

*"I'm an object maker, reflector, and commentator. I make mixed media, pattern-based, constructed paintings and that's as close as I can come to describing my work."*



Gerry Trilling is a 1990 graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute who is (mostly) making large mixed-media paintings constructed of layers of textiles, chipboard, paper, lenticular plastics, table cloths, shower curtains, shiny stuff, transparent stuff, stuff with patterns, stuff which reflects. She is "fascinated by patterns and other systems, static, ordered and confined, or endlessly repeating with no clear termination point." Her work is in numerous private and corporate collections as well as in the Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art and the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.

*"I want to know what happens next. I think that if you know what something is going to look like before you start, you've lost the reason to make it. It's finding out where it's going and what it's going to be that makes it interesting to me. That's what feeds me: Curiosity."*

Gerry Trilling's parents were childhood sweethearts in Vienna where both were from well to do Jewish families. Fleeing the holocaust, Gerry's mother emigrated to the United States in 1939 and her father spent a year in Amsterdam, arriving in the states in 1941. They came to the US with nothing, settled in St. Louis, and her father and his

brother-in-law became successful manufacturing boys' and men's outer wear. Her family was all makers, creative people, civically active.

Gerry (b. 1946) grew up playing in her father's Washington Avenue factory around bolts of fabric, the constant buzz of the sewing machines, stacks of garment parts. Gerry always enjoyed making things, especially things with patterns. She recalls that around age four she became totally fascinated while crocheting a hanger with variegated yarn – the colors changed as she knotted and made a pattern all by themselves. She has been attracted to making things and patterns ever since.

*"I think that's what art is all about. It's bringing something into the real world that answers some question."*

Gerry studied art at Syracuse University and Washington University for summer school. After two years, she wanted to be closer to home so she transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago where she studied weaving patterns and structure with Else Regensteiner.

*"I met my husband, Howard, while living in Chicago. He had just finished a program in international trade and we had dreams of travel. Strange as it sounds today, I was the elder of two girls and since there were no sons, it was my responsibility to marry someone to go into the family business. Believe me, it sounds normal when you grow up with it, and honestly, it worked out very well."*

*"I left school when I married. We moved back to St. Louis while I was pregnant with my first child. That's where I began working with a weaving group. I was a member of Craft Alliance and started showing my work locally and regionally. I continued to weave until the family business was bought by a local company. That's when we moved to Kansas City – during the mid-1980's."*

*"I didn't know a soul in Kansas City, so in 1986, at the age of 41, I decided to go back to school and enrolled at the Kansas City Art Institute. I started out in the fiber department, but I'd already been weaving for a long time. Lester Goldman taught an elective drawing class and he really opened doors for me through his curiosity and enthusiasm. I moved into the painting department to study with Lester and Warren Rosser. What a gift! It was an entirely different experience than I'd had previously in school. I knew what I wanted (and I was very aware of how much it cost). If I didn't understand something, I wouldn't hesitate to keep asking for clarification until I did understand. That was a big difference from when I was in my 20's. Lester made me feel it was OK to be an artist. I graduated in 1990. I was older than the other students, a contemporary of my instructors. The Goldmans and Rossers became our dearest friends and family. They sort of adopted us and let us become their friends and family, too."*

*"So here's what I learned at KCAI: You start out drawing something and then you want to know what it'd look like in the real world, so you make some object based on that drawing, and then you want to know possibilities of that object that you made, so you draw it again, and constantly go back and forth between the objects and the drawings. "*

Today, Gerry maintains a spacious studio in a large building in the West Bottoms, a building very much like her father's factory complete with freight elevators, creaky wood floors, high ceilings, no air-conditioning, minimal heat – Spartan and industrial until you enter the studio itself which is carpeted, white-walled, well lit, gallery-like except for the large work surfaces and textiles everywhere.



Track-hung flood lights brightly illuminate the mostly large-scale works in progress hanging on her studio walls as though her studio is masquerading as an upscale gallery. There are several big tabletops covered with 'stuff' – paper tile squares, gaudy illusion plastics, bright colors, antique prints, works in progress. Several racks house a hundred or more largish completed works. At one end of the studio is a large flat-file topped by pie-tins organizing cut tile-squares of various colors; there's an easy chair; a

bookshelf with art books and magazines; an L-shaped desk strewn with pattern designs drawn or printed on copier paper; books; pens and pencils; a computer.



