



## Dahlov Ipcar

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Dahlov (rhymes with Olive) Ipcar of Georgetown, Maine with her 1970 patchwork quilt. This stunning, modern quilt, a mixture of light-weight fabrics with a black back, is 105" x 80" and was completed over a three-year period. For a picture of the complete quilt see the 1975 QUILT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR published by E P Dutton. Photo courtesy Dahlov Ipcar.

### DAHLOV IPCAR

by MarySue Hannan

Ms Hannan is no stranger to JOURNAL readers. Her articles have appeared in JOURNAL #20 and #21.

Much has been written about the quilt show now touring the country and the catalog accompanying it, called "The Artist and the Quilt". These artists designed or painted a picture which was then adapted into a fabric by a quiltmaker.\* While this show was getting publicity, I discovered an artist 40 years ago who received little or no publicity at the time but has recently been featured in art shows in her home state of Maine.

Like so many of my stories, how I came to find this artist/quiltmaker is another series of coincidences. While on vacation I happened to choose a book, THE CALICO JUNGLE+ as a bedtime story for my grandchildren. The frontispiece of the book depicts a quilt of fanciful animals in a jungle. Each animal is made of a different print calico

\*See JOURNAL #24 for review of the catalog

+Ipcar, Dahlov, THE CALICO JUNGLE, Knopf



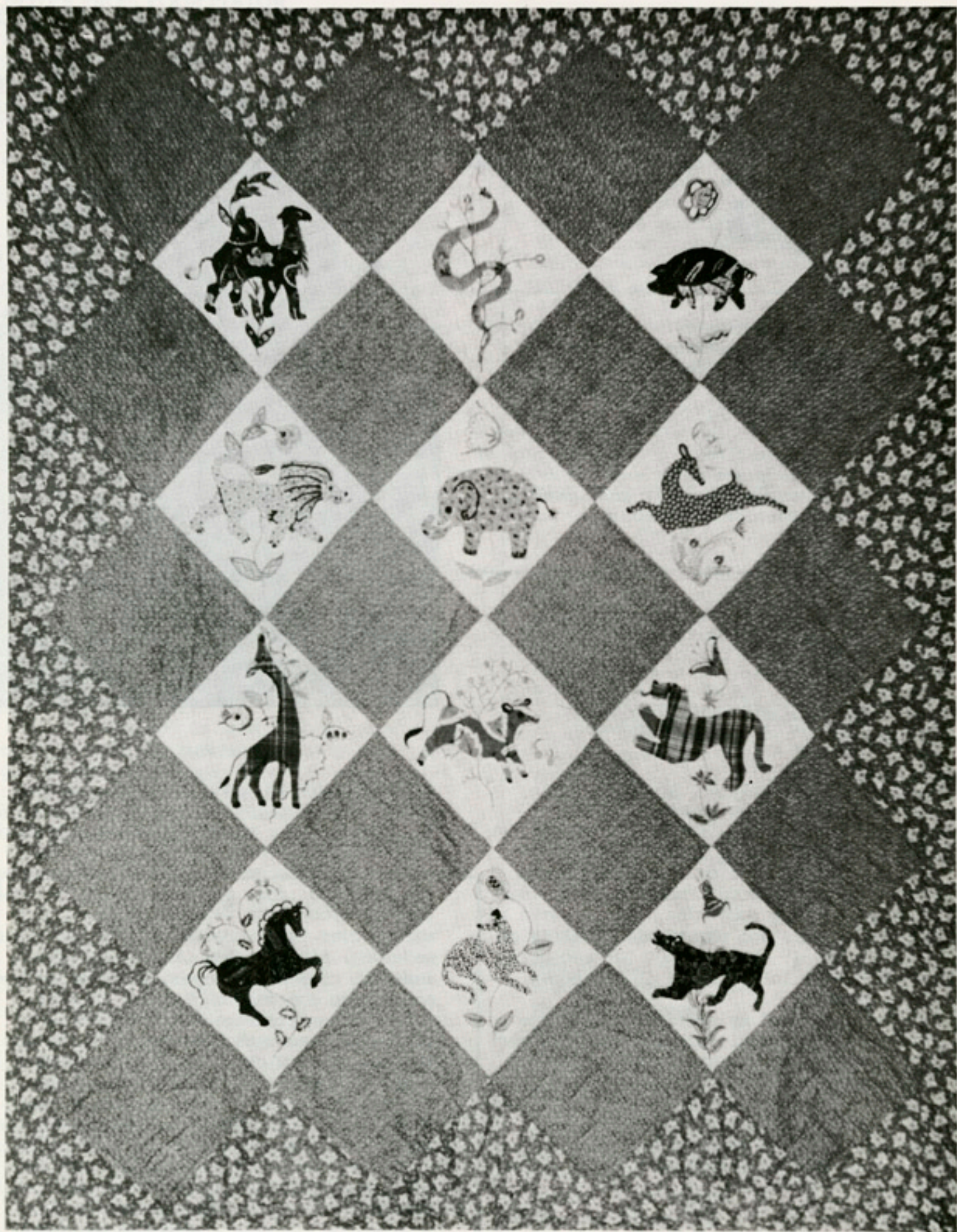
and the whole is bordered with assorted green calico triangles. As the story unfolds it relates how a young boy tries to identify each animal in the fading light as night draws near. The young readers join him in the game and trace the animals and the snake twisted around the trunk of a tree. They marvel over the fanciful flowers and trees and then, like the boy of the story, are ready to close their eyes and dream of the animals in the calico jungle.

