

QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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Photo by Steve Kurtz

JEAN RAY LAURY

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LAURY, JEAN RAY, born Mar. 22, 1928, Doon, Iowa. Designer, author, quilt-maker, Daughter of Alice Kloek and Ralph Robert Ray, 2nd of four girls. Grad. Northern Iowa Univ. with B.A. in Art & Educ. M.A. in Design Stanford Univ. Listed Who's Who Among Student's, 1949, Who Who's Among Women, Who's Who Among Western Artist.

One woman shows DeYoung Museum, American Crafts Museum, Nut Tree, American Crayon Co., Museum of Contemporary Drafts, Stanford Art Gallery.

Lectured nat'l quilt symposiums Ithica, N.Y., Toronto, Canada, 1st Continental Quilting Congress, Patch in Time #4, Quilt Symposium '79.

Married Stan Bitters, noted ceramic sculptor. Has two children Tom and Viz. Laury.

Author of APPLIQUE STITCHERY, QUILTS & COVERLETS, DOLL MAKING, NEW USES FOR OLD LACES, GETTING IT ALL TOGETHER AT HOME, etc.

Jean Ray Laury is frequently asked "How do you get all of those things done?" Typically she responds, "Oh, it's not much."

The "not much" includes authoring or coauthoring 11 books, a whirlwind lecture schedule which takes her out of town at least once a month for two or three days, working on an upcoming one-woman show, and a lot of "etc."

"When you are making a living at it -- you have to keep busy. A friend once told me, 'I like to finish one project before starting another.' To me that would be sheer luxury I am always working on four or five different things and I am always juggling deadlines." Yet to the rest of us she is a calm, unhurried woman who always has time to talk and wants to know what you are doing.

Jean was born in Doon, Iowa, a shy child who always liked to paint and draw. She moved to Oak Ridge, Tenn., with her family and graduated from grade and high school there.

She returned to Iowa to attend Northern Iowa Univ., where she majored in Art and Education, expecting to teach.

She and her husband moved to California and while her son Tom was still young, she returned to college at Stanford Univ. for her master's degree. Her class had an exhibit of their work at the DeYoung Museum which included her quilt Tom's Quilt and it was chosen for an exhibit sponsored by the United States Information Services for a world tour. This was an auspicious start for our young fiber artist!

She had shows at the Stanford Research Institute and the Stanford Art Gallery while attending the university.

In 1958 she decided to enter a quilt in the Eastern States Exposition though her friends thought she was silly. Roxa Wright, Creative Skills Editor of HOUSE BEAUTIFUL was so impressed with Jean's work that she took the time to write her, "I have seen many attempts to modernize the art of quilting but yours was the first to combine good design and contemporary color with the inherent simple and structural integrity that should be the basis of any quilt that the untrained woman in her own home might be encouraged to do."

The result was Jean's first article which was published in HOUSE BEAUTIFUL, Jan. 1960 entitled "Creative Stitchery." She wrote, "Stitchery is one of the most charming, expressive, and delicate of the decorative arts. I find it wholly absorbing, and perhaps I can encourage or inspire you to slip on your thimble (and your glasses?) to begin." And she has been encouraging and inspiring students ever since.

When they finished at Stanford the four Laurys, including Tom and daughter Liz, moved to Fresno. Even with two small children she made it a practice to do some needlework every day.

May quilting bring
you much joy

JEAN RAY LAURY

♥ Jean Ray Laury

Jean's autograph to admirer.

After the article appeared she began getting requests for lectures locally. She taught workshops and classes and even taught one semester at Fresno State Univ. but gave up college teaching because she felt with the children she needed a more flexible schedule.

She lectured to many women's groups like the Reedley Study & Civic Club where she was guest of honor at the past president's day. The local newspaper carried an article on Sept. 30 about the event on the social pages. The caption under the picture was a personal statement of Mrs. Laury: "Trees, beetles, colors, children, apples. all growing things amuse and delight me and inspire my work. I attempt to bring a personal, creative and contemporary approach to a traditional American art form While I have merely started working towards the potential of needlework, for the present it offers a stimulating and rewarding art form to my family and my home."

Jean reports that the women were curious and interested because they knew of no one doing her type of work.

The American Crayon Co. of Los Angeles asked if she would do a show for them. Again her friends told her to wait for a more prestigious offer but she was intrigued with the idea that her quilts would be seen by teachers. She always felt that her work is a form of communication and to her it is important for her, the person producing the work, to have someone see it. The viewing of the stitchery is the final stage of communication.

