AI Rules of Engagement: Quilt Show Entries, Copyright, and Attribution Standards

As generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools become increasingly integrated into graphic design, textile pattern creation, and longarm quilting systems, major international quilting organizations have established clear boundaries regarding eligibility, mandatory disclosure, and authorship credits.

This document details the official regulatory standards for leading textile competitions, proper attribution practices for photography and source material, and the baseline legal requirements governed by the U.S. Copyright Office.

1. Quilt Show AI Eligibility and Disclosure Frameworks

Different organizations maintain distinct thresholds for the allowable use of AI in competitive exhibitions. Compliance requires careful documentation of the entire creative workflow, from initial concept to the finished stitched piece.

Competition / Organization	AI Threshold & Eligibility	Mandatory Declaration Requirements
International Quilt Festival (Houston / Quilts.com)	Maximum of 15% of the total creation process. Any quilt exceeding 15% AI utilization in design, software layout, or execution is disqualified from entry.	Mandatory "Yes/No" declaration on the entry form. Entrants selecting "Yes" must provide an explicit, written explanation detailing the tools used and cite the digital source material.
American Quilter's Society (AQS QuiltWeek - Paducah & Regional Shows)	Strict emphasis on original human craftsmanship. Highly automated or entirely AI-generated visual outputs without significant physical intervention face disqualification under	Full disclosure of all digital pattern-generation tools, specialized longarm software, and digitized quilting files within the design and quilting credit sections.

Competition / Organization	AI Threshold & Eligibility	Mandatory Declaration Requirements
	originality guidelines.	
Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) Global & Regional Exhibitions	Requires the artist to maintain primary creative control over the expressive, tangible elements of the fiber art. Pure generative AI prompt outputs are excluded.	Mandatory disclosure of any machine-learning, algorithmically assisted design filters, or computerized alteration software utilized during layout planning.

Note: Failure to disclose the use of generative software or misrepresenting the percentage of AI assistance constitutes a violation of competition ethics rules and can lead to immediate disqualification, forfeiture of prizes, and multi-year exhibition bans.

2. Deconstructing the "15% Threshold" Rule

Understanding what constitutes "more than 15%" of the entire creation process requires breaking down an art quilt's lifecycle into distinct phases of labor, decision-making, and execution:

- **Phase 1: Concept Generation & Sourcing** (Brainstorming themes, taking reference photography, or querying tools for mood boards)
- **Phase 2: Pattern Transformation & Mapping** (Posterizing images, identifying clean edge paths, dividing the composition into distinct tonal value blocks)
- **Phase 3: Material Selection & Preparation** (Building physical value strips, hand-dyeing fabrics, sorting gradients, and transferring layouts to freezer paper or overlays)
- **Phase 4: Construction & Structural Collage** (Cutting complex templates, precision positioning fabric shapes, fusing or piecing components)
- **Phase 5: Execution & Stitch Finishing** (Guiding free-motion tracks, sandwiching layers, machine quilting fill patterns, and completing the binding)

Operational Evaluation: If generative AI tools are used exclusively in Phase 1 or Phase 2 to map value blocks, the machine's involvement touches only a fraction of the design lifecycle. Because the tactile acts of physical fabric selection, hand-cutting, positioning, and machine quilting comprise roughly 85% to 90% of the creative and physical labor, an artist-guided piece sits safely within competition rules.

3. Traditional Digital Tools vs. Generative AI Posterization

Competition entry juries draw a firm technical line between standard image editing tools and modern machine-learning models based on algorithmic automation vs. direct human control.

Workflow Characteristic	Traditional Tools (e.g., Adobe Illustrator / Photoshop)	Generative AI Tools (e.g., Midjourney / DALL-E / ML Filters)
Technical Classification	Electronic design aids / filtering software.	Generative neural networks / algorithmic synthesis models.
Operational Control	The artist dictates exact mathematical parameters (e.g., setting number of value steps in a posterize filter or adjusting trace noise thresholds). The software rearranges existing pixels without introducing external imagery.	The user provides a text prompt or baseline photo, and the algorithm references its training database to guess, interpret, and synthesize entirely new visual data and edges on the user's behalf.
Show Rule Application	Treated similarly to a specialized xerox copier, light box, or digital projector. Does not trigger AI disclosure flags or penalties.	Triggers mandatory AI disclosure forms. Requires full tool citation and percentage calculations to ensure compliance.

