

# SNIPPETS



Newsletter of  
The Kenya Quilt Guild

November 2011

## A note from the Chairman!

Hi all! I just can't imagine how fast the year has gone by and that this is our last meeting for the year. First of all I would like to thank Gill Rebello for hosting Paula Benjaminson and for all the effort put into arranging for the classes and also to Dena Crain for having her for one weekend when Gill was busy. We all enjoyed the classes and as always we do have fun and pick up lots of ideas and tips. We hope to see lots of quilts or samples of what was taught in the near future.

I would also like to thank Martine Chamorel, our vice-chairperson, who is emigrating back to Switzerland next month. Thank you Martine for all that you have done for the Guild in the time that you have been with us and we will surely miss you a lot. Best of Luck to you for the future and we do hope to see you in Kenya again.

Ladies, once again, we are now in need of a new vice chairperson, so please we do hope that we can have someone to volunteer for the post.

It has now been decided that we will be moving to Shalom House from January 2012 as our meeting venue.

Dear members, it's once again that time of the year, time for our Christmas Lunch. This year it's on the 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2011, at Bibiana's house. It will be a Pot Luck lunch, for those who cannot come to the meeting and would like to come for the lunch, please get in touch with me on what you would like to bring for lunch.

*Neela Shah*

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## TIPS & BITS..... SHEARS OR SCISSORS

Good, sharp scissors and shears are mandatory. Scissors handles are not bent and have two handle holes that are the same size. Shears have a smaller hole for thumb placement, a large hole for several fingers, and bent handles to allow them to slide easily while cutting along a flat surface. Generally, scissors are used for trimming small areas and cutting threads, while shears are used for large cutting jobs such as cutting patchwork pieces.

A good pair of paper-cutting scissors is a must for cutting templates out of cardboard and plastic. They, too, must be sharp and sturdy

# *Underground Railroad Quilt Code*

Secret messages in the form of quilt patterns aided slaves escaping the bonds of captivity in the Southern states before and during the American Civil War.

Slaves could not read or write; it was illegal to teach a slave to do so. Codes, therefore, were part and parcel of the slaves' existence and their route to freedom, which eventually became known as the Underground Railroad. Some forms of dance, spirituals, code words and phrases, and memorized symbols all allowed the slaves to communicate with each other on a level their white owners could not interpret. Codes were created by both whites aiding the slaves, and by Blacks aiding the slaves. The Blacks included other slaves, former slaves or free men and women. In slavery, secrecy was one way the blacks could protect themselves from the whites; even the youngest child was taught to effectively keep a secret from anyone outside of the family.

Most quilt patterns had their roots in the African traditions the slaves brought with them to North America when they were captured and forced to leave their homeland. The Africans' method of recording their history and stories was by committing it to memory and passing it on orally to following generations. Quilt patterns were passed down the same way. It is interesting to note that, in Africa, the making of textiles was done by males; it was not until the slaves' arrival in North America that this task fell to the females.

The quilt patterns, used in a certain order, relayed messages to slaves preparing to escape. Each pattern represented a different meaning. Some of the most common were "Monkey Wrench", "Star", "Crossroads", and "Wagon Wheel". Quilts slung over a fence or windowsill, seemingly to air, passed on the necessary information to knowing slaves. As quilts hung out to air was a common sight on a plantation, neither the plantation owner nor the overseer would notice anything suspicious. It was all part of a day's work for the slaves.

Characteristic of African culture is the communication of secrets through the use of common, everyday objects; the objects are seen so often they are no longer noticeable. This applied to the quilts and their patterns, stitching and knotting. It has been suggested that the stitching and the knotting on slave quilts contained secret information, too, as map routes and the distances between safe houses. Using the quilts, spirituals and code words, the slaves could effectively communicate nonverbally with each other and aid each other to escape.

