

# WASH & WAX: A COLLABORATION VIRGINIA GREAVES & LEISA RICH

Have you ever thought about collaborating with another artist or art group? Leisa Rich tells us why, in this case, collaborating on a project was well worth all the effort



Clockwise from left:  
Ginny and I at opening;  
Gobsmaeked detail;  
Agitated detail; Quilt 3;  
Entry Point; Strips 2.



Even as far back as 70,000-35,000 years ago, Neanderthals collectively embellished their world, decorating burial sites with flowers and were working together making ritual objects. Humans collaborate, sometimes even when they don't want to! Miriam Webster defines the word 'collaborate' as a positive AND negative:

1. to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something
2. to give help to an enemy who has invaded your country during a war.

Interesting, isn't it?! Most of us think of 'collaboration' as being just a "good" word!

In artistic endeavors, collaborations are often affected by both subjective opinion and objective educated experience - the yin: individual, personal ideas brought openly to the table and freely shared to form a unified artistic direction with all parties working equally, and the yang: divisive egos that get in the way as divergent ideas are eschewed and a resulting stalemate brings the project to

a screeching halt. However, when they are good, collaborations positively affect the participating artists (and their careers) as ideas take off, more is accomplished by many hands, and the viewing public benefits.

I have had a couple of terrible, some so-so, and a few good collaborations. The biggest hurdle for me has been that I end up resentful that I have done most of the grunt work, and yet the collaborator(s) equally shared the accolades. None of the good collaborations I have had have been as interesting, or as balanced, in the division of labor and decision-making as my recent, and on-going, collaboration with traditional portrait quilt artist Virginia (Ginny) Greaves. We accomplished so much over a mere 18 month period, culminating November 2015 in a monumental exhibition, Wash & Wax: A Collaboration. The show consisted of 8 quilts, a massive 25 foot by 9 foot deconstructed quilt, a walk-through simulated car wash, 8 framed mini quilts and 8 framed car wash photos, all based

on an odd source of inspiration... photos I take when I drive through car washes!

Our teaming up occurred when the director of a gallery, exhibiting our award-winning art works next to one another on the wall, suggested that Ginny and I team up, an unlikely pairing, very obvious when you see our work side by side. Ginny started making quilts after the birth of her first child 18 years ago, and grew from making traditional quilts to creating intricate portraits of people, animals and famous figures, using textiles as her medium. Using fiber and thread, the works resemble realistic paintings. I first discovered fiber arts in 1975 while on a scholarship for piano and dance at a private fine arts school, and have since received three degrees: a Master of Fine Arts and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fibers, and a Bachelor of Education in Art. I work with unusual and usual materials, my work is experimental and I create viewer interactive art works, conceptual installations and environments. I am now incorporating 3D printing into my work.

Ginny and I are an odd couple, indeed!

Initially, we were only going to do one piece. We decided to pass a small piece back and forth, allowing each to take creative license in its manipulation. Ginny kicked off the project by using one of my car wash photos as inspiration to piece together quilting cottons on a cotton base, using Wonder Under as the stabilizer "glue," and working to make it look as close to the photo as possible. When she passed it back to me, I was floored by her precise cutting and placement skills! She made it easy for me to be creative from this meticulous two dimensional base. I used thread and free motion machine embroidery to work the surface. I kept thinking that it didn't resemble the car wash concept enough though, so I turned to the addition of clear vinyl layering, slicing the vinyl away in areas. The resulting piece was shiny and seductively tactile, reminiscent of a feeling of being in a soapy cocoon as the agitation brushes sweep over the windshield glass.

I know Ginny was a bit taken aback at first by my addition of plastic to a quilt,

but to her credit, she remained open-minded. We were both intrigued by what was serendipitously transpiring. She then added quilt batting and a backing, used machine stitching to bring the layers together, and finally Entry Point was finished. We immediately agreed to jump on board and try another piece!

Each quilt then progressed in both size and concept as we experimented, talked by phone, texted and met regularly at our studios, Starbucks and in parking lots to pass the quilts back and forth. We experimented with breaking out of the geometric boundaries of "quilt" and built interesting textures on the surfaces using nail polish, recycled shirts, vintage haute couture gowns, sequins, recycled shower curtains and other weird materials and treatments to pump up the visual interest. Stitches varied as we tried lines, circles, waves and more.

The saving grace of our successful collaboration was our mutual work ethic. While we certainly had occasional differences of direction or opinion (I was

sometimes too aggressive and intent on shaping the artistic direction, and Ginny would occasionally feel overwhelmed at the daunting task in front of us if we were to do a show), it was readily apparent that we WOULD get it done, that Ginny was just as strong-willed as I (despite her more petite stature and softer speaking voice) and that we were BOTH going to be totally involved in every decision TOGETHER. We discovered mutual respect for each other's strengths and artistic styles. The project grew, shaping up to be a really tremendous undertaking, which ended up becoming bigger than initially conceived when we decided to mount a large exhibition featuring what we had accomplished.

I can't say enough about the ways in which I have grown through this experience, and I highly recommend getting together with another artist and seeing what comes of it! *BC*

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