, her name and book title were at

¹³⁰ Porcella, interview.

¹³¹ Content, interview.

the top of the book in large letters. Throughout her career, Porcella maintained a busy teaching schedule, published nine books, successfully “selling herself and a technique.”¹³²

Jean Ray Laury taught a wide variety of techniques ranging from basic quilt making skills, to quilted clothing and image transfer methods. She also taught design principles, imparting her creative philosophy, so eloquently stated in her writings. “At its best, a quilt is a personal expression—not a mimic of the ideas or designs or color preferences set down by someone else. Original design is not beyond the capacity of any homemaker or student or quilt maker.”¹³³ Her sense of humor made her not only a popular teacher but also in demand as a motivational speaker. She especially enjoyed teaching a group of educated women who were often uncertain of their talents. Laury said, “Working with them was great because I felt it was so worthwhile. They spent all their time and energy supporting everybody else, and they were rarely getting support themselves.”¹³⁴

Therese May also frequently taught workshops for quilt makers and encouraged students to paint and embellish their quilts. Similarly, Judith Content’s and Joan Schulze’s teaching focused primarily on techniques, *shibori* dyeing and photo transfer techniques respectively. Schulze also wrote and published; however, her books focus on her artwork and poetry rather than technical instruction.

The three artists employed outside the home, Linda MacDonald, Miriam Nathan-Roberts and Ellen Oppenheimer, all occasionally taught or lectured in addition to making art. Their light teaching schedules reflect the technique dependent nature of teaching. MacDonald felt the only “new” technique she had to offer was her method of air brushing on fabric. The process required expensive equipment, specialized facilities, and hours of practice to master the skill and MacDonald didn’t feel it was a marketable class. Also, taking time from her job at the Continuation High School posed an impediment. “There were many people who were teaching at quilt symposiums all over the country for a week or two at a time. With my high school teaching job, I didn’t really think that was fair of

¹³² Porcella, interview.

¹³³ Laury, *Quilts & Coverlets*, 12.

¹³⁴ Laury, interview.

me to do. So I would teach a few places in the summer and then teach full time at the school here.”¹³⁵

Oppenheimer, who has held various jobs outside the home, didn’t promote herself. “I have done lectures but I don’t sell myself. I am not out there on the circuit trying to do workshops and lecture.”¹³⁶ In addition, the artist developed an extremely technical method of machine inlay piecing to realize her designs, one that she admits is not highly marketable.¹³⁷ “. . . I always felt like I didn’t have that much to teach. I felt like I had this bizarre way of working and didn’t feel like it was anything valuable to people because they weren’t going to work like that. Well, maybe one or two people!”¹³⁸

Nathan-Roberts attributed her light teaching schedule more to temperament than technique: “I like teaching quilt making a lot. I haven’t been very active in pursuing quilting jobs.”¹³⁹

*Exhibitions and Sales **

All the artists exhibited their work in art, craft, and textile only museums and galleries, and participated in mixed media, craft, fiber art and art quilt only exhibitions. As with teaching and lecturing, exhibition and sales primarily depended on self-promotion. In addition, each artist’s production and particular working style affected how frequently they exhibited and how many quilts they sold. It may be coincidental, but the three artists who also had other jobs, MacDonald, Oppenheimer and Nathan-Roberts, made large, technically complex quilts that were hand quilted.¹⁴⁰ Their working methods

¹³⁵ MacDonald, interview.

¹³⁶ Oppenheimer, interview.

¹³⁷ Ellen Oppenheimer, *Threads Magazine*, “Fabric Puzzles: Inlay your pieces for a freewheeling quilt,” October/ November 1990. 39-41.

¹³⁸ Oppenheimer, interview.

¹³⁹ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

¹⁴⁰ Both Nathan-Roberts and Sarah Hershberger hand quilted Nathan-Robert’s quilts

*For purposes of this paper, a museum refers to a non-profit institution that exhibits objects that may or may not be for sale. A gallery refers to a commercial establishment whose primary goal is to sell the objects they exhibit. Gallery representation refers to a long-term partnership between a gallery and artist, longer than a single exhibition of the artist’s work.

dictated their annual production would be low and employment further limited the time they had to devote to quilt making.

Schulze and May were prolific exhibitors in the 1970s and 1980s and a look at some representative venues illustrates the range:

Schulze claims to be her own best marketing tool, early on asking for and getting museum and commercial gallery one-woman shows. In the 1970s and 1980s she had solo or featured exhibitions at the Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara (1975), Montalvo Center for the Arts, Saratoga (1977), Palo Alto Art Center, (1978), and Center for Visual Arts, Oakland (1984). She exhibited with the Bay Area Arts and Crafts Guild (1972-1975, 1981) and enjoyed the Bay Area Arts and Crafts Guild Invitational exhibits that combined textile, clay, glass and wood works by both male and female artists. “You were bouncing against some very high-powered [male artists] men. Your work had to stand up to their work.” She exhibited her work in art galleries that have never shown or represented fiber artists (Smith Anderson, Palo Alto, 1993.) Schulze also participated in art quilt only shows like *The New California Quilt* at the California Crafts Museum, San Francisco (1984), and *Five Artists: Quilts* at the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery (1986). The artist first participated in Quilt National in 1989.¹⁴¹ Over the years Schulze has enjoyed representation by a variety of galleries.

At the encouragement of artist David Gilhooly, Therese May showed her first quilt in a mixed craft media exhibition at the Walnut Creek Civic Art Center in 1969, *Animals, Quilts and Blunt Instruments*. This was to be a pivotal experience in May’s professional life; Jean Ray Laury saw the *Therese* quilt and included it in her second book, *Quilts and Coverlets*. May commented, “With

¹⁴¹ Schulze, interview and Joan Schulze et al., *The Art of Joan Schulze*, (San Francisco: Custom & Limited Editions, 1999), 150-153.

things like this happening, my identity as an artist gradually came into consciousness again.”¹⁴²

May also held solo exhibitions at De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara (1981), Fiberworks, Oakland (1984), and the San Jose Museum of Art (1985). She participated in *The New California Quilt* (1984) as well as national fiber and art quilt group exhibitions. The artist was a regular participant at Quilt National from 1983 onward. During the 1970s and 1980s, May didn't have gallery representation but sold her quilts fairly regularly.¹⁴³

Two large and lucrative commissions for the San Jose Convention Center in 1986 convinced May she could support herself as an artist; the event also empowered her to get a divorce. For the next several years she augmented her income by teaching more and through “production work”—making and selling t-shirts, sweatshirts and small quilts adorned with her imaginary animals and fish.

Like Schulze, Yvonne Porcella excelled at self-promotion. However, Porcella exhibited far more frequently in community, state and national quilt shows and in two decades participated in just a few group fiber shows. During the 1970s, when she was making and teaching wearable art, she exhibited primarily in wearable art exhibitions. By the 1980s, when she began making more quilts and her kimonos were designed more for the wall than for the body, she exhibited in art quilt exhibitions. Her work was included in *The New California Quilt* (1984) and *Five Artists: Quilts* (1986). She has had gallery representation off and on, enjoying a steady relationship in the 1980s with the Connell Gallery in Atlanta. “I've sold a fair amount but I still have a lot of inventory.” Porcella began exhibiting at Quilt National in 1983 and was a juror in 1989.¹⁴⁴ May, Porcella and Schulze were also included in McMorris and Kile's *The Art Quilt* exhibition.

Jean Ray Laury never had a dealer or gallery representation. “I never sold a lot of work . . . I would have an exhibit and sell pieces. Mostly I worked on commission with

¹⁴² May, unpublished interview with Katherine Huffacker conducted for *Artists and Archives* Exhibition, Euphrate Gallery, De Anza College, Cupertino, CA, July 12, 1981.

¹⁴³ May, interview; May resume undated.

¹⁴⁴ Porcella, interview; Porcella resume dated 2008.

architects. That was the best paying, and it was also the most enjoyable . . .interior designers were less willing to let you do what you wanted, but architects were wonderful to work with in that way.”¹⁴⁵ Laury is the only quilt artist to participate regularly in the triennial *California Design* exhibitions during the 1960s and early 1970s. She is also the only interviewee never to participate in Quilt National; it can’t be determined from her interview whether she never entered or her work was not accepted.

Linda MacDonald prefers multi media exhibitions, especially ones that combine craft media with painting, drawing and printmaking. “I find that . . .the multimedia approach makes it very rich . . .and I usually sell something whenever I am in a show, which is nice.”¹⁴⁶ MacDonald did have gallery representation off and on and explains, “I think it is difficult to find a gallery that really knows the breadth of your work and believes in you . . .” During the 1980s, MacDonald exhibited her works far less than May and Schulze, a schedule that may reflect both her slow production, high school teaching job, and return to school for a Masters degree. The artist struggles with the subjective process of pricing: “I am not giving it [my work] away but I also don’t want to have real high prices. I think you just have to look at the market and see what other people are selling for and come up with a price you feel comfortable with. It’s very subjective and the economy goes up and down.”¹⁴⁷

Ellen Oppenheimer isn’t interested in marketing her work and doesn’t feel compelled to sell it. “But my work isn’t all that easy to sell . . .it is so geometric that it’s not going to go in a hospital [or facility like that.]” Also, she works slowly, usually producing only one large quilt a year.¹⁴⁸

Miriam Nathan-Roberts claims to be the “most un-business like person and disorganized thinker that I know.” She doesn’t enter shows because the entry forms usually linger in a big pile until the entry deadlines pass. Troubled by how to price her

¹⁴⁵ Laury, interview.

¹⁴⁶ MacDonald interview.

¹⁴⁷ MacDonald, interview and online resume <http://www.lindamacdonald.com/> (accessed February 19, 2011).

¹⁴⁸ Oppenheimer, interview.

quilts, she doesn't seek out sales, instead telling those who ask, "They're too expensive for you."¹⁴⁹

Jean Hewes entered and was accepted regularly to Quilt National and included in other national exhibitions of art quilts, including *The Art Quilt* in 1986. She didn't pursue sales and says, "I still have most of my work."¹⁵⁰

Many elements of Judith Content's professional life fall outside the norms of the other artists. Except for a brief sales job with her silk fabric supplier, Content worked full time as an artist immediately after college graduation in 1979. She didn't have children until several years later, by which time she had already established successful wearable art company. In the mid 1980s, there was strong economy and a commercial market more receptive to fiber art. Content received regular corporate commissions that kept her busy until the early 1990s, when the economy faltered. She has almost always had gallery representation and regularly augmented her income through production work, making and selling scarves and jewelry. "When I started, the way to promote your work was magazines, essentially, or exhibitions or exhibition catalogues. I'm very fortunate to have a really wonderful portfolio of that kind of exposure. Now, I have brick and mortar galleries and virtual galleries, too . . . I just don't have any trouble with sales."¹⁵¹ The apparent ease with which Content found the balance between making art and economic success may depend largely on Content's age; she is the youngest artist in the group. Older women like Jean Ray Laury, Yvonne Porcella and Joan Schulze certainly helped pave the way for Content and opened the public's eyes to fiber art in general. However, Content also operated outside the art quilt world, exhibiting primarily in wearable art and craft media exhibitions. It was not until the early 1990s, when another quilt artist called Content's kimono-shaped wall pieces "art quilts," did Content hear the term. Since the mid-1990s, she has exhibited primarily in art-quilt-only exhibitions and is a regular participant in both Quilt National and San Diego's Quilt Visions.

Based on the interviews, it was impossible to determine if any artists competed or exhibited in more traditional quilt venues, such as the Festival of Quilts show and

¹⁴⁹ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

¹⁵⁰ Hewes, interview.

