

CAROL SHINN: RE-PRESENTING REALITY

BY JAMIE CHALMERS

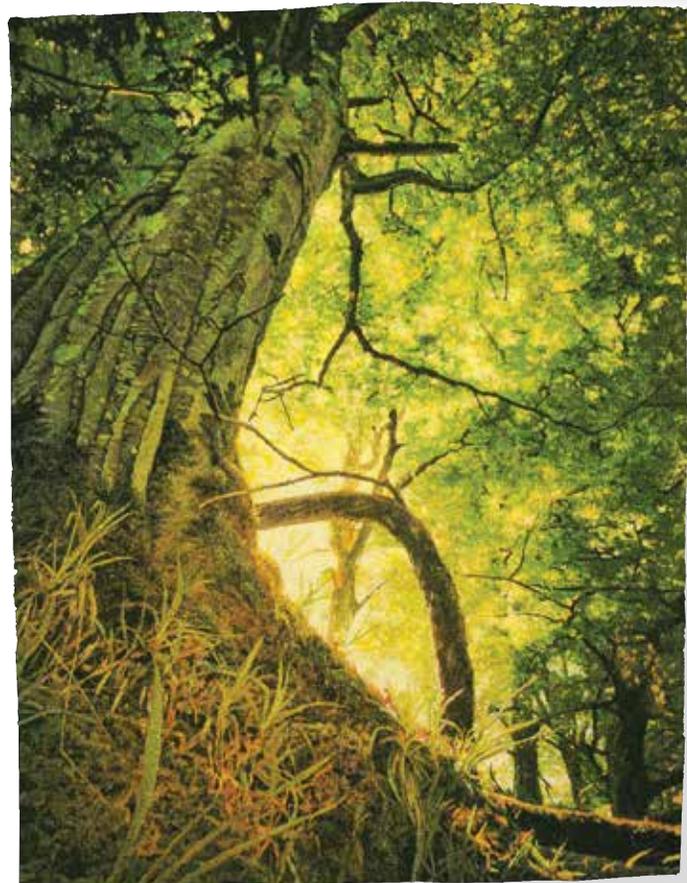
WE LIVE IN AN AMAZING WORLD FILLED WITH EVERYDAY MIRACLES that we take for granted. Constant cycles of life and death appear around us, and while their familiarity might not breed contempt, rarely do we spend the time truly appreciating them, let alone appreciating our own part in this existential equation.

Carol Shinn has spent more than 25 years paying attention to her environment and recreating reality through the medium of free machine embroidery. Her photorealistic artworks are jaw-dropping, capturing texture, light, shade, and surface with thousands of tiny, color-blended stitches.

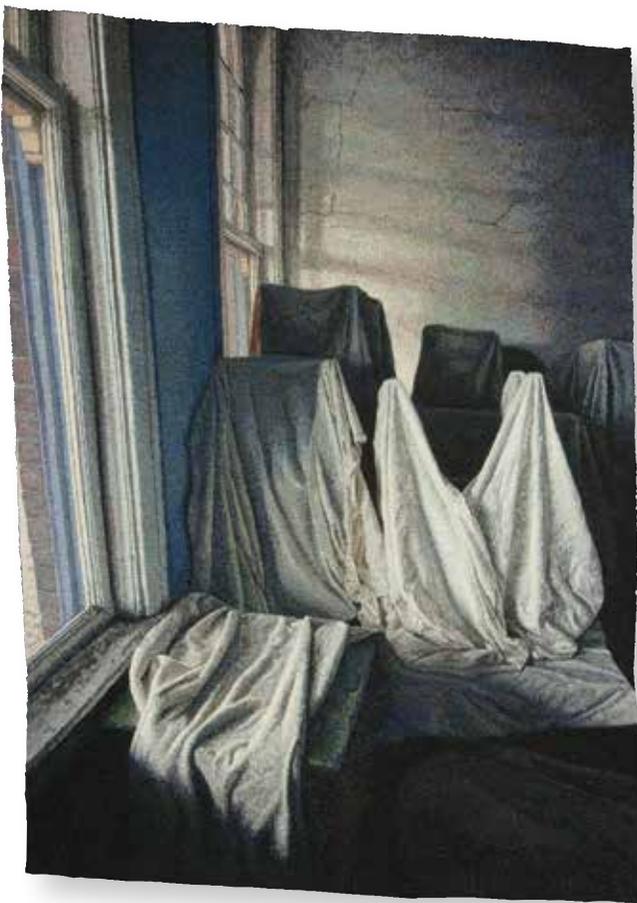
Shinn's self-confessed obsession with exactitude has earned her

