

## **Patricia Ciricillo: A Quilting Biography**

Patricia Ciricillo came to Maryland in 1969 when her husband David Bogen got a job teaching at the University of Maryland School of Law. Patricia took her first quilting class in 1975 from Peggy Hood. Over the next dozen years, she took occasional classes from Marie Newman in Howard County and Sarah Hornsby at the Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. She worked on quilts while studying or working in nursing and caring for her children. The classes and the quilts she worked on at home taught her the technique of making pieced squares, and how to combine the quilt top with batting and backing in a three layer sandwich. Experimenting with many traditional quilt blocks such as “attic window,” “courthouse square,” “road to California,” and “hexagon bouquet,” strengthened her love for the feel of quilting. She finished her first large quilt Virginia Reel in 1983, and it resided for many years on our bed. She eventually recycled it as small items such as baby quilts and placemats. In addition to block squares in which pieces are sewn together with a seam to form a new piece of cloth, Patricia learned appliqué in which cut-out forms are sewn onto the quilt or “applied” to the quilt, allowing for more variation and freedom of design. She began to make “Patricia’s Quilt” in a folk school class, combining pieced and appliquéd squares, some depicting places in her life and symbols of her family.

In 1987 Patricia took a course from Nancy Crow at Arrowmont in Gatlinberg, Tennessee which transformed her approach to her work. She found the “Mayflower” design, but more importantly learned how geometric shapes and the dynamic use of color could produce something extraordinary. The Mayflower design has no curved pieces, but produces an effect of overlapping kaleidoscopic circles. Patricia made twenty Mayflower quilts in a variety of sizes,

including Rainforest Prayer (Mayflower 11), purchased by Professor Barbara Bezdek after it appeared in numerous shows.

Patrica also started painting on fabric. She sometimes used embroidery stitching buttons and beads to enhance the design. Each new technique presented an opportunity to add more layers. She painted five small “Tree quilts,” one of which was purchased by the late Professor Kathy Vaughns, who was one of her first patrons. Research Librarian Susan Herrick also has one of this series.

In the spring of 1989 we visited our son in Japan, and Patricia took a dying workshop at the Kawashima Textile School near Kyoto. She picked up Japanese fabric at flea markets, shops, craft markets and friends, giving her the good fortune of collecting fabrics from around the world. That summer she attended a second course from Nancy Crow at Arrowmont. There she developed her own quilt block, which she called “Waves”. In this series, Waves, she also made twenty quilts, including Malcolm (Waves 12), which belongs to the law school. Malcolm uses the pieced formal block that Patricia created, and adds color and texture symbolically to create a meditation on the life of Malcolm X. This quilt was chosen for **Art Maryland 1997** and exhibited at the Howard County Art Center, and was also selected for an exhibit at Artscape in Baltimore entitled **ARTSCAPE '97, PlayinG in the DarK: Images from the Black Literary Landscape**.

In 1989, Beverly Carter, my first research assistant on Maryland African American history, opened a gallery in Baltimore, Objets d'Art, with her mother, Hazel Barrett. They invited Patricia to have her first solo exhibition there in September, featuring her Mayflower quilts.

In 1990 Patricia gave up her nursing career to engage in quilting full-time. She became active in a number of art organizations. She joined the Ohio based Art Quilt Network (AQN) and attended their symposia. She stayed with AQN for a half-dozen years and co-chaired one of its retreats. Patricia also became a member of the Art Guild of Maryland where she was the only quiltmaker in the group and she co-founded the Fiber Art Network of Maryland to link to area quilt artists. She also mentored a group of friends in the Columbia community in an informal art study group with an emphasis on quilts and textile art.

One important influence on Patricia's work has been her friendship with and learning from the Wooster Ohio quilt artist, Susan Shie. Patricia took her first class with Shie in 1991 and went to several "Turtle Moon Art camps" at Susie's home including one in 2009 where I joined her. Shie founded the Green Quilts Project in 1989. "Its purpose was to create healing energy for the Earth and all life forms (including people!) Any spiritual concept you personally employ to help generate healing is right for your Green Quilt. You can see the healing method as prayer, meditation, affirmation, etc.." As a student in Shie's class, Patricia began her "Meditation Mat" where she painted a large piece of fabric with a yellow road and various affirmations and then added appliqué of flowers, animals, and objects with particular personal meaning. Patricia took up the Green Quilt project. Many of her quilts, including all of the quilts on display at the law school, are labeled Green Quilts because they were done as part of her concern for environmental healing. She participated in Green Quilt shows throughout the country – Kentucky, Louisiana, New York and Ohio.

Patricia's quilts continued to be shown over the next years both at solo exhibitions, juried shows both those devoted to art quilts, and art shows generally. For example, her Spider quilt (Waves 9) became part of "The Quilt Show" at Towson State University in connection with a

stage production of “How to Make an American Quilt.” **Tactile Architecture 1993** at Decatur House in the District of Columbia included one of her landscape quilts, and her quilt Fushimi Inari I was selected for **Tactile Architecture 1996** and traveled from Montpelier Virginia to Lyons, France, to Houston, Texas before coming home to Maryland. The quilt used photographs of the Fushimi-Inari shrine near Kyoto as inspiration, incorporating photo transfers of Japanese castles and fabric collected on our trips to Japan. Fushimi-Inari I was displayed at Government House in Annapolis in **A Celebration of the Arts in Maryland 1997-98**. She based Fushimi-Inari II on the ribbons and origami cranes attached to a fence at the shrine.