There is still controversy among historians and scholars over the quilt code theory, and whether or not escaping slaves actually used codes concealed within quilt patterns to follow the escape routes of the Underground Railroad. As oral histories leave no written record, there is no written proof that the codes in the quilt patterns actually existed. What remains are the stories passed down through the generations from the slaves themselves, and, following the code of secrecy, many of the stories were never told.



## **Drunkard's Path Pattern**

The Drunkard's Path quilt would remind them to travel in a zigzag pattern as they traveled to confuse those who might be following them. This patterned quilt may also have represented the placement of "stations" of the Underground Railroad in a certain area.



## **Monkey Wrench Quilt Pattern**

If people displayed a quilt sewn in the Monkey Wrench pattern, it was a signal. It told them it was time to gather the tools they needed for their journey. These tools might be real tools. They might also be tools like courage and awareness



## **Bowtie Pattern**

Some feel this quilt symbol was a signal to the escaping slaves to dress up. Freed blacks and others would meet escaping slaves and give them fresh, new clothing, so that they could blend in with the other black people living in the area.

# RHONDA DENNEY'S CLASSES - JANUARY 2012

We are already looking forward to welcoming American teacher Rhonda Denney back to Nairobi. Rhonda is no stranger to Kenya, having spent part of her early childhood here. We met her last January when she visited the KQG meeting in the company of Alex Anderson and Ricky Timms. Rhonda will be with us for the first meeting of the year on January 19<sup>th</sup> and will teach three classes on the days following the meeting.

## LANDSCAPE QUILTS

Ever wonder how to use fabric to create beautiful landscape quilts? In this one-day workshop we will explore the basic concepts of landscapes and how to incorporate fabric and fibre into creating a landscape quilt. Whether you go for a fantasy landscape or one that is more realistic, once you understand the basics there is no end to the wonderful landscapes you can create. We will first discuss the concepts involved in designing a landscape quilt, including perspective, good design elements, and tips on extending the use of your fabrics. You will use your fabric as your palette. With the use of spray starch to help "tame" the fabric there will be no turned edges or piecing required. The raw-edge appliqué technique is fast and easy.

## FABRIC PAINTING/COLOURING WORKSHOP

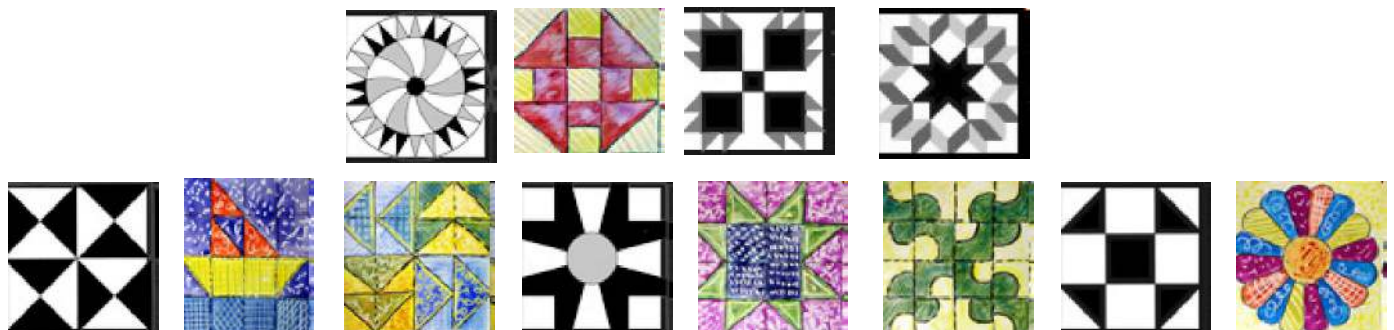
You will be amazed at what you can do to add life to your quilts by adding color to your fabrics! You probably have all the materials you need to start to experimenting with adding color. In this one-day workshop, we will explore three different ways to add color by painting and/or drawing on fabric. We will create a sampler that includes the use of paint, colored pencil and pastels on muslin, utilizing several different techniques for making the colors permanent, including a soy milk fabric treatment. You will finish with six panels which can be made into a wall hanging.

