

## WHAT'S NEW

Since I have dedicated my energies and skills to working on major art pieces in the last few years, I have chosen to get back to basics in the studio this month. For one thing, my mind has been racing from all the focus on my art pieces. If you have been following me for any length of time, you know my art is emotionally and spiritually profound. Not a lot of lighthearted work emerges from my studio! Getting back to basics is a good way for me to quiet my mind. In doing so, I become more effective in the studio.

Simplifying my efforts by focusing on the fundamentals such as basic quilt studio mathematics, cutting rudimentary geometric shapes, pressing seams, chain piecing, and making bindings reminds me of the importance of regular discipline. When I am intensely working on an art piece, I can easily stagnate. My energies can get sucked into the vacuum of repeatedly working for months on the same art piece, particularly since my art pieces tend to be large and complicated. Some days that can make it difficult to feel motivated. But more often, it is just grueling and mind-numbing. Taking a month in between finishing one art piece and working on another to do basic quilt-making is a way of resting for me.



However, I'm not starting from scratch at that point. Getting back to basics is also a way to keep those memory muscles active. For example, since it takes a while to finish an artwork, I don't make binding too often. Making smaller pieces is a way to stay nimble at making binding. It is also an opportunity for me to play with new techniques and/or new materials. Sometimes I will deconstruct a store-bought item to see how it was made, or I will practice using new fabrics and textiles, play with color and thread, or even just try a new sewing technique.

So, getting back to basics is an important part of my studio life. It is a great opportunity to explore new things. It is also a valuable time of rest and rejuvenation when I am not ready for a vacation.

## MY ARTIST JOURNEY

This year I have made significant on my current *oeuvre d'art*, *Shame & Redemption*. There is still a lot to go as I have been balancing working on it with other pieces and projects. I am getting back to it soon, but in the meantime, here's a chance to catch up on what I have done so far.

In *Shame & Redemption*, each of the hand embroidered blocks was created as a stand-alone phrase, regardless of which side of the art quilt it is on. However, because of how I envisioned and created this piece, in some cases the *Shame* phrases have several balancing *Redemption* ones. In other cases, one *Shame* phrase can be redeemed by a number of *Redemption* phrases.

On occasion, I have paired a *Shame* phrase with a *Redemption* phrase to highlight their meaning and importance. I did not necessarily design these particular phrases to go together, but the pairings show how this piece can work. When it is finalized, you will have an opportunity to create your own pairings – or not – as fits your life experiences.

Click on any of the following links to read some select journal entries about some of the pairings I made in *Shame & Redemption*.

[On "Shame and Redmption" \(art quilt in progress\)](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 5](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 1](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 6](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 2](#)

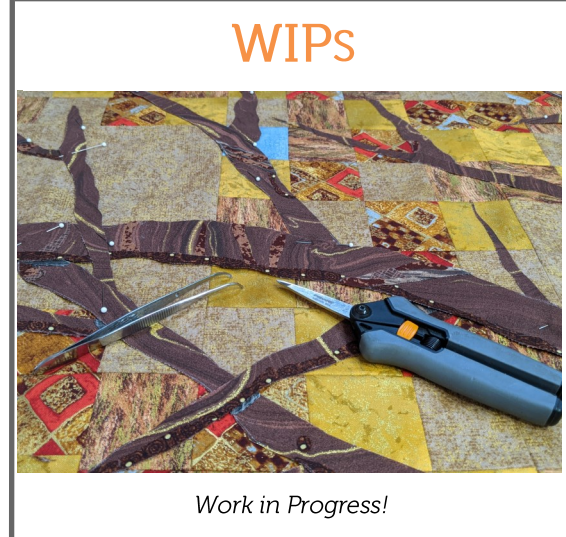
[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 7](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 3](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 8](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 4](#)

[On the Phrases in "Shame & Redemption" - Part 9](#)



## QUILTATIONS

*I tried to kill the fear in front of me, because one thing that can kill you fast is fear. That panic that comes at you, it kills you before your real death comes.*

- Harrison Okene

## HINTS, TIPS, & TRICKS

My home studio is a sitting room that we converted. It is small and does not have any built-in cabinets or closets. Keeping it both organized and aesthetically pleasing can be a challenge.

Since at some point in the future I may no longer use this space as a studio, I don't want to make any structural changes to it, such as adding built-in cabinetry. Besides, I like the look and mobility of standing shelves. I learned long ago that I work best in a feng shui environment; I often rearrange my studio to maximize its energies as I change and shift as a person.

I also love working in a beautiful, creatively inspiring space. It makes my work more enjoyable. But....I am also frugal. To that end, maintaining my studio as an artistically appealing as well as a practical space on a tiny budget has been a good challenge.

Shopping at thrift stores has been the best solution for me. With the numerous thrift stores around, I am always bound to find something aesthetically engaging that I can use at an affordable price.

