

Artists demonstrate use of design principles

by Jill Jensen

For the *Art Meets Science* exhibition, SAQA members were challenged to create work that explores the intersection of two seemingly different disciplines, art and science. Members rose to the challenge, and 35 quilts by 31 members from all over the United States, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Israel, The Netherlands, and Switzerland were juried into the exhibition.

As managing curator for *Art Meets Science*, I saw the submitted entries and as well as the results of the jurying process. Our juror, David Fraser, MD, is both an epidemiologist and an expert on several types of woven textiles. The work he chose met the theme of the exhibition, but also had to stand out as visual art. This is an art show, not a science fair project, so the work was analyzed with regard to art and design principles.

Lists of design principles may vary, but most include the following: balance (symmetric or asymmetric), proportion (the relationship of objects within the design through size and scale), rhythm (repetition and pattern), emphasis (focal point or areas of interest) and unity (that the elements of the design/image all belong together). I have selected three pieces from the exhibition to discuss how artistic design principles are exemplified by works in this exhibition.

A Storm Broke Loose in My Mind by Sandra van Velzen displays a number of design principles. Her work incorporates balance, rhythm, emphasis, and unity. First, her choice of color falls into a complementary scheme,



A Storm Broke Loose in My Mind 39 x 39 inches ©2009 Sandra van Velzen

with the use of orange and blue. By varying the values in her blues, there is enough variety to keep the simplified color scheme interesting. Generally, artists don't place the focal point dead center in a piece because it leads to a static design. In this case the eyes are nearly centered, but the dark values of the nose and mouth in the lower part of the image create a sense of movement.

According to van Velzen's statement, "A storm broke loose in my mind" were words used by Albert Einstein to describe the events of the year in which he stated his famous Theory of Relativity. After reading her statement and looking at the work, it was very clear that the image was of Einstein and that she had indeed created the essence of a "brain storm."

Binary Fission by Betty Busby transforms a microscopic event into a

monumental and energy-filled image. Her design elements include value, repetition of shape, direction of linear elements, and positioning of the main objects in the picture plane.

Busby uses contrasting values effectively to separate the tentacles from the background. Usually we think of warm colors as advancing and cool colors as receding in a picture plane, but in this case the strong contrast in value projects the cool-colored tentacles forward. The choice of predominantly warm colors lends a highly charged atmosphere to the work. The repetition of the tentacle-like forms gives a feeling of cohesiveness to the overall image, and their radiating diagonal forms add a sense of movement and energy to the piece. Once again, the artist has placed the focal point near center stage, but the design isn't static because the two

cells are placed at a slight angle, and they're just enough off-center to add energy.

Tracks by Mary Ellen Heus is created primarily in a monochromatic color scheme. The warm earth tones and contrasting values add interest to the piece. The background is the lighter value and the foreground has the darker value. In landscape painting, this is called atmospheric perspective, where objects in the distance are lighter in value than objects that are closer to the viewer. Contrast between the softly shifting color in the background and the very crisp linear lines in the foreground enhances the illusion of depth. This is another way that artists portray perspective in an image: softer edges on items further back in the picture plane and sharper edges on objects in the foreground.

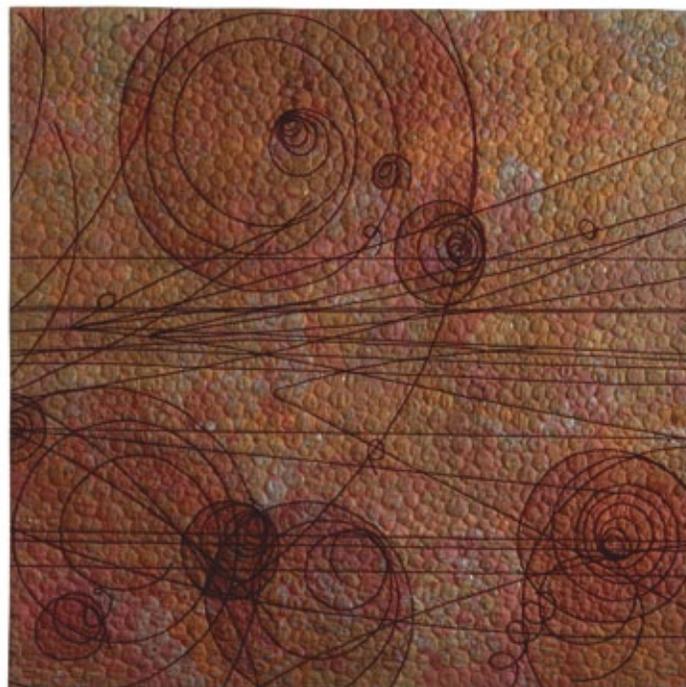
Heus uses repeated forms in a range of sizes. This repetition of the spiral shape contributes to a cohesive design, while the variety of sizes of the spirals keeps the work from becoming stagnant. Contrast between the straight lines and the spirals also keeps the design interesting. The large spiral in the top half of the design is balanced by three smaller spirals in the lower half of the image. The eye moves around the entire image because of the placement of the smaller spirals and the directionality of the linear elements.

It was difficult to pick only three pieces to discuss in this article. When looking through the images for the accepted quilts, it was interesting to look at the array of choices the artists made when creating their designs. Each quilt displays various artistic elements to create images that are based on sound principles of design. ▼

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Binary Fission
31 x 20 inches
©2009 Betty Busby
photo by Alan Mitchell



Tracks
34 x 34 inches
©2009 Mary Ellen Heus