

FEATURE

Interview with Jim Shore, One of America's Most Popular and Successful Artists

By John Saxtan



Editor's Note: Artist Jim Shore is one of America's most popular and recognizable commercial artists today. His distinctive style ranges from two-dimensional paintings to three-dimensional figurines and decorative accessories, most notably for [Enesco LLC](#). He is also one of the most popular artists to appear on QVC, the home shopping channel. Jim is a long-time friend, and we are pleased to be able to bring you this exclusive interview with him.

Gift & Home Interactive (GHI): While art has always been a strong interest of yours, your college degree is in business and engineering. Tell us a little about that.

That was my Dad's in-

fluence and he was probably right. He always wanted me to have a marketable skill, and it came in pretty handy over the years. Earning a living at art is a pretty chancy thing. There are thousands of very talented artists out there, a lot of them a lot better than me, who can't make it for one reason or another. Being an engineer allowed me to take care of my family and pursue my art in my free time. I was kind of a freelancer. I'd take contract jobs, basically troubleshooting or problem solving, for anybody that would hire me. I'd work like the dickens for a while, save as much as I could, and worked on my art between jobs. It worked out pretty well.

GHI: Your art style is very distinctive. What are its roots?

People call me a folk artist but that's not really what I do. I combine a lot of elements from different folk traditions to create what I

hope is a unique look. I use quilt patterns of course, that's seemingly a bottomless source of inspiration for me. But I also use influences from rosemaling, fraktur, Pennsylvania Dutch painting, appliqué, and several other techniques and styles to get the look I want. My advantage as an artist is that I have absolutely no formal training at it, so I'm not constrained by any rules or standards about what I'm "supposed" to do. I can mix all these traditions together to create something that pleases me and not have to worry too much.

You told us your grandmother was a master quilter, and I understand that you are. How does one become a "master" quilter?

I don't suppose there's any official designation as master quilter, certainly not in my grandmother's day. It's more a recognition by peers, the knowledge that this is a person who understands every



I've got a line of textiles with Cranston. Village They're one of the oldest fabric companies in the country so they've been around awhile and know what they're doing. We just came out with a collection featuring roosters and florals together. I'm biased, of course, but I think it's beautiful. (Visit www.quiltingtreasures.com.)

GHI: Are there distinct patterns in quilting that you follow, or do you create your own? Or is it a combination of both?

I use my own take on traditional designs for the most part. There's probably a thousand variations on the eight-pointed star pattern that I use. I like the Flower Basket a lot, as well as Flock of Geese. To me the secret is in the combination of color and scale and how the design all fits together on the piece. So I never run short of options. But when I can, I like to use a specific quilt pattern that has a particular meaning or history as part of the story line or subtext or the piece, like using the Irish Chain on a St. Patrick's Day piece or Wedding Ring for a bride.

GHI: You are such a busy person, with appearances at shows, episodes on QVC, etc. How do you find time to create?

Honestly, I'm not sure. And if

you ask the people in charge they'll tell you I'm always behind. But I'm lucky, these days most of my work is drawing and painting and that's a pretty portable job. I can take it on airplanes or to hotel rooms, it doesn't really matter much. Last week I was sketching new products while I was on the soundstage at QVC.

GHI: Where do you spend most of your time creating? What are your inspirations?

Most of my creative time is spent in my studio in South Carolina. I designed it myself so it has everything I need including plenty of space and light. I'm pretty happy there.