Thrifting can be a fun activity, but I've encountered people who say it stresses them out. They don't know what to look for or they feel uncomfortable using something second-hand that strangers have previously used. But if you're like me and want a beautiful studio at low cost, here are my go-to suggestions for thrifting for your aesthetic studio:

- 1) Before heading to the thrift store, have an idea of what it is you need or want in your studio. This helps to keep impulse buying down, but also helps prevent you passing over something you later realize you get use. What you see at a thrift store is what you could, and if you don't snap up what you want when you see it, the next time you go it may already have sold. I have bought things before knowing specifically what I was going to do with them, but knew it was something I could use in my studio at some point.
- 2) If you're looking for furniture items, such as shelving, measure the size of the space you're thinking of putting it in before you lug that behemoth home. Since I like feng shui, I measure different spots in the room for incoming items. While we should do that anyway, many thrift stores do not have a money-back guarantee like other stores often do should you change your mind. Furniture tends to be pricier, even when thrifting.
- 3) Know your aesthetic and be picky. I love baskets and using them in the studio to store my fabrics. I have picked up some lovely baskets for about \$2.00 each. However, some items don't work for me, whether it is the size, color, or material they are made of. That being said...
- 4) Thrift store prices are often affordable, making buyer's remorse a lot easier to deal with. I've bought an item at a thrift store, brought it to the studio, and realized it isn't going to work as I thought it would. Because I paid only a few bucks for it, I don't mind putting it back in the "give-away" pile.
- 5) If you prefer new items because they are shiny and don't smell like someone else's house, remember that thrift stores often sell items that have never been used and sometimes even still have original tags on them. The colorful photo boxes and fabric baskets I use in my studio were all unused and in their original wrapping when I bought them from a thrift store. But also, some items can be cleaned up well and easily if you are willing to take the time to do that.
- 6) If you're like me and want to not only save on cost but also like beautiful things, small vintage boxes, bowls, jars, etc. are abundant at thrift stores and great places to store items like binding clips, pins, pens, etc.
- 7) As a quilter, sewist, and crafter, I always look for fabrics, ribbons, buttons, beads, etc. at thrift stores. You may be pleasantly surprised at what you can find of those items there!
- 8) Lastly, good lighting is super important in the studio, but lamps are expensive. Thrift stores often have lamps at excellent bargain prices, and some of them are as beautiful as they are practical. However, make sure to check the electrical cord and components at the store before buying it. A lot of people give electrical items away that are damaged and therefore dangerous.



## INSPIRATION FOR ARTISTS

Being an artist is not easy. Many of us have a rich and vibrant inner world that conflicts with society. Our art work is often a means for us to communicate complex thoughts and emotions as well as a plea to be seen for who we are. The highs and lows many artists experience can feel dramatic and extreme.

It can take a lot of work to overcome the creativity blocks that occur in the studio and many artists look to others for inspiration and encouragement to help keep their creative energies working. I have recently discovered a new inspiration and a guiding light: Harrison Okene.



In 2013, Mr. Okene was working as a cook on a tugboat. The vessel capsized off the coast of Nigeria and sank 100 ft to the ocean floor. He was trapped for 3 days in a dwindling air pocket in the cold water and colder darkness. After being rescued, he discovered his other crewmates had all perished in the accident.

Of being alone in the darkness of the okene capsized boat with diminishing oxygen, Mr. Okene said, "I tried to kill the fear in front of me, because one thing that can kill you fast is fear. That panic that comes at you, it kills you before your real death comes."

In addition to surviving this ordeal, Mr. Okene subsequently was involved in an accident where he flipped his car upside-down in the harbor. He had

to extract his trapped travel companion as well as return to the water to remove the car. He spent the next few years emotionally adrift and determining how to recover from these events in a way that fit who he was.

Despite these tribulations, Mr. Okene said, "I have faced a lot of fears in my life, and I decided to face this once and for all. I know it should be my fear, but I don't need to be scared of water. Because I need to embrace my fear once and for all and be strong. Our happiness, our joy, our future – they are all in our hands. I had to reprogram my thinking. I balanced my mind." He knew he still loved the ocean, and so decided to overcome his experiences by becoming a professional diver. He said that he knew if he hadn't faced his fear, he would have given up on his life. Today Mr. Okene works as a diver repairing oil and gas facilities off the coast of Nigeria.

Most of us will never face our mortality in the complete isolation of cold, watery darkness, working to keep despair at bay as Mr. Okene did. But that is not to say we do not have our own sufferings and fears. Whether it is facing illness, overcoming an assault, or healing from abusive bullying, our struggles are our own and not a competition over who 'has it worse.'

Even something as seemingly simple as facing the work in the studio and overcoming creative depression can be emotionally and mentally challenging. While facing our fears is an individual engagement, it is certainly one we each have had to do in our lives, often multiple times.

For me, in spite of the periodic difficulties, my work gets accomplished. And now I can draw on Mr. Okene's inspiration of confidence in his strength of spirit and encouraging words.

To read Harrison Okene's story, [click here](#).

(Photo credit: The Guardian News, September 2023)

