

“Catalog Essay,” *Quilt Visions 2012: Brainstorms*, San Diego: A Visions Art Museum Publication, p. 6

“What is the purpose of art?” The question came often to mind while I reviewed the quilts submitted to Quilt Visions 2012. The work encompassed a wide range of materials and techniques, of genres and skill. More often than not the connection between *Brainstorms* and the image in front of me was not apparent. By default, how the artists addressed this question became a guide.

What was clear, however, was evidence of the biennial’s continued importance to accomplished artists as a significant venue for their work. For this, we owe the Quilt Visions Board of Directors, its small staff, and its numerous volunteers a great debt. It was a wonderful survey and I felt honored to participate on the jury.

Art’s purposes seem only to accumulate, never fade away. One might be more popular in a given time or place, but all are connected with what it means to be human. Among the oldest is fulfilling our need for decoration and self-expression. Art also calls attention to the beauty or importance of the unnoticed and to the relationships between lines, colors, and shapes. It both serves our institutions and critiques their values. It inspires national unity and propagandizes in the cause of revolution. Art documents the most humane and the most despicable of human behavior. It questions our perceptions of objects and space and examines contemporary ideas and events. It tells stories and advances causes. It tells us who we are as a people. Art examines itself – its materials, its processes, and its makers. Whether it is made for a wide audience or a small one, these are the contexts in which serious viewers understand art. The quilts in this exhibition serve all of these purposes.

As a group, they represent the collaborative efforts of three people with different outlooks on art but with a common interest in compelling work. We argued for what we thought outstanding and learned from each other. I think the result demonstrates the extent to which the participating artists are working in the arena of fine art. It also includes fine quilts in the tradition of studio craft whose evocative power or other characteristics suggest that categorizing them should be left to the viewer.

Given limited space, I can cite only a few. Among them are quilts which continue narrative series by Linda Colsh, Dinah Sargeant, and Kathy Nida. Colsh's dignified, elderly shopper brings to mind the heart wrenching loneliness that can accompany age as well as the terrible losses endured by Europeans in two world wars. The absence of color and the film strip-like construction allows the viewer some relief. *That was another time and place*. But is it really? Sargeant continues her story of a flawed humanity struggling in a threatening world, but simultaneously seems to be exploring how air and space function as elements of composition. Nida offers us another humorous slice of contemporary life in *Sediment*. Is she suggesting that no matter how fierce our determination or how strong our passions, we are already caught in a flow and will soon be just fertilizer?

M. Buchanan's *Isolation Gown*, created from the polypropylene used for this purpose in real life, illustrates traditional textile function in fine art. This quilted garment, with its intricate surface design and its icy blueness is a stinging reminder of the importance of human connections. D. Miller's *Sentinels* is extraordinary for its projection of the crispness and clarity of the air and trees on a winter day. The artist foregrounds her subject, their branches becoming bars and blocking our way from the beckoning blue beyond. Carolyn Coohy's *My Breath Coming from Your Body*, part of her *Voices* series, was possibly the only quilt dealing directly with the tense political crises of our day. The format and title highlight the importance of both words and images in the struggle for freedom in Iran, as well as the artist's conscious decision to speak for the murdered victim.

To all of the artists who submitted work, be assured that we took your work seriously, spending many hours at home and in San Diego to review and discuss it. To the viewer, I hope we have provided you with an exhibit which you will enjoy and from which you will learn.

Kate Lenkowsky

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