## BOW-TUCK BAG WORKSHOP

You can make your own designer bag and be the envy of everyone who sees it! In this 1 day workshop, you will create a large bow tuck bag (measuring approximately 17" long, 12" tall and 7" wide. These bags use 4 different coordinated fabrics that are sandwiched with fleece and quilted to make each a one-of-a-kind bag. The outside has a large pocket. The inside has a series of side pockets that are customized to your needs. The bag is secured using a loop and decorative button and the bag has 2 handles that are customized to the length you want. The bag has a hard bottom to make it durable. You will create a one-of-a-kind bag that will last you for years of use. Rhonda will be bringing a limited number of kits with everything that is required, including 4 co-ordinated fabrics. You can either purchase one of these kits or bring your own co-ordinated fabrics and buttons, and purchase the extras (fusible fleece, and bag bottoms) from Rhonda.

**N.B. DATES AND FINAL COSTS OF CLASSES AND KITS WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY AND RESERVATIONS WILL BE TAKEN DURING THE NOVEMBER MEETING AND THE FOLLOWING WEEKS. JUDGING BY THE RESPONSE WE HAD FOR PAULA'S CLASSES IT WOULD BE ADVISABLE TO BOOK EARLY TO SECURE PLACES.**

Gill Rebelo



*“It takes seventeen muscles to smile but forty three to frown.  
So do what you’ve got to do with a smile and it will take less effort.*

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*Every minute your mouth is turned down you loose sixty seconds of happiness  
The most wasted day of all us on which we have not laughed.*

## IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT NEEDLE & THREAD COMBINATION

### CORRECT NEEDLE /THREAD

When sewing, the thread should travel smoothly down the long groove on the front of the needle

### TOO THIN THREAD OR TOO THICK NEEDLE

The thread has too much clearance in the groove. Skipped stitches and damage to the thread can occur

### TOO THICK THREAD OR TOO FINE NEEDLE

The thread rubs on the edges of the groove and can get jammed. This can break the thread

### CHECKING THE NEEDLE CONDITION

The needle condition could be checked and needle replaced regularly. A defective needle not only damages the fabric but also the sewing machine.

*Courtesy "Kundan Pattni"*

## Exhibition IQCAfrica 2012

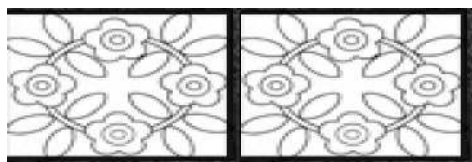
Kenya Quilt Guild has been invited to send a satellite exhibition to Johannesburg for the IQCAfrica. Those who participated in the African Challenge are encouraged to contribute their quilts for that project as well as anyone else who has African quilts. Our quilters are invited to participate in the “Dreams” challenge for this festival.

Full details can be found at <http://www.iqcafrica.ning.com>

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Please note that our next monthly meeting will be on the 17th November, at SHALOMHOUSE. We are going to having a workshop in the afternoon after our meeting on Thursday, so those of you who are staying back to help, please bring your sewing machines. We will still be working on the quilts for our exhibition. Please, let's have a big turnout for the workshop. Members please note that we will be having a Christmas Lunch on the 8th December, which is the second Thursday of the month. at Bibiana's House. It will be a Pot Luck lunch. - Map across.

Next Executive meeting to the 16th January, 2012  
Monthly meeting is on 19th January, 2012 at Shalom House



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“ No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself or to get all the credit for doing it ”

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“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people”

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## Member Profiles on the KQG Blog

Dena has begun a project to feature our members one at a time on the blog. That's good content for the blog, helping us to build an information base about our members.

Interesting— Dena is soliciting the same kind of information and photos as what I need for our Pro Quilter pages, so she will probably copy the same from the blog post into a Pro Quilter page (more permanent and better location for those wanting to make money from their quilting) for those for whom it would be appropriate.

