

Familiar Patterns: Hmong and Mennonite Quiltmakers in Lancaster County

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The quilt pictured in Figure 1 is decorated with a graceful flower bouquet appliqué within a circular medallion, surrounded by geometric piecing in graduating shades of teal and rose, and finished with parallel lines of quilting. This is the type of country style quilt you might find at a shop in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. It would be displayed among a colorful array of handmade quilts, and would probably be promoted as “Locally Made” or simply “Amish.” In this case, however, the quilt is decorating the bed of the local quiltmaker, a Hmong woman from Laos who made it. The flowers, bows and birds she sews onto country quilts are not part of the repertoire of designs she learned as a girl, but these motifs have become a significant part of her life in the United States.



Figure 1

In this study I combine oral history with material culture to explore Mennonite and Hmong quilting partnerships in Lancaster County. A thriving network of quilt shops emerged in this area during the 1970s, and Hmong refugees joined the quilting business in the mid-1980s. The quilts these women produce are often marketed as “local,” “Amish” or “country,” and offer few outward clues to their maker’s identity. By taking a look at the stories of several quiltmakers, I hope to illustrate how these quilts are meaningful expressions of their makers. These quilts reflect the cultural history of the Hmong and Mennonite quiltmakers, and complement the lifestyle of these women. Furthermore, quilt gifts exchanged within the quilting community are vehicles for commemorating significant events and demonstrating emotional support.

My research builds on a body of scholarship published in the 1990s. Trish Faubion provides a comparative analysis of the lifestyles and ideologies of Hmong and Amish cultures.¹ Faubion places the arrival of Hmong refugees in Lancaster within the context of the beginnings of the Amish quilt market. She argues that both Amish and Hmong quiltmakers extend their repertoire of traditional craft skills to earn extra income, yet both groups suffer some loss of their cultural values.² Jean Henry focuses her study on Hmong refugees and emphasizes the market’s influence on which textile styles were developed within the Pennsylvania Hmong community and which were neglected.³ For example, Henry notes that muted colors became standard to suit the decorating tastes of American buyers, and patterns were simplified because consumers were hesitant to pay for more sophisticated designs.

Faubion and Henry published articles within a decade of the beginnings of Hmong quilting in Lancaster County. Both articles provide a useful timeline and cultural analysis, and comment on adaptations that took place to meet demands of the market. Now another decade has passed and I offer a study that draws from the concepts already established by these authors. As a material culture study, however, the heart of my research is the quilt as an expressive object. I view quilts as touchstones for significant cultural transactions that are cloaked in the veil of cultural tourism.

Although Lancaster has become somewhat synonymous with “Amish quilts,” the quilting business in the county actually involves a range of individuals, including Hmong and Mennonite quiltmakers. I focus on those groups because both include a significant number of women working for the “Amish quilt” market despite the fact that their products are promotionally credited to an identity not their own. In many other geographic areas, the term “Mennonite” simply refers to a pacifist Christian denomination emphasizing adult baptism. Pennsylvania, however, is home to the two largest gatherings of Old

Order Mennonites. Much like the Amish, conservative Mennonites set themselves apart from “the world” through distinctive plain dress and by limiting their use of automobiles and other modern conveniences. Although my study focuses on conservative Mennonites, quilting is common among all branches of Mennonites.

The association between Mennonites and Hmong began as a sponsor and refugee newcomer relationship. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) sponsored the settlement of a community of Hmong families in the Lancaster area, beginning in the late 1970s. The Hmong were one of the highland tribal groups forced out of Laos because of their alliance with the United States C.I.A. during the course of the Vietnam conflict.⁴ The Lancaster County Hmong community is one of numerous non-urban areas which relatively small gatherings of less than 1000 Hmong families call home.⁵ The majority of Hmong in Laos lived in isolated highland villages without electricity, indoor plumbing or motorized vehicles. Hmong refugees experienced dramatic changes when they arrived in the cities and towns of host countries. Refugees were confronted with a multitude of new features of every day life: automobiles and traffic lights, modern kitchen appliances, telephones and televisions, not to mention pay checks, banks, rent and income taxes.

