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# Machine Quilting

UNLIMITED

## Hollis Chatelain

Awareness through Art

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Part 1

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Alicia Merrett  
Mapping the Imagination



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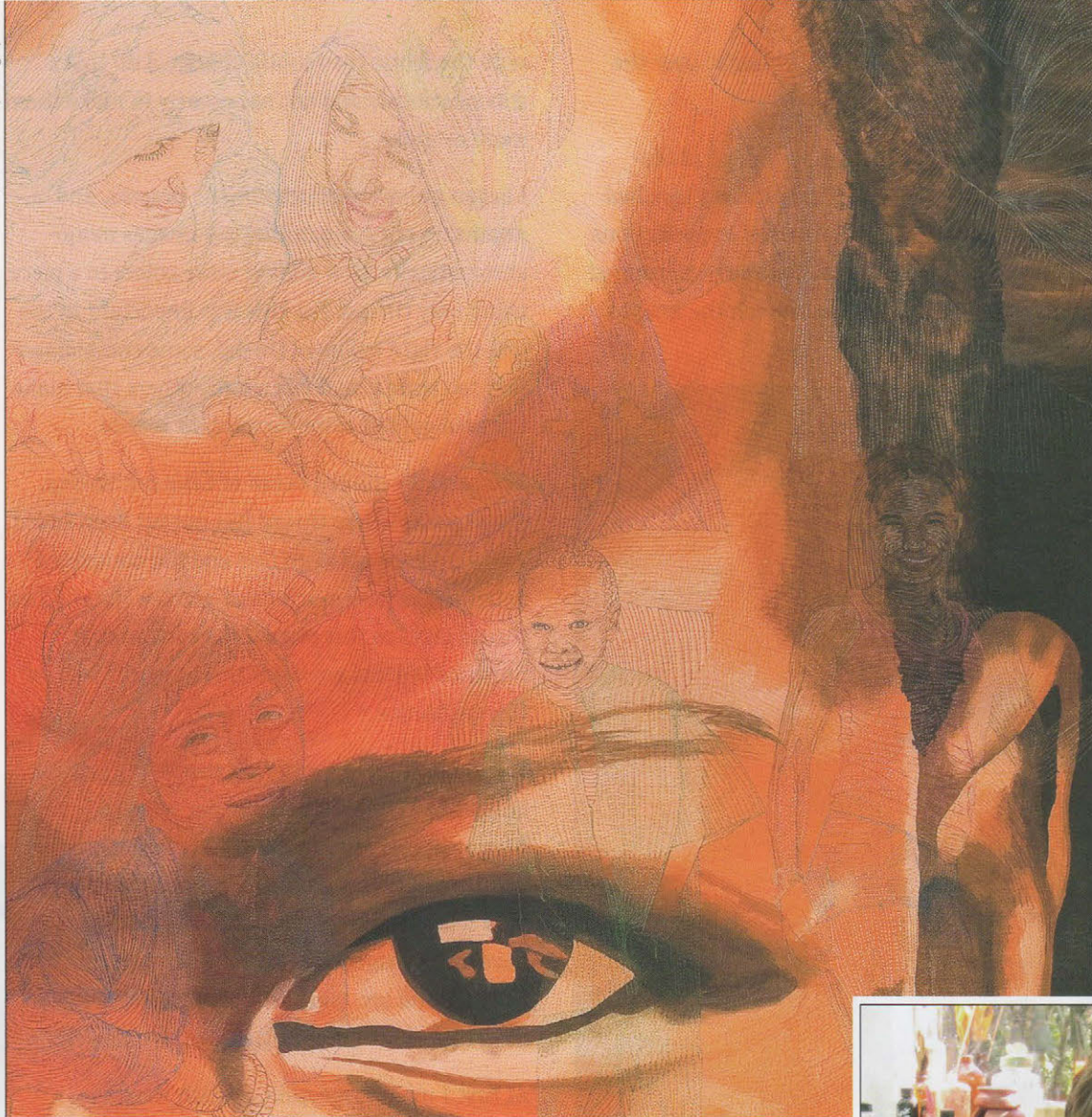