global recognition and her works are held in numerous public and private collections. They feature snapshots of the American wilderness, both urban and rural—vignettes that capture the wonder of the normal in remarkable detail. Light and shade combine with natural decay and the passage of time to beautify the surroundings. By concentrating on these moments, Shinn stops us in our tracks and gives us the opportunity to pay full attention.

“Realistic work, like photography, sums up and captures one moment in time. To share this moment and capture the essence of the place, a certain amount of editing must occur. The intention, the editing, the focus and viewpoint are what separate it from daily living. The single frozen



TOP: **Doorway Still Life**; 2016; embroidery; 15.25 x 20.5 in., 22.25 x 27.5 in. framed
RIGHT: **Beyond the Tree**; 2016; embroidery; 19.5 x 15.25 in., 26.5 x 22.25 in. framed



THIS PAGE ABOVE: **Shrouded and Waiting**; 2015; embroidery; 21 x 14.75 in., 28 x 21.75 in. framed

moment is different from being in a place and moving through it. The maker becomes the arbitrator of what is chosen for the record," she says.

Shinn's process begins with digital photography that is transferred to fabric and then stitched over using a manual sewing machine. The simple act of dropping the feed dogs is what unlocks the potential, but Shinn's skill in recreating light and color is what produces the magic. The transitions of depth and texture are created using blending techniques akin to silk shading, with multiple colors being skillfully selected and placed in precise proximity to one another.

Whether it's daylight beaming through the forest in *Beyond The Tree*, or evening shade coming through a window in *Shrouded and Waiting*, the realism of the environment is brought forth through this process with stunning effect. We see the

images and appreciate their natural beauty, yet Shinn's technique is so mind-blowing that it makes us look at the image in more depth. This, in turn, makes us look at the environment in more detail and offers us the chance to reflect on our own state of being.

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Shinn cites the nature writer Edward Abbey as a significant influence; his book *Desert Solitaire* reflects on the importance of the surface, rather than the underlying reality, as the latter is hard to



