

THE QUILT INDEX

June 3, 2009

Signature Quilt Project Update

Dear AQSG, H-Quilts, QHL and BQHL list members:

[Apologies for cross-posting] We are writing to update the quilt research community about work going on this spring at the Quilt Index with signature quilts.

Working closely with several members of the Signature Quilt Project team (primarily Karen Alexander, Nancy Hornback, and Lynn Gorges with additional support from Cinda Cawley), we are developing a pilot for public quilt submissions. Thanks to everyone from AQSG and elsewhere who shared their signature quilt research interests and methods -- even example excel spreadsheets and access databases people set up to work with information on their quilts.

We've been meeting weekly on the phone and working through a lot of general discussions about protocols and issues involving individual submissions (such as: how, by whom and through what technical mechanisms to vet submissions; update submitted records; communicate with the submitter if necessary; what kinds of costs would be associated with a full public submission process; imaging standards, etc., how to invite participants to the pilot in a way that also encourages both inclusion and quality submissions). Three SQP members tested out the Quilt Index "Comprehensive Fields" and "Core Fields" with one quilt each, to review the fields and determine modifications for signature quilts. We have also reviewed comments and feedback we have received on the fields from a broad range of users, including many of you.

Based on this review, we have developed a new shorter form for data entry, with particular focus on inscriptions for this pilot. We're framing some training materials, and we are now looking for contributors/researchers to participate in this free pilot.

To capture more of the remarkable stories that draw so many to study signature quilts, we are defining the scope of this pilot to include the broad traditions of writing names on quilts, from fundraising-type "signature quilts", to "friendship", "album", and "presentation" quilts. A quilt with more than one name inscribed on it, that is not only the artist's "signed" mark qualifies. Text on the quilt often will include text in addition to signatures, as well. Quilts from any time period are eligible.

In an attempt to be open and fair, we have set a minimum target goal of 50 submissions for the pilot. These will include "tester" quilts owned by the SQP team members, quilts documented by the SQP already in an earlier phase, direct invitations to contributors and researchers who have been working with us, and an open call for participation to members of AQSG, QHL, BQHL and H-Quilts online networks. The training and quilt entry will take place over the summer and the pilot section will be launched October 15.

Watch for the Call to Participate to follow shortly in a second email/post.

For this pilot, the QI staff first and SQP team as a whole will review actual submissions for completeness and either approve them or communicate with the owners for more information to clarify or enrich the submission. Vetting quilts from a completely public process will be important in the future. So we will work with the QI Task Force and Editorial Board to evaluate how long this takes, what kinds of questions people tend to get stuck on, and revise the form and the training materials accordingly through the process.

Thanks very much to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (which is supporting the development of public object submissions to the Quilt Index), to the Salser Foundation for supporting a specific focus on Signature Quilts, to Lynn Gorges for collaring Nancy Hornback in 2004 to jointly begin the Signature Quilt Project, and to the AQSG list members for sparking the conversation that led to the present convergence this spring.

Sincerely,

Quilt Index staff team and Signature Quilt Project

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