

MJ Kinman's Diamond Quilts



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"When people ask me what I do, I like to tell them I make the biggest diamonds in the world. But instead of working with the hardest substances on earth, I work with the softest... cloth."

– MJ Kinman

We are honored to have MJ Kinman as our newest [Sulky Featured Artist](#). If you haven't gotten a chance to see her amazing work, you must [check out her website!](#) Her beautiful gem-inspired quilts are intricate and unique in every way! Her passion for quilting shows throughout every single piece she creates. Because she uses [Sulky](#) products, you may even see one of her quilts in the Sulky booth at one of the quilt shows! ☐

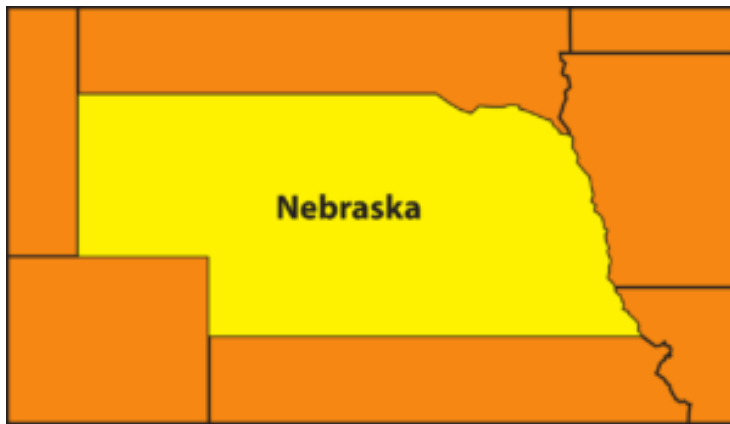


Titled: "I'd Rather Have Roses On My Table Than Diamonds On My Neck"

We got a chance to ask her a few questions, such as, what inspires her, where she's from, how she got started, and more!

Where were you born?

I was born in Hastings, an amazing town in the middle of the Nebraska cornfields. If you take a map of the contiguous United States and fold it into equal quarters, Hastings is a straight shot north about 60 miles of those fold lines. It truly is the heartland.



How did you grow up (i.e. in a city, on a farm, raised by wolves)?

My family lived in town. Hastings was the perfect size for kids back then – small enough so that you could get just about anywhere on your bike if you really wanted to and big enough so that there was plenty to explore. My favorite places were the Hastings Public Library and the House of Yesterday, our local museum.

When did you first know you wanted to be an artist/designer?

I knew I loved color and creating things as a little girl. I kept a running list of all the color combinations I loved, but could never decide on my favorite. One day it might be the green of the trees against the blue sky. Another day it was the bright pink of my fuzzy slippers on the dark black bathroom rug. But the one that still makes me crazy to this day is the sight of a storm coming across a sunlit wheat field in July. I'll stop the darn car any day to watch that.

As much as I loved color and making things, I never thought it would be a career for me. I had a terrible time in college figuring out what I wanted to do. I ended up becoming a social worker for the first part of my career and then jumped into corporate America as a project manager. All the while, though, I was quilting.

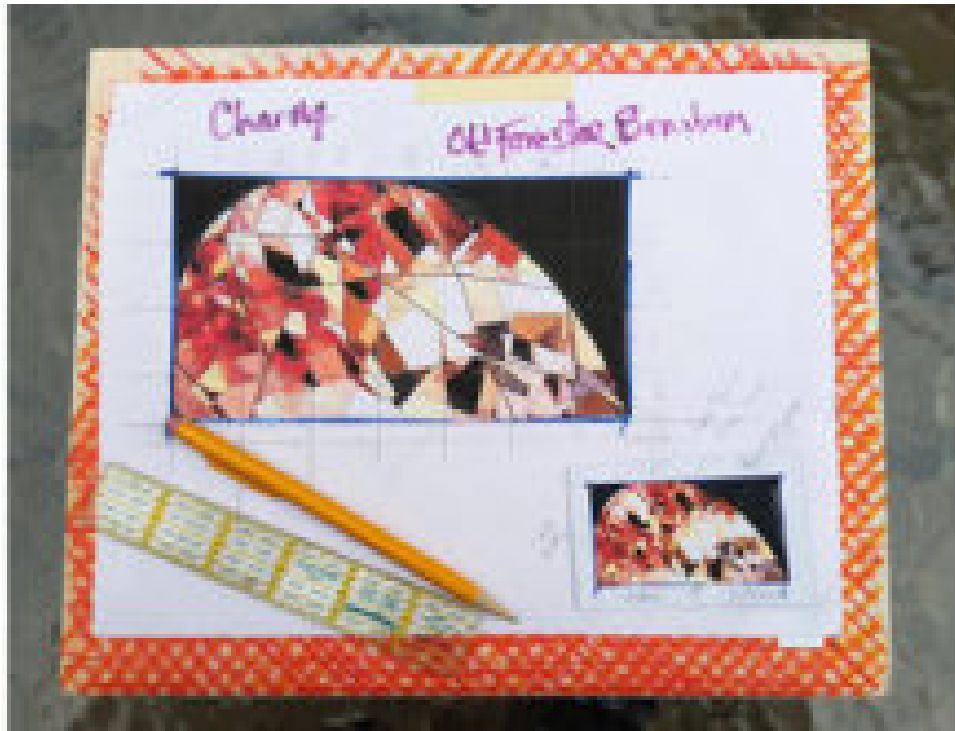


“Copper Queen” Series: “Bourbon Diamonds”

How did you get started in the Sewing/Textile Industry?

