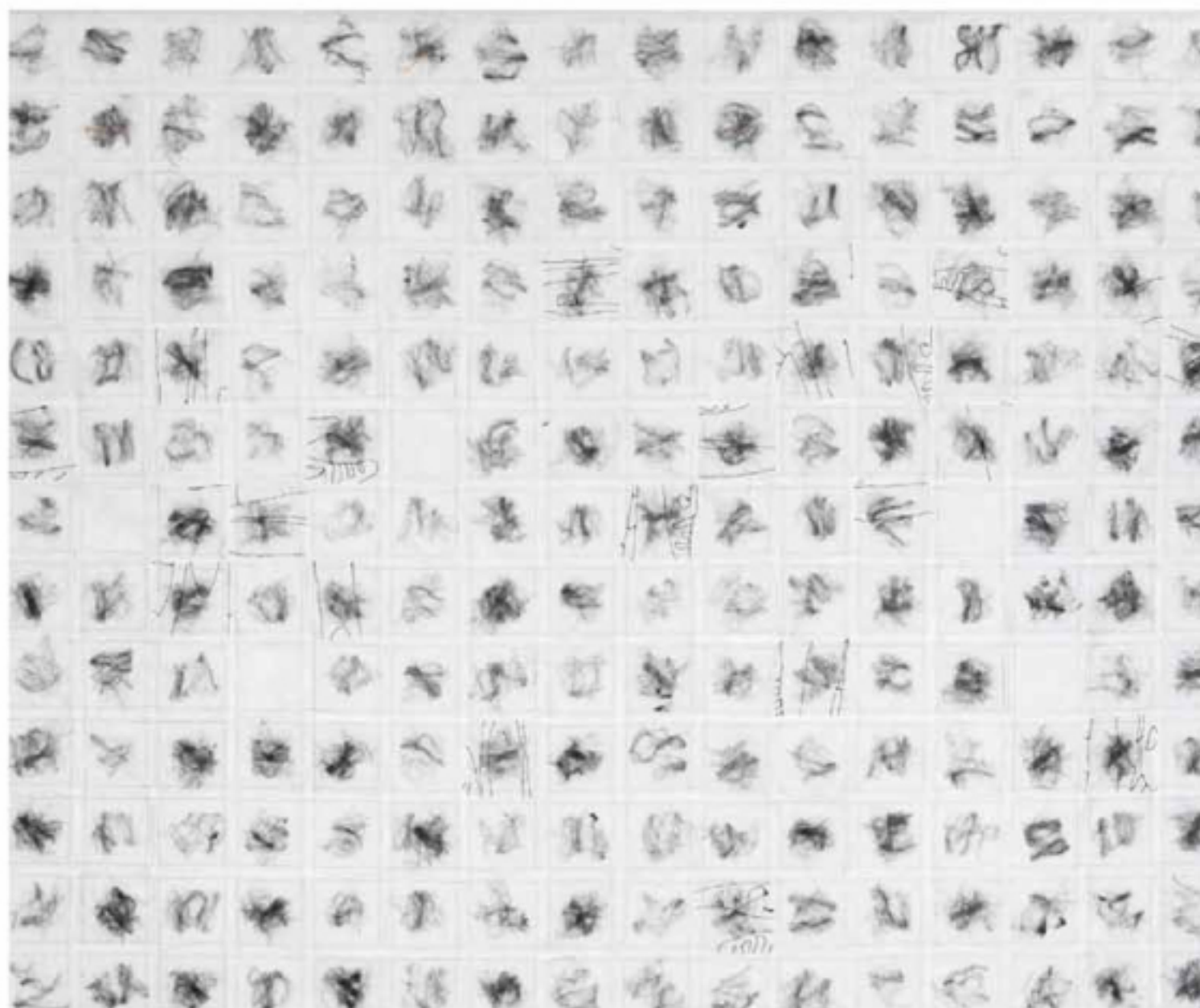


# SAQA *Journal*

Studio Art Quilt Associates, Inc.    Volume 22, No. 2    Spring/Summer 2012



**Hidden Messages** (detail)

55 x 46 inches

©2011 by Mirjam Pet-Jacobs

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## Featured Artist:

# Mirjam Pet-Jacobs



The first art quilts Mirjam Pet-Jacobs saw were part of the premiere *European Art Quilts* exhibition at the Dutch Textile Museum, Tilburg, the Netherlands, in 1997: "I had never seen work like this before, not even in publications. I was thrilled and stupefied when I saw the possibilities and freedom with which the artists had made their work and that they really had something to say." Now, Mirjam's own textile artworks convey complex emotions and themes through impeccable use of form and color, augmented by carefully placed stitched lines. She strives to transform her personal experiences and reflections into artwork that speaks to us all.

