

# Quilt Art: Thirty-three years and counting

words | SARA IMPEY

**Quilt Art was founded by The Quilters' Guild in 1985 to provide a forum for artists who wished to experiment with the quilt as an art form, but who faced limited opportunities to show and sell their work.** At that time, the idea of quilts as artworks rather than functional objects was a novelty, so the group attracted attention by being the first of its kind. For several years it remained the only one. After a few years, Quilt Art left The Guild to become an independent exhibiting group.

The artists stage a major touring exhibition every two or three years and often produce a smaller one in between. As well as many European countries, Quilt Art has exhibited in Canada, Russia, and Japan.

The bigger exhibitions are accompanied by a book which is designed and published in-house. For its thirtieth anniversary, the group mounted two exhibitions, 'Dialogues' and 'Small Talk', and produced a book in which, Dr Susan Marks, the quilt academic and historian, interviewed all the members. 'Dialogues' has been seen in various venues in Britain, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, and 'Small Talk' has recently returned from an exhibition at the International Quilt Study Center in Nebraska.

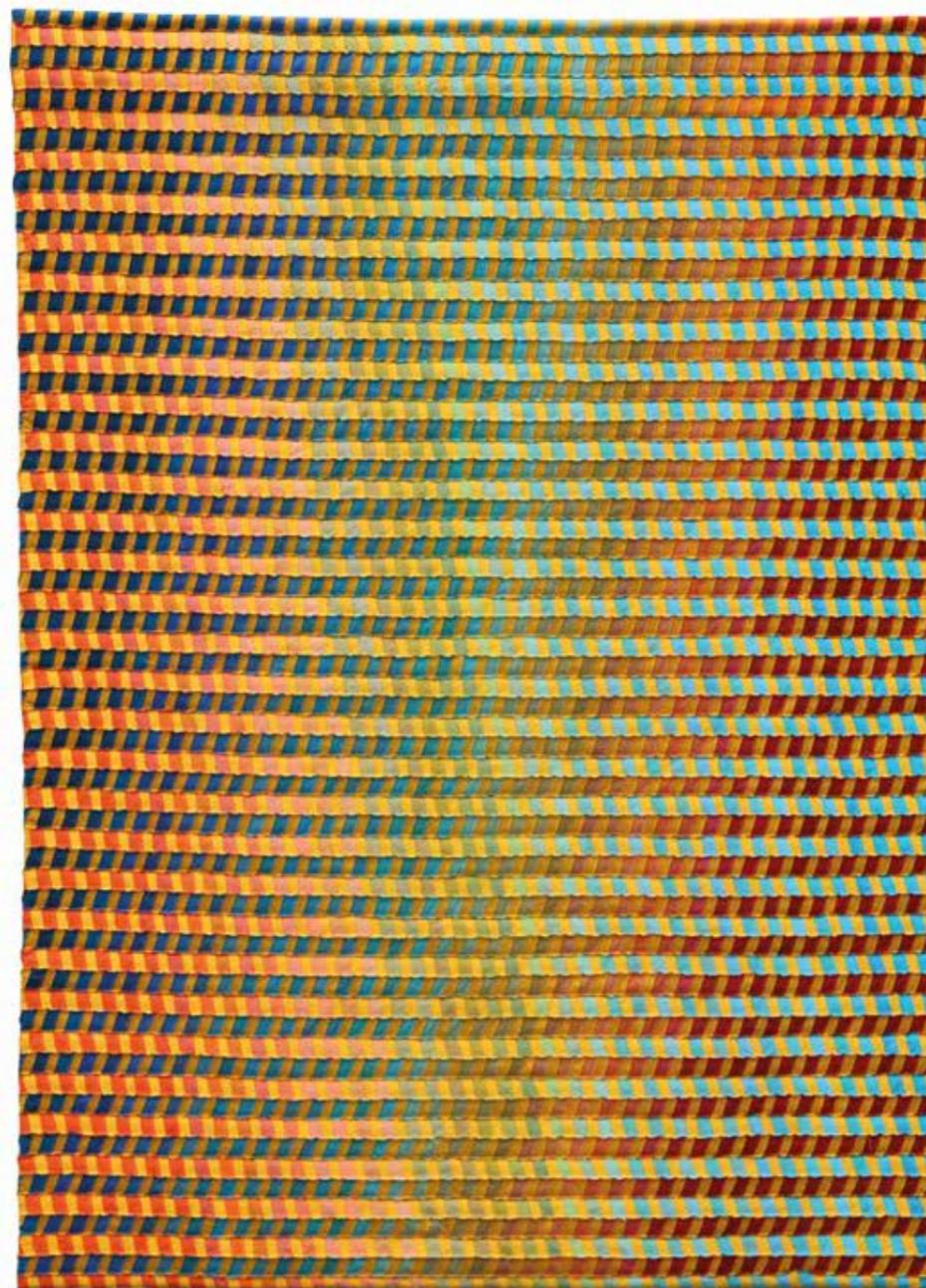
'Dialogues' is travelling to Scotland in 2019. It opens at the Kirkcudbright Galleries on 12 January and runs until 24 March. This has a special significance for one member, Sue Hotchkis, whose husband's great aunt was Anna Hotchkis, a well-known painter who set up a studio in Kirkcudbright. The galleries still have examples of her work in their collection.

