

Transforming Silk

INTO A PRAIRIE LANDSCAPE

by Philippa K. Lack

My landscapes are frequently imaginary, but sometimes they are based on personal photos. I have a stash of silk I dyed using Dupont French Silk Dyes in various shades so I have colored strips ready to go all the time. Nothing about my work is proprietary or secret. My work comes from the way I combine fabrics, and things may change as the piece progresses.

Evening Sky is one of my earlier landscapes and still remains one of my favorites. The effect of the landscape marching toward the far horizon is mesmerizing. Mountain Home features overlays of smocked, pleated silk organza. I roughly pleated hand-painted silk for the central parts of the picture. Blue Mountains also features smocked, pleated organza mountains and this technique adds deep texture to the composition. The foreground is hand-painted silk and the fields are of embroidered flowers.

I did Seascape in the depths of winter when I was homesick. The frothy beach sand is pleated organza embellished with beads and seashells. The sea is hand-painted, quilted silk, as are the hills behind the beach. Steep Slopes is the most geometric of the five. The stylized hills are stitched to give texture, and the foreground is dotted with machine-embroidered flowers. →

SUPPLIES

- Basic sewing supplies
- Beads
- Dyes: (DuPont - French Silk Dyes)
- Fabric: silk; sheers; commercial cotton
- Fusible web: (Mistifuse)
- Sewing machine: (Bernina - 790)
- Smocking pleater: (Amanda Jane)
- Specialty machine needles: (Schmetz)





TECHNIQUE

My technique varies with each piece. I take a casual approach and follow where the composition leads. I choose my bits and pieces from my stash of painted silk scraps and commercial cotton fabric. I may also add hand or machine embroidery, pleated and manipulated silk and sheers, and hand stitching over the entire composition to secure the materials, particularly if there is no glazing. As in a painting, I try to use paler colors for features farther away and darker ones for closer objects.

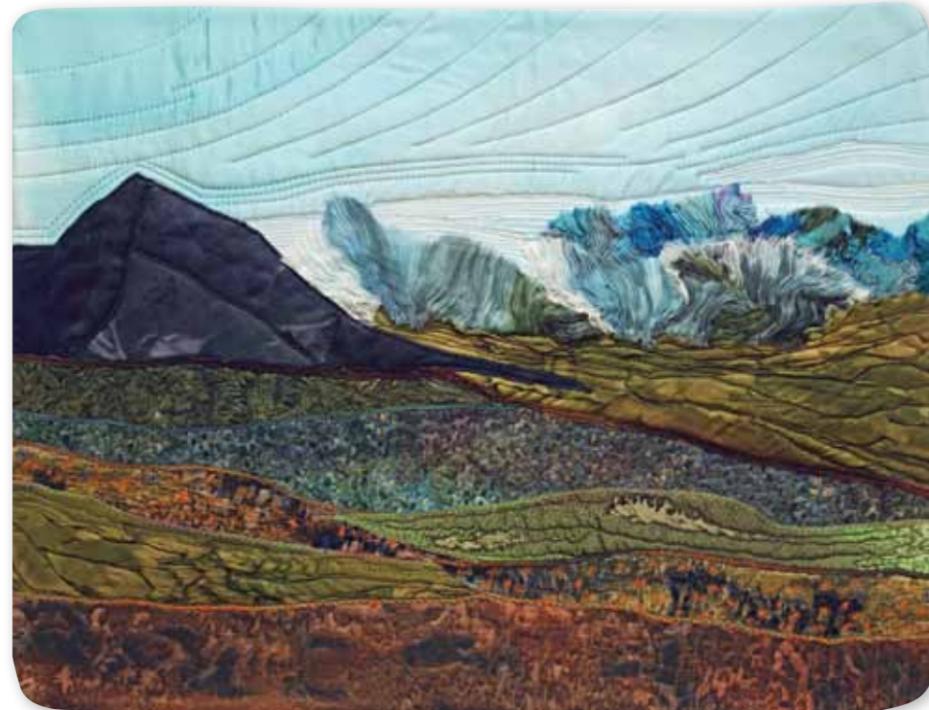
I place the sky-painted fabric on my worktable. I usually do not piece the sky, preferring to stitch in the clouds and other details later. I build the landscape from there. I collect a little stash of suitable fabrics to signify the mountains, trees, meadows, and other landscape elements, and refer to my pre-dyed pieces. I audition likely scraps and pin them on to see the effect. I use light fusible web, particularly if I'm adding painted silk pieces because it can shift easily. I do not stitch any bits permanently until I'm sure I like the overall design. When assembly is done, I tack the piece to a design board and step back. After evaluating the composition, I finish the stitching, and add thin braids or thin lines of satin stitching and beads as desired. →