Hmong women were faced with a particularly difficult situation when adapting to life in their new country. Girls in Laos were seldom sent to school, and therefore many Hmong refugee women had no experience with writing or mathematics. Lo Mao Moua, a professional Lancaster County quiltmaker, found herself in a frustrating predicament because of her age at the time of resettlement. She explains, “When I came to this country in 1977 my English was poor. I didn’t even know ABC. I didn’t have the choice to go to school because of my age. I was seventeen at the time. They wouldn’t put me with little children to learn ABC, but I couldn’t go to high school either because of my language. My parents were in Thailand at the time, so I just decided to go to work at the Hilton Hotel as housekeeping.”⁶

Lo Mao worked in housekeeping for ten years before she discovered an opportunity for which she, as a Hmong woman, was uniquely qualified: quilting. Hmong women living near Lancaster began working for area quilt shops in the mid-1980s. These women discovered that despite their lack of formal education or vocational training, they were well-suited for the exacting work of sewing quilts for local businesses. Earning income through sewing handmade crafts was a familiar practice for Hmong refugees. Living in the Thai refugee camps, Hmong men and women were faced with endless hours of forced inactivity, with virtually no opportunities to earn personal income, that is, except for sewing. With the assistance of

refugee camp workers, Hmong women learned to create potholders, eyeglass cases, purses, wall hangings and other marketable crafts. Lo Mao explains, "I had a year in Thailand that was just eat, sleep and that's it. Nothing else. We did a lot of hand embroidery...In the first couple of months we just replaced what we lost. But after that, a lot of tourists came to the camp, so we just started doing it for the market."

Quilts, as we know them today, have enjoyed widespread popularity from the beginnings of affordable fabrics and the common availability of printed materials, such as Godey's Ladies Book, in the early 19th century.⁷ Public interest in quilts has risen and fallen at various points through the past two centuries. As the 1960s progressed, popular interest in quilts was once again on the rise. Inspired by the wealth of literature developing on homesteading and folk art, collectors recognized handmade quilts as relics of an earlier lifestyle. Likewise, as the U.S. bicentennial of 1976 approached, tourists sought out reminders of U.S. history, and quilts served as icons of colonial days. "Pennsylvania Dutch Country," with its Amish and conservative Mennonite communities, became a destination for those who wished to view life as it was lived before electricity and cars. The gallery world began to recognize quilts as art objects, most notably through the 1971 Whitney Museum of Art's exhibit, "Abstract Design in American Quilts."⁸ Artists began choosing the quilt as their medium, further blurring the line between fine art and craft. All of these factors created a broad-based cultural appreciation for the art of the quilt.

Lancaster County has achieved notoriety as a mecca for handmade quilts. Quilt shops range from ordinary homes with "quilts for sale" signs in the front yard to large barn-like stores that incorporate quilts into their selections of souvenirs. Witmer's Quilt Shop in New Holland, Pennsylvania illustrates how many shops began. Run by an Old Order Mennonite family, it was one of the earliest home quilt shops to become established in Lancaster County. Quilting had been in the family for some time. Emma Witmer, the proprietor, says her grandmother made each of her grandchildren a quilt from start to finish. Emma notes that her grandmother was "always sewing" and so she and her siblings began attempting sewing projects as small children. "I was about four years old when I started making dolly clothes," explains Emma.⁹ The quilt shop began when a fabric salesman from Philadelphia asked that Emma's mother lend him twelve of her handmade quilts to sell in the city. When he returned with some of them unsold, Emma's father simply placed a sign along the road that read "Quilts for Sale."

It was just this sort of sign that attracted Hmong women to the homes of Mennonite and Amish quiltmakers not as customers, but as

potential employees.¹⁰ The timing was ideal. In the late 1980s, quilts featuring appliqué began to enjoy great popularity.¹¹ The most coveted designs became floral bouquets, birds and bows made of curved appliquéed pieces.¹² The Hmong women who came to call Lancaster County home just so happened to be experienced practitioners of some of the most intricate appliqué in the world.¹³ The Amish had almost no background with appliqué, as this technique wastes fabric and is more time-consuming than piecing.¹⁴ Mennonites have a more involved history with appliqué because restrictions on fabrics and decorative sewing have not been as strict as with the Amish. As there are numerous Mennonite sects it is difficult to generalize about Mennonite sewing techniques. Suffice to say, the demand for appliqué exceeded the supply of accomplished appliqué artisans within the Amish and Mennonite communities, and the Hmong were a welcome addition to the Lancaster networks of quilters. Emma comments, “The Hmong from Laos do a lot of the fine stitching. Appliqué is what they like to do.”

