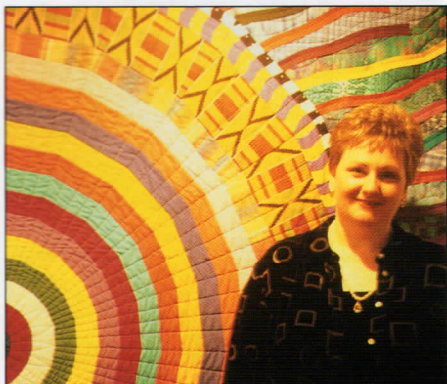


Developing your Own Style

How to Give Personality to Your Quilts



Priscilla Bianchi

You are unique and non-repeatable. Your quilts should reveal that uniqueness.

Every quiltmaker dreams of acquiring an identifying style. We may think this only happens for “real artists,” but everyone can do it. Developing your own personal style is a never-ending learning process that evolves throughout your life, transforming your quilts in the process. Your art will constantly change and develop as you practice, experiment and undergo new life experiences.

From an artistic point of view, the creative process has three phases.

Step 1.

The intuitive or sensitive phase
When you first start, you just do it. You follow your gut feelings. You are in an “absorbing mode,” copying other peoples’ work and following step-by-step instructions. You do things pretty much the way everyone else is doing them. Even so, your own tastes, likes and dislikes are surfacing.

Step 2.

The academic or technical phase
This is a rational, maturing period during which you strive to master technique and achieve the best workmanship possible. You acquire skills and a knowledge of materials that make your work easier and more pleasurable. You become a problem solver, finding what works best in different situations. This “doing your homework” phase makes you versatile and flexible, liberating you to do your craft. In my opinion, completing this phase successfully is a prerequisite to producing superb artwork.

Step 3.

The creative, personal phase
Now you are ready to innovate, doing things your own way through introversion, going back to your intuitive beginnings. With awakened sensitivity, you are now able to express your inner self through original design in whatever techniques will successfully render your vision.

Your art is—or should be—a reflection of your life. The quilt artist who presents new ideas is sending messages:

- *Who I am and where I come from*
- *What I think and believe in*
- *My perceptions of the world I live in*

Everything you create stems from your inner self. Don’t try to please others or work in a style that you think is “acceptable.” Your quilts should be an extension of *you*, representing your personality, tastes, passions, convictions, and the opinions you want to express.

My own quilts express my individualism. I like to imprint myself on everything I do. When I started quilting five years ago, I was aware that I was “importing” a completely foreign tradition into Guatemala where I live. I wanted to pay homage simultaneously to traditional quilting and to my Spanish heritage and Mayan-influenced culture. Using hand-woven Guatemalan textiles was a natural step in my development.

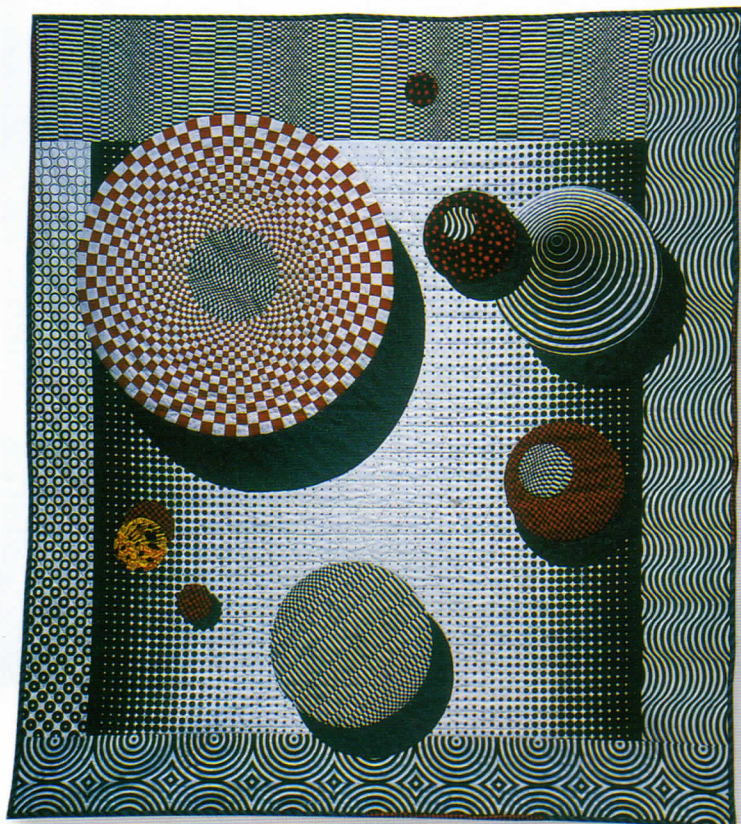
I experiment constantly, challenging myself to expand the possibilities of the striped and Ikat nature of the Guatemalan fabric as far as it will go. I also complement my native textiles with other ethnic fabrics like Indonesian batiks, African mud cloth, and hand-dyed cottons that share the same rustic qualities. They all sing together harmoniously. Using my native fabric has gradually changed my style into something that is my own, strengthening the direct influence of my roots and the cultural context I live in.

