

Creating a STORY QUILT...

by ellen edith



KELLY FIXES HER HAIR FOR THE FAMILY PHOTO®, 37" x 37", by ellen edith. Photos: ellen edith

*H*aving roving parents is a great advantage for an artistic child—at least it was for me.

My family had lived all over California until I was 16, when my parents announced, "Surprise, kids, we're moving to Mexico!" We moved to Guadalajara, where I fell in love with the handicrafts—decorated in riotous colors—that were displayed everywhere. We children were enthusiastically encouraged in our creative endeavors by our parents. Mine began with painting murals on the walls of the house and sewing my own

clothing, and I've been sewing, cartooning, and creating ever since.

My latest quilt, KELLY FIXES HER HAIR FOR THE FAMILY PHOTO, is based on a true occurrence. Each year before Easter, my mom, Donna, would hand sew cute matching dresses for my two sisters and me and a little suit for my brother, Richard. Before we could get dirty, Mom would pile us into the station wagon and drive us to the photographer for a family photo. One year Kelly blithely sawed off one of her pigtails with paper scissors

while in the back seat of the car on the way to the photographer's studio. She and her stuffed monkey, Mono, were always adventurous; I always wanted to be fearless like her. My mother was accustomed to surprises, so that year we posed in profile.

Creating a story quilt

Step 1. Doodle until you have a satisfactory line drawing (photo 1), and enlarge it to the desired size. If drawing isn't your strong suit, check out books on cartooning from the library, or use the Dover Books pictorial archive series of copyright-free images for inspiration. Simplify your concept down to the basic character and props.



Photo 1

Step 2. Trace over the main elements with a black Sharpie pen. This also helps you simplify the shapes—too much detail is difficult. (Remember cartoon characters often have only four fingers on a hand!) Place any desired lettering or words into the design.

Step 3. To compose the background, start with a square of fabric about an inch larger all around than the size of the finished quilt. Organize a variety of shapes, fuse them to the background square, and appliqué or free motion stitch the edges, creating a flat surface—preferably without seams—for the project.

Step 4. Turn your drawing to the reverse side, and trace over the lines with a felt-tipped pen. Outline the shapes for appliqué and number them in the order they will be appliquéd, from the bottom layer to the top of each unit (photo 2). Using this as a guide and a light box or window as your light source, trace the individual pieces for a single appliqué unit onto the paper side of fusible web (photo 3). In my quilt, for example, the monkey is one unit and Kelly is another unit. Add a scant 1/4" extra, shown by a dotted line, if the edge is to be covered by another piece lying on top. *Tip: Always write the identifying numbers straight up so when you are arranging small pieces, you can tell which is the top.*



Photo 2

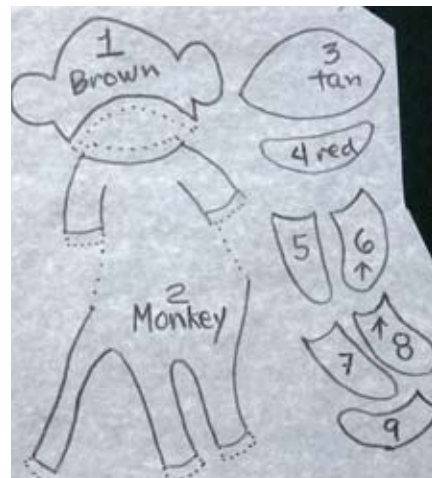


Photo 3

Step 5. Rough cut the pieces of fusible web (leaving about 1/4" extra all around) and fuse them to the wrong side of the desired fabrics, following manufacturer's instructions (photo 4). Don't use steam, as it makes it hard to separate the paper backing from the web. After fusing, cut pieces exactly on the drawn lines.

Step 6. To build each appliqué unit, lay a leftover piece of the paper backing from the fusible (or a Teflon



Photo 4

sheet or parchment paper) over the front of the paper pattern so you can see through it to work. Build the pieces into a unit, following your pre-numbered system. Peeling off the paper as needed, tack the pieces with a dry iron into a single unit, ensuring all the pieces are in place (photo 5). Then add the small details such as facial features.



Photo 5

Step 7. Audition each unit in various locations on the background until you create a visually-pleasing composition (photo 6). Remove any remaining paper and steam iron the appliques to the background. A thin layer of batting can be added to the underside to stabilize and define the shapes as you appliqué them to the background with either a buttonhole stitch or a narrow satin stitch. Since the quilt backing has not yet been added, don't worry about the loose threads on the back.



Photo 6

Step 8. It's always nice to incorporate a title into the quilt using your own handwriting. Following the technique previously described, prepare the words, audition,

and fuse them (photo 7). Sew around the fused letters with a buttonhole stitch.



Photo 7

Step 9. Assemble your decorative borders. For the Kelly quilt, I created giant fabric rickrack, fused it over the raw edges of two border strips that were butted together, and buttonhole stitched the edges of the rickrack to hold it all in place (photos 8, 9). When the borders are complete, sew them around the central story section.

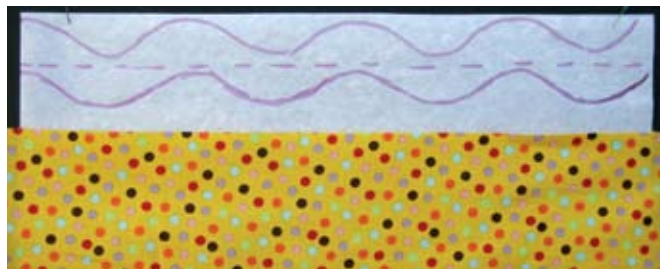


Photo 8



Photo 9

Step 10. Add a full layer of batting and the backing, and decorate with additional free-motion quilting through all layers, within and around the elements. If an element has too many layers to quilt through easily, quilt around it. Quilted doodling or words are a fun addition. Always remember to label your quilts with the title, your name, and the date of completion. I often free-motion stitch this information directly into the quilt.

Step 11. As a final step, add embellishments by hand. I added embroidered eyelashes, rickrack, stacked buttons, and vintage banana hat decorations.