The Hmong preference for appliqué stems from the complex decorative sewing known as “paj ntaub,”¹⁵ mastered by Hmong girls in Laos. From a very young age, Hmong girls began sewing for their costumes. They would emulate the stitching of their mothers, grandmothers and other female role models. Hmong quiltmaker Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun explains, “I learned [to sew] from my mom. I think at about age seven or eight my mom died. I already began from her.”¹⁶ Lo Mao Moua responds, “Whoever can’t do that [sewing], that means they are not a very good mother or very good daughter. Because I learned when I was very young, maybe about five or six years old. We see our mothers sit down and do it and we just go ahead and start doing it. Something like in this country every boy and every girl has to go to school, but in my country every boy has to learn farming and every girl has to know how to do needlework, cook and clean.”

Most of the Hmong living in Pennsylvania are from the group known as the “White Hmong,” named for the white ceremonial skirts they traditionally wore. White Hmong textiles feature prominent use of intricate reverse appliqué. For example, the “elephant print” pattern shown in Figure 2 consists of concentric lobed shapes executed in reverse appliqué. To create this design, the maker first cuts the concentric pattern out of the black fabric. At this point, the design exists in negative space. Then this black layer is laid on a purple background and the raw edges are sewn under. The design that was once negative space now appears in purple. This procedure is done by eye without the aid of measuring tools or templates. The “elephant print” shown here is sewn into a square measuring approximately 8” x 8”. Although this may appear quite intricate, this

is actually an enlarged version of the pattern that was created for the craft market. In Laos, sewing skills reflected a Hmong woman's wealth and abilities, and therefore girls endeavored to perfect intricate, visually stimulating designs.



Figure 2

Sewing these complicated traditional designs translated well to sewing appliqué designs for quilts. The quilts created for Lancaster shops are often made by quiltmakers who purchase a pattern from a local supply shop. For appliqué quilts, the pattern consists of a large central design and often a coordinating design at the pillow area. The quiltmaker can choose to use only the pattern as purchased. However, many women are inspired to incorporate additional designs to make the quilt special. Lo Mao refers to a Country Bride quilt when she explains, "The original design is only the pattern in the center. But if I want to do more, that's my own creativity." Incorporating original designs opens up an opportunity for quiltmakers to experience creativity beyond following a published pattern, thus allowing the process to become more personally fulfilling. Lo Mao continues, "I create more corner to the quilt to make it a combination of appliqué and piecing. This I call 'Country Bride Combination'. So that's my creation...They don't have patterns that come out like this. I do what I need to do to make the quilt look better, nicer when you put it on the bed."

Hmong sewing skills contributed to the success of the area's quilt businesses, but the Mennonites, Amish and other non-Hmong shop owners remained in control for several reasons. Hmong women were new to the Lancaster style of quilting when they first arrived in the area. Women needed employment, and quilting allowed them to work as crafters without paying overhead expenses. As Hmong women attained a firm grasp of successful designs and color schemes for the market, some eventually began to make quilts on speculation, offering them to shops to purchase. This gave Hmong women more control over the quilting process, but introduced the risk of shops not accepting work. If a shop dislikes a quilt, they

might refuse it or use it in a fundraising auction.

Lo Mao is a quiltmaker with a keen eye for what will sell. Raised in Laos, she mastered Hmong needlework techniques by the time she arrived in the U.S. at age sixteen. While she eventually became a renowned quiltmaker, her early commercial sewing efforts were Hmong crafts. She explains that MCC sponsors recognized the marketing potential for Hmong needlework, but encouraged women to create larger designs that would appeal to buyers. She explains, "Because we do needlework all the time, they say 'but it's too little for the market, can you do something bigger?'" The public was interested in pieces large enough to use as well-hangings, but the tiny scale of traditional Hmong patterns was too time-consuming to fill up large pieces to sell at reasonable prices. This led to enlarged patterns like the elephant footprint described earlier.

In 1990, Lo Mao opened a storefront in Intercourse, Pennsylvania. Set amidst a busy cluster of Amish-themed tourist shops, it was the first and only Hmong quilt storefront in the area. It is rare for a Hmong woman to sell quilts to the public with no intermediary. Typically a shop is run by a "plain" family, or operated by a non-quiltmaker business person who deals in locally-made quilts. Lo Mao was grateful to the local quilt shop community for offering employment for Hmong women, but frustrated at the lack of recognition for their efforts. She eventually closed the store in the interest of caring for her children, but still retains the business name "Pennsylvania Hmong Crafts" for occasional craft shows and other periodic sales opportunities.

