

This is part of a series of articles on randomly selected SDA members.

# At Random

## Iren Rothenberger

BY JEANNE RAFFER BECK



Iren Rothenberger, born in Zurich, Switzerland, has spent a most interesting life pursuing her creative interests. Iren grew up and attended college in Switzerland, where she became an early education music teacher, helping her young students create music through improvisation and attempting to communicate the feeling of sound.

In 1977, Iren came to the United States to study at Lesley College in Cambridge, MA, where she earned a Master's degree in Expressive Arts Therapies. She spent the next 20 years working privately and in public institutions helping individuals heal through art. Iren co-founded a dance and improvisational theater studio. She studied and taught various dance and movement techniques. Then, while searching for a Tai Chi book in a small Asian store, she discovered the book *Opulence: The Kimonos and Robes of Itchiku Kubota*. The fabrics' mesmerizing beauty and fluidity, the intricate detail within the expanse of a landscape changing through the seasons, sparked a simple thought in her: "I want to create something with such beauty." Iren spent a semester studying silk painting at RISD and took classes in various printmaking techniques at the Museum School. She shared a studio in Boston where she made and sold wearable art.

In 1981, Libana, a Boston-based women's group that performs women's music from around the world, started to wear Iren's scarves. A box of Iren's scarves and cards for sale still continue to accompany them on their tours today.

In 1994 a childhood friend visited Iren from Switzerland and within a year the two decided to marry. They left the east coast in 1996, traveled across the US, and decided to settle in Fort Bragg, California. Iren's husband, Stefan Furrer, was accepted into the Fine Woodworking Program of the College of the Redwoods. Iren joined with Lolli Jacobsen as partner in the Fort Bragg Textile Studio where the two make and sell decorative and wearable textiles.

Like many textile artists, Iren has needed to augment her textile work with other sources of income; she stepped into another phase of her life once she settled in California, becoming a garden designer. She both creates and maintains gardens filled with vibrant flowers and touches of wild flowers growing up amidst the more orderly arrangements. Iren envisions these created environments providing rest and refreshment for people and animals.

Iren is drawn to the fluidity and flexibility of textiles. "I like that my paintings can travel with someone as a jacket or scarf that compliments and enhances the zest and beauty of the wearer." Iren's paintings also may become free moving hangings, folding screens or a sculptural coffee table display, as in her newest work, *Accordion Poem*. "I think of my designs as images in a picture book; they tell a story of animals, people, and the beauty of life."

Now this talented artist is considering a next step in her full and diverse artistic life. The physical demands of gardening are spurring her to revisit how she might make a living from making art. When she took a class in disperse dyeing from Jason Pollen and Lisa Grey at the Mendocino Art Center in 2007, she felt the process might offer a less labor intensive method of creating a line of her own designs. For Iren, who has carved a full and interesting life in a country far away from her native land, entering a time of change and exploration will surely lead her to a wonderful new focus for her artistic talents.



IREN ROTHENBERGER *Chameleon* Detail. gutta-percha resist, French dyes, paint on silk, 72" x 18"

IREN ROTHENBERGER *Walk on Water* Detail. Manhole cover rubbings, screenprinting, gutta-percha resist, French dyes, paint on silk, 72" x 18"

