

Left
Summerhimmel
 by Els
 Nusser-Lampe

Europe's finest

Gillian Cooper revels in the quality quilts from the fifth European Art Quilt exhibition

Two years ago I saw the fourth European Art Quilt (EAQ), exhibition in Mulhouse in France. This year I was delighted to discover that the fifth edition was to be launched at the Festival of Quilts 2008 in Birmingham, not quite on my doorstep, but closer and a lot easier to visit. The EAQ is a juried exhibition of art quilts to which any one of us could submit a quilt. From 160 images of quilts, the five jurors chose the 42 on show. These quilts came from all over Europe, from Iceland to Israel, including seven from the United Kingdom. As part of the selection process, for the first time, applicants were asked to supply a sample of the quilt for the jury to examine in addition to supplying the usual digital images. This, no doubt, must have made it much easier to select the quilts as it is often incredibly hard to photograph quilts to their best advantage. As well as the selected quilts, each of the jurors also had

the opportunity to show a quilt too. Given that there are always grumbles about what gets included and what gets missed out, this was a good idea as you got a feel for who had made the decisions and it showed that they were all worthy selectors.

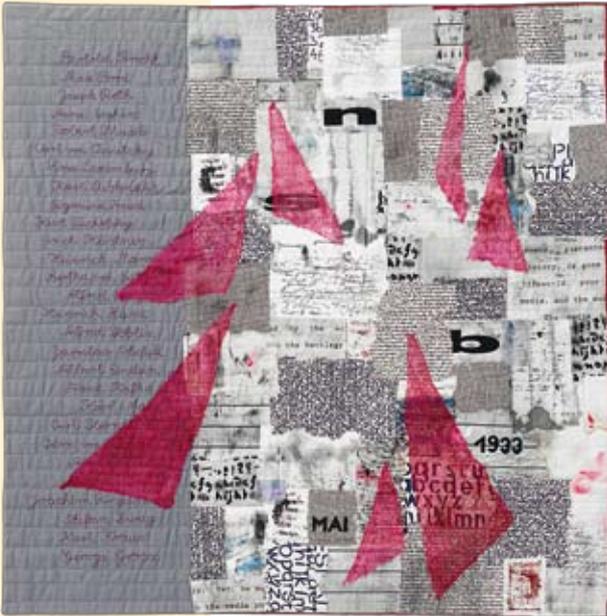
Summerhimmel by Els Nusser-Lampe explored the form of one of our most common summer plants: the dandelion. She is fascinated by the different shapes of the flower and seed pods, before they fly away, seeing it as a wonderful metaphor for life. I'm not sure about that, but it did make me reconsider the humble dandelion, rather than seeing it as an annoying nuisance invading our lawn, viewing it as an object of fragile beauty. The quilt captured the delicate nature of the seed heads through stitch, paint and couched threads. You can feel the sense of movement as the seed heads fly away on the breeze, ready to take over another part of the garden. Els had used netting

cleverly to subtly change the colour of some areas of her quilt, which was a vivid, happy blue; just right as a background to the white of the dandelions.

A curious use of stylised bodies caught my attention. *Les Gens* by Véronique Douillet used both reverse and raw edge appliqué to depict a group of people, 'les

Below
Les Gens
 by Véronique
 Douillet





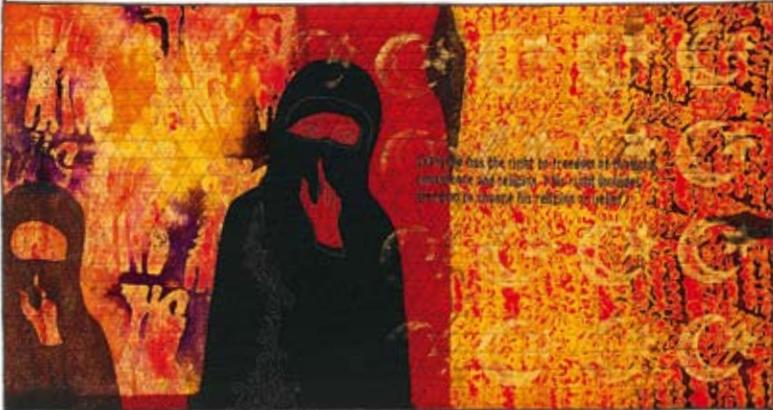
Clockwise from top left
Burning of the Books
 by Christa Ebert

