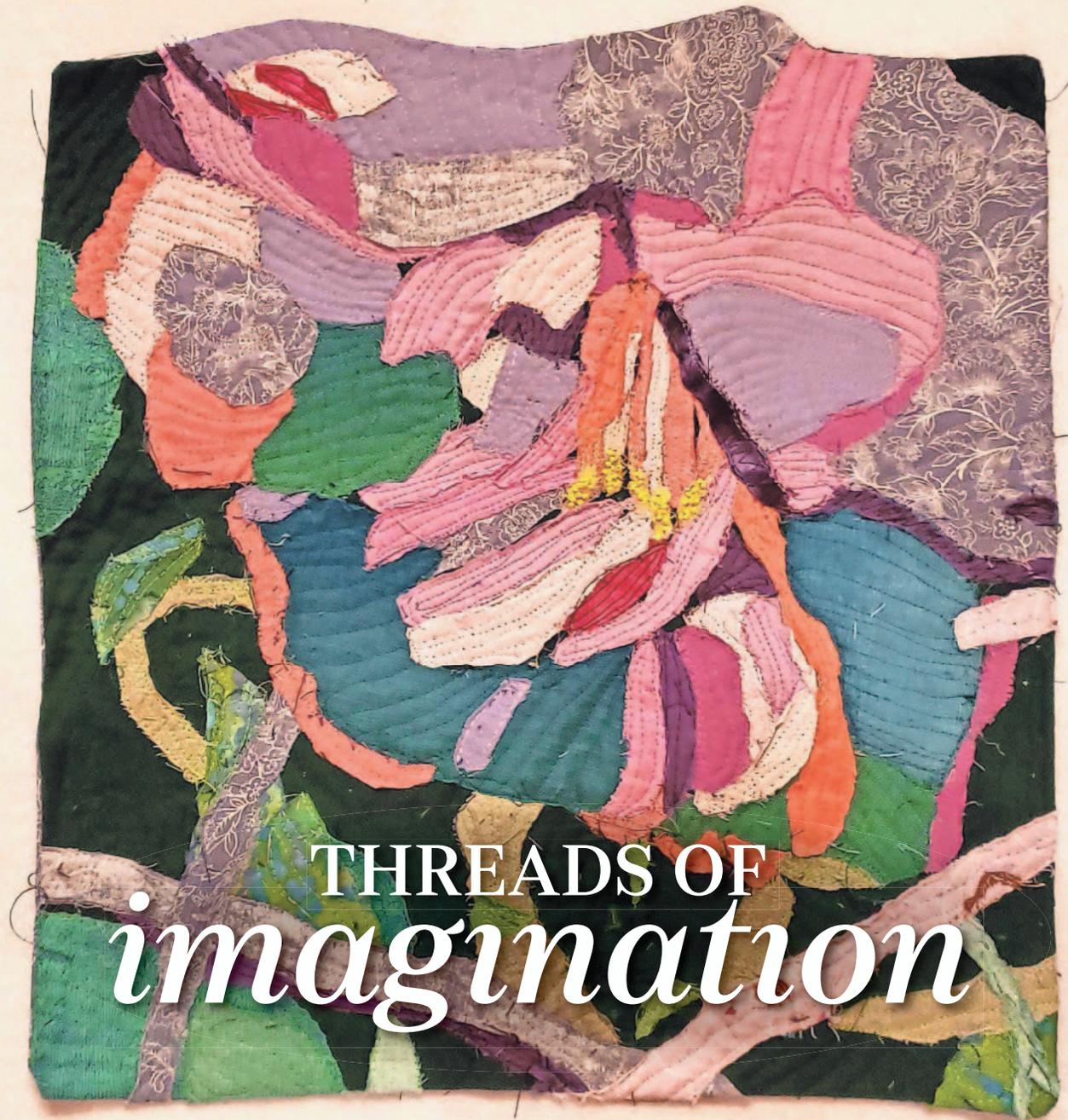


TLHLife



A quilt by Leslie Cohen, who also weaves baskets and sculptures.
LESLIE COHEN

THREADS OF *imagination*

Leslie Cohen's sculptural quilts swirl with energy

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

When she weaves, Leslie Cohen stirs up a little magic. Baskets and quilts appear under her fingertips. Her husband remarks it's almost as if she makes them from the air. In fact, she made her first quilt at her husband's request. It was of a log cabin, and in exchange for the quilt, they bought their first home. ■ She made another quilt for his birthday featuring squares of orchids, his favorite flower. Cohen wasn't as intrigued with the repetitive process it took to stitch the squares together. She found herself instead drawn towards art quilts, which allowed for more freedom. As an art quilter and retired educator, Cohen's perspective on art continues to be largely based in play. **See QUILTS, Page 4C**

Quilts

Continued from Page 1C

"I want art to be enjoyable and about discovery so that anyone can do it in their own way," says Cohen.

Cohen is part of the Studio Art Quilt Associates "Perspectives" exhibit at LeMoyné Arts. She joined SAQA a few years ago to get to know other art quilters from around the country. The organization has 3,000 members and 200 venues on six continents. LeMoyné Arts is a new venue added this year for quilters in the Florida Panhandle.

