



Sharon Braunagel, Featured Artist for Mesas to Monuments May 1-2, 2026, Quilt Show

Written by Sharon Braunagel; Photos by Janet Wheeler

I wish I could say that my introduction to sewing and textiles was unique, but in fact, it mirrors the experience shared with most women my age, I am in my 70's. My mother originally made my clothes and when the photos of my sister and I wearing matching pajamas are displayed, the comment is usually "How Cute." But the reality was that mom had to find time, clean off the kitchen table and set up her sewing machine - a cast iron, 50-pound equivalent to half of my mother's body weight. She would then sew outfits hoping to please two finicky girls and then later, three more equally finicky daughters. It was no wonder that as soon as we grew old enough, we were encouraged to make our own clothes and learn to sew.

And learn I did, not just to sew, but how to crochet, make rugs and knit. And I loved it, enjoying the process so much that my undergraduate degree was in Fine Arts, specializing in costume design. I'm not sure how good my designing skills were, but I enjoyed working with the fabrics. Theatre provided such freedom! If the fabric was the wrong color, you dyed it; too new, you distressed it; not shiny enough, you embellished it; and on and on. You get the picture. It was fun.

Then life happened, working in a totally different career and while keeping my fabric stash but sadly, rarely touching it. I was too busy. However, because of living in Texas, it was possible to make a yearly pilgrimage to the Houston International Quilt Festival. I marveled at the amazing artwork and quality of workmanship and made myself a promise that one day, I would return to working with textiles.



Sharon's poppy art quilt is displayed in her bathroom, along with a stained glass piece, another one of Sharon's artistic accomplishments.



Hence when finally able, I joined the local quilt guild, learning quilting techniques and tricks. What began as an amusement, quickly became an important activity in my life. As my skills advanced and with each visit to the Houston show, so too did my understanding of how those amazing quilters produce such beautiful work. This hastened the process of realizing my own capabilities for creating equivalent work. I continue to marvel at the beauty of the work at Houston and Paducah KY - and other shows - it is now within the context that my work is also being displayed in those shows.

It was at the beginning of my quilting journey, that a friend asked if I was planning to make an Art Quilt. Not completely understanding what an Art Quilt was, I assured her that I was firmly planted in the traditional quilt world and was not interested. She had a knowing smile and simply said I just wasn't far enough into my journey and that she suspected I would be a pretty good art quilter. This annoyed me at the time, but in retrospect, this friend clearly knew me better than I knew myself. I have since learned what constitutes an Art Quilt and have learned another set of techniques and tricks that allow me use fabric and media to translate whatever hair-brained idea enters my head into a textile art piece.

Now I have come full circle, and my theatre training is invaluable. Once again, there are no rules, and all those ways I learned to manipulate fabric to become whatever I wanted it to be are being used again. It is as fun as it is creative.

As my husband and I retired, we returned to my home state, and we moved to the Western Slope of Colorado. I was delighted to join the Sunset Slope Quilters, a guild consisting of nearly 200 members, with endless activities and learning opportunities. I was equally delighted to learn that there was a local organization of textile artists that focused on Art Quilts. This led to my membership with the Art Quilt Association (AQuA) of Grand Junction.



Quilts are displayed beautifully throughout Sharon's home



People ask me why I spend time working with textiles. My answer again mirrors the answer that is given by many, many quilters. There is something mesmerizing about the touch of fabric, the beauty of the textile itself and the way it feeds our souls as we work with it. A woodworker spends hours cutting, sanding and caressing the wood until a beautiful product has been created; a painter spends hours blending and manipulating paint until every shadow and highlight is perfect. Textiles are the same. The process of cutting, piecing and making something beautiful somehow fills a need that makes our life richer. Even more wondrous than the fabric itself, is the community that is formed when textile artists come together in fellowship. This is a community that supports us, encourages us, provides friendship and one to be the first to volunteer with help, many times even before we know we need it.

BIO: Sharon is an accomplished quilter and has received the National Association of Certified Quilt Judges Award of Merit (Diane LeClair). In addition to multiple regional shows, she has had work displayed at:

Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, CO
Pennsylvania National Quilt Extravaganza, PA
Pacific International Quilt Festival, CA
Quilt Fest of New England, MA
Houston International Quilt Festival, TX
Pacific Northwest Quilt and Fiber Arts Museum, WA
AQS Quilt Week, KY
New Legacies Contemporary Art Quilts, CO
Nature's Canvas, SAQA Global Exhibition