

# Minimalism

When less is more

by Patty Kennedy-Zafred

Order, simplicity, and harmony were among the theme words used to inspire artists submitting quilts for SAQA's newest exhibition, *Minimalism*, premiering at the European Patchwork Meeting in Alsace, France, in September 2023. SAQA members responded in a multitude of ways, creating works that reflected the importance of line, shape, form, and color.

Juried by internationally renowned Canadian artist Dorothy Caldwell, *Minimalism* features the work of forty-three artists from around the world. Formally trained as a painter, Caldwell early in her career was familiar with the concept of this austere abstract art style but was influenced to consider textiles in her

own work after viewing the 1971 exhibition of traditional quilts at the Whitney Museum of American Art embodying stripes, squares, and daring colors. She considered this jurying experience as a new opportunity to consider Minimalism's relevance in the modern world of art, through the lens of contemporary art quilts.

Art quilts, and the techniques used to design and create them, have evolved significantly during the past fifty years, and although simplicity in line, tone or geometry is evident in Caldwell's selections, so too are sophisticated forms of surface design, quilting, and pattern.

Color takes center stage in several pieces, including Joanne Alberda's *Blue Line*. Hand-dyed fabric, mixed with commercial black cotton, creates a dynamic vertical curtain of movement and mood.

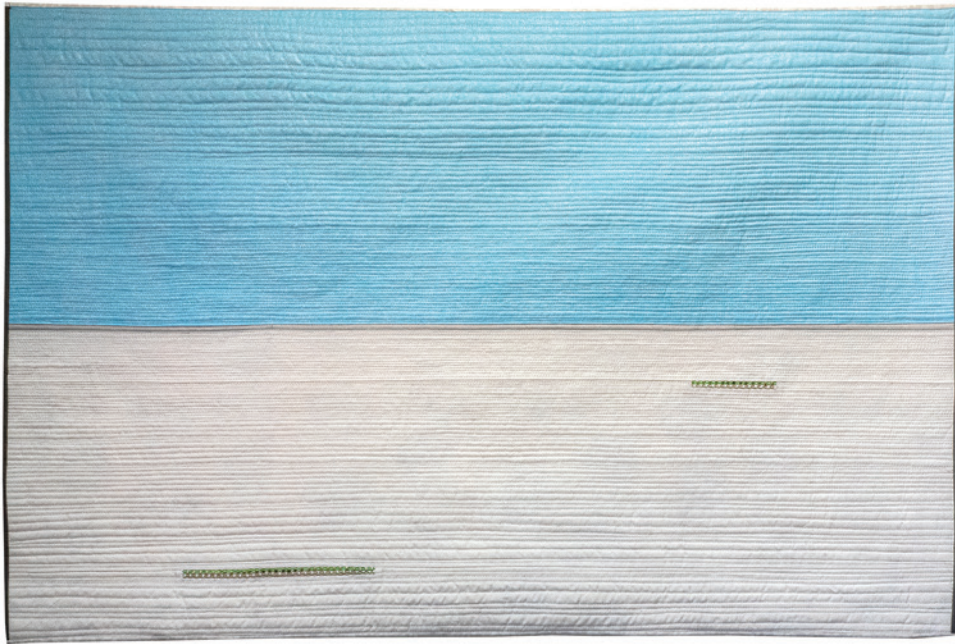
## Joanne Alberda

### Blue Line

47 x 93 inches (119 x 236.2 cm), 2021







