

Quilt as a social activity.

Quilt as legacy.

Quilt as obsession.

Quilt as art.

Most people know someone who is involved in the making of quilts. I have read that over 20 million quilt makers are in the United States. My guess is that the numbers are large in rural and urban areas everywhere. What is not known is how many countries have joined this worldwide movement since it exploded in the early 1970's. If Outer Mongolia has a quilt group, you can visualize other seemingly isolated areas where the making of quilts have been incorporated into the local culture, often changed in ways that couldn't have been visualized by the early makers.

I meet makers of quilts everywhere when I lecture and teach. I have met painters, printmakers, sculptors and various artists working in ceramics, glass and wood who also make quilts. Early in my career I was surprised when I met nurses, doctors, surgeons and dentists who made quilts. No longer as it is a common occurrence. These occasional makers often belong to one or more groups who meet regularly to share materials, ideas and advice on the making of their latest project. It is also not unusual anymore to find artists working full time in the studio creating work for exhibitions, gallery and private sales.

The field has broadened since I began making quilts in the 70s. It has grown to include professional teachers, lecturers, art writers and cultural historians. Shops and schools specialize in quilt workshops, materials, and tools. Book publishers regularly produce inspirational, historical and practical how-to manuals which indicates an audience for quilt related subjects. Major magazines feature the quilt as art. The continuing growth in this field encourages organizers of symposiums and conferences, museums that emphasize the exhibiting of quilts and related works, and art museums which acquire quilts for their permanent collection. Major juried competitions and invitational exhibitions are sponsored by organizations, museums and art centers around the globe. Quilts have joined all the arts in being acquired for corporate, public and spaces such as hospitals. There is a growing group of serious private collectors.

The quilt medium is not static and has been growing in its aspirations and changing with technology. It has shown to be a flexible medium intriguing to all ages who participate in this wide ranging world of quilts. How wonderful that it can accommodate so many values, experiences, cultures, methods and results.

I recently participated in an exhibition in China at the Shandong University School of Arts and Design. *Realm of Diversity and Equality* included 6 men: 2 painters, 2 sculptors, and 1 fiber artist from China, a photographer from the UK and myself exhibiting quilts. This is just one example of a sea-change in the acceptance of quilt as art. The quilt has shown to be able to hold its own when showing with diverse media.

On a personal note

My artistic adventures have been driven by a need to make meaningful art works. My obligation as an artist is to witness and observe, concentrate on the task at hand and most of all be serious and committed to my art making. The following poem says it best.

Mind and Mirrors

enter the artist's working mind
access the rooms
the silence
slip quietly among
shadows and stories
blends of memory
immediate
complex
wordless quirky poetry of
harmonies and improvised chords

in the light
fragments remain
seen through warped mirrors
a secret déjà vu floating world

Joan Schulze 2008