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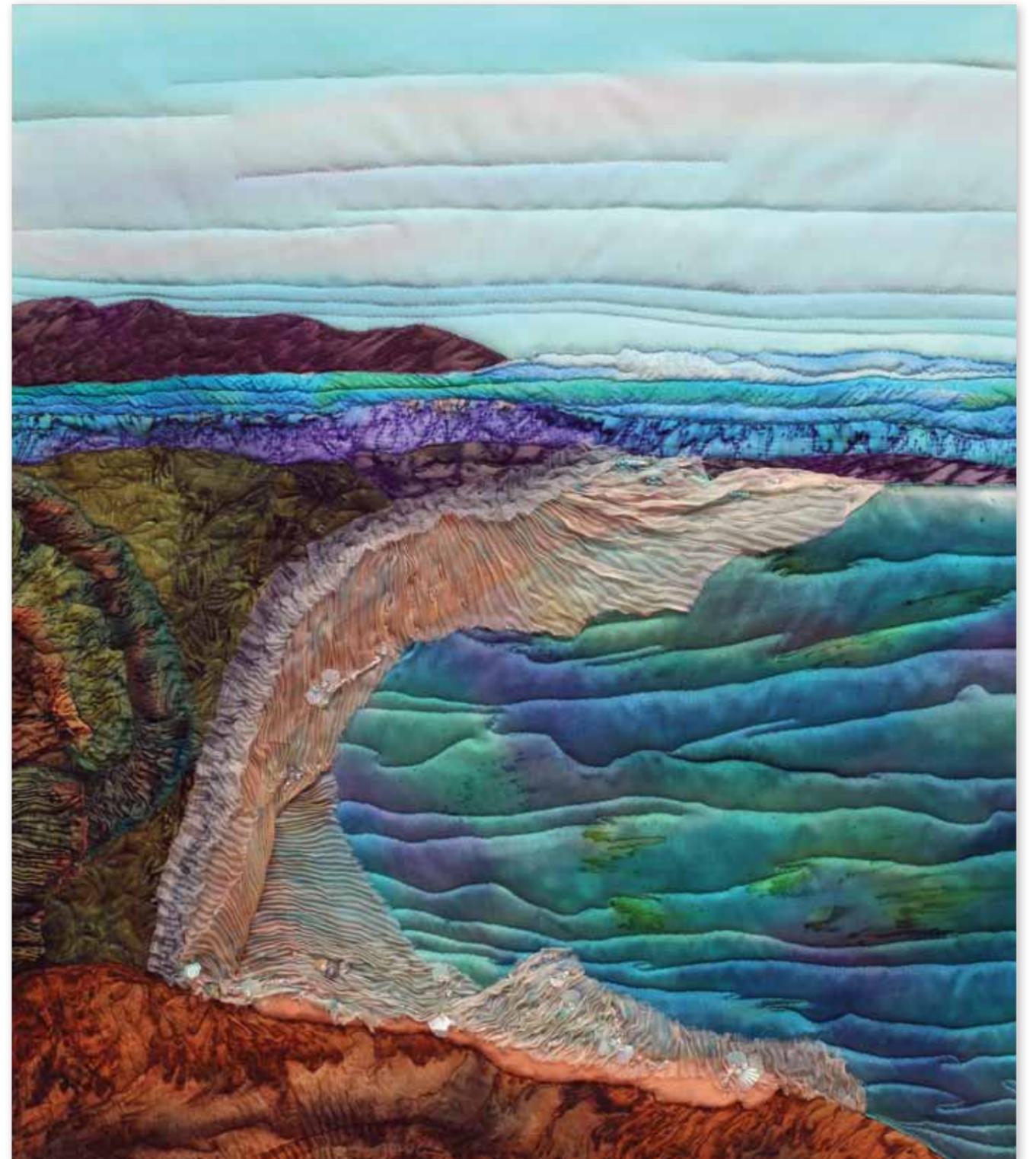
Steep Slopes 24" x 18"



Blue Mountains 24" x 18"



Seascape 22" x 24"



TIPS

- I purchase the majority of my threads from local sewing stores or Red Rock Threads in Utah.
- I purchase my silk from Dharma Trading Co. in Petaluma, California, and commercial cottons from local quilt and fabric stores. I'm always on the lookout for small batik patterns that I can overstitch.
- The dyes are from Atelier de Paris in Los Angeles, California.

Phillippa K. Lack is a rare tropical bird transplanted to the high prairie of Wyoming, traveling there along a meandering route from Jamaica some 40 years ago. She gave up her artwork for a while, but it kept calling. Now she wonders how she ever found enough time to hold down a job, paint, and do fiber art at the same time. To learn more, visit pklack.com. She welcomes email at phil@pkldesigns.com. She happily teaches small groups of four or fewer in her studio.