

Hot finds

By Ellen S. Glozer

To touch and be touched

Newton fabric artists' remarkable work



WHEN KAREN ROTHSCHILD MONDELL AND DIANA GALSON-KOOY

met at the Quinobequin Quilters Guild in 2001, it was fabric and color at first sight. "We clicked," the two women say in unison. Galson-Kooy adds, "people tend to wear things they've made to quilters' gatherings and I liked what she was wearing."

Galson-Kooy and Mondell knew immediately that they would be quilting friends.

What they could not have known then was that they would launch a business together. Each had a "day job" and quilting was simply a passion and pleasure. But like others who have followed their hearts, Galson-Kooy and Mondell discovered they had something to sell. In August, 2006, they launched DK Threads, a fabric arts business that offers everything from personalized and commemorative wall hangings to handbags, photo quilts and fabric bowls. For those who prefer to wear their art, Galson-Kooy and Mondell offer colorful and intricately woven scarves. Now, one short and busy year later, their work has

What it is:
Original and custom fabric arts with a personal touch

Where:
Artitudes in West Newton, Five Crows in Natick or the Wayland Depot in Wayland. Or on-line at www.dkthreads.com

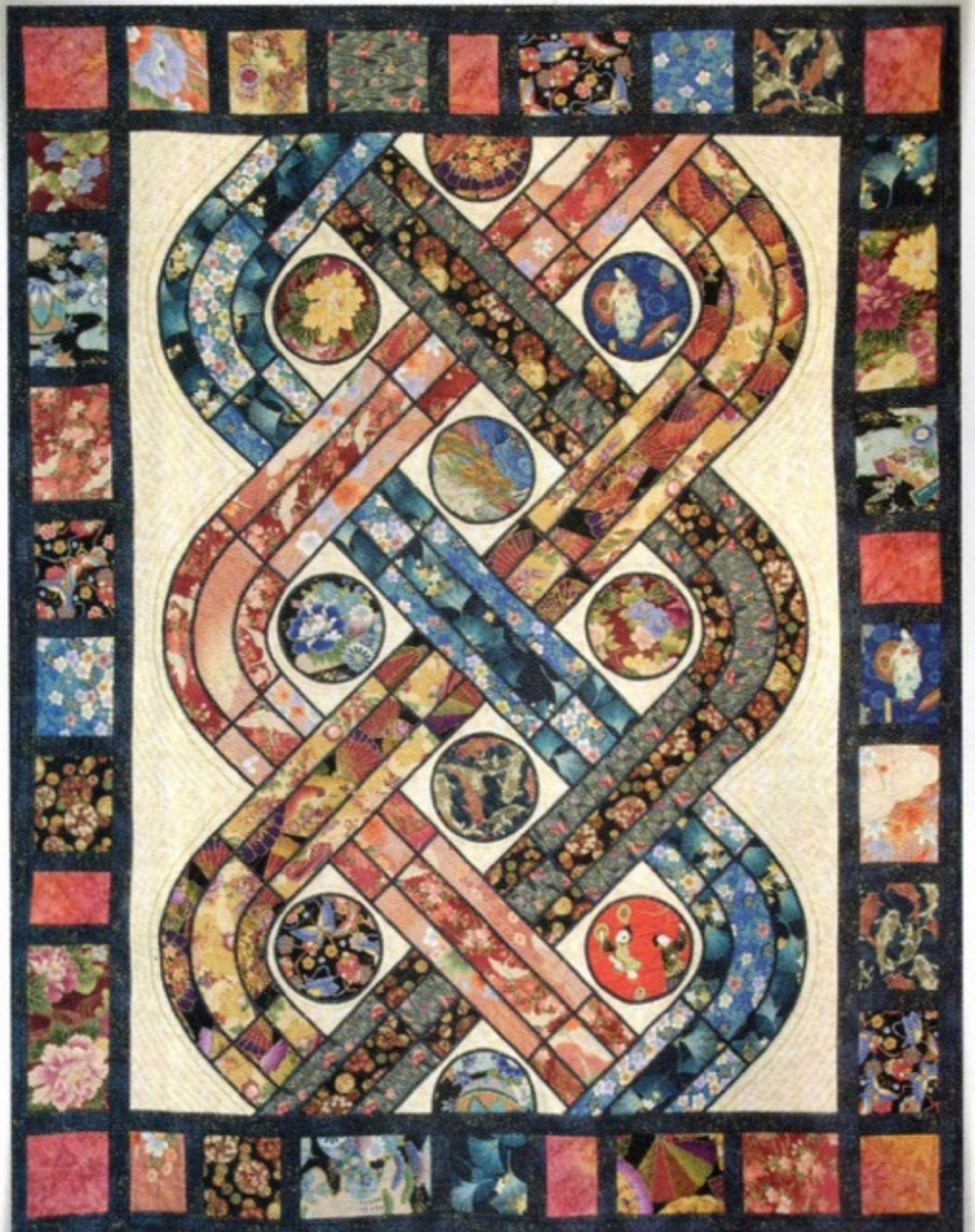
found its way to distant shores including China, Holland, Israel, Kosovo and Australia. It has also earned a strong local following that now includes the Radiation Oncology Department of Massachusetts General Hospital, which commissioned DK Threads to do a soothing quilt for its waiting room.