In the decades that have passed since Hmong women began sewing for the quilt market in Lancaster County, the generation of Hmong women raised in the United States have had the opportunity to take more divergent paths than their mothers. Some have chosen professional careers while others have chosen to stay at home to raise their children. Some Hmong "stay-at-home-moms" have utilized their family's connections with the quilt industry to earn extra income.

Houa Yang was born in Laos and brought to the United States as a child. Unlike previous generations of women in her family, she did not grow up learning to master the intricate paj ntaub needlework that decorates traditional Hmong costume. As a girl raised in the United States, Houa attended school rather than accompanying her mother or grandmother through the day's domestic activities. She married in her teens and came to live with her husband's family in Lancaster County. She gave birth to a son, who is now in his teens. Houa considers herself to be a typical American soccer mom. In one respect, she certainly lives up to this image. She drives her son to school and piano lessons in her mini-van. She does not work outside of the house, devoting her time to keeping her family comfortable

and happy. Yet, as every woman is connected to a complex set of cultural ideologies and unique personal experiences, there is truly no such thing as the typical American mom.

Houa learned to make quilts for the local market from her mother-in-law. Having established herself in the local quilting network, Houa became involved in a working relationship with Sarah, a Mennonite woman.¹⁷ Sarah creates pieced quilts to which Houa adds appliqué designs. She explains how they work together: “I have a Mennonite friend and we love to trade work. I would make an appliqué top for her, whatever she needs, and sometimes I would trade work with her on her piecing...She doesn’t know how to do appliqué, so when she needs appliquéing done she comes to me and asks me what to do and I would make the appliqué for her.”¹⁸ In Figure 3, Houa holds an example of the type of work on which she and her friend would collaborate. This is a Bargello quilt pattern—a pieced style that, through the careful use of color, appears to have curved peaks. Sarah pieced the center of the quilt in shades of blue, and requested that Houa add some appliqué. Houa explains that Sarah “wanted something more contemporary and said ‘do whatever you think will look nice.’” Houa decided to add simple, contemporary leaves. The quilt will be sold in a shop, and Houa’s “pay” will be pieced work in return, such as the Mariner’s Compass quilt shown below the Bargello in Figure 3.¹⁹

Houa has become so close with her Mennonite friend, who is “like a second mom,” that she helps her complete quilts for the bi-annual auction for Dr. Morton’s clinic, which specializes in treating genetic diseases occurring within the Amish and Mennonite population. Pointing to a photograph of a Mariner’s Compass quilt, Houa explains, “We donated this one...I would do all the appliqué, come up with the pattern, her daughter would do the middle, and she does the star.” Houa admits that hers is a unique situation, and that Hmong and Mennonites do not often sit down together at the quilt frame. She says, “We always joke about this, a Mennonite lady and a Hmong lady...because mostly it’s just business. People would just work to appliqué a top for a Mennonite or an Amish lady, but they never have a friendship. They do have friends, but it’s just like an acquaintance.”

The stunning pieced and appliquéd quilts produced through this friendship are designs that appeal to the market and to the quiltmakers themselves. Sarah’s piecing virtuosity lends itself to the exacting points of the Mariner’s Compass. The Bargello quilt becomes a pieced canvas for Houa’s graceful appliqué. These patterns do not have cultural precedent within either woman’s community. The skills used to create them, however, bear cultural meaning. Piecing echoes the conservative Mennonite community’s



Figure 3

dedication to simplicity. Appliqué reflects the intricate fancy stitches used to communicate good stature and talent in Hmong society. The combination of the two techniques is a complimentary juxtaposition, as piecing has historically represented plainness and thrift, while appliqué has been used to display wealth.

As gifts, quilts play an important role within cultural traditions. Although so-called “Amish” appliqué quilts were marketed as traditional from the beginning, the designs were recently developed and did not have a long-standing history within the cultures of the women who made them. Tradition was fabricated in the interest of the marketplace. Over the years, however, these patterns have become adopted as part of the Mennonite and Hmong cultural traditions. Lo Mao presents family members with appliqué quilts, including a wedding quilt for each of her sisters and brothers. This is an enormous undertaking, as she has ten sisters. When asked what types of designs she makes for her family, she answers, “Mostly my family has those Country Bride designs because that’s what I like the most.” Mennonite women as well present family members with quilts. Emma comments, “As they get married, my daughters have eight quilts. The boys get two. My grandchildren get a quilt when they turn sixteen.”

