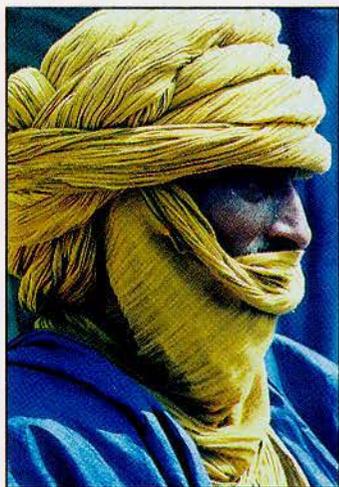


# OUT OF Africa



ABOVE: Putting on the 30 ft. piece of cotton the Touaregs wear as a turban is an art in itself. Taken in Benin.

RIGHT, TOP: A mosque on the banks of the Niger river, near Mopti in Mali. Mosques in the Sahel are always made of adobe and wood. This gives them a serene and natural beauty which admirably fits their surroundings.

RIGHT, CENTER: This breathtaking view of the mountains and forest villages was taken at the border between Ivory Coast and Guinea. As in other parts of the world, the rain forest in West Africa is disappearing very quickly because of demographic pressures.

RIGHT, BOTTOM: Just walking into a compound in the Sahel was an experience in harmony and subtle beauty. I learned that peace and serenity are often found in the most simple places. Taken in Bukina Faso.

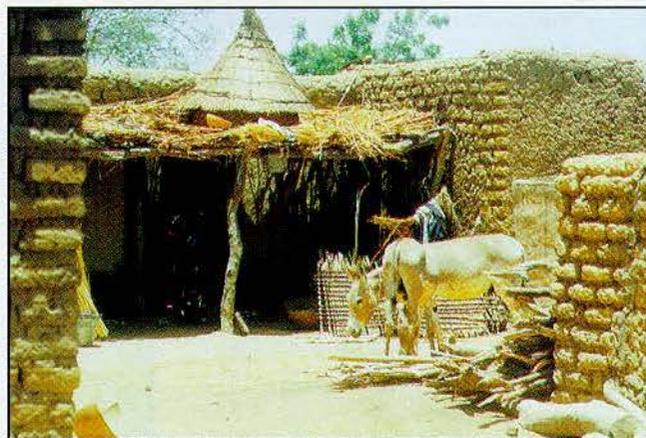
The moment I set foot in Africa in 1980, I knew it was where I wanted to be. The activity, the colors, and the contrasts captivated me from the start. Having worked as a photographer in Philadelphia, I saw everything as a potential photograph. The elegance and beauty of the people and their majestic land were fascinating.

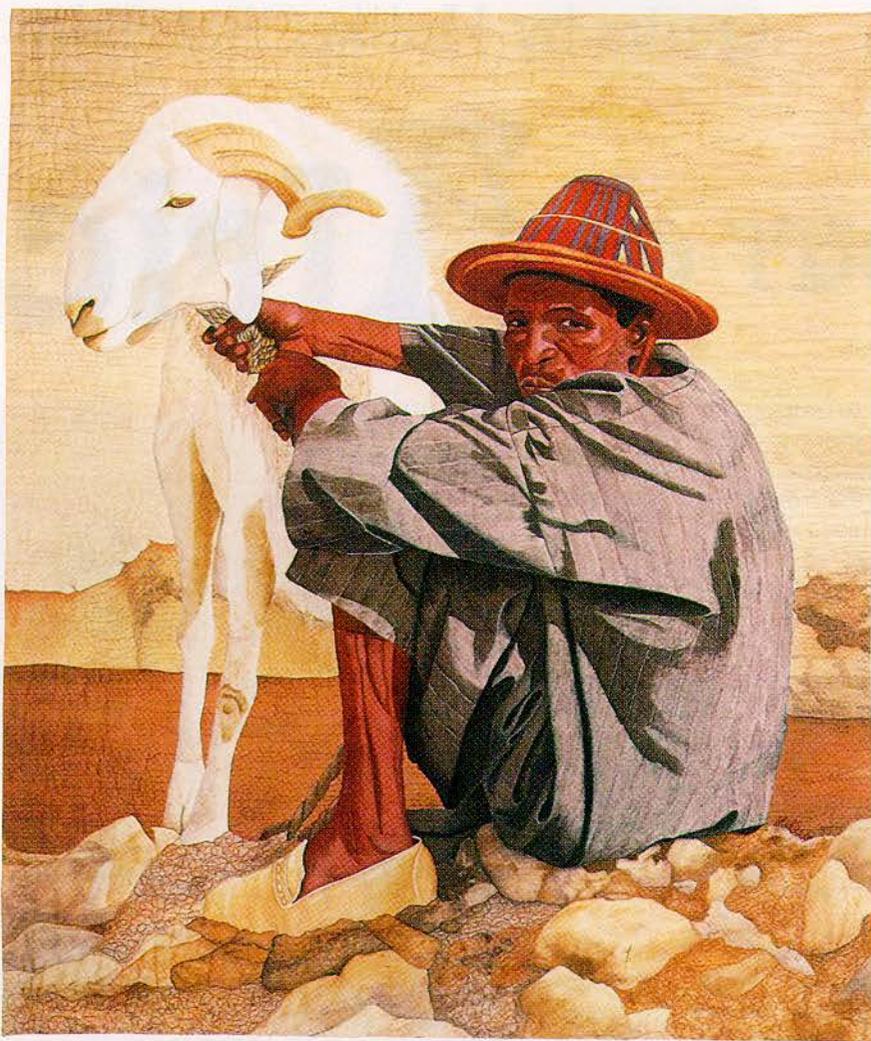
After Peace Corps training I was sent to a village in the mountains of the rain forest, to serve as an agricultural education volunteer. As I traveled to and from different villages in the West African country of Togo for my job, I spent my time drawing and taking photographs.

