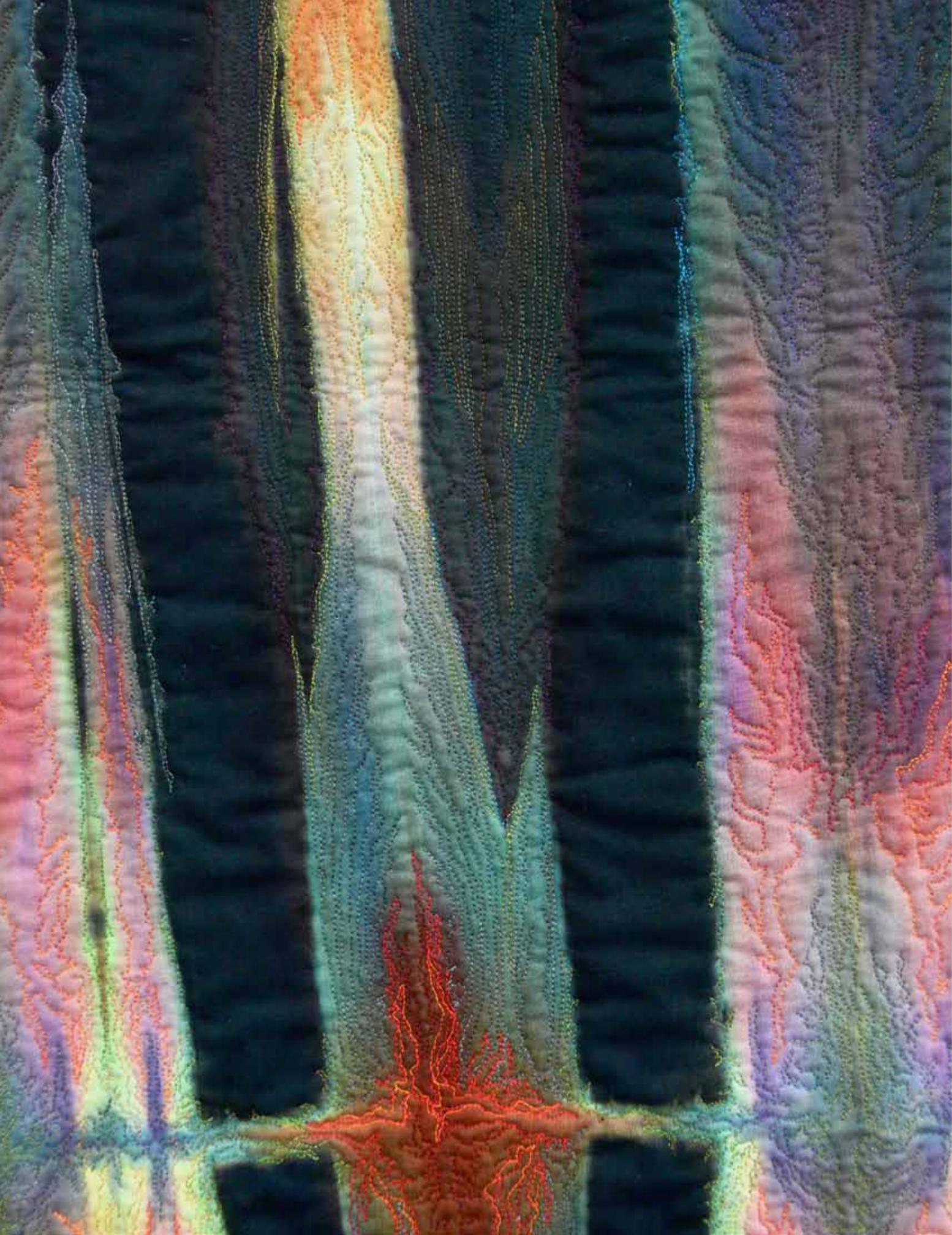


FOLD AND UNFOLD
The Cloth and Quilts of **ELIN NOBLE**



June 1 - August 19, 2012

FOLD AND UNFOLD
The Cloth and Quilts of **ELIN NOBLE**


SCHWEINFURTH
ART CENTER

I was first introduced to Elin Noble at our annual quilting conference *Quilting by the Lake*, where for many years Elin has been one of our most revered teachers. Over the years, she taught dyeing classes in the most inconvenient circumstances - a dormitory lounge, a gym, a college classroom, often in spaces with no water and 100 degree temperatures. Elin proved to be talented at improvising and in spite of the challenges, her students managed to produce great work. Elin is one of the most highly regarded and generous teachers in our programs. Her hand dyed thread and cloth is coveted by fiber art enthusiasts, and her artistic influence is seen in the work of fiber artists and quilters around the country.

