


free-range art

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Photographed by TROY CAMPBELL

Inspired by her remote Texas surroundings, artist Katherine Shaughnessy fashions a simple life that helps her stay focused on the crewelwork she's single-handedly making hip.

A photograph of a woman, Katherine Shaughnessy, standing in a field of tall grass. She is wearing a white short-sleeved top, blue jeans, and a straw hat. She is holding a young child, Fiona Mae, in her arms. The child is wearing a pink dress and red boots. The woman is also holding a long wooden staff or pole. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees in the distance.

Katherine Shaughnessy, holding daughter Fiona Mae, stakes claim to a two-bedroom/studio-loft farmhouse perched on 20 acres on a shared parcel of 150 acres. Katherine and her husband, Tom Michael, bought the farmhouse several years ago to get away from city life.

{CREATIVE WOMEN}



"When we were growing up, my mom let us have chickens," says artist Katherine Shaughnessy. "I wanted my daughter Fiona Mae to experience that, too."



Katherine works on her 3x3-inch "Love Loop" design, one of the first kit patterns she designed after reigniting her love of creating crewelwork.



This is just one of the 421 crewel wool colors Katherine keeps on hand in a variety of numbered and labeled storage bins.

On a windswept day in southwest Texas, a little gray ball of tumbleweed bounces across the porch of a small farmhouse. Artist Katherine Shaughnessy heads over to catch it—then delights in discovering the tangled mass is actually an empty bird's nest. The moment is further sweetened when, upon closer inspection, Katherine sees pieces of yarn, thread, and fabric woven into it—pieces most certainly from the fiber and mixed-media work she does at her studio here.

"You know, whenever I teach fiber art, I talk about bird's nests," Katherine says. As she talks, she handles the nest like a Fabergé egg. "I try to explain that the original weavers are birds. They use whatever they have in their environment."

Katherine certainly has, too. Ever since her mother taught her crewel embroidery at age 5, the Ohio native has been using wool and thread and other materials to weave an artist's life. Thirty-some years later, she opted to leave city life (Cleveland and Chicago) to live and work in one of the most remote reaches of Texas—Calamity Creek, near Big Bend National Park. Here, she lives in a 1,000-square-foot farmhouse with her husband, writer Tom Michael (who manages the public radio station in nearby Marfa, an artist's community), and daughter Fiona Mae, 2.

