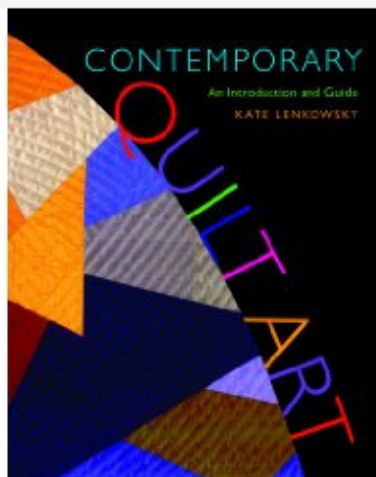


## Beautiful and useful



### [Contemporary Quilt Art: An Introduction and Guide, by Kate Lenkowsky](#)

Indiana University Press, 2008

Hardbound, 288 pages

Retail price: \$34.95

Contemporary Quilt Art is a big, erudite, and beautifully produced book in the style done so well by university presses. In Part I, it provides us the 30,000-foot view of the development of the art quilt, drawing in the social milieu and economic factors, the role of quilting organizations and adventurous museums in promoting the craft, the place that textile art takes for itself in contemporary art, and the hardships the medium has had to overcome to be accepted by the

larger art community. We've heard many of these before -- quilting's origins in folk and domestic arts, its long association with women artists, its populist serialization in newspapers and magazines. This recounting of the trials and tribulations of quilting to find its true place in art is no doubt accurate, but it has a curious defensive quality that underscores the inferiority complex that quilters have had for so long with regard to acceptance as a "true" art form.

If anything belies the need for another apologetic for art quilts, it is Part II of this book, "Artists." This section features, with biographies, aesthetic musings, and lush photography, the work of 19 prominent quilt artists from around the world. Well-known names such as Nancy Crow and Michael James are mixed in with lesser-known talents such as Marilyn Henrion of New York, Korean Kyoung Ae Cho, and Britain's Pauline Burbidge. You will want to linger over these brilliantly original works of art and steal ideas and styles shamelessly in the great visual art tradition. The variety of approaches, media, and style are a stunning testament to the power of the individual vision as it melds a profusion of influences into a unique expression of self and the world. It is clear that the art quilt movement has come to a rich maturity.

After this riveting survey of the current scene, Contemporary Quilt Art succumbs to what seems to be the inevitable need for quilt books to be useful as well as beautiful. In its final third section, "A Guide for Buyers and Collectors," there is much valuable information about how to evaluate quilts, insure them, hang, store and preserve them. Aimed at educating a collecting public and thus encouraging the growth of the high-end quilt art market, this excursion will no doubt assist the struggling quilt artist in getting a better price. Somehow, though, it seems once again unnecessarily to validate the second-class citizenship of quilts in the world of art. Which is too bad.

Nevertheless, this book is a must for any private or guild quilt library. The inspiration to be gained from the hundreds of quilts represented here is invaluable, and should encourage many a young would-be quilter to follow her eye and mind to creations which lead contemporary art into new territory.

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