It is particularly gratifying to now celebrate Elin's artwork in the exhibit *Fold and Unfold: The Cloth and Quilts of Elin Noble*. The exhibit includes several series representing a range of techniques, exploring color, pattern, scale and transparency. Elin's ability to manipulate cloth and color to create expressive works of art is in a class by itself. This exhibition is one of a series of exhibits at the Art Center featuring influential fiber artists. Past exhibits featured John McQueen, Nancy Crow and Jane Dunnewold.

The Schweinfurth Art Center is extremely grateful to Elin Noble for her kindness in lending the work for this exhibition. We also gratefully acknowledge a grant from the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation for this exhibit and funding from the New York State Council for the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

Donna Lamb / Executive Director
Schweinfurth Art Center



Elin Noble in front of
"Pages From A Dictionary of Natural Phenomena," 2010
Photo by Neil Alexander

“Cloth is her Canvas” by Catherine Carter

New Bedford textile artist Elin Noble has always been an explorer, constantly searching to find out how and why. The overlapping colors and intricate shapes in her hand-dyed fabrics reflect years of experimenting and research into the art and science of color theory and dyeing techniques.

This inherent curiosity is spiced with a keen aesthetic sense and a child-like enjoyment of tactile experience. Dyeing cloth, like her other favorite activities of cooking and gardening, allows the artist to relish the sensation of feeling her “fingers in goo.”

Ms. Noble’s ongoing appreciation for new impressions reflects the peripatetic lifestyle of her youth. Her father’s position in the Army meant the family moved every few years to various points around the world, from Germany to New York City to Okinawa to California to Washington state.

Ms. Noble’s creative spirit was fostered by her mother, who encouraged her to savor the unique sights and sounds of each new location. Her mother was an accomplished seamstress who made the family of five’s wardrobes and household furnishings by hand. With loving parents and regularly changing environments to explore, it was, the artist recalls fondly, a “charmed childhood.”

When Ms. Noble was 16, her father retired from the military and the family moved to Seattle. Her main interests in high school were science and sports; she was a serious gymnast and studied classical ballet. But her artistic side was budding, too; she started a small business sewing and selling stuffed animals, then worked in a fabric store and taught sewing classes.

At first, her college studies at the University of Washington centered on biology, chemistry and physics. Then, in a plan to “get my humanities credits out of the way,” she signed up for three art courses one summer, in design, drawing and art history.

“The three classes were magical,” she says. “They made me ponder things in a different way.”

She was most excited by the similarities between her favorite aspect of biology class, examining and drawing cells under the microscope, and the experience of observing and rendering still-life forms in her art classes.

She began taking courses in the university’s interior design program, which included classes in architecture and engineering, “what goes into buildings, interior and exterior.” She also took courses in color theory, paper-making and book-binding. Finally her studies focused on textile history, textile science and dyeing techniques, and she earned her degree in textile design. She also spent a semester in Italy, studying Roman and Etruscan art.



Detail of “Pages From A Dictionary of Natural Phenomena,” 2010
Photo by Neil Alexander

Ms. Noble moved to New Bedford after graduation, where she worked as a cook and repaired sails before turning to teaching. She first taught paper-making at the Fuller Museum of Art (now the Fuller Craft Museum) in Brockton, then courses in dyeing at Snow Farm in Williamsburg and the Women's Studio Workshop in Roslendale, N.Y.

As Ms. Noble's technical expertise developed, her artistic expression began to blossom, and for this growth she credits the guidance of two people in particular.

Her friend Barbara Goldberg, a professor of textiles at UMass Dartmouth, introduced her to shibori, a dyeing method of folding, twisting or clamping fabric, as well as to indigo dye.