Speak no Evil
 by Charlotte Yde

Salt Desert
 by Margrit Kopf

gens' in French. Although not the right shape, these characters reminded me of Russian dolls with their curvaceous armless bodies, which were patterned using reverse appliqué. The faces were all framed with a white oval of bias tape setting them apart from the multi-coloured bodies and background. Following a recurring theme in the exhibition, a wide variety of types of fabrics had been used, creating a colourful background for these strange figures to inhabit.

Christa Ebert chose a sombre subject matter in her quilt, *Burning*



of the Books. As she explained in her statement, in May 1933, many books were burnt all over Germany. One man, Georg Salzmann, started to collect books to save them, building up into a library of over 10,000 books. This quilt recorded these events. On the left hand side was an embroidered list of some of the authors whose books were burnt, all in red. The main body of the quilt used red pieces of muslin, patches of cloth and text fragments, some with burnt edges to depict the bonfire. The text, even where readable was incomprehensible, just a few snatches of odd words, all jumbled together with other fragments. The red muslin brought the black, white and grey quilt to life, just like flames would bring a bonfire to life.

STRONG STATEMENTS

Another strongly political quilt was Charlotte Yde's *Speak no Evil*. This piece consisted of two quilts: the top one featuring the image of a Christian female icon; the bottom one featuring two ladies covered in burkas. The carefully considered composition had echoes in both of the quilts. For example, the machine quilting pattern used on the burka carried directly above to the black rectangle of

the top piece. An ominous feel was created by the used of red and orange, hinting at flames and fire, even more so than in Christa's quilt. As a Danish artist, Charlotte made these pieces in response to the reaction to the publication of the Mohammed cartoons in a Danish newspaper. By polarising the Christians to one quilt and the Muslims to the other, she was emphasising the divide felt in some European societies today. Her message to us all is machine quilted. On the top it read: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference." The bottom quilt stated: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief."

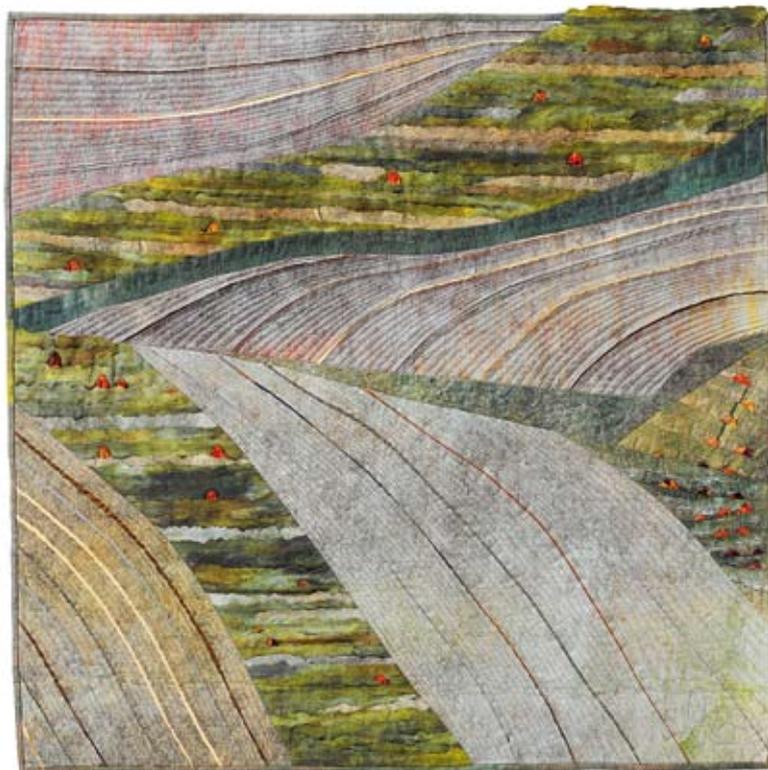
By portraying her message through the medium of a beautiful quilt, Charlotte is trying to reach an audience who may not normally be challenged by such messages. It is maybe worth noting that quilting and embroidery are part of women's lives in some form in almost every culture. Quilts are universal, just as people are; we all have rights and obligations to consider others.