I was not aware of it then, but my color sense was being deeply affected. Colors are intense in Africa. The sun is very bright and people wear vibrant colors that contrast beautifully with their dark skin. The whole palette was something I had never seen in America.

I left Africa after two years, but returned four years later, with my Swiss husband, whom I had met there earlier, and our children. This time we went to an area just south of the Sahara desert called the Sahel. Having young children changed my life. Now my children accompanied me during the many hours I spent visiting women in their compounds.

While weaving their fabrics, these women talked about this tradition and the stories behind their different patterns. Collecting fabrics became my passion. Merchants were only too happy to share their tales about each fabric as well. I

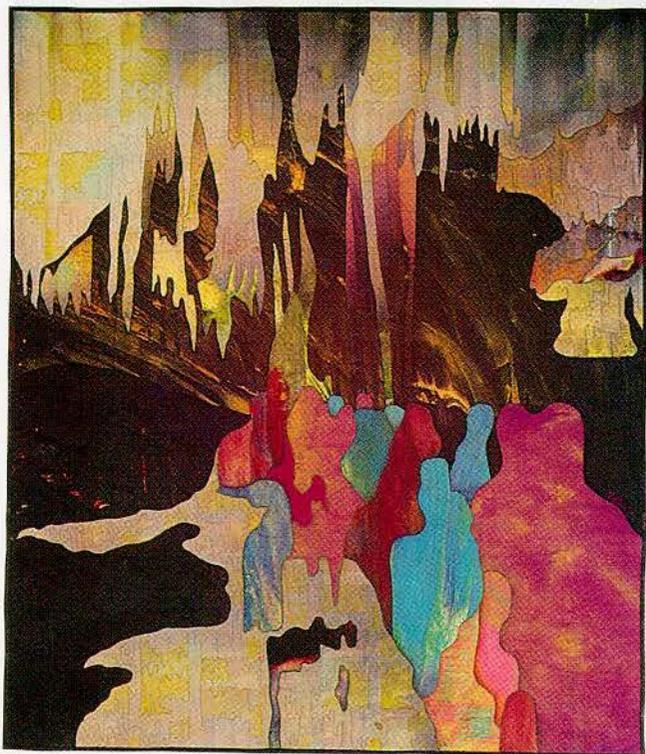




ABOVE: *TABASKI RAM*, 34" x 40", 1997. *This man had brought his ram into Bamako to be sold for the Tabaski Festival. See page 47 for photos of this festival held in Bamako, the capital of Mali.*

COLLECTION: BOB AND CARYL FALLERT

LEFT: *WAITING*, 38" x 43", 1995. *In March of 1995, my father called me to say he was to be operated on for cancer the following day. There are only a couple of planes leaving each week, so I was unable to be with my parents during this difficult time. This quilt came out of that period of waiting to hear how he was.*



was taught how each country in West Africa has its own dye lots, designs, specific names, and weavings.

Tailors gave me their leftover scraps. My collection was growing but I had no idea what to do with it. Sewing made chills go up and down my spine and brought back terrible memories of failed home economics projects. I just couldn't imagine myself using a sewing machine.

