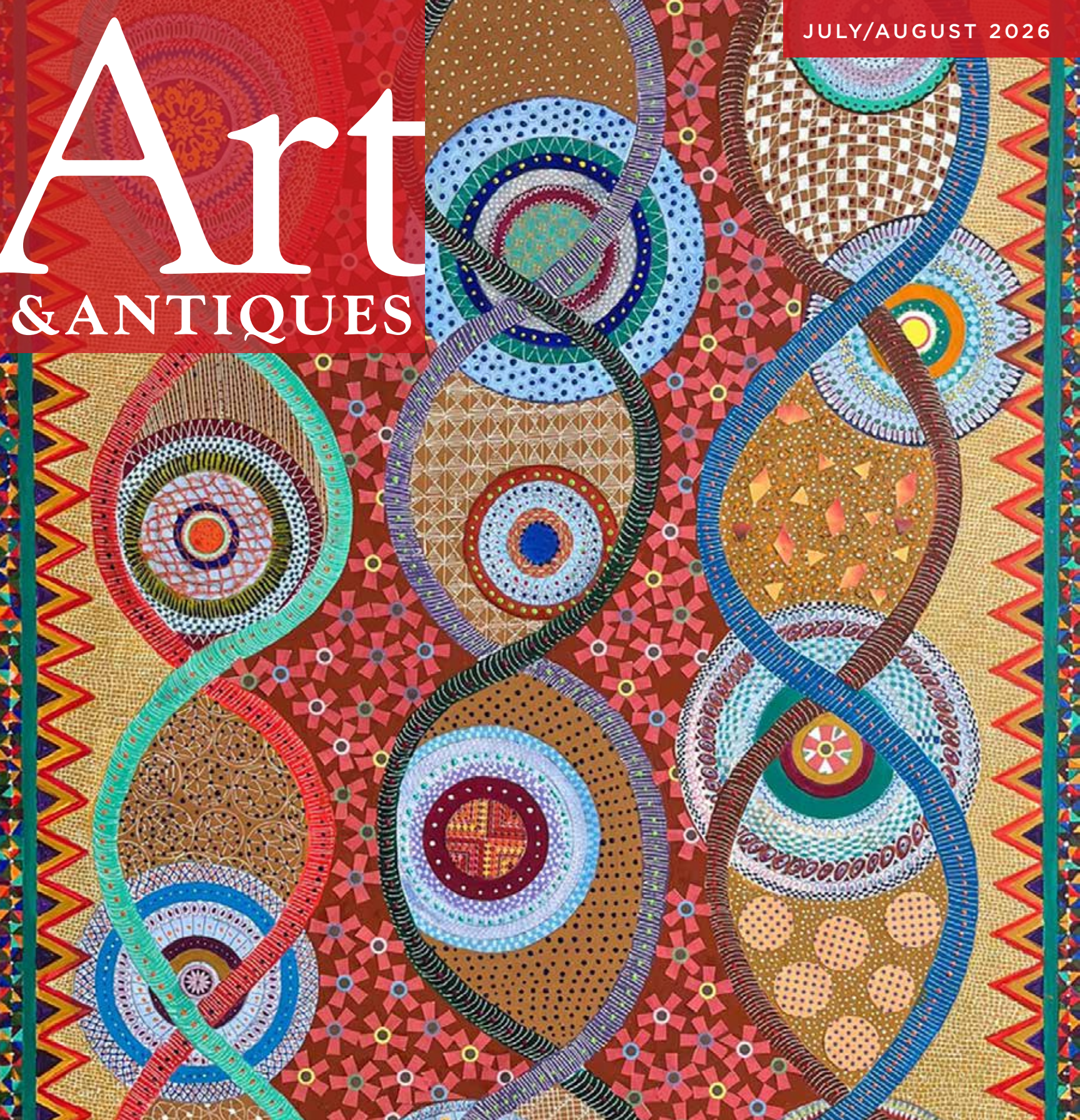


Art & ANTIQUES

JULY/AUGUST 2026



THE ART OF DEE SHAPIRO

A SANTA FE
SOJOURN

JAMES MCNEILL
WHISTLER

MEET THE FRIENDS
OF FLORENCE

WOMEN OF THE
WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

CHINESE
FASHIONS

Pieced Together

DEE SHAPIRO HAS BEEN MAKING ART FOR 70 YEARS. WHILE HER MEDIUMS AND SUBJECT MATTERS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME, HER COMMITMENT TO WHAT SHE WANTS HER PIECES TO ACCOMPLISH REMAINS THE SAME. BY DAVID MASELLO



Dee Shapiro (opposite) says, “I don’t remember having done a piece when I’m done with it—it just comes together in the process.” Pictured here, above and below: *About a Quilt*, a mixed media work; *Soft Landing* (Flashé paint, paper, thread, ink on canvas).