From the outset, two features have made Quilt Art distinctive – its international membership, and its selection process. One of the founder members was Inge Hueber

from Germany, and her influence attracted other European quilt artists so that now, roughly half the members live in the UK and the others are from Germany, Holland, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Hungary, and Denmark. There is also one American member – Dominic Nash.

This geographical spread has the advantage that the variety of the artists' backgrounds brings diversity to their work and they can draw on contacts in their own countries to arrange exhibitions. But, naturally, it makes getting together difficult. The group meets four times a year and members are expected to attend at least two of these meetings. The key to the group's smooth functioning between meetings is good communication. But, as with any group, the most important attribute that members bring is commitment – a positive attitude which is prepared to overcome logistical difficulties and geographical distances. The small size of the group – only 19 members – reduces the administrative burden, but it does mean that every member has to be prepared to work for the benefit of the group. The longevity of the group, even with many changes of membership over the years, acts as a bonding element. About half the members have belonged for fifteen years or more.

But Quilt Art is by no means inward looking and is actively seeking new members. The work does not have to conform to the strict definition of a 'quilt' – applications from textile artists working in any discipline are welcomed. There is a selection process: the group is looking for well established artists working independently and consistently, whose work is not only technically proficient but demonstrates something that is harder to define –



the artist's own unique 'voice.'

The small size of the group also means that the artists can produce larger work. Unlike many art forms, a quilt can make a big statement with a dramatic visual impact and gallery space is often limited. The cost of transport means that large quilts have to be rolled up for touring exhibitions, eliminating work which is three-dimensional, free standing or contains rigid elements. In Quilt Art's smaller exhibitions, such as 'Small Talk', the artists have free rein to be more experimental.

Quilt Art is currently planning

From left to right: *Thrall*, Sara Impey; *Passages (1)*, Mirjam Pet-Jacobs; *Colourscape*, Inge Hueber; *Embrace*, detail, Sue Hotchkis.

two new exhibitions for 2019 or 2020 in memory of one of their founder members, Mary Fogg, who died in 2016 at the age of 95. She was a much-respected and influential quilt artist working from the 1970s until the early years of this century. The exhibitions, entitled 'Material Evidence' and 'Traces', will take as a theme memory, repetition, and the power of stitch.

Today, there are numerous exhibiting groups and many more venues showing textile art. The internet too, has hugely expanded the opportunities for work to be seen. So, the challenge now facing

Quilt Art is rather different from when it was founded: continuing to stand out in a textile art world that has blossomed around it. The group's international reach and the high quality of the work remain its strengths.

For many members however, belonging to Quilt Art is about much more than an opportunity to exhibit but about international friendships and the opportunity to share the issues and concerns everyone faces working in isolation most of the time. After more than thirty years, Quilt Art is a mature and self-confident group of textile

artists, still finding inexhaustible expressive potential in the quilt as an art form and as a cultural artefact, and looking forward to the future and the next challenge. [📖](#)

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