

Jette Clover, 'Metropolis 5' (2014). Photo: Pol Leemans.



Janet Twinn, 'Grandiflora Gold' (2014). Photo: Michael Wicks



30 wonderful years

As the international exhibiting group Quilt Art celebrates a milestone with two new shows, *Pretty Patches* looks at the diverse work of some of its members

Feature by **SARA IMPEY**

Quilt Art was founded in Britain in 1985, but from the outset it attracted textile artists from overseas and today more than half the members come from outside the UK. The group mounts touring exhibitions here and in Europe and has also exhibited in Japan, Canada and Russia. Each exhibition is accompanied by a book published by the group.

Most of the 18 artists base their work on the techniques of patchwork and quilting, but their interpretations are highly individual. The group does not insist that the work has to conform to the standard definition of a quilt: that is, layers of fabric held together with stitch. Many of the artists experiment with a wide range of materials, techniques and methods of display. Several have backgrounds in other media and this diversity contributes to the variety to be found in Quilt Art exhibitions. The selection and control over the materials – in other words, the design – lifts and distinguishes their work. Many artists are inspired by the world around them.

INTRODUCING...

Jette Clover, who is Danish but lives in Belgium, is interested in the visible traces of time on the urban landscape. She photographs fragments of lettering from old advertising hoardings and graffiti, and screen-prints them on to cloth. Sometimes she paints over them and sands the surface to simulate the destructive effects of the weather. She also uses collage techniques to add overlapping layers, just as fresh posters are constantly covering old ones.

Her designer's flair ensures that these potentially chaotic elements are carefully arranged into strong graphic images, with textural details that repay close examination.

Fenella Davies, from Somerset, is similarly drawn to the urban landscape but her work is more free, abstract and often minimalist in style. Several of her quilts are based on crumbling walls in Venice. She works with a wide variety of fabrics, such as rough linens with raw and torn edges,

'Members value not just the exhibiting opportunities but the support and friendships'



to build up a highly textured surface, often incorporating dye and paint. Hand stitching both seals the layers and adds to the texture. Her deliberately restricted palette often results in large areas containing a single neutral colour such as cream, black or brown, but within these there is a huge variation of shades. She invariably introduces contrasting accents, usually in bright but natural colours such as ochres and rusts, highlighting the visual accretions that appear over time on city walls.

Pure patchwork is less common among quilt artists today than it was a generation ago, but **Inge Hueber** from Germany and **Janet Twinn** from Surrey still piece their vibrant hand-dyed fabrics to build up an intricate abstract arrangement of colour and shape. However, they construct their quilts in very different ways. Inge machine stitches her work using the Seminole technique. She positions the strips in graduated steps so that the closely related shades seem to shimmer against one another, echoing the seascapes by which she is often inspired. The regular and repeating patterns on her quilts appeal instantly to the eye, but have an underlying complexity which enriches the surface, particularly as she displays her quilts so that the raw edges are at the front.

Janet uses her drawing skills to sketch aspects of the natural world that inspire her, such as flowers and woodland. She dyes, paints and prints the fabrics and then meticulously plans the construction to build up a controlled interplay of irregular but balanced shapes and distributions of colour. To add an extra visual element, she finishes her quilts with dense machine quilting, sometimes in variegated threads.



Above: Dominic Nash, 'Stills from a Life 45' (2014). Cotton and silk organza, machine appliqué and quilting. Photo: Mark Gulezian/Quicksilver Photographers.

Top right: Sara Impey, 'Hustings' (2013). Hand-dyed cotton, machine stitched lettering. Photo: Kevin Mead.
Middle right: Fenella Davies, 'Seam/stress - Bloodline' (2014). Photo: Matt Lincoln.

Right: Inge Hueber, 'Colourscape' (2014). Photo: Roland Hueber.