4. Step-by-Step Entry Protocol for AI-Assisted Quilts

When submitting a textile piece that utilizes digital tools or posterization workflows backed by algorithmic software, follow this standardized compliance sequence:

1. **Calculate the Technical Percentage:** Document your workflow to prove that AI-generated elements comprise less than 15% of the total design and execution phase (applicable to the International Quilt Festival standard). For example, if an AI image generator was used to brainstorm a layout, but you manually redrew, posterized, selected fabric values, and pieced the shapes, the physical execution remains safely within acceptable human authorship ratios.

2. **Draft the Authorship Statement:** Prepare a concise, transparent one-paragraph statement specifying the precise boundaries of the human-to-computer interaction. Identify what the software contributed (e.g., color map rendering) and what you contributed (e.g., hand-guided machine quilting, value grouping, textile selection). *Example Declaration for Houston:* "Generative AI software was utilized strictly in the digital image preparation phase to map out tonal value layers (under 15% of the total process). All subsequent fabric value selections, template cutting, collage assembly, and machine quilting were executed entirely by human hands."

3. **Log Source Citations:** If the AI model generated an output based on existing artistic databases, or if your prompt referenced specific historical artists, list the platform used (Midjourney, DALL-E, specialized textile CAD plugins) and any primary photographic references.

4. **Complete the Submission Form Blind-Jury Fields:** Ensure that your uploaded full-view and detail-view images are completely devoid of watermarks, digital name stamps, or metadata identifying the quilter, preserving the integrity of the blind-jury evaluation.

5. Intellectual Property and Photo Credit Standards

Proper attribution protects the artist from copyright infringement claims and ensures transparency for commercial pattern replication and public display.

U.S. Copyright Office Baseline Regulations

- **The Human Authorship Requirement:** Legal copyright protections apply exclusively to works created by human beings. Under prevailing federal precedents (such as the Thaler v. Perlmutter ruling), pure generative AI outputs cannot hold copyright.

- **Protectable Elements vs. Raw Data:** While raw AI-generated images lack individual copyright protection, an artist's original arrangement, physical transformation, human selection of values, fabric collage application, and intricate quilting lines are fully protectable layers of human authorship.

Standardized Credit Formatting

When entering shows, publishing patterns to online platforms (such as Etsy), or formatting exhibition labels, utilize the following mandatory credit structures:

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[Quilt Title]
Designed by: [Your Name]
AI Tooling: [Platform Name, e.g., Gemini, Co-Pilot, Claude, Midjourney v6] used for initial concept generation (under 15% total process).
Source Inspiration: Based on a photograph by [Photographer Name], used with permission / licensed via [Source].
Quilted by: [Your Name / Longarm Quilter Name] via [Specify Software if using commercial digitized files].
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By adhering strictly to these documentation, disclosure, and labeling protocols, textile artists can confidently explore modern tech integrations while honoring the traditional standards of competitive quilt crafting.

Copyright Infringement

Creating a copyrighted stock photo or copyrighted photograph as an art quilt—even if translated through an AI design tool—**can constitute copyright infringement** unless you have a license or permission from the copyright owner.

Why Stock/Copyright Photo Use Can Be Infringement:

1. **Derivative Work Rights:** Under U.S. copyright law, the original copyright owner holds the exclusive right to prepare (or authorize) derivative works based on their photograph. Changing the medium (from photo to fabric/stitching) or stylizing the image (cartoonizing, posterizing, or running it through an AI generator) does not automatically erase the original photo's underlying copyright.
2. **Stock Photo Licensing Limits:** Standard stock photo licenses (e.g., Getty Images, Shutterstock) generally permit digital or print graphic design use, but they often restrict or require specific extended licensing if the image is adapted into physical artwork, patterns, or products intended for display, exhibition, or sale.
3. **The "Transformative" Standard:** For a stylized version to bypass copyright via Fair Use, it must transform the original work with entirely new expression, meaning, or message (rather than just recreating the scene in fabric or vector art).

Merely translating a photo into an art quilt or simplified vector design generally retains the recognizability of the composition, making it a derivative work rather than a fair use transformation.

Best Practices & Solutions:

- **Use Public Domain or Creative Commons Zero (CC0) Photos:** Source reference photos from platforms like Unsplash, Pixabay, or Wikimedia Commons (verify public domain status).

- **Use Your Own Photography:** Original photos you took yourself completely eliminate third-party copyright issues.

- **Obtain Permission / License:** If using a specific stock photo or copyrighted image, secure permission or the appropriate licensing terms that cover artistic recreation and quilt exhibition.

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