

Uncoverings 2016

Volume 37 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Lynne Zacek Bassett

Uncoverings

2016

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of the American Quilt Study Group

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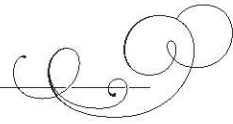
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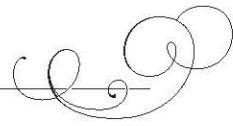
Cover image: Pearl Harris Evans, Lattice Quilt, Macon, North Carolina, c. 1951-1958. Satin acetate florist ribbon, pieced. 63 x 86 inches. Made in memory of Willie Raymond Riggan, North Carolina Quilt Project, courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.

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Foreword



A FACEBOOK FRIEND AND I have recently been debating the term “artisan quilter,” as used by Pottery Barn to promote its new line of designer quilts. Is every quilter an artisan? If every quilter is an artisan, does that mean every quilt has artistic merit? No matter which side of the debate you take, it must be acknowledged that the quilters presented in this volume of *Uncoverings* put careful thought and artistry into their quilts. Their stitches give voice to personal messages of mourning, spirituality, fear, pride, delight, anger, and determination.

Peggy Hazard provides the AQSG 2016 Seminar attendees in Tempe, Arizona, with an intimate look at the difficult and divisive issue of illegal immigration in the state. Using the discarded clothing of migrants making the dangerous desert crossing from Mexico into Arizona, The Migrant Quilt Project commemorates the lives lost under the unforgiving sun and opens a conversation not only about humanity, grief, and generosity, but about public policy. Unlike the faceless and sometimes even nameless people commemorated by The Migrant Quilt Project, the makers of the funeral ribbon quilts studied by Diana Bell-Kite memorialized their own family members. Bell-Kite documents the southern practice of collecting the ribbons from funeral floral arrangements in order to stitch together a treasured keepsake of the ceremony as well as the loved one. The demise of the practice with the floral industry’s shift to thinner, less-stable ribbon material has made this a bygone tradition—important to document now, before these inherently fragile quilts disintegrate or are forgotten by families separated by time or distance from the maker.

Mourning is not always due to the death of a beloved friend or family member. The loss of a dream can also cause profound sadness. Jonathan Gregory examines this sort of mourning in his essay, “Why Ernest Haight Made Quilts.” In the face of the 1930s economic depression that took away his career hopes and caused severe stress over his family’s well-being, Ernest Haight turned his engineering skills to quilt design in order not to “crack

up.” His success as a quiltmaker not only satisfied his own intellectual goals, but also his desire to be useful to his community. In contrast to Haight’s difficult situation, in that same decade of the Great Depression, wealthy socialite Mildred Potter Lissauer also set out to prove her talents as a quilt designer. Sandy Staebell offers an in-depth study of Lissauer’s colonial revival *Godey Quilt*, discussing its inspiration, sources, and production. Staebell presents new information about this well-known quilt—how Lissauer developed her design, and how other talented needlewomen fulfilled Lissauer’s vision. Both Ernest Haight and Mildred Potter Lissauer sought praise and validation of their work—Haight, through his county and state agricultural fairs, and Lissauer through national competitions and publications.

The decades following the Great Depression were generally quiet ones in American quilt history, but there was a significant ramping-up of interest as the country got closer to the Bicentennial of 1976. Colleen Hall-Patton examines how quilts were perceived by the writers for American women’s magazines between 1940 and 1971, focusing particularly on the beginnings of feminist values associated with the practice of quilting—quilting not just within the context of homemaking, but quilting as a legitimate and worthy outlet for a woman’s creativity (or “artisanry,” to return to the opening debate of this Foreword), personal expression, and time. Hall-Patton ends her study just prior to the beginning of the Quilt Revival in the 1970s, as large numbers of women rediscovered this textile art as a medium for more than just home decoration or warmth. The quilts of Mary Catherine Lamb are a dynamic result of the growth of the Quilt Revival. Susan Stanley assigns Lamb’s work—which is only now gaining a widespread appreciation for its imagination, beauty, and imagery—to its deserved place within the Studio Art Quilt movement of the 1990s and 2000s. Lamb created tributes to her Catholic upbringing that were both honorific and humorous. Constructed of unusual fabrics gathered from thrift shops and yard sales, she sliced, skewed, and arranged the pieces to create slightly off-kilter images of biblical saints and monsters.

I would argue that an important element of art is emotion—the emotion with which it is imbued by its creator, and the emotion it evokes in the viewer. While (in my humble opinion) not all quilts rise to the level of art or even artisanry, this volume of *Uncoverings* offers significant fodder for consideration of the importance of quilts as art and emotional expression.

—Lynne Zacek Bassett