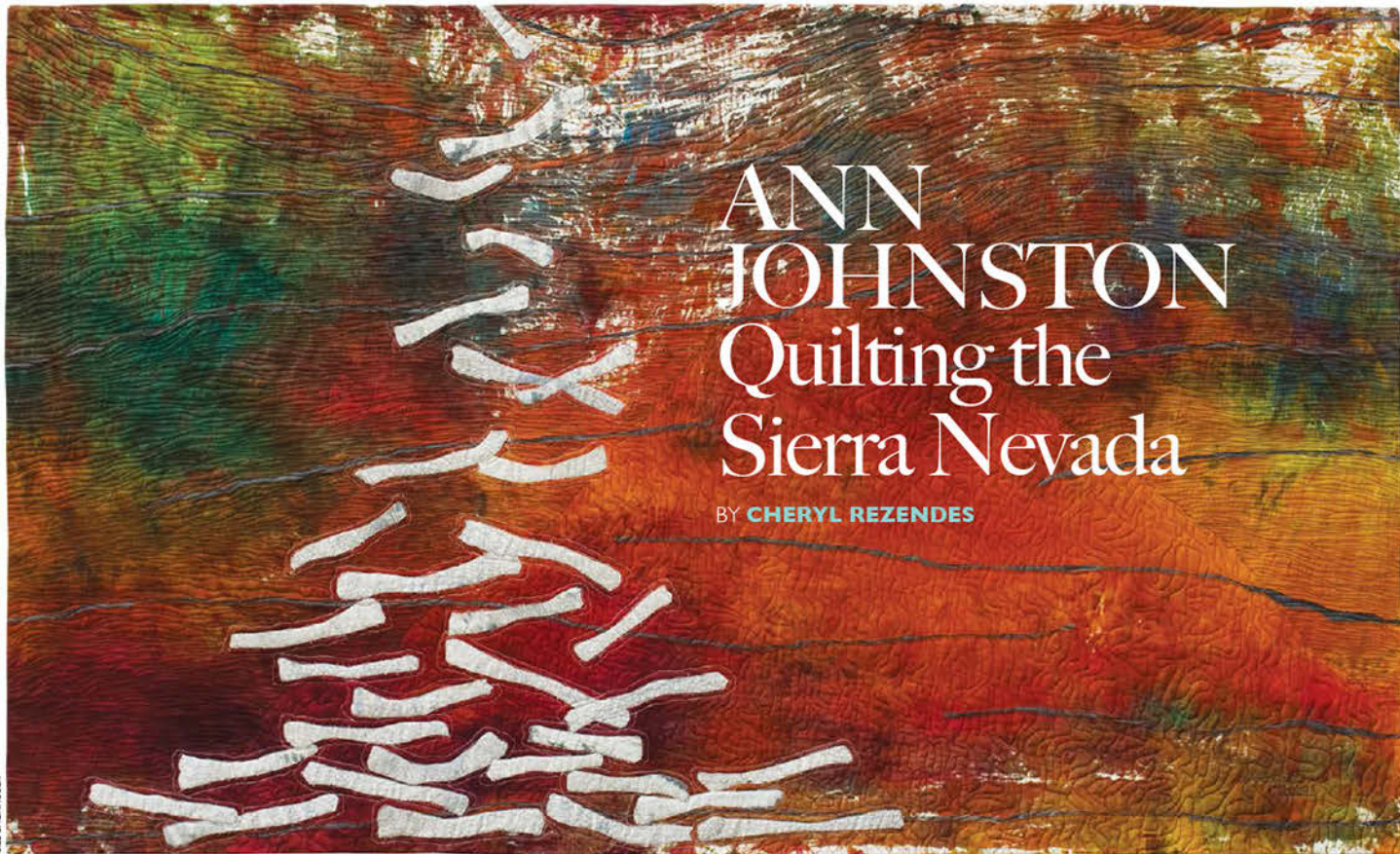


# ANN JOHNSTON

## Quilting the Sierra Nevada

BY CHERYL REZENDES



TOP: **Countless**; 2009; hand dyed cotton broadcloth; machine stitched; 34 x 56 in.

ABOVE: **Blue Lines with Orange Sky**; 2004; hand dyed silk; machine stitched; 20 x 27 in.