COLOURFUL QUILTS

Margrit Kopf in her statement says she is 'always interested in circles'. Her quilt, *Salt Desert*, shows how her interest has developed into an accomplished quilt. Inspired by an aerial photo of a salt desert in Gambia, Margrit cut through the layers of fabric to reveal other circles beneath. Some were left with raw edges, other had stitched wool tops around the edge. A trail of multicoloured beads traced its way across the quilt from top left to bottom right, adding to the overall effect.

At first glance, it looked like Anco Brouwers-Branderhorsts from the Netherlands had also used beads on her quilt, *Connected Circles*. Actually, on closer examination, the 'beads' were little stitched fabric rolls. This quilt was stunning in its execution. A seemingly simple form – 100 square blocks, each with only five pieces of fabric – was taken to another level in Anco's treatment. Each of the blocks was different and the machine quilting gives the form of another circle outside of the little fabric rolls. The fabric, which was hand dyed by Heide Stoll-Weber, was placed perfectly to give the sense of movement in the overall design. The choice of colours used: grey, muted green and bright blue, was unusual, yet that only added to



the impact of this quilt. With such a 'simple' form, for the quilt to work, Anco had to piece and stitch with absolute accuracy and she certainly had. It is probably not surprising that along with Jane Lloyd, Anco is the only artist whose work has been selected for all five of the EAQ exhibitions.

Strong coloured quilts obviously appealed to the selectors of this year's exhibition as *Strukturwandel*

('Structure Transformation'), by Annemarie Schnabl clearly demonstrated. Using a mixture of fabrics such as cotton, linen and felt, she stitched little snippets of bright felt in lines on to the background fabric. The strong maroon and the vibrant orange brought this quilt to life. Like all the quilts in the show, it was well executed, showing great technical skill on the part of the maker.

