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Penny Sisto Biography

Penny Sisto was born in the Orkney Islands off the northern tip of Scotland. As a health worker for the British Ministry of Overseas Development, she worked as a midwife and aided in health clinics for the Maasai, LuBukusu and Kikuyu tribes of East Africa. During this time, Sisto combined the embroidery, appliqué and quilting techniques she learned from her grandmother with the beading and collage methods of her African friends. Sisto says, "I have little or no formal education. My Granny taught me to sew and read by the soft light of a kerosene lantern at the age of three. The nuns taught me to embroider, the Maasai taught me to crochet, and to revel in color. My quilts spring full-born into my mind. My task, if you will, is to allow my clumsy hands to make them manifest. My granny taught me quilting. Placing square against square in neat stacks to be sewn that night after the farm chores were done. Granny was stern, 'Stitch and unpick, corners must be squared, and colors mixed dark and then light!' - Even at seven I rebelled!" Today, Penny's work continues at a prolific pace in her Floyds Knobs, Indiana, studio.