

WHEN YOUR ART IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Where artists live and play profoundly changes their art.

By *Martha Sielman*

When 19 artists all claim that where they live is absolutely the best place for making their art, one must sit up and take notice. The artists I interviewed for my book *Art Quilt Portfolio: The Natural World* felt that their surroundings were just right for them. However, the artists lived all over the United States (plus Australia), so each best place was very different.

I thought, “There must be a story here,” but I was wrong. There were 19 different stories! I invited four artists from the book to take photos of where they live and talk in greater depth about the influence of place on their art. They are deeply inspired by their love for the beauty of the world that surrounds them. Each artist’s work reflects the colors, plants, birds, and animals present where they live.

What we see around us profoundly influences what we create. As you work on your own quilt art, think about how your environment is affecting your color palette and which things you choose to feature. Being aware of your responses to your environment will enrich your enjoyment of your quilting adventures.





Ginny Eckley lives in Kingwood, Texas, just outside of Houston.

Recently I've been creating a series based on how birds find ways to live in man-made environments. On a trip to Hiroshima, Japan, I was delighted to see birds thriving in that city. I walked to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. The Genbaku Dome

there was damaged by the atomic bomb and has been left as a memorial. Herons, egrets, and blackbirds perched on it, though it was fenced off to humans. My quilt Hiroshima shows one of those herons.

The Japanese design concept of notan is about combining equal amounts of light and dark. Birds against a light sky or clouds are a perfect example of that. I do love how many of Houston's skyscrapers reflect the surrounding architecture. The contrast of the birds' organic movements against the static lines of the buildings, such as in Hospital Rising, is endlessly inspiring.

Blackbirds and crows seem to prefer to mingle with people. I often see them in parking lots, perched on top of cars or looking for discarded food. I'm totally amused by the rows of blackbirds lined up on top of billboards. A group of trees may be below them, yet they choose to perch on man-made structures.

My local office store attempted to keep birds from nesting around its entrance. The trees were wrapped in some kind of netting, and finger-like metal spikes were put around the signs. The birds wove nests around the spikes and pushed holes through the netting. They are very persistent and increasing in numbers.



Clockwise from above left:

Ginny, left, painting silk with a student; birds in man-made environments; Hospital Rising, 41 x 41 and Hiroshima, 62 x 55 inches, with detail, both by Ginny Eckley





Photos this page by Pat Gould



Pat Gould lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and travels throughout the Southwest.

From my office, I have a great view of Sandia Crest, which rises 10,700 feet

to the east of the Rio Grande Valley. This massive wall of granite, limestone, and sandstone glows a brilliant pink almost every evening when the setting sun shines on it. Sandia means “watermelon” in Spanish and the crest looks very much like a slice of watermelon since it has a ridge of pines on top that look like rind.

Mountain and high desert skies are very different from coastal skies. At this higher altitude, away from industrial smog, the blue is so very intense that it almost seems unreal. Many of the rock formations are sandstone, in either orange-pink or deep garnet colors, a vibrant contrast to the deep cerulean blue sky seen in Moonrise: North Rim. Sunrises and sunsets display exciting colors created by the dust particles typical of desert areas.

It didn’t happen overnight, but I’ve noticed that my color palette has become narrower so that now I mostly work with blues, earth tones, and greens. This limited palette is especially evident in Canyon Light. Daytime light is bright and harsh due to such clear air, but the dawn and dusk light tends to be soft and I am always excited to see the beautiful shadows that move across the mountains and rocks at sunset.

Clockwise from above right:

Pat Gould and her husband with their pets; views of the Southwest; Canyon Light, 40 x 60 inches, and Moonrise: North Rim, 63 x 46 inches, both by Pat Gould





Photo by Terri Cappucci

Sally Dillon lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, and vacations in Maine.

My art is *all* about where I live. I use maps and aerial views as the centerpiece of each work and place details around the map: birds, mammals, and rocks. Then I add even smaller details, such as insects, flowers, or animal tracks, in the squares where the sashing crosses. The colors are based on my feelings for the place at a particular time and season.

Massachusetts—Thoughts of Home features the Massachusetts coast from Boston Harbor to the Elizabeth Islands. My husband and I grew up in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and both sides of my family have lived in New England since the 1600s. I love the beauty of the colors in the changing seasons. The colors of this piece reflect the optimism and clear days of summer.

Coast of Maine shows a map of the Sheepscot River near Boothbay Harbor and includes Westport Island, where I have vacationed for 40 years. Maine seems more muted and misty to me, so the blues are more grayed and overall the colors more subdued. In the long, quiet days of midsummer, I have more time to observe and draw the animals, birds, and ocean creatures. I could do dozens of Maine coast quilts: some all sunsets and sunrises, others with the mysterious white fog, and still others with stormy seas and huge waves. This particular one shows a calm day with all the animals and the artist at peace.

Photo by UMass Photo Services



Clockwise from far left:

Sally Dillon in her studio; Massachusetts—Thoughts of Home, 63 x 87 inches, by Sally Dillon, hand quilted by Ruth Anderson; views of Massachusetts and Maine; Coast of Maine, 52 x 80 inches, by Sally Dillon, hand quilted by Sally Weymouth

Photo by Gail Negle Photography



Photos by the artist





Katherine K. Allen maintains two studios: one in urban South Florida and the other on the Chesapeake Bay in rural Maryland.

I gravitate to certain colors repeatedly no matter where I am working. However, what is bright, pure, and warm in Florida becomes more grayed,

complex, and cooler in my northern studio.

My Maryland studio is in a mature woodland area with wetlands. The landscape is visually dense and animated by sounds, smells, and the constant movement of birds and animals. This layering of sight and sound has a profound effect on me: I strive to imbue the artwork with the flavor of this lively texture and chaotic cacophony, including more birds in the work. I am also frequently out on the water in my kayak surrounded by grasses. This low, wet vantage point inspired Interlude.

In my South Florida studio, compact trees, palms, low shrubs, and flowers populate my world. The leaves, flowers, and palms are represented in single large shapes. In response I strive to make art that reflects this environment by being very bold and graphic. Time in my tropical garden is punctuated by short excursions to the Everglades and to the beach. *Minnow and Leaf* also includes a shore reference point that emphasizes the relationship between plants and earth. **TQL**

Clockwise from above:

Katherine K. Allen at the design wall; *Interlude*, 33 x 42 inches; water and wildlife views; *Minnow and Leaf*, 32 x 78 inches, both quilts by Katherine Allen



Quilt photos by Gerhard Heidersberger; others by the artist