

THE CONTEMPORARY QUILT AS ART

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Patricia Bromley, PhD

This paper explores the history of quilts and the evolution of quilts from being viewed only as utilitarian objects to being placed in the category of crafts, and from crafts to the category of fine art. A review of important historical events and individuals who contributed to quilting arts is given to show what has happened that led to the acceptance of some quilts as fine art. Information was retrieved from organizational websites, scholarly reviews, forwards and introductions to exhibit catalogs and publications, and articles written by art quilt professionals.

Not all quilts are considered fine art, but all art quilts share some common characteristics. This paper discusses those characteristics, describes some techniques used in the construction of art quilts, and lists some of the more prominent quilt artists. The paper also reviews a few of the post-secondary schools that offer classes and degrees in textiles and fiber arts, and significant museums and organizations devoted to promoting quilting as an art form.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Fabric has been around for thousands of years – ever since humankind first recognized the need for physical covering. The first clothing may have been made out of the leaves of a fig tree, a readily available plant, and later out of animal skins. According to the Bible: “...they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings,” and “And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them,” Genesis 3:7, 21 (New American Standard Version). Whether one subscribes to that theology or not, throughout the history of Homo sapiens, both plants and animals were used to provide a wide variety of fabrics, from crude animal hides to the finest silks, woven into beautiful and elaborate brocades.

Quilts also have existed for thousands of years. The desire to embellish and transform ordinary cloth into objects of beauty followed the discovery of simple fabric making, and out of that grew the development of quilted fabric. Quilt construction has ranged from simple scraps of fabric sewn together and bound with knotted yarn to elaborate abstract creations of mixed-media materials rich with embellishments, stitching, and originality.

Beautiful and elaborate though most quilts are, however, the art community traditionally disregarded quilts as fine art. Quilts rarely hung in fine art galleries or art museums. Historically, quilted fabrics were displayed in textile or folk arts museums, historic homes, and occasionally as examples of history and technology in museums like the Smithsonian.

This paper will examine a brief history of fabric and quilts, explore methods of rendering fibers and fabrics, follow the transformation from utilitarian to art form, review post-secondary schools that teach fiber arts, and provide an overview of art quilt organizations, galleries, and museums.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The term “art quilt” was coined in 1984, after the traveling exhibit titled “The Art Quilt.” Art quilts sometimes also are referred to as contemporary quilts, studio quilts, textile art, fiber art, fabric art, or mixed media. The problem to be addressed is has the contemporary artworld elevated the studio art quilt from the category of craft to fine art; if so, are there accepted criterion for that recognition?

## **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this paper, a quilt is defined as any two pieces of fabric that serve as top and bottom layers, held together in some fashion, such as with stitching, with some form of padding or batting between them. There is a distinction between quilts as studio art and quilts as folk art. “Folk art is the art of people who have had no formal, academic training, but whose works are part of an established tradition of style and craftsmanship” (Frank, 2006). An example of folk art quilts would be traditional Amish quilts. Other terms that may not be familiar are defined within the body of the paper.

## **Delimitations of Research**

Very little professional, academic literature has been written on the acceptance of art quilts as fine art. Much of the information on the history of fabrics and quilting was obtained from non-professional websites and books, although all of the history was corroborated by academic writings and the websites of specific related organizations. Limited writings exist on the elevation of African-American quilting to the category of art, and some writings exist that explore art in general, including fiber arts, from a feminist approach. Because of the short amount of time that art quilts have been recognized as such, and the ongoing controversy over and gradual acceptance of the concept that some quilts may be fine art rather than craft, not much

peer-reviewed literature is available. Thousands of books and articles have been written on the subject of quilting, fabrics, studio (or art) quilts, and related areas of fiber arts, but few have been from a professional, academic perspective, in spite of the hundreds of thousands of quilts that have been completed by both amateur and professional fiber artists.

### **Method of Approach**

A review of both online and print literature relating to the history of fabrics and quilting was conducted. In addition to that, literature on various methods of transforming fibers into art quilts, and on the role fiber arts plays in museums, galleries, and education at the time of this writing was explored. Professional, peer-reviewed articles were accessed through the Karmann Library to add to the validity of the research. What little information was found was seen repeatedly, with little or no variance in details; the benefit of this is that it validates the information that is available.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

Prior to the 1970s, quilts were placed in the category of crafts, or at best, decorative arts. The transition of some quilts to acceptance as fine art has occurred just in the past forty years or so.

