

Shea Wilkinson

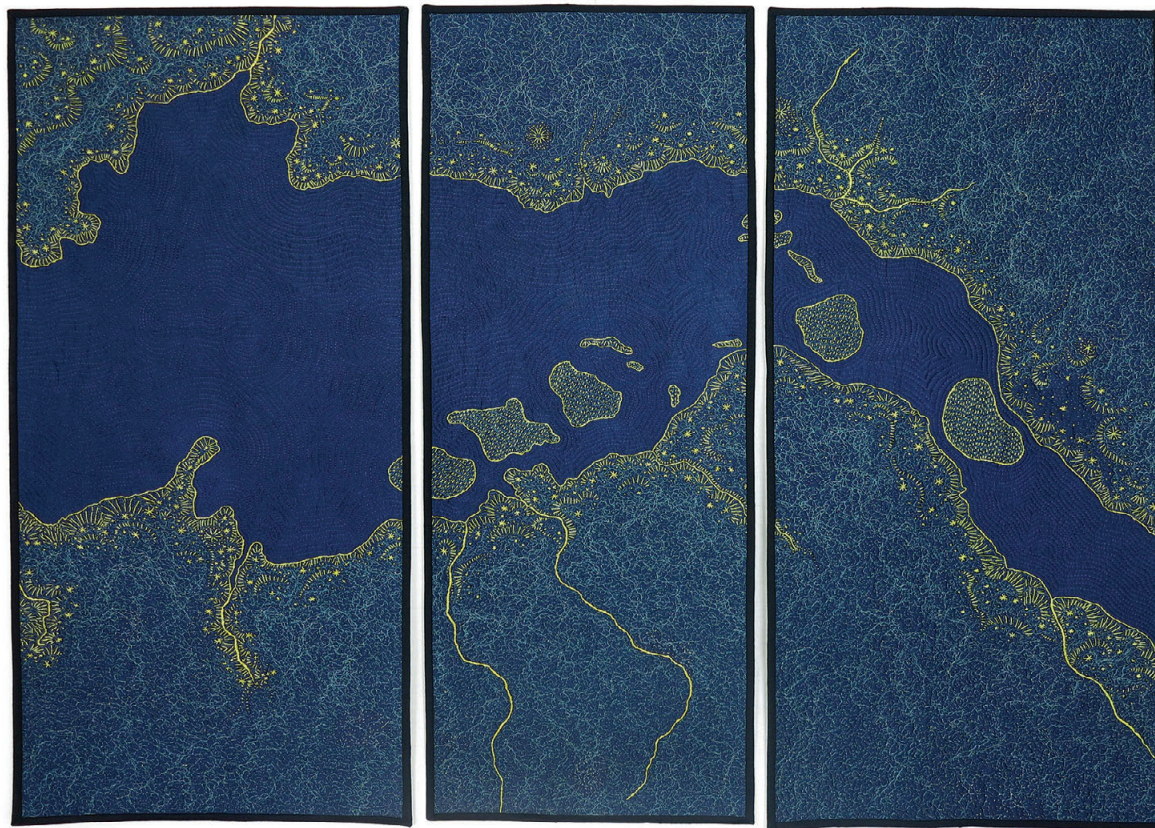
I have been working on a series called *Maps: New Discoveries*, which might lead one to think of the latest in cutting edge mapping technology, satellite imagery, or ground penetrating radar. Presently, there is hardly a corner of the world left to be discovered by the naked eye and wandering feet; rather, we are uncovering the world anew in layers—what lies below this, or above that—making our maps deeper.

With the influx of this technology, maps are more complex, detailed, interconnected, and accessible. They are an embedded encyclopedia of culture. A future archeologist would just have to find one thumb drive full of GIS (geographic information system) maps to learn the most relevant things about the society—how it retrieved its water and food, traveled en masse, developed its urban centers over time, and more—all in just a few gigabytes of data. Our navigation and understanding of the terrain is taken for granted now that it has become so compact and visual, relieving us of the inherent guesswork once required to analyze a map and plot a course.

While I find this all very interesting and an asset for our global society, I am captivated by the hand-drawn and engraved maps of old, particularly those of Lewis and Clark's expedition of 1804–1806. There is a quality and mystery to them, as if we really can't solve the puzzle of Earth's surface; all we can do is approximate it before and until the landscape shifts again.

I am also interested in utilizing the oldest mapping equipment around—our brains—to make these places come alive. When I am working on these pieces, every group of stitches represents an elevation or depression, and I enjoy daydreaming of the contours and deciding how steep the hills and valleys should be, and whether there will be subtle erosion or drastic alterations to the land. There is another reality that comes to being with each group of swooping stitches, the story of the landscape becoming clearer with every pass of the needle through the surface.

