

INSPIRED TO  
**Sew**

*A glimpse into the creative heart of today's  
most talented sewing & quilting artists.*

**MJ Kinman**



MJ Kinman and Rhonda Pierce  
Fall International Quilt Market  
Houston TX 2018

MJ Kinman's quilts are breathtaking! I gaze in awe, like everyone else, when viewing her quilts. MJ's quilts are enchanting!

MJ is fascinated by gems. After years of meticulously studying gems, MJ challenged herself to unite her love of gems with quilting. The result is captivating. MJ's quilts have cut, clarity and color. Her technique is the carat, delivering its weight in gold, so you can make your own gemstone quilts.

Rita Farro's interview with MJ is delightful and inspiring. She reveals the scary, life changing leap. MJ's quilts are brilliant. MJ is clearly working and living in her brilliance.

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*Rhonda*

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**YOU** *to Sew?*



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*Sewing  
Star*

*MJ Kinman*  
*Textile Artist*

Issue 62





Fall International Quilt Market  
Houston TX 2018

## *MJ Kinman*

One year ago, MJ Kinman and her unusually large gem quilts burst onto the quilting scene like a 4th of July Fireworks Finale. The first time she was a vendor at the International Quilt Market in 2017, it looked like a rock concert was happening in her booth. The quilting world had never seen anything quite like her large gemstone quilts ... it was like you were looking into a gigantic glittering diamond.

Since that explosive beginning, MJ's quilts have been exhibited in galleries, museums, national juried competitions and private collections. Maker's Mark Distillery commissioned a "Bourbon Diamond" for their permanent art collection. Her work has been featured in **Quilting Arts Magazine**, **McCall's Quilting Magazine**, **France Patchwork**, **Make Modern Magazine**, and **Online Quilt Magazine**. Quilting Arts TV is currently airing three episodes featuring her unique quilt patterns on PBS stations around the country, and The Quilt Show is preparing to broadcast three segments featuring MJ's techniques and patterns in Spring 2019.



Every great move forward in  
your life begins with a leap of  
faith, a step into the unknown.

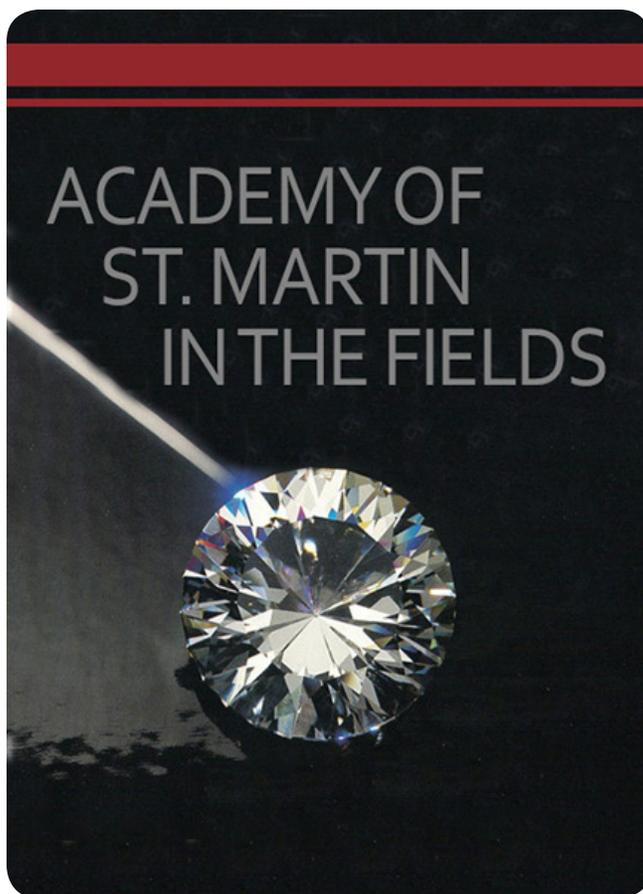
Brian Tracy

To the seasoned quilt store owners crowding to get into MJ's booth at that first market, MJ's gem quilts felt like an amazing "overnight success" story. But the truth is, MJ's success is a culmination of 25 years of hard work — learning how to take the gemstone images in her head, develop techniques to translate her vision, then building her business to brand and market her one-of-a-kind gem quilts.

In 2014, MJ Kinman was working as a project manager for a Fortune 100 company in Louisville, Kentucky. Her days were filled with team meetings and client conference calls. She had worked her way to the top of the corporate ladder. She was exactly where she wanted to be.

Imagine her shock when she realized she was completely and profoundly miserable.

