

# The Scotts preserve heritage in stitches

By Carl A. Schoettler

A LANDSCAPE of memory is stitched into Elizabeth Scott's Plantation Quilt. She's sewn in the geography of life, a map of history, the topography of a culture. Her thousands and thousands of stitches furrow the cloth into a portrait of the land.

"Now this is called a Plantation Quilt because it comes from the farm," Mrs. Scott says. "They were made by the slaves. That's the slave's pattern of the quilt. And all their quilts was just plain material.

"Some of them never had but one piece of material," she says. "They would take one piece of material and make beautiful stitches over the material."

Mrs. Scott's Plantation Quilt hung most recently in an exhibition of her work, and quilts and beadwork made by her daughter, Joyce, at the 409 Gallery of the Urban Services Agency.

"That's the way the fields were surveyed off," Mrs. Scott says "surveyed" in the soft, easy and expressive accent she brought up the East Coast from Blackstalks and Chester in South Carolina.

"It's an aerial view," Joyce Scott says. The Plantation Quilt outlines plowed fields, and tree lots, and growing crops like a contour map. "The stitches in these quilts represent rows of crops, sugar cane or cotton, anything they were growing."

"Every corner had to be filled," Mrs. Scott says. "There were no leavings. The fields had to be finished. There were no spots in the fields."

Mrs. Scott's got a dark, quiet strength about her as she talks of the past recaptured in her needlework. She's wearing a tunic handsewn by her daughter. Joyce Scott stitched a cloth mandala onto the breast and crocheted edging for the sleeves and throat.

Ms. Scott's dressed from boots to turban in clothes she's made and decorated. She wears a subtreasury of necklaces. Her hair is braided and beaded. Her ears are pierced for at least five pairs of earrings.

Her mother's a little tired this afternoon. Mrs. Scott's been talking a lot about her quilts since their 409 show.

She's 65. She remembers her father sharecropped the land where her grandparents were slaves: "He was a sharecropper and we were sharecroppers' children. Victims."

She's marked her initials in a corner left unsewn in the stitchery fields of the Plantation Quilt: E.T.S., Elizabeth Talford Scott.

"See that spot there," she says. "That spot was left to let you know where the line of the plantation was. Probably was a stone there with the master's name on it. And you didn't cross it."

"Some people say escape routes for the slaves were stitched into these quilts," Joyce Scott says.

"That was a three-year quilt," Mrs. Scott says. "It took three years. A couple hours a day. Sometimes eight hours, if I was off."

"There's only a certain amount of stress your eyes and fingers can take," Ms. Scott laments.

"You have to have the will to do it," Mrs. Scott says. "The spirit goes with it. You don't just start and stop. If you don't feel like doing it, you have to do something else. I did two other quilts while I was doing the Plantation Quilt."

Her quilt is overlaid with constellations, galaxies of appliqued stars, as if you were looking down on the plantation through a bright-colored heaven.

"That's something of my own," she says. "That signifies me. That kind of star This is my design. I'm the only one in my family up to me who ever appliqued stars on their quilts."

Her signature stars identify her 50-Year Quilt.

"My mother started working on this quilt when she was 9 years old," Ms. Scott says. "She stopped around three years ago and said I should work on it."

Mrs. Scott's 50-Year Quilt has burst out of the traditional oblong, like a Frank Stella-shaped canvas or a Claes Oldenburg soft sculpture. But somebody has slept under Mrs. Scott's quilt for most of its half-century. It's evolved into a work of art under her hand a little at a time, like a country chapel everybody in the church helps build.

"It had gotten so old, I would add something else. It would wear and I'd add something else over it," she says. "I

Baltimore, Md  
(P 9 C T O, M D.)

THE EVENING SUN  
MONDAY, APRIL 13, 1981





Evening Sun photo—William Holz

**ELIZABETH SCOTT, JOYCE SCOTT**  
*The daughter took over the 50-Year Quilt*

kept it with me. It got used more than I ever used it. My daughter played with it with her dolls and took naps under this quilt with her dolls."

She lifts a corner: "This material here we got our food in this kind of bag and they were called sacks."

The sack cloth is still marked with

the faded blue letters: "Manufactured by A.E. Staley, Decatur, Ill."

"When we made the quilt my father would dye it with red clay. My father would pack it in a bucket and put boiling water over it and it would get wet and get to a muddy color."

She uncovers a raspberry-colored

(Continued Page 17, Col. 1)



# The Scotts preserve heritage in stitches

[Continued from Page B1]

spot: "This was dyed with a berry, a berry called a poke berry. All of them have different colors from woods and berries.

"There are a couple of monsters in this quilt. See the monsters. See the eye and the feet. I put them on so Joyce would be entertained while I would be doing something."

Ms. Scott's baby pajamas turn up as a patch, and a gray wool fragment of a skirt worn by Mrs. Scott's mother, and a scrap from a yellow-checked suit Mrs. Scott wore.

"I consider these to be family diaries," Joyce Scott says. "If you think of them as a book, the cloth stacked as in a book, if you open it up you can read

them as pages in a book, memories. I think of them as personal hieroglyphics. They were pictures for people who could not read or write, the catalog of their emotions."

Mrs. Scott calls nubby, curling, colorful knots of stitches that decorate her quilts "dobbings."

"Have you ever seen a wasp make his nest out of mud? Well he does it. He spreads it until he has a wasp nest made. That's what they called it when I was a child: a dobbing stitch. Now they call it a rosebud.

"When we were kids my mother would put them on our dresses. You put them like lace on the girls' dresses. We were very well-dressed. You knew the Caldwell girls by the way we were dressed. I am one of 14 children, seven

boys and seven girls. I'm the sixth child. The third girl."

Her mother's name was Mary Jane Caldwell and her father was Samuel Mofford Caldwell, and they were both quilters.

Joyce Scott has included them all in her quilt, Three Generations of Quilters, which is almost as much a family chronicle as her mother's 50-Year Quilt.

She started sewing just about as soon as she could crawl off her mother's lap. But she's also been to school at the Maryland Institute, the Instituto Alende in Mexico, the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine.

"A lot of what I've gleaned comes from my travels in West Africa, Central and South America, Cuba and the continental United States," she says. Her beadwork in the exhibit perhaps reflects best her travels and training. And her Three Generations quilt is "an amalgam of what I've been taught by Africans, African-Americans and native American Indians."

"I used the Mola technique that comes from the San Blas Indians in Panama. They tell stories with their work and then they wear it. So what I'm doing is chronicling my family."

Mola work, she explains, is done by cutting and sewing designs through layers of colored cloth.

"It's called reverse applique by westerners," she says. "For me it's like cutting through layers of visibility."

Three panels of three squares each make up her Three Generations quilt. At top center is a square as colorful as a Matisse cutout, a plot of floral shapes and dancing abstractions labeled Joyce Scott.

"That's me in Innocence, in the garden, with butterflies and bugs, just Innocence, a kid."

Ms. Scott and her mother and her grandparents, the Scotts and the Caldwells, living and dead, are quilted into the center: Mrs. Scott hands her daughter a silver needle threaded with blue thread.

"This to me is an initiation rite, or puberty rite. My mother's giving me knowledge of quilting," Ms. Scott says. "At the bottom is a family portrait of my mother, my father and myself."

In the center is a heart, the heart of the family, and from the heart a yellow stitching winds through the quilt.

"Yellow is the color to me of bright light, sunlight. And it runs through everybody from the heart of the family and it goes around and links up to the center square. It's locked into the thread of the needle.

"The thread of my sewing is interwoven with the family thread."

The long thread of life, and in the hands of Elizabeth Scott and her daughter, Joyce, of art.