



Do you want to see
My Quilt
 at the next
**National
 Juried Show?**



2010 *NJS* Judges Lily Lam, Susan Mark Purney, and Bonnie Voice. Photo by Colleen Peake

by Lily Lam, Susan Purney Mark and Bonnie Voice

We all enjoy showing off our work. We can feel a heartwarming glow when our friends applaud our efforts. However, how many of us take advantage of the annual *National Juried Show* offered by the Canadian Quilters' Association and participate?

The CQA/ACC's *National Juried Show* is a unique opportunity for Canadian quilters to share our common passion. Showcasing a selection of excellent works each year, mostly Canadian, the show features unique Canadian talents for all to see. This annual event is made possible by the team of volunteers at the hosting city who put in hours of work to organize and to take care of all the details to ensure a beautiful show with the dedicated support of the Board of Directors of the CQA/ACC.

The *NJS* presents an excellent show each year because: quilters offer to share their pride and joy by answering the Call for Entry, the jury team faces tough decisions when selecting the best entries for inclusion, often based on limited information, and the judging team examines each and every selected entry for the show in order to highlight several outstanding pieces as winners. Along the way, many tough decisions are made.

We were the three lucky members of the judging team at the 2010 *NJS* held at the TELUS Convention Centre in Calgary, Alberta. We considered ourselves very lucky for several reasons, not the least of them

being the excellent quality of the entries selected, the thoughtfulness of the hosting team and the efficient support provided by the scribes and helpers. We enjoyed the two full days working together, sharing our points of view, trying our best to provide useful feedback to each and every participant. We were privileged to view the *NJS* from a unique angle, providing us with some insights that we think are worth sharing

with our readers.

Considering the number of quilters in Canada, the general calibre of skill and

talent known to us, let us consider the total number of entries received each year in response to the Call for Entry for the *NJS*. We conjecture that it is not enough. The question, therefore, is why?

"The *NJS* is not for me."

"My quilt is not good enough."

"It will not be accepted."

"I do not want to be judged."

"I will never win, so I will be just wasting my money and effort."

Let us take these hypothetical answers one by one.

"The *NJS* is not for me."

But of course it is. To quote the mission statement of CQA: "Formed in 1981, the aims and objectives of the Canadian Quilters' Association/Association canadienne de la courtepointe are:

- to promote a greater understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of the art, techniques, and heritage of patchwork, appliqué, and quilting
- to promote the highest standards of workmanship and design in both traditional and innovative work
- to foster cooperation and sharing among quilt makers across the country."

The *NJS* is an annual event established to enable this vision. As members of this association, it is our right, responsibility and privilege to contribute to the fulfillment of the common vision.

"My quilt is not good enough."

First, each quilter has to make this decision for herself. Theoretically, any quilt that is made with care, that is finished and that answers to the rules of the competition is good enough to enter. To participate in any show takes courage and an investment on your part. This applies equally with the *NJS*. However, by crossing the threshold, by making the decision to participate, you are declaring to the world that you take pride in your achievement and you like to share your





pride and joy with others. You have promoted yourself to the rank of *NJS* participants. Your candidacy will earn you at the very least useful feedback about your work that may influence your future direction in quilting.

"It will not be accepted."

First of all, your quilt will definitely not be shown at the *NJS* if it is not entered. By participating, your quilt stands an equal chance at receiving fair and critical appraisal from the jurors. Whether or not it will make the cut at the *NJS* depends on several factors, some of which actually depend on you.

The jury team accepts the task of selecting from among submitted entries the best quilts for inclusion at the *NJS*. They are given guidelines and quotas. The guidelines are public knowledge. The quotas depend on the capacity of the exhibition facility of the particular show as well as the distribution of the numbers of entry in each category. The jury team evaluates each submitted proposal within a category by considering the information provided by the entrant, the photo images and artist statement describing the work. Based on what they can see or read, the applicable rules and the quotas set, they recommend the best selection in their educated and combined opinions for inclusion. They provide feedback in the form of critiques for the rest of the entries that unfortunately must be released.

