Quilt Stories

“My quilts include traditional patchwork patterns and original designs. I have experimented with geometric designs as well as landscape or architectural scenes. My primary inspiration has been the fabric itself: First, traditional quilting materials and designer cottons; later supplemented by ethnic fabrics from around the world; still other fabrics, I paint and dye myself. Always my fabrics are enhanced by gifts from and exchanges with other fiber artists. My work tends to have an abundance of symbolic content. They quilts are a kind of journal for me, incorporating reminiscences and ongoing commentary.”

Patricia Yolande Ciricillo

**Waves 12: Malcolm (1996)**

This quilt represents the life of Malcolm X. Patricia developed the quilt block pattern herself and calls it “waves.” The bottom row of bright tie-tied material represents the confused violence of his youth when he engaged in criminal activity. The middle row presents stark plain colors with some all black squares and red green and blue representations of the strong racial and religious polarization of the Black Muslim movement which helped him rise above his criminal past and advocate on behalf of his race. Finally, the top row of light brown shades represents his adoption of Islam and the pilgrimage to Mecca where he acknowledged the common humanity of all people. Within the fabric there are a variety of objects enmeshed including a crescent moon ornament at the top to signify his religious experience.

**ARTSCAPE ’97, PlayinG in the DarK: Images from the Black Literary Landscape**, Baltimore 7/25-8/17, 1997)

[Criminal Law, Civil Rights, Freedom of Religion]

**Australia 3 (1999)**

This quilt has a simple block structure. The concentric circles painted on fabric by the artist represent the dots used in traditional aboriginal art in central Australia. Other squares have fabrics with dot painting designs purchased in Australian textile shops or indigenous cultural institutes. The tribe’s claim of intellectual property rights to the commercialization of such designs has sparked much discussion and litigation in Australia.

The piece also contains blocks of fabric made by Mandy Muir, an aboriginal artist in the Northern Territory using the X-ray style for animal and plant representations common to bark paintings there. Muir was the director of Daluk Daluk (“women’s group” in the Gun-djeihmi language), a women’s organization of the Gagudju Association engaged in the screen printing business making clothing and wall hangings in Kakadu National Park. We stopped at the business when we stayed at the hotel in Kakadu. Mandy, who had designed the hotel’s wall hangings, sold us scraps of her fabric for use in Patricia’s quilts.

The black blocks tend to be above with red blocks below and yellow ones centered, particularly yellow used in the artist’s dots toward the center of the quilt. This echoes the aboriginal flag, which consists of a yellow circle centered between a black block above and a red block below. The brown and blue colors suffusing the quilt suggest the bush and the ocean surrounding the continent.

**Places in My Mind**, exhibition, Slayton House, Columbia MD, November 2-25, 2000

[International and Comparative Law, Intellectual Property, Indigenous Peoples]

Polar Bears at Las Fallas (2004)

“My polar bear quilts arrived on a variety of pathways. These quilts imagine the polar bear journeying through the universe – sun, moon, sky. The arctic in my imagination appears as vast expanses of snow and light. The quilts began in my mind as white quilts, and quickly exploded into color and illumination.

I created the polar bear patchwork motif in a class on Escher and tessellated design at a San Diego Visions Symposium. The polar bear has fascinated me as a fierce animal image with the appearance of gentleness. In the last few years the threat of global warming to the arctic ice has made the polar bear an icon for environmental issues. The polar bear may soon be counted among the endangered species.”

Las Fallas is a traditional celebration in Valencia Spain in honor of Saint Joseph. Each neighborhood creates a gigantic puppet of cardboard, wax, Styrofoam, etc., stuffed with firecrackers and mounted on wheels, called a “falle” or “torch.” These fallas are paraded in the streets. The mascleta or setting off of firecrackers occurs every day at 2 in the afternoon during the celebration, and fireworks light up the sky the last nights of the celebration. On the final day of the festival, all of the *falles* are burned and the firecrackers adorning them are set off. It is unimaginably loud and bright. Despite hints in the sky of the aurora borealis that is part of the polar bears’ habitat, the festival here suggests the global warming that places polar bear survival at risk.

**Polar Bear Quilts**, solo exhibition, Columbia Art Gallery, Columbia MD, February 14-March 16, 2008

[Environmental Law, International Law]