

Patricia Cox Proposes

Patricia Cox was co-chairperson for the recent Winter Fantasy quilt show and symposium. She and Helen Kelley helped document pattern names for the current quilt exhibit at the Minnesota Historical Society so that the catalog includes this information. "Pat" is also one of the "movers" of the Minnesota Quilters.

Through the years, I have visited a number of museum collections but recently after seeing the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Minnesota Historical Society, I began to wonder about collections.

What is the purpose of the collection? Are the functions of an art museum collection so very different from that of an historical museum? Could they both benefit from a broader base? Are they preserving a bit of history or merely providing visual impact? Should they be educating the public?

For whatever reasons, museums tend to be miserly about showing their quilt collections either to groups or to the public. They tend to be sketchy with information about their quilts. They usually know who donated them, sometimes they know the maker and can date them. Sometimes they have a pattern name or the kind of batt or fabric used. Seldom do they have anything about techniques or classification. Rarely do they have all this information about any quilt in one place.

I asked at The Chicago Art Institute why they did not have pattern names listed at the exhibit (See p.18 for the review) I was told that sometimes the names were similar to those used for woven coverlets and they did not wish to confuse the public.. I fail to see the validity of this argument.

Collections may have a preponderance of one type of quilt. Shouldn't these collections be analyzed periodically and excess in one area traded or sold to other museums in order to acquire pieces to round out the collection? Some of the quilts may not be worth the storage space, either because they were

poor items in the first place or they have deteriorated through the years. If they are of sufficient value, perhaps they should be restored, traded or sold.

Who is to decide which quilts are to be kept and which passed along? Quilt groups could provide experts in many facets to aid in these decisions. Museums tend to want to preserve everything but space restrictions limit them. They will have no room for modern items... History is constantly changing and a collection should be kept up to date.

Quilt exhibits should be used to educate the public with documented information about fabric, batting, pattern names, quiltmaker and their proper historical context.

I would like to propose that quilt groups help museums with collections to improve them and encourage historical societies and museums which do not have them to acquire them. Quilt groups might help in the following ways:

1. Studying the quilts in the collection for as much information as possible;
2. Making a written and photographic record of each quilt;
3. Raising money to acquire quilts to enhance or enlarge the collection;
4. Acquiring quilts from private collections which are put on the market;
5. Persuading collectors to donate all or part of their collections;
6. Providing money or personnel to mount exhibitions so that collections may be seen oftener;
7. Restore and repair quilts or raising money for recognized professions to do it (see "Textile Conservation Institute," Fall, 1978 QUILTERS' JOURNAL).

People have a very special feeling for quilts. We should do everything we can to encourage and promote that feeling.

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