

Connections and Discussion Points for Docents and Visitors

Art quilts are as varied as the creatures in this exhibit. 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. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed. Keep in mind that individual pieces may connect to others in more than one way.

A Menagerie of Techniques

Like the animal kingdom, the textile medium is replete with pattern and color, plus, it is a perfect substrate for additional surface design such as natural and chemical dyes, paint, and resists, to name a few. Designs in commercially printed fabrics can be co-opted for realistic or fantastic fur, scales, or hints at the animal's surroundings. The textile artist can print photos on fabric -- which can be used on their own, as templates for imagery, or foundations for intensive stitching by hand or machine. Fabric textures range from smooth to rough, and can be folded, layered, frayed and sculpted to accentuate the forms in the chosen imagery. In addition to the fabrics themselves, stitches of all types and other embellishments, both the expected and unusual, add physical and conceptual layers to the artwork. Look at the various ways the artists have presented their subject matter. Which techniques are you familiar with? Which are new to you? The following are some examples of works using various techniques. Note that some quilts may fall into several categories.

Photography and stitching over photos:

The Kiss by Maggie Vanderweit
No Worries by Jennifer Day
Murder of Crows by Jill Kertulla
Red Eyed Tree Frog by Jan Holzbauer

Using photos as inspiration/templates:

Yellow-headed Blackbird by Sandra Poteet
Beauty of the Beasts by Barbara Yates Beasley
Red Fox, Blue Fox by Kate Themel

Painting on fabric:

The Blue Eyed Beast by Sharon Rossi
What Happens in the Swamp? by Christine Holden

Stamping and Printing:

The Shores of Atlantis by Barbara Martinson
What Happens in the Swamp? by Christine Holden

Raw edge applique/collage with fabric:

Polka Dodo by Susan Carlson
The Long Necked Cats and the Long Legged Bird by Kathy York

Applique:

In Her Dreams She Dances by Sonia Grasvik

Patchwork and piecing:

The Last White Rhino by Lou Ann Smith

Embellishment:

Humans Taste Like Chicken by Jim Hay

Two Creatures by Judith Roderick

Dimensional Construction

It's a Jungle Out There by Mary Vaneecke

Who's Laughing Now by Nora Bebee

Blind as a Bat — Not Quite by Holly Altman

Identify these techniques or combinations of techniques in other artworks, as well as other unconventional (non-fabric) materials. Are any quilts constructed with items from flora or fauna?

Skin, Scales, Feathers, and Fur

SAQA members from around the world let their imaginations run wild to create interesting and unusual interpretations of animals using unexpected or unconventional materials, adornment or unusual techniques. The artists were able to embrace the double meaning of “fabrications”, referring both to the fact that the animals could be made up, and especially to the medium in which they work. How many different ways of fabricating the myriad textures of animal skins and coverings can you identify? In what ways have the artists transformed common materials? Which ones do you find most effective?

Color

Look carefully at the use of color in the quilts. Greens and blues are prevalent in this exhibit. Blue can connote water and sky, but it is also a mood. How is blue used in *Red Fox, Blue Fox* by Kate Themel, and in *Can We Save the Whooping Cranes* by Sara Sharp? Describe a few of the colors you see using colorful words, such as swamp green or flamingo pink.

Animal Classification

Mammalian and Avian creations are most prevalent in the exhibit, but take the time to also find Reptilian, Amphibian, Actinopteryii (bony fish), Arthropod, and Imaginary creatures which the artists were encouraged to “fabricate.”

Wild or Domesticated?

Which animals are wild, which domesticated, which complete fantasy? How important is realism to you as a viewer? Compare the realistically rendered fantasy creature in *The Blue Eyed Monster* by Sharon Rossi, with a fantastically colored real (though extinct)

bird in *Polka Dodo* by Susan Carlson. Compare as well a photographic image such as *No Worries* by Jennifer Day with a more abstract image such as *The Last White Rhino* by Lou Ann Smith, or a whimsical interpretation such as *Two Creatures* by Judith Roderick. How do you respond to the different types of imagery? Which do you think is most effective?

Making a Statement

The theme not only lends itself particularly to bold colors and whimsical imagery, but also to beautiful realism, and humor that can be ebullient or dark. We must remember that man can himself be a beast, and that we impinge upon the habitats of animals as much as they on ours. By sharing the intriguing and inspiring qualities of animals, artists serve as reminders that conservation and understanding is necessary in order to maintain the natural world in which we live.

Now You See Him... by Cat Larrea suggests by the title that soon you “won’t.” It’s common knowledge that polar bear habitats are shrinking. This piece is a reminder, and perhaps call to action — particularly as the polar bear’s plight is an index of more widespread problems to come.

Grieving Animal by Chiaki Dosho is more evocative than anything specific, but leads us to wonder, what is the animal grieving? Loss of a mate, habitat, freedom, or something else?

Can We Save the Whooping Cranes? by Sara Sharp is not only a pretty image of graceful birds, but a reminder that they live in sensitive environments and are particularly affected by human encroachment. Can we leave well enough alone to give these birds space, clean water, and an abundant future?

Further Investigation

Choose a piece to investigate on your own or with a group. Look at it for one minute, then turn away from it and try to remember one thing about it. Turn back to the artwork and view it again. What do you see now? How was the artwork made? What colors dominate? Are there themes or issues to investigate? Look for stories versus information, urban versus wild, and beauty versus truth. Does the artwork make you consider aspects of art or life in a new way? Why do you like or dislike the artwork? What question(s) would you ask the artist if they were there?