DEE SHAPIRO HAS one request of those who stand in front of one of her artworks. “I want people to spend as much time looking at my piece as I did creating it.”

That might be difficult, given that some of Shapiro’s collages and assemblages (whereby the canvas or board assumes a three-dimensional quality) can take weeks to make. But what her works do convey, even at a glance, is their complexity, beauty, originality, and sense of infinitude. Her works incorporate a seemingly infinite amount of detail, with some of her painted borders that circumscribe a work composed of a countless number of repeating shapes and alternating colors.

“Really, what I most like to hear is someone who comes up to me after looking at one of my works and says, ‘I love that. I relate to that piece. I recognize something in it that I hadn’t known before about any artwork.’ I’ve heard these remarks. I just keep wanting to hear them again.”

Shapiro, whose youthful mien completely belies her age, (she proudly confesses to having been born in 1936—you do the math), climbs to the third-floor attic studio space in her home on Long Island multiple times throughout the day—at least 10 trips daily, by her estimate. “I think my climbing those stairs is what keeps me fit,” she says. When she goes up to the bright, steeply pitched room after breakfast, she is content to spend most of the full day cutting fabrics and papers for the works, applying paints, drawing, preparing canvases and boards, or, perhaps, just cleaning and rearranging, quotidian acts that feed her creative self-consciousness. Her husband, Stan, a personable, retired doctor (who also plays a mean saxophone in jazz bands), sometimes comes partially up the stairs to look over the railing, see her working, and ask a question about a domestic matter. “Stan likes to look at my paintings, but he doesn’t offer any immediate responses to them,” she says. She acknowledges that his lack of a



response might actually be a good dynamic in that she alone gets to serve as her own critic while a piece is coming together.

By her estimate, Shapiro says she has been making art for some 70 years, though motherhood and being a wife took precedence for much of that time—something she acknowledges, with both satisfaction but also some rueful poignancy, as witnessed in a compelling 2025 documentary, *Material Matters: The Art of Dee Shapiro*, which was directed by Diane Crespo and premiered this spring at the Berkshire International Film Festival. Shapiro has never confined herself to a single medium or style, something she says might have contributed to why she is not more recognized than she is as a presence among creative contemporaries. But given the documentary and her regular participation in gallery shows, such as those at New York’s storied National Arts



Of a finished work, Shapiro says, “I want one of my pieces to feel at home, as if where it’s hanging is where it should be.” Above, left to right: *Dissimilarity* (ink, paint, paper, plastic on panel); *Jumble (Encircled 3)* (ink, gouache, paint, pasted paper on paper).



Above: Works from Shapiro's "Iconic Nudes" series include (left to right) *My Standing Nude* and *My Pink Nude*, both works composed of mixed media on paper. Below: One of her earlier, small-scale cityscapes, *Downtown West Side* (oil on board).

For more information on Dee Shapiro please visit: deeshapiro.com



Club (where she is an active member), as well as in museum exhibitions, Shapiro is a known and revered working artist.

Early on she was invited to show at New York's A.I.R. Gallery (Artists in Residence, Inc.), an enterprise founded in 1972 and run by female artists who felt that art by women wasn't getting the notice or respect it deserved. Earlier in her career, she painted numerous cityscapes and landscapes, but Shapiro focuses mostly now on collages and assemblages that encompass multiple mediums and materials. In addition to acrylic paint and colored pencil, such works include everything from fabrics and acrylic paints and beads to plastic parts, faux jewels, and, in the case of one notable work of a reclining female nude, pubic hair. "My materials are detritus," is

how she references them as a whole.

In both her Long Island home and in another studio space at a weekend home in Connecticut, Shapiro has accumulated a lot of detritus, much of which comes with special meaning and import. Her paternal grandmother, who came to New York in 1909 from Europe, began work as a seamstress while still just a teenage girl. "My grandmother was always an inspiration to me. She taught me how to sew on a simple Singer sewing machine that you had to operate with a pedal. My aunt, her daughter, was a buyer in the garment industry. Over the years, the two of them—mother and daughter—acquired scraps and leftovers of fabrics, so many that I'm still using them in my artworks." In many of her pieces, Shapiro actually sews material onto the canvas with a needle. Thus, as she actually pieces together her artworks, so, too, is she metaphorically piecing together her family's past.

