

Art by Barbara Watler, Virginia Spiegel, Alison Muir, Margaret Abramshe, and Judith Content



## **H<sub>2</sub>OH! DISCUSSION POINTS**

H<sub>2</sub>Oh! is an exhibition of 34 art quilts created by members of Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the art quilt through education, exhibitions, professional development, documentation, and publications. Founded in 1989 by an initial group of 50 artists, SAQA now has over 3,400 members worldwide: artists, teachers, collectors, gallery owners, museum curators and corporate sponsors. Since its establishment, the organization has grown alongside the evolution of the quilt as an art form. Today, SAQA defines an art quilt as a creative visual work that is layered and stitched or that references this form of stitched layered structure.

Every living thing depends on water to survive, and life hangs in the balance when this precious resource is squandered. This exhibition encouraged artists to interpret one of the most vital, desired, powerful, sacred, and enjoyed resources on earth in their own unique, individual style, whether abstract, graphic, or representational. We invite viewers to look at these works not only for their beauty and inspiration, but to also take the time to ask questions about the artists' decisions and to make connections between the works to further deepen the experience. *H<sub>2</sub>Oh!* Draws on a well of beauty, reverence, and contemplation and invites you to consider the importance and the impact of water. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed below. We've organized a few pieces by theme, but keep in mind that individual pieces may connect to others in more than one way, and the themes below overlap as well.

## Environmental Concerns

In *Gulf of Mexico: April 2010* Isabelle Wiessler finds intriguing colors and patterns in the devastating effects of an oil spill. Likewise Chiaki Dosho's *Light & Dark 11* imagines damage to the ocean floor after a tsunami in a beautiful way. Nancy Crasco's *Didymo*, Alison Muir's *Wrecking the Reef*, and Virginia Spiegel's *Boundary Waters 83* all use engaging color, texture, and pattern to highlight the beauty of a place or organism in order to create the sympathy to preserve it. As a viewer are you swayed more by depictions of beauty to be protected, or of destruction which should be avoided? Disasters can produce colors and shapes that are aesthetically pleasing. Many artists call attention to serious issues by drawing the viewer in with beautiful imagery. Which pieces draw you in and why? Do you find conflicting themes of beauty within destruction effective as a way to send a message about our environment?

Susan Lenz's *Flood Clothesline* uses a laundry line and vintage linens to air photographic evidence of flooding near her home in South Carolina. Her installation uses personal stories to connect real people to the larger story. What metaphors can you read into the imagery of putting laundry (and entire homes) out to dry? What might the artist be trying to say, and to whom? If possible, listen to the audio statement for this piece.

Jayne Himsl's *Delta Blues* map questions who does and doesn't get water. How is water distributed and controlled? Donna June Katz's *Water Over Sky* is also map-like. It is worth listening to her audio statement for a description of her micro and macro imagery. What do these two artists choose to represent in their maps. What is similar, what is different? How might you use a map to tell a water story?

Nancy Lemke's *El Niño, Weather's Puppeteer* uses personification to portray a mischievous, but not intentionally malicious, weather pattern and thus speaks gently to climate change without doom and gloom. In what other ways have you seen weather or the elements personified? What kind of message do they send?

A small but powerful sculpture, Mary Vaneecke's *Poisoning Flint* is simple yet poignant. Water is life, but what if it isn't safe to drink? Compare this to Cherrie Hampton's *The Woman at the Well* who is so happy to have clean and accessible water. Do we in developed countries take water for granted? What are the trade-offs? What are we willing to sacrifice to have water in arid land, or to save money in an economic downturn?

Find pieces that celebrate water. Compare those with pieces focused on a lack of water, such as Regina Benson's *A River Ran Here*, which represents the vestiges of a once plentiful arroyo and the effects of growing cities.

## **Sacred Places**

*Mountain Stream* by Marianne Williamson evokes the dappled light and babbling sound of a peaceful stream. *Ponderings* by Erika Carter is similarly evocative. These are places of respite. Margaret Abramshe's *Sound of Water* actually puts the meditating figure in the scene. How do these artists convey sound through a visual medium? Do you relax to the gentle sound of a fountain, a babbling brook, or perhaps the crashing but rhythmic sound of ocean waves? Do you have a sacred water place?

Els Van Barle's *Zeeland* literally means Sea and Land and reflects her homeland of the same name. Compare *Zeeland* to *Sa Conca* by Olga Gonzalez, which celebrates her lovely Spanish coastline, and to *Force and Reflection* by Doris Hulse. What colors, textures, shapes would you use to represent your favorite watery place?

## **Water Stories**

*The Place We Cannot Breathe* by Diane Skidmore is based on a poem about going deep into a well to find resiliency. Listen to the audio statement for more of her story. In what way is water used as a metaphor? How does the unusual shape or all the circles reinforce the message?

For Linda Colsh, water is also the start of a narrative in *Past is Present*. Be sure to listen to the audio statement for her story. What story do you see in the artwork?

*First Thaw* by Carole Anne Grotrian seems to be a visual haiku. Implied texture created by simple dye and resist techniques resembles floes and reflections of trees. How might you use fabric and surface design to portray something? What shape, color, or texture might hint at it with the most economy?

## **Graphic Interpretations**

Liz Kuny's *Boiling Point* uses shape, color, and abstraction to convey the properties of water. Similarly, Diane Firth's *Flow #3* is a graphic representation of the physics of water's movement. Compare these two to Gay Lasher's *Ebb and Flow* and to Barbara Schneider's *Reflections in a Canal, Venice* which portray water, sand, and time in eternal motion. What is it about each of these pieces that can be abstracted and still convey the subject matter? How might you interpret water?

## **Technique**

Art quilting is open to myriad ways of manipulating fabric and fabric-like substrates. Look at the various ways the artists have presented their subject matter. Which techniques are you familiar with? Which are new to you? Which seem particularly appropriate to the theme of the exhibit? The following are some examples of works using various techniques. Note that some quilts may fall into several categories.

### ***Dye and Resist***

*A River Ran Here* by Regina Benson

*First Thaw* by Carole Anne Grotrian

### ***Painting on fabric:***

*Mountain Stream* by Marianne Williamson

*Gulf of Mexico: April 2010* by Isabelle Wiessler

### ***Thread Painting:***

*The Woman at the Well* by Cherrie Hampton

### ***Stamping and Printing:***

*Zeeland* by Els Van Barle

*Past is Present* by Linda Colsh

### ***Raw edge applique/collage with fabric:***

*El Niño, Weather's Puppeteer* by Nancy Lemke

### ***Patchwork and piecing:***

*Delta Blues* by Jayne Himsl

**More Information:** For more information about this exhibition (including image slideshows and audio statements), please visit [www.saqa.com/h2oh](http://www.saqa.com/h2oh). If you have any questions, please contact us at [info@saqa.com](mailto:info@saqa.com).