

**Urban Chatter: textile art by Sharon Kerry-Harlan**  
**Ronald E. Holstein Gallery**  
**February 16, 2018 – April 29, 2018**

**Kerry-Harlan's art quilts and textile collages are visual poetry inspired by jazz improvisations.** Influenced by “the density of contemporary city living,” she compares the work to a bustling city that “merges vocal, electronic, mental, and spiritual chaos.” Her art quilts and textile collages are bright, playful, and rhythmic, zagging through percussive exclamations and restful spaces.



Kerry-Harlan remembers and recreates the labor of handwork through her process, transforming plain cloth by adding layers of color and meaning. She wraps rusty tools with vinegar-soaked fabric, dusts them with salt, and bakes them outside in the Florida sun. The car parts, nails, bottle caps, shovels and other metal objects encrusted with rust recreate “handprints” of working people. Kerry-Harlan also uses screen-printing and reductive bleaching to create the raw materials for her quilts and collages. She reassembles and embellishes the dyed fabrics, thus stitching together segments of history. Through her process, Kerry-Harlan records, adds to, and reinvents the cycle of working hands.

The roots of jazz are visible in the black and rust palette of traditional mud cloth. The figures and faces meld contemporary cartooning, abstraction, African sculptures, and ritual masks. The namesake of the series, *Urban Chatter* integrates figures, faces, and a clock with an abstract cityscape. *Straight No Chaser* pays homage to mid-century urban music: instruments and musicians, musical notes, marquees, and snippets of jazz

lingo. The smaller *Neo Geo* fabric collages are rhythmic segments of symbols and abstractions stitched into visual poems.

Figuration mingles with geometry throughout the exhibit. Kerry-Harlan writes, “I use the human figure to make statements about the quick turnarounds that confront us both in life's mundane and unexpected circumstances. I am particularly intrigued by the human face—what it reveals to the world and what it disguises from the world.”

Born in Miami, Florida, Kerry-Harlan divides her time between Wauwatosa, Wisconsin and Hollywood, Florida. She received a BA from Marquette University and studied art at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, both located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Kerry-Harlan's work includes textiles, mixed media, and photography. She has exhibited at the Smithsonian/Renwick Gallery, the American Craft Museum, the Harn Museum, and the Milwaukee Art Museum. In 2017, her work was included in three South African exhibitions and was accepted into the US Department of State Art in Embassies Permanent Collection.