# Hollis Chatelain

## Awareness through Art

Interview by Kit Robinson



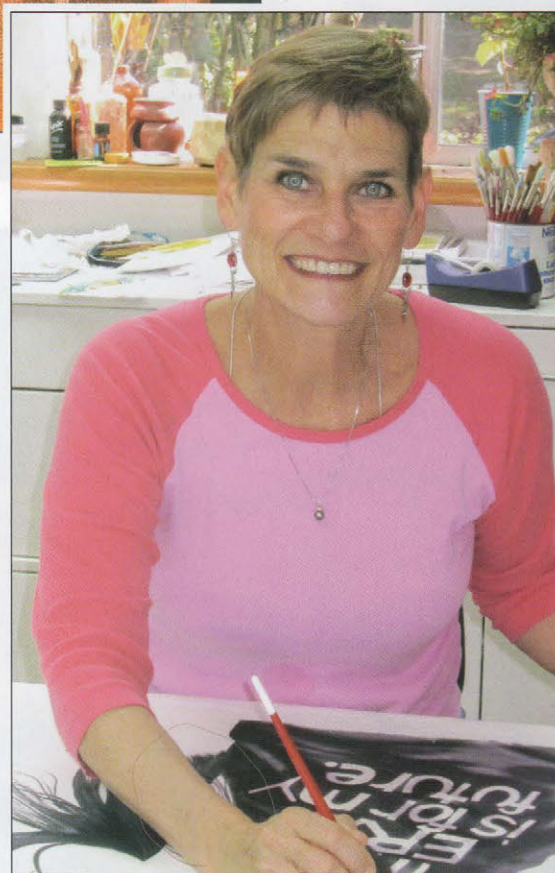


*Innocence*, © 2010  
78 × 103 inches, and  
detail.

**H**ollis Chatelain's work has been a great inspiration to me for many years. Her signature style is immediately recognizable, and her fabric art never fails to be both stunning and thought provoking. Recently I had the great pleasure of talking with Hollis about her art, her techniques, and about the environmental, social and political causes that inform her work.

**MQU** How did you first get into the field of art quilting?

**HC** I had been an artist for over twenty years, working in several different media, and had also taught drawing, color design and photography. A friend asked if I could make a quilt that featured Mark Twain, which sounded like quite a challenge. I wondered if I could paint this image on fabric, and tried creating this and other portraits with thickened dyes painted on fabric in full color. This experience drew me to experiment more with this technique and refine it in ways that would complement my artistic style.





*Girls are Strong,*  
detail, partially  
quilted.

*Girls are Strong,*  
© 2014, detail with  
quilting completed.

**MQU** How has your process changed over the years?

**HC** I used to try and make an almost photographic representation of the pictures I wished to portray, but now I embrace the imperfections that occur as I go. I start with drawings inspired by my photographs, but as I sketch the images

onto the fabric they subtly change. I do this subconsciously and not necessarily to make them more original.

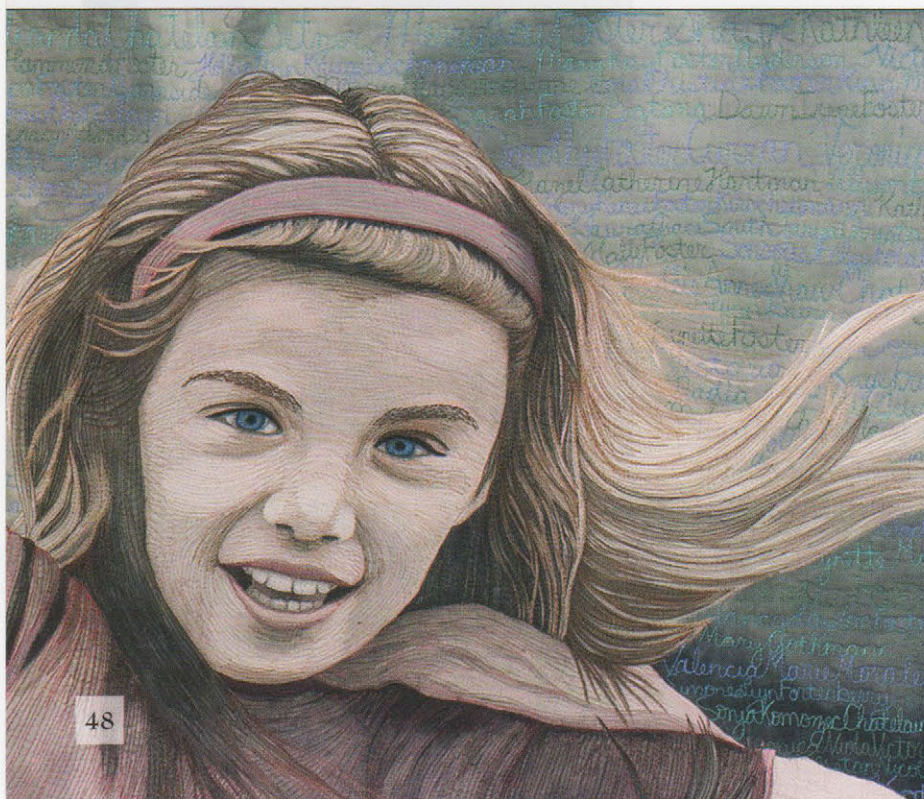
I began to have monochromatic dreams, and decided to try dye-painting my images monochromatically, later adding more colors to a piece using only thread. For this it is important to use just the right colors of thread, some complementary to create visual vibrations, others that make the area quilted come forward, or recede.

