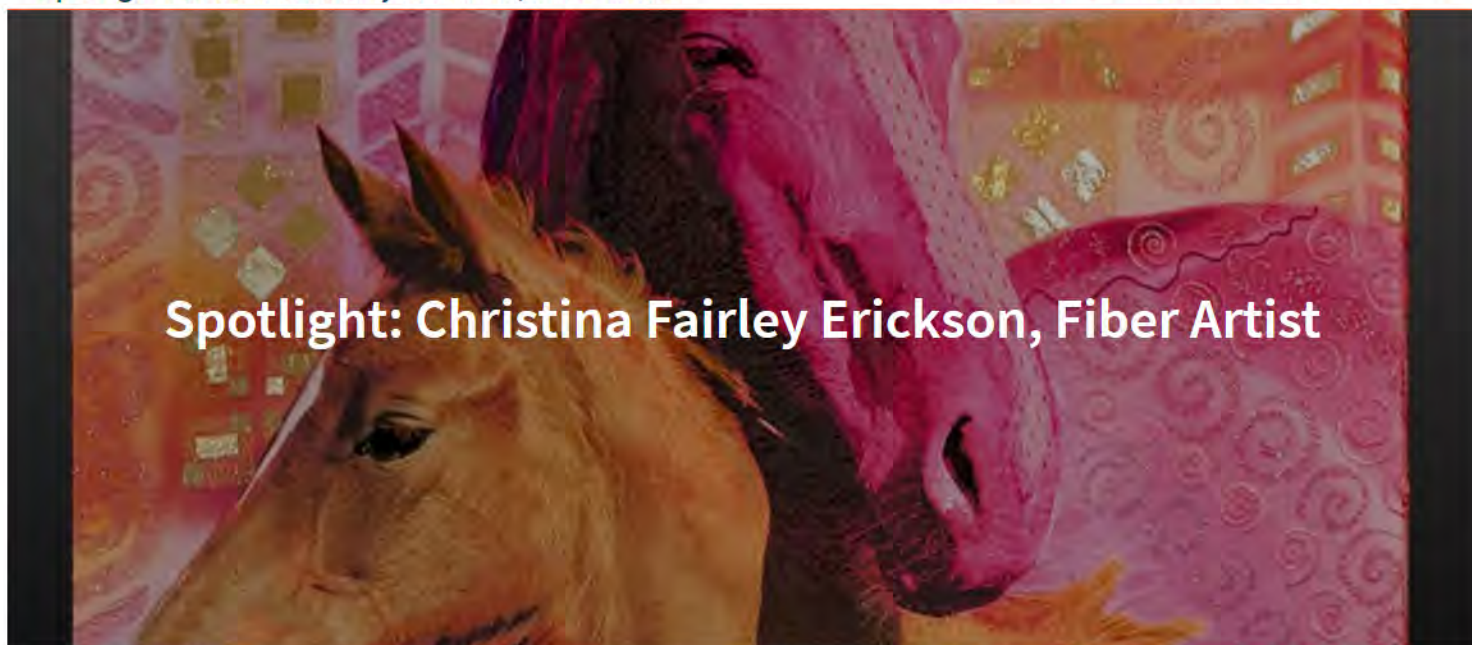


Spotlight: Christina Fairley Erickson, Fiber Artist

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Meet Christina Fairley Erickson. Inspired by nature and travel, her art quilts and embroidery reflect her journeys, in person and as creative adventures. Her works are intricate and complex, giving the viewer so much to enjoy. We are very excited to share this interview with Christina and what we learned about her influences and inspirations.



How do your varied experiences inform your work?

As people get to know me, they often comment how it seems I've lived many different lives. I've chased numerous passions through my life and most of them continue to inspire me in my art.

At one time I studied marine biology and was an avid scuba diver, including being a diver at the Seattle Aquarium. I have a number of pieces based on my love of the marine environment, especially seaweed. I'm currently working on a theme of "The Water's Edge". It reflects more where I am today, at the shoreline rather than being undersea.

Animals have been another of my passions. When I was little I wanted to be a veterinarian, and we had some pretty unusual pets, including a chipmunk, a scarlet macaw, and even a skunk (her scent glands had been removed). I consider horses and dogs my closest

companions, and they appear in my creative efforts frequently.

I also have a great love of watching of wildlife. My husband Randy and I have done some wonderful adventures to view different creatures in their habitats including Africa, the Amazon rainforest, and most recently to see Orangutans in Borneo. Many of my pieces include animals, birds and marine life... not so much reptiles, but who knows what will come in the future? There was that incident with the Paradise Flying Tree Snake in Borneo...



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My travels also influence my work greatly, and I specifically plan my trips to see as many textile art items and artists as I can. I named my website "[Fiber Artist Journey](#)," to help share both the textile related experiences I learn from my travels as well as to convey my personal journey in developing my artwork. To this end, I contact artists through different international organizations I belong to, such as the Surface Design Association (SDA) the Embroiderer's Guild of America (EGA) and Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) or those I've met through social media: [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). Some of my most wonderful experiences traveling have been meeting other artists like this.