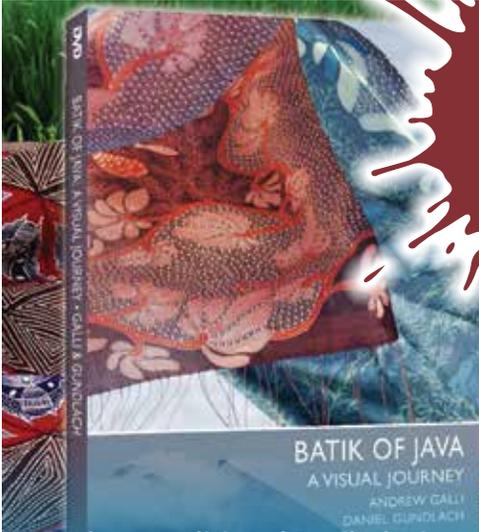
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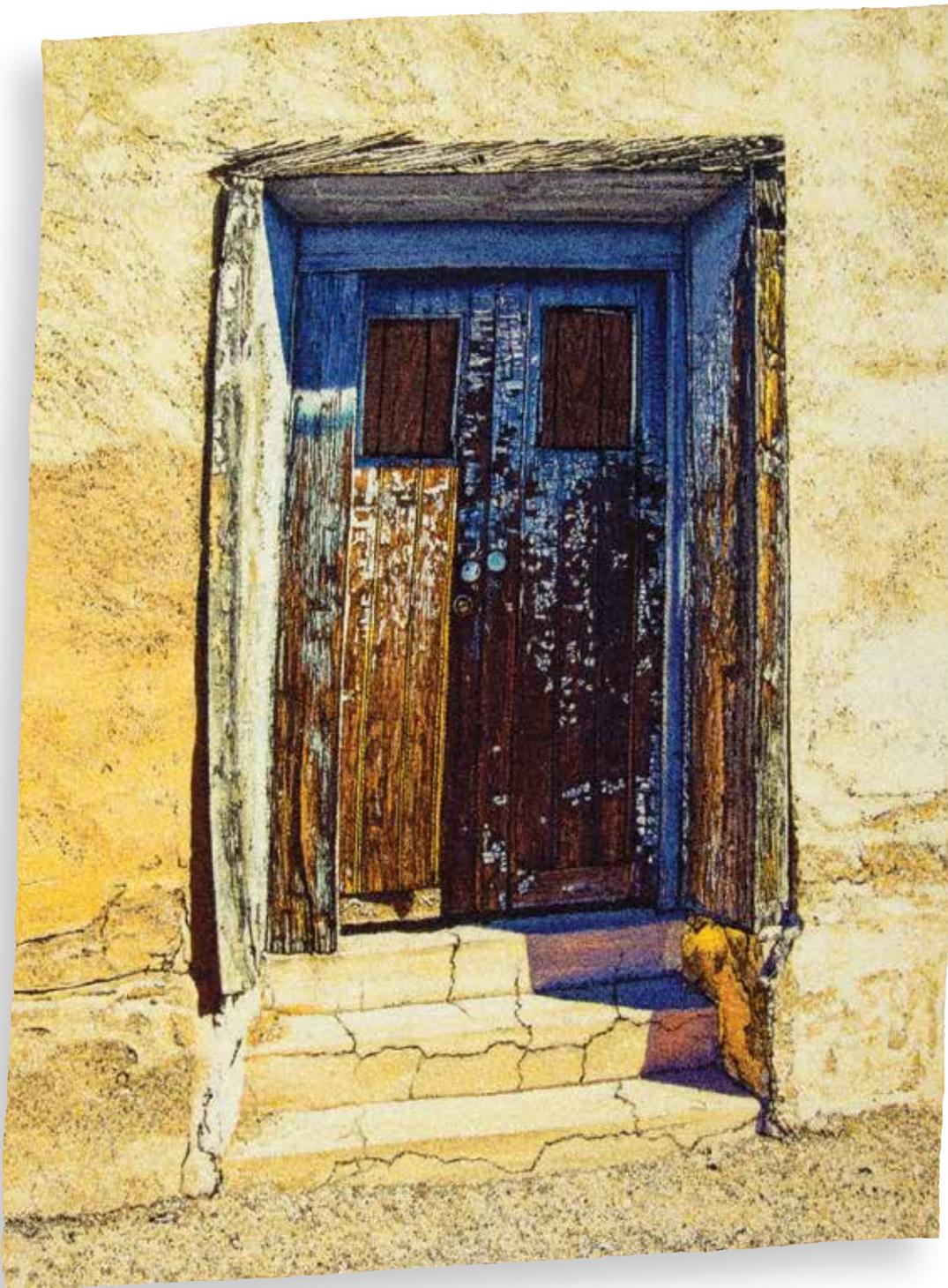
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I have noticed brief moments when seeing, being, and making coalesce to some transcendent point, or I become the thing I am stitching.



qualify while the former is that which we experience. Shinn chooses to explore the face value of the environment, rather than comment on the mood or meaning of the image. This forces the viewer to appreciate the visual aesthetic but removes preconception from it; the peeling paint and worn floorboards of *Empty Hotel Room* are presented without any story or