The breakthrough came when a good friend in Switzerland was having a baby. We had met in Africa years before, and I knew she would love a baby quilt made from African fabrics. As I sewed this first project by hand, my African friends sat with me and asked questions. They were absolutely intrigued with this idea of putting scraps together to make something beautiful. Before I knew it, I was teaching patchwork to a group of women. Using a book I had bought in Europe, I read how to do a step and then explained what I had read to them. We all learned together!

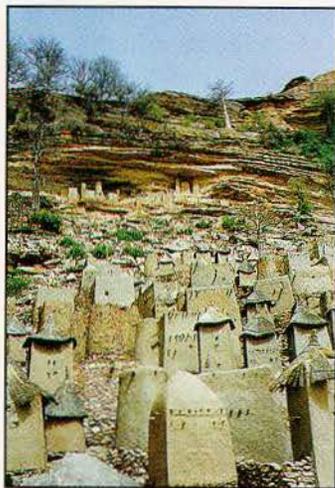
As time went on, I realized that my African friends' color sense was totally different from mine – and stunning. Unable to read or write, these women had never had enough money to buy cloth for themselves; they had never been able to even choose what they wore. Through patchwork, they were given their first opportunity to choose different fabrics and colors and put them together however they wanted.

Since we were getting our scraps from tailors, we had a large selection of fabrics to choose from. In Africa, there are tailors on every street corner for there are very few stores selling ready-made clothes. People either buy used clothing in the market or buy cloth and take it to a tailor who then makes them an outfit. Since the tailors are not always interested in economizing on fabric, there are often large amounts of fabrics left over.

When my husband's employer came to visit us a few months later, he saw me working with the women and was interested in financing us as a project. On his

Quilts by Hollis Chatelain

# OUT OF Africa



ABOVE: This slide was taken in the Dogon country in the north of Mali. The Dogon people built their villages in the cliffs for protection. Being isolated made them keep their traditional ways. The Dogon are known for their unique cosmogony. Related mythic signs can be seen on the houses made from the clay and stones that surround them.

RIGHT: FULANI WEAVERS, 27" x 41", 1997. These women had come from the bush to go to the market. They were weaving baskets while waiting for the market to begin.

COLLECTION: A. J. MAYHEW

BOTTOM, LEFT: Typical scene in the bush of West Africa. One can seem totally isolated and then, out of nowhere, a person on a bicycle will appear or a couple of sheep will wander by. Taken in Bukina Faso.

BOTTOM, RIGHT: I love baobab trees and couldn't resist photographing this magnificent specimen in the Dogon country. Taken in Mali.

OPPOSITE PAGE CENTER, LEFT: During an important funeral in Togo, this woman played the role of the village chief, who had died. RIGHT: The riches of the entire village were paraded in front of everyone for major funerals in Togo. Most of these traditional hand-woven clothes are too expensive to be worn and are kept as hidden treasures in the houses.

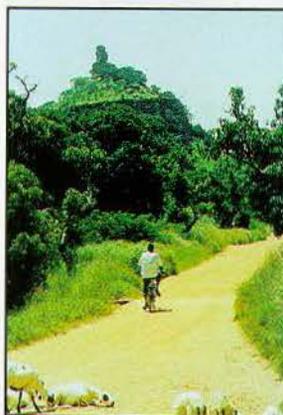
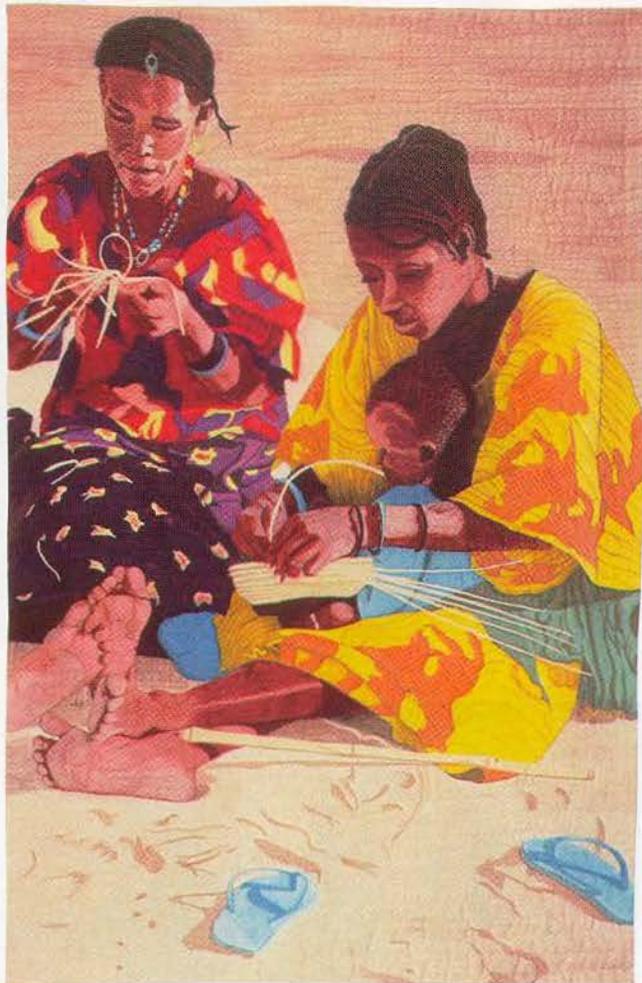
return to Switzerland, he sent me a used sewing machine to make the work go faster. Before attempting to teach the women how to use the machine, I decided I needed to learn myself.

