

Uncoverings 1992

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Edited by Laurel Horton



Cover Artist's Statement: *News Reports*

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During the Gulf War I immersed myself in public radio news broadcasts and national call-in shows. I was feeling deep concern, indignation, and a sense of urgency to respond to blatant, deceptive manipulation of words and symbols regarding the nature of an escalating conflict and the need for, as well as the effects of, a military offensive in the Middle East. In retrospect I see that I had begun a personal quest to find out *What is really going on here? What am I experiencing?* and *What does any of this have to do with me?*

I did not find a sense of orientation nor a satisfying mechanism for response through the media, and so I began to discuss the news, its effects, and response options with just about anyone I encountered and everyone I could reach. I felt disheartened as many expressed a sense of isolation, and professed a belief that "I do not really matter and cannot really influence public policy nor hope to influence the course of events because 'they' will just do what they want anyway." So many expressed such a belief that it seemed to be functioning as a myth, a cultural myth which also seemed to prescribe or at least justify the general practice of disregarding the news, despite revelations of circumstances which directly and indirectly threaten our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren and all life on Earth. Many people expressed denial, confusion, frustration, guilt, and above all, resignation.

My response was to create a quilt which I've titled *News Reports* (1991, 44" X 35"). It depicts my dizzying sense of riding in an airplane which is moving into a tail spin, a situation that only concise

and efficient action can remedy. It shows a vortex pulling down life, fish, children, and the claws and jaws of the monster which even devours itself. It displays puffed up roosters which symbolize the cultural preponderance of the masculine perspective, male domination in positions of cultural power and the disproportionate misuse of trust, power, resources, words, symbols, and information by men. The quilt and the roosters represent the effects of our current gender/power imbalance rather than anything inherently negative about the masculine or men. Noticeably missing in this quilt is any overt representation of the feminine, that which is yet to be more fully explored, expressed, and integrated.



Preface

Although the papers for *Uncoverings* are selected on the basis of individual merit, when taken as a group they often share common themes or concerns. This year all of the papers, in one way or another, discuss forms of communication.

Communication takes place among quiltmakers and their families. Groups of quilters, both large and small, share particular modes of communication. Quiltmakers express themselves verbally, in writing, or through their works, and others interpret the meanings of what is said or not said. Both the text and the context, or, if you will, the medium and the message, are laden with information.

Nancy Armstrong's exploration of the creation of numerous Desert Storm quilts provides a timely look at the motivations of contemporary quiltmakers. For many of these artists, the opportunity to share strong and sometimes ambiguous feelings found an outlet through Nancy's research.

Kristin Langellier examines one of modern quiltmaking's most valued practices, quilters' Show and Tell. She finds that this deceptively simple communication ritual holds rich and complex meaning for the participating quilters, both locally and nationally.

JaneE Hindman reports from her experience as a participant/observer in a predominantly African-American quilting group. She analyzes different modes of verbal communication among members of this single small group in relation to other works on African-American quilts and forms of expression.

Carolyn Krone and Tom Horner provide perspectives from the healing professions on the ways traditional quiltmaking can serve as a largely non-verbal process to facilitate the mourning process following a loss. They use historic and fictional sources to support what they have found in their own counseling.

Several papers serve as conduits to the world of nineteenth century quiltmakers. Dorothy Cozart correlates the letters of the Caldwell women with their surviving artifacts to provide an insightful look into needlework traditions of earlier generations. Her paper helps us realize that quiltmaking was not an isolated form of handwork.

Margaret Ordoñez, a textile chemist, examines an ironic phenomenon: Signature quilts, intended to immortalize their makers and signers, have been damaged by the ink in the signatures. Further, she suggests how these important historic documents may best be preserved.

Barbara Brackman has examined the writings of women on the overland trails to present data which punctures yet another myth of American quiltmaking. In this case, the lack of quilt-related entries in written communications provides important negative evidence.

Kari Ronning looks at the quiltmaking context of turn-of-the-century Nebraska through the filter of contemporary newspaper accounts. Not only does her work bring to light important information during an understudied period of American quiltmaking, but it demonstrates the potential for research in many other local areas.

Finally, Virginia Gunn presents a thoughtful re-evaluation of early twentieth-century quilt scholarship, including the misinformation we once accepted as fact. She provides a perspective through which we can understand the creation and functions of these myths.

Together, these writers seek to communicate their explorations and experiences to readers, both present and future. Each such act of communication adds a piece to our as yet incomplete understanding of the whole picture of American quiltmaking. These writers also build upon the work of other researchers. The references cited by the authors of this volume include many of the articles published in the previous twelve volumes of *Uncoverings*.