*"I'm an artist. Everything I experience is part of me and my art narrative. Whatever I look at, wherever I go, I'm aware of a certain kind of processing and taking in information. There's so much really great-looking stuff everywhere. I know all about paper and pencils and paint. But there's so much OTHER material out there you can make stuff with."*

*"I'm fortunate that I have a supportive spouse and am able to manage financially. Howard and I travel a LOT. He headed up the international division for Staples promotional products and still consults for them, so we've been all over the world. We lived in London for a month. Last year we were in Sidney, Australia. Grocery, hardware and drug stores (as well as local flea markets of course) are my favorite places to go! If you want to know what it's like somewhere, what stimulates a people visually, grocery stores and drug stores are the key. It is SO interesting to me, the visual manifestations of material culture."*

*"I need to feel I'm doing something essential. I'm not ambitious; I don't want to be the head of a company – that isn't interesting to me. Waiting to see what happens, that's what I do. I want to see what happens."*



*Chain of Command, 2008, 28 x 62 inches, Lace printed plastic, colored transparent vinyl, paint, paper*

*"Showing my work is really important to me. I'm alone in my studio most of the time, so when I show my work it's a way of getting out what I've been thinking about and doing the past couple of years. Some people don't feel like that. They just want to see where it goes. But for me, it's important to be engaged in the conversation."*

Gerry's current body of work, layers of plastic and textile and squares tiled into patterns began around 2005.

*"I started this work (with the squares) while Lester was really sick. It was awful. I was looking for a metaphysical comforter, something I could wrap myself in to feel better, if that makes sense. When you just listen, you're going to direct yourself toward what you should be doing next. I picked up a book of weaving patterns. And the one that was of interest to me was in the very beginning of the book which had just kind of fallen open to that one. Not a single one of the other patterns in the book would have worked because they all were symmetrical with borders. The pattern that interested me was unbalanced. Whatever I did with it would be a fragment of itself. But the pattern was infinitely expandable. I like the implied extension beyond the frame."*

*"So, I wanted to make something with that pattern. I had some clear vinyl in the studio. I did drawings of the pattern first, but it was too time consuming and I was*

*in a rush to articulate something - if it took too long I was afraid I would be unable to nail it down. I found some bird netting (a mesh used to keep birds out of fruit trees) which defined my grid. And I laid the vinyl over it because I needed something to glue stuff to. I love Diet Mountain Dew – the taste, the caffeine, the color – I always have it at the studio. The graphics on the carton were soft grays and greens and silvers So I cut it up into little squares. It was the right weight and it was non-descript enough for me, but it still had information on it. Today I would say it had visual texture. And I started gluing it down into that pattern. It was a small piece, but that was the beginning of my investigation into this technique and my current work.*

*"Because the pattern is infinitely expandable, I thought, "what if I made more?" So I made one that was twelve panels, and it was HUGE! And then there were issues like, "What do you do with it?" and "How do you hang it?". Over time, I've managed to resolve some of those.*



**San Telmo 110**, 2010, 54 x 40 inches, *Printed plastic tablecloth, colored transparent vinyl, paint, mylar, lenticular plastic*

*"I have a strong populist bent and am attracted to craft. I repurpose commercially available materials. PepsiCo (maker of Mountain Dew) eventually supplied me with soft drink cartons. JoAnn Fabrics carries all kinds of fabrics and transparent*

*plastics in bright colors. What interested me in some of my earlier pieces was the way layering worked with these.*

*"A recent problem with my vision (now resolved), caused me to start using sparkly, reflective and refractive surfaces that turned out to be ideal materials to express mutability. Working with vinyls and lenticulars enables me to construct visual structures that are discerned, obscured and revealed again in response to light. Canal Plastics in New York is a great resource for lenticular plastics and illusion plastics.*

*"When you look at this work, you see the form of the stretcher, you see that there's something collaged onto the stretcher, and they're shingled, textured, shaggy.*