### **The History of Fabric and Quilted Items**

Flax is considered the oldest natural textile fiber used to create fabric, dating back to before 5000 years before Christ (Swantko, 2006). Cotton, wool, and silk soon followed - all used thousands of years before Christ appeared. Natural fibers also include hemp, jute, and ramie. Natural fibers were the only ones available to make cloth until 1910, when rayon, a synthetic fiber, was developed in the United States. Over the next 82 years, rayon was joined by nylon, acrylic, polyester, triacetate, spandex, polyolefin/polypropylene, microfibers, and lyocell, an environmentally friendly synthetic produced from the wood pulp cellulose of trees grown specifically for that purpose (Swantko, 2006). All these fibers have been used to make fabric.

A quilt is “anything made of two pieces of material with padding between and held together with stitches” (Hall, 1935). Any fabric can be used to create a quilt, but until recently, most quilts were made from natural fabrics. Even after the advent of synthetic fibers, the majority of quilt tops and backings continued to be made from cotton. When times were hard, quilters used whatever fabric was at hand, and this resourcefulness was seen especially in the early part of the twentieth century through the Depression, when quilt tops were made from sugar, flour, or tobacco sacks, ribbons, ball gowns, christening dresses, ties, old jackets, and even cloth tire wrappers. The padding was typically wool or cotton batting, but it was not unusual (especially during America’s westward expansion, and among poorer people) to use anything at hand, including fabric scraps, animal fur, feathers, paper, corn husks, moss, or whatever plant

material was at hand. During the 1970s, when double-knit fabrics were all that was available to quilters, simple patchwork and crazy quilts and pillows were often made from this stretchy, difficult to work with fabric. Today, quilters have the benefit of choosing batting made from ready-made wool, cotton, and polyester, and an infinite variety of cotton, silk, linen, and other fabrics.

Quilts generally have been thought of as utilitarian objects. They were most often used for warmth: as bed coverings, and hung over doors and windows, to insulate against dust and winter drafts. Although people generally think of quilts as being made during the past 300 years or so, the history of the quilt goes back to long before the time of Christ. In ancient Egypt and China, layers of fabric were padded and stitched together to prevent the layers from slipping (Fons & Porter, 2000). Ancient statues dating to 3000 years before Christ depict Egyptian monarchs wearing what appears to be quilted clothing (Shaw, 1996). Judy Breneman wrote that in Europe, medieval knights wore quilted clothing under their armor for added protection and warmth, a custom brought back from the Crusades (2001). Quilted petticoats were popular during seventeenth century France, worn under the dress, but exposed in the front, so the needlework could be admired (Breneman, 2001).

Quilts were made for soldiers and hospitals during the Civil War, and as fund-raisers for missions, benevolent and abolitionist causes, the temperance movement, and social reform (Shaw, 1995).

Due to constant use, few quilts have survived. Family quilts would be passed down from generation to generation, used as bedding and throws, to cover legs on cold wagon rides, even to cover crops with when frosts hit. They would be used until they were threadbare, then often

used as batting for a new quilt, or cut apart, so better pieces could be reused in a new quilt. Quilts that have survived are most often ones that were made for display, rather than use.

In Colonial America, the wealthy could import elaborately printed English and Indian patches and ready-made quilts from England. In 1774, John Hewson, a block printer in Philadelphia, started producing beautiful printed quilt blocks (Brackman, 2009). Quilts made from those blocks were expensive, and today are highly collectible; many people consider them works of art. No quilts have survived from the seventeenth century (Fons & Porter, 2000).