While I'm just now joining the industry, I've been sewing since I was 8. A group of us formed a 4-H club as 5th graders and I kept up with that until I was in junior high. I entered sewing projects and did cooking demonstrations at the county and state fairs.

I learned to quilt in 1987. I moved into my first apartment and wanted to hang a quilt on one of the walls to brighten up the place. My mom and I asked one of her friends to teach us how to quilt, so in 1987 she and I spent every Wednesday evening at Gay's house putting together our wall samplers. That was it. I was hooked.



Title: "Char #4" in progress. Series: "Bourbon Diamonds"



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Do you have any professional training or are you self-taught?



“Char #4” in progress. Series: “Bourbon Diamonds”

I haven't had any professional training. I'm primarily self-taught and love taking classes with the experts and learning new techniques. That's how I figured out how to create my diamond quilts. I have to admit that I'm NOT an expert sewist. By the time I first pick up the scissors or sit down at the machine on any given day, I'll have already committed a dozen grievous sewing sins. I like to tell people who are interested in taking my classes that if they are looking to learn how to be an expert sewist, please, please, please do not take my classes! However, if they want to learn the techniques that I use to make my diamonds, I would love to share that with them. You know, one of my favorite things about teaching is that I learn so much from the participants. I definitely benefit, too.

What inspires you?

Oh my, lots of things. Clearly, diamonds and colored gemstones are my biggest source of inspiration now and have been for the past 20 years. The geometry of the facets and the flow of light and color across the face of beautiful gemstones captivate me. My recent work has taken a turn toward the abstract as I've discovered the stunning landscapes inside gemstones. These little compositions of line, shape, and color that you find deep in the facets has really caught my attention. I'm excited about sharing that personal discovery – and how to facilitate that with any image – with others.



“Lila” Series: “Angle of Repose”

But, truly, I'm inspired by others who are pursuing their passion. People who are moving in sync with their personal vision have an energy and honesty about them that inspires me. That's why we're here! I believe that every single one of us arrives on Earth with a mission and purpose. And when we

aren't pursuing our specific purpose, life can get very dark and "un-fun". I've had to learn that the hard way.

I know Sewing and textile art isn't your only hobby, what other things do you like to do to express yourself creatively?

Making my quilts is my primary creative focus right now and has been for the past 30 years. But there's also a book of historical fiction – a mystery – bouncing around my brain. The idea arrived a few years ago. So while I'm charting, piecing, and quilting my diamonds, I also like to listen to what I call my "research" on Audible – books about early religious groups and manuscripts, crazy stuff on quantum physics and astrophysics, and the history of lost and hidden art. I'm starting to write, but there's a long way to go. We'll see what comes of all of it.



“Communion” detail shot. Series: “Angle of Repose”

How do you come up with your designs and collections?

I’m inspired by images of gorgeous gems in books, magazines, and online. When I first started doing this work in the mid-1990’s, I was living in a log cabin in the woods of Kentucky. It was the early days of the Internet and we only had extremely slow dial-up. Trying to pull up an image on the PC was agonizing. Now, of course, it’s much easier. I also have a friend who is a gem dealer who has given me express permission to use any of her gemstones as inspiration.

My current series is called Bourbon Diamonds. It’s inspired by amber-colored gems and Kentucky’s amazing bourbon makers. I really enjoy the research for this series!



Titled: “Devil’s Due” Series: “Bourbon Diamonds”



“Kentucky Honey” Series: “Bourbon Diamonds”

What is your mission statement?

Love God, do good, have fun.



“Angel’s Share” Series: “Bourbon Diamonds”

What is your vision for the future?

Joy-filled work.

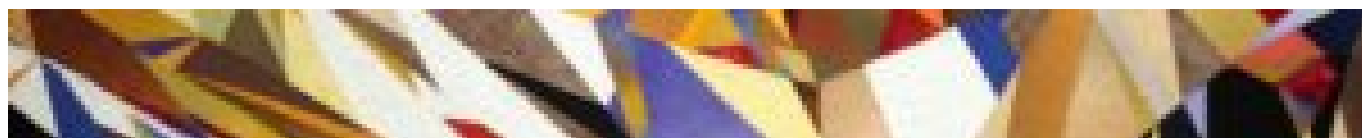
What’s your next big project?

It’s been a dream of mine since I started creating the diamond quilts to do a series inspired by the National Gem Collection, the gemstones at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History. My friend the gem dealer put me in touch with a curator in their Mineral Department and I received the green

light to move forward! As she mentioned, the National Gem Collection belongs to the people of the United States, and we can use them as inspiration for whatever we'd like to do. The caveat of course is that you can't use their original images for your own use (which is true for any image, or course). So creating work inspired by the Hope Diamond, the Blue Heart Diamond, the Hooker Emerald, and other gems in the collection is what's on deck for 2018.



MJ's work has been exhibited in galleries, museums, and national juried competitions. Her gems were recently featured by the Women's Jewelry Association at the 2017 Awards for Excellence Gala in New York City. As well as being featured in national publications and local media, her work will be featured in a PBS series that is airing in 2018.



Want to see more? Check out [her website](#) and give her a follow on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram!](#)