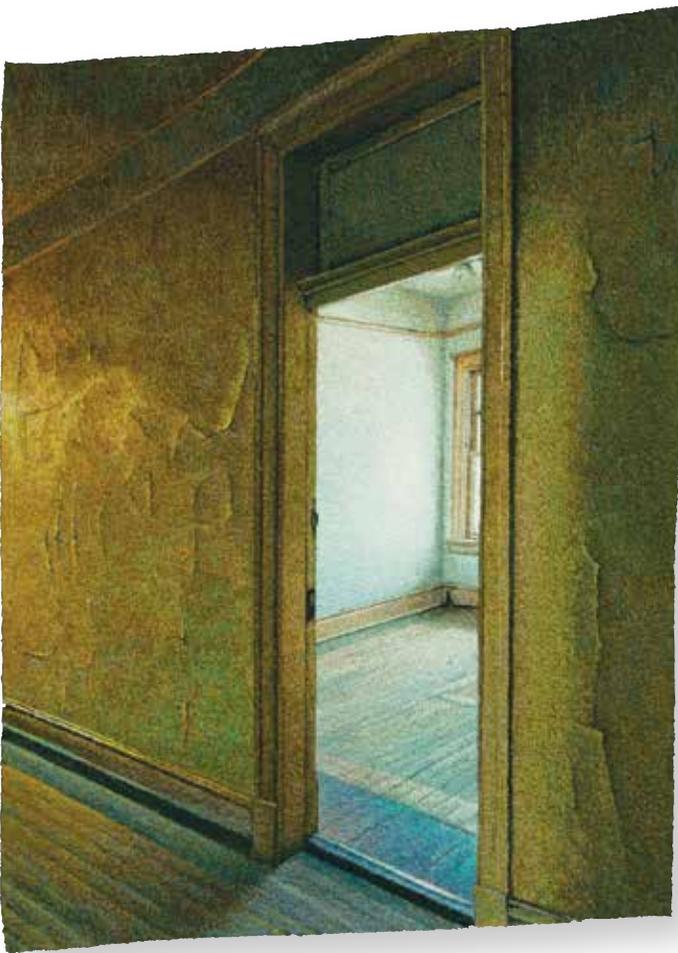
commentary so we can draw our own conclusions from the textures we see.

Shinn places great value on the particularity of a situation, and how the small details bring forth the life and character of a moment in time. *"After looking through and reading part of a book on the American Tonalist movement...I*

thought about the shift away from the interest in depicting detail in the mid-19th century to the interest in depicting mood. I felt the erasing of detail blunted the mood—it seemed that color and light were only important when married with the details that explained the light."

Even before Shinn took to the textile medium, she had become

an acute observer of her world, and cites frequent occasions where she would experience a moment without judgement—a true act of communion. In her practice of recreating the images for her work, she often returns to this singular moment where the distinction between creator and creation dilutes into something more profound.



OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: **Old Doorway**; 2016; embroidery; 19.25 x 14.25 in., 26.25 x 21.25 in. framed RIGHT: **Garden at Dawn**; 2017; embroidery; 17.5 x 14 in., 25 x 20.5 in. framed

THIS PAGE ABOVE: **Empty Hotel Room**; 2015; embroidery; 19 x 14.25 in., 26 x 21.25 in. framed

"I have noticed brief moments when seeing, being, and making coalesce to some transcendent point, or I become the thing I am stitching," she says.

Shinn has a function as an observer and recorder of the environment she sees. Her attention to detail is amplified through her choice of medium, and the combination of those two elements gives us the opportunity to transcend the moment and gaze with wonder at the magnificence of the world that we all too often take for granted.

A new work, *Encroaching Forest*, will be shown in *Current Reflections on the Natural and Man Made Worlds* at Landmark Arts Galleries, Texas Tech School of Art, Lubbock, Texas, October 7–December 17. To see more of

Shinn's work visit her website at www.carolshinn.com.

Jamie Chalmers took up cross-stitching 15 years ago and he's never looked back. Since establishing the Mr X Stitch website in 2008 (mrxstitch.com), he has been showcasing new talent in the world of textiles and stitch and has curated a number of stitch-based exhibitions in the UK and Ireland. Chalmers is an accomplished and internationally exhibited artist in his own right, the curator of *PUSH Stitchery*, and the author of the *Mr. X Stitch Guide to Cross Stitch*. He is the founder of the game-changing *XStitch*, a cross-stitch design magazine which launches this year. Chalmers is an active leader in the online stitch community and what he has dubbed "the new embroidery movement" and is active on various social networking platforms. He loves introducing new people to the benefits of embroidery from a creative and wellbeing standpoint and is proud to be an ambassador for this ubiquitous craft.

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