

Australian Mariya Waters claims Best in Show at Paducah 25th Annual AQS Show



By Eddie Grant

For Mariya Waters, and her quilt Renaissance Revival, receiving the Best of Show Award for the 25th Annual American Quilter's Society Show and Contest, marks the end of what Waters calls, "a phenomenal journey and a labor of love." For Waters, from Melbourne, Australia, saying her and her work have had a phenomenal journey is a bit of an understatement. "Well the quilt won the Best of Australia so it has been on a national tour for 14 months, so for it to end up here is wonderful." And for Waters herself it was quite an excursion to get to Paducah.

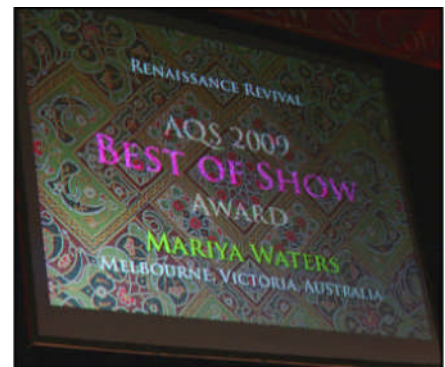
"It was only 24 hours from the time when I got the call from Meredith (Schroeder) until the time I had to get on board the plane," she said. "I got the news on my birthday, the 20th because we are a day ahead, and my husband said to me that I needed to go so he spent the entire day booking my flights so I could be here." After spending 32 hours on an airplane, she was almost prevented from making the flight from Memphis to Paducah, which could have potentially delayed her arrival in Paducah until Thursday, something that would have caused her to miss the awards banquet Wednesday night. "The flight in Memphis was fully booked, but one of the Northwest pilots was repositioning and he gave up his seat so I could make it to Paducah on time, Waters said.

Her magnificent quilt is the culmination of some 17,000 hours of work over four years, six months of which she spent drawing out the design of her work. Even halfway through the process of creating her masterpiece, Waters wasn't sure that she was on to something. "I knew when I was making it that it was going to be a disaster or something wonderful, she said."

A quilter for almost 20 years, Waters said that she started out early on as an art quilter and recently has branched out to teaching the art form of quilting. "I guess I have done things a bit backwards I suppose," she said. "Most people do it the other way." Waters said in Australia, she and her fellow quilters from the southern hemisphere have a different outlook on quilting.

"In Australia, we don't know the traditions that quilting has here as well as other parts of the world," she said. "So as a result of not being tied to those traditions we do things differently and have sort of created our own style and tradition of quilting."

Waters drew her inspiration for the quilt came from something she saw during a trip to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. "I saw painted room there where both the walls and the ceiling were painted, and the design of it inspired me, and the quilt is my interpretation of that design."



The Best in Show Award is a purchase award, meaning that the \$20,000 is given to Waters only if she agrees to give the Quilt to the AQS and National Quilt Museum. Giving up her work was an easy decision for her, as she sees it it's the perfect place for her quilt to reside.

I think the Museum is the right place for the quilt to be," Waters said, "Its in a place where it can be looked at and studied by future generations. From the time I started it I knew that if it worked it was going to need to be in a place where it received special care. It is all just so wonderful I am amazed."



Waters, who is in town until Monday, was afraid that she wouldn't be here long enough to see it in the National Quilt Museum, but Mary Kay Zumwalt, Executive Director of the National Quilt Museum, assured her that she would. "We will actually put it on display in the museum Saturday Night once the show is closed," Zumwalt told Waters much to her relief.

"You know I told my husband that my only regret is that I probably wouldn't be able to see it in the museum, but now that I get to, that is just fabulous. The fact that I get to share the quilt with others is the most important thing, Waters said. "That means more to me than any amount of money, that other people will get to see the quilt and enjoy it. I am honored that it will be taken care of and be held in a place where people two generations from now will be looking at the quilt and studying it, much like we are studying quilts from the generations before us." It was then, Waters revealed one of the secrets her quilt has. "You know there are hundreds of hearts stitched in the design of the quilt," she said, "Hundreds of them."

Waters said it is traditional for her after completing a large quilt like *Renaissance Revival* that her next project, she does a miniature quilt. And as it turns out the miniature

quilt she did after completing *Renaissance*, garnered 3rd place in the show's miniature quilt category, something that she was surprised to learn. "I didn't know about that quilt winning until I got her and someone told me," she said., This is amazing, its just getting better and better."

You can see both of Waters' quilts as well as the other amazing works from the night's other award winners and many other selections as part of the 25th Annual AQS Show going on through Saturday, information about the show can be found in our [AQS Quilt Show section](#) .

