

Pleating, Momigami

& UNIQUE MATERIALS

Artwork by Claire Passmore
Interview by Danielle Williams



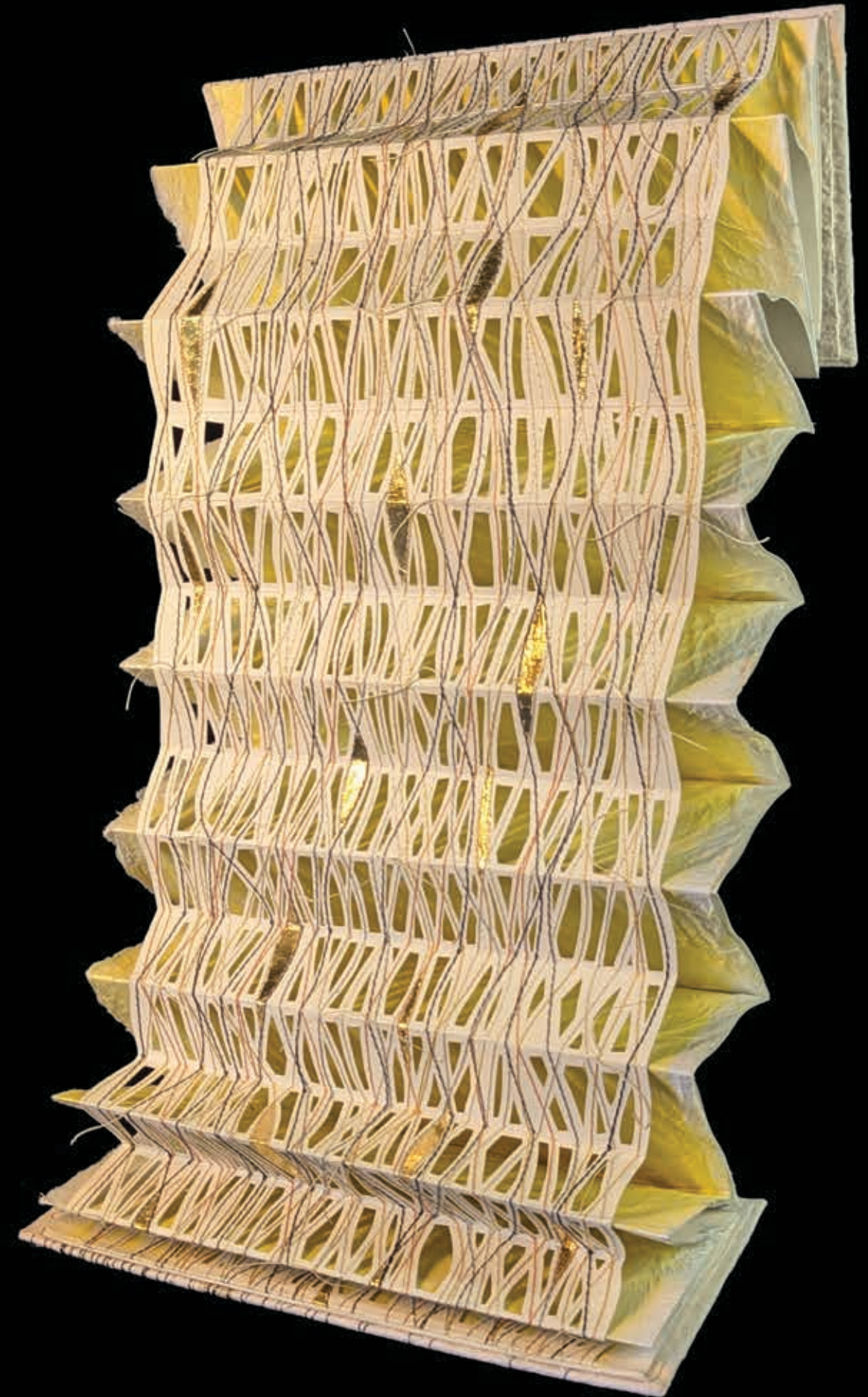
When Claire Passmore moved to a new home, it was time to set up an art studio for all her future creative projects. Her simple, light, airy space opens into a lush garden, provides tranquillity, and fills with uplifting golden light every evening. It was this light, and her desire to stretch what an art quilt can be, that gave her the idea of “A Golden Hour.” Read on to learn more about the piece and Claire’s opinion on the word “inspiration.”

Art Quilting Studio: What drew you to art quilting?