¹⁵¹ Content, interview.

competition Joyce Gross helped organize for the Santa Rosa Quilt Guild held during the late 1970s,¹⁵² the larger festivals such as the International Quilt Festival, Houston (begun in 1976) or the American Quilter's Show and Contest, Paducah (first contest 1985). If any did exhibit or win prizes in these combination "traditional" and "contemporary" quilt shows, their current résumés do not reflect it.

Could you have supported yourself?

Only a very small percentage of trained artists manage to make a living through selling their artwork and the quilt artists in this study are representative of their counterparts working in other media. None of the artists supported themselves solely through their art and related activities between 1966 and 1986, nor did they expect to. Linda MacDonald never expected to make a living from selling her work and realized that unless she worked as a commercial artist, she was unlikely to earn a livable income.¹⁵³

Oppenheimer has always had a clear vision of the economic realities of being an artist. "I always knew that I would never make the amount of money I wanted to as an artist. I would always have to somehow or other supplement it, which has been exactly my experience and my partner's experience." While they both have had reasonably successful careers, they always felt that what they earned from making art was not enough to live on.¹⁵⁴

When asked if they *could* have supported themselves through their art and related activities, even those with long and successful careers making art, teaching, writing, and lecturing felt it would have been a considerable challenge.

¹⁵² Festival of Quilts, National Quilt Contest & Exhibition, Show Catalogue, April 21, 22, 23, 1978, Santa Rosa, CA. Michael James private papers, Lincoln, NE. Festival of Quilts categories included "Traditional" and "New Look" quilts. Jean Ray Laury was a judge in 1978; Michael James, Chris Wolf Edmonds and Californian Charlotte Patera were prize winners in the "New Look" categories

¹⁵³ MacDonald, interview.

¹⁵⁴ Oppenheimer, interview.

Schulze: “If I weren’t married and had no children, I could possibly have done it.”¹⁵⁵

Laury: “I have wondered that so often. I don’t know if I would have had a very good health plan! If I had my children to support, I probably couldn’t have supported us all. I feel grateful I didn’t have to do that.”¹⁵⁶

Content: “I think I could have, but fortunately I never had to . . . I think I probably would have stepped up the teaching a great deal and been a teacher “on the circuit,” but I don’t really enjoy traveling that much. But if I had to, to keep being an artist, I would have taken some kind of supplemental job.”

Conclusion

The striking similarities in these artists’ lives highlight the relative homogeneity of the group. They are white, mostly middle class, educated women, with similar family backgrounds. When they began making quilts, eight of the women were in what was considered a traditional marriage during the 1950s and 1960s, where the wife stayed home to raise children and the husband was the primary wage earner. After “discovering” quilts, they quickly realized the medium’s artistic potential and turned to creating original designs. They found making quilts compatible with child rearing but continued working in the medium even after their children were grown.

Uniformly, these artists didn’t expect to make a living as an artist and had a back up plan—teaching, nursing and a supportive spouse or partner. Their income was directly related to energy spent promoting themselves, making art and teaching or writing. Résumés and interviews reflect that those who exhibited in the 1970s did so more in art and craft venues and less in quilt or art quilt exhibitions. By the 1980s, this ratio reversed, perhaps a reflection of the growing number of quilt stores, nationwide conferences and festivals, and the interest in art quilts.

¹⁵⁵ Schulze, interview.

¹⁵⁶ Laury, interview.

Despite the promotion of “quilt as art,” the blending of art and craft media, the feminist proclamation that quilts are The Great American Art, and the nationwide quilt revival, art quilts hovered on the fringes of all these classifications. What that meant for these artists was that they straddled practices in several spheres, exhibiting in art and craft centered museums and galleries, and in art quilt only exhibitions, and taught, lectured and exhibited at traditional quilt shows and conferences.

Chapter Three

Introduction

In this chapter we will consider the art quilt's relationship to both quilt and art history and discuss examples of each artists' work.

The art quilt reflects the dual heritage of quilt history and art history, blending quilt making techniques and implicit historic cultural associations with principles of contemporary art. Art quilts accomplish what Jean Ray Laury proposed in 1970, which was to “retain the structural integrity of the traditional quilt and add to it a contemporary approach to color and design . . . [and] achieve a quilt which merges past and present.”¹⁵⁷

Linda MacDonald, as representative of the other interviewees, talked about her work in 1981:

*My subject matter is landscapes in geometrics, fields of space moving in counterpoint with lines, small objects and other fields, while being presented in the medium of fabric. This fusion of disparate elements—cool geometrics with the soft warm quilt fabric—rewards me. The American quilt is not dated or locked in the past but is the arena of a new frontier.*¹⁵⁸

MacDonald achieved what Laury described, merging “the structural integrity of the traditional quilt” and “a contemporary approach to color and design.” Her comment reflects both her art training and desire to move the quilt out of its static recent past.

Compare MacDonald's comment to northern California painter and sculptor Nathan Oliveira's about his work in 1979:

The Site series, whether painting or monotype, are environments with the figures removed. I hope that these paintings have a sense of landscape (luminosity,

¹⁵⁷ Laury, *Quilts & Coverlets*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Mattera, 76.

*space) as much as my figure paintings have a sense of human presence through the gesture in paint. I hope the two concepts will merge.*¹⁵⁹

In comparing the two comments, the intention is to show that both artists—one working in fabric and the other in paint—approach their work similarly. There is no implied corollary that “This quilt is art because it looks like so and so’s painting,” because MacDonald’s and Oliveira’s work look nothing alike. Instead, the comparison illustrates that both artists are developing their own ideas about landscapes in completely different media. They both talk about ideas first and technique or medium second. In this regard, quilt artists owe more to art history than quilt history.

Quilt artists did not sacrifice all references to traditional quilts, but the debt owed to quilt history had more to do with the medium and technique than to design concepts. Like their earlier counterparts, most quilt artists retained the basic quilt structure—a top, batting and backing. They relied on familiar methods of construction—piecing, appliqué and whole cloth. The materials were the same or similar—woven fabric and thread. Nature, familiar objects and color often inspired artists’ designs. The 1970s quilt artists usually worked in the large scale of the original bed quilt, even though they had no intention of putting their quilts on a bed.¹⁶⁰

Where the quilt artists differed significantly from their traditional quilt making predecessors was in their approach to the medium. They expanded their work beyond the traditional quilt shape and size; in doing so their works ceased to be functional bedcovers. They experimented with embellishments familiar to late nineteenth century quilt makers—paint, photo transfer, and embroidery—but developed new processes like air brush painting and glue-based photo transfer. They relied on well-known construction techniques like piecing and appliqué but rejected the technical rigidity of earlier quilt makers, preferring more improvisational methods that better met their expressive needs. They frequently explored subject matter once thought inappropriate for quilts, including modern themes like popular culture and feminism.¹⁶¹ Lastly, these artists occasionally referred to traditional designs but, more frequently, discarded them altogether. Instead

¹⁵⁹ Henry Hopkins, *50 West Coast Artists* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1981), 53.

¹⁶⁰ MacDonald, my interview

¹⁶¹ McMorris, *The Art Quilt*, 60.

they preferred to create completely original compositions, based more on art school principles and their knowledge of the contemporary art world, than on traditional quilt designs.

Expressing themselves in a non-traditional *art* medium, the artists rejected established art hierarchies; by also applying non-traditional methods to the medium, they rejected both histories.¹⁶² Rather than seeking to conform to pre-established norms of quilt making, of which they knew little, they strove to chart new territory in both art and quilt worlds.

Study of twentieth century art movements was part of most artists' university training; after graduation most regularly visited art museums and galleries and read art publications. While a particular painter, sculptor, ceramicist, etc. inspired some quilt artists, they didn't attempt to copy another's work. Their interviews reflect that they were influenced by art in a general way and incorporated multiple influences into their work.

Although most artists made their first quilts for bedcovers based on traditional designs, they quickly began creating original designs. Similar to artists working in other media, they developed a personal style that was clearly identifiable and different from other quilt artists. However, as a group, their work doesn't reflect a "California aesthetic;" there is no unifying theme, approach or style, no "California look." The artists' work more broadly reflects the postmodern art world, not only in their choice of medium, but in the various styles they explore. Influences of Pop and Op Art, Assemblage and Collage, Post Painterly Abstraction, and Minimalism are all readily apparent in their work. In addition, their work sometimes reflects the craft media they also studied in college.

Linda MacDonald expresses the sentiments of many quilt artists: "You can't get away from thinking about [art history and contemporary art] unless you are a naive painter or artist who doesn't know anything about art history. Or, you can just try to forget all about it and just work from your daily life, experiences . . ." ¹⁶³ MacDonald

¹⁶² Auther, 17.

¹⁶³ Metzler interview, 44.

saw herself as part of a larger art historical continuum and was fascinated to see how “art responds to itself.”

The Artists

Jean Ray Laury

Jean Ray Laury was born in Doon, Iowa in 1928, the second of four girls. Her father was an electrician and while she and her sisters were young, her mother was a homemaker.¹⁶⁴ In the 1930s, Laury's family moved to Oak Ridge, Tennessee where she attended elementary and high school; the remnants of a faint southern lilt are still apparent in her speech. She returned to Iowa to attend Iowa State Teachers' College (now Iowa Northern University) where she majored in art and education, combining her interest in art with the practicality of a teaching credential.¹⁶⁵ With a friend, she trekked across the country to California in 1950, planning to get a job teaching. Not realizing she needed a California teaching certificate to work, she instead found a job in the Meteorology Department at UCLA where she met her husband Frank. In 1953, after he was discharged from the Navy, she decided to get a Masters degree at Stanford University while her husband also attended Stanford on the GI Bill.

Although as a child she saw her mother making quilts, Laury didn't actually make a quilt until working on her degree in design at Stanford. She created *Tom's Quilt* in 1956 as both a gift for her young son and as a project for her Masters.¹⁶⁶

*I was allowed to do a project for my graduation. I chose three things related to children and to art. I wanted to make things that were traditional, and do them in a contemporary way. I can't recall now what the other two were, but one of the three was a quilt. * That just changed the world for me.*¹⁶⁷

*The second was a wooden toy. Laury continued to work with wood throughout her career.

¹⁶⁴ Jean Ray Laury, unpublished interview with the author, November 30, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Gross, *Quilters' Journal*, Fall 1979, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Colleen Hall-Patton, "Jean Ray Laury in the 1960s: Foremother of a Quilt Revival," *Uncoverings* 2005, ed. Kathryn Sullivan (Lincoln, Nebraska, American Quilt Study Group, 2005), 79.

¹⁶⁷ Jean Ray Laury, unpublished interview with the author, November 30, 2009.

As an indication of the changing academic approach to art and craft, it is important to note that Laury's Stanford Professor Matt Kahn "allowed" her to use craft oriented materials to create her Masters design projects. She describes with enthusiasm the spontaneity and freedom of cutting shapes out of colorful fabric and assembling them into a whole, a freedom she did not get from painting and drawing.¹⁶⁸

As the oldest quilt maker interviewed for this project, Laury was not only a participant in the late 1950s revitalization of American craft but also served as a role model for thousands of future quilt makers. Without compromising her personal aesthetic she found success in designing projects for magazines. At the same time she found modest commercial success, her work was highly esteemed by her peers; she was accepted into *California Design* exhibitions 8, 9, and 10 (1962, 1965 and 1968.) According to her, "If you were anybody in the craft world, you wanted to be in those shows. It was very prestigious and highly competitive."¹⁶⁹

From the beginning, Laury consciously rejected the mindless reproduction of traditional quilt designs and instead developed a modern aesthetic.¹⁷⁰ She not only creatively merged past and present, she also continued the historical tradition of using quilts to express social or political beliefs. While her early quilts and creations from the late 1950s through the 1960s were primarily decorative, as they were made for magazine audiences, by the mid 1970s she was using quilts to express her social, political and feminist views.