I take inspiration from a lot of sources but particularly my collection of quilts and folk art. There's a purity in real folk art, a purpose that comes from a basic human desire to create beauty out of what's often a very challenging world. Most American folk art has its roots in European traditions, brought here by immigrants in the 18th and 19th centuries. When they got here, those folks faced a pretty harsh environment, where most of their energy had to be focused on basic survival. It inspires me that in the face of that hardship they created enduring art forms that enrich our lives today.

aspect of their craft and can execute their vision as an artist. Make no mistake, quilters are artists, capable of composition and color that could fit beautifully in any art museum in the world. My grandmother was a master at crazy quilts, a kind of free flowing design from seemingly random bits of cloth. From scraps she could create a finished work with balance, movement and energy that you could stare at, and be fascinated by, for hours. And she wasn't afraid to mix colors of any sort to get the effect she

wanted. Green with purple, orange with pink, it didn't matter to her if the finished piece looked good. I always liked that so I guess you could blame my use of color on her.

GHI: Do you do quilting today?

No, I'm not a quilter myself. I was just brought up surrounded by it and can't help but love it.

GHI: Because of your quilting background, have you ever considered developing a line of textiles?

Things to Celebrate in April

April is:

- National Garden Month
- National Humor Month
- National Poetry Month

April 9th. 1st public library opened in 1833, in Peterborough, NH.

April 12th. Space Shuttle Columbia First Launched, 1981

April 13th. Thomas Jefferson's Birthday. Born in 1743.

April 15th. First McDonalds Opens, by Ray Kroc in Des Plaines, Illinois, 1955. Income Tax Day. Leonardo Da Vinci's Birthday.

April 16th. National Eggs Benedict Day. Slavery Abolished by Lincoln, 1862.

April 17th. Daffy Duck's Birthday. Sesame Street's Sherlock Hemlock's birthday.

April 18th. First laundromat opens, Fort Worth Texas, 1934. Great San Francisco Earthquake in 1906. 1775 Paul Revere rides to alert patriots that "The British are coming..."

April 21st. Administrative Professional's Day. The first kindergarten was founded by Friedrich Froebel in Germany in 1837.

April 22nd. Earth Day! Girl Scout Leader appreciation day. Take our daughters and sons to work day.

April 23rd. Hank Aaron hits his first home run in 1954. International sing out day . William Shakespeare's Birthday

April 26th. Hug a Friend Day. National Pretzel Day

April 27th. Tell a Story Day Walter Lantz's birthday. The creator of Woody Woodpecker.

April 29th. Modern zipper invented by Gideon Sindback in 1917.

April 30th. Arbor Day. Usually the last Friday of April. Celebration dates may vary from state to state.

April 30th. National Honesty Day. George Washington inaugurated as first U.S. president in 1789.

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GHI: You have branched out from your original figurines and paintings and have added home decorative accessories. Are there other areas you see yourself tackling in the future?

I really want to focus on garden, plus I have a line in mind for fashion accessories in the near future. But I don't want to give too much away too early.

GHI: You are without a doubt very successful in your art career. What has this success allowed you to do that you might otherwise not have been able to do?

I love to travel, I love to meet people. My work has taken me literally all over the world. And I've made great friends that I would never have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. I've been blessed.

GHI: Do you have any other "passions" such as reading mystery novels or fishing or other interests? In brief, what do you do when you are not creating something artistic?

I'm a pretty simple guy. I've got five daughters, one son and a houseful of grandkids. I'm lucky they're all healthy and they all live

pretty close. They're my passion outside of work. I don't have much time for anything else and that's the way I like it.

GHI: I know you collect quilts. Are there one or two that you particularly cherish? Why?

I've got a Log Cabin quilt that Jan and I found a while back. It dates from the late 1800's, but some of the fabrics in it go back more that century before that. That's pretty typical, most quilts back then were made from scraps. The really unusual aspect of this quilt is that the center squares in each of the Log Cabin patterns is black instead of the traditional red. The red center represents the "heart" or "hearth" of the home. That this quilter used black fabric leads to all manner of speculation, and I'm intrigued every time I look at it.

GHI: Is there something that you have always wanted to do, but have not yet done it? (e.g., climb Mt. Everest, visit Australia, go bungee jumping). And do you think you will get the opportunity?

I've always wanted to see the Taj Mahal. That's always been kind of the definition of exotic to me. Maybe someday. ★