The author-illustrator of the book was Dahlov (rhymes with Olive) Ipcar, who has written some 30 children's book and is a familiar name in children's literature. However, my nagging questions were, had she written this book for a grandchild and had she made up the quilt for a real child?

Not long after this, while in Maryland looking up quilt articles, I happened on a book by Allen Eaton, HANDCRAFTS IN NEW

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ENGLAND. I was sure quilts would be mentioned, but instead found only one short chapter on "Decorative Needlework: Embroidery and Quilting", with only two quilts pictured to represent all of New England. The first was the crib quilt with fanciful calico animals seen on page 6 and described below.

It is regrettable that Mr Eaton is not around to answer the question, "What is native stitchery?" From the two illustrations I have seen, it appears to be the same embroidery practiced by women in every state and every country of the world.

Mrs Ipcar says, "'Native Stitchery' is a ridiculous term! I learned my embroidery stitches from my mother, who was famous for large embroidered tapestries done in wool on linen. One depicted the entire John D Rockefeller Jr family at their Seal Harbor, Maine home. My stitchery on the quilt was done in cotton embroidery floss mostly using chain and feather stitches."

Some biographical research unearthed the facts that Mrs Ipcar had been born of artist parents, Marguerite and William Zorach. They had been part of the Paris Art scene prior to WWI, where they met while attending art school. When they returned to the

United States, they were married. After Dahlov was five, they spent summers in Ogunquit Maine. Their associates had been pioneers in appreciation of children's/peasant/folk art. These people may have influenced the young Dahlov's works, whether consciously or unconsciously.

She was given a fine liberal arts education in New York private schools and after graduation returned to Maine to marry a young teacher named Albert Ipcar. Together they established a dairy farm and raised two children. She began to write and illustrate children's books while continuing to paint for her own enjoyment and for sale. These were the depression years so when she heard of the U S Treasury's request for bids from artists to design murals for public buildings, (this was prior to the WPA) she submitted two designs.

In 1939, she received \$650. for her design "On the Shores of the Lake" - a handsome fee for those times. It was put into the post office in Lovelet, Tenn. Two years later she submitted an idea for Yukon, Oklahoma which depicted settlers running for their claim in the Oklahoma territory. It was entitled "The Run" and for this she received \$700. Mrs Ipcar writes, "The Post Office murals were a  
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\*From HANDCRAFTS OF NEW ENGLAND  
by Allen H Eaton, Harper & Brothers  
Publishers, New York 1949.

"One of the most charming quilts recalled from many seen in the New England states is a crib quilt made by Mrs Dahlov Ipcar of Robinhood, Maine. For years she has been collecting remnants of cloth for animal figures especially, and these she uses in her homemade quilts for her own children and those other members of the family. On the crib quilt are appliqued twelve animals, including a snake which any unprejudiced child would like. She has used native stitchery depicting plants, flowers and fruits which give it added charm. Mrs Ipcar is also a painter, but her fine feeling for color, form and texture could hardly have a happier outlet than through the toys and quilts she makes."