Tips for Acquiring Your Own Style

Identify yourself. Look inside yourself. What do you have to say that is different from what others are saying? Don't be discouraged if your initial answer is, "Nothing." You're wrong! Keep going.

PRISCILLA BIANCHI, Purple Cross, 2001, 46" x 52". Guatemalan textiles, Indonesian batiks, hand-dyed cottons. "I've always been attracted to certain shapes like crosses, diamonds, and zigzags. They show up in my work again and again. I recently realized they're all part of the Mayan/Guatemalan iconography. I have seen these symbols all around me for so long I hadn't consciously noticed them."

Identify what attracts you. If you're unsure, start a collection. (I keep my own sketches, magazine cutouts, and fabric scraps in a file cabinet, classified under titles like "Geometrics," "Guatemalan," "Landscapes," "Color



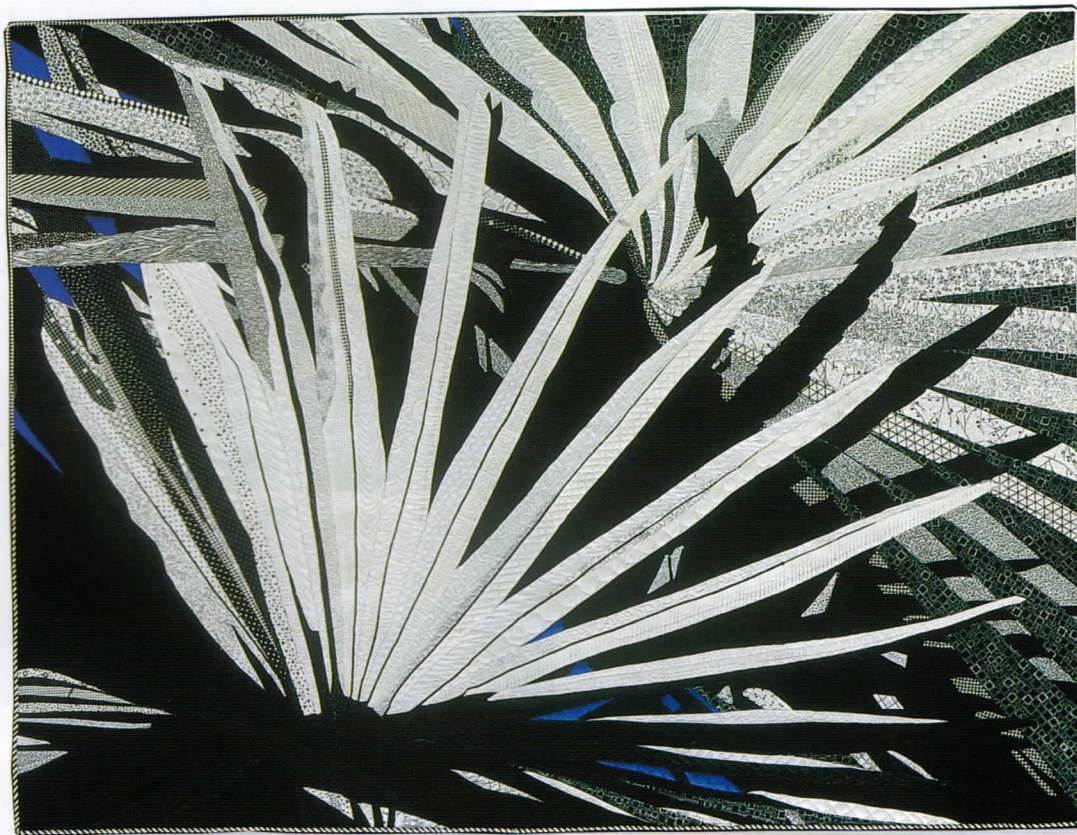
Schemes," etc.) Gather up anything that excites you—colors, textures, fabrics, patterns, and symbols. Then spread them out and absorb the whole. Is there harmony or conflict? Excitement or boredom? Are there subjects or colors that are repeated over and over? What does your collection show you about you?

