

in the
SPOTLIGHT
Jeanette
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“Leaps of faith. This describes my 30 years in art quilting. I had always loved painting, sewing, and making all kinds of art, but not until I was writing my Ph.D. dissertation in epidemiology did I decide to make the leap to becoming a full-time, professional artist. I have never looked back. Every day I work in a variety of media, experiment with techniques, collaborate with interesting people, and express my love of Judaism.



The biggest leap—from academia to artist—was in 1984 as my husband and I were preparing for our wedding. I taught myself how to make our ketubah, a Jewish marriage contract. Other couples began asking for them and a career was born.

While fulfilling these commissions, I explored paper cutting's rich Jewish history. I began incorporating this into my art, and also started dyeing the silks to go behind the paper cuts. The excitement of dyeing silks and

working with interesting fabrics led to my first set of Torah covers. (The Torah—a parchment scroll of the Five Books of Moses—is the central concept and ritual object in Judaism. Traditionally, Torahs are dressed in beautiful mantles.) My friend Amanda Ford, an accomplished Maryland quilt artist, and I made a set of seven Torah covers depicting Seven Days of Creation. Photographs of those Torah covers were featured in national publications and so began additional commissions. Over the past 20 years I have made commissioned Torah covers, ark curtains, huppahs, wall hangings, and other fiber art for more 350 synagogues, schools, and community centers around the world.

All of my commissioned art involves working with small or large groups of people, each person with



Left, Torah covers for Temple Chai, Long Grove, Illinois. Below, Torah covers for the Community Synagogue, Port Washington, N.Y.



an opinion about what he or she wants the art to look like. The skills that have served me best have little to do with the art itself. I rely on listening (the most important skill!), remaining both open to ideas and yet

strong enough to bring those ideas to a cohesive center, and communicating effectively what the art will look like when it is completed. Only half of my time is actually making art; the rest is spent communicating with clients and running my business.

Each commission has its own distinctive parameters. When a funeral home wanted wall hangings for its chapel, I carefully kept the imagery universal and non-specific. I took photographs of nature in that

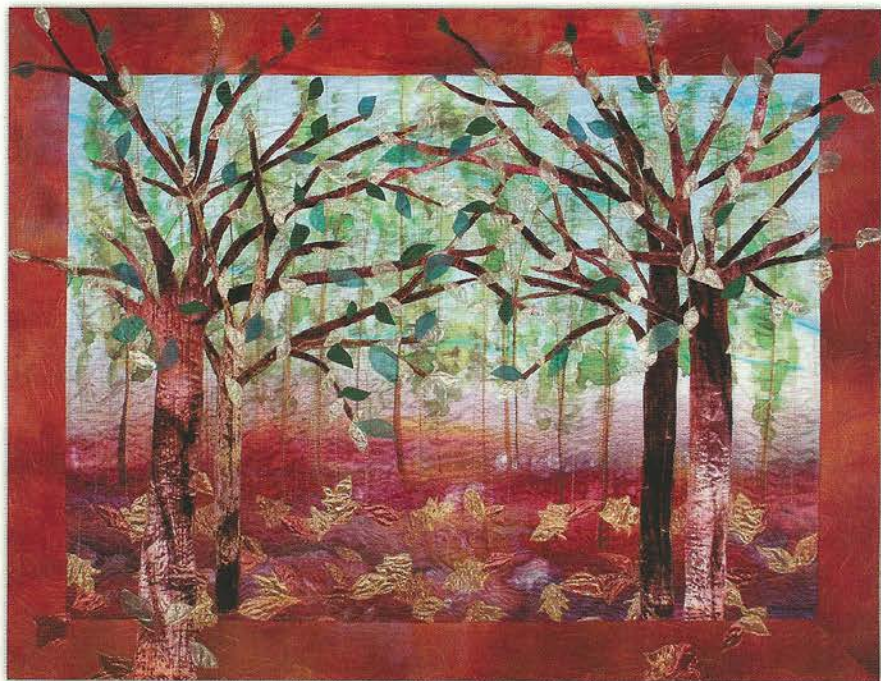
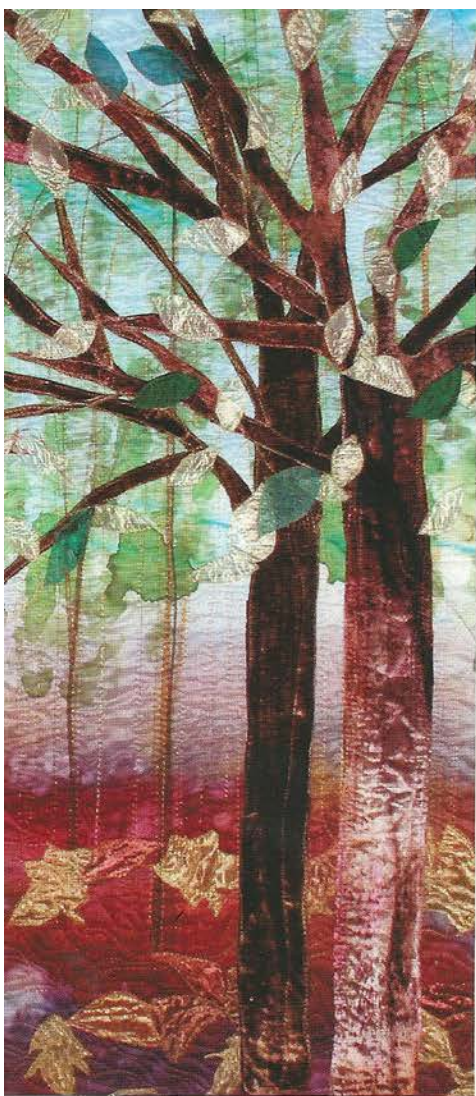