¹⁶⁸ Laury, interview.

¹⁶⁹ Laury, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Laury, *Quilts & Coverlets*, 17.

Figure 1***Barefoot and Pregnant*****1980-1984****46.5” x 46.5”****screen printed**

In one of Laury’s best-known quilts, *Barefoot and Pregnant* (1980) she uses her keen sense of humor to comment on women’s rights and reproductive freedom. Based on a speech given by Arkansas state legislator Paul van Dalsem, Laury recalls the 1980 obituary that inspired her:

. . .when Senator van Dalsem died they had a little article in the local paper and they made a reference to him being called 'the barefoot and pregnant Senator' because of his comment in the legislature. He always claimed he had been quoted out of context. When you went back and read the whole two sentences, it was even worse. And I just thought nobody should forget who that man was and so that is what prompted it [making the quilt]. . .¹⁷¹

Inscribed on the quilt, one block per line, is van Dalsem’s, 1963 speech:

Once upon a time there was a senator from Arkansas
 In a famous speech he said
 “I’ll tell you what we do up here in Perry County when one of our women
 Starts poking around in something she doesn’t know anything about.
 We get her an extra milk cow
 If that don’t work we give her a little more
 Garden to tend
 And if that’s not enough, we get her pregnant and keep her barefoot.

¹⁷¹ Laury, interview.

The phrase “barefoot and pregnant” became associated with the idea that women should not work outside the home and therefore didn’t need shoes, should reproduce willingly and according to her husband’s wishes, and concentrate on the mundane tasks of homemaking. The quote rankled Laury, who felt strongly about a woman’s right to control all these aspects of her life—reproduction, home and work.

Laury claimed that she was not a confrontational person and couldn’t argue politics or feminism loudly or strongly in a group. She could however, make her statement in a quilt. Like Pop Artists, Laury understood and used the power of the comic strip format not so much as a critique of the commercialization of art but as a device that was accessible and understood at a glance. “Nobody turns away from the comic strip format; everybody feels 'I can get this.' So they'll read what I have to say, and I can comment on things that I think are important to me or important to people in general . . .”¹⁷² Planned Parenthood felt her message was important enough to license the quilt and use its image nationwide on their informational literature and publicity posters.

Figure 2

These Is Not Art

1984

57” x 65”

screen printed

Laury clearly poked fun at modern art *and* art quilts in *These Is Not Art* (1984.) Silk screened around the border of the quilt is a quote she saw in the guestbook of an exhibition of contemporary paintings. “These is not art to me all these squares and things . . .real art has—you know—like a Madonna in it . . .” Her quilt is filled with little multi-colored “squares and things,” that are not static but instead dance around the surface. These diminished “squares” could be miniature Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman Abstract Expressionist paintings. By shrinking the often-monumental scale of their paintings, Laury succeeded in diminishing their importance and value. As if to give *her*

¹⁷² Laury, interview.

work the imprimatur of art she stamped a Madonna in the center, thereby proclaiming it “Art.” Laury used humor to continue the debate, “What is art?”

Laury intentionally didn’t try to position herself in the mainstream art world; instead she strategically positioned herself squarely in the quilt world where her audience was primarily female. She was less concerned about the ‘art’ part of art quilt than she was about its message. She, like many quilt artists, dislikes the term “art quilt,” explaining, “I don’t like the word ‘art quilt,’ because it suggests that you have to tell somebody that this is art. ‘Now you are looking at art whereas these are just quilts.’”¹⁷³

Laury’s long career of over fifty years defies summation in a few paragraphs. She worked in a wide variety of media (wood, felt, fabric, paper, paint), techniques (piecing, appliqué, silkscreen, photo transfer) forms (quilts, panels, clothing, dolls, toys) and altered her style to reflect her message (comic strip, traditional block, medallion.) One aspect of her work rarely varied; her sense of humor.

¹⁷³ Laury, interview

Yvonne Porcella

Yvonne Porcella, (b. 1936) earned a Bachelor of Science in nursing from University of San Francisco in 1958. For almost 20 years she worked as an operating room nurse and raised four children on the family almond ranch. As a young wife and mother she made clothing and then began weaving her own cloth. During the 1970s Porcella was active in Northern and Southern California Handweavers Guilds. Inspired by her own extensive collection of Asian textiles and garments, she taught classes on clothing design and wearable art. In 1980, she exchanged yarn for fabric and began making quilts.¹⁷⁴

Her first quilts were kimono-shaped, intended both for the wall and the body, reflecting her clothing design background. However, when her quilted kimonos were exhibited at Quilt National (1981, 1983, 1985) in the early 1980s, the innovative work was seen as a challenge to the traditional definition of the quilt.¹⁷⁵ Porcella's 1985 entry to *The Art Quilt* exhibition, a giant thirteen-foot tall kimono, was not only "beyond bed-sized"¹⁷⁶ but far beyond human scale as well. The artist pushed the boundaries about what could be considered a quilt *or* a kimono.

Porcella's work is based on color and movement. She favored bright bold colors for her abstract rectilinear pieced quilts but was also comfortable combining a softer pastel palette and fabric collage technique. Her imagery was often self-referential as she explored themes from her daily life. However, her contemporary iconography was familiar to a larger audience and her experiences broadly shared.

Throughout her career, Porcella worked in two distinct styles: abstract compositions of simple pieced shapes and free-form fabric collage. She favored two different color palettes, one of commercially manufactured fabric in bright clear colors and another consisting of her own hand painted silks in softer, delicate pastels; she sometimes combined the two in the same piece. For her bold abstract compositions, Porcella pieced simple shapes common in traditional quilts—strips, squares, triangles and half squares--but reassembled them in non-traditional abstract compositions. (Her technique may also

¹⁷⁴ Porcella, interview.

¹⁷⁵ McMorris and Kile, 68.

¹⁷⁶ McMorris and Kile, 68.

reflect the early 1980s introduction of the rotary cutter, a tool that made it easier and faster to cut accurate strips and rectilinear shapes.) She grounded the profusion of color with her signature black and white checkerboard. She explained the pragmatic way the checkerboard pattern came about: While working on her 1980 book *Pieced Clothing*, the printer suggested she incorporate black and white in her work to make it easier for the scanner to calibrate contrast.¹⁷⁷

The artist occasionally hand quilted her work but her piecing techniques made hand stitching difficult. Most works are machine quilted or constructed so the quilting is part of the quilt's assembly; as each completed section is joined to another, Porcella stitched the seam through batting and backing.¹⁷⁸

Porcella, a self-taught artist, has won numerous prestigious awards in the quilt world, including being named to the Quilters Hall of Fame (1998) and receiving the Silver Star Award at Houston International Quilt Festival (1998). In 1989 she founded the Studio Art Quilt Association, the first professional organization for quilt artists.

Figure 3

Taking the Greyhound to Bakersfield

1986

71" x 76"

Porcella made *Taking the Greyhound to Bakersfield* (1986) at a time when she was looking for new direction in her work. When she reorganized her studio she discovered the Pope fabric, printed in Cameroon in honor of his visit there in 1985.¹⁷⁹

The quilt was the first in a series of personal narrative quilts. Porcella combined images of Pope John Paul II, a geisha, flag bunting, stars and several pompadour-sporting

¹⁷⁷ San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, *Yvonne Porcella: Bold Strokes* (San Jose, CA: San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, 2010), 8.

¹⁷⁸ Quilt National, *New Directions for an American Tradition* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd, 1983), 35.

¹⁷⁹ Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd, 1987), 63.

rock ‘n roll figures with her familiar pieced elements—checkerboard blocks, pieced strips, rectangles of stars and squares of star flag bunting--all set on the diagonal. Closer inspection reveals smaller images of two presidents and the statue of liberty. The overall layout resembles the patchwork of farmland in California’s Central Valley where Porcella lived. The geisha refers to her visit to Japan in 1986, a trip that inspired her to seek a new artistic direction.¹⁸⁰

The quilt also referred to the artist’s deep spirituality and religious beliefs. Raised in a Catholic household, she attended parochial schools from elementary grades through college. For Porcella, the Pope’s visit to California in 1987¹⁸¹ was a religious as well as popular event. The event gave the quilt its title: Everyone attending the Pope’s visit was required to arrive by chartered bus. The quilt was her vision of riding on one of those buses and all the people she might see riding through towns in the Central Valley of California.¹⁸² *Taking the Greyhound to Bakersfield* is Porcella’s personal celebration of popular American culture.

¹⁸⁰ San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles, *Yvonne Porcella: Bold Strokes*, 18.

¹⁸¹ <http://www.blujay.com/item/POPE-JOHN-PAUL-II-Pastoral-Visit-to-United-States-1987-3022200-3408765> (accessed February 27, 2011)

¹⁸² Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt*, 63.

Joan Schulze

Joan Schulze (b. 1936) grew up in Chicago, the second child and oldest daughter of immigrant parents. She was interested in art as a child and often rode her bicycle to the Art Institute of Chicago to view her favorite painting, Georges Seurat's *La Grand Jatte*. Although her parents saw no need for her to attend college, Schulze was determined to go and won a scholarship to the University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana. She graduated in 1959 with a Bachelor of Science in Education. She taught elementary school for the next several years, married, and then moved to California with her husband in 1967.

She began doing “stitchery,” as embroidery was then called, and joined the Peninsula Stitchery Guild (PSG), in the late 1960s. PSG members, most of whom had studied art, approached their work as professional artists and held regular juried exhibitions.¹⁸³ There was a level of seriousness that Schulze found attractive; she too, was learning how to be a professional artist. She studied with Constance Howard, the former head of the textiles program at Goldsmith’s School of Art in London. Howard made several trips to the Bay Area to teach contemporary embroidery workshops in the early 1970s.¹⁸⁴

Schulze was vaguely aware of quilts but didn’t consider the medium a serious one. “At that time [the early 1970s] I didn’t even look at quilts. It wasn’t even in my thoughts. I didn’t like quilts. I didn’t go to quilting exhibitions. I had a very poor opinion of quilts.”¹⁸⁵ However, a friend mentioned that the local Adult Education Department was looking for a quilt making teacher, and since the job paid well and the classes were at night, Schulze jumped at the opportunity to teach. She knew nothing about quilt making and for the next six months she taught herself, staying one step ahead of her students.¹⁸⁶

Throughout most of the 1970s, Schulze continued to do stitchery, but by 1980 quilt making had captured her complete attention. She experimented with various photo transfer techniques, including cyanotype, and eventually developed a distinctive image

¹⁸³ Schulze, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Joan Schulze et al., *The Art of Joan Schulze*, (San Francisco: Custom & Limited Editions, 1999). 13.

¹⁸⁵ Joan Schulze, interviewed by Le Rowell, August 4, 2003, interview #CA94107-001, transcript, Alliance for American Quilts/Quilters’ Save Our Stories, <http://www.allianceforamericanquilts.org/qsos/> (accessed September 12, 18, 2010).