You win a chance to be part of a great show by sending in your entry. If you receive an invitation, that will be welcome news. Congratulations. Now you must take care to prepare your piece carefully for shipment. If you plan to attend the *NJS*, look forward to having a great time sharing with kindred spirits. If, unfortunately, the response you received is "regret", well it is not the end of the world. Seasoned show exhibitors will tell you, they too have received their share of disappointments.

It is unavoidable that some excellent work may not make a selection. It could be that a quilt had to stand against extremely tough competition. It could be that the category in which it was placed was very popular and the quota was limited. It could also be that the category for which it was submitted was not suitable. The quality of the images provided

may have prevented the jurors from getting a good appreciation of the actual quilt. It may also be that despite the best effort of its maker, there is obvious room for improvement that an impartial observer with a fresh pair of eyes can pick out.

It is important not to take things personally. Put the critiques aside and return to it after a cooling off period. When you are ready, sit back, make yourself comfortable and take another honest look before dismissing the whole thing. You may or may not agree with the critiques you received, but there will always be useful insights for the seeker. Even if it is a deep conviction that your quilt is a gem and the *NJS*'s loss, it is a gain for the effort you took. Jurors are entitled to their opinions and honest opinions are hard to come by. Remember, jurors work under specific constraints and their decisions can only be based on what they can observe.

Now that you have done this round, you can look forward to doing it again. Build on past experience, enter other works next time, give them a good run for the money and make them work for you.

"I do not want to be judged."

Do you enter your guild or local shows? Do you show your work to friends or family? Every time your work is displayed it is being judged and evaluated by others. When you visit a quilt show and walk around viewing all the quilts, are you not thinking or saying "I wonder why she chose blue for the appliqué?" or "look at how wonderful the quilting stitches are!" By entering the *NJS* you are saying that your work is worthy of being seen and enjoyed by others and it is a progression of your abilities as a quilter. The judging component of the *NJS* is not about saying a quilt is "good or bad"; it is about growth and encouragement of our skills.

"I will never win, so I will be just wasting my money and effort."

Every participant is a winner. Your winning increases if your quilt has been juried into the actual show. You become part of the select few who will be wearing the Exhibitor ribbons at the annual *NJS* opening night. Your work will appear in the printed catalog for all to see. However, there are more intangibles to be won.

Before the show opens to the public, your quilt has been appraised carefully by the team of judges for its merits. Each quilt is reviewed by critical eyes (3 pairs). Individual and impartial considerations are given separately and in consultation by the judges regarding its effectiveness in visual impact, success in achieving stated intention, as well as details in technique application and workmanship. Honest and helpful feedbacks are provided. Again, you may not agree with the judges' points of view, and that is quite all right. The feedback represents educated and impartial points of view and is given with helpful intentions. It represents valuable experience money cannot buy.

To receive an award at the prestigious *NJS* is, of course, a special honour to look forward to, the icing on the cake. Just to see your work hung with care, shoulder to shoulder with other worthy works, in a hall milling with appreciative viewers, many of whom share your passion, make it worth all the trouble. The recognition you win is something that defies measure.

Make the *NJS* your show too

One of the most interesting aspects of the *NJS* in Calgary that we noticed as judges was the encouraging number of first time entries. This trend showed us that quilting is vibrant and growing within Canada and that many quilters are devoted and serious artists who wish to celebrate their love and passion for their chosen medium. The CQA/ACC Quilt Judge Certification Program, introduced in recent years, is a significant step towards ensuring continued advancement of quilting in Canada. We can anticipate a growing resource of professional knowledge and quilt connoisseurs to contribute to further enjoyment of our favourite pastime. This also predicts that juried and judged quilt shows are becoming more accepted as the norm, not just for national shows such as the *NJS*, but also at regional and local shows. It is in our interests to encourage and support these trends. Let us encourage you to be players in the building process for high quality quilting and excellence for the future. Participate and show us your best efforts.