Mirjam has created designs of her own making for decades, though not always as an art quilter. An avid clothesmaker during her studies of English Literature and Linguistics at her university, she also took classes in drawing, painting, etching, and batik at several free art academies. A few years later, she realized a change was in order. She says, "I discovered that paint and clay didn't go well with babies, so I turned to patchwork to combine color, design, and fabric with clean hands."

In the beginning, Mirjam drew her own designs as blocks based on Jinny Beyer's books. She then took a few classes, and soon her work became more contemporary. It took five more years before she felt she had truly managed to express herself using this art form.

Most of Mirjam's artwork is the result of contemplating what's happening in her own life and in the world. "I always collect newspaper articles and photos that grab my interest. After a while, I notice connections. Slowly the pressure to do something with them, with the theme they present, builds up until something has to be made." Mirjam's personal life is also a good source of inspiration, although she takes great care to translate everything to a more general level, to things everybody experiences. She says, "I do not want to make 'journal' art. My art is a mix of myself and a lot of imagination." She does not consider her work to be private. Instead, she hopes viewers will add their own biases and experiences to the viewing experience.

Mirjam calls her style "sober," but there are many layers of meaning and depth. She is perhaps best known for her work featuring Mimis.

Approximately 10 years ago, Mirjam saw an exhibition of hollow-log *Mimis*—carvings of Aboriginal spirits—in the Aboriginal Art Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Inspired by the vertical forms and the Arnhem Land line decoration, she designed a very simple, vertical shape. That first form served as her initial inspiration, but for all the artwork thereafter, Mirjam did not use the *Mimis* as a reference to Aboriginal spirits themselves; instead she used them as forms to express her own ideas.

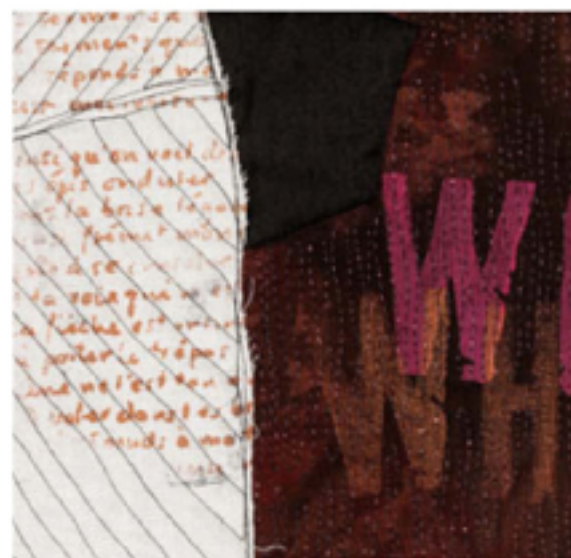
"Currently," Mirjam says, "I'm working on several series with different themes: human helplessness, contact and relationships between people, social problems, and the concept of 'time.'" To conceptualize human helplessness, Mirjam often uses the image of the *Mimi*. The sense of "helplessness" is reinforced because the figures have no arms. By varying the curves of the shapes and their placement in a composition, they also show different kinds of relationships and emotions. She says, "It's amazing that I still can tell so much with that simple shape." Jurors agree; Mirjam's quilt *Mimiquilt IX: Solidarity* was selected to be part of *Quilt National 2005*.





**Lost**  
49 x 54 inches  
©2011

(detail below)



Mirjam's "time" pieces explore her fascination with this concept. Time cannot be held or caught; it simply goes on and on. She says, "We all perceive time differently in different situations. Sometimes it seems to have stopped; other times, you don't notice it at all and it flows past you." She has made several different kinds of artwork dealing with this theme: "normal" quilts, transparent mixed-media work, miniature objects, even a video installation that was awarded first prize at the 2009 4th *European Quilt Triennial* in Heidelberg, Germany, the most prestigious art quilt competition in the European Union, comparable to *Quilt National* in the United States. She has more creative ideas regarding time than she can manage and says, "I need more time!"