There are over 5500 named quilt patterns; however, many patterns are the same, with different names (Malone, 2003). Patterns came from three primary groups of colonists: the Dutch, the Virginians, and those from New England. As these groups moved west across the United States, they mingled and shared patterns, which explains the variety of names. Although the meanings of many quilt pattern names have been lost over time, there are obvious groups. The names of patterns give clues to history, culture, and important events. Some patterns reflected trades of the time: Anvil, Water Mill, Saw-Tooth, and Chips and Whetstones. Flower names were very common, especially Rose and derivatives of it, such as the popular Rose of Sharon. The influence and importance of the Bible is obvious in the many names that came from it: Job's Tears, Crown of Thorns, Jacob's Ladder, Children of Israel, and Joseph's Coat. Some patterns were inspired by politics, and show that the events that shaped our history were important to women, who have been the dominant quilters throughout time. Political names included Lincoln's Platform, Whig Rose, and Old Tippecanoe (Hall, 1935).

There were varieties of styles of patchwork and appliqué quilts. Album quilts were very popular, as they depicted important events, places, or people. Giving quilts to ministers and their wives was a church tradition in most regions. One impressive quilt, titled Circuit Rider Quilt,

depicted the Reverend G. C. Warvel, who was a traveling minister in Ohio. He covered a 100-mile circuit, allowing him to visit each church only eight times a year. In 1862, forty quilters in the Miami, Ohio, area presented to him an album quilt showing aspects of his work (Hall, 1935). Quilts of this type that have survived serve as a record of history.

**Quilts as social and artistic expression.** Regardless of position in life, every girl was taught to sew, usually by her mother (Shaw, 1995). This continued to be true until the middle of the twentieth century. As stated by Carrie Hall (1935, p 27), “Needlework was the one art which women could claim as their own. In every household, rich or poor, women sewed.” Quilting bees were one of the few social activities women engaged in. Women would make the quilt tops at home, and then gather at each other’s houses to quilt the tops, batting, and backing together. During America’s pioneer days, a quilting bee could involve three or more days, allowing two days for traveling back and forth over inadequate roads. Life consisted of hardships and isolation. Women of all lifestyles attended quilting bees, in both rural and urban settings, and their importance gained momentum as they became a forum for discussion and change. One example of the place quilting bees held in leading to social change is the fact that the first speeches given by Susan B. Anthony on equal rights were presented at quilting bees (Hawkins, 1993).

**Quilting trends over the years.** Quilting has gone in and out of style, with many changes along the way. In Colonial America, quilting was common mostly among upper class women, who could afford the silk and chintz that was used. Whole cloth quilts were most common, usually made with solid-colored wool, which was often commercially glazed by the use of heat and pressing (Shaw, 1995). The wealthy would import elaborately printed English and Indian patches and expensive ready-made quilts from England, which today are highly

collectible due to their rarity. It was during the Civil War that patchwork quilts became popular, with cotton and wool as the most often used fabrics. Scraps of fabric were saved and pieced together, with little waste of anything. Appliqué quilts, which involved sewing pieces of fabric cut into recognizable shapes onto a full piece of cloth, were less popular because they were viewed as wasteful.

Stories about quilts and quilting have been handed down through generations, and quilting has become a popular subject of modern literature, for both adults and children. Within the past century, stories centering on quilts have gained popularity. Several books have been written (many for children) that romanticized the history and function of quilts and the lives of the women who made them. These works of fiction have been used in countless classrooms by teachers who wanted to teach history in a more creative way, often not realizing that they were accepting fictional stories as truth.

One such story is that during the Civil War, quilts were used to signal safe houses for the Underground Railroad. The controversial book, *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, by J. L. Tobin and R. G. Dobard, became instantly popular among quilters, teachers, and the general public. At a time when educators were desperate to include more black history in their lessons, teachers willingly embraced the notion that quilts held a secret code to help slaves escape to the north, and built lesson plans around the idea. The accuracy of the contents of the book was not questioned. The book was based on an interview with an elderly quilt vendor in Charleston, South Carolina. According to her, each block represented a specific instruction for following the escape route. This popular story has gained wide acceptance since being published in 2001. However, Giles R. Wright, black historian and former director of the Afro-American History Program at the state Historical

Commission in Trenton, New Jersey, stated that there was little evidence to support the theory, calling the book “inaccurate nonsense” (2001, p. 1). Quilting has often been romanticized, and some of the notions of when and why people quilted continue to thrive, in spite of evidence to the contrary.