Claire Passmore: I was originally drawn to art quilting because I found a special group of friends who encouraged me to explore and experiment, and a supportive organization that gave me the opportunity to exhibit my work: Studio Art Quilt Associates. I find great satisfaction in all kinds of creative activities, but creating art quilts is what I always return to. I am continually motivated to create pieces that stretch the notion of what an art quilt can be. It is this challenge that keeps my mind buzzing with ideas.

AQS: Where do you find your inspiration?

CP: This big word, “inspiration,” is something I used to feel pressured by. The notion of having to come up with an original idea and then turn that into something amazing felt like a huge hurdle. Gradually, I came to realize that inspiration is just my response to all the people, places, and events I experience in my everyday life, which I distill into something that becomes both visual and tactile. Taking time to slow down, look, smell, touch, taste, and notice things ... this is the place from where my best ideas grow. →

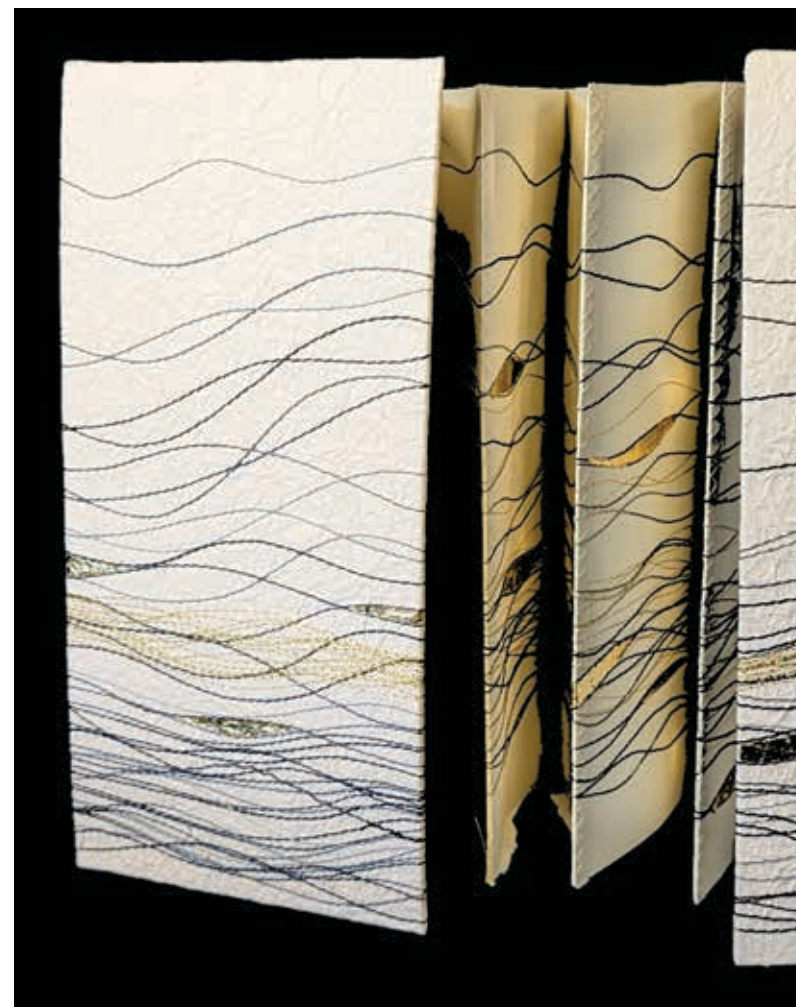


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But there is a second strand too, as the more I create, the more my ideas flow. As I work on a piece, I notice or think of new things, triggering ideas for new possibilities. Sometimes it takes great discipline (not one of my greatest strengths!) to stop myself from getting sidetracked and disappearing down a new rabbit hole mid-project. In an effort to control my butterfly mind, I try to jot down the ideas, or at least take a photograph of the newfound possibilities, which usually means I can focus on the work at hand and not get distracted!

AQS: What are some of your favorite techniques/supplies to use?

CP: I love to work with stiff fabrics or materials that can be shaped with a crease. Organdy, heavyweight interfacing, starched or waxed fabrics, and different kinds of paper are firm favorites. I also like to explore how I can make use of upcycled materials, and I am looking forward to exploring what I can do with some large dog food bags, which a very kind friend had given me. When appropriate, a little bit of bling makes me smile; using things like decorative threads, iridescent paint, and metal leaf adds some extra fun. In terms of technique, a lot of my work now focuses on creating volume by using traditional folding techniques, such as pleating and origami, and the new-to-me technique of momigami.