TOP RIGHT: **The Contact: Cross Polarized Gabbro**; 2014; hand dyed cotton sateen, hand and machine stitched; 85 x 25 in.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ann working on **Eureka Chimney**.

ON PAGE 48: **The Contact: Tuolumne Intrusive Suite**; 2013; hand dyed cotton sateen; hand stitched; 84 x 51 in.

THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAIN RANGE IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES is a mighty place. It is grand and replete with geological history that holds a special place in the heart and mind of Oregon textile artist Ann Johnston. Not only has Johnston hiked and camped among these great natural masterpieces but a mining claim near Tioga Pass, California, has been in Johnston's family since before a deed was created in 1881. Even the ghosts of Johnston's own ancestral past linger among the layers of mineral rich rock.

Johnston's most recent body of work, *The Contact: Quilts of the Sierra Nevada*, is about this majestic place and holds a mightiness of its own. As of this date, 17 art quilts, all measuring seven feet tall, comprise this wonderful and stately series. Each quilt tells a unique story and displays the artistic maturity of a maker who has spent years exploring and discovering

the many-layered nuances of hand-dyed cloth, surface design, and stitch.

The word "contact" refers to the touching of two or more entities, including where rocks of different content, age, and perhaps even origin come together. In the catalog for the collection, Johnston writes, "It is a place where you can see bands of color in the earth, mineral-rich rock layers that have been squeezed and heated between intrusions of light granite...dark meta-sedimentary, and meta-volcanic rocks." One of Johnston's sons, Scott Johnston, a geologist, has encouraged Ann's interest in geology and taught her a whole new vocabulary. Johnston was quite simply, and in her own words "blown away" with what she saw through his camera-mounted microscope that uses cross polarized light to see the minerals present in a black rock called Gabbro. Her quilt *Cross Polarized Gabbro* is the result.

*The Contact: Tuolumne Intrusive Suite* is a wonderful example of Johnston's ability to not only transfer into cloth and stitch what she sees when she looks closely at a piece of granite, but also to successfully enlarge it to a size that dwarfs the viewer, thus giving way to the grand scale of her larger subject matter—the mountains themselves.

Because of the size and scope of this new work, Johnston's process for creating art quilts has changed. "I am far more focused on the original idea now," explained Johnston in a recent interview. For projects in the past, she simply chose material from her fabric storage area where she has over 2000 yards of hand dyed fabric at any given time. But these expansive works require larger pieces of cloth. So Johnston is manipulating, painting, monotype printing, and dyeing fabric specifically for a project. "I am not devoted to a technique," stated Johnston. "I'll use any surface design, sewing, or appliqué technique necessary to achieve the visual idea."

Johnston is well known among fiber artists for her expertise in dyeing. In addition to teaching, she has published two respected instructional books on dyeing, *Color By Accident* and *Color By Design*. She has also produced a DVD version of *Color By Accident*. In *The*



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*Quilters Book of Design*, (Second Edition, 2008) Johnston guides her readers, new or experienced, through the complex maze of design principles for art quilters.

Johnston has been making art quilts with her hand dyed fabrics since 1983. A sewer since childhood, Johnston continued through high school and her undergraduate years at Stanford University where she earned a degree in literature, as well as while she was at the University of Oregon getting a masters degree in geography. The idea of making quilts and sewing by hand developed out of Johnston's two years in Peru with her husband as a Peace Corp volunteer. Without access to a machine she made do with needle and thread, and fell in love again with cloth and stitch.

Johnston's quilts have been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. Her workshops

and lectures often accompany those exhibits. When asked if and how teaching influences her work, Johnston poignantly stated that, "It's a healthy thing to do—to get out and give. . . . And I never come home without having learned something significant myself."

*The Contact: Quilts of the Sierra Nevada* opened at the Martin Museum in Texas, and was shown in Stiges, Spain, and Birmingham, England, in 2014. The collection will be on display at the University of California Merced Gallery through March 20, 2015. To learn more about Johnston's art quilts and other projects, visit her website at [www.annjohnston.net](http://www.annjohnston.net).

*Cheryl Rezendes* is a writer, teacher, and fiber artist whose fine and wearable art have been exhibited in galleries and boutiques throughout the US. She is the author of *Fabric Surface Design*. [www.CherScapes.com](http://www.CherScapes.com)



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