While making these wall quilts, Patricia also made garments, fabric jewelry, and many miscellaneous accessories for sale at area art and craft fairs. She won first prize in crafts at the Loyola College Festival of the Arts in 1995 and 1996 with her display of quilts and quilted related objects. Scraps from large quilts found their way into smaller quilts – Patricia’s style is improvisational. The quilts, small or large, spring from the fabric itself suggesting its design rather than being placed into a predetermined design.

In addition to the Mayflower and Wave blocks, Patricia used a third pattern for several of her larger works. In 1994, while David visited California Western School of Law in San Diego, Patricia attended a Quilt San Diego symposium where she developed her Polar Bear in a class on Escher. Each outline of a bear interlocks with other bear outlines. Five quilts, including Polar Bears at Las Fallas, which hangs at the law school, use this design..

Throughout the spring of 1995, Patricia traveled in Australia and New Zealand as David visited several schools there during his sabbatical. She attended a fibre forum at Sturt in Mittagong outside Sydney taught by a group of aboriginal women artists. As a student, she was

invited to experience their relationship to the environment and their materials – trees which they brought from the Northern Territory. We later met the aboriginal artist Mandy Muir, who provided her with scraps of her paintings on fabric, some of which incorporated designs inspired by the rock paintings in the Kakadu region. Secrets are not revealed in this art work, but continue to be protected. These fabrics and others purchased in Australia have been used in a number of quilts, particularly in her Australia series – Australia 1 through 4. The first two Australia quilts, Australia I: The Red Centre and Australia II: the Forest Ring used the “Road to California” pattern, but the fabric created its own impressionistic picture as a fabric collage within the traditional quilting structure. Australia I incorporated an outline of our 1995 travels in Australia typed on fabric, and was part of an exhibit entitled **Treasured Threads** at the Life of Baltimore Gallery in Owings Mills. Australia II: The Forest Ring participated in the **Governor’s pre-inaugural gala** in January 1999. .Australia III used the Waves pattern, and Australia 4, which hangs at the law school, uses separate blocks with aboriginal fabrics and an impressionistic version of the Aboriginal flag. **Evolutionary Threads** at Maryland Hall in Annapolis displayed both these quilts in 2002. Patricia also created Pages From a Fibre Art Journal which consisted of squares concerning events from different places during the sabbatical year sewn together to make a cloth book, which hangs in my office, now taking the form of a couple of long banners.

Australia I began a group of quilts in which the image produced by the strips created a powerful impressionistic painting. Blue Moon I hung at the law school on loan for several years before being replaced by the loan of Polar Bears at Las Fallas. Blue Moon 2: Yosemite (purchased by Barbara Bezdek), sprung from a photograph of the reflection in the water of the trees and rock of El Capitan, exemplified this technique. Polar Bears at Las Fallas uses the

Polar Bear block with an impressionistic use of color in the service of an environmental idea – which is why I like it so much.

As we moved into the twenty-first century, Patricia's quilts became both more political and more family oriented. She completed Borders 1, a comment on the way in which immigration laws affect the US/Mexican border at San Diego, now owned by Taunya Banks. The fence extends out into the Pacific Ocean posing less of a problem for fish crossing the border. Patricia was continuously working on a series of quilts about capital punishment – Professor Marina Hsieh holds Abolition I, Professor Taunya Banks bought Abolition 2, and we have Abolition 3 “Not in My Name” and Abolition 4 “Isolation.” Patricia combined the personal and the political in a 2006 show at Slayton House Gallery entitled *Quilts about Katrina and Home*. One set of quilts combined family pictures, mementos from her childhood and family souvenirs. The impetus for this came from a challenge by Susan Shie for her students and friends to make quilts with the theme “Mom and Apple Pie.” It must include the dishtowel she sent each of them which had a calendar and apples. Patricia incorporated many mementos and a photo of her mother's recipe for apple cake, her mother and aunt Bettina. She made another much larger quilt with pictures of three generations of her family playing the trumpet and a silk program from concerts which her father played with Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra. In contrast to these personal quilts, five quilts grew out of her reaction to the disaster in New Orleans caused by Hurricane Katrina and the racial disproportion of its effect. Several law school faculty – Bob Keller, Taunya Banks and Barbara Bezdek all purchased quilts from this show. .

Patricia was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Related problems have made it difficult to do hand-work. Two unfinished quilts hang on our wall “In search of our mother's garden” (from Alice Walker's poetry) and “Four and 20 Blackbirds.” She has had two shows

since 2007, the solo show *Polar Bear Quilts* in 2008 at the Columbia Art Gallery in Columbia, also three of her works were displayed in *Spaces & Places* at Case[Werks] Gallery in Baltimore in 2013.