

SAQA members quilt for others

by Deborah Quinn Hensel

Quilt artists frequently pour their hearts into their work, and sometimes, when an appropriate cause speaks to them, they stitch even more love into it to share with others. Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) members, including Jamie Fingal of Orange, California, are committed to sharing their talents.

"Giving back is a way of life for me," Jamie said. "If I can do one thing to make a difference in the life of someone else, I will. I pick and choose my projects based on my passion for particular organizations. I have supported SAQA, the Quilt Alliance, the Girl Scouts and Fiberart For A Cause.

"In an effort to share the love, I started the House Quilt Project in 2010 to coordinate the making of 16x12-inch house quilts for Habitat for Humanity in Orange County, California," she said. "I look at this as an opportunity to educate the public about art quilts for the wall, not for the bed."

To date, the House Quilt Project has provided more than 100 quilts to families in Jamie's community, and it inspired Candice Phelan, a SAQA member from Wellington, Florida, to launch a similar project in southern Florida. The Palm Beach County Quilters' Guild committed to making

20-25 quilts for new homeowners through the Palm Beach County Habitat for Humanity program during 2013. The guild has already reached that goal.

Each one-of-a-kind, signed wall hanging is 20 x 24 inches. Each has a welcome-home theme, includes the family's name and house number, bears a label documenting the project and maker, and has a ribbon loop for hanging.

"I want to have an impact," Candice said. "Now that I have retired from a rewarding career where I helped organizations and individuals grow, I would love to continue



Jamie Fingal made this quilt in 2012 for a Habitat for Humanity family.



Gerrie Congdon of Portland, Oregon, made this quilt for a wounded military service member.



Candice Phelan, right, with Habitat for Humanity house-quilt recipients, from left, Jeni and London Davidson.

photo courtesy of Candice Phelan

using those skills in the service of deserving organizations and people.”

In addition to quilting, she makes pillowcases for young cancer patients, and she designed and embroidered T-shirts for children in Joplin, Missouri, to wear their first day back to school after the 2011 tornado that devastated their town. Knowing the local guild will continue to produce quilts for the Habitat project is satisfying to Candice.

“I love being a catalyst for improvement through initiating efforts that are

positioned for a strong start and that will be able to continue with or without my future involvement,” she said.

Healing from trauma

Art quilts can also serve as a healing force in communities impacted by natural disasters. SAQA member Pat Owoc of St. Louis, Missouri, was pleased to see SAQA's *Sightlines* exhibition, in which she has a piece, come to her home state. It has helped children traumatized by the Joplin tornado heal. *Sightlines*, which

showcases the work of 14 SAQA artists, was exhibited at the George A. Spiva Center for the Arts in Joplin from December 2012 into early 2013.

The exhibition inspired Joplin third graders to express their feelings about the tornado in their own works of art. Although the exhibit closed March 1, 2013, the students are continuing to create quilt blocks by drawing on fabric in an art program at the center, Pat said. Their blocks will be used to make quilts for others in the Joplin area and people in the Northeast who were affected by Hurricane Sandy.

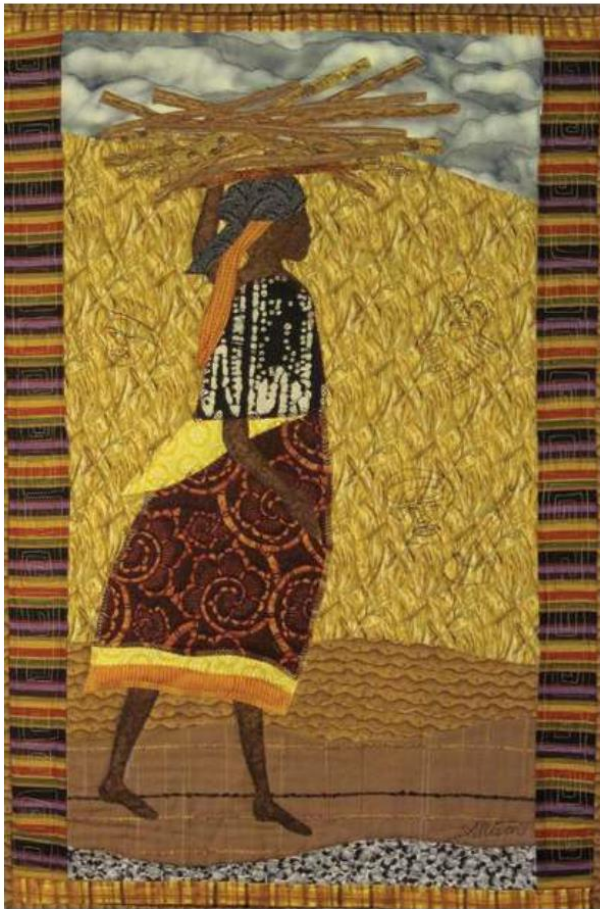
Pat's piece, *Landthreads*, recalls her childhood memories of growing up on the prairie of western Kansas. It incorporates a repeating arrow motif as a tribute to the Pawnees whose arrowheads her father collected. *Sightlines* shows how art quilts can be used to tell stories, Pat said.