ANDI PEREJDA, Just Plane Fun, 1998, 58" x 52". "My medical and analytical background influences my view of the world. This quilt is my concept of two-dimensional circles of illusion floating over a grid with a light source from above left." (Contact Andi at apquilts@pacbell.net)

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KATIE PASQUINI-MASOPUST,
Black and White Palms,

2002, 38" x 50". "I began with a photo of magnificent palms that were growing alongside the road on a trip to Florida. I chose to create it using only black and white graphic print fabrics. At the last minute I added a bit of blue where the sky peaks through. This quilt is about shadows and light." (See Katie's work at www.katiepm.com)



Analyze your past work. What traits stand out? Even if you haven't yet developed your own style, your personality will already be apparent in your work without your conscious awareness.

Analyze what makes you different. This is one of the *most* important examinations you'll ever make as a quilt artist. What special talents do you have? What experiences have made you or your life unique? How are you different from everyone else?

Isolate yourself periodically. When I was starting out, one of the country's leading quilt authorities, author and curator Bob Shaw, passed on some astonishing advice: "Don't look at quilts!" Although very difficult to follow,



HOLLIS CHATELAIN, Blue Men, 2001, 58" x 78". "Before I went to Africa, I was a photographer of people. During my twelve years there, I drew a lot. These two things, along with the vibrant culture and beautiful environment of Africa, strongly influenced my present art." (See Hollis' work at www.hollisart.com)

it is wise advice and really works. It's easier for me living outside the main quilting scene. U.S. quilters run the risk of overexposing themselves, of being too strongly influenced and even overwhelmed by all the quilts, books, classes, fellow quilters, quilt shows, and other input around them. Creating something completely new would be hard in such an intense and distracting environment. When you want to be creative, arrange blocks of time to isolate yourself.

Investigate other art forms outside quilting. Despite my advice not to be overly influenced by what other quilt artists are doing, you can get fresh

perspectives from studying the creative processes and design solutions of artists in other disciplines.

Work only on things that you're passionate about. That way, your whole being will be part of the creative process. It's hard to make a successful quilt about something you don't like.

Feeling comfortable in an artist's skin may not come easily for you. It didn't for me. It was a conscious effort that took time, personal commitment, determination, and, above all, a lot of hard work.

Your own artistic identity is constantly being influenced and changed. You have practiced and honed your

technical and problem-solving skills. You acquired experience that will let you express your inner self confidently. You identified who you are and understand what moves you. You have evolved. You are now ready to explore and present your own unique ideas in your own unique style. On to new heights!

Quilt artist, designer and teacher, **PRISCILLA BIANCHI'S** work has been acquired by the American Craft Museum in New York City, New York, and by many private collectors. She operates her Mayan textile export business from her hometown in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

You can contact her at pb@intelnett.com or see more of her work at www.priscillabianchi.com



LURA SCHWARZ SMITH,
Dancing Peace, 2002, 68" x 60".
"My art background is in illustration and graphic design. I often incorporate my inner life in my work, combining images from my dreams with images from nature." (See Lura's work at www.lura-art.com)