

# Critique principles in the *Musings* jury process

by Sandra Sider

**A**s sole juror of the SAQA *Musings* exhibition, my first goal was to select quilts that clearly had enough visual interest and sophistication to qualify for a SAQA exhibition, with no thought of how they might work together in the room where the show would be installed. I based my choices on the critique principles discussed below. Secondly, I considered whether each quilt that made the first cut expressed some aspect of the “musings” theme. The final choice focused on whether the quilts would create a balanced, coherent exhibition. This essay addresses the principles used for the preliminary selection, with a few remarks about the thematic subject.

For my critique workshops, I have fine-tuned basic design principles to apply to contemporary quilt art. Each piece initially selected for *Musings* had to incorporate successfully at least two of the primary principles: texture (physical and visual), color, line, or mass; and at least two of

the secondary principles: balance, focus, contrast, or repetition with variation. The three quilts discussed in this essay demonstrate that the artists who made them were applying virtually all the principles of great quilt design. These particular quilts are included here because they also demonstrate the range of stylistic approaches in the exhibition.

In *Handwork*, Mary Diamond created a peaceful, cozy, indoor space where the viewer might muse upon the wintry landscape seen through a mullioned window. She places us in a season when handwork is typically done, with evidence of workers’ hands in ceramic jugs on a table and in rough-hewn logs comprising the wall. When I first saw the image of this quilt, I was struck immediately by the vibrant mass of contrasting colors produced by reddish-brown jugs against a cool blue table, and by the subtle patterning of these hues on the wall. Stitching, mullions, and a sawhorse seen through the window

emphasize the natural linear structure of the logs. By silhouetting the jagged ends of the logs against a black border, Diamond draws our attention to their black interstices. Because these dark lines recede visually, the somewhat lighter logs push forward as a monumental structure.

The composition of *Handwork* is unified by color, with dual focal points of a tabletop in the foreground and a landscape in the background. Visual and physical texture in the interior wooden wall balance these design elements. Because *Handwork* is meant to be a pictorial work of art, the composition had to conform to a logical depiction of space and depth. Except for the edge of the table, where a piece of fabric seems suspended in space, Diamond indeed positioned objects solidly on the table and put the distant house in proper perspective. Volumetric characteristics of dishes and jugs are indicated by shadows in the foreground, and by reflections along the surfaces facing the window.

Part of the genius of this piece is that a cozy domestic scene is suggested without any sentimentality. Adhering to a predominantly cool palette, the artist maintains a serene yet serious ambiance. In addition, the white clarity of the landscape illuminates the interior, bringing everything into sharp focus. Within that landscape, Diamond uses a diagonal thrust of images across the window from upper right to lower left, a bold stroke that returns our eyes to the horizontal display of objects on the table. *Handwork* is a quilt to savor.



*Handwork*, 40" x 60" ©2005 Mary Diamond