

P O R T R A I T

Kaffe Fassett

CATHERINE AMOROSO LESLIE

Vibrant. Daring. Kaffe Fassett's designs for knitting, needlework, and quilting are instantly recognizable. No wonder the author, artist, and lecturer has been hailed as "the master of color."

Born in San Francisco in 1937, Fassett grew up in Big Sur, California. He studied painting, first at the Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston and then in London. But a trip to a Scottish woolen mill changed the direction of his life. Discovering that yarns matching colors he had seen in nature were available, Fassett purchased twenty colors of yarn and a set of knitting needles on the spot. Improbably, a passenger on the train back to London taught him how to knit. Thus began his life as a textile artist.

Beginning as a knitter, Fassett has branched out to include needlepoint, quilting, and other techniques. He has written numerous books, including his latest, *Kaffe Fassett's Pattern Library: Over 190 Creative*

Catherine Leslie: What is your idea of the perfect needlework experience?

Kaffe Fassett: Knitting is my favorite needlework technique with primitive hand quilting running a close second. The perfect environment to do needlework would be in a garden, not too hot, with a breeze blowing. I would like to be surrounded by interesting things and visual stimulation with gentle people walking around.

CL: Which historical needlework do you most admire?

KF: Old quilts get me going, especially those [made] between 1820 and 1900. Quilts from that period are so inventive. They were created by unsung women heroes who filled the world with light.

CL: What is your current state of mind in terms of your needlework?

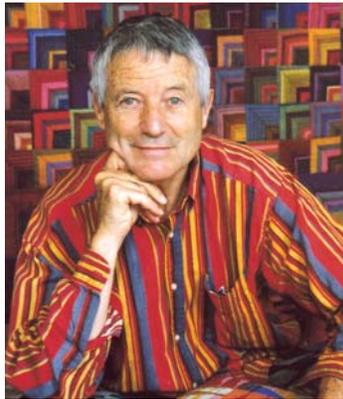
KF: I'm working on a book inspired by quilts in the Victoria and Albert Museum. From those beautiful old quilts, I have designed special fabrics. These fabrics are not reproductions but an interpretation of the general mind of the pieces in the V&A. The fabrics are woven in India and are very usable for quilting. Quilting is my "painting."

CL: Which needlework talent would you most like to have?

KF: I would love to be able to sew quilts beautifully like Liza Lucy, who sews the quilts I design. We are a great team. I also admire those with great skill in embroidery, specifically crewel and Japanese embroidery.

CL: What do you consider your greatest needlework achievement?

KF: Knitting and bringing



Kaffe Fassett.

Photograph courtesy of Westminster Fibers, Nashua, New Hampshire.

Knitwear Designs (Newtown, Connecticut: Taunton Press, 2003). He is the first living textile artist to have had a one-man show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; that show subsequently traveled to nine other countries. He codesigned the set and costumes for the opening of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Millennium Season. Among his many projects for radio and television, his six-part British television series *Glorious Colour* has been aired many times and in several countries since its debut in 1986. And at the request of the international charity Oxfam, he has worked with artisans in India to create more marketable textiles.

Fassett lives in London but travels frequently. If you have the opportunity to attend one of his workshops or lectures, do. His passion for knitting, needlework, quilting, design, and color is catching.

ambitious complexity to the typical knitter. What I do in knitting is not complicated, although before my books and teaching, many people were terrified to work with color in this way. I'm happy that I was able to share the trick of working with color.

CL: Do you have a treasured needlework possession?

KF: It depends on the mood I'm in, but one of my favorite things is a knitted beaded bag with roses on it. It is absolutely beautiful, but unfortunately I've misplaced it somewhere. Some of my treasured possessions are shown in my book *Welcome Home: Kaffe Fassett* [Woodinville, Washington: Martingale, 1999].

CL: How would you like to be remembered?

KF: That I took the fear out of rich color and pattern—

allowed it to be manifest in the world.

CL: If you could choose any needlework project, what would it be?

KF: One quilt after another.

CL: What other projects are you working on?

KF: A stitch library, a sampler sweater for a Rowan book, and lots more fabric ranges. I'm overseeing quilt fabric production and getting it correct. Overall, I'm celebrating the joy of making quilts. I'm enjoying that more than anything, especially being influenced by old quilts in my work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

Catherine Amoroso Leslie is an assistant professor in the School of Fashion Design and Merchandising at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.