¹⁸⁶ Schulze, interview.

transfer method of her own. She painted archival bookbinder's glue onto photocopied pictures and stuck the paper to silk fabric. When the paper was peeled away, the image remained on the fabric. A talented photographer, Schulze used her own images as well as commercial ones torn from magazines.¹⁸⁷ With her glue process, she could make the transferred image opaque or transparent, smooth or textured by varying the quantity of glue applied and brush size. Even though Schulze used mass produced magazine pictures, the result is a unique image, one that could not be duplicated; the paper copy was destroyed in the glue transfer process and the exact brush strokes were unrepeatable.

Schulze didn't keep a sketchbook or use preliminary drawings; once she has made a drawing she was bored with the idea. She preferred to work in an intuitive collage technique, one she equated to her other passion, writing poetry. To construct a quilt, she gathered her fabric images, arranged and rearranged them, so that by the end of the day she might end up with two or three quilts, each one having evolved and each exploring a different idea.¹⁸⁸

Her iconographic imagery was inspired by modern culture and her extensive travels. Rather than trying to recreate visual landscapes, she produced an impression of place. She combined images of clocks and watches, beautiful women and text, to comment on modern society, cultural values, materialism and the temporality of life.

Figure 4

California

1976

104" x 96"

cotton, batik on cotton, pieced, appliquéd, hand quilted

One of Schulze's earliest quilts, *California* references traditional quilt blocks, but visually and metaphorically looks beyond the patterned foreground to an impressionistic California vista. Like many quilts from the mid 1970s, it illustrates the artist's urge to apply new designs and techniques to the quilt format while still honoring traditional quilt

¹⁸⁷ Schulze, interview.

¹⁸⁸ Schulze, interview.

patterns. As if looking out of a cave, rigid quilt blocks have been chiseled away to allow the viewer to see beyond. The batik landscape captures the characteristic golden hills and luminous quality of California light. Like the state it portrays, the quilt is also enormous in size.

California was one of fifty finalists in the Good Housekeeping National Quilt Contest. Unfortunately, while it was in New York for final judging, it was destroyed in a storage facility fire.

Figure 5

Aroma

1997

70" x 53"

silk cotton paper, monoprinted, blueprint process, photo transfer process, machine pieced and quilted

Like the implied ruins in *California*, there is an element of decay in *Aroma*. Images of tulips, perfume bottles, clocks and beautiful women are obscured by the chalky white glue residue, looking more like flaking Renaissance frescoes than symbols of luxury. A dark patterned surround frames the chalky white pictures of coveted objects, a setting that makes them appear even more precious.

Tulips and perfume bottles have personal associations for the artist and universal meaning for viewers. In the early 1990s, the artist taught and traveled in the Netherlands where she saw colorful field after field of tulips. In *Aroma*, the artist reminds us not only of the flower's beauty and ephemeral nature, but also of the tulip's historical reputation as a status symbol. The work refers to the Dutch 17th century "tulip mania" that resulted in the rapid rise and fall of tulip bulb prices, and subsequent financial ruin of speculators. Schulze juxtaposes the 17th century symbol of luxury (and decline) with perfume bottles from prestigious modern perfumeries, linking the past with contemporary culture.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Schulze, *The Art of Joan Schulze*, 58.

Perfume bottles also play a role in Schulze's personal visual narrative. As a young girl, she collected all types of colorful bottles and one day her mother disposed of several of the prized objects. The action might have been an effort to discourage competition among Schulze's five siblings for physical space or to subvert the young girl's desire for material objects. However, Schulze responded by hand painting the remaining bottles, giving them an inherent value that her mother had to recognize and respect.¹⁹⁰

Just as Rauschenberg had done during the 1950s in his assemblages and combines, Schulze mixes mass media images and commercial text with bold gestural brushstroke. In doing so she continues the dialogue about the relationship between the everyday object and inner experience (expressionism), posing questions about visual and verbal signifiers.¹⁹¹ The work synthesizes Expressionist, Pop, and Feminist influences to reflect the artist's personal aesthetic.

¹⁹⁰ Schulze, *The Art of Joan Schulze*, 58.

¹⁹¹ Schulze, *The Art of Joan Schulze*, 48.

Jean Hewes

Jean Hewes (b. 1941) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1963 from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. The liberal arts school wasn't the best choice for a budding artist; the university's art department focused more on art history than on drawing and design. The subsequent three years that Hewes studied ceramics (and to a lesser degree, watercolor) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, were to prove more influential to her artwork, both in clay and fabric.¹⁹²

Hewes' ceramics teacher in graduate school, Wayne Taylor, influenced her work, not only the ceramics she made as a student but also the collage style she later developed for her quilts. Taylor had studied in California with Robert Arneson and had adopted the California Funk style. "He used all these hot colors and made all these zany objects . . . I liked to use wild colors. Before that [the early 1960s] ceramics was mostly Oriental in feeling, with mild grays and beiges. Taylor's work had a different look, a different style." While at the university, Hewes assembled large clay slabs to create oddly shaped, non-functional ceramic pots.¹⁹³ However, after Hewes received her Master of Fine Arts degree in 1966, she stopped working with ceramics.¹⁹⁴

After leaving Madison, Hewes and her husband volunteered for the Peace Corps and spent the next two years in Iran; impressions from their travels recur in her work. Upon their return to the U.S. the couple moved several times while Hewes' husband attended business school and began working. They were living in Chicago in 1974, with two infant sons, when Hewes made her first quilt. She saw an article in the Chicago *Herald* about a woman who used remnants from a fabric store to make a quilt. Hewes didn't know anything about traditional quilt making and had no preconceived of what a quilt should look like. "I thought of quilts as fabric puzzles to be used as bedcovers."¹⁹⁵ However,

¹⁹² Hewes, interview.

¹⁹³ Jean Hewes phone interview with Penny McMorris, 1985, McMorris Papers, University of Nebraska Library Archives, Lincoln, NE.

¹⁹⁴ Hewes, interview.

¹⁹⁵ Mattera, 77.

since she had always sewn most of her own clothes and was well supplied with scraps, Hewes decided to make a quilt, too.¹⁹⁶

Her first two quilts were geometric, using squares and rectangles, with an overall format inspired by Persian rugs. While in Iran, she spent many hours in the Teheran bazaar studying Persian rugs as a design source.¹⁹⁷ She was also intrigued by the colorful tile patterns used to decorate many of the mosques.¹⁹⁸

A year later in 1975, Hewes's husband was transferred to San Jose, California, and they moved into a development of newly built "California modern" tract houses designed by Joseph Eichler. Hewes realized she could brighten dark brown wood-paneled walls with fabric "wall hangings," and this was when she realized the full creative potential of quilts.¹⁹⁹

While in California, Hewes turned to a figurative style and completed a series of quilts with images of birds. Over time, the birds took on more human shapes and their wings became arms.²⁰⁰ However, Hewes's figures are only vaguely human and her semi-abstract, amorphous shapes have a surreal quality.

To create her distinctive imagery, Hewes used a process that owed more to the collage techniques favored by the Surrealists, who composed works based on unconscious random association of images, than to traditional quilt appliqué methods. The artist worked intuitively, without a plan or preliminary drawing, feeling that she could achieve a looser, freer look this way. She assembled a wide variety of fabrics and threw them on the floor, feeling how colors, textures and patterns worked together.²⁰¹ From this grouping she selected large pieces of fabric and sewed them together to form a background. After she sandwiched the background top with batting and backing, she pinned it to the wall. From additional fabrics, she cut shapes similar to those she used in

¹⁹⁶ Hewes, interview.

¹⁹⁷ Mattera, 78.

¹⁹⁸ Hewes, interview.

¹⁹⁹ Hewes, interview.

²⁰⁰ Hewes, McMorris Papers, UNL Archives.

²⁰¹ Lark Books, *The New American Quilt* (Ashville, North Carolina: Fiberarts/Lark Books in conjunction with Quilt National 1981), 84.

her free-form ceramic pieces,²⁰² arranged the fabric pieces on the background, and started building her imagery. As she worked, shapes and figures began to suggest themselves,²⁰³ each creative decision informing the next. When she was content with one area, she machine appliquéd the unfinished edges of pieces and then began work on another area. The unfinished edges provided added dimensionality to her work and gave it a forceful, primitive look that the artist liked.²⁰⁴

As Hewes built her quilt, she also pinned in the machine quilting design, using the quilting lines to imply, extend or define additional shapes. Hewes usually used a great deal of machine quilting in her work explaining, “I draw with my sewing machine.”²⁰⁵

The artist used a wide range of fabrics from around the world—silk, cotton, rayon, polyester, glittery brocades with gold and silver threads, and her own and purchased resist dyed or painted fabrics. For additional dimensionality, she occasionally added sequins or imported Indian textiles with *shi sha* mirrors. The artist acquired fabric from a variety of sources, including home decoration and fabric stores and through mail order.

²⁰⁶

With the exception of her University of Wisconsin ceramics teacher Wayne Taylor, other artists influenced Hewes only in a general way. She frequently attended art museum and gallery exhibitions but was not inspired by any one artist in particular. Although Hewes felt as if she were part of a new quilt movement, she didn’t actively engage with other California quilt artists, except for Therese May, who was a friend from Madison.²⁰⁷

Hewes’ enigmatic works challenge the viewer to interpret the artist’s meaning. The artist is reluctant to discuss her work or creative intentions, preferring to let the work do the communicating. “My work has figures in it but I actually don’t like speaking to any of it. There’s an old saying, ‘half of art is in the eye of the beholder.’ So when people

²⁰² Hewes, McMorris Papers, UNL Archives.

²⁰³ Lark Books, *The New American Quilt*, 84.

²⁰⁴ McMorris and Kile, 67.

²⁰⁵ Mattered, 78.

²⁰⁶ Hewes, McMorris Papers, UNL Archives; Hewes, interview.

²⁰⁷ Hewes, interview.

become specific about their work it loses what magic it has; it doesn't communicate as much as before."²⁰⁸

Figure 6

Beach Birds

1977

80" x 111"

machine appliquéd and quilted

Beach Birds is from Hewes' early bird series that marks the beginning of her unique figurative style. Many of her quilts from the 1970s and 1980s are large; *Beach Birds* is gigantic, measuring 80 x 111 inches, and the birds are enormous. The approximately forty inch tall shore birds portrayed in this quilt could represent nightmarishly oversized sandpipers from the California coast or illustrate great blue herons, which actually are over four feet tall. In this work, two birds are set against a background composed of large rectangles in contrasting commercially printed fabrics that include a plaid, calico and a center square of value gradations in solid fabrics. The arrangement creates an abstract landscape, complete with horizon line, into which the artist plants trees and wading birds. Three serpentine tide lines suggest the water's edge; lapping waves hide the birds' feet. Quilting lines extend the leg shape and allude to the birds' hidden feet/appendages. Are we seeing underwater? Other quilting, several areas of slightly bent parallel lines, suggest the wavelets at shore's edge.

Figure 7

Rocketing

1984

92" x 72"

silk, cotton, rayon; machine pieced and appliquéd

²⁰⁸ Hewes, interview.

During the 1980s, Hewes's compositions grew increasingly complex as she added layers of translucent fabrics to disguise and obscure forms and images. "I am interested in the idea of veiling—the veiling of faces and body parts, the veiling of harsh colors to create illusions of depth, translucencies, blending and floating abstractions."²⁰⁹ The artist's intrigue with concealing and revealing forms may relate to her years in Iran and the Muslim women who carefully covered their faces and bodies.²¹⁰

The two fantasy figures in *Rocketing* seem vaguely human, with heads, torsos arms and legs. Their veiled faces contain what appear to be eyes, noses and mouths, but the features are ambiguous and ill defined. The title suggests the enigmatic shapes might be people joyfully "rocketing" around the dance floor; they could just as easily transform into cylindrical rocket ships, ready for blast off.