The partially quilted detail of *Girls are Strong* shows areas where thread has not yet been added. The difference between this and the completed detail shows how much color and life the stitched thread gives to this piece. I have found that Superior trilobal polyester thread works well for this technique.

When I first started entering shows, my art quilts filled with imagery did not seem to have a category in which I could place them, because there was no classification that fit. Now it seems that almost all quilt exhibitions have several categories for representational imagery and art, and at the same time, more art galleries are accepting of fiber art, as well.

At first I made large quilts, which were a year or more in the making. I liked working big, and I realized that I *had* to do this art. My husband Reynald and I lived in different countries in West Africa for a number of years, and this gave me a sharp awareness of the richness of human diversity and the scarcity and fragility of natural resources, and all of my life experiences have informed me that inequality of any kind is something that should be recognized and addressed. At times my pieces are deemed to be too political for specific audiences but this is the work that I need to do and find most rewarding.

**MQU** Communicating your thoughts on the issues that face the world today is very important to you. Can you give us some examples of this?







**HC Innocence** (on pages 46 & 47) is a very large quilt that I made because of a dream I had in which I saw from a distance a portrait of a young African boy. As I came closer I could see that there were images of children from all over the

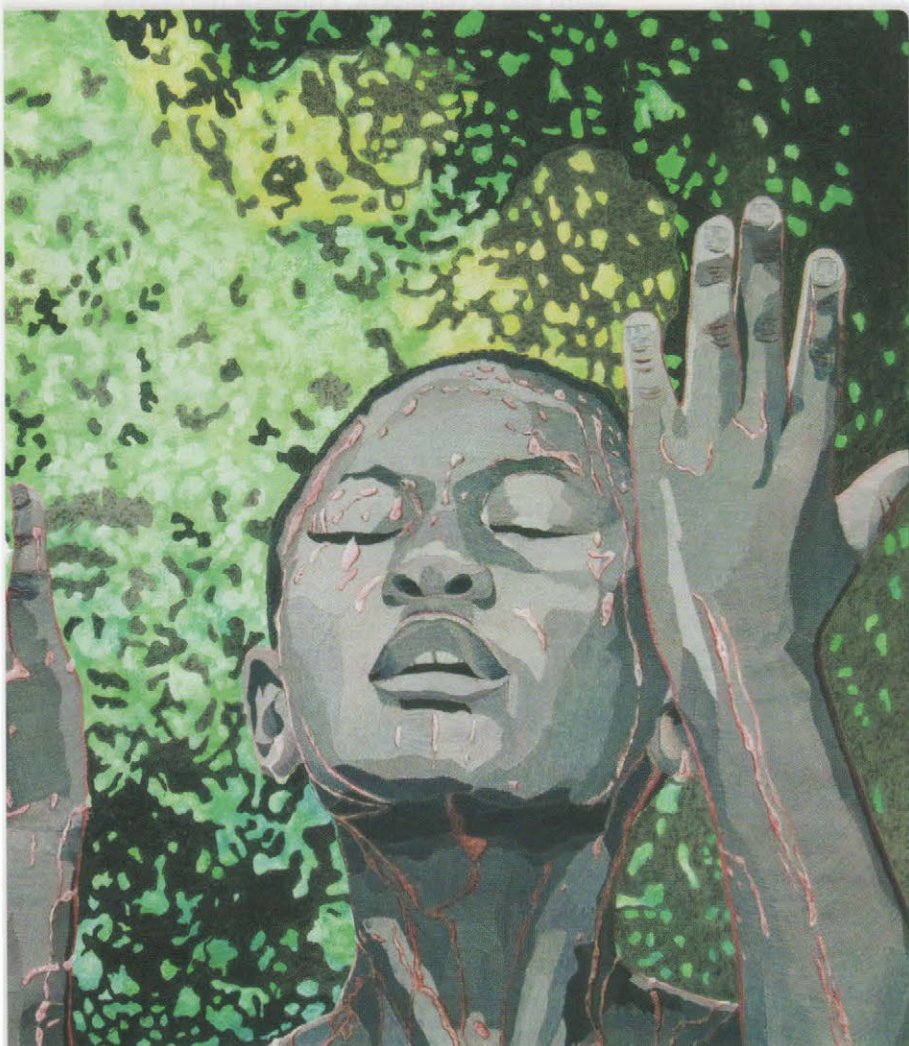
world floating all around him. There were happy children laughing, playing, eating and working; but there were also child prostitutes and even a child soldier. It seemed important to capture the images of these innocent children and tell their