As these women have used quilts to express their esteem for marriage and childbirth, quiltmaking as a form of employment helps women maintain a lifestyle that reflects the importance of these factors. Quiltmaking provides a means of income with a flexible schedule to women with family responsibilities to take into consideration. Unlike a typical “9 to 5” job, quiltmaking allows mothers and grandmothers to work from home, and the hours are flexible. Houa describes the quiltmaking activities of her friends and relatives as “something they can do while they are home watching the children to get a little income.” Emma suggests that piecing is more convenient for many of the younger Mennonite quiltmakers, “Young Mennonite women enjoy doing the piecing because you can pick it up and put it away easier. Also senior citizens. Young mothers and senior citizens still need to cook and clean for the men. You can do it in your spare time.” In addition to reinforcing the family unit within Mennonite households, quiltmaking also serves to preserve a sense of community and separateness from the outside world. There is no need to discard conservative dress in the interest of the workplace. The situation is quite the opposite, as the quilt industry is based on the buyer’s appreciation for the perceived simplicity of conservative life.

Quiltmakers can be involved in one or more stages of the creative process, choosing their level of involvement. Houa and her mother-in-law use sewing as a part-time occupation to generate extra income,

mostly sewing appliqué that will be quilted by a Mennonite or Amish person. Lo Mao has taken on quilting as a full-time job. She carries out all aspects of the process including piecing, appliqué and quilting, although she often commissions the quilting from an outside source. Quilts often pass through several hands before they reach the shops, including the hands of postal workers. The network of quiltmakers for Lancaster shops extends not only to western Pennsylvania but to other states as well.

In addition to reinforcing cultural interests, quilts can become vehicles for expressing personal affection and support, as illustrated in the following example. Houa became pregnant with twins. As a gesture of well wishes, Sarah offered to sew a pair of quilts for the babies. Houa chose fabrics in yellow and blue and Sarah set to work. However, Houa was unable to carry her babies to term. Sarah used the material for the twin quilts instead to make a single quilt for Houa's son. In addition, she made a memory quilt which she had signed by doctors and nurses from the hospital. It is a Bargello pattern to which Houa added the inscription "In Loving Memories of Long and Xiong Yang. April 2000. You will always be in our hearts. See you soon." When the memory quilt top was completed, Houa, Sarah and Sarah's daughter all came together and quilted it on a frame.

The finished quilt became a vessel of meaning in several ways. The time, energy and thought that Sarah invested in the making of the quilt reflect her reverence for the lives of the unborn twins. The participatory aspect of the process, with Houa and Sarah's daughter joining together to quilt, allowed these women to share in the grieving process. As a result, a positive memory became associated with the painful event. The medium of the quilt itself, born out of the need for comfort, contributes to the healing nature of this gift.

Thus far I have dealt with Hmong and Mennonite quilts that bear no outward reference to Hmong needlework. There is a group of quilts, however, that explicitly recognizes Hmong culture. Emma created a series that celebrates the harmonious relationship between Hmong, Mennonite and Amish quiltmakers in Pennsylvania. These quilts incorporate blocks of Hmong needlework into Amish-style quilts. She explains, "The Hmong brought me some squares and said I could purchase some and I would be helping people and I would have something to keep. So I did something with them."

Initially called "Hmong-Amish" quilts—despite the fact that Emma is herself Mennonite—then "Harmony Quilts," Emma is now satisfied with the clever play on words "Harmony A-Hmong the Cultures." The example you see pictured in Figure 4 is shown on the Witmer Quilt Shop display bed, where it rests sandwiched between dozens of other quilts waiting for the right buyer.



Figure 4

This “Harmony...” quilt is made in the block and bar style with green squares inside a red border with black corner pieces. Inside the squares are pink and black reverse appliqué “snail house” pattern blocks that were brought from Thailand by Hmong women. The resulting design is a harmonious combination of intricate decorative appliqué and bold, stark piecing. Through the combination of these elements, Emma’s “Harmony A-Hmong the Cultures” quilt reflects the complimentary relationship between Hmong, Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster County. As long as Lancaster County’s tourism relies on the mythical “Amish country quilt,” Hmong women will remain silent partners in the business of quiltmaking.

Quilts that combine traditional Hmong reverse appliqué with country piecing are a rare find. On the surface, most of the quilts you will find in Lancaster reveal little about their makers. Residents of Lancaster County are, at this point, familiar with local Hmong quiltmaking. Local interest newspaper articles have presented the topic as a colorful cultural juxtaposition. To much of the world, though, the connection between Hmong and Mennonites is the line of hill tribe textiles sold through the MCC’s Ten Thousand Villages.²⁰

Material culture lends voice to the otherwise unspoken. In the case of Hmong and Mennonite quilts, the objects embody the traditional skills of the quiltmakers and reinforce their cultural lifestyles. This significance is not readily apparent through casual observation of the “Amish” style quilts for sale in Lancaster County. The meaning within the quilts is vocalized when the material objects are engaged in conjunction with cultural history and personal testimony. It is

then that the quilts become poetic expressions of cultural identity and friendship.