²⁰⁹ Quilt National, *Quilts: The State of an Art* (West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd, 1985), 48.

²¹⁰ Hewes, McMorris Papers, UNL Archives.

Miriam Nathan-Roberts

Miriam Nathan-Roberts (b. 1942) studied textiles and design as an undergraduate at Cornell University, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1964. In the same year, she came to Berkeley, California to attend the University of California, where in 1966 she was awarded a Master of Arts degree in art education.

For Nathan-Roberts, the quilt made it possible for her to combine two life long passions, her love of fabric and of art. She was teaching and designing needlepoint in the early 1970s when she made her first quilt in a class with Bay Area teacher Roberta Horton. (That quilt, a traditional sampler, is still unfinished!) Nathan-Roberts made several more quilts based on traditional patterns before she realized the quilt surface offered a blank slate on which she could impose her own designs.²¹¹ Once she made that mental and creative leap, she relished the freedom from traditional quilt making rules and expectations.²¹² Nathan-Roberts also appreciated that the quilt permitted her to explore the same art concepts that had intrigued her in college—color, texture, value, repetition of shapes and patterns, and illusions of depth.²¹³

Nathan-Roberts is most well known for her exploration of three-dimensional illusion. Her curiosity is the result of a creative and physiological challenge; Nathan-Roberts lacks depth perception.²¹⁴ Unless she wears special glasses with prisms that help her eyes achieve normal fusion, she only sees in two dimensions.²¹⁵ While this visual impairment made it easier for her to draw and paint (she didn't have to translate three-dimensions into two before putting an image on paper or canvas,) it was the challenge of creating three-dimensional geometric illusions in fabric that drew her to quilt making.²¹⁶ Although she constructs her quilts from carefully planned blocks, using traditional quilt

²¹¹ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

²¹² Miriam Nathan-Roberts, *Miriam Nathan-Roberts: Retrospective*, (San Francisco: C & T Publishing, 2007), 1.

²¹³ Miriam Nathan-Roberts, "Artist Statement," <http://www.miriamnathanroberts.com/about.htm> (accessed January 7, 2011).

²¹⁴ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

²¹⁵ Miriam Nathan-Roberts, "Artist Statement," <http://www.miriamnathanroberts.com/about.htm> (accessed January 7, 2011).

²¹⁶ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

making techniques, her overall imagery owes more to Op Art than to traditional quilt making.

Like Op artists working in other media, the artist incorporates geometric forms and color theory to explore the physiology of human perception.²¹⁷

Figure 8

Lattice Interweave

1983

84" x 84"

cotton and cotton blends; machine pieced; quilting designed by artist and hand quilted by Sarah Hershberger

Nathan-Roberts's interwoven lattice quilts are characteristic of her work from the 1980s and 1990s. To turn a flat quilt surface into what appears to be a three dimensional interweaving, the artist meticulously plots her designs on graph paper and carefully selects precise value gradations of fabric.²¹⁸ By manipulating shades of gray fabric in *Lattice Interweave*, Nathan-Roberts creates three-dimensional stripes that appear to weave over and under each other. Although constructed with only straight lines and seams, the bands also appear to curve and bend, like woven steel cables. The sense of depth is further enhanced through color contrast; the cool gray gradations in the interwoven foreground float in front of the subtly colored diagonally striped background. The quilting lines reinforce the separation; the foreground quilting forms a horizontal and vertical grid format in the woven sections that contrasts with quilted diagonal lines in the colorful background.

The steely gray over and under of the interweavings remind Nathan-Roberts of the numerous bridges in Pittsburgh where she grew up. As a child she would go on long walks with her father, who had studied engineering. Together they would study the steel

²¹⁷ Wilson and Lack, 155.

²¹⁸ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

girders and beams underneath one of the many bridges that arch over the rivers in the city. Her quilts remind her of those childhood images.²¹⁹

Figure 9

Letting Go

1985-1986

70" x 70"

cotton, hand-dyed and hand painted by artist; machine pieced; quilting designed by artist and hand quilted by Sarah Hershberger

Although the artist continues to carefully graph out each dimensional illusion before cutting fabric, the resulting design in *Letting Go* (1985-86) is much more relaxed. Compared to the carefully controlled and rigid grid structure of the earlier *Lattice Interweave*, *Letting Go* may reveal Nathan-Robert's increasing comfort with the quilt medium and growing confidence in her ability to create dimensionality in fabric. As the interlacings unravel, they look less like steel cables and more like party streamers. Some of the woven strips only appear curved because of skillful manipulation of color and form, while other strips are actually curved. The strips of interweaving, softened by the use of blue rather than gray gradated color, vary in size and density to reveal more of the red background. The confetti-like cascade of triangles—both appliquéd and quilted—give the work a celebratory feeling. In *Letting Go*, Nathan-Roberts continues to challenge the viewer's expectations and the reality of what they are actually seeing.

²¹⁹ Nathan-Roberts, interview.

Therese May

Therese May (b. 1943) studied painting at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree there in 1967. She continued her art education at San Jose State University where she was awarded a Masters of Fine Arts in 1974.

May began making quilts while still an undergraduate in Wisconsin. “When my children were small I finished my degree in painting and began making quilts for the beds. Soon I began using photographic images, and my quilts became art objects.”²²⁰ One of her first photographic quilts, *Therese*, 1969 was published in Jean Ray Laury’s pivotal book, *Quilts and Coverlets*.

Until the late 1970s, May’s subject matter focused on domestic scenes, her children, and her collection of salt and peppershakers. In addition to quilt making, she continued to paint and draw, and in 1977 she began drawing and painting fantasy animals.

*A lot of the imagery was from my childhood; things like hallucinations and dream images . . . When I was 3 or 4 years old one night I saw animal heads floating all over the room. They had rainbow outlines, and were mostly cows. . . The original feeling was part of my perception of the world as a child; I wanted to use some of those images as an artistic expression. I don’t remember being scared; I was just watching them like cartoons.*²²¹

Artists like Joan Brown, Roy DeForest and David Gilhooly also inspired May, in that they “gave me permission to tap that source that was already in me, of those fantasy images and childlike imagery.”²²² Her dreamlike images, strange plants and animals, mystical quality and ask viewers to consider, “What is a dream? What is reality?”

The artist claims to be “a compulsive drawer”²²³ and has notebooks full of drawings. She uses the drawings as the basis of a quilt or incorporates the ideas into a larger

²²⁰ Robert Shaw, *The Art Quilt* (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin, 1997), 51.

²²¹ May, interview.

²²² May, Bavor interview; May, Huffaker interview.

²²³ May, interview.

painting. For her quilts, she makes a full size drawing on paper, cuts it up for a pattern, replaces the paper pattern with fabric and satin stitches around each piece. She often leaves raw edges exposed and threads uncut, revealing the sewing process and giving the work an added dimension.²²⁴

May is perhaps most well-known for painting on her quilts. She describes how she began:

*I made a quilt in 1981, Donnie's Pet HorseI got it done and I didn't feel quite right about it. It needed something and it just occurred to me, 'Well I have my paintbrush here, just put a few dabs of paint on it.' That got me going. That was a real discoveryI never stopped going back and forth from quilts to painting but once I discovered I could paint on the quilt, it simplified things.*²²⁵

In combining quilting and painting techniques, May intentionally confuses the boundaries between art and craft.²²⁶ How is an oil painting on canvas so different from acrylic painting on a fabric quilt? In addition to paint, she frequently adds puff paint dots, buttons and beads, until her quilts resemble mixed media collages; the quilt itself becomes a collection of objects.

Figure 10

Therese

1969

90" x 72"

cotton on muslin backing; machine appliquéd, tied

In her quilt *Therese*, May cleverly combined elements from traditional quilt making with Pop Art aesthetics. Like her nineteenth century counterpart, she designed a block and made multiple repeats of it. However, this is no nineteenth century imagery or

²²⁴ Quilt National, *The Quilt: New Directions for an American Tradition* (Schiffer Publishing, 1984), 52.

²²⁵ May, interview.

²²⁶ Quilt National, *The Quilt: New Directions for an American Tradition*, 52.

quilt. Instead of using a geometric or natural form as inspiration, she made herself the subject of the quilt and we see eighty “Thereses.” May incorporated a wide variety of light and dark fabrics, large and small floral, striped and plaid prints in bright and subdued hues, none of them realistic colors for human flesh and hair. Based on her self-portrait, she cut hundreds of fabric pieces to make up the shapes of her face. Although each face looks haphazardly composed, every image was carefully planned and no two are alike. May’s working method assured that each “Therese” was unique and because every block is different, each face seems to have a slightly different expression. The effect is not one of mechanical replication, like Andy Warhol’s *Self Portrait* of the same year, but one of individuality.

Although the media and methods differ, there are similarities between May’s and Pop Art’s critique of popular culture. May’s choice of the quilt medium, resulting in a one of a kind object, rejects mass-production and consumerism. Like Warhol’s silkscreen process, the quilt was not considered a fine art medium. The tactile and dimensional qualities of fabric are the opposite of Pop Art’s flat mechanical methods—either actual or in appearance. Perhaps May is making fun of the art world as if to say, “My quilt looks like what you call art.”

Figure 11

Fish and Chicks

1986

83” x 85”

polyester, cotton, silk, taffeta, acrylic paint; machine appliqué

In *Fish and Chicks*, layers of fantasy creatures burst forth, almost like volcanic residue raining down on an unsuspecting populace. The patterned geography is filled with May’s private mythology and forms a personal visual narrative. May explains the symbolism:

A more apt title might be Fish, Chicks, Tulips, Shamrocks, Braided Rug Pattern and a Christmas Tree. Fish are for the deepest feelings; chicks represent rebirth; tulips are

happiness and childhood; shamrocks are for St. Patrick and the Trinity; the braided rug pattern is for home; the Christmas tree is for the Christ.”²²⁷

May’s work relates to the California Funk artists Roy de Forest and David Gilhooly, who encouraged her to use imaginary creatures in her work, and whose own work similarly embraced a more animated style of working. The naive designs of May’s quilts appeal to a broad audience which can create their own personal narrative from her fanciful creatures.

²²⁷ Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt* (Exton, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 1987), 35.

Linda MacDonald

Linda MacDonald (b. 1946) studied art at San Francisco State University in the late 1960s but left during the student riots there in 1970 before completing a degree. A few years later she returned to school and in 1978 received her Bachelor of Arts degree from San Francisco State; in 1992 she received her Master of Fine Arts from the same university. In addition, she earned a California teaching credential in 1985.

While at San Francisco State in the late 1960s, textile teacher Marjorie Livingston introduced MacDonald to weaving and during the early 1970s, when the artist and her husband lived in a cabin in the Mendocino County woods, she continued to weave off and on.

Although MacDonald's family owned traditional quilts growing up, and as a young girl she knitted, tatted and sewed, she didn't consider any of these forms a worthy medium for art.²²⁸ Linda made her first quilt as part of a feminist consciousness-raising group she joined in 1974, an activity that highlighted "the appropriately rural and woman-oriented" nature of quilts.²²⁹ She decided to make another quilt on her own but since she knew only the crazy quilt techniques she learned from the feminist group project, she checked out from a library book by Michael James and taught herself the basics of quilt making.²³⁰

MacDonald recognized that the quilt's grid structure related to her weaving diagrams and grid drawings, but that quilt making could provide her with more creative flexibility than weaving. The immediacy of the quilt's fabric and resulting audience approachability appealed to her; she was gratified by the warm reception viewers gave to quilts.²³¹ "I noticed the difference in feeling between a person looking at a drawing and a person looking at a quilt that was really remarkable. There is no distance between a person and fabric, especially when it has all these romantic and nostalgic feelings . . ."²³²

²²⁸ Linda MacDonald, Keynote Speech, ". . . *ideas first, techniques later*," Studio Art Quilt Associates Conference, November 1-2, 2002, Oceanside, CA. <http://www.lindamacdonald.com/index.html> (Accessed July 17, 2010).