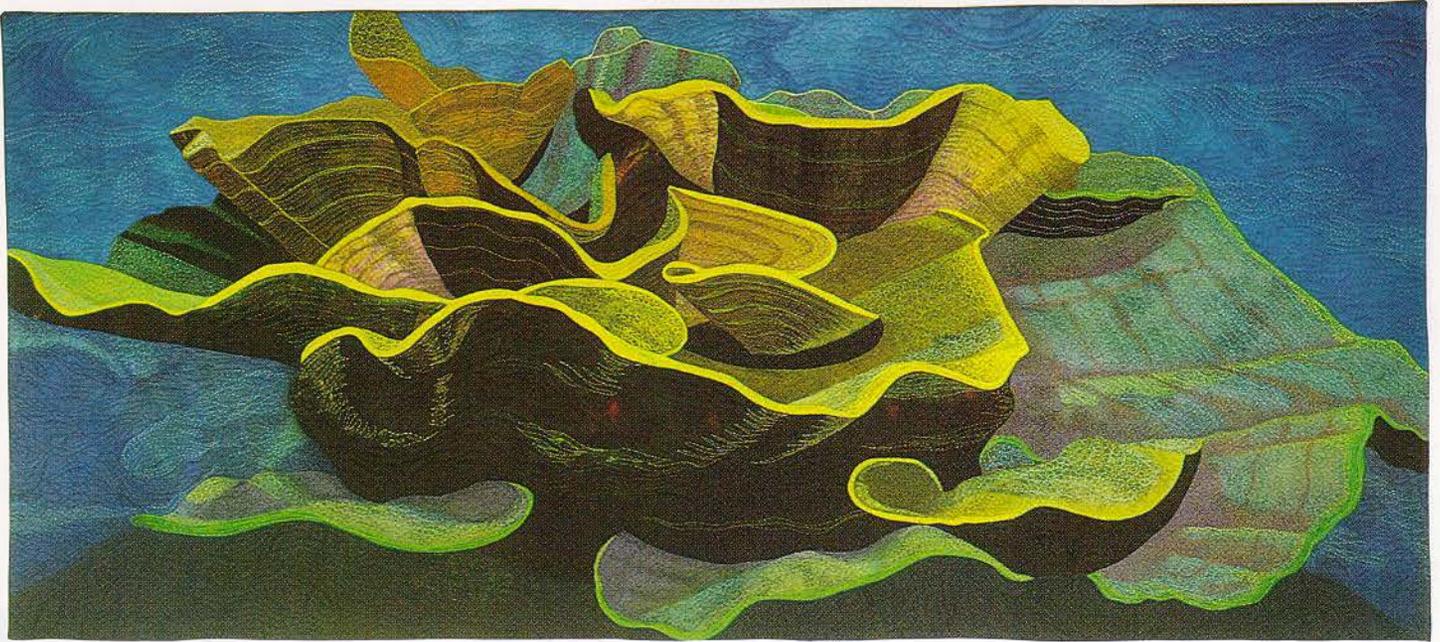
I never did teach these women how to use that sewing machine! They preferred to work by hand, so I concentrated on teaching myself. In learning, I used the fabrics most readily available to me. The incredible array of colors and designs were a challenge to put together, and I found myself seeking out my African friends. Their color sense was so fresh and just right for the fabrics.