Below: Dirkje van der Horst-Beetsma, 'Skoda 1' (2013). Photos printed on canvas, hand and machine stitched. Photo: worldonphoto.com





Above: Allie Kay, 'Happy Days, Contained, Fractured, Phantom' (2013), Photo: Rob Lamb.

Right: Elizabeth Brimelow, 'Around Here' (2014), Mostly silk, hand and machine stitched, appliqué and reverse appliqué, hand knotted. Photo: Michael Wicks.

Far right: Karina Thompson, 'As Quick as Foxes on the Hill' (2014), Digital print on cotton, rayon thread, machine stitching. Text from the poem 'A Postcard from the Volcano' by Wallace Stevens. Photo: Richard Batty, River Studio, Birmingham.



Elizabeth Brimelow also bases her work on the world around her, specifically the natural and man-made marks on her local landscape in Cheshire. Like Janet, drawing is her starting point. The patterns found through the changing seasons are rendered in a variety of often very simple embroidery and appliqué techniques to create a surface which is partly pictorial, partly impressionistic, but always graphically satisfying. Her work sometimes departs from the usual square or rectangular format. 'Around Here' (*above*) is inspired by a walk near her home.

Sandra Meech, who lives in Somerset, adds an element of social commentary to her landscape-based work. She is concerned with environmental issues, such as the effects of climate change on the Inuit people in her native Canada and the flooding in the Somerset Levels in the winter of 2013–14. 'Reality and Rhetoric' (*shown on page 51*) is based on a photograph of the floods that Sandra took at the time. She transferred this on to fabric and then stitched it in a series of 'slats' displayed in panels. Visible at the bottom of the panels and behind the slats is a text she wrote in pen directly on to the background fabric about the response to the flooding by local people and politicians. *You can read more about Sandra in our in-depth interview on page 48.*

CREATIVE COLLECTIVE

This is just a selection of the work in *Dialogues*, the main anniversary exhibition which opens at The Quilt Museum in York in September. All the quilts are pictured in the accompanying book *Quilt Art: Dialogues & Small Talk*, with profiles of the artists by quilt historian Dr Sue Marks.

Many of the artists have been members for 15 years or more and this longevity helps to maintain Quilt Art's cohesion, despite the obstacles posed by geographical



distances. All the members value not just the exhibition opportunities but also the support and international friendships that come with being a member of Quilt Art. Speaking personally, the past 15 years of my life have been hugely enriched by these friendships and I feel privileged to be a member. 🐾

❖ *Sava Impey writes: It is with much sadness that Quilt Art heard of the death of Allie Kay on 14 July 2015. Allie, who lived in Ireland, had been a member since 2009. Her beautiful work and her valuable and insightful artistic input will be greatly missed by the group.*

Find out more about Quilt Art at www.quiltart.eu

GET INVOLVED!

❖ Applications to join Quilt Art are welcomed. The group is looking for textile artists who are working consistently and independently and have both a high degree of technical proficiency and something else that is harder to define: their own unique artistic 'voice'.

Because the group is so small, every member has to be prepared to contribute to the work involved in running it.

Interested artists are asked to take part in a selection process which involves submitting images of recent work and additional information. Successful applicants are then invited to attend an interview. To find out more about how to apply, visit www.quiltart.eu/applications.html

TOUR GUIDE

To see more of the work of Quilt Art members, visit:

➔ *Quilt Art: Dialogues* 11 September – 31 October, at The Quilt Museum, St Anthony's Hall, Peasholme Green, York YO1 7PW www.quiltmuseum.org.uk

➔ *Quilt Art: Small Talk* 19 September – 31 October, at The Silk Museum, Park Lane, Macclesfield SK11 6TJ www.silkmacclesfield.org.uk

➔ Additional shows in Drachten and Veerwouden in the Netherlands in early 2016, and Delmenhorst, Germany in late 2016. Details on the website

➔ *Quilt Art: Dialogues & Small Talk*, with text by Dr Sue Marks, is available from www.quiltart.eu price €18, plus p&p