“Light from the sky or windows shines through the wedding canopy to the bride and groom.”



community and highlighted the muted colors of the chapel's interior. The wall hangings were made of wholecloth, dyed and painted, and embellished with cording.

I continue to be interested in working with new media. Last year a synagogue in Massachusetts commissioned new ark doors. (The ark is the cabinet in the sanctuary that houses the Torahs.) First, I made a large quilted wall hanging from hand-dyed silk and metallic cording. I took high-resolution photographs of the completed wall hanging and imported them into my computer's photo manipulation program to make them work with the glass doors. Translucent film of the quilted fiber



Opposite, top, huppah for Sarah and Michael Brasky; bottom, "Menorah."

This page, wall hangings for Robert E. Shure Funeral Home, New Haven, Connecticut.

art on the glass gives an effect that is a combination of both stained glass and fiber art.

I love combining techniques to make a new art. I have made many hand-painted silk, quilted huppahs (marriage canopies), but for my daughter and son-in-law's wedding I wanted something unique. Their huppah (82" x 82") is made of hand-cut faux suede sewn onto a sheer background. Light from the sky or windows shines through the wedding canopy to the bride and groom. I have since adapted this combination paper

cut/fabric technique to make quilted Torah covers, ark curtains, and metal doors and gates.

I love discovering new tools for fiber art. A synagogue in Baltimore commissioned an ark curtain to depict the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, a seminal moment in Judaism. Piecing dyed silks did not give the ethereal look desired. After some experiments with sodium alginate (gelatin that thickens dye), I painted the curtain as a single, large watercolor painting on habutai silk, quilted it as a wholecloth, and finally





Below and detail left, ark curtain for Chizuk Amuno Congregación, Baltimore, Maryland.

embellished the clouds and light streaming above Mount Sinai.

Each new commission brings thrills and possibilities. I just completed the Judaic art for a sanctuary's new bima (altar)—large metal ark doors using a paper cut style, brightly colored quilted Torah covers that show through the doors, and a glass Eternal Light that hangs overhead.

Every day, as I leap out of bed and into my studio, I remind myself how fortunate I am to be able to do this work. ”

Jeanette is the author of *THE ART OF JEANETTE KUVIN OREN*, which celebrates her 30 years as a Judaic artist. To learn more about Jeanette and her work, visit kuvinoren.com.