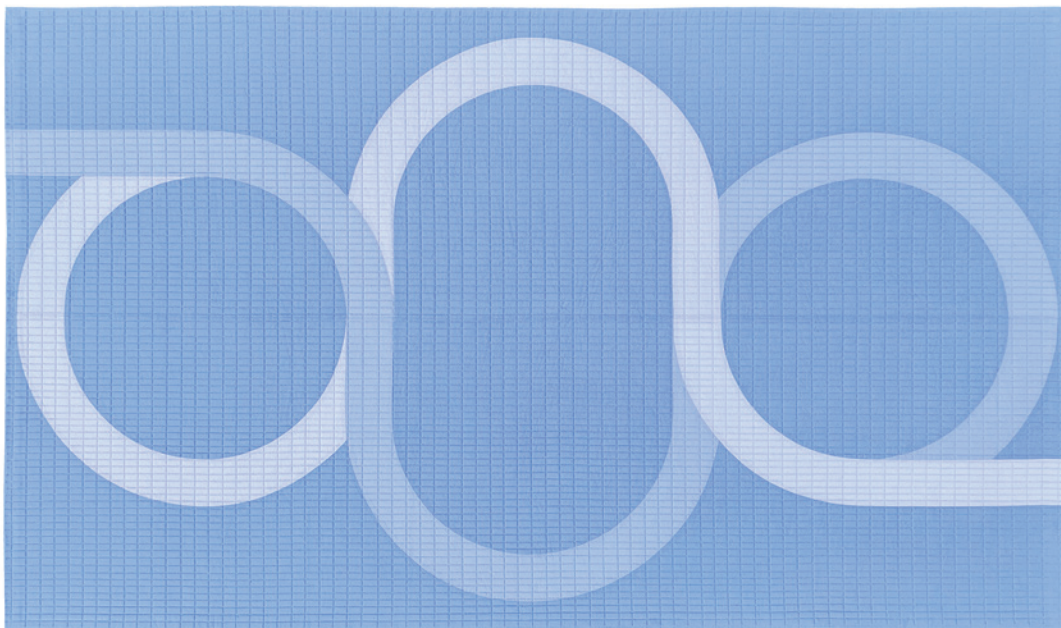
**Jill Kerttula**  
**Spring Emerges in the Midwest Fields**  
30 x 42 inches (76 x 107 cm), 2022

Closer inspection of the blue areas reveals patterning in the Procion dye, resulting in a dimensional appearance as if the fabric were rippling in motion.

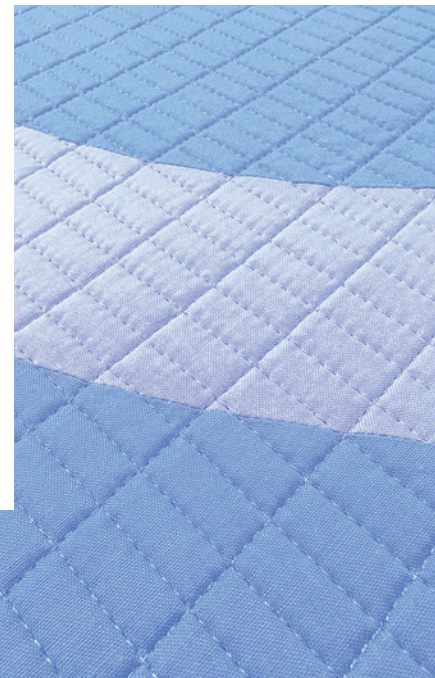
Jill Kerttula relies on the simplicity of two horizontal bands of color in *Spring Emerges in the Midwest Fields*, her reflection on the expanses of Midwest farmlands beginning to emerge from winter. Small strips of green peek through the snow, and intense

lines of quilting create a surface that truly results in “miles of barren beauty.”

Curves and the application of brilliant color shine in Kelly Spell’s *Celestial Swirl*, part of her ongoing series that explores movement and energy. The muted yet vibrant color palette glistens with the addition of metallic thread, as the overlapping curves lead the eye from one side of the quilt, around, and back to the other edge.



**Kelly Spell**  
**Celestial Swirl**  
38 x 65 inches (96 x 165 cm), 2022







**Kathy York**  
**Conversations**  
33 x 52 inches (132 x 84 cm), 2020



**Cindy Grisdela**  
**Balancing Act**  
41 x 42 inches (104 x 107 cm), 2022  
photo by Gregory R. Staley







**Susan J. Lapham**

**Playland #1**

82 x 83 inches (208 x 211 cm), 2020

Kathy York's overlapping curves of color refer to an abstraction of talking and listening, as multiple bands of color play across the field, some overlapping, shifting tone in the visual interaction. York created *Conservations* as a whole-cloth quilt, painted with Procion dyes in stunning precision.