This theory has been a guiding principle in Jean's life and she advises her students to show their work wherever they can. She feels it is important to show quilts in a variety of places so they reach different audiences. Not all people go to galleries or museums.

The show at the American Crayon Co. was such a success that they asked if they could take it to their New York office. The office was down the street from the American Crafts Museum and it wasn't long before someone at the museum saw it and she had a request to do a show there.

She really enjoyed writing so she began working on a book. While she was attending a crafts conference in New York she went to the Reinhold Publishing Co. It took all her courage to go through the door but was immediately relieved when the man behind the desk said, "Come in. I've been trying to get in touch with you. I saw your exhibit at the American Crafts Museum and hoped that we could get together while you were here." The APPLIQUE STITCHERY book was published in 1966 by Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. By this time she was being asked to do more and more lectures and her circuit now included state organizations like the home economics groups and larger women's organizations.



*Photo from Merced SUN-STAR
SOCIAL NEWS, Nov. 13, 1969.*

QUILTS & COVERLETS was published in 1970 and joined her other book APPLIQUE STITCHERY as best friends to the quilting world. Still there were no quilting groups as we know them today and few stitchery groups.

In 1971 the Kingsley Art Club of Sacramento invited her to be guest speaker and the SACRAMENTO BEE reported, "Stitchery," began Mrs. Laury, "has been one of the few continuing folk arts in this country. A folk art is something artistic, made to be used and rarely to be sold. And it is usually made with a certain person in mind!"

"She also said, 'I don't have strong feelings one way or the other about stitchery pieces done by machine or hand. Use whichever method works best on a particular piece.

She still feels that way, but she is very careful about the workmanship. She says, "When I was a freshman in high school and took an (enforced) home economics class, our teacher announced that when we finished our clothes they would be shown at the PTA. Half of us would show our work right side out and the other half, inside out and we wouldn't know until the day of the show who would do what. We developed great pride in having the unseen areas as beautiful as what was on the outside."

On Sept. 14, 1972, Jean and Joyce Aiken opened Everywoman's Studio and learned quickly that women needed space in which to work. They both taught classes and workshops and did an occasional weekend workshop which prepared the way for their very popular week long China Peak experience. They sold the shop in 1978.

The Finger Lakes Bicentennial Quilt Exhibit in Aug. of 1976, known affectionately to quilters as "Ithi-

ca," was the first national gathering of quilters. It was a very "heady" experience. Since then it has been a steady round of symposiums etc., including Toronto, the First Continental Quilting Congress, the Kansas Symposium, Patch in Time #4, and Symposium '79. Jean has been the featured speaker at most of them.

A recent development is the proliferation of quilt groups and associations throughout the country. Jean feels this is a welcome addition to the quilt world because "it allows for an exchange of ideas and somehow validates the quilter's worth."

Her latest book, THE CREATIVE WOMAN'S GETTING IT ALL TOGETHER AT HOME book was an immediate success. She got the idea in Seattle while talking to a young woman with small children. She seemed to really need support and encouragement and Jean recognized that because of the isolation of housework and the discrimination in the work field, women everywhere needed support. Not only physically, but morally and economically.

She sent questionnaires to 200 friends and acquaintances in the textile arts and related fields to ask them how they coped with their responsibilities. The answers were edited and compiled with added bits of Jean's insight into the book.

Jean feels strongly that women must support each other whenever they can economically. "It is hard but if you believe in a person do what you can. If you can't buy a piece of her work because it is too expensive, get your group to invest in it as a raffle prize like they did for PATCH IN TIME. All of the prizes were contemporary artist's work. If you can't buy a piece, try to buy a piece on time or at least buy a book. Think creatively about how you can help your artist get ahead in this highly competitive field."

On the horizon is another one woman show at the Fresno Arts Center, two new books (one on crafts and the other on women working together), several new quilts and a grandchild.



Illustration from Everywoman's Studio folder

JEAN RAY LAURY PRESENTATION DINNER



Photos by Steve Kurtz

- 1) Jean holds banner proclaiming her "The fastest needle in the West" made for her by the Texas Stitchers. Husband Stan Bitters and son Tom Laury.
- 2) Jean talks with dinner guests while others enjoy the blocks presented to her.
- 3) Joyce Aiken, Marilyn Judson and Jody House. Joyce, Jody and Ruth Law made the wagon to hold the blocks.
- 4) Holding a block.
- 5) Warren and Jasmine Whaley, Sarah Minor, Catherine Anthony, Helen Goertz, Janet Shore, Michael & Trevor James. Standing are Sally Garoutte and Judy James.
- 7) David Kakalia presented an orchid lei and the traditional aloha kiss on behalf of his wife Deborah.

