

On Technique

Cindi Huss, ©2005

During some recent research involving both quilts and paintings I became conscious of a pattern. Although the materials are listed for paintings and assemblage, generally the technique is not. Why? Because it is irrelevant.

What is relevant? Whether the artist can use the technique to further his or her aims and whether the technique distracts from or enhances the work as a whole. Oil painters don't indicate whether they used fine brushes or a palette knife. So why when we enter most art quilt shows must we still list all the techniques we use? It's irrelevant.

Some in the art world have said we focus too much on technique. We reacted so strongly to this perception that we seem to have missed the point. How a work of art is made is unimportant. How well it is made, how well it communicates the intent of the maker and stands the test of time—that is important, regardless of the medium. However, we have given up serious criticism on the premise that we cannot discuss technique while continuing to list our techniques on the applications to, among others, SAQA @ Noho, Art Quilts at the Sedgewick, Quilts=Arts=Quilts, Fine Focus, and Quilt National, the mother of all art quilt exhibits.

On an application form technique should be boiled down to, "Does this work comply with the definition of a quilt for the purpose of this exhibit: [state definition]. G Yes G No

On viewing a piece, technique cannot be boiled down, nor should it be overlooked. Fine art, from painting to sculpture, music to dance, demonstrates both clarity of expression and mastery of technique. Fine art quilts should do the same. We can—and should—continue to push the envelope, but we must also strive to master our materials, both conventional and new.

—This is the original version of the article. An edited version appeared in the Summer 2005 issue of the SAQA Journal. Because the basic message in that version changed significantly during the editorial process, the following was published in the Fall 2005 issue of the SAQA Journal for clarification:

Article clarification From Cindi Huss, SAQA Active Member

As a journalist and an editor myself, I understand that sometimes you have to edit for space, but my message ["Opinion: On Technique" in the SAQA Journal Summer 2005 on page 8] had changed enough during the editorial process that I must disagree with myself on a couple of points.

In a nutshell, the point I hoped to make in my article was this: *technique* should not be a bad word. It should be discussed critically in the context of its contribution to the artistry of a piece, rather than listed as a laundry list on an exhibition application. What the piece ended up saying was, "Serious art criticism never includes technique. We must master our materials . . . But we should be judged by our clarity of expression."

I believe that discussing technique in criticism is a fabulous way to educate non-quilters, particularly art professionals, [regarding] the possibilities of the art."