

OPOSSUM INSPIRES DESIGNS FOR QUILT

by Bets Ramsey

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Anyone who is a serious collector, scholar or detective knows the trials of the long search and the ecstasy of discovery. Gathering data on quilts falls in the same realm. When surprises and unexpected discoveries occur, it's exhilarating.

I had such an experience recently when I gave a lecture. I was asked if I had ever seen an opossum quilt, and I said I hadn't. I was then shown an opossum quilt made over 100 years ago. It was love at first sight!

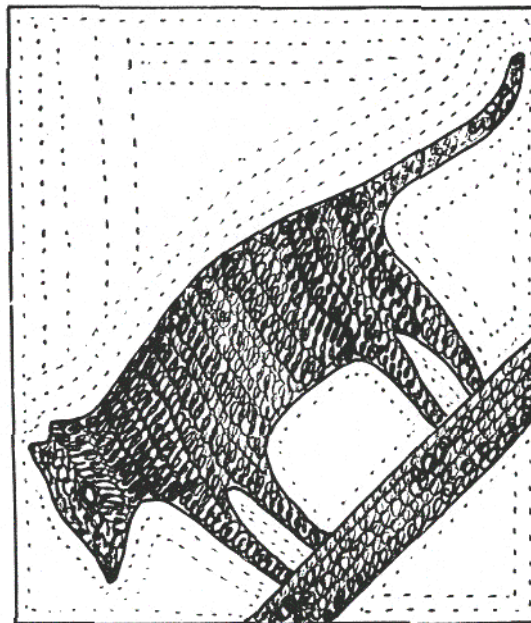
The quilt is a monument to opossum hunting. Each square has a opossum in standing profile or as a stretched-out hide. The simple, uncluttered shapes are cut with impressive subtlety of line as refined as any Matisse cutouts. Warm shades of browns in prints and solids predominate. Parallel rows of quilting shadow the figures and act as rims for the blocks.

This is a most lively, imaginative quilt with humor in every square. Obviously the women who made the quilt must have had fun doing it. And what pleasure the recipient must have gotten when he received his gift.

The opossum quilt was made in a rural area northeast of Athens, Ga. Family tradition says it dates before the Civil War, from the family of Mary and William Sorrells. It has been kept and used by their descendants.

William was a great hunter and had a number of friends who enjoyed the same sport. On one hunting occasion, deserted by their husbands, the ladies decided to have a quilting party. Whether annoyed by the lure of the opossum or pleased to be socializing, they chose to commemorate the event by appliqueing the subject of the hunt onto quilt blocks. A result was the opossum quilt later presented to William.

The quilt has been passed down through several generations. It has always been a source of delight for its owners. As time went on, worn spots became holes, and the holes were covered with patches. One figure was completely worn away, leaving a saw-tooth edge outline. For further preservation the quilt was tacked to a quilted bedspread and bordered with blue material. Thanks to this homey construction, the opossum quilt is still alive and well.



Opossum Quilt

This is an example of one of my favorite themes: using familiar items as subjects for quilts. Choose objects and events identified with a person or family and you will have a strong basis from which to develop ideas.

In years to come, the memory evoked will say far more than words or pictures. Grandpa Sorrells may have been a man of many talents and virtues, now long forgotten, but he will be remembered as an opossum hunter as long as his quilt lasts.

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On the Book Shelf

THE QUILT DIGEST 2, Kirakofe & Kile, San Francisco \$12.95 + \$1.50 post & handling

Anyone who enjoyed THE QUILT DIGEST 1 in 1983 could hardly wait to see the 1984 edition. I liked this one better!

My husband came home one evening singing the praises of THE QUILT DIGEST. He told about the wonderful quilts, he described how the photographers had captured the quilting details to perfection and he marveled at the color reproduction. He is not one to enthuse so I was eager to see the book. He had not exaggerated one bit!

I found the text equally important. It was easy to read and informative.

I love my books and try to keep even the covers from getting dog-eared. I appreciate the attractive mailing carton provided which will make it easy to keep my book looking fresh.