Landthreads

Pat Owoc

Center pieces are 38 x 48 and 38 x 33 inches, respectively. The others are 8 x 8 inches. 2010



Isolation
Allison Wilbur, Barrington, Rhode Island
30 x 18 inches 2011
Women, Peace and Security exhibition



Symbols of Life
Rose Legge, Castle Rock, Colorado
28 x 20 inches 2009
Global Fund exhibition

photos courtesy of
Quilt for Change

"I think it's important for every person who has reached some level of skill to reach down and across to find a way of communicating with others," Pat, a former school counselor, said. "I don't think that's just the bailiwick of quilters but of everyone."

Speaking up through art

Convinced of the power of art quilts to tell stories and effect change, SAQA member Allison Wilbur and her husband, Dick Wilbur, of Barrington, Rhode Island, launched Quilt for Change, an organization that coordinates art quilt exhibitions that bring attention to social justice issues affecting women. Their

current touring exhibition, *Women, Peace and Security*, features 20 works from artists around the world. The website, www.quiltforchange.org, says the exhibition "recognizes women's strength within their societies—as teachers, organizers and leaders—as well as their vulnerability in times of conflict."

Allison talked about the exhibitions: "I've had some pretty dramatic conversations with women who've seen the exhibits. They talk about how they've always wanted to make quilts that address issues related to women but were afraid to do so. They were afraid that using their voice in quilting would not be welcomed, but

now the sky's the limit. Women are starting to use their voices in many, many ways to stand up for what they believe in to try to change things."

The Wilburs began organizing art quilt exhibitions when Dick was serving as a foreign service officer in Kuwait. The budget for traveling arts exhibitions was dwindling, so Allison, an avid quilter, suggested a quilt exhibition. Dick put out a call over the radio for U.S.-inspired quilts. Six weeks later, there were 80 quilts in the Wilburs' living room, and Allison, who was new to organizing a quilt exhibition, had just three days to figure out how to hang them.

At the time, Kuwaitis' image of

Americans was not very positive — fast cars; fast food; and “Mission Impossible,” which was the most popular movie.

“The quilt exhibit really gave them a different insight into the United States,” Allison said. “A lot of countries have a tradition of women doing some sort of sewing, embroidery or handwork, and that was true in Kuwait. They reacted well to the exhibit and a side of America they hadn’t seen.”

This and subsequent successful exhibitions at other postings led the Wilburs to create Quilt for Change to use quilts to effect social change.

“We organize our exhibitions to educate quilters about social issues and to engage them in promoting social change,” Allison said. “Quilters can put their talents and passion to use in support of women.”

Their latest exhibition will open at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and then travel around North America to highlight the work of Solar Sister, which uses a

microenterprise model to empower African women and bridge the energy gap through the sale of solar-powered lighting and cooking appliances.

Addressing eating disorders

Susan Schrott of Mount Kisco, New York, is yet another SAQA member who quilts for others. Women’s issues—especially body image and eating disorders—are of especial interest to Susan, who is a therapist and yoga instructor. She used art-quilting techniques to help young women at Avalon Hills, an eating-disorder treatment center in Logan, Utah.

Invited to lead a two-day healing art workshop, Susan asked the participants to create quotes that would become part of a fabric tree of life. Her goal was multifold — to have the patients create art, to encourage mindfulness, to decrease anxiety and frustration, to promote positive self-esteem and body image, to help the women gain confidence and control, to foster positive interaction with

peers, and to develop a sense of community. Susan put the participants’ art together in a quilt.

“I wanted to quilt it with the absolute respect and integrity they put into their art, so I put a lot of love, care, skill and feeling into the quilting, just as they had done,” Susan said. The quilt was donated to the Avalon Hills Foundation for its annual auction, where it sold for \$4,000. The funds will help patients who might not otherwise be able to afford treatment.

“I try to live my life in service of my values,” Susan said. “Using art to support people in need or to inspire people to find their own creative voices. It’s just part of the way I live.” ▼

Deborah Quinn Hensel, a writer based in Houston, Texas, is an avid fiber artist who has been inspired by other quilters in her family. She was associate producer of “Stitched,” a 2011 documentary film about three art quilters’ road to entering the International Quilt Festival in Houston.



Susan Schrott, below, lays out quilt blocks created by women at Avalon Hills. At left, a finished quilt.

photos courtesy of Susan Schrott

