

Susan Ball Faeder

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Artist's Statement

The thing I am most drawn to in making art is the process itself. For me, the creative process is one of letting go, of letting my intuition and self-sense guide me from start to finish. Even though I consciously select a “palette” of fabrics when I start a new work, there is no vision and no pre-conception of how the finished work will look. There is no story line. There is no drawing. If I happen to have a vague idea of what I am going to try to express, it always changes and clarifies itself throughout the process as the work comes out of me and develops and becomes what it is. If I had to put into words what I do when I am making art (if it is indeed that), it would be something like: learning to trust myself, and to be a part of that process of self discovery. I feel that somehow that I am allowing the human or collective consciousness of many lifetimes to surface while embracing the practice of personal evolvment. It is the closest thing to personal happiness or deep satisfaction I have ever experienced. Like a painter, I am always concerned with and thinking about the elements of line, color, shape, movement, and especially the overall composition in my work. Does it work? Does it stand up? Unlike a painter, however, who creates with a brush and paint, my medium is fabric and thread. Working with fabric to create line and shape is perhaps a different kind of challenge than working with paint. Cloth is more finite, more limiting. For as much as one can manipulate a surface of fiber, for dimension and effect, one cannot simply mix two fabrics together to make a new color!

The Fiber Connection: When people think of quilts, they think of grandma. My mother's mother was a cook and a baker. She taught me to crochet at age seven. My father's mother was a professional seamstress and an avid, exquisite knitter. She knitted doll clothes for me and taught me how to do a basic stitch to keep me still. Are talents genetically transported? Or, do we see others and want to be like that? My earliest childhood memory of color is (the thrill of) opening a box of 64 brand-new crayolas. I liked to draw a swirling line around and around on blank paper with eyes closed, something resembling a loopy cosmic big map...and then carefully fill in each newly created space with color, one by one, until all the spaces had come to life in a harmonious way. The affinity for touching fabric—as many will agree—goes as far back as I can recall...perhaps shortly after birth. As for sewing, I started making my own clothing as a teenager. By high school I was earning money from making prom gowns. I made my wedding gown out of 10 yards of butter cream silk charmeuse and adorned it with lace and beads. It wasn't until I was in my early 30s, when I saw an ad in *The New York Times* offering a 6-week quilting class advertised, that my direction moved away from clothing. After a few years of taking basic classes, I was able to release the traditional “grid” of quiltmaking and began developing my own style. 45+ years later, my choice of materials and tools remains the same (fabric, thread, needle), but the art work has evolved into a broad spectrum that includes not only traditional quilting, but also Japanese *sashiko*, abstract fiber collage, and rag weaving.

The Japan Connection: In 1970, I was selected by Rotary International to go to Japan as a high school exchange student. I was sent to a remote village in the north where most of the people had never even seen a foreigner. On the other hand, it was a rare opportunity for me to learn about the traditional values of Japanese culture. In 1978, after graduating from Bucknell University with honors in Japanese, I returned to Japan for another year of study on the graduate level. In between language classes, I was able to study Japanese watercolor painting and Japanese flower arranging. Fast-forward 10 years to 1988. I went to Japan as an invited lecturer at the first major quilt exhibit. I was so struck by the quilting I saw there that I decided to find a way to show other quilters what was happening in Japan. A year later, I gathered a group of 33 quilters from around the globe and escorted them to Japan in a mission of friendship with quilting as the common language.

In January 2019, almost 50 years after my first trip to Japan, I led my 30th—and last—textile tour to Japan. Quilters' Express to Japan tours were especially known for the emphasis on the history and development of quilting in Japan within the context of Japanese culture and Japanese indigenous textiles.