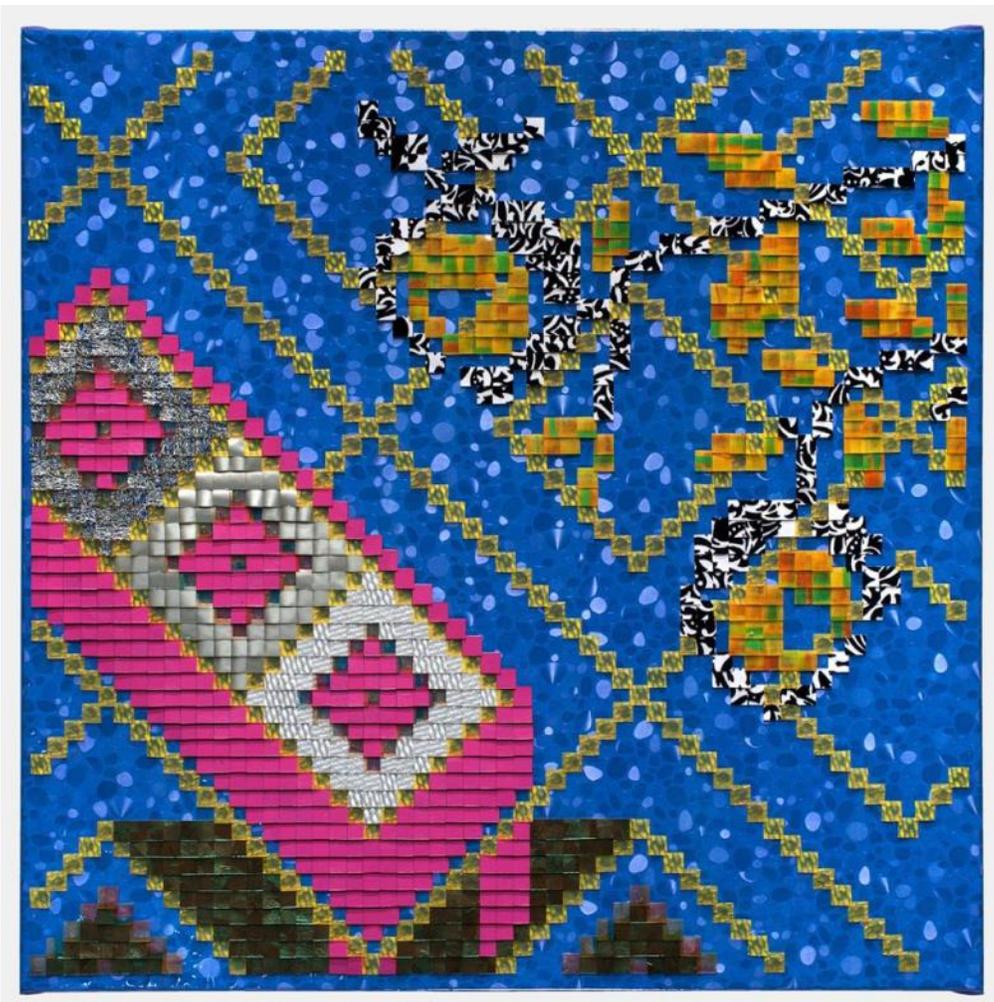
*SQ111 Color Line, 2011, 36 x 36 inches, Athletic fabric, vinyl, paint, handmade paper, lenticular plastic*

*"Pattern holds the ground formally so that I can interrupt it to construct objects with open-ended narratives that I integrate into the overall structure. Patterning*

*systems have a lot in common with time or religion, as a mainframe onto which I attach experiences.*

*"All this in the service of slowing down viewing. And I am a VERY slow processor. The elephant is my animal. My thinking feels ponderous like an elephant moves, lovely, deliberately and slowly, but it does reach its destination. It takes me a long time to process stuff.*

*"So this gives me a space to do it in – the way I work. I can look at something and it doesn't look the same to me yesterday or tomorrow as it looks now. I just can't tolerate predictability. If I know what it's going to be, then it just holds no interest for me at all. I want a surprise when I finally arrive."*



**SQ412 The Table**, 2012, 36 x 36 inches, Lenticular Vinyl, colored transparent vinyl, paint, extruded rubber, flocked paper, gauze embedded in heavy vinyl, lenticular plastic