So far, we have Princess Mutero for January and Gretchen Sanders Mwaura for February. Possibly Farhat, will likely feature her for March.

One by one I will be inviting specific members to tell us more about themselves and their work. This, I figure, will be a great way for us to get to know one another better, and to show the world the kind of quilting each one is doing. Volunteers are welcome to come forward at any time! Contact Dena for more info

## TAMBANI EMBROIDERIES

Those quilters who also enjoy embroidery will enjoy watching Pam Holland's video of the Tambani embroideries from South Africa.



### Discover The Tambani Embroidery Project: Where Stitches Become Stories

Join TQS roving filmmaker Pam Holland as her video explores  
**How African folk tales are told through works of embroidery.**

What began as a way to preserve an oral tradition has evolved into a tangible way to pass stories from generation to generation and—at the same time—allow the stitchers to provide life's basic necessities.

You can access the video at:

[http://www.thequiltshow.com/os/blog.php/blog\\_id/4243](http://www.thequiltshow.com/os/blog.php/blog_id/4243)

Contributed by Gill Rebelo

## PAULA BENJAMINSON'S CLASSES

Thank you to all of you who attended Paula's classes and contributed to making them a great success. Paula certainly enjoyed teaching you all and loved being in Nairobi. All the feedback I received was very positive and I think everyone enjoyed the experience of working with new materials and techniques. The highlight of the classes was probably the two days of Oshiwa block stamping which was a wonderful creative experience for those of us who hadn't tried the technique before.

If you want to learn more about Oshiwa blocks, and the Namibian carvers who make them, you can check <http://promoteafrica.org/oshiwa.html> as the official website – [www.oshiwa.com](http://www.oshiwa.com) – does not seem to be working at the moment. You may be interested to hear that your executive committee is looking into the possibility of having blocks made in Nairobi, so those of you who missed the class will hopefully have the opportunity to try it at a later date.



For more general information on the history of block printing you can go to the Indian Block Company's website at <http://www.theindianblockcompany.com>. There you will find a wonderful selection of designs, like those illustrated, which can be ordered together with lots of information on how to block-print and even how to design your own blocks. You can also watch a You-tube film on block printing. The article below comes from that site.

## A Potted History of Wooden Block

Printing Block Printing began in the middle of the third millennium B.C. in the North West corner of India, now called Rajasthan and Gujarat. Locally grown hardwood, such as teak, was harvested and carved by skilled artisans, soaked in olive oil and then dried in the Indian sun. The process is still going on unchanged some four and a half thousand years later.

While the process might have remained unchanged in India, across the rest globe block printing has led a varied and distinguished life. The Industrial Revolution in England saw block printing brought into Britain's factories block printed cloth was mass produced on an enormous scale for distribution throughout the world. This proliferation landed block printing so firmly in the public eye that, by the mid Victorian era, fashionable artists began to adopt the technique. William Morris is probably foremost amongst these: indeed his patterns are still popular today and can be best enjoyed at the William Morris museum. This elevation of block printing to high art gave rise to its use in high fashion around the beginning of the twentieth century. Costume designers like Leon Bakst used the technique to create some of the most startling productions that the Ballet Russe has ever seen. In the middle of the last century block printing became ubiquitous and lost some of its cachet. Certainly in the 70's there was a sharp decline in its popularity.

The Indian Block Company sustainable employment for highly skilled craftsmen living in a historically and cultural areas in the world. The Indian Block Company sells selections of these incredible printing blocks, either chosen by the skilled employees of the company or designed by Jamie Malden. Alternatively, if you have a specific design in mind our carpenters will carve it just for you as a 'one off' creation. If you are an experienced printer or, want to try it for the first time, The Indian Block Company's Printing Blocks are the perfect resource for fabric design, textile art and mixed media projects.

Gill Rebelo

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*“wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been” - have a smiling everyday!*

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