Mostly, my stories tell of glacial activity. I live near the Loess Hills of Iowa, which are composed of a unique soil created by moving glaciers.



SHEA WILKINSON *Puget* 2015, hand-dyed silk, cotton, polyester thread, hand-dyed cotton thread, hand embroidery, 32" x 48". Detail TOP.

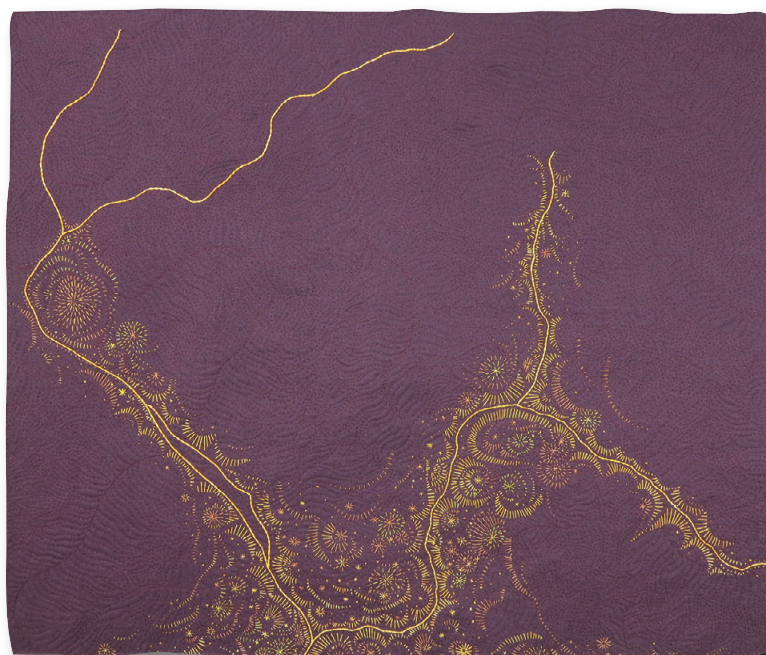
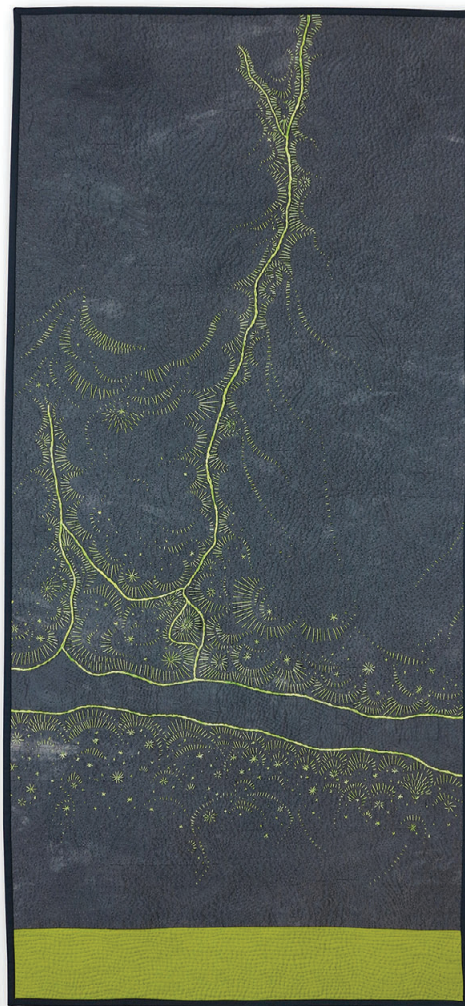
All photos by the artist.

It is quite a stretch of the imagination to first try to envision the scale of the glaciers that once resided right next door and covered miles of the surface, and to then envision those gargantuan chunks of ice sliding, grinding, and crunching over the land.

Today's technology is lightning fast. If a landslide occurs somewhere, the maps can be immediately adjusted, and its previous life forgotten as if it had never existed. By contrast, I am happy to create works that are a representation of a landscape that will never again shift into a new reality, which will always be a snapshot of the organic beauty of Earth's development at one point in time.

Shea Wilkinson's solo show *Scene from Above* will be on display at Gallery 92 West in Fremont, Nebraska (October 3–29, 2017). www.92west.org

—Shea Wilkinson is an award-winning fiber artist working in Omaha, Nebraska. She has exhibited widely and is the recipient of the 2016 Chrysalis Award from the James Renwick Alliance. www.sheawilkinson.com



ABOVE: SHEA WILKINSON *Channels & Tributaries*
2015, wool, hand-dyed cotton thread, polyester thread, cotton, hand embroidery, 34" x 29". With detail.

TOP RIGHT: SHEA WILKINSON *Yellow Gulch* 2015
hand-dyed silk, cotton, polyester thread, hand-dyed cotton thread, hand embroidery, 41" x 19".

