

THE EXHIBIT OF QUILTS AT THE ART
INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Last fall I went to Chicago twice in order to see the two parts of the exhibit of quilts at The Chicago Art Institute. The exhibit was in a new gallery and the space was limited so that only two dozen quilts could be seen in each half of the exhibition. As their collection numbers about one hundred, this comprised approximately half of the collection. The lighting was dim to preserve the fabric and it certainly precluded taking any clear pictures as no tripods or flash equipment were allowed. The quilts were hung full length or were displayed in such a way that all parts of the front could be seen. There was no catalog available; just brief descriptions of donor, maker (if known), and fabrics used written on cards adjacent to each quilt.

Is it a good collection? The quilts shown were, for the most part, fine examples. There was a higher percentage of crazy quilts than was really necessary, although those displayed were lovely examples of their genre; one even had pearls and semiprecious stones incorporated in the embroidery. Since I am an avid quilt enthusiast and it is difficult for me to say categorically whether a quilt exhibit is good or bad, my criteria is: Did I see anything in the exhibit I would have been sorry to have missed seeing or was there anything there I would like to own? I make quilts and have them in various stages all over the house, so a quilt has to be special for me to want to own it.

At this exhibit there were several I would have been sorry to have missed and one, in the second part of the exhibition, I simply cannot get out of my mind. There was a quilted silk christening cover, dated 1758, in mint condition, which was a little gem. The jewel encrusted crazy quilt was certainly exceptional and there were some very good pieced and appliqued quilts (especially one made by Dr. Jeannette Dean Throckmorton of Iowa). There were medallion quilts, presentation quilts, a Turkey red embroidered quilt, and example of "broderie perse," special event quilts (Philadelphia International Exhibition, 1876), log cabin quilts, hexagon quilts and many others.

The quilt that so piqued my interest was a friendship quilt made for Ella Maria Deacon about 1842. It is large with some 85 blocks, almost all of them different, and although many of the patterns seem to be traditional ones, they have little touches added which change them and have made them especially charming designs. It is a treasure trove for anyone interested in different and unusual patterns.

This exhibit whetted my interest and I am curious about the rest of the collection. Maybe all the exceptional quilts were displayed but from what I have seen I would like to explore the rest.

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As this is the Year of King Tut in America, QUILTERS' JOURNAL readers may be especially interested in this photo of a falcon mummy found in an Egyptian tomb of about 500 B.C. Now in the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San Jose, CA, the bird's intricate linen wrappings form a pattern very familiar to quilt lovers -- our old and dear friend the Log Cabin.

In Ancient Egypt it was not uncommon to embalm, wrap and entomb favorite household pets such as cats, birds or even an ox. Narrow linen strips in different colors were wrapped to form many different designs in the coverings of animals.



Photo by KOKOMO PRINT