Cindy Grisdela explores the relationships between large curved shapes and open negative space in *Balancing Act*, which seems to topple outside of the boundary of the quilt. Grisdela cut all of the shapes freehand, using the rotary cutter as a drawing tool. She then filled in the negative space with dense stitching.

From a distance, *Playland #1* by Susan J. Lapham attracts the viewer for a closer look, revealing countless tiny pieces of fabric, stitched together to form squares and rectangles in subtle monochromatic black and white, resulting in a geometric puzzle. Lapham considers this piece a “unique juxtaposition of bold and graphic and dazzlingly complex, yet minimalist, design.”





**Heidi Koenig**

**Can you see me?**

72 x 23 x 13 inches (184 x 54 x 34 cm),  
2022

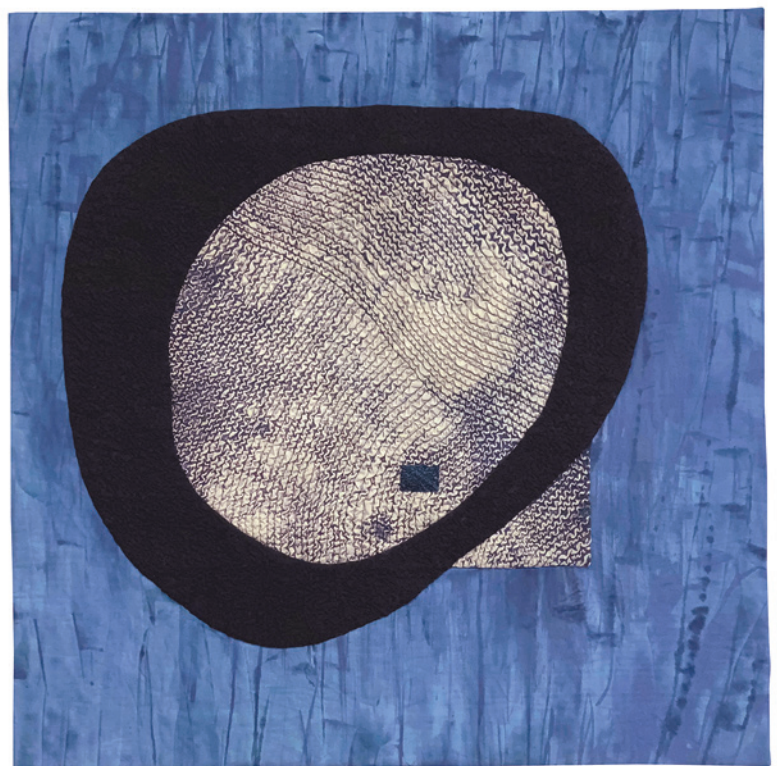




Experimentation led to success for Heidi Koenig, as she worked through the concept for her piece, *Can you see me?* Playing with light and dark colors on a long panel, she discovered that, by turning the panel into a three-dimensional loop, a simple abstract figure appeared. By applying discharge paste on black cotton fabric, along with black solid fabric, she made an intriguing textural field that brings additional interest to the innovative final shape of this quilt.

Unique use of surface design techniques is evident in *Perinatal Depression* by Karen Rips, who relied on discharge and hand-dyed fabric to create a tactile work featuring large areas of manipulated ripples of fabric. She notes that the tactile nature of fiber is the “perfect medium to abstract or simplify ideas and images into basic shapes, lines, and textures to convey my thoughts.”

*Minimalism* will undoubtedly create a bold, appealing exhibition in the many upcoming venues where it will travel through 2026, providing additional inspiration in the approaches and techniques on view. As Dorothy Caldwell concludes in her juror’s statement, “Multiple interpretations of ‘Minimalism,’ in the dynamic world of the Art Quilt, challenge viewers to experience a movement rooted in the 1960s in a thoroughly modern context.”



**Karen Rips**

**Perinatal Depression**

40 x 40 inches (101.6 x 101.7 cm), 2020

photo by Ted Rips