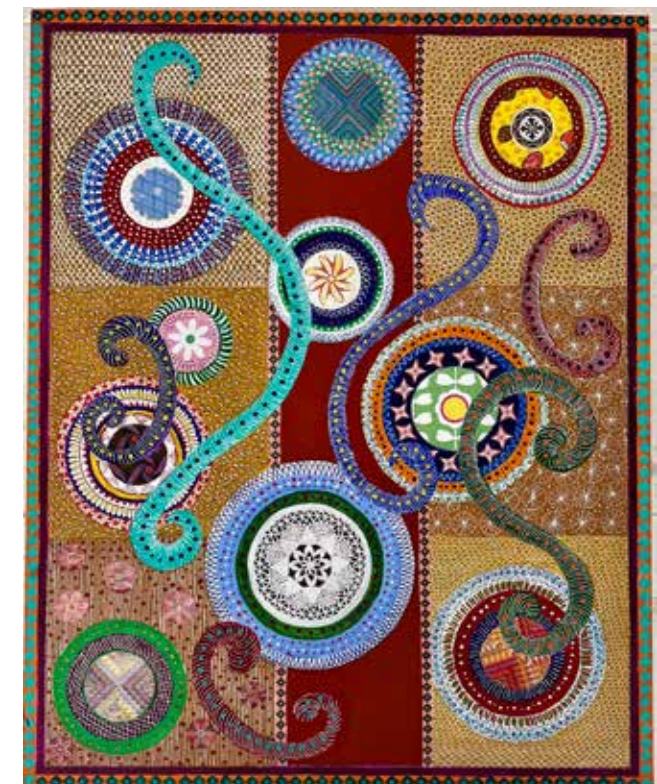
When she talks about the art she makes, Shapiro assumes a thoughtful, contemplative middle-distanced gaze, as if she is seeing the process and the inspirations she is describing and the very



execution of work in her mind's eye. She speaks easily about her methodologies and passions. "I have no interest in symmetry," she states, preferring asymmetry. "I don't think there is symmetry in nature. Even in the human body, one eye is going to look a little different than the other. I enjoy asymmetry because it creates a tension that you don't get when something is predictable." She embraced this ideal when she learned about something known as the Golden Mean, whereby everything in nature is in proportion to and relating to the body, be it sunflowers or butterflies.

It makes sense, then, that she would have a penchant for numbers and geometry. The human figures she includes in works are often set amidst abstract geometric forms. "Even my cityscapes and landscapes are about geometry more than what is actually depicted. Everything I put on a canvas is part of my geometric progression as an artist."

Among the many series she has undertaken, Shapiro's "Iconic Nudes" involves her



"Geometry is in everything, even in the proportions of the human body," says Shapiro. Clockwise from top left: *What Was I Thinking* (mixed media on panel); *From Whence It Came* (mixed media on panel); *In the Queue* (ink, paint, paper on panel).



“I’m obsessive about cutting little shapes,” says Shapiro, as reflected in these two works—left to right, *Surprise Steal* (ink, paint, fabric, paper on panel) and *Picture This* (mixed media on paper).

reinterpreting classic male depictions of female nudes, through collage. “Female nudes have been around for centuries and perhaps that’s because the female body is more interesting, more nuanced than the male body. What I find interesting is that all of these iconic nudes of women were done by men. What I wanted to do is to make the female figure mine.”

In watching the documentary about Shapiro, you see an artist eagerly climbing those

stairs to her studio, a place she calls “my second home.” She evinces a spirit, on film and in person, that is, at once, enthusiastic and passionate, but also ruminative and, perhaps, even tinged with a current of melancholy or introspection. You can feel and sense the creativity that propels her up to the attic space.

To look at any of Dee Shapiro’s works is to be enveloped by color, geometry, materiality, and a joyful, energizing repetition. What repeats in her works engages. Her canvases are imbued with an uncanny ability to be busy with expression yet never lost in chaos. Maybe that’s because Shapiro has had a life-long fascination with numbers, mathematics, and geometry. She exercises an inherent sense of order. If anyone has, as she would wish, a spare three weeks, or so, to really look at a finished Dee Shapiro work that took her that long to make, it would be time well spent. 

“My aunt, her daughter, was a buyer in the garment industry. Over the years, the two of them—mother and daughter—acquired scraps and leftovers of fabrics, so many that I’m still using them in my artworks.”



“I love quilts and the piecing together of things and I always want to find ways to use what I have around me,” says Shapiro. Top left: *Encircled 2* (paint, ink, pasted paper); left to right: *Spoonings* (paint, ink, mixed media on panel); *Recovered* (paint, ink, cut paper on panel).