When I first decided to reach out to an artist this way, I sent an email just asking if there were any exhibitions she would recommend. When she invited me to her home and also show me her studio, I wasn't sure... I'm much more of an introvert than you might expect. It turned out to be the highlight of my trip! Now I've met fiber artists in Iceland, Israel, England, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea, as well as going to textile museums and exhibits wherever I go. While their work might not directly influence mine, I find it very inspirational and it sparks my own creativity, not to mention getting me out of my introverted shell! Hopefully, it does the same for them.

What draws you to representational work? Have you ever worked abstractly?

I've always liked pictorial/representational work. I think it comes from my mother being a librarian – we had a rich life of stories as children and I continue to be an avid reader, often having up to 10 books going at a time. I like looking at representational work and imagining the story behind it and love the rich history of pictorial artwork. There is still plenty to express in this way.

I have a great appreciation for abstract work as well and have made some forays into abstraction. I have been stitching quite a number of smaller abstract pieces, particularly ones with Goldwork embroidery. And I made an art quilt of hand-dyed fabrics strip-pieced then reverse appliquéd with silk dupioni as an abstract representation of madrona tree bark, which sold at a gallery last year.

Why textiles? Why stitch? How did you get started?

You might say textiles and stitch are in my blood. My ancestors, San Francisco bay area pioneers, included a tailor, seamstress, and a milliner, and I own an antique cigar-band quilt made by my great-great grandmother. My mother started teaching me to sew on a treadle machine at 10 years old and I started working for a seamstress when I was 14. And my father always had a bit of flair or eccentricity and it rubbed off on me through expressing my creativity in costumery.

In my young adult years, I designed and made costumes for rock 'n rollers while my first husband was a rock sound engineer. Then, with the tragic loss of my daughter at birth, I stopped all my creative endeavors. Several years and a divorce later, I came across a church bazaar where a woman had all sorts of beautifully colored Trip Around the World quilts. I considered buying one, but then thought, "I can make that!" This started me back on the path of being creative, not to mention bringing myself closer together with my mother, who shares my interest in quilting. I quickly moved on to art quilts and then branched out to more fiber arts. I believe in the healing power of stitch.

Who or what has inspired/influenced/empowered you?

My mother, Nan Cerini-Lopis has always empowered me to be the best I can be. No matter where I've been in life, I've always known she would love and support me.

My biggest artistic influence is my mentor, Gail Harker. I'm working on a graduate program at the [Gail Harker Center for Creative Arts](#) in design and stitch. I started taking classes with Gail after I met one of her students who invited me to an exhibition at her school. It amazed me to see how each of Gail's students had developed their own artistic voice and style, rather than being taught to make something that looks like the teacher's own artwork. I feel particularly lucky that she is fairly close to where I live, although students travel from other states and Canada all the time to work with her. I'm currently finishing up her "Level 3 Advanced Experimental Stitch" 2 year course, and have an additional 4 years with two courses to finish my diploma.

How do you make the leap from an idea in your head to the art you produce?

That process has evolved a great deal over time. I used to create much more spontaneously but would get frustrated when my artistic vision wasn't realized. Through my work with Gail Harker, I've learned to be much more methodical. I make sketches, try out colors, make a full color mock-up and test materials prior to starting the actual artwork.



It's amazing how much of a difference, although time consuming, this can make on the final outcome of the piece. For instance, on a hand embroidered pheasant I was making, I thought I could probably skip testing the white thread I was going to use for the ring around its neck. But, then I decided that I should go ahead and try it out first. I was surprised that it took 9 types of white embroidery thread before I found one that met my vision! That experience reminds me of the importance of testing, even when I don't think it's going to be necessary.

If you had the opportunity, whose creative brain (past or present) would you like to pick?

There have been so many inspirational fiber artists I would love to be able to learn from. Beryl Dean, a 20th century legend in English embroidery, would be at the top of my list. She's likely the biggest influence on contemporary ecclesiastical embroidery. I went to see the 5 panels she made at Saint George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. They take your breath away. Similarly, Constance Howard contributed to and advanced contemporary stitch, through forwarding both design and color. At Goldsmiths University of London, their Textile collection includes the Constance Howard Gallery, which I hope to visit this summer.



Tell us about a challenging piece. What were the obstacles and how did you get past them?

Since many of my pieces have dense machine stitch, I learned the hard way that heavily stitched areas draw up the fabric, causing shrinkage in the stitched areas and wrinkle and distortion in the unstitched parts. Ways to combat this include using a very heavy backing or stabilizer, hooping your fabric during free motion stitching, or sometimes choosing to have layers distort the fabric as a design decision.

Are there indispensable tools and materials in your studio? How do they improve your work?

I've had a love affair with Bernina sewing machines since I started working on a Bernina industrial machine for a seamstress at age 14. I still have and use my mechanical Bernina I bought in the 1980's. On top of that, I have two computerized Berninas (one to take to classes) and one of their sergers. Since I do a lot of dense machine stitching, my threads are like my paint palette... so I have a large array of colors, arranged in drawers by color. Similarly, I have bins of hand embroidery threads. Since I mainly work with my own hand-dyed or painted material now, I also have a huge selection of different white materials and threads to dye.