In opposition to common opinion about the reason and ways most quilts were made during America’s westward expansion, Amelia Peck, curator of American textiles at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, stated that quilts are a large part of the “American frontier myth.” She claimed that scraps of fabrics being saved by thrifty women and sewn together to make quilts is a legend, and that actually most quilts were made of fabrics purchased specifically for that purpose. She used as an example a Metropolitan Museum quilt that was made by a wealthy woman named Phoebe Warner (Danziger, 2007). The fictional literature of recent years has fed the romantic ideas about quilts that many hold dear. Regardless of which representation is true, (frugal saving and repurposing or purchasing fabrics specifically for quilting purposes) the American quilt is an important part of the heritage of the United States.

The Victorian era of the 1870s and 1880s, with its conflict between puritanical inhibitions and growing romanticism, saw quilts evolve into elegant and elaborate pieces of work.

During the Victorian era fancywork came into vogue: turning ordinary objects into decorative and useful articles. This was accomplished by embellishing household items with beads, shells, feathers, moss, dried flowers, lace, thread, broken eggshells, braids, tassels, or fabric. Decorating the home to make it beautiful was a “woman’s duty” and by the late 1800s, for many, there was more leisure time to do so. Middle and upper class women were encouraged to cultivate their creative side, and magazines and advertisers took full advantage of that philosophy. Patterns and decorating and craft ideas were published in numerous newspapers and

women's magazines, along with ads to sell the supplies necessary to adorn the home. Quilting was one extension of that home design element, and was encouraged and accepted as a legitimate form of creative expression.

The Victorian era and the early twentieth century saw utilitarian fiber creations such as quilts, carpets, blankets, and needlework ascend from the category of simple necessities to that of crafts, and then to decorative arts. Influences from other cultures began to be seen in the arts. The International Exhibit in London in 1862 provided the first large scale display of Japanese art outside of Japan, and was viewed by 9.5 million people. The influence of Japanese art was being seen in the work of European artists, such as Vincent van Gogh. Cubism was being explored, and art was becoming more abstract. It was inevitable that those styles eventually would be reflected in the United States.

A pivotal event in quilt history was the acceptance of needlework as part of the "decorative art movement" into the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Quilts were beginning to be viewed as artistic, as well as functional. The 1876 Exposition also had a Japanese Pavilion, exposing Americans to Japanese art (Pillsbury, 1997). The Pavilion displayed a screen depicting a priest standing on a tessellated, "crazed" pavement. Instantly popular, Japanese design started appearing on dinnerware, wallpaper, in art, and on fabrics. Quilt historians believe that the broken pattern in that Japanese screen and the appeal of the beautiful brocades and silks displayed in the pavilion had a profound effect on quilting fashion. That beauty, combined with the globalization of the world, contributed to the creation of the "Crazy Quilt." These quilts were made of non-geometric pieces of velvets and silks, randomly sewn onto a backing fabric, and intricately embroidered to hide the seams. Crazy quilts were ornate, utilizing the more expensive satins, silks, and velvets, and extravagantly using an entire piece of

fabric on which to sew the pieces. Many of these quilts were meant for display, not for use. They were viewed as art, and not used for bedding, which is why some have survived. Two such pieces, meant for display, not use, were exhibited in the 1930's. One was a crazy quilt made in the 1880's, containing badges gathered at General Grant's funeral. Another was a quilt top of satin and silk pieces gathered at the dress shop where Queen Victoria's gowns were made. It included pieces of the fabric used for the Queen's court robes. The top, consisting of over 4000 pieces, was never finished as a quilt, but it offered a look into the fashion and history of Victorian England (Hall, 1935).

Crazy quilts were an ornate luxury, utilizing the more expensive satins, silks, and velvets, and the extravagance of using an additional, entire piece of front fabric on which to sew the pieces. By 1910, crazy quilts had fallen out of fashion, but they continue to provide a glimpse of an era of excessive decoration. They are an example of excessive decoration and artistic fervor, providing knowledge about British and American history.

Industrialization offered several benefits to the art of quilting. The invention of the sewing machine in 1846 revolutionized sewing. Mechanized spinning and weaving led to factory-produced cloth. Fabrics became more affordable. Fashion changes also affected quilting. Clothing became more fitted, leaving more scraps for quilt use. As the country prospered, however, quilt making experienced a lull. During the late 1800s, women began to work in factories. Ironically, the demand for cheaper, more efficiently made cloth resulted in a surge in the workforce by the very people who had previously needed the cloth. Women working 80 hours a week had no time or energy to sew.

