

B"H
Old City Jewish Art Center
A project of Jewish Heritage Programs

First Friday Shabbos Fiber Art Exhibition
June 6-27, 2008
Biographies

Betsy Platkin Teutsch

Renowned for her captivating ketubot, ceremonial objects and book illustrations, Betsy Teutsch is a prominent figure in the contemporary Jewish renaissance. Her outstanding lettering and design sense, combined with a wide-ranging Judaic knowledge, result in exquisite works of art.

Teutsch, born and raised in Fargo, North Dakota, has specialized in illuminated Judaica and Hebrew calligraphy for over 30 years. She has designed custom ketubot (Jewish marriage contracts) for hundreds of couples, and her lithographed ketubot are among the most popular in North America. She illustrated Michael Strassfeld's classic, *The Jewish Holidays*, as well being Art Editor and illustrator for *Kol Haneshamah*, the Reconstructionist Prayerbook Series. She is the co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. In 1997 she created her first tambourine and eight more designs have followed – to date, over 10,000 have been produced.

She majored in Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and has a Masters degree in Jewish education from HUC-JIR. She is also an active environmentalist, reflected in some of the *kavanot* in the Kavanah Card designs. She and her husband David live in Mt. Airy (a vibrant, diverse neighborhood of Philadelphia, PA) where they have raised their children Zach and Nomi.

Helen Webber

My life's work has been focused on creating images in the fabric collage technique. I enjoy the juxtaposition of contrasting textures and hard edge shapes brought about by scissors. I use yarns to define the edges almost like a line from a pen and favor bold shapes and strong color. My experience in collage has enabled me to transfer the technique to a variety of media such as stained glass, sculpted clay tile, metal and wood collage.

Landscapes and images of birds and animals are frozen moments that speak of the glories of our natural environment. I rejoice in brocaded trees, and velvet rivers, and revel in all kinds of landscapes expressed in varieties of fabric, including my own hand painted pieces.

Painting on the other hand, gives me the opportunity to defy edges; to rub and smear and splatter, and above all to express my personal feelings, striving for strong emotional content in my paintings as well as my drawings.

Putting words into my pieces is deeply satisfying because I am at heart a storyteller and I like to make pictures for my stories. They are tales told from a dreamer's viewpoint. For me words and images are like music with a libretto. It works together as a partnership...in fabric, drawings and paintings. The formations of the letters go beyond their meaning and offer another layer of texture.

Since my career in art began I have been dancing a duet between fulfilling my own personal aesthetic, and at the same time satisfying those for whom I am creating. A lifetime of making art commissioned for specific environments has honed the habit of including an audience's vision with my own.

I want to touch people on some level, so that if my art flows into a space in someone's soul than I have succeeded as an artist.

Susan Yitzhak

Color has always played a major role in all of my artwork. It can inspire excitement, just as the lack of color can create a somber mood. Boldness and size have also contributed to my work. Put them together, and I found my new medium--wall hangings. I've experimented with jute as well as cotton rope, which can also lend itself to brighter or more subdued colors.

"I've worked in a variety of mediums ranging from paints and pencils to metals and fiber. My inspiration, since the time I've been in school, has always been my religion."

Susan Yitzhak has a BFA from the Crafts Department of the University of the Arts and presently resides in Philadelphia. Her work has been exhibited in Philadelphia, New York and Israel. She is currently working in multi-medium crafts and paintings as well as designing and creating jewelry and Judaica.

Gail Zelikovsky

Art has always been my passion. I began exploring and experimenting with oil paints and pastels while still a child. I used these media for a long time, way beyond my formal Art School education. My subjects at that time were mostly landscapes and still life. After losing my son to cancer I searched for new avenues with which to express myself artistically.

I learned to paint on silk from a master silk painter some 15 years ago and became captivated by this graceful medium. This elegant medium holds many challenges and just as many rewards, and its exciting possibilities inspired and intrigued me. The tactile feel of the material and the luminous and pearlescent quality of the silk that comes through the dye are alluring. The color combinations one can create on silk are exquisite.

Painting on silk demands your total concentration. Unlike painting with oil paints or pastels, when painting on silk, you cannot correct any mistakes. If you make a mistake, your design needs to take a turn in a different and unplanned direction, so even with all the careful planning, at times there are spontaneous moments. Controlling the fluid dye and bending it to my will and mixing my own colors are important aspects in the creation of my artworks. I continuously

experiment with a wide variety of colors and often discover unexpected and surprising combinations that help keep my art fresh and exciting.

My inspiration comes from observation of my surroundings. When I have a clear vision I draw it on paper, and go from there.

My designs on silk are representational and come mostly from nature: flowers, trees, and animals (birds, horses, etc.). These are motifs with which I hope to give the viewers a sense of serenity and refuge from their lives. After I finalize my design on paper, I transfer it to the silk by drawing the wax resist onto the silk. That is when I begin the most enjoyable aspect of my creative process - breathing life into a black and white drawing.

I use the Serti technique in which Gutta or water-based resist are applied to pre-washed silk that has been dried and stretched. When the Gutta has dried, it acts as a barrier for the dye or paint keeping the color within the outlined areas of the design. I'm currently experimenting with the technique in which the white resist lines are hidden. This technique presents a new and difficult challenge in that the sequence of drawing and painting has to be even more carefully planned.

I turn my silks into wearable art: scarves, neckties, bowties and cummerbunds, vests, tote bags, pillows, as well as wall hangings. I use hobatai silk (8-12 momie or thread count), crepe de chine (12 momie), and charmeuse (19 momie).