The idea of leaving her job was horrifying. For MJ, being "jobless" meant disaster. Forty years earlier, her father's business failed and the family declared bankruptcy. They lost their home and her parents' marriage crumbled. Fear engulfed her family and MJ vowed that would never happen to her. She started working at 15 and has never stopped. Having a job was her protection against disaster.



The brochure that grabbed MJ's soul!

MJ says, *"while I couldn't believe I was actually thinking about walking away from my job, I couldn't imagine staying. It's hard to explain what was going on in my head and my heart. It wasn't a logical process. It was much more of a knowing, a deep sense that I needed to get out ... and fast. I needed to do something with the diamonds. I had no idea what form that would take, but I had to find out."*

To understand MJ's leap of faith, you need to go back to where her obsession with gems began. In the early 90's, a brochure arrived in MJ's mailbox featuring the image of a gemstone on the front cover. Even though she was a novice quilter at that

time, she immediately wanted to transform that image into a quilt. There had to be a way; the shards of light within the image were all just straight lines, after all ... *"The idea grabbed hold of my soul and I knew I had to find a way to make this happen."*

But MJ knew nothing about gemology and only the basics of quilting. She learned how to sew from her 4-H days back in Hastings, Nebraska. Her mom's ancestors came from communities with strong quilting traditions. Her great-grandparents were Amish and her mother was raised in the Mennonite faith tradition. It seems quilting was in her DNA . . .



"Lila"

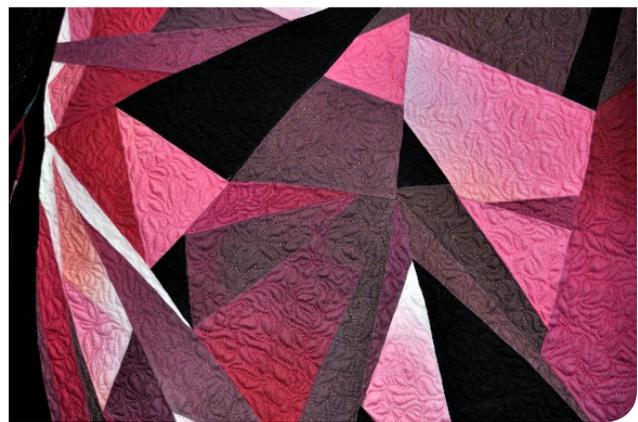
Spring International Quilt Market, Portland OR 2018

MJ was determined to figure out this gemstone puzzle. The questions were daunting. How would she create and keep track of hundreds of templates when every single one of them would be a different shape? How would she know which color of fabric to use? What was the pattern underlying that chaos of light?

The first breakthrough came when MJ sat staring at the image, trying to make sense of the shards of light. When the answer emerged, she gasped. There it was! A recognizable pattern within all those shards of light. She traced 12 pie-

shaped sections with a pencil, and then further divided each pie shape into additional sub-sets. The gem's faceting pattern would be her guide.

The answers to other questions took a bit longer. MJ took classes and bought books about foundation piecing. She experimented with many techniques and methods before finding her answer: freezer paper. She made her first gem quilt in 1997 and continued to quietly develop her gem ideas while she worked her way up the corporate ladder.



In process: Wild-motion machine quilting.

Turning gem images into giant sparkling quilts was a gradual process. She used solids for her first quilts, but then experimented with prints. Not satisfied with the results, she switched to batiks. Eventually, she taught herself how to paint fabric. *"Because everything else about the process is so precise and premeditated, I love the time I spend painting because it's wild and gestural."* The results are spectacular. MJ uses Dye-N-Flow fabric paint produced by Jacquard Products. You can use it just like a watercolor paint, it doesn't change the "hand" of the fabric, and it is permanent once heat set.

Figuring out how to quilt the gems was another challenge. Because the layers of fabric made it difficult to push a needle through by hand, MJ realized she was going to have to learn

how to machine quilt. Over the years, she developed her own style of a random, non-directional pattern of machine quilting that fills the space without distracting the viewer's eye from the light and color of the gemstone. She calls it *"wild-motion machine quilting."* MJ's go-to thread is Sulky 40 weight Rayon.

Part of MJ's incredible success can be attributed to her unconventional approach to both the quilting itself, and the marketing of her finished quilts. For example, MJ signed up to be a vendor at the Bourbon Women Association's Sipsosium in 2017. There she met Rob Samuels, the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation owner of Maker's Mark. Rob's vision to expand the family's



MJ, the artist at work on "Between River & Sky"  
(inspired by Old Pogue Distillery)

brand included making fine arts a signature feature of Maker's Mark, Kentucky's iconic bourbon maker. He commissioned MJ to create a one-of-a-kind piece for their Star Hill Provisions Restaurant on the distillery grounds.

