

## Border Clash - I Live in Southern Arizona!

*Border Clash* is one of many paintings in my Fabricscape Series. This series explores the ambiguity of having a painting read both as a still life and also as a fantasy landscape. Part of my inspiration for this series came from recalling childhood memories of playing in bed with small toys on a patterned quilt, and part of it came from sewing - pushing fabric around reminded me of mountains and valleys. From there it was just a short leap to setting up still lifes that could tell a story, make a social comment, be a parody or satire or just plain *fun*.

For me, part of what makes this series work is having an idea that can be translated into a still life/landscape format, and part of it is having the right viewpoint of the setup. I particularly like the nearly overhead point of view as it mostly eliminates perspective, and lets me feel as if I'm flying over the landscape I've created. I also favor tight cropping, so that

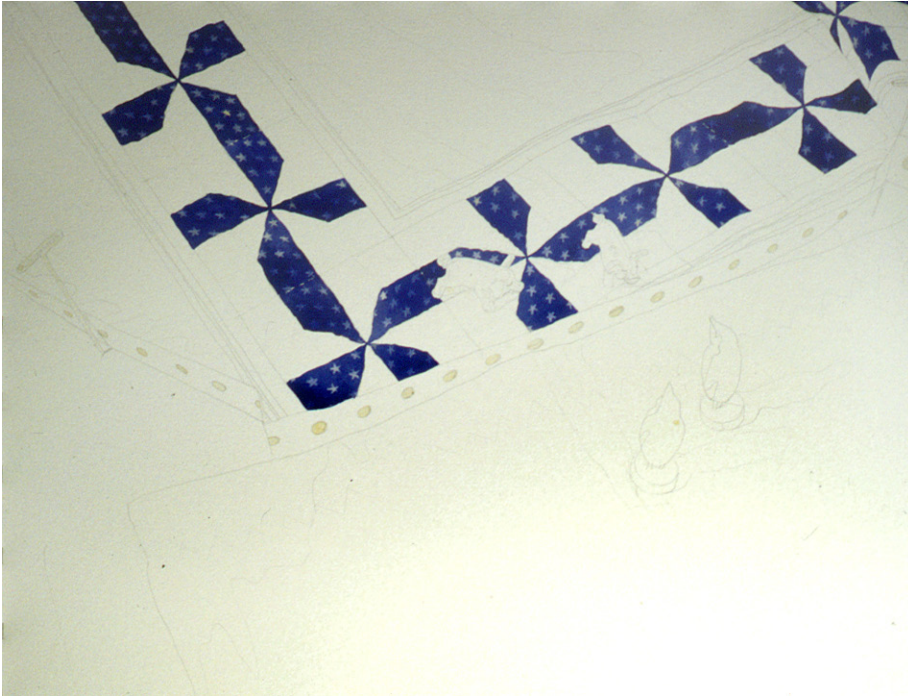
the fabric doesn't overwhelm the actors on this tiny stage. It also allows my props — which include everything from needles and thread to scissors, paper models I construct, toys, and penguins from my collection — to be presented larger than actual size for more impact.

This painting, *Border Clash*, was inspired by reading an article in our local paper about how porous our border is with Mexico. They were talking about people and smuggling of course, but I also know that culture leaks through too - from both sides. To set up my still life, I created two different border patterns – one in red, white and blue and the other in red, green and white – to represent our two countries. I used the tear off strip from dot-matrix printer paper to create my fence full of holes, anchoring it to the

fabric with T-pin “posts”. My actors are two plastic pig dice from the game of Pigmania, and two penguins from my collection. They eyeball each other from each side of the fence, wondering if they have anything in common besides the first letter of their identities.

Above: After drawing my image on my watercolor paper in pencil, and masking out some things with liquid mask, I put in the first color (ultramarine blue).

Right: Here I've painted gray shadows on the fabric as a base layer, added the second color of blue to the border pattern, and removed the masking fluid from the small stars in the ultramarine blue areas.







**Above:** Once the gray shadows are dry (I used transparent, staining pigments - a mix of permanent alizarin crimson and thalo green to make the gray) I begin layering the local color of the fabrics in washes, strengthening and varying the color as I go. The rose pink area and orange-red area are examples of this. Having the gray underpainting automatically makes the color darker/grayer where the color goes over the gray. I also made/used a stamp from a pearl eraser that spelled out the word MOM or WOW, depending on how you viewed it, and used that with red watercolor to stamp a repetitive pattern into some of the triangle shapes in the top border fabric.

At this point, I'm painting around some shapes - the pie pieces in the pink fabric, the toy pigs and penguins, and the paper fence and T-pins.

**Bottom:** More glazes or layers of color have been added, including two shades of green for the bottom piece of fabric. With a full sheet painting, some of the smaller white areas (like the space between the orange-red and the lime green and dark green) can just be painted around rather than having to be masked first. With a smaller image, I'd have to use liquid mask to protect these areas or a very tiny brush!







Above left: First wash applied to fence, and holes filled in with background color/texture/pattern. I've also begun painting the pigs and penguins.

Above right: Little details are added - the stencilled on geometric southwest designs on the orange-red and lime green parts of the bottom border fabric, the pie slice design on the pink fabric and a stamp pattern of small red apples with green leaves. The penguins and pigs are finished as well. Like most watercolor, painting goes more quickly at the start with large areas of washes, and much more slowly at the end, when the small final details are added.

At right is the finished painting. Not only does the culture clash, but so do the very different patterned and colored border fabrics. Got my message across both visually and symbolically!



*Border Clash*  
watercolor on paper  
image 21.5 x 29.5 inches  
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