Notes

- 1 Faubion, Trish. "The Amish and the Hmong: Two Cultures and One Quilt." *Pieceworks* 1 (1993). 26-35.
- 2 Hmong quiltmakers spend effort practicing their appliqué sewing for the local market rather than traditional Hmong sewing skills that are rapidly being forgotten among the children raised in the United States. Faubion also suggests that Amish women lose some of the separation from the world through selling the quilts to tourists.
- 3 Henry, Jean. "Hmong and Pennsylvania German Textiles: Needlework Traditions in Transition in Lancaster County." *Folk Art*.20 (1995): 40-46.
- 4 Hmong soldiers aided the U.S. in hindering the flow of Viet Cong supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In addition to serving as soldiers, they guarded and maintained mountaintop landing strips, aided wounded U.S. soldiers and fought off insurgents. When the Viet Cong-allied Pathet Lao came to power in Laos, the Hmong who served with the U.S. faced retaliation.
- 5 According to U.S. Census Data reported at <http://www.hmongcenter.org>, 494 Hmong people resided in Lancaster in 2000. For comparison, two of the largest Hmong communities are in Fresno, California (22,456) and Minneapolis-St.Paul (40, 606). One Hmong leader in Philadelphia informally stated that there are approximately 130 Hmong families in the Lancaster area.
- 6 Interview with Lo Mao Moua by Heather Gibson for the Alliance for American Quilts' *Quilters Save Our Stories* project. QSOS# PH02. Available online at <http://www.centerforthequilt.org>. All future Lo Mao Moua quotations in this article are taken from this interview.
- 7 The predecessors of quilts "as we know them today" were whole-cloth bed coverings that were available only to the wealthy who could afford the expensive, hand-decorated textiles.
- 8 Curated by Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof. This was not the only exhibit of its type, but it is the most highly publicized.
- 9 Interview with Emma Witmer by Heather Gibson for the Alliance for American Quilts' *Quilters Save Our Stories* project. QSOS#PH04. Available online at <http://www.centerforthequilt.org>. All future Emma Witmer quotations in this article are taken from this interview.
- 10 The precise beginnings of Hmong quiltmaking in Lancaster are unknown. It is understood that the Hmong community gradually became aware of quiltmakers and recognized the opportunity for employment. Faubion notes, "One day, the story goes, a Hmong woman in Lancaster County noticed a Quilts for Sale sign in the home of an Amish woman..."
- 11 Appliqué involves sewing fabric shapes onto a larger piece of fabric. Piecing, by contrast, is the technique of placing pieces of fabric side by side and sewing them together to create a solid surface.
- 12 Faubion and others note that the "Country Bride" pattern, designed by quilter Rachel Pellman and graphic artist Cheryl Benner for a special issue of *Bride* magazine, was actually the quilt that started the craze for appliqué.
- 13 Hmong needlework in China and Southeast Asia has been critiqued as some of the world's finest. Gina Corrigan provides an excellent history of Miao (Chinese term for Hmong) culture and a well illustrated explanation of Miao textiles. See: Gina Corrigan, *Miao Textiles from China* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001).
- 14 Appliqué wastes fabric because pieces are cut out in irregular shapes. With piecing, geometric shapes can be cut along the edges of the previous shape, allowing much less fabric to be left over.
- 15 Pronounced [pen dow], meaning "flowery cloth."
- 16 Interview with Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun by Heather Gibson for the Alliance for American Quilts' *Quilters Save Our Stories* project. QSOS#PH01. Available online at <http://www.centerforthequilt.org>
- 17 Pseudonym.
- 18 Interview with Houa Yang by Heather Gibson for the Alliance for American Quilts' *Quilters Save Our Stories* project. QSOS#PH03. Available online at <http://www.centerforthequilt.org>. All

future Houa Yang quotations in this article are taken from this interview.

19 To see Figure # 3 in colour visit <http://www.centerforthequilt.com/qsos/qsos.html>

20 Hmong artisans in Vietnam and Thailand have adapted their traditional patterns to create marketable crafts, such as purses and placemats, to sell through this humanitarian organization.