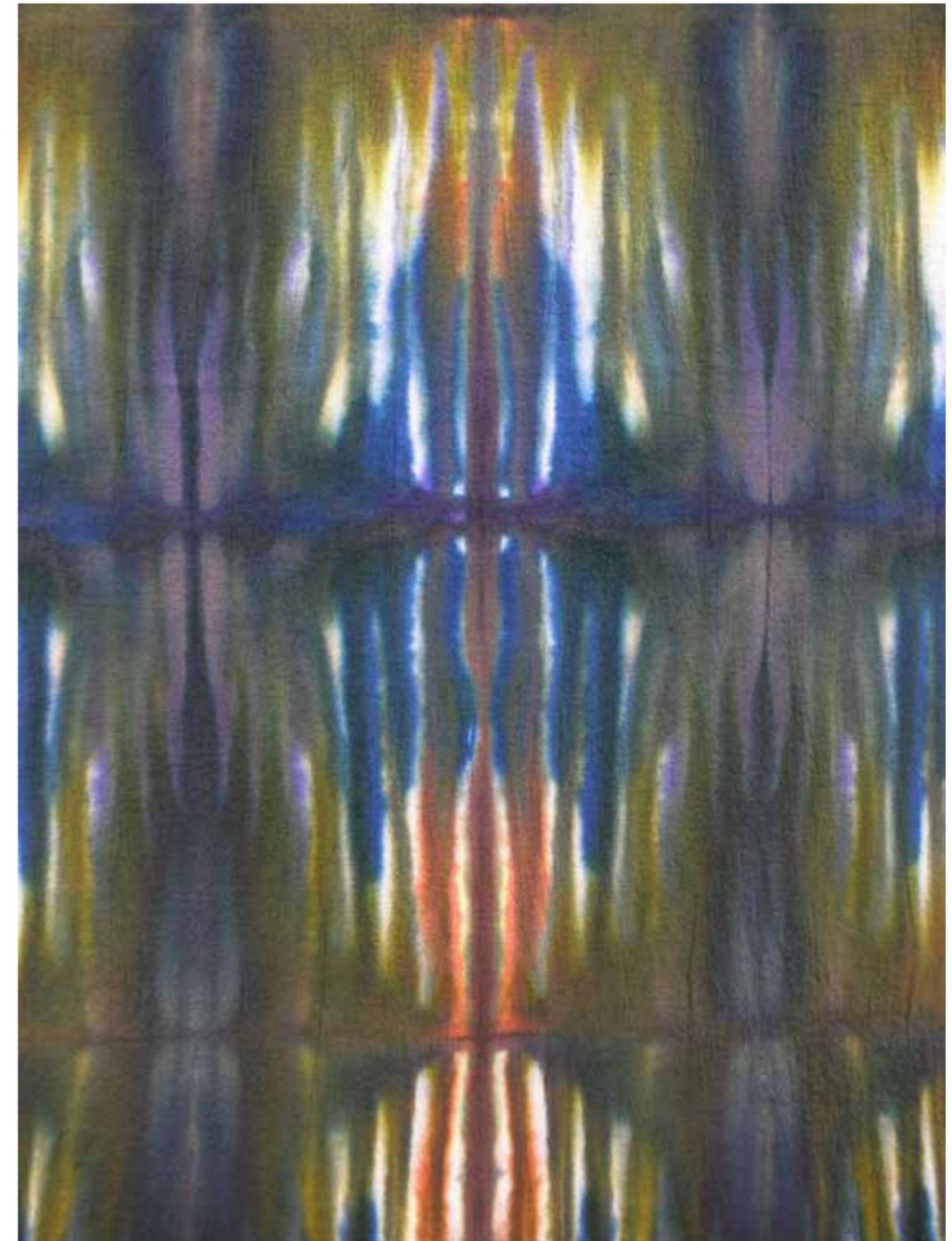
Ms. Noble found that the process of dyeing with indigo awakened her inner scientist. "It's like playing with a chemistry set," she says, noting that indigo undergoes an oxidation process as it colors the cloth, turning from mustard yellow to green before finally reaching its characteristic dark blue.