MJ recently received the green light to create a series of work inspired by the National Gem Collection. The National Gem Collection is housed at the Mineral & Gem Department of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. It includes gems such as the Hope Diamond, the Blue Heart Diamond, the Hooker Emerald and other less well-known but equally beautiful stones.

MJ says of her decision to take this gigantic leap of faith:

*"The journey has been remarkable. I define myself first and foremost as an artist. My primary goal is to make gem inspired art quilts that take people's breath away. I love everything about the process: from searching for stunning gemstones to use as inspiration to quilting the work with wild-motion machine quilting. I want to create gemstones for private and corporate collectors (like Maker's Mark) and continue to show my gems in galleries across the country. I can't think of any work more joyful."*



## *The Birthstone Series*

Secondly, I define myself as a pattern designer. I want others to experience the joy of creating gems, too, and so have developed my first set of patterns. The Birthstone Series is comprised of 12 blocks representing the traditional birthstones. I'm planning a second series of larger diamonds that I'm calling the Diamond Divas series for release in May 2019.

Thirdly, I am a teacher. I visit guilds and groups around the country sharing the techniques that I use to create my giant gem quilts. Freezer paper piecing is a powerful technique for quilters to have in their toolbox. In addition, I am lucky to have a cadre of amazing independent quilt teachers and quilt shops who have joined my Gem Affiliate program and are teaching others how to create my gem patterns.

(For more information about bringing a Gem Affiliate to your shop or guild, visit [www.mjkinman.com/meet-the-gem-affiliate-team](http://www.mjkinman.com/meet-the-gem-affiliate-team).)

When I had the opportunity to tape several segments of Quilting Arts TV, host Susan Brubaker Knapp asked me if I would ever run out of inspiration for my diamond quilts. My reply:

"Never!" There's a world of inspiration out there. The designs planned for future work fill my brain and spill out of my design notebooks. I can't wait to get started on the next project!"

[www.mjkinman.com](http://www.mjkinman.com)

— written by Rita Farro

## A Gem for Every Month: The Birthstone Series



Ruby



Sapphire



Pink Tourmaline

It was a challenge bringing 12 birthstone block patterns to market, but MJ loved every step of the way. She loved finding the gems that inspired each design. She loved charting out the design and the colors so that the gems sparkled with the fewest amount of facets. This was important to her, because she wanted to be sure that the blocks were not overwhelming to makers and did not have so many fabrics that they broke the budget. She knows that small pieces are hard to manage for people with dexterity issues. *"I have some arthritis in my hands, so working with tiny pieces isn't fun. I wanted my blocks to be a joy to put together. I wanted the pieces to be manageable for all makers."*

Sewists are getting creative with the Birthstone Series. Not only are they creating "Jewel Box" quilts with all 12 blocks, they are making smaller quilts that celebrate the birthday month of each family member. Some sewists are even making mini-quilts with gemstones to celebrate a wedding engagement or the arrival of a new baby. The most surprising development of all – the one that absolutely delights MJ – is that some makers are swapping the fabrics between blocks, creating entirely new gems in gorgeous colors. MJ says, *"I'm amazed at the ways people are putting their own creative twist on these patterns."*



Diamond



Amethyst



Emerald



Tanzanite



Citrine



Alexandrite

As she was designing blocks, MJ fell in love with Paintbrush Studio Fabrics' line of solids, Painter's Palette. Together they have packaged little Birthstone Bundles, fat-quarter bundles for each gemstone. ([www.pbsfabrics.com](http://www.pbsfabrics.com)) However, MJ wanted to make her blocks accessible as possible, so she has translated the birthstone colors into additional lines of solid fabrics. To find the color translations for Kona Cotton, Michael Miller Cotton Couture, and Hoffman's 1895 Bali Batiks, visit <http://www.mjkinman.com/birthstones/resources/>. Scroll down to "Fabric Translations" and click on the documents you'll find there.

You can find MJ's Birthstone Series patterns at your local independent quilt shop, on your favorite online retailer's site, or at MJ's website at [www.mjkinman.com/patterns](http://www.mjkinman.com/patterns).



Peridot



Aquamarine



Garnet

# Needle Points with Rhonda



## *MJ Kinman's Gems of Wisdom . . .*



**Recommendation:** I use SCHMETZ Microtex needles to piece my hand-dyed cotton sateen fabrics. I love the way they glide through the fabric and result in perfect stitches.

**Tip:** Change your needle every 5 hours of stitching or at least with every new project. Your machine, your quilts, and your blood pressure will love you for it!



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