Cohen's piece in the exhibit, "Bound Together" combines her two favorite forms of visual art — basketry and quilting. The quilt centers on a knot at the bottom of a basket that she wove from passionflower vines.

"I took close up photos of the basket on my phone and got such cool imagery," says Cohen. "I went to my phone and played with filters so it would still look like wood, but the background is a periwinkle purple and the branches are deep violet."

In middle school, Cohen took sewing and weaving courses. She recalls a fashion show where she proudly showed off an A-line dress and skirt, solidifying her love for fiber. At George Washington University she took classes in printing and sculpture, but eventually completed her degree at the University of Miami.

When she took her first basketry class Cohen says she felt she had finally found her medium. She made and sold baskets, whipping them up in as little as a few hours. She learned from contemporary weaving masters and worked without an armature, or guiding form.

"They're called random weaving baskets," explains Cohen. "You make a globe with clothespins and you go in and out with whatever the reed wants to do. Then, it appears."

Cohen taught at Lincoln High School for seven years and Chiles High School for 13 years as an art educator. Her classes were in 3D, sculptural and ceramic art. While she taught, Cohen also maintained her own creative practices, often asking students for their critiques and thoughts on her artwork.

Her classroom was presented as an open lab meant for artistic development and experimentation. She would play games with students and wanted them to have fun while they learned various techniques. One class focused on Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí. Inspired by his work, Cohen had students make clay, glaze it, then take a hammer to their pieces and make a sculptural piece or mosaic.

"When I was teaching school, I always said that sculpture is so much more exciting than drawing pictures of flowers in vases," says Cohen. "You start with raw materials and they grow in your hands as you make it from what



Leslie Cohen's "Out of the Blue" quilt won an award with the Quilter's Unlimited Guild.

LESLIE COHEN

If you go

What: Perspectives: Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) Exhibition

When: Opening Reception 5-7:30pm Monday July 18, exhibit runs through August 31

Where: LeMoyné Arts, 125 Gadsden St.

Cost: Free for members, \$5 for non-members

Contact: For more information please call 850-222-8800 or visit <https://www.lemoyne.org/exhibitions.html>.

think of bed coverings, but art quilts can be sculptural pieces," says Cohen. "To me, an art quilt is more a narrative that tells a story."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

you see all around you."

Before retiring, Cohen took a workshop with Florida A&M University's Valerie Goodwin who taught an art quilt class based on architecture. This rekindled her love for fiber, as well as her inclination to make art without strict rules.

She joined the local Quilter's Unlimited Guild and has been a part of the sit and stitch group, Sew Arty, for many years. The support from these colleagues motivates her work, and each quilt is a new process. Cohen says she'll fight with herself mentally about what she wants to do before looking through photos and making illustrations based on what she sees.

"Most of my stuff is from nature which is easy to photograph these days because I take my phone with me and play with the filters," says Cohen. "I have a piece on display at the City Hall Gallery right now, called 'Fantasy Chameleon Flower' where I abstracted colors and textures."

Most of her quilts relate to a theme. One quilt weaves the eye of a hurricane out of hot colors, swirling it into a cacophony of texture that speaks to the idea of "growth." Another lightning storm quilt was featured as part of FSU's Summer League show.

Currently, Cohen is working on a piece that sculpts fibers into a three-dimensional space. Surrealism plays a large role in how she views imagery and incorporates it into the medium, as she did in her "Out of the Blue" quilt that won an award with the Quilter's Unlimited Guild.

"I looked at my hand and held it a certain way so I had surfers coming out of my fingers," describes Cohen. "The arm and hand were part of the waves."

Stylistically, Cohen challenges herself to always complete new tasks and techniques, such as stitching around rocks or altering colors and textures. She wants viewers to feel the need to reach out and touch her work as colors entice and make each piece come alive.

Cohen says she shares a little bit of herself with each quilt. She is excited for

the SAQA exhibition as it will serve to educate more of the community on the power of art quilts.

"When people think of a quilt they

TCC Manufactures Welding Professions

Special to the Democrat by Ayanna Young

The ability for students to work with their hands and build a variety of objects is why people enroll into the welding program at the Tallahassee Community College Kim B. Williams Advanced Manufacturing Training Center (AMTC). Dylan Sutton, the Welding Lab Assistant at the College said the small class sizes offered at TCC also attracts students who are looking for one-on-one training.

"Our class sizes are generally smaller and we intentionally structure them that way so they get better teacher-to-student ratios," Sutton said. "We also have night classes for almost all of our classes at AMTC. We purposefully schedule our classes later for working adults."

Sutton said the welding program allows for its graduates to excel in any environment. Some of the welding graduates currently work for welding unions and small businesses.

"With this trade you can go anywhere around the world with this skill set," Sutton said. "You can create



your own business and be completely independent. Students can attend the classes, excel and create their own future out of it."

For Sutton, he says it's really enjoyable to watch students have that 'light bulb' moment in class and finally grasp a concept. "At the Advanced Manufacturing Training Center, we're pushing the cutting edge," Sutton said. "We're trying to use the most up-to-date techniques and processes to give these people the best opportunity they have whenever they graduate."

The welding program ranges from nine months to a year depending on how quickly a student understands and progresses through each concept.

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