

## Two museums display the new faces of quilting in San Diego

By Lonnie Burstein Hewitt

*Contributor*

For generations, possibly going back thousands of years to the time of the pharaohs, quilting has been a traditional folk art, usually practiced by women, often a record of personal or community history.

Today, the adventurous works of a new generation of quilters are more like “soft paintings,” displaying a range of exciting techniques made possible by new technologies. And an art quilt is not something to cover a bed with, but something to proudly display on a wall.



Velda Newman stands in front of her quilt 'Zinnias,' part of the exhibition at Oceanside Museum of Art. Almost 18 feet wide, it's the largest piece in the show. Courtesy Visions Art Museum

Visions, a small but mighty art museum in Liberty Station, is a good place to see what's happening in the world of contemporary quilting.

What started in 1985 as a group of quilters who wanted to elevate the art by mounting a juried exhibition has turned into a celebrated international biennial. In 2007, as Liberty Station became a magnet for local arts organizations, Visions opened a gallery there, achieving museum status in late 2010.

One of Visions' board members is La Jolla resident Gillian Moss. Originally from Ireland, she trained and worked as a jeweler, but decided to try something different after she married.

“I was interested in textiles, but I didn’t really want to follow patterns, so I was pretty much self-taught,” she said. “Then I got involved in the Irish Quilting Society, which is quite a thriving guild, with meetings and workshops and members’ exhibitions.”



“A Breath Away,” a quilt made by La Jolla’s Gillian Moss, was shown at Visions Art Museum in 2009. Another of her pieces will be on view in the Critique Group section of the new exhibit opening Feb. 4. Photo Michael C. Lancaster

Moss continued quilt making when the family moved to La Jolla in 2001. She became part of the Seaside Quilters’ Guild, joining Visions in 2007. Her great contribution there has been the critique group she started two years ago.

“Most quilters work on their own, at home or in their own studio, and I thought it would be good to have somewhere we could get feedback,” she said. “The group is an amazing source of stimulation. Critique is too strong a word for it, really. We’re very helpful to each other. I always drive home so full of ideas, I’m delighted I started it!”

Since 2002, the Visions biennial has been taking place at Oceanside Museum of Art, and continues to be the most popular of all OMA’s exhibitions. At a recent walkthrough of the show, led by Visions President Charlotte Bird, there were 135 attendees, attentively listening and closely examining each piece.

What is a quilt? Beth Smith, executive director of Visions and former director of development at OMA, says the definition these days is very loose.

“For the most part it’s still three layers of fabric (top, batting, and backing) but it can really be anything,” she said. “We’re moving beyond the boundary of quilting and into the realm of contemporary fiber art.”

The 39 quilts on display at OMA were chosen from more than 600 submissions by a jury of notable artists and curators who were looking for original ideas, mastery of design, and exemplary execution. They include the whole gamut of quilting techniques, from machine-stitched, computer-generated designs to very labor-intensive hand stitching.

“They’re all narrative,” Bird said. “That is, each quilt tells a personal, mythical, or historical story,

though we may not know what it is.”

There’s a quilt made from cut-up thrift-store clothing, another made of fleece, and one speckled with bits of metal and mirrors.



This 12-foot-high quilt by Valya, a Ukrainian-born artist living in Oceanside, is titled “Cell Memory, Baba” and traces her father’s DNA back to the African mother of us all. Photo Maurice Hewitt

There are quilted photos and solar paintings, strip-pieced quilts, quilts that are painted over and sanded to produce exquisitely textured surfaces, austere conceptual quilts, and quilts made of canvas, sheer tulle, or silks that are over-dyed, burned, appliquéd, rusted, and stitched with painted thread.

Ready for an art-quilt expedition? Remember to look at each work from a distance and then get as close as you can to admire the technique.

### **If you go**

**What:** ‘Quilt Visions 2010: No Boundaries’ (closes March 13)

**Perk:** While you’re there, check out the Imogen Cunningham photography show and the SDSU grad student art upstairs.

**Where:** Oceanside Museum of Art, 704 Pier View Way

**When:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 1-4 p.m. Sundays

**Admission:** \$8-\$5

**Contact:** (760) 435-3720. [oma-online.org](http://oma-online.org)

**What:** Opening of ‘Counterpoint’; Critique Group exhibition

**When:** Feb. 4, then 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays

**Where:** Visions Art Museum, 2825 Dewey Road, Suite 100, NTC, Liberty Station, Point Loma

**Contact:** (619) 546-4872. [visionartmuseum.org](http://visionartmuseum.org)

**Admission:** \$5

**Perk:** Free admission at Visions and Open House at all Liberty Station galleries on 5 to 8 p.m. on first Fridays