Ms. Noble also benefited from the expertise of Don Weiner of PRO Chemical and Dye in Somerset, Massachusetts where she purchased her dyes and supplies. Mr. Weiner, a chemist, advised her as she experimented with various mixtures and colorations. Later, he hired her as the company's lab manager, so that she could answer questions and problem-solve for his customers.

In 1998, Ms. Noble published her comprehensive book "Dyes and Paints," which won the 1999 Independent Publishers Book Award for the Best How-To Book. In addition to documenting dye-mixing procedures and demonstrating the fold/clamp/immerse method that is the basis for Ms. Noble's personal working process, the book illustrates such diverse patterning techniques as hand-painting, monoprinting, stamping, stenciling and marbling.

Today, Ms. Noble divides her time between teaching courses and workshops nationwide; creating and exhibiting her own work; and marketing fabric and threads that she hand-dyes for quilters, embroiderers and home-sewers. Her New Bedford studio is set up with an expansive work table, a deep sink, a washing machine and dryer, and long rows of clotheslines.

Lined up along the wall are tall bolts of white fabric — silks, cottons, linens — ready to be unfurled and awakened with color. A large box holds the stacks of folded cloth that she calls her "teachers": lengths of dyed fabric that aren't finished pieces on their own but that offer possibilities for shape or color combinations for future projects.



"Lake at Night 3," 2012
52" x 39"

One of Ms. Noble's favorite dyeing processes is the shibori technique called itajime, which involves folding cloth into various accordion-like configurations, placing wooden blocks against the folds and holding them in place with spring clamps, immersing the cloth in a dye bath, rinsing it out, and pinning it to the clothesline to dry. The wooden forms are moved and reclamped, then the cloth is dipped into a new color. The blocks prevent the dye from reaching the cloth, so each time they are moved and the cloth is redyed, new shapes emerge.

Ms. Noble repeats this process as many as 30 times on a length of fabric, until she is satisfied with the pattern she has achieved. Sometimes the cloth itself is the finished work; other times, the artist embellishes the piece with decorative stitching or quilting.

Her choice of hue for each project is often intuitive and depends on the mood she's in or what a particular piece of fabric seems to need next. Some colorations are basic studies in tonal contrast, like the black stripes overlaid with beige strips in a recent piece that's hanging over her work table. Others are quiet and introspective, like a dark blue piece undulating with waves of lavender and turquoise that is pinned to the wall. And some are glowing and warm, like another new piece on the studio wall, with yellow crosses floating over a burgundy field.

Often Ms. Noble's work reflects her interest in shadows and their effect on architectural spaces, perhaps a link to her college studies in interior design. "Shadows play on walls, ceilings, floors and dance all around a room," the artist says. "They always defy gravity."

Another new series is a grouping of nine small images, each a single black circular shape on a white cloth background, made with the marbling technique of squeezing paint onto water and laying fabric against the wet design floating on the surface. The title of one of these pieces, "A Grain of Sand," could be a description of the series as a whole, referring to the line in William Blake's poem, "To see a world in a grain of sand."

Each picture from this series captured one dollop of the black liquid as it was dispersing across the water's surface, giving the appearance of a newly formed planet just brought into existence by a Big Bang. "These lines, dots, concentrations of ink, expansion and contraction of energy, are stories about macrocosms, microcosms and perception," the artist says.

After more than 25 years as a fiber artist, Ms. Noble is still questioning and experimenting, still pushing the boundaries of what fabric and dye can say together. The untested possibilities of the process are what continue to intrigue her.

"The fabric has a life of its own," she says. "You have to let it be what it's going to be."

Originally printed in The Standard-Times, New Bedford, Massachusetts on November 23, 2007



"Fugitive Pieces 8," 2012
70" x 40"

Fugitive Pieces

The series, "Fugitive Pieces," is inspired by the by Canadian poet Anne Michaels' novel of the same name. I seek the visual equivalent of her beautifully crafted sentences, her quietly unfolding imagery, and both subtle and haunting stories. I believe her range of feelings and moods can find its equivalent in the softness and depth of cloth, in its tactile and luminous qualities.