NEITHER DIANA GALSON-KOOY nor Karen Mondell planned to become a fabric artist, but looking back, each realizes that she began to weave the threads of her fabric art early in life. Galson-Kooy, who grew up in Syracuse, New York, remembers sewing from the time she was a little girl. "I learned on Barbie doll patterns," she says with a wry smile. "My grandmother was a seamstress and she introduced me to sewing. It was my mom who really taught me to sew. She refused to let me use a sewing machine until I was proficient in sewing by hand. My sister and I made all our clothes. I suppose some kids would have resented this and wanted store-bought clothes but I always loved what I made. When my husband and I married 30 years ago, I made his wedding tie."

Karen Mondell remembers always liking crafts. She learned to sew in a junior high school home economics class and advanced her skills with the help of a neighbor who sewed. Mondell sewed many of her own clothes while in high school. She also made some for other family members, and a nightshirt (with cap!) for her boyfriend (now husband).

Mondell, who moved to Boston with her husband in 1977 and worked for many years as the head of legal recruiting at Ropes & Gray in Boston, focused on needlepoint, embroidery and crochet in those years.

For Galson-Kooy, the introduction to quilting came when her now 22-year-old daughter had back surgery. "I had to be home with her and a friend of mine urged me



well as her own. They enjoyed working together and found that their collaboration made sense economically and aesthetically. "One thing led to another and we decided to become business partners." With this decision, the two women embarked on building a website, arranging to exhibit their work at local craft shows and to sell at craft stores. "We offer a broad range of products in part because we really enjoy doing a variety of things," says Mondell. "For us, the common denominator is that our work is unique and distinctive. We like making one-of-a-kind pieces, whether by custom order or simply because we create something special."

Galson-Kooy and Mondell clearly like working together. The "business aspects" of their business have presented some challenges, such as determining how to price their work. The artists explain that while designing and sewing quilts is what they love to do, it is very labor intensive. Although they want to be fairly compensated for their time and effort, having happy clients who are pleased in all respects with the experience is very important. Mondell explains that DK Threads now uses written contracts for all large projects. "This ensures that we're all on the same page about what's involved."

Another challenge for Galson-Kooy and Mondell comes with expanding their business. Both are mindful that they need to maintain a balance that enables them to grow at a steady, comfortable pace. In addition to DK Threads' mission of creating, exhibiting and selling their work, Galson-Kooy gives private lessons. For her, a dedicated teacher, this is an ideal fit. "Teaching is in my blood," she explains.

As in all partnerships that survive and thrive, Galson-Kooy and Mondell have managed to treat even the bumps in the road as an adventure. Having always worked for others, they say that they love being in charge, setting their own goals and priorities, and having their own voices—and hands—in their business.

When asked why she thinks fabric art has such broad appeal, Mondell answers without hesitation, "Fabric can incorporate other mediums. With fabric you can embellish. You can draw viewers into your work by using fabrics that others might not put together. You can vary textures, patterns and colors in a way that no one has ever seen before. In fabric art, it all fits together in a magical way." ■