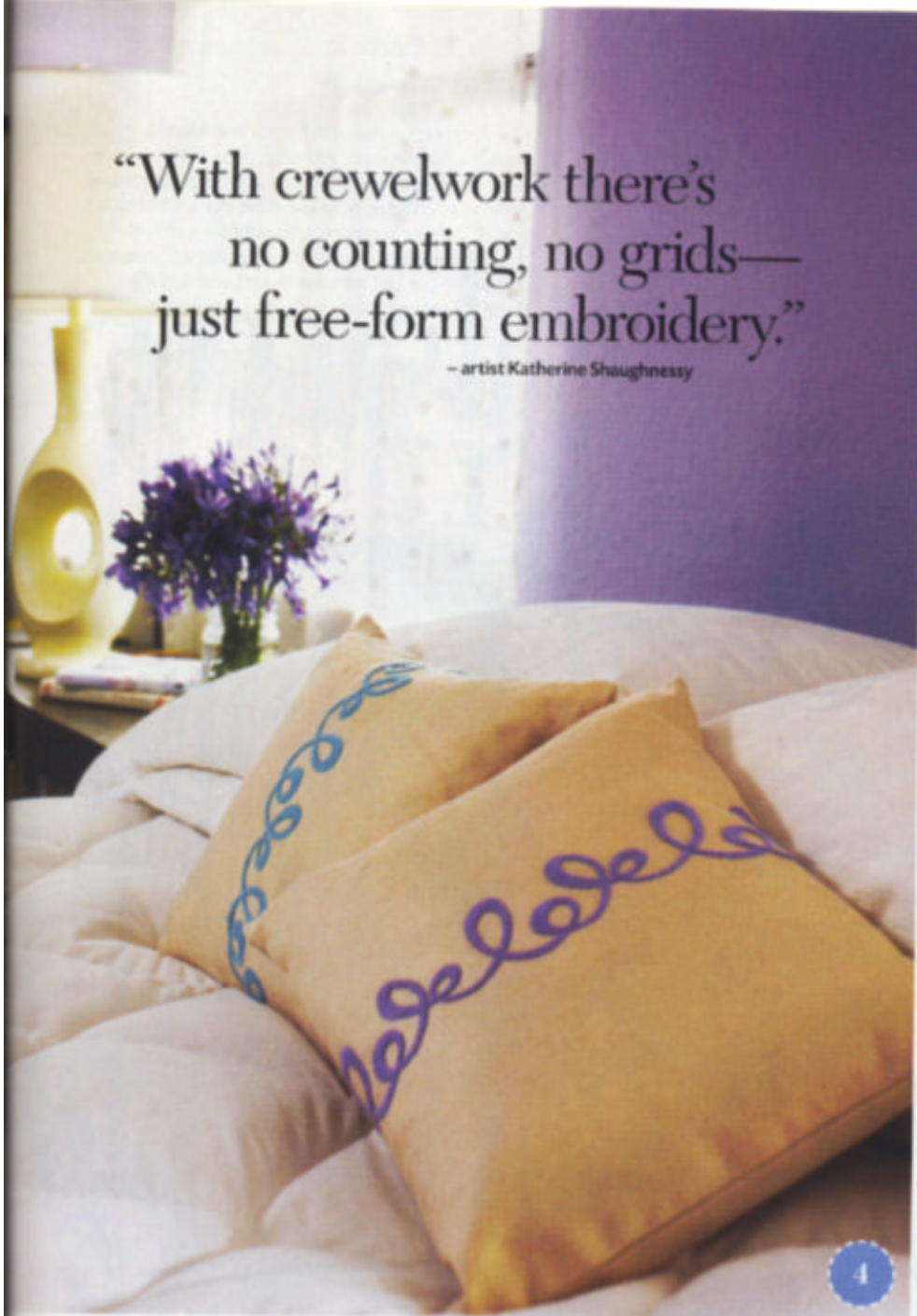
Katherine also runs a business, Wool & Hoop (www.woolandhoop.com), designing kits for embroidering wool on linen. That venture began several years ago when she couldn't find the type of embroidery kits she remembered from her childhood. So, she created her own. That was followed by her book, *The New Crewel* (Lark Books, 2005), which touches on various stitches and offers contemporary practice designs.

"Once I realized I could quit my day job and crank out as much art as I could, I jumped at the chance," she says. "So far so good. I love the opportunity to just focus on what I truly love."



“With crewelwork there’s
no counting, no grids—
just free-form embroidery.”

— artist Katherine Shaughnessy



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1. ORGANIZED LIVING. Katherine designed the loft’s storage to feature two long closets, each with roll-out shelving doors fit with organizer bins. “One afternoon I made one to see if it would work. Then I had construction workers make the others,” she says.

2. CREATIVE PROMPTS. Next to Katherine’s computer is her inspiration wall, where she tacks an ever-changing mix of things that inspire her. Current items include “old crewel pieces done when I was a kid,” she says. “The pear is one my brother did. The ‘Love’ one I did when I was 10.” Another item shows Tom as a boy. “I love that somebody put him on a button,” she says.

3. SHARED SPACE. Katherine’s desk, in a loft overlooking the living room, is part of one long table that she and her writer-husband use for computer-oriented work.

4. CHARITY (PILLOW) CASE. In the master bedroom, two accent pillows reflect Katherine’s “Spring Fling” ropelike pattern (in “kingfisher blue” and “hyacinth purple”) that she designed for Nest, a St. Louis company (www.buildanest.com) that helps support women entrepreneurs in underdeveloped countries.

5. ALL IN A DAY’S WORK. Katherine and Fiona Mae enjoy a reading session in a hammock on their farmhouse porch, one with a brilliant view of McIntyre Peak. They’re lying on a quilt that Katherine made in college from a variety of colorful fabric scraps.

6. BUSINESS AS USUAL. Across from the computer station, Katherine uses a large work surface to cut fabrics, make art and crewel kits, sew, and fill orders.

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