

MERYL ANN BUTLER – A Full Life

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By Kim Hanson 1124 words

Meryl Ann Butler loves the joyful life she has created for herself. As she enters her “third act”*, each day is an adventure. She approaches life with a vigor unfamiliar to most of us. She is a creative force – a teacher, an extraordinary quilter, author and a loving, devoted grandmother. Meryl Ann is unique; unconventional in the depth to which she pours her heart and soul into the work. She is talented, wonderfully able to re-create her visions and dreams in fabrics and threads.

Insert Photo_1_Goddesses Rising

Caption: Meryl Ann’s fiber art mandala, a fabric depiction of her vision of joy and hope. There are eight Goddesses here. Can you spot them?

Like a farmer tending her field, Meryl Ann ascribes to a crop rotation style of living. Days revolve around teaching quilting and art in her studio, working on her own fiber art pieces and writing. The rotation allows her mind to remain open and fresh, a fertile ground for germination of new ideas and projects. She proclaims, “I don’t have a typical day. I guess that’s what I love most about my life...almost every day is different.”

Ocean View Arts, Meryl Ann’s inspirational workspace, is a quick 42-step commute from her home. (And yes, she’s counted!) Her quilt and fiber art studio, classroom and gallery space is housed on the second floor of a cheery, partially solar-powered building, across the street from Chesapeake Bay in Norfolk, Virginia. Here, unbridled creativity flourishes.

Insert Photo_2_Meryl Ann in her studio

Caption: Always smiling, Meryl Ann hard at work in her expansive studio.

In her studio’s abundant 1600 square feet, Meryl Ann teaches her craft to students in either an intimate classroom setting or individually, one-on-one. Initially, each student is taught how to draw with charcoal in order to establish a basic foundation in art. Quilting and fiber art students often rebel, wondering: “What does drawing have to do with quilting?” Only when that skill has been mastered, do the novices move on to use the medium they are most interested in – be it paints, fabric or even colored pencils. Everyone works at their own pace, learning both from Meryl Ann and from each other, much like a contemporary version of a one-room schoolhouse. Students quickly discover that establishing a basic foundation in art enables them to create quilts and fiber art rich in color and definitive in form.

Meryl Ann's exquisite work sets her apart. She uses many different fabrics and embellishments in her projects – ultra-suede, rayon, velvet, hand-dyed cottons, carved wood animal beads, ribbons and metallic threads - all adding to the distinctive flavor, texture and theme of her quilted art. Some of her work resides in the collections of the late Honorable Nelson Mandela, Dr. Patch Adams and one piece hangs in city hall in Moss, Norway. Her work is dazzling. It attracts attention and heads turn. But, sadly, there is a distressing corollary to her success.

August 8, 2001 is a day Meryl Ann will never forget. Following a show and tell with classmates at the Art of Academy of Los Angeles, thieves broke into Meryl Ann's parked car and removed suitcases of her life's work from the trunk. They stole wearable art, quilted wall hangings and slides of all her work completed to date... basically her entire portfolio. She says, "The biggest issue with the theft wasn't that they took finished work... that was from the past. Instead, I feared I had lost my future... lost what I understood to be defining projects of my lifetime." Despite the pieces being oh-so distinctive, and her identity label having been sewn into each piece, none of the quilted art has been recovered. A comprehensive list and photos of the stolen pieces are all displayed on the Lost Quilt Come Home website. (www.lostquilt.com) Nancy Taylor, the recently minted administrator of the Lost Quilt Come Home website, confirms she has received no leads on the whereabouts of Meryl Ann's stolen art. Neither have the LAPD, which has the theft on record. Nancy, along with another quilter and a tech/security specialist, is currently working on the development of a microchip; an anti-theft device for quilts. She says, "We hope to be able to offer an affordable product for sale by the end of 2019 or early 2020". Stay tuned!

Insert Photo_3_ Stolen Piece from 2001

Caption: Florence Cristelli wearing Meryl Ann's Egyptian Mysteries Unveiled ensemble, featured in the Fairfield Fashion Show of 1998-1999. This piece was one of ten stolen in the Los Angeles theft of 2001.

Then, in a cruel twist of fate, it happened again! Meryl Ann's quilted fiber art piece entitled Isis: Goddess of Egypt was stolen. April 12, 2019, thieves removed it from its hanger on the student gallery wall adjacent to her studio. Since the devastating 2001 theft, Meryl Ann has been ever so vigilant to secure her work. The gallery building was always locked, with only tenants having access. However, Meryl Ann was unaware that contractors had been given keys in order to facilitate a move in the building, thereby rendering it insecure. Only when she noticed the empty hanger on the gallery wall, did she realize her work had been stolen. "At first," she says, "I was so shocked. My heart dropped. It's a violation of my space. Isis took me over a year to make! The piece has extensive beading, semi-precious stones and hand-dyed fabrics." Meryl Ann wonders, "Could this theft somehow be part of a divine plan?" A plan to help bring home my stolen art from 2001?" She's ever so hopeful that by shining a light on this latest theft, it may somehow raise awareness and facilitate return of her previously stolen work.

Isis: Goddess of Egypt is valued at approximately \$5,000.00 US. Meryl Ann has offered a reward for its return. (Please contact her if you have information regarding any of her stolen work.)

(<https://www.OceanViewArtscom/>)

Insert Photo_4_Isis: Goddess of Egypt

Isis: Goddess of Egypt, quilted wall hanging, stolen in 2019 from the gallery wall adjacent to Meryl Ann Butler's studio.

She remains pragmatic about the thefts, not angry. Obviously, she would prefer, "That when someone loves my art, they purchase it rather than steal it." The theft of so much of Meryl Ann's life work has altered preparations for her future. She dreams of exhibiting in a one woman show. It's a bucket list item, something she has wanted for a very long time. Now, with this latest theft, it's unlikely she'll be able to pull it off for quite some time.

But, if anyone can pull it off, Meryl Ann Butler can! She begins her long work days mid-morning, attends a yoga class, then heads to her studio to work, often until the wee hours of the morning. She readily chooses her work and honing her craft, over other things life has to offer...like watching TV for instance. She doesn't even own one.

Certainly, Meryl Ann's heart beats to a different drum. She is dedicated to living a life almost solely immersed in joyful, artistic creation. But, a piece of that heart is roped-off, kept private for her beloved granddaughter, Myla. Meryl Ann was first on the scene when Myla was born. The midwife was stuck in traffic, so grandma stepped in. As the first person ever to hold her grandbaby girl, a forever bond was forged between the two of them. Myla visits Norfolk regularly. Nearly every day she's there, she asks her grandma, "Can we make art in your studio today?" Like grandma, like granddaughter. Life in constant motion, brimming with infinite possibilities, travelling full circle.

Photo_5_ : Myla and Meryl Ann sewing in grandma's studio

Myla working on a cover for a bolster pillow. She picked out the fabrics at the quilt shop herself! Myla made the quilted vest she is wearing, with a little help from grandma.

*Third act, by definition does not mean retirement. On the contrary. Laurence R. Samuel writes in Psychology today: "Instead of heading en masse to retirement communities...60-somethings are going back to school, starting new relationships, exploring their [creativity](#), taking new [spiritual](#) paths, embarking on "encore" careers, forming new communities, fighting for causes in which they believe, giving their time and money away, and yes, bucket listing. For financial and other reasons, a good number are working and staying in their current homes as long as possible, seeing no compelling reason to do otherwise."