The "Fugitive Pieces" series are all whole cloth cotton quilts. The cloth is irregularly fan folded in one direction, and then irregularly fan folded in another direction, making a repeat within the bundle of cloth. This bundle is held between wooden boards with clamps during the dyeing process. The irregular folding and the dyeing create a deep space and subtle luminous forms. For me this process parallels the fractured narrative of Anne Michaels' book, and the resulting imagery suggest themes of trauma, grief, loss, memory, and discovery.

The dyeing involves layering pattern by adding and subtracting color repeatedly; leaving hints and marks of what was there before. The stitching brings an important dimension to the work. Through machine quilting I accentuate color nuances and imagery, playing cloth and thread against each other. The machine stitching is dense in many areas while absent in others, creating a textural typography. Overall, I aim for subtle narrative spaces.



Elin Noble in front of "Fugitive Pieces 3," 2011
136" x 87" Photo by Neil Alexander



"Fugitive Pieces 9," 2012
70" x 48"



"Fugitive Pieces 7," 2011
70" x 40"

Lake At Night

The “Lake At Night” series grew out of an invitation by Jay Rich in 2010, to participate in the exhibition, “Carved Board Clamp Resist Dyeing: Historical Perspective and Contemporary Application” at the University of Nebraska Art Gallery in Omaha. The exhibition juxtaposed traditional and antique Japanese and Chinese carved board clamp resist textiles with new carved board textiles by nine contemporary textile artists. The invitation to participate gave me the opportunity to return to carving boards and gave me a renewed interest incorporating that technique into my work.

Carved board clamp resist is known as *kyokechi* in Japanese and is a little known dye technique. The resulting pattern is determined by the imagery carved on the resist boards. The boards are carved as a mirror image and fit tightly together.

I use the technique and process to create layers of modulated colors and forms. What fascinates me is that the very simple pattern I have carved, results in complex imagery. I utilize repeat but the cloth reads as abstract landscape. The contemplative scenery suggests lights at night reflected on water.

I enjoy reading poetry, and since I began the “Lake At Night” series, I kept coming across poems I feel are related to the mood and imagery I have tried to establish.

A poem by the Albanian poet, Luljeta Lleshanaku, titled “The Night Will Soon Be Over . . .” in her book of poems, *Fresco*, starts out this way:

When night arrives
trees strip off their shadows . . .

and
quarrel in the warm lake.

The mood established is riveting. The blackness and flatness of a moonless night strip trees of their shadows. It makes me think of how I feel I “see better” with my eyes closed when it is pitch dark. The blackness and flatness of a moonless night is cooling and haunting. I can imagine the movement of the trees’ branches “quarreling” with one another in the nocturnal movement.



“Lake At Night 2,” 2010
52” x 39”



"Lake At Night 4," 2012
52" x 39"



"Lake At Night," 2010
52" x 39"

Vox Stellarum

The “Vox Stellarum” series was made as a result of an invitation to create a response piece to the extraordinary prints published in the early 18th century by the German theologian, Jakob Scheucher. The exhibition was at the University Art Gallery, at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. At the beginning of the enlightenment period Scheucher hoped to prove that science and sacred scriptures were not mutually exclusive.

The print I responded to depicts a prophet who views future generations in the stars. My inspiration came from the subject matter and the quality of the lines in the engraving.

The dyed cloth naturally lent itself to creating a room installation. The first one I created was for the exhibition “Layered Affinities” at the Narrows Center for the Arts in Fall River, Massachusetts in 2009. There I sought to fill the room, like I imagine the heavens, with the billowing, breathing, and transformative qualities of cloth in space.

In the “Vox Stellarum” series the silk is folded and clamped, and sericin removed. This process is called de-gumming. By selectively removing sericin, sections of cloth become less transparent. This allows two pieces of cloth to engage in a play between transparency and opaqueness when hung together. When the cloth gently moves, it also allows for a play of moiré patterns.

The three sculptural pods suggest the origins of the seeds of future generations. I see the installation as an affirmation of love, desire, and aspiration. In “Vox Stellarum” I seek to establish a spiritual and meditative space.