²²⁹ Mattera, 35.

²³⁰ Linda MacDonald, "Interview with Cover Artist," *Sojourn Magazine* (Fall 1997), 11.

²³¹ MacDonald, Bavor interview; MacDonald, Metzler interview.

²³² MacDonald Metzler interview.

MacDonald's work falls into three distinct stylistic phases.²³³ During the first phase, from the late 1970s until the late 1980s, she created large pieced quilts that explored three-dimensional geometric landscapes. She wanted to go beyond just optical illusion and create "another world you could step into and be surrounded by."²³⁴ She also liked working in large scale—many of these quilts are over ninety inches square. MacDonald graphed out each section of her dimensional quilts, carefully controlling every aspect of the composition. She used only solid color fabric, not prints, feeling solid colors were the closest to pure pigment. When the palette range of commercial fabric became too limited, she began dyeing her own fabric.²³⁵

In the mid 1980s, MacDonald started teaching at a local high school where they had an airbrush and compressor and she began experimenting with the equipment. Airbrush painting "sent me on new path using images, animals, and learning how to paint in an entirely new way, not just abstract."²³⁶ MacDonald developed a new imagery along with the new technique²³⁷ and for the next several years rendered fanciful monochrome figures on fabric that she then assembled into quilts. She continued to work in this style while she completed her MFA in 1992.

The completion of her degree marked another transition in MacDonald's work and the beginning of the third phase. She continued to paint with an airbrush, gradually adding more color to her paintings on fabric. Her imaginary creatures became recognizable northern California plants and animals as both her imagery and message evolved. The artist focused on her immediate world--the intense logging and its effect on the Mendocino forests that surrounded her, and the small town where she lived. She approached often- controversial subjects with sensitivity and a sense of humor that defused some of the community tension.²³⁸ She doesn't think of her work as "environmental art" but prefers to think of herself as a northern California artist who

²³³ Candace Crockett, "The Evolution of an Artist's Imagery," *Surface Design Journal* (Spring 1996), 15-16, 37.

²³⁴ MacDonald, interview.

²³⁵ MacDonald, interview.

²³⁶ MacDonald, interview.

²³⁷ MacDonald, SAQA lecture.

²³⁸ Dot Brovarney, "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: The Art of Linda MacDonald," *Mendocino Arts* (Summer 2010), 20-22.

narrates the issues in her area and addresses how humans relate to nature. Like fellow artist Jean Ray Laury, MacDonald uses humor to express her political ideas in a non-confrontational way, one that viewers often find more acceptable.²³⁹

MacDonald started keeping a sketchbook when she began making airbrushed quilts. “I think a sketchbook is a must. Everywhere I go I doodle and draw. I’ll look back over my sketchbook and see something I am interested in.”²⁴⁰

MacDonald extensively hand quilted her illusionary pieced quilts. The quilting added a secondary design layer to the front and created a separate composition on the back of the quilt. She continued hand quilting longer than most quilt artists, using simple lines in her later, air brushed works. She now uses both hand and machine quilting, basing her choice on how she wants the quilt to look. “I don’t want the quilting to be a distraction but an addition. If the accuracy of hand quilting is what is needed then that is what I will do—if it is a machine line, then that is what I chose.”²⁴¹

Like most of the artists, MacDonald was aware of the national and California art scenes. However, for her work, she tried to “forget all about it and just work from [my] daily life, [my] experiences.”²⁴² She admired Al Held’s work who, between 1979 and 1985, created large-scale abstract paintings with illusionary space. Although he worked in a variety of styles, MacDonald was drawn to his abstract dimensional works; like MacDonald, he was interested in creating “another world.”²⁴³

Figure 12

Salmon Ladders

1986

92” x 92”

painted and hand dyed cotton; machine pieced; hand quilted

²³⁹ MacDonald, interview.

²⁴⁰ MacDonald, interview.

²⁴¹ MacDonald, SAQA lecture.

²⁴² MacDonald, interview.

²⁴³ MacDonald, interview; and “Al Held Paintings: 1979-1985,”

<http://www.nyartbeat.com/event/2008/79FA> accessed February 12, 2011.

Salmon Ladders is one of the last large dimensional pieced quilts MacDonald made and one of most complex. Like a lot of her work, this one has multiple meanings; salmon refers not only to the fabric (“I wanted to use large areas of one color—in this case salmon.”²⁴⁴) but also the salmon fish ladders constructed near dams or barriers to allow fish migration and spawning. Anyone who has seen these fish steps adjacent to California dams recognizes in this quilt the structural components of the actual fish ladders and the frothy cascade of water that flows down them. MacDonald found beauty in the monochromatic color scheme of steel and concrete and reinterpreted it in subtle gradations of pinks and grays. Like her other quilts from this period, this one is elaborately hand quilted emphasizing the three dimensional forms.²⁴⁵

Salmon Ladders presages two directions the artist’s work would take. First, like Therese May, MacDonald discovered that paint could provide another possibility for artistic expression and add another layer of complexity to the artist’s work. Although the extensive hand quilting adds linear and textural elements, MacDonald hand painted white lines in the background—lines too wide to be quilted and too narrow for piecing. She wanted the large areas of salmon color to come alive, perhaps representing the frantic fish working their way upstream. From a distance one sees the painted lines and up close sees both hand quilted and painted lines. The paint and quilting accentuate each other and enliven the entire design. She used paint elsewhere in the quilt to add a heavier linear element but one not so heavy as to be a shape.²⁴⁶ Less than ten years after MacDonald made *Salmon Ladders*, she painted the entire quilt surface.

Second, the quilt presages the artist’s interest in environmental issues, an interest that would soon reveal itself in a figurative way in her air brushed quilts. Although salmon ladders help sustain native fish populations, they and the dams they adjoin are an assault to the natural landscape.

²⁴⁴ Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt*, 47.

²⁴⁵ Shaw, *The Art Quilt*, 67

²⁴⁶ Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt*, 47.

Figure 13***Tree Park*****2002****36 x 48****hand painted and hand quilted**

Northern California forests have always been logged but in the 1980s, large companies saw a last chance to get even the old growth trees out before environmental restrictions halted logging altogether. In doing so, the large timber companies decimated the countryside. For MacDonald's hometown, logging was a contentious issue. While the town's economy depended on the forestry business, some of the residents were fervent environmentalists.

This representational image of a solitary tree, protected by a wooden fence in a "Tree Park" and surrounded by tree stumps, is MacDonald's realistic portrayal of an imaginary world where all the trees are gone, except one. The world she paints is filled with tree stumps and one symbolic tree. The simple design carries a powerful impact and one can't help but think of the 1970 Joni Mitchell song:

*They took all the trees and
Put 'em in a tree museum
And they charged all the people
A dollar and a half just to see 'em
Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot²⁴⁷*

²⁴⁷ <http://www.lyricsfreak.com/j/joni+mitchell/#share> accessed February 21, 2011

This thoroughly modern quilt pays homage to art, textile and quilt traditions. The work, after all, was first a painting before being made into a quilt. Unlike MacDonald's earlier large abstract quilts, this one is smaller, a common size for paintings, and is surrounded by a frame as if it is ready to hang in a museum. The solitary tree in the center resembles the Tree of Life from 18th century Indian *palampores*; this may be the tree of life that propagates the decimated forest. *Tree Park* is also a whole cloth quilt and like its eighteenth and nineteenth century precursors, is covered with pattern and natural designs.

Ellen Oppenheimer

Buoyed by the rediscovery and enthusiasm for the material and artists, Ellen Oppenheimer (b. 1952) studied glass blowing at Goddard College ²⁴⁸ graduating in 1973 with a Bachelor's degree. She continued her studies at New York State College of Ceramics in Alfred where, feeling limited by the small scale possible with hot glass, she started working in wood and textiles.

While still a student she traveled to Quebec to visit a friend who had just purchased a small farm. In the farmhouse, she discovered dozens of quilts—many more than the number of beds warranted--along with boxes of fabric the previous owner had abandoned. Her image of quilts as warm and comforting was shattered when even after piling several on her bed, she still froze at night. It dawned on Oppenheimer that quilts “may be physically comforting but I really think that they’re made as artistic expressions.” ²⁴⁹

After leaving Alfred in 1975, Oppenheimer lived in Allentown, Pennsylvania, not far from the Amish communities in Lancaster County. As local textiles mills went out of business, their fabric remnants and machinery were sold in local second hand stores; Oppenheimer purchased an old sewing machine. The Amish and Pennsylvania Dutch designs inspired her earliest quilt making, which consisted of traditional looking quilts made from silk and satin fabrics acquired from remnant shops. ²⁵⁰

Oppenheimer came to California in 1978 at the behest of her then partner; the more relaxed cultural and political environment in the San Francisco Bay Area attracted them both. Oppenheimer continued making quilts and on a whim, after seeing an ad in the Bay Area weekly paper *Art Week*, entered her first juried exhibition, Quilt National. *The Quilt That's Supposed to Be on Our Bed* (1982) was accepted. ²⁵¹

Oppenheimer has always preferred working with striped fabric, intrigued by what happens visually when two lines meet. ²⁵² In her minimalist grid-based quilts, the artist uses intersecting lines to explore elements of geometry, pattern and color. She likes to

²⁴⁸ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁴⁹ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁵⁰ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁵¹ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁵² Oppenheimer, interview.

work in a series and increasingly complex quilts have resulted from her sustained study of specific design elements or concepts.

Contemporary artists, notably the Minimalist artist Sol LeWitt, and traditional quilts both inspire her work. In explaining the link between the two Oppenheimer elaborates:

*He [LeWitt] is so much in the grid. He's so focused and so mathematical. He really just takes mathematical formulas and says, 'This is going to be art. This is going to be beautiful,' which is what quilters do. For my own work, I look more at traditional quilts than contemporary or even historic artists . . . I look at traditional quilts and think, 'That kind of intensity, that kind of obsession is what is interesting to me. I'm really inspired by traditional quilts. They are really just simple geometric shapes—squares, triangles and rectangles. But you can combine them to create this very complicated geometry.'*²⁵³

Oppenheimer enjoys working in the large scale the quilt affords; she makes smaller quilts to work out design or technical challenges. “I am always trying to make big quilts. I have this magic size in my head; it has to be at least five feet square. The geometric quilts work better on a larger scale.”²⁵⁴

Figure 14

Broken Arm Quilt²⁵⁵

1986

72” x 72”

Machine pieced and appliquéd

Oppenheimer also has always been interested in pattern, whether the small patterns on the fabric or the larger patterns created by the overall quilt design.²⁵⁶ The artist's

²⁵³ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁵⁴ Oppenheimer, interview.

²⁵⁵ Oppenheimer managed to piece the quilt while she had a broken arm.

²⁵⁶ Oppenheimer, interview.

fascination with large and small graphics is apparent in her *Broken Arm Quilt* (1986). Thirty-six brightly colored squares, each patterned with busy stripes, bold lines, curvy squiggles, or leopard spots, make up a discordant background for this quilt.