How do you stay organized when working with multiple design ideas and processes?



I'd like to first admit that I'm not nearly as organized as I'd like to be. I try to keep my different projects in separate bags or bins, particularly anything that I plan to take with me either on my travels or just in my daily life. I'm a little OCD in needing to always have something with me to work on.

For smaller pieces, I may pull out the threads I need for that specific piece and put it in a gallon baggie with everything needed to work on it – hoop, needles, scissors, and the fabric to stitch on.

Generally, for my larger-scale ideas and plans, I start a new sketchbook to keep my ideas, inspirations,

sampling, color studies, and all supporting material on the project. I also take photos at different stages of the project to document the steps.



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How do you keep skills fresh?

It was challenging with young children. But as they got older, I instituted that after dinner was my time for art. It may not work for everyone, but I'm a night person, so it works for me. Now that I don't have kids at home, I'm freer and can work anytime. Whether I put in daytime hours or not, I still stitch or do artwork nightly for 3-6 hours. Inspiration comes from all around me. I take way too many pictures and categorize the ones which I may want to use in my art in a filing system on my computer. Then I go through them if I need to kick-start a new project.



I also do a lot of research on whatever I'm trying to express. For instance, I was researching the Austrian artist Gustaf Klimt (most notoriously known for "The Kiss" and his work using gold leaf) when I decided to take inspiration from his style of using shape and pattern in a partially realistic portrait. From there, I experimented with changing a part of a photo to be more surrealistic through color manipulation and added on layers of different fabrics in shapes and machine stitch, to add decorative elements which would be out of context in a strictly realistic portraiture. "[In Klimt's Corral](#)" was the result.

The foal's color and hair-like stitching convey realism, while his watchful mother's bright pink color and body patterns that match the background give her a surrealistic quality, as though she is there with her baby, or is it just that she's always looking over him? This piece also resonates with me as a mother – one who is always wishing to be able to protect my children, as well as being a mother who has lost a child and will forever carry her in my heart.

How do you seek out opportunities?

I belong to several excellent organizations which host exhibitions or release lists of opportunities specific to fiber artists.

[Surface Design Association](#) (SDA)

[Studio Art Quilt Associates](#) (SAQA)

[The Contemporary QuiltArt Association](#) (CQA)

[Embroiderers Guild of America](#) (EGA)

As part of both SDA and CQA, I've served as a volunteer to run exhibitions. This has taught me the ins and outs of creating opportunities, working with venues, and putting on a quality show. Furthermore, my ongoing coursework at the Gail Harker Center for Creative Arts puts on exhibitions for each upper level class you complete, further experience for excellence in presentation of your artwork.



Where can people see your work?

I just had 11 pieces on view at the [Pacific Northwest Quilt and Fiber Art Museum](#) in La Conner, WA. I'm planning entries to the EGA Pacific Region conference and a CQA show here in Seattle, but my main focus is on my student exhibitions at the Gail Harker Center. Online, you can follow my [Instagram](#), which is devoted to my art and my fiber art-related travels, or my [Fiber Artist Journey](#) Facebook page. You can also subscribe to my mailing list to get notifications of any upcoming exhibitions or other news on my [website's blog page](#).

Do you lecture or teach workshops? How can students/organizers get in touch with you to schedule an event?

I have several [lectures](#) and [workshops](#) listed on my website. Students or organizers can reach me through my [Contact Page](#).

What are you working on now?

Like my book-reading habits, I always have quite a few projects in the works. Sometimes I need to prioritize which project needs work, but often I go with what I feel like working on. My big projects currently fulfill my Advanced Experimental Stitch course graduation requirements, which will be exhibited October 27-28, 2018. My pièce de résistance is a large-scale (15" x 24") stumpwork great blue heron (3-D raised embroidery). Another piece in my "Water's Edge" theme will be a 3-D abstract stitched vessel with wave imagery. In addition, I'm completing two handmade books on different stitch topics, with drawn, painted, and collaged artwork and stitch samples. I've also got a number of Goldwork embroidery pieces in various states of completion. They will also be in a special Goldwork exhibition at the Gail Harker Center.

On top of my artwork, I started volunteering as a seamstress for an Angel Gown project. The project provides hospitals with bereavement gowns for babies who don't survive, made from donated wedding gowns. To find out how to contribute or donate your gown, you can go to the [Angel Gowns page on my website](#).

What do you hope the next year will bring?

I'm scheduled to travel to Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. I'm looking forward to tracing some of my roots and seeing more textile arts in the British Isles.

My big desire is to start a new body of work for a solo show. I'm in the process of planning it now. I'll be revisiting my love of animals using mixed media to create a congruent but varied style for the pieces. I'm exploring domestication, wild, and endangered states and the impact of humanity on other creatures.



Christina Fairley Erickson
Fiber & Mixed Media Art