AQS: How did “A Golden Hour” come to be?

CP: Just over a year ago I moved to a new home and set up a new studio. It is a simple, light, and airy space that opens into a lush garden, providing both space and tranquillity. It is also oriented in a wonderful position, so every evening the most beautiful and uplifting golden light fills the room. I wanted to make a piece that celebrated this golden light and the good feelings I have in my new place.

AQS: How did you prepare to make it?

CP: When preparing for this piece, I remembered materials I had brought back with me from a recent trip to Japan. Whilst there, I found a lot of beautiful papers and saw many different ways to incorporate them, using techniques previously unknown to me. I learned about transforming papers into a more fabric-like material using a process known as momigami, and wanted to explore and experiment with these new materials and techniques. I researched the technique further and made a whole boxful of fabric paper as I became familiar with the process. Happily, I now have a lot of this paper to use when creating new work.

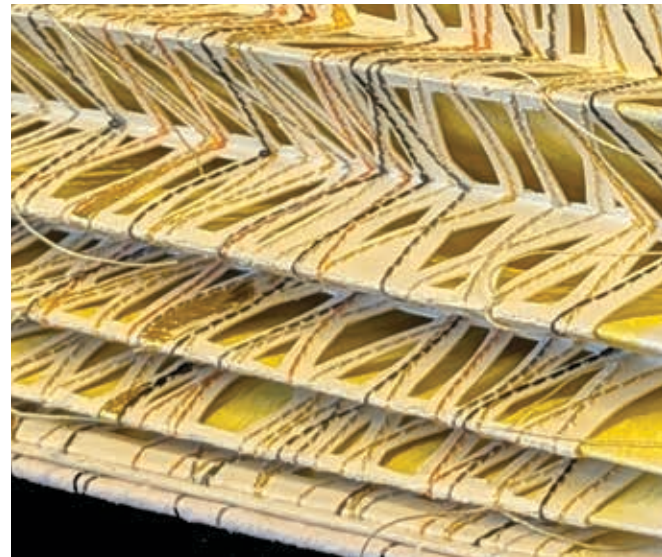
AQS: What tools and materials did you use, and why?

CP: On my travels, I collected mulberry papers, rice papers, tissue papers, and watercolor paper, all of which I used for different parts of the piece. For the traditional momigami process, a plant-based paste, known as konnyaku, is used to coat the surface of the paper. My research suggested other starches or products could also be used, but as I was using the papers I brought back with me, I wanted to stay faithful to this traditional ingredient. Treating the paper with konnyaku enhances the paper’s durability, making it more flexible, abrasion resistant, wind and water resistant, and even capable of being stitched like fabric. Mixing the paste was a detailed and time-consuming process, but that was all part of the pleasure of discovering something new. Once dried, the paper was hand-massaged until its fibers were softened and broken down.

I also used metallic and cotton pearl threads to add decorative stitches to the folded and altered papers, and rather a lot of 24-karat gold leaf. I love to use real gold leaf, as it has such a deep luster, something that gold paint or artificial gold leaf cannot match. The tools were simple: my hands, a scalpel, and my trusty sewing machine.

AQS: Did you encounter any challenges during the construction?

CP: Fortunately, not too many. The momigami process is simple, almost meditative, but can leave your hands feeling tired. Fortunately, it does not need to be done in one sitting. To ensure the pleated watercolor paper did not break apart due to all the perforations caused by the stitching, I took the precaution of fusing two layers together and adding a layer of tissue over the top. A longer-than-usual stitch length also helped to keep things stable. →



AQS: What type of response/feedback have you received regarding this quilt?

CP: I have had wonderful feedback about this piece and am grateful to all those who take the time to get in touch to ask questions or make comments. Most often people ask about materials or techniques, but this time I am receiving a lot more questions about the unusual and varied ways the piece can be reshaped and displayed. This seems to have captured people's interest and imagination in a new way.

AQS: Do you have a new project you're excited about?

CP: As this was such an enjoyable piece to make, I plan to make a small series to develop some of the ideas that occurred to me as I worked on "A Golden Hour." For sure there will be more pleating, more momigami, and definitely some dog food bags!

Claire Passmore is a practicing artist and teacher working with textiles and art quilts. She is currently based in England but travels extensively. Claire is a Juried Artist member of Studio Art Quilt Associates and also serves on the board of directors. Her work can be seen in many international exhibitions and also on her website, clairepassmore.com. To learn more about the piece featured here, visit clairepassmore.com/a-golden-hour.html. She welcomes email at cpassmore01@gmail.com.