

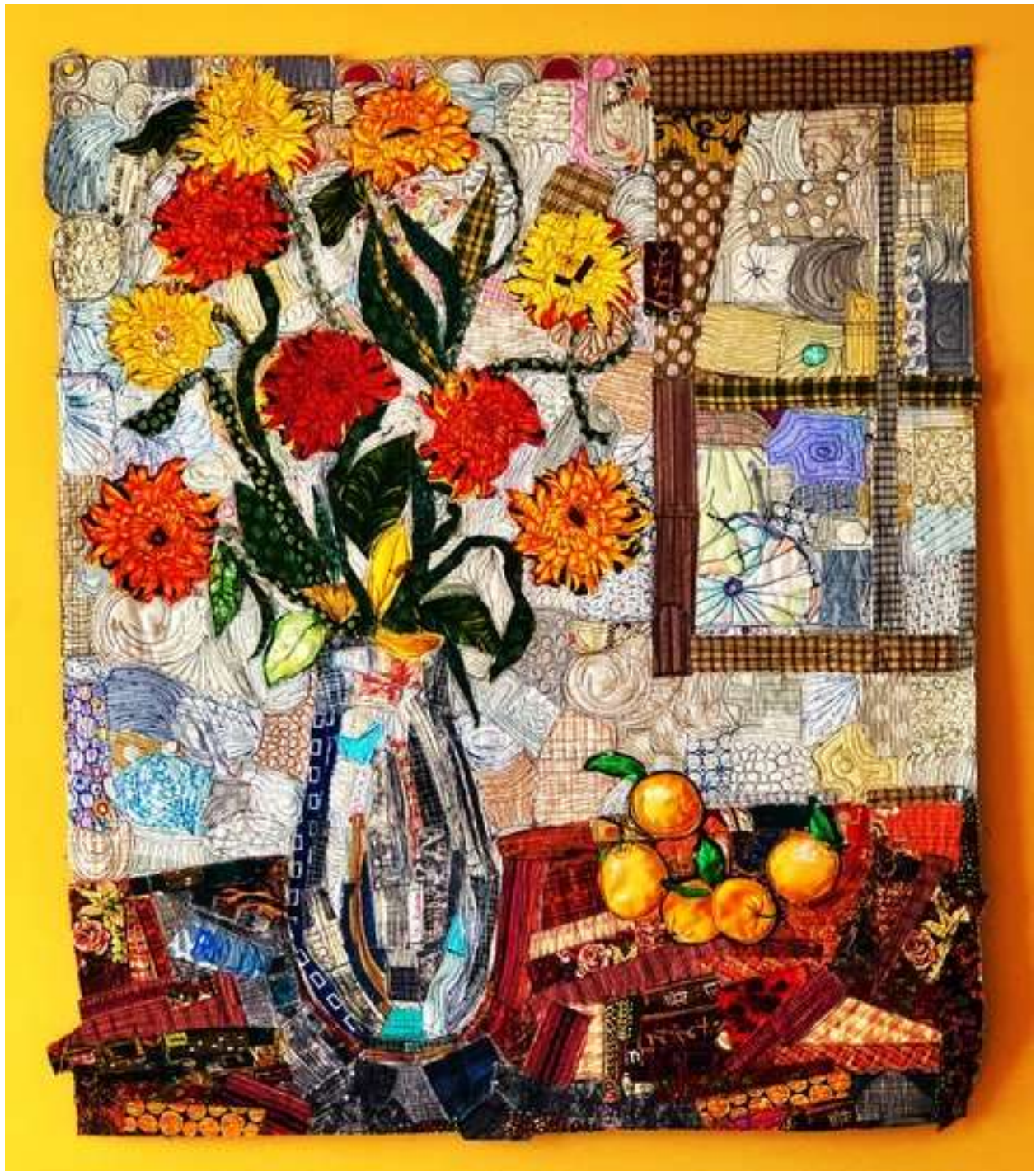
How Art Challenges Have Shaped My Daily Art

By Opal Cocke

I make art every day. it may be a simple contour sketch on the busiest days, a finished portrait, stitched sketchy lines on paper, a fabric collaged portrait, or a significant piece of fabric art . I use all kinds of paper, sketchbooks, index cards, or fabric to work on with paint, fabric, ink, or thread. There is always a camera within reach. I find that although fabric art and paper/paint art are quite distinct in techniques and media, the elements of design cross over. What I learn about mixing colors of paint also applies to mixing fabric colors on a quilt design. Good composition and a strong center of focus is always in my thinking whether I'm composing a photo in the camera lens or a fabric collage on my design wall. If I miss a day of 'doing' at my design wall, in my sketchbook, or my art table, I feel the loss of that time.



Where did this drive to create come from? Quilt making comes from my family. After retiring in 2000, I jumped right in and began creating quilts from patterns that were familiar to me. Later, I started sketching and painting and 'seeing' in new ways. I began making quilts with no patterns...and soon I was exploring the use of color in untraditional ways. In 2007 I began sketching for the first time. I took online classes and workshops and participated in online challenges. I am self taught mostly through the daily practice and rhythm of creating art every day within the framework of a class or workshop or the format of an organized group challenge.



