

ORIGINALITY

After a discussion at a recent Steers meeting about originality, I wrote to three different nationally and internationally known quilt artists: Pam Holland from Australia (www.pamhollanddesigns.typepad.com); Jane Dunnewold (www.artclothstudios.com); and Libby Lehman (www.libbylehman.us). In general I wrote about originality and what follows is in essence what I asked:

FROM RITA FAUSSONE

As an introduction, our group (www.theartquiltassociation.com) exhibits at two or three venues each year. This year we were at Denver Quiltfest, in August we start a 3-month exhibit at Mesa Verde and then in October we will be at Pacific International Quilt Fest. We are a very active group and are suffering some growing pains (although we have been in existence since 1996).

Question:

We always use the wording "ORIGINAL" on our Calls for Entry. Many of us interpret this as no use of patterns, cheater cloth panels, or use of photographs not taken by the quilt maker or a member of her family. Which leads us to other questions.

- ◆ Some people wanted to use digital embroidery patterns which they had purchased.
- ◆ Others want to use freely available non-copyright Clip Art, and
- ◆ Still others wonder about using the oil stick rubbing plates and similar items.
- ◆ Also, vintage photographs that are easily available on the web and have no copyright attached.

By using any of these items, can a quilt still be considered original? I realize a technique cannot be copyrighted, but if in the course of making an original quilt, can you use items such as the above?

RESPONSE FROM PAM HOLLAND

To be honest, if you said "Original Design" it would be NO to all the above.

But what is "Original"? I personally think "Original" would also be No to the above.

I can't put "Original" to my Rhino, or Frida or even the Bayeux Tapestry Quilt... however, they are my interpretations...

"Original" in international and national quilt events means that the maker must draw, design, and complete the quilt themselves.

All of my challenge Quilts, are "Original" I designed and have ownership of the design.

My Rhino, is designed by Albert Durer, given to me copyright free by Dover and interpreted by me...

I put your question to the art quilt list... it created a huge discussion.. and in reality, it's quite black and white. Any image or instrument to make an image used in a quilt made by another person ... The quilt can not be called "Original"

This discussion could go on and on, however, it's up to your group to make the rules...

Best wishes, Pam

RESPONSE FROM JANE DUNNEWOLD

Good questions you are asking. I know there are those who will disagree with me but my opinion is that embroidery patterns, (digital) rubbing plates, and non-copyrighted photographs and clip art all fall under the category NOT ORIGINAL. Not all venues are as strict with the guidelines as I would be as a juror. The exception to my thinking is when someone takes any of the above and alters it dramatically enough to make it their own. Incorporating photos or clip art can be so simple and derivative that almost anyone would recognize the source - and that's not ART. On the other hand, a clever or thoughtful use of someone else's material COULD be art - it's mainly in the usage, which must be creative and relevant in order to be valid.

I think the standards are getting tougher because the field is growing, so what used to be acceptable may not be acceptable anymore, because the bar

of creativity has been raised! This would make a good topic for my blog on creativity so I hope you'll be ok if I write on it without actually quoting or mentioning you and your guild!

This probably isn't the simple answer you hoped to get, but it might be the beginning of guidelines for the group. I would be happy to review any guidelines the group might decide to write - but then must point out that in the case of a disagreement over some usage on an individual piece, it would be the juror's call to interpret the guidelines. SO if you don't already use a juror to decide which works will go to the important venues you mentioned, it might be time to consider that possibility.

Jane

RESPONSE FROM LIBBY LEHMAN

Originality is one of those "iffy" areas. While people tell me they love "my" ribbon technique, I wasn't the first person to stitch a ribbon. As a judge, I'm pretty liberal. I think the instances you mentioned should be considered original unless it is an exact copy. For example, years ago, Linda Poole made a quilt by duplicating a cross stitch pattern into cloth. She credited the pattern (she wasn't trying to say it was original) and its maker. The problem came because it was a very popular quilt and Linda won prize money with it. The pattern maker wrote her a cease and desist letter, which Linda immediately did. In this case, I think she did the right thing.

On the other hand, I've had students in a week long independent study class who worked on their own. My main contribution was to go by occasionally and say "good job". I don't feel that I had a big part in the creation of that piece and they could (and should) call it theirs.

The other problem is that sometimes we are influenced by things without being aware of it. Artists are highly visual and sensitive to their surroundings. It can't help but become part of their work, whether they are consciously portraying it or not.

I guess what I'm saying is that there is no defining answer. Unless it is an outright copy, I give the quiltmaker the benefit of the doubt. I realize this probably doesn't help very much!

Lester and I leave tomorrow for CO. We can't wait-see you Saturday!

Libby