Priscilla Rose of Georgetown, Maine wrote to the JOURNAL on April 3, 1985,

"It's almost worth a trip across the country to see some of Dahlov Ipcar's soft sculptures now on exhibition at the Bath Public Library. You can't imagine the shapes she can evolve with cloth. There's St George and his dragon, a possum carrying young, a mystical creature with rooster's head and a long dragon-y tail to name only a few. And of course her fabulous materials!



big help. At that time \$600. was enough to live on for a full year. All during this time, she did oil paintings that were shown at prestigious galleries in Boston, New York and Washington.

None of these facts helped to answer my questions on quilting, so I wrote to her. I received her answer which I quote in part:

"There was a time when I would have been eager to cooperate with your idea to write up my quilts, but somehow the time seems to have passed.

"I have only done two quilts. Only one with applique animals; the one in Mr Eaton's book. The quilt in THE CALICO JUNGLE was purely imaginary. It seems so long ago now. THE CALICO JUNGLE is still in print, but it was published 19 years ago. My crib quilt was made over 40 years ago. I am sorry to disappoint you, but it no longer seems important to me (at least my part in this)."

"I love quilts too. I love the new things that are being done in quilting. There are some marvelous young quilters here in Maine (and I suppose all over the country) doing imaginative quilts in many styles. My own venture into quilting seems very paltry by comparison. I am delighted to see the interest in and revival of this ancient craft. It transcends the definition of craft, it is frequently 'High art'."

For two years the case has rested, but quilters deserve to know of Mrs Ipcar's latent ability that broke out to bring joy to so many people in so many different places.

Mr Eaton tells of her collecting fabric to make toys. She is still making animals and I am sure, was making them long before the term, "soft sculpture" was used. Hers are often made in batik fabrics and stand upright through use of interior wire armatures.

The article "Pioneer Women's Lib"\* comments on a statement which appeared in an early catalog for a group show entitled "Women Pioneers in Maine Art, 1900-1945" in which Mrs Ipcar participated. The catalog states that since most of the women were not relying on the proceeds from art for their livelihood, they were considered hobbyists rather than artists. Does that have a familiar ring in the quilt world?

Her work has been shown in too many shows to be listed here and her soft sculptures were recognized as collector items, shown and sold as "fine art" rather than mere toys, as early as 1956.

She is listed in WHO'S WHO IN AMERICAN ART, WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA, WHO'S WHO OF AMERICAN WOMEN and WHO'S WHO IN THE EAST.

Mrs Ipcar's works are in the Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Newark Museum and in private collections such as Laurence Rockefeller's. She was awarded an Honorary Degree, Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Maine in 1978 and a Doctor of Fine Arts, from Colby College in 1980.

So here is an artist-illustrator, soft sculptor and children's author who made with love a quilt for her first born and went on to be chosen by two prestigious authors to illustrate the best of its kind for many to enjoy. It may no longer be important to you, Dahlov Ipcar, but the people of the quilt world salute you as an artist and a quiltmaker.

\*Letter from Dahlov Ipcar to MarySue Hannan Aug 16 '85

"...The quilt (depicted in Calico Jungle) inspired the book, which was first intended to be done in collage, of fabrics. I did the jacket design in collage, but could not persuade my publishers to go to the expense of four color photo process printing, so ended doing watercolors and doing the separations myself in four flat colors alternating with two-colors. (one in wash).

"The collages inspired me to do a large collage of the Garden of Eden. But I found this method very hard on my back. I liked the fabric effect so much though that it had considerable influence on my oil paintings. A case of handicraft following art and then vice versa.

"Fabrics also inspired my soft sculptures. Since you mention them, I might say that often parts of them are quilted: wings on birds, fins on fishes, and in the case of 'St George and the Dragon' the dragon's wings and the knight's armor." (See pg 7)

\*DOWN EAST, "Pioneer Women's Lib" April 1985 pg 46-47