1 Flowers in Vase - a fabric collage 45x55" free form stitching and raw edges

I love the pace and excitement of an organized Art Challenge. I think it might have something to do with my love of school both as a student and a teacher. I was the student who sat front row center to be as close as possible to the instructor. I always loved homework and the rush of a deadline. It isn't surprising that I loved teaching...the daily challenges of that classroom. These art challenges

fit right in with my comfort happy place - only instead of being in a classroom, I am in my studio creating with fabric and paper and paint.

What is an Art Challenge?

An Art Challenge is an organized group event focused on producing art within a defined time frame. Most challenges provide a daily prompt word and ask that you create art in your media responding to that word. A challenge could be to create art around a quote, or lyrics to a song, or a list for the day. There are many



2 Macaroon - Stitch sketched and painted on an index card for ICAD2019 Art Challenge



3 Tapestry - Collaged papers and painted with gouache, stitched on an index card for ICAD2019 Art Challenge

online art groups that offer challenges throughout the year. I have certain challenges I do yearly. I look forward to these and to seeing the work of people I have come to know through these groups. Several years ago I challenged myself to learn how to draw a bird by setting a time limit of 90 days and drawing a new bird every day with different media. I used small mailing tags which were cheap and disposable if I had to. I found my inspiration in Sibley's Guide to Birds. This was a safe way for me to practice my drawing skills and play with paint. And, by the 90th day I was able to draw a bird. These early sketches are fun to see and make me smile. They are framed and hang in the house to remind me of the importance of doing daily art. An added bonus for me was that I could use these little sketches to print on fabric

and use in my art work. This is a true crossover in both paper art and fabric.

How have I benefitted from doing Art Challenges?

Here are just a few benefits from daily art through an Art Challenge.

1. An organized challenge provides a structure and focus for the day. Sometimes I think about a prompt all day and wrestle with ideas and media until I find the right one that gives form to the niggles of an idea in my head. I love that interaction and thinking process.

2. A challenge keeps me honest and accountable to the group and to myself. Others in the group doing the same challenge become connected and visible through the online group and posting daily work...I look forward to seeing their daily work.

3. By wrestling with a prompt, I better understand my relationship to that word or idea. I can be playful and wonky and just have fun.

4. The art I have done within the structure of a challenge has defined my voice in my art, introduced me to new techniques, provided a safe place to experiment and try new materials, and given shape to my voice in art



4 Rose - Fabric collage, acrylic and stitching on an index card ICAD2019 Art Challenge

5. Completion of an Art Challenge is a powerful personal achievement. And, I am left with a body of work that defines the 30 days, or 90 days or daily art.

6. Art, whether fabric art or painting with acrylics or watercolors, makes me happy. I am always happy when I am engaged in working towards a goal in my studio.

Many online challenges are repeated each year.

"Capture Your 365" is an online challenge to take a photo a day using a given daily prompt. Every morning I check on the prompt for the day. I can decide to use that prompt word, or go off prompt for the day. After deciding on the photo to use for the day's prompt, I post it online to the group. The group is a social platform

and allows participants to interact with each other by leaving comments about a posted photo. There is a learning component to this challenge with mini-lessons on camera settings and techniques using the DSL camera. My skills have multiplied since I started way back in 2012 and knew little about the DS camera. Now, my camera is always within reach, and I know the settings and lenses. This challenge has given me that.

My days are filled with other challenges which come and go throughout the year. Some are short 30-day challenges, others are longer, say a 100 day project. Once I



5 Botanicals - Stitch sketching on an index card with acrylic paint for ICAD2019 Art Challenge.

commit to a challenge, I see it through to the end even if I miss a day here or there. I make those up. These challenges have provided a defined space for me to explore and play with different media and techniques.

A challenge I recently completed was the "100DayProject". The only requirement was to create a piece of art each day for 100 days and then post it on social media with proper tags so others could find it. I chose to do my daily art on heavy stock index cards stitching with the sewing machine the sketch lines and adding watercolors, acrylics, or collage.

Another fun annual challenge is the "Index Card A Day" challenge, or ICAD. I have participated in this challenge for many years. The finished cards can be kept intact as a year's work, used for postcards or mail art, or as collage pieces. I try to incorporate both fabric, stitching, and paint on each card. One year I made a photo book of my completed cards.

In 2018, I participated in a "30 Days of Faces" challenge. I drew a portrait each day. On the first day of the challenge, I had never drawn a portrait. By day 30 I was hooked and in love with portrait drawing. To date I have drawn over 300 portraits. My skills improved so much from this challenge.

Yes, the challenges and prompts provide a platform for practice and experimentation. It offers a structure to work within. It opens my eyes to new ways of 'seeing'...and 'doing'. And then there is the feeling of having completed a body of work within a time frame.



Here is a list of recent Art Challenges I have participated in.

CaptureYour365 (photography)

Inktober (a sketch a day using ink)

ICAD. (Index Card a Day) (art on an index card)

100DayProject (you decide your theme and technique.)

30 Days of Faces

Want to join me in a short challenge?

Would you be excited to make art every day for a month? I would provide prompts for each day which you could choose to use or not. And we could have a closed private group at Flickr where we could safely share our work to only our group. Contact me if you would like to play along.