Detail of “Vox Stellarum 12,” 2009
106” x 42”

FRONT COVER:

Detail of "Fugitive Pieces," 2009

Photo by Neil Alexander

INSIDE FRONT COVER:

Detail of "Fugitive Pieces 9," 2012

INSIDE BACK COVER:

Detail of "Fugitive Pieces 7," 2011

BACK COVER:

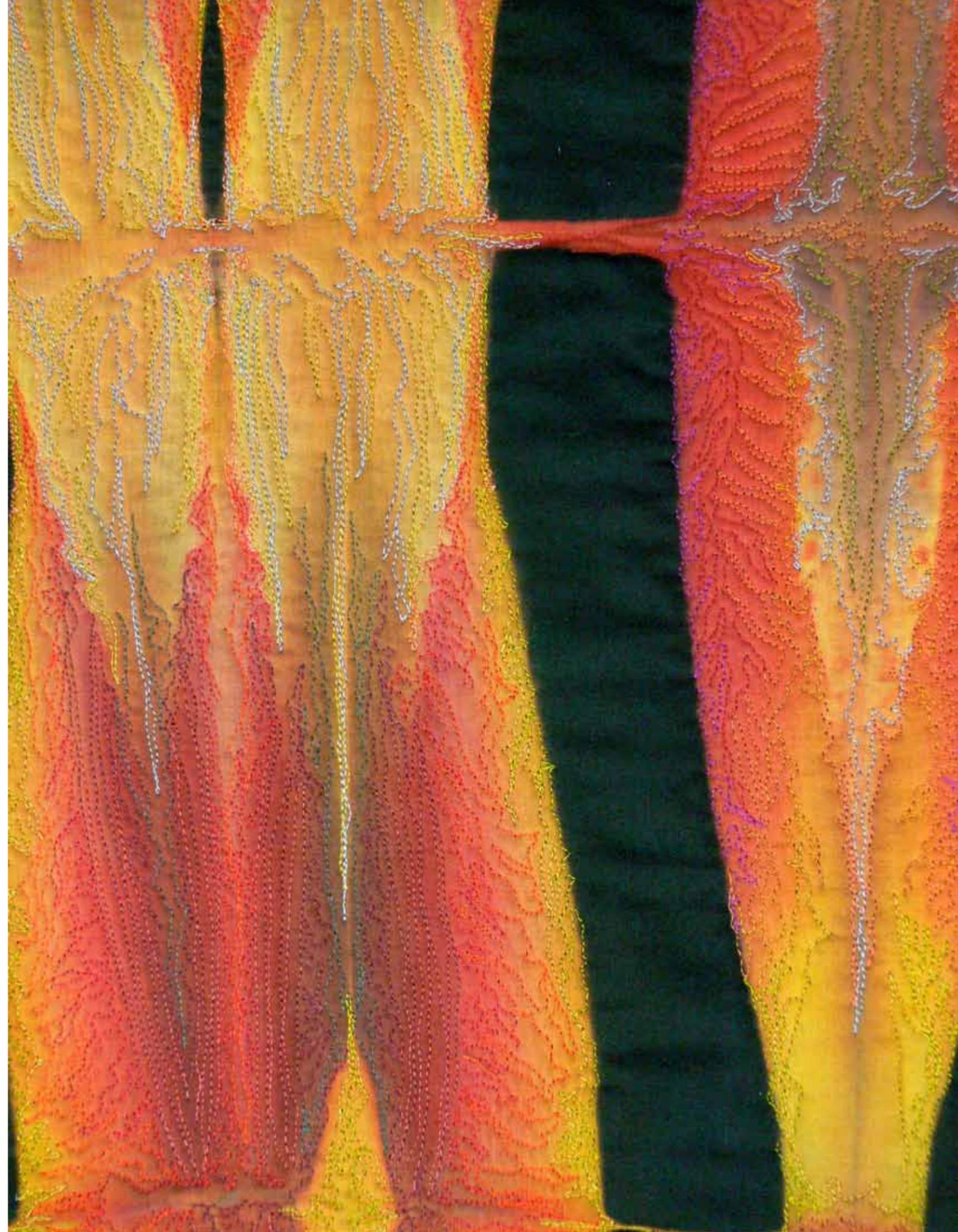
Photo of the Artist's Studio, featuring "Fugitive Pieces 8,"