When our family moved to Bamako, Mali, in 1991, I lost my support group of friends. They continued with their patchwork, and we sold the machine so they could buy yardage of fabrics and not have to work with only scraps.

Starting over was hard for me. Mali is basically a Muslim country, so meeting women there was more difficult. I worked alone on my quilts and simply taught several women how to quilt them. The contact was not quite the same, but at least I was still able to share some time with other women through sewing.

It was in Mali that I realized I wanted to do more with my sewing than traditional patchwork. I had many drawings I wanted to work with in fabric but had no idea how to do it. One of my missionary friends had a copy of the 1989 issue of *American Quilter*, with Caryl Bryer Fallert's CORONA II: SOLAR ECLIPSE quilt on the cover. I realized her curved lines were very much like my drawings so I decided to write to her about





TOP: *CABBAGE CORAL*, 46" x 21", 1996. *I have always been captivated by the mystery and the beauty of the ocean. Drawing the intricate relief of a coral plant offered too strong a challenge to resist.*

COLLECTION: KEVIN & MARY MILLER

BOTTOM: *AFRICAN LONELINESS*, 77" x 61", 1994. *I decided to make a quilt encompassing as many green fabrics as I could. With its 280 different fabrics, *AFRICAN LONELINESS* took such a long time to make that I felt removed from the liveliness of life outside my studio.*



how to sew my drawings in fabric.

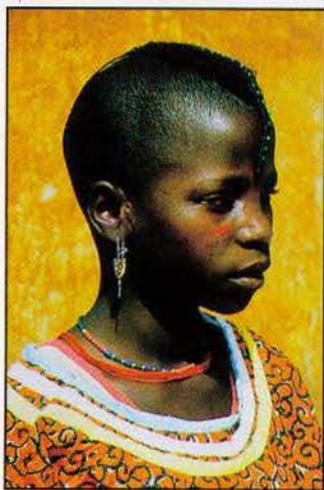
When Caryl and I were finally able to talk, she suggested I take a class at the Quilt Surface Design Symposium organized each year by Nancy Crow and Linda Fowler, to meet other art quilters and learn what I needed. I arrived in Columbus in 1993 with one of my drawings enlarged full size (97" x 65"). I took Caryl's class and by the end of the week I had learned how to put the whole thing together and was ready to return to Africa and get to work.

Once back in Africa, I realized that using only African prints was limiting the scope of my creativity. I decided to learn to dye fabric to complement and enhance the African material available. I was lucky enough to be living in the cloth dyeing capital of West Africa. People come from all over the region to buy hand-dyed Malian cloth, and throughout the city thousands of dyed cloths can be seen hanging to dry on the roadsides.

Over the next couple of years, as I learned to dye, word spread of my interest in textiles. We had many merchants come to the house from as far away as Timbuktu, Mopti, and Gao. They brought hand-woven fabrics that were a splendor of color and pattern such as I had never seen before.

My husband and I found ourselves unable to resist buying the best and most unusual ones.

# OUT OF Africa



ABOVE: Fulani women are famous for their beauty all across West Africa. Their husbands are mainly herders and are known to be very jealous. As a proof of their love, they will invest all their savings in their wives' jewels. Taken in Burkina Faso.

BELOW: VOLCANO DREAM, 97" x 80", 1994. Dreams are powerful images. This one happened to me in November of 1991 during my daily nap.

RIGHT: SAHEL, 60" x 80", 1997. The area just south of the Sahara desert is called the Sahel. The Fulani people are nomads that wander this desolate area. A source of food and medicine, the baobab tree is considered to be a tree of life.

PHOTO: CHARLES R. LYNCH

We spent our spare time traveling to far away bush markets to look for cloth and hand-woven blankets. It was a time of discovery and a time of humility. We discovered the amazing diversity and wealth of these "bush" people who put their art in everything from the tribal scarring on their faces to the designs drawn into their adobe houses.

My time overseas is over for now as we have recently moved back to the States, but the warmth and beauty of Africa stay with me. I learned much from my African friends, and I am thankful for the twelve years shared with them.

My work has changed considerably since my return. Currently I

am painting African images with dyes and then quilting them. These new quilts seem to be my way of dealing with not being in Africa – my way of saying goodbye to a continent I still very much love. ■

Hollis Chatelain has had eight solo exhibitions in Africa since 1991 and has participated in numerous shows in the United States, including Quilt National in 1995.



Hollis's current studio and home are in Hillsborough, NC, where she recently moved with her husband and three children.