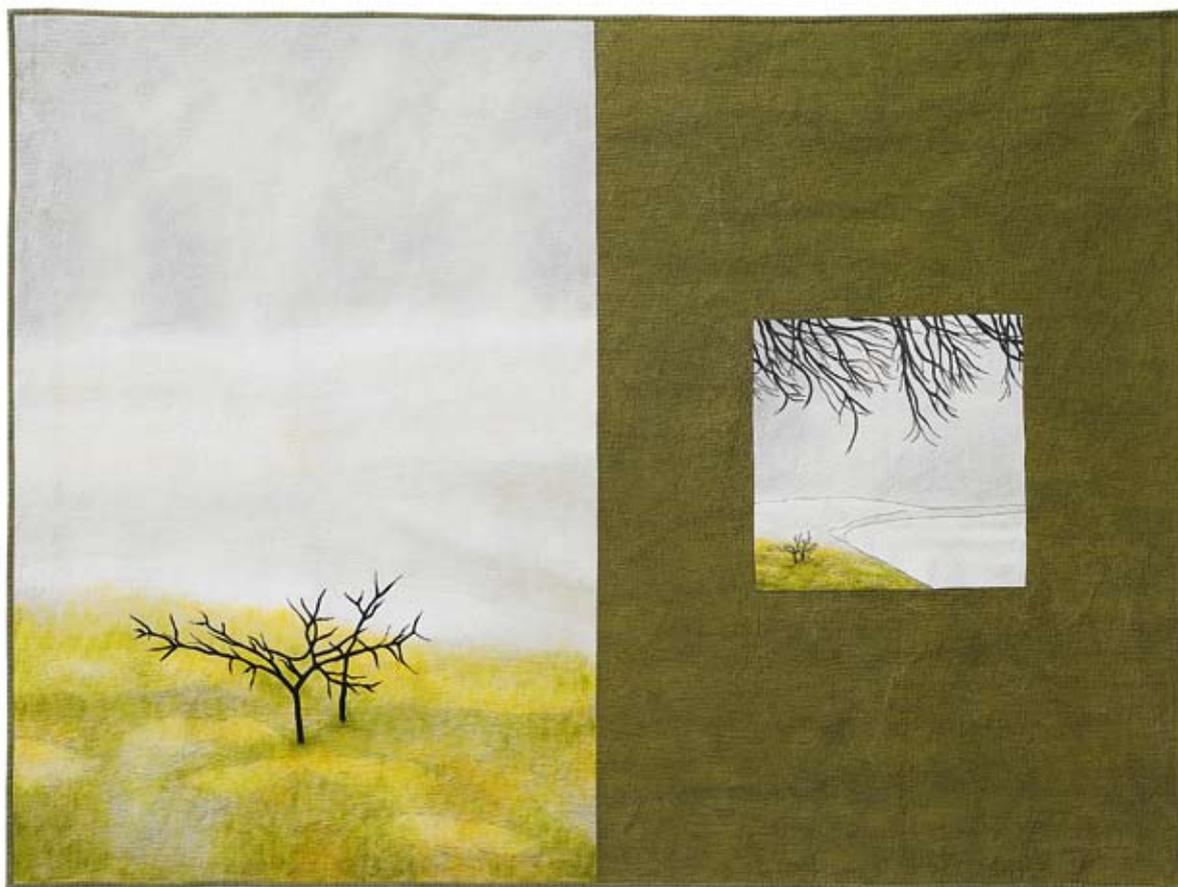
Clockwise from left
Connected Circles
by Anco Brouwers-
Branderhorsts

Strukturwandel
by Annemarie
Schnabl

Zen-Garten
by Greti Raffener

Right
Scenery Detail 1
 by Inge Mardal and
 Steen Hougs

Below
I Want to Stitch
 by Bethan Ash



PEACEFUL COUNTRYSIDE

'Take time! It is good for your soul,' was the complete artist's statement of Greti Raffener about her quilt *Zen-Garten*. Greti's garden was one metre square and had raked paths with slashes through them to give hints of colour in the grey. Her surface was very textured, with rows of green layered one on top of another. I especially liked the little prairie points sticking up through green, like little shoots of orange pushing their way through the grass. Originally, I had thought it to be an image of country roads and fields, which would correspond just as well with the message of taking your time to enjoy life. Another peaceful quilt was *Scenery Detail 1* by Inge Mardal and Steen Hougs. The large image on the left is a detail taken from the smaller picture on the right, a bare tree in a misty landscape. The tree in both cases is painted onto the cloth. The quilt is meticulously quilted with hundreds of gently undulating lines running horizontally across the surface. This gives the ground an almost 3-D effect, bringing it to life, taking away the flatness of the fabric and allowing us to enter into the barren scene.

GOT TO SEW

Finally, I have to finish with Bethan Ash's *I Want to Stitch*. Inspired by the poet and painter, Adrian Henri's poem *I Want to Paint*, Bethan adapted it for quilters and emblazoned her words appropriately onto a quilt in large letters fused onto a multi-coloured background. In it, she summed up why so many people just have to keep making quilts of all types from traditional to art, for beds and for statements. She concludes: "I want to stitch – quilts, that are worth more than gold, that keep the homeless warm, that swathe a new born babe, that bring back memories, that are here when I am gone, I want to stitch quilts."

The Festival of Quilts was the only UK venue for this touring exhibition, which is travelling to Korea, the Netherlands, the USA, Denmark and Germany. There is a catalogue and DVD available and further details of them and of the exhibition can be found on the website www.europeanartquilt.com. Also on the website is news of the next EAQ exhibition: EAQVI will open at the Festival of Quilts in 2010. This gives you plenty of time to start creating your next masterpiece for entry! ♦