Mirjam's works on social issues are different from her other pieces, often featuring manipulated photo transfers. Though she has no personal experience with the scenes she portrays, the pieces are emotionally and artistically difficult for her to do. She

is deeply touched by what she reads and hears in the news. Hungry children in Africa, women dying through illegal abortions, and people with Alzheimer's have all been featured in Mirjam's work.

At the moment, Mirjam is a full-time artist. She spends more time on administrative tasks than she would like, and she says, "What I miss most is the time and freedom just to play." Her busy teaching schedule has taken an enormous amount of time this past year and kept her away from her art. As a result, she is giving herself more studio time in 2012. Her studio is in her house, so it's always accessible. It includes closets for storage of materials, two large tables, and good lighting. In an effort to be less distracted, Mirjam moved her computer to another part of the house. "Now I get more exercise by running up and down the stairs," she says.

She keeps her quilts hanging in a dust-free dark closet; three-dimensional artwork is stored in boxes elsewhere in the house. New work hangs

or stands throughout her house so it can be enjoyed for a while. In between projects, Mirjam likes to tidy and organize the studio. This is an important ritual for her, and she says, "I think I need this 'in between' to tidy my mind as well. As a whole, I must be organized to be able to cope with my wonderful, complicated life."

When asked why she works on multiple series concurrently, Mirjam explains, "Although I prefer to create work by work, I like to alternate working on different themes. It enables me to keep a fresh look. Keeping to one kind of style and theme feels boring and dulls my imagination. Sometimes a theme can be so crude and harsh that I need to compensate for it with less emotionally demanding work."

Her process begins with an idea, thought, or theme; occasionally it's something Mirjam has been pondering for a while. She explores several design possibilities by creating mind maps. (A mind map is the visual

cont'd on next page



**iSociety**  
7 x 5 x 3 inches  
©2011  
(detail, above)



result of a brainstorming session, in which one word is surrounded by other related words and drawings.) She looks for unexpected combinations, sketching and trying out several compositions. Sometimes she makes trial paper collages. Then, it's on to the wall, preparing whatever materials and elements the work requires and examining possible compositions. Mirjam says, "I try to think of a working title at an early stage because this keeps me focused on what I want to say. The whole process is a building up of layers, actual and imaginary."

Her process includes a great deal of introspection, making small changes, and taking photos to check composition without distractions. She takes

her time on every piece and dislikes working under deadline stress. "Stress and worries are lethal for my concentration," she says. The entire process—finding a theme and pondering over it—might take several months, even years.

Mirjam emphasizes that materials and techniques are only a method of expression for her. After many years of exploring various techniques and materials, she has narrowed down her process to a few methods. She likes to try new things and steps out of her comfort zone at times, as with her video installation *Timeless in Time*, but she doesn't feel the urge to be at the frontlines of popular new techniques. She finds it important to concentrate on keeping her own voice.

Sometimes, Mirjam will have several tops waiting to be quilted. She tries to quilt during busy periods in her life, those filled with teaching obligations and little time for long quiet hours in her studio. "I don't need to think deeply to quilt; it calms my mind," says Mirjam. She uses as many different threads as possible, matching the colors of the fabrics or selecting colors intuitively. If she has the time and if the work needs it, Mirjam will add hand quilting, which she enjoys as well. She relishes the differences in appearance between machine and hand stitches.

Mirjam's preference is to work in either black/grey/white/sand or monochromatic warm-color schemes. She still has a small collection of





**Hidden Messages**  
55 x 46 inches  
©2011  
(detail, right)



commercial fabrics, but she usually dyes or paints fabrics herself. "Lately," she says, "I pin white cloths on stretcher bars, place them against a wall, and paint on them directly with big bold movements. This is something I want to explore further." She often incorporates panels of modern crazy patchwork, in combination with large appliqués, enabling her to play with tonal values and achieve a painterly style.