Inserted into each square is one or more linear elements that link one block to the next and unite the whole quilt design. Straight paths of black and white print fabric create a parallelogram-shaped frame around the outer rows of blocks. A wide striped fabric in red, blue or turquoise juts in and out of the parallelogram looking like a four-sided line graph gone haywire. Finally, a multicolored necklace consisting of squares with large and small dots, snakes from one block to the next, looking like a string of overlapping dominoes. Irregular triangles of contrasting color mark where the corners overlie and create a fourth connecting element throughout the quilt. Although the initial impression of this quilt is chaos, each block and shape is unified through a multitude of interconnected linear elements.

Although referring to her slightly later maze quilts, Oppenheimer's explanation of her interest in mazes could apply to *Broken Arm Quilt*. "This quilt has a continuous line going through it—in mathematical terms the . . . line is a continuous curve. In symbolic terms this quilt represents the convoluted journeys we take to get exactly where we started."²⁵⁷

In order to construct this quilt Oppenheimer developed a technically sophisticated machine inlay process. Not wanting to construct her designs using hand appliqué, and disliking the look of machine appliqué, the artist developed a painstaking but highly accurate technique that relates more to tailoring than patchwork. With it, she was able to produce crisp lines, create odd rectilinear or curvilinear shapes, and keep the fabric layers to a minimum.²⁵⁸

Although she usually makes preliminary drawings for her quilts, she made this one without a plan, letting each creative decision dictate the next one.²⁵⁹ In spite of its improvisational design, the quilt presents as a chaotic yet unified design.

²⁵⁷ Shaw, *The Art Quilt*, 163.

²⁵⁸ Ellen Oppenheimer, "Fabric Puzzles," *Threads* (Oct/Nov 1990) #31, 38-41.

²⁵⁹ Quilt National, *Fiber Expressions: The Contemporary Quilt*, 64. from QN catalogue

Judith Content

Judith Content (b. 1957) received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at San Francisco State University in 1979. By her junior year she had already taken every art class the Art Department offered, including painting, sculpture, jewelry and ceramics, so she impulsively took her first textile class from a teacher she had heard “good things” about, the weaver Candace Crockett. Crockett arrived at the first class clutching a giant basket; she spilled out its contents to reveal woven and embroidered textiles from around the world.²⁶⁰

Content had never seriously considered textiles as art but Crockett’s class opened her eyes to the creative possibilities of fiber.²⁶¹ Content tried card and loom weaving, but quickly decided the weaving process was too premeditated for the spontaneous working methods she preferred. When visiting professor Ana Lisa Hedstrom introduced the class to *Arashi shibori*, the process of twisting, pleating, wrapping, and dyeing fabric, Content was immediately mesmerized by the technique and its unpredictable results. She bought dyes that day after school, went home and experimented with the only thing she had to wrap—broom handles.²⁶² She would spend the next thirty years working with *Arashi shibori* and its technical variations.

Within a year of graduation, Content was a busy full time artist selling wearables made from her *shibori* dyed silk fabrics at seventeen galleries around the country. Her early success in galleries quickly led to commissions from Silicon Valley businesses to create larger works for office walls. These pieces, often monumental in scale, were layered with batting and lightly quilted. She associated their form more with Asian culture and called them scrolls, not quilts.

The scrolls Content created in the 1980s, often of monumental proportions, were inspired by nature—water, marshes, rocks and woodlands. Using her *shibori* discharged and dyed fabrics, the artist created works that aren’t literal images of landscapes but

²⁶⁰ Content, Le Rowell interview.

²⁶¹ Content, Le Rowell interview.

²⁶² Content, interview.

mysterious, foggy abstractions that create moods rather than define specific images or places.

Content's early work in wearables and the commissions that followed, set the stage for what would quickly become her definitive style—*shibori* dyed silk panels, assembled into kimono shapes and machine quilted. It was just such a work, made in 1984 for the invitational *Art to Wear* exhibition that ultimately transformed her focus. (The exhibition was co-sponsored by the American Craft Museum and Arts in America traveled internationally.) She realized she liked her kimono better when it was hung flat on a wall rather than on a body. While she liked the movement and three-dimensionality of wearables and enjoyed the fact that there was another person—the wearer—intimately involved in the work, she also felt clothing spent too much time in the closet. As she increased the number of wall pieces she made, Content gradually phased out making clothing.²⁶³

While she thrived on the large commissions, appreciating the larger audience they reached, two events in 1990 shifted Content's focus once again. One, a faltering economy ended the lucrative corporate commissions she had been receiving and two, a family move resulted in a smaller studio space. As a result, Content focused on scrolls and kimono shaped works of a more human scale, eventually working almost exclusively with the kimono shape, merging her early interests in Asian textiles and techniques, with wearables and wall pieces.

Content's works are distinctive and identifiable, largely the result of her self-dyed fabrics. She works exclusively with silk and at first simply dyed white silk different colors. She later discovered she could get additional layers of depth and complexity if she first discharged black silk and then slowly built up new areas of color.

The artist doesn't use recipes or keep records of her dyeing process. Her long experience with the Japanese dyes and Thai silk she uses allows her to work instinctively and spontaneously, often with just an idea or image in her head. She prefers the

²⁶³ Jessica Scarborough, "The Wall hangings of Judith Content," *Fiberarts* (Mar/Apr 1986) 10.

unexpected results of this improvisational method to the tightly controlled formulas used by some fabric dyers.²⁶⁴

Figure 15

Cascade

1989

12' x 16'

shibori dyed silk

Cascade, typical of Content's corporate commissions in the 1980s, is of such gargantuan proportions that it required scaffolding and custom designed hanging equipment to install it in a northern California corporate center. The work consists of seven scrolls of varying lengths; each scroll contains three tiers of panels. The entire work is unified by backdrop of purple and blue hand dyed fabric, eliminating the distraction of the existing wall color.

Through repletion of color and shapes, the artist creates an abstract "cascade" of pinks and blues that flows rhythmically over black and white shapes that resemble the fragmented layers of sedimentary rock. Unlike the kimono, there is no straight horizon line in this work; each of the seven large scrolls stair step down as if falling, an effect that increases the feeling of linear perspective. The tiers of panels form an arch, a curved line that resembles a mountain creek bed. Like other quilt artists, Content has created an original landscape from her own imagination.

²⁶⁴ Content, interview

Figure 16***Sweltering Sky Kimono*****Front 1986, back 1992****61” x 52”****shibori discharged and dyed silk****Collection of Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco**

Sweltering Sky Kimono is an early example of what the artist would eventually focus on entirely—the kimono shape, layered and quilted, intended for wall display rather than wearing. Although completely non-representational, the design encourages the viewer to contemplate the sweltering sky that the title suggests. The bright orange color set against cool blue captures perfectly the feeling of a hot summer night; the sharp black diagonal streaks stab through the areas of color like bolts of heat lightning. The quilting lines echo those diagonals, like afterimages of the lightning bolts. The cutout areas of the kimono create a kind of horizon, further emphasizing the landscape quality of this work. Content is the only artist to work exclusively in silk, a fabric provides her work with luster and sheen.

Conclusion

The decades leading up to the emergence of art quilts in California during the 1960s portray a complex picture involving the intersection of art, craft, quilts and American culture. What emerged was an unprecedented set of circumstances that cumulatively provided a powerful force for change, and the rise of an art quilt movement was one result of this momentum. As artists questioned the rigidity of Greenbergian theory and formalist painting in the 1960s, they began searching for new forms and materials of expression. A nationwide mid-century craft revival, perhaps stronger in California than elsewhere in the U.S., provided the alternative media these artists were seeking. Cultural movements that embraced hand made objects, sought to acknowledge women's art history, and highlighted the beauty and cultural significance of quilts, elevated women's domestic hand work not only to craft status but also to art status. All these developments had the effect of making the quilt "available" and acceptable as a means of artistic expression.

Against this backdrop, a particular group of women was inspired to apply their art school training to quilts. Most of these women still followed the middle class norm of the 1960s, where the husband provided the main financial support and the wife tended the household and children. Freed from the economic need to earn a living either outside the home or through domestic textile production, these artists had the leisure to pursue art and quilt making for pleasure.

Exploration of both the broader American cultural background and each artist's biography reveal that no single individual, local, state or national element overwhelmingly influenced these women to apply their art school training to quilts. Rather it was a unique combination of circumstances that emerged in the 1960s that exerted their collective influence on a particular set of female artists.

After considering the art quilts these women made, both individually and as a group, the "art" part seems to be the greater part of the whole than the "quilt" part. By definition, the works refer to the quilt form, although most artists challenged the traditional format and developed innovative quilt making techniques. All the works reflect art world movements of the period, to a greater or lesser degree, and some works are more

successful than others. The art quilts reflect the dual heritage of quilt history and art history, one that blends quilt making techniques and implicit historic cultural associations with principles of contemporary art.

The scope of this thesis was limited to events in California during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the emergence of the art quilt movement, some of the first artists who combined art practice with the quilt medium, and consideration of how their quilts fit into the continuum of art and quilt history. The social and cultural background was far more complex than originally thought and required assimilation of a huge amount of information. The artist interviews provided ample opportunity to compare and contrast their personal lives and art work, and supplied a variety of topics to explore. Placing each artist's work in the context of quilt and art history proved challenging and required the simultaneous application a dual set of standards, one as a quilt historian and the other as an art historian.

Additional research

When analyzing the artist interviews and attempting to draw conclusions about the artists and their motivations, there was one important area where information seemed incomplete. The interviews didn't reveal what, if any, social or political motivations were at the forefront of the artists' decision to make quilts. It is unclear whether this had more to do with the interview questions or the relative unimportance of external forces. It may provide additional insight into art quilt history to ask the artists specifically about their art school education, awareness of art trends and political beliefs in the 1960s, and how these factors contributed to making art quilts. However, it could be that the forces were so subtle that they may be impossible to distinguish forty years after the fact.

The nine artists interviewed for this project were chosen based on their art training, participation in Quilt National during the 1980s and the quality of their work. To complete the picture, four additional artists whose lives and work parallel those in this study should be included:

Charlotte Patera worked in San Francisco as a graphic designer. Since the 1960s, she has created a significant body of work based on a multi-layered reverse appliqué method, like that used in *molas* from the San Blas Island. Patera also derived inspiration from other cultures—Mexico, Central and South America, India, Europe and early American folk art.²⁶⁵ The artist’s life and work show great similarities to Jean Ray Laury’s. Their design aesthetics are similar; Patera’s writings also encouraged originality and extolled the virtues of the hand made object. In addition, she designed projects for the same women’s magazines as Laury in the 1960s, including *Woman’s Day*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*.²⁶⁶

Esther Parkhurst grew up in Los Angeles in the 1930s. As a young girl she learned to sew, made many of her own clothes and in the 1960s began hand weaving. She received international recognition in the craft world for her woven fabric wall hangings and only after back pain forced her to give up weaving did she turn to quilt making. She achieved considerable recognition for her quilts and participated in prestigious exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s before her death in 2001.²⁶⁷

Deborah Felix, who participated in *The Art Quilt* exhibition as well as Quilt Nationals 1989, 1991, and 1993 was trained as a painter. After approximately fifteen years making art quilts, it is the author’s understanding that she returned to painting full time. To date, the author has been unable to locate her.

Sharon Robinson received Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees at the California College of Arts and Craft. She participated in Quilt Nationals 1979 and 1981, where she exhibited a dimensional quilted horse blanket. She published two books,

²⁶⁵ Charlotte Patera, *The Applique Book* (Des Moines, Iowa: Creative Home Library, 1974).

²⁶⁶ Patera, 9.

²⁶⁷ Ken, Denis and Lynne Parkhurst, *Remembering Esther Parkhurst* (Los Angeles: Parkhurst Family Trust, 2001).

