

Houston & Texas News

"Journal quilts" draw attendees of the festival at the George R. Brown Convention Center on Sunday.

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Quilters sew meaning in fabric of life

By **CAROLYN FEIBEL**

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Quilting can be painstaking work. The canvas is large, the stitches tiny, and the designs are often complex, even labyrinthine. Not to mention the beads, dyes, metal threads, digital photo transfers and other new techniques that have infiltrated the art form in recent years.

"People can't really risk a lot on a great big quilt — it's expensive," said Karey Bresenhan, director and founder of the International Quilt Festival, which concluded Sunday at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

With so much at stake, a new quilting form has emerged: the journal quilt. They are small-scale, experimental and often personal works.

Hundreds were on display at the festival, wowing attendees with their unorthodox techniques and subject matters ranging from chemotherapy to James Bond.

The idea behind journal quilting is simple: The artist completes one small quilt every month. Through a schedule of modest projects, the artist learns to experiment and make mistakes.

"I was feeling very uptight about being creative," said Jeanne Williamson, of Natick, Mass., who developed the idea of journal quilts in 1999. "I felt I didn't have time to make mistakes."

To get unblocked, Williamson told herself she would make a small quilt every week for a year. "Some of them were horrible and some of them were really nice," she said. "It didn't matter if I made one I didn't like because I was going to make another next week. It took the total pressure off."

The experiment was so fruitful and freeing that Williamson kept it up for more than six years. She used all sorts of materials, including the discarded plastic wrapping from a clementine and dryer lint from the final load of laundry she did for her son before he left for college.

"I felt like a little switch went off in my head," Williamson said. "All my inhibitions about being creative just went away."

Williamson told her online quilting group about it, and The Journal Quilt Project was born in 2002. Hundreds of artists pledged to make a small quilt every month, for nine months a year. Journal quilters use the form to depict personal experiences, and or to experiment with new methods.

More than fabric

In her quilt, *Walking Humiston Woods*, Ann Mays used items she picked up during her strolls near Pontiac, Ill. Rocks, dried mushrooms, lichen-covered twigs, and a feather are attached to the fabric.

Family Tree of Alcoholism by Sandy Sue Anderson of Wisconsin includes cloth leaves stitched with the words "divorce" and "jail time." Crushed beer bottle caps and a car key also are sewn into the quilt.

An accompanying statement reveals that Anderson's son, father and four brothers all suffer from alcoholism.

Some are not autobiographical but reactions to social issues, such as peak oil and Hurricane Katrina.

"This intrigues me," said Houston teacher Rita Spess, as she examined a journal quilt depicting cliffs in New Brunswick. "It makes me think, 'Hey, maybe I could do this.'"

RESOURCES

MORE ONLINE

For more information on the International Quilt Festival, visit www.quilts.com.

To view some of the journal quilts showcased, visit www.quiltart.com.

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NanaKib wrote:

Same here Justmy, I have several quilts from my family (grandmothers, Great Aunts) I just started quilting myself 5 yrs ago. I love it. It is relaxing for me, each of my gr children have 2 quilts just for them from Nana. I have made a quilt for whom ever I draw for gift exchange the last 3 yrs. They all love them. I now have another gr. son 2 wks old to sew for. I taught both daughters in laws to quilt and we at times get together to work on just one to finish quicker. It is a great bonding time.

For Katrina victims, and others, about 5 women come to my basement and we made quilts to send to those who had been relocated or displaced. It's a great feeling to help others.

11/5/2007 9:26:09 AM

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justmyopinion03 wrote:

I have saved every blanket that anyone has ever made for me and my children.As I look at each one I can honestly tell you that they have a lot of sentimental value and I wouldn't give them up for the world.For someone to take that much time to make something just for me is a Blessing all by it's self.

11/5/2007 8:48:41 AM

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