Though perhaps best known for her quilts, Mirjam also makes both 2-D and 3-D abstract and figurative abstract textile and mixed-media artwork. "I love using simple forms, like the square, as a symbol or metaphor for a unit of time; for instance, to express a second, a day, a year, or even an age. Or I may use feathers as metaphors for messages or thoughts." Mirjam is also exploring how to express herself with lightweight, transparent works, since a quilt often feels so heavy and dense.

Mirjam notes that she is fortunate

not to have to make a living from her art and, as a result, doesn't take a commercial view of her work. She feels she doesn't need to make more "mainstream" art, meaning art that's easier to sell, although her art is for sale.

She sets prices at a point she's comfortable with, and prices for her pieces are consistent, regardless of where the work is presented. However, Mirjam expresses the same frustration many textile artists do when it comes to pricing her art. "People often don't realize the costs involved, such as Value-Added Tax (VAT), materials, equipment, website maintenance, entry fees, shipping, commissions, and class fees to further artistic development. I'm not even talking about the time needed to make the artwork. In the present situation in the Netherlands, it has become practically impossible to make a living from art, unless you have a real talent for business and presenting yourself."

Mirjam does share her artwork in exhibitions and has earned prize money. However, that's not her goal. "If I feel happy with my work and I would like to share it with others, I enter it for an exhibition I'd like to be in. If I'm not selected, well, *tant pis*. I know it is not due to a lack of quality of the work, but due to circumstances. Of course I'm disappointed for a couple of hours, but it's absolutely not the end of the world; it comes with the job. In fact, the making process itself is the only aspect that really counts." For Mirjam, the most disappointing part of not being selected is not being part of the fun—going to the opening and meeting colleagues and other artists.

"I'm still amazed," she says, "at everything that happens in my art life. It's like a roller coaster, with sometimes too many loops." Her first entry into a prestigious art quilt exhibition was awarded first prize (*2nd European Quilt Triennial*, Heidelberg,

See "Mirjam Pet-Jacobs" on page 28

Germany, 2003). As a result, she felt brave enough to send some CDs with images of her work to a local museum and to one of Europe's largest patchwork quilt festivals. Both venues invited her to exhibit. From those early successes followed invitations to exhibit, jury, publish, and teach. Mirjam continues to enter top-notch textile art exhibitions. She posts announcements of her exhibitions on her website and on Facebook. She has chosen not to have a blog, fearing it would take too much time.

Mirjam maintains her website as an online portfolio. People who are interested in acquiring work can contact her through it. She has made the decision to list prices on only a

portion of the small works displayed on the website. Workshops and lectures may be listed on the website; she no longer organizes them herself because of the time involved in doing so.

The income she earns through these engagements enables her to be a member of the international textile art group, Quilt Art. It also provides her with the opportunity to travel and meet wonderful people all over the world. Mirjam enjoys teaching. In fact, she was recently asked to write a book based on one of her workshops designed to guide students towards finding a more personal voice in their work. The book, titled *Textile Adventures*, was released in December 2011

and is available in three languages (English, German, and French).

Mirjam has also published her own portfolio book, highlighting a selection of work from the past five years.

A glance through Mirjam's website shows the breadth and artistry of her evocative work. Consider how the shapes and images of her work enter your psyche and give you pause. This, Mirjam says, is what is supposed to happen. ▼

*SAQA professional artist member Mirjam Pet-Jacobs is an art quilter living in Waalre, the Netherlands. She currently has work traveling in SAQA's Sightlines exhibition. Her website is [www.mirjampetjacobs.nl](http://www.mirjampetjacobs.nl).*

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Tree Skirts: Annual Rings, Liz Alpert Fay



## STUDIO SCHWEINFURTH

### FIBER ART 2012 WORKSHOPS

**Judy Robertson**  
Innovative Dyeing  
April 24-28

**Jan Myers Newbury**  
Shibori  
September 4-8

**Robin Blakney Carlson**  
Art Felt  
September 29-30

**Ilisha Helfman**  
Jazzknitting  
September 29-30

**Flo Hoppe**  
Basket Weaving  
October 6-7

**Carol Soderlund**  
Disperse Dyes  
October 26-27

**Terry Jarrard Dimond**  
Quilt Design  
October 26-27



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205 Genesee Street, Auburn, NY 13021  
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