Contemporary Basketry and Contemporary Quilting.²⁶⁸ To date, the author has been unable to locate her.

Although Patera's and Parkhurst's lives are similar to the artists already interviewed, the women would add additional dimensions to the study; Patera's interest in ethnological textiles further reinforces that element of influence and Parkhurst illustrates that the California art quilt movement was not solely based in northern California.

Finally, understanding why Robinson and Felix stopped making art quilts may lead to other avenues of exploration and contribute to understanding the complex origins and development of the art quilt movement.

Future Research

Future research might include interviews of the "next generation" of quilt artists working in California and an abundance of questions to be answered. Do the somewhat arbitrary dates covered in this thesis, 1966-1986, have merit? Are there other milestones in the life of the art quilt? What, if any, social and cultural motivations remain to encourage artists to make art quilts, and are they expressed more definitively in the artist interviews? Do the artists remain such a homogeneous group? Has the artists' approach to the medium changed dramatically?

²⁶⁸ Sharon Robinson, *Contemporary Quilting* (Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, 1982).

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1	Jean Ray Laury	<i>Barefoot and Pregnant</i>	108
2	Jean Ray Laury	<i>These Is Not Art</i>	109
3	Yvonne Porcella	<i>Taking the Greyhound to Bakersfield</i>	110
4	Joan Schulze	<i>California</i>	111
5	Joan Schulze	<i>Aroma</i>	112
6	Jean Hewes	<i>Beach Birds</i>	113
7	Jean Hewes	<i>Rocketing</i>	114
8	Miriam Nathan-Roberts	<i>Lattice Interweave</i>	115
9	Miriam Nathan-Roberts	<i>Letting Go</i>	116
10	Therese May	<i>Therese</i>	117
11	Therese May	<i>Fish and Chicks</i>	118
12	Linda MacDonald	<i>Salmon Ladders</i>	119
13	Linda MacDonald	<i>Tree Park</i>	120
14	Ellen Oppenheimer	<i>Broken Arm Quilt</i>	121
15	Judith Content	<i>Cascade</i>	122
16	Judith Content	<i>Sweltering Sky</i>	123



Figure 1
Jean Ray Laury
Barefoot and Pregnant
1980-1984
46.5" x 46.5"
Screen-printed

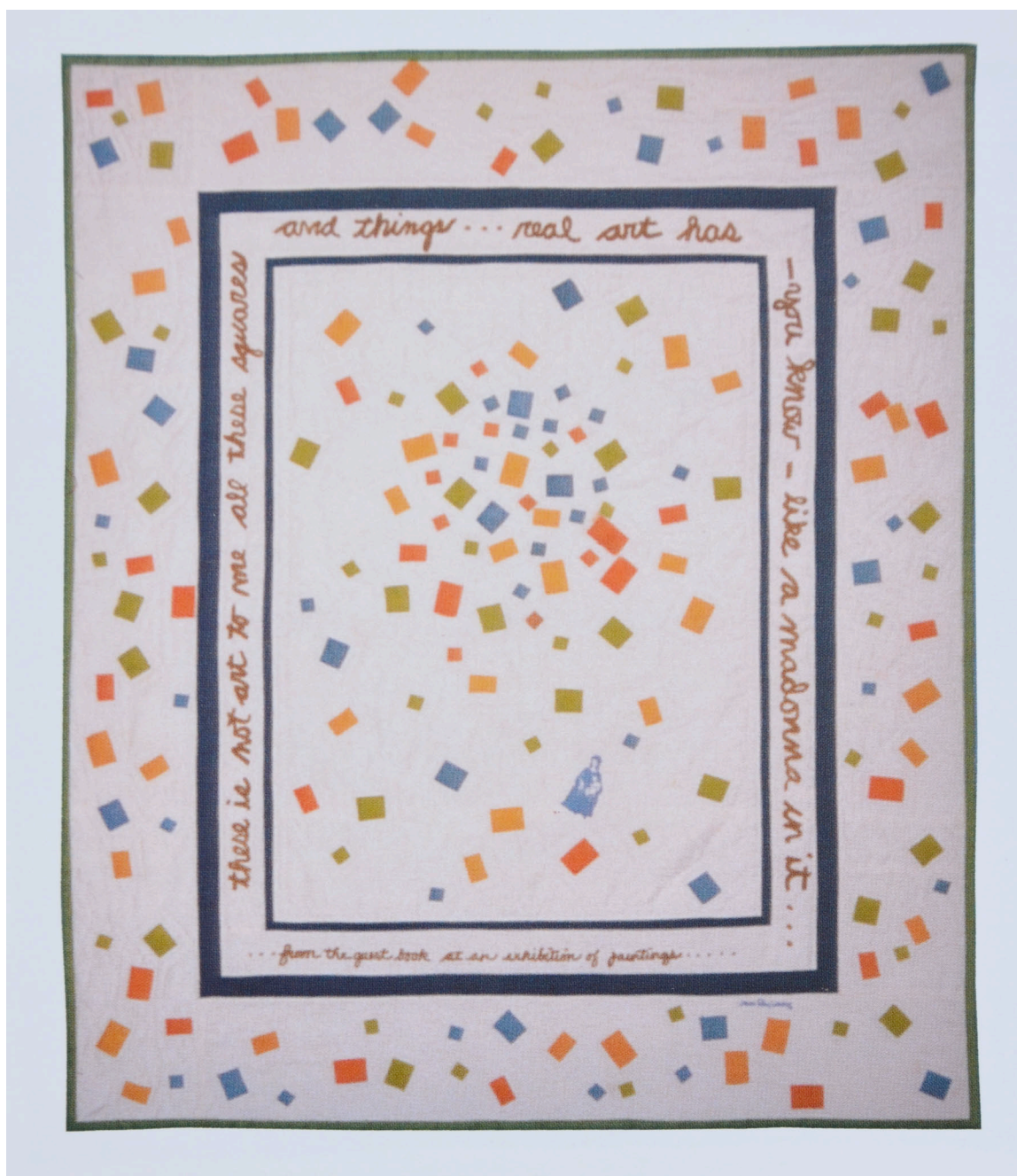


Figure 2
 Jean Ray Laury
These Is Not Art
 1984
 57" x 65"
 Screen-printed

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Figure 3

Yvonne Porcella

Taking the Greyhound to Bakersfield

1986

71" x 75"

cotton, hand painted border fabric, buttons; machine pieced and appliquéd

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 4
Joan Schulze
California
1976
104" x 96"
cotton, batik on cotton; hand pieced , appliquéd and quilted

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 5
Joan Schulze
Aroma
1997
70" x 53"
silk, cotton, paper; monoprinted, blueprint process, machine pieced and quilted

Copyright permission applied for

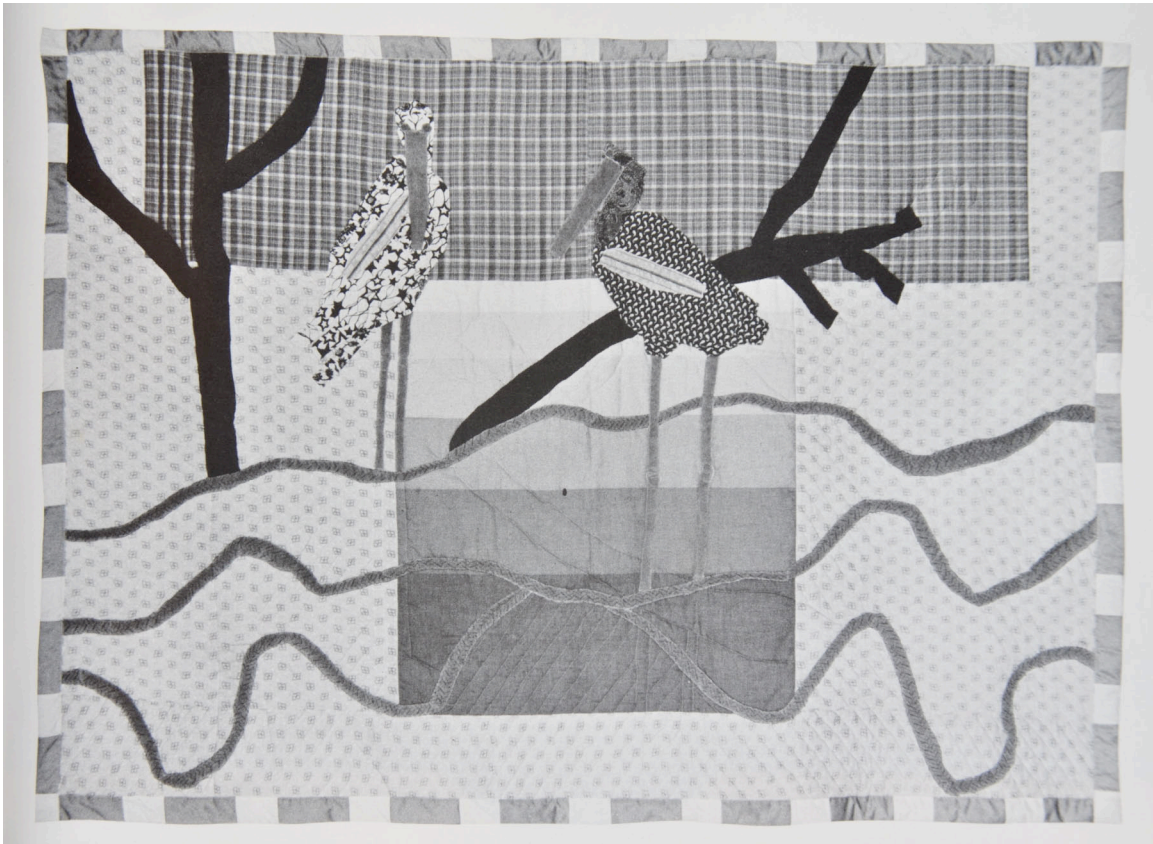


Figure 6
Jean Hewes
Beach Birds
1977
80" x 111"
machine appliquéd and quilted



Figure 7
Jean Hewes
Rocketing
1984
92" x72"
silk, cotton, rayon; machine pieced and appliquéd

Copyright permission applied for



LATTICE INTERWEAVE, 84" x 84"
1983

Figure 8

Miriam Nathan-Roberts

Lattice Interweave

1983

84" x 84"

cotton and cotton blends; machine pieced; quilting designed by artist and hand quilted by Sarah Hershberger

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Figure 9

Miriam Nathan-Roberts

Letting Go

1985-1986

70" x 70"

cotton, hand-dyed and hand painted by artist; machine pieced; quilting designed by artist and hand quilted by Sarah Hershberger

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Figure 10
Therese May
Therese
1969
90" x 72"
cotton on muslin backing; machine appliquéd, tied

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Figure 11
Therese May
Fish and Chicks
1986
83" x 85"
polyester, cotton, silk, taffeta, acrylic paint; machine appliqué

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 12
Linda MacDonald
Salmon Ladders
1986
92" x 92"
painted and hand dyed cotton; machine pieced; hand quilted

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 13
Linda MacDonald
Tree Park
2002
36 x 48
hand painted and hand quilted

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 14
Ellen Oppenheimer
Broken Arm Quilt
1986
72" x 72"
Machine pieced and appliquéd

Copyright permission applied for



Figure 15

Judith Content

Cascade

1989

12' x 16'

shibori dyed white silk, discharged and dyed black silk; machine quilted and appliquéd

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Figure 16
Judith Content
Sweltering Sky
Front 1986, back 1992
61" x 52"
shibori discharged and dyed silk
Collection of Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

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