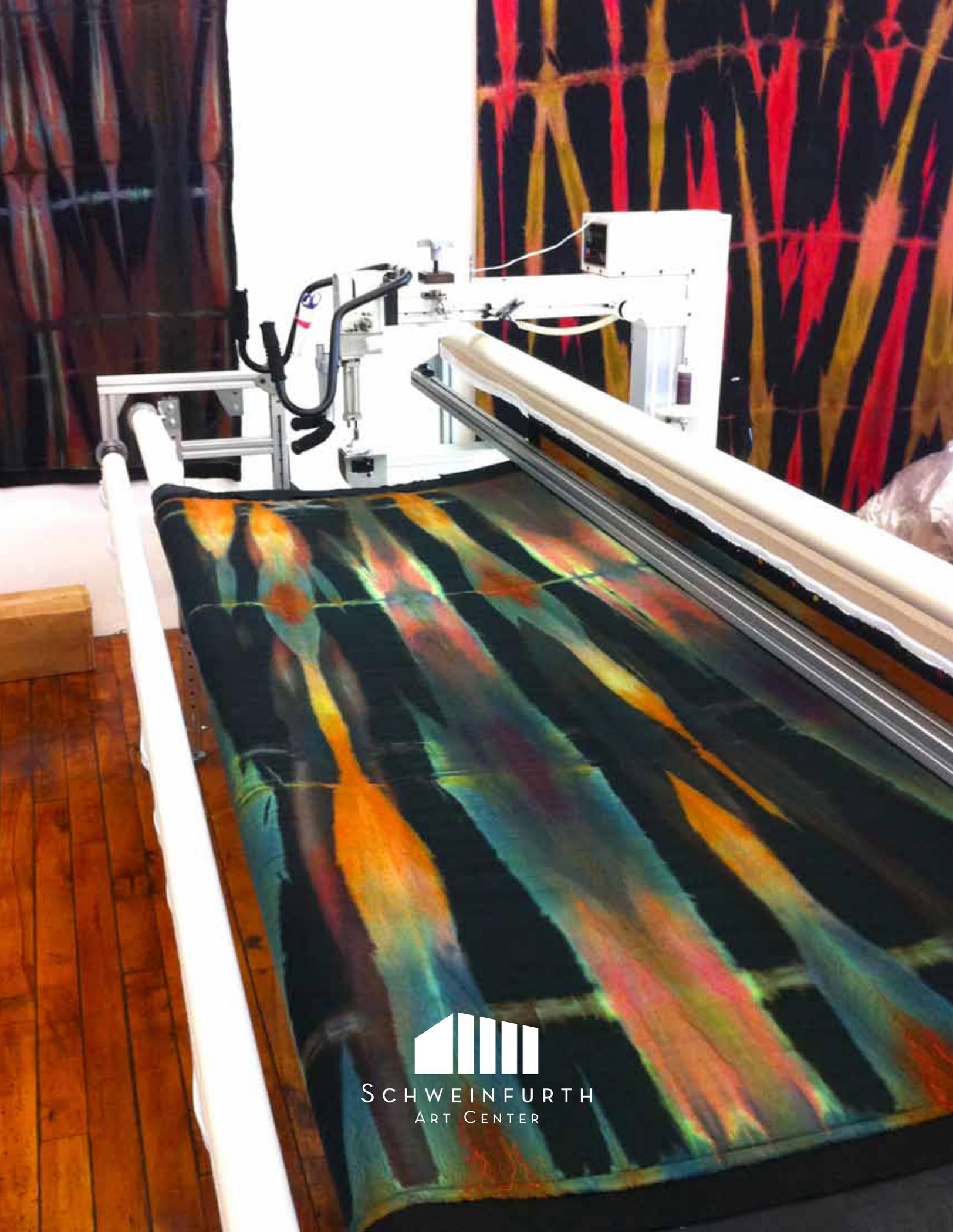
"Fugitive Pieces 9," and "Fugitive Pieces 3."



SCHWEINFURTH
ART CENTER

205 Genesee Street, Auburn, NY 13021
315-255-1553 / www.schweinfurthartcenter.org





SCHWEINFURTH
ART CENTER