stories in a work of art.

After the boy's face and the background were dye-painted

*Parched*, © 2013 72 x 27 inches, and detail.

*Source of Life*, © 2013 58 x 58 inches, and detail.





monochromatically, the images of these children were painstakingly stitched across the canvas, six square inches at a time. Each quilting thread was chosen carefully for its placement and for how it would react to the underlying color. For instance, I used twelve different colors of green thread alone for some of this stitching.

*Parched*, made from recycled denim, shows a young girl enjoying a drink from a water fountain, a simple act that is frequently taken for granted. This is a luxury not found in every part of the world.

Because I have lived close to the desert, I have become more aware of the importance of water in every aspect of our lives. It quenches our thirst, grows our food, washes us, and gives us a means of play and relaxation. As our world becomes more crowded and our resources diminish, we will cherish water more and more. Many of my quilts, including *Source of Life*, speak to this essential element of our world.

*Healing Waters*, ©  
2014 37 × 24 inches.

*Source of Life* is also made from recycled denim. When I lived in Africa, the local customs made it unacceptable for a woman to wear blue jeans, and also the weather was too hot and humid for these pants. When I got back to North Carolina, I happily bought myself several pairs, and as they wore out I started recycling them into my quilts.

*Healing Waters* is the first full color dye-painted quilt that I have painted since 2000. Because the orange is so bright, it is quilted with blue threads (a complementary color) to calm it down. This piece is part of my on-going interest in the many aspects of our relationship with water.

Wetlands have always intrigued me. They are an incredibly important part of our environment; they protect us from floods, provide fish and wildlife habitat, control erosion, and protect our water quality and our shorelines. Throughout the world we are destroying wetlands with pollution, dams and development. I imagine the cypress 'knees' depicted in my quilt *Protection* as the



Jason Dowdle photographer





Lynn Ruck photographer



soldiers standing guard over the wetlands. We must also be those soldiers and protect our wetlands from destruction.

*Protection* is a whole cloth quilt made from black fabric. The colors in the piece are created entirely with thread.

*Steadfast* is made from one of my hand dyed fabrics, and the design was suggested by the colors in the cloth. The images in this quilt are also created entirely with thread. The tree depicted inspired me because it grew in extreme conditions. The canyons around it were dry and rocky. The natural desire to survive and endure over the years brings out the beauty and inner strength in all living beings.

My latest quilt *Girls are Strong* (on the cover) was made for an exhibit at the Visions Art Museum, *Expressions in Equality*, curated by Sheila Frampton-Cooper. I come from a family of very strong women and I have been significantly influenced by this heritage. *Girls Are Strong* is a tribute to my mother Merry Lou Foster Shaw who fought tirelessly for the Equal Rights

*Protection*, © 2008  
86 × 42 inches, and  
detail.



Amendment when I was growing up. I accompanied her as she went to rallies in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. where we marched and she gave speeches.

The names in the background are the names of the 112 females in our family. These are just a

few whose lives have been affected by Merry Lou. I do not believe that today's younger generations of women realize that many of the rights they have are because of women like my mother. **MCQU**

To see more of Hollis's work, and to find out about her new DVD, Dye-Painting with Hollis, go to [www.hollisart.com](http://www.hollisart.com).



*Steadfast*, © 2011  
36 × 27 inches, and  
detail.



Reynald Chatelain photographer