

A Quilter's Garden (by Katrina Parris)

Gardens have always been a favourite source of inspiration for needlework as they are rich in colour, shape and texture. An article in RHS The Garden magazine August 2015 tells how to 'Adorn your garden with buttons and tassels.' It recommends a variety of plants that include 'Pieters' that will provide a haberdashery of fuzzy buttons, bobbles, and tassels of subtle colour. No wonder that many of us who work in textiles feel at home in the garden.

It is a RHS garden called Hyde Hall in Essex that has inspired me to produce a series of designs for quilts. The changing seasons and skilful planting are an ongoing resource for some of my journal quilts and larger pieces. My most recent quilt was inspired by the Dry Garden in Hyde Hall and I was interested in the contrast of the brightly coloured flowers alongside the rough, purple-grey rocks and textured gravel. There are many places to sit and admire the grounds and surrounding countryside; to relax, contemplate, and lose your thoughts. "The Rockery" has been selected to tour the ICHF Shows 2015-2016 with The Quilters' Guild's "Lost in a Quilters Garden" exhibition.

As well as taking photos I like to keep a small sketchbook as a visual diary and enjoy working in it on location. I am interested in exploring the qualities and characteristics of individual flowers as well as recording flowerbeds and borders. Capturing them in various media produces pages that include pencil, pen and ink, pastels, felt pens, and different types of paint. This variety produces a more interesting book than does only one medium.

The marks made by different media can suggest various textile techniques such as seeding and french knots to represent dashes and dots made by pen and ink. Layers of net and sheers work together to create colours like watercolour washes. Hand painted muslins and cottons can represent the textures of pastels and acrylic paint. They can be used to create the surfaces of rock, brick, and gravel as well as the delicate, mottled colouring of petals and leaves.

When I return to my workroom after my visit I work from photos and sketches and paint a series of fabrics inspired by my impressions. I record the colours in the garden and add commercially purchased sheers and nets that will help me shade and blend. I collect my fabrics together and start with large background pieces and layer on smaller fabrics, pinning the pieces together and on to the wall to review and edit. I make adjustments and when satisfied with the composition tack through the collage, wadding, and lining. To hold all the



"The Rockery" as sketch and finished quilt



layers together I machine stitch as a drawing tool. The thread works to shade, blend, and add details of fine line. Hand stitching is used to create texture.

Now comes the interesting and most challenging stage as the quilt is pinned back on the wall and more decisions need to be made:

- Is the focal point strong enough?
- Is there a balance of shape, tone, colour, and texture?
- Should adjustments be made to achieve depth?

When changes are needed I never unpick or cut away, as another layer of fabric and stitching adds to the texture.

I aim to produce a good representation of the garden by applying detail but it is important to leave some areas for the viewers to interpret themselves. This good advice was given to me by Jae Maries, a textile artist and painter whose work I admire.

Although I am working in a series each design presents new challenges that inspire me to start another quilt. It is also a good excuse to make another visit to the beautiful gardens of Hyde Hall (rhs.org.uk/hydehall).

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