

Selwedge

DESIGNER EDGE



LENI LEVENSON WIENER

"I consider what I do journalistic in nature. I think of myself as a storyteller in fabric." Leni Levenson Wiener is a "people watcher" and has always been drawn to observing and immortalising everyday moments – people hunched over mobile phones or

absorbed in their book, intimate glances between couples, children devouring ice cream and outstretched bodies on park benches. Details that reveal a person's story is what she's after.

Leni creates realistic art quilts based on pictures she's taken – or in her words, "representational fabric collage from photos". "Catching people

unaware of the camera in a private, unguarded and introspective moment gives me a glimpse into the inside person, rather than their public personality. I like to capture a moment in time but leave the story in the hands of each viewer, so each person can see in it whatever relates to their own life experience," she says.

Once she has snapped the perfect photo, Leni uses a computer program,



such as Photoshop, to make a pattern. "This makes it easier to establish changes of value and colour and produces clear lines to work from. Then I print my working pattern to the actual size of the finished art quilt [usually 30-40cm/12-16in square]. I have developed a grey-scale value card that I use to establish the values in each photo and then to find those same values in fabric. Using freezer paper to trace sections of the pattern makes it easy to cut each piece of fabric." The whole thing can then go together like a giant puzzle, using raw-edge machine appliqué. "My goal is not to just translate a photo into fabric; I want to elevate it by using all sorts of unexpected prints and patterns and make the final result more nuanced and intriguing."

Living within an hour of New York City means Leni is never short of subjects for her work. "Two of my favourite places to take photos for my work are Grand Central Terminal and across the street from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The large front steps of the Museum are always filled with people."

And sometimes, whole exhibitions happen by chance. Looking through the hundreds of photos stored on her computer one day, Leni noticed a theme – she had dozens of pictures of people on benches, so she decided to put together a series for a solo museum show. When her son and daughter-in-law went to Italy, they asked her what she'd like – "I said photos of people on benches!" She ended up making 40 fabric collages for that particular show.

In the interests of art, Leni's husband is sometimes enlisted to help – as a decoy! "When I am too close to get the photo I want without someone knowing I'm focusing on them, I have my husband 'pose' as if I were taking his picture, when really snapping the person next to him. Consequently, I have lots of pictures of him looking bored standing next to the person who was the true focus of my attention."

To discover more, visit www.leniwiener.com. Or you can email Leni, leni@leniwiener.com.

– Janai Velez