The Great Depression caused a return to quilt making. The novelty of women in the workforce was wearing off, and women looked for something they considered exclusively their

own – needlework. There was little money available for recreation. People learned to reuse and recycle whatever they could. By the 1930s, whole pieces of yardage for quilts were sold to those who could afford to buy it, but many still had to collect whatever scraps they could find.

Necessity again became the mother of invention. Quilt making was also spurred on by the Works Progress Administration, which kept artisans of all types creatively employed, and by the 1933 Century of Progress quilt contest sponsored by Sears, which drew 25,000 entries by quilters across the United States (McMorris & Kile, 1996). One of the quilts displayed at this event was a History Quilt, commemorating people and events of Oklahoma's history. Started in the late 1920s by an Oklahoma woman, it contained 40 hand-embroidered blocks, and took three years to complete (Hall, 1935). Other quilts provided information about the past. Handwriting styles could be displayed, as in a quilt from the early twentieth century that had autographs from famous generals, poets, actors, and political leaders. It took 40 years for the maker to collect enough autographs to make the quilt. Such quilts that have survived serve as a record of history.

The quilting craze faded with the advent of World War II. Both men and women enlisted to serve in the military. Many women went to work in the factories, to replace the dwindling male population. Time that was previously spent on quilting was devoted to making socks, sweaters, and bandages for soldiers. Family life and the tradition of quilting were changed forever. The combined effects of the Depression, the war, and the remarkable changes in technology reshaped family priorities and activities. As the twenty years following World War II saw an accelerated move toward mechanization and modernization, quilting became one of the casualties of the era.

## **Moving from the Traditional Quilt Forward**

Quilts have developed a large following in this country. For example, a quilt show at the New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2007 showcasing only nine quilts drew 40,000 visitors (Danziger, 2007). The past 40 years have seen a slow, yet growing trend to view certain fiber creations, including contemporary art quilts, as art. This has been a slow transition for several reasons, but important occurrences during the past four decades have helped art quilts transition from the category of craft to that of fine art.

**The rise and fall of the quilt as folk art.** It was during the Arts and Crafts movement at the end of the nineteenth century that quilts were for the first time defined as art (McMorris & Kile, 1996). Fine artists began working in the applied arts (furniture making, pottery, weaving, and needlework), and crafts, raising the status of the quilt to art. Artists at that time stated that a work was art if it was intended as art, had originality, and used quality materials and techniques. Quilts began to be collected, and written about as artistic objects, and early quilt makers were referred to as folk artists for the first time. It seemed as if quilts finally were being recognized as art, but the victory was short-lived.

The revival in the 1920s of Colonial quilt making made quilting extremely popular, but had a negative effect on artisanship. People desired the decorating look of the Colonial period to the extent that quilts were made to replicate traditional patterns, rather than based on originality. Patterns were published in newspaper and magazines, and quilt kits became available for purchase, complete with instructions, thread, and pre-cut pieces of fabric. The creativity that was the hallmark of the Arts and Crafts period was abandoned (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

**The impact of the feminist movement on quilting.** A major inhibitor to quilts and other fiber arts previously being viewed as art was that objects of handiwork were usually made by

women, and throughout history, women were rarely recognized as artists. Early research into feminism in the arts showed that the artistic creations of women typically were presented negatively, and not worthy of being considered “high art.” The feminist movement was instrumental in establishing art by women as being worthy, although women artists are still often portrayed as the “exception” in a male-dominated artworld (Chadwick, 1990). The struggle of craft and fiber artists for acceptance into mainstream art has been compared to the struggle that both gays and women have endured to gain acceptance into a male-dominated, heterosexual world (Kunimatsu, 2010). In her article about fiber artist Josh Faught, Susan Kunimatsu stated that the history of textiles as a stereotypically feminine pursuit has been used as a tool of feminist propaganda.

The early feminist movement declared that needlework had been used to confine women, and viewed quilting as a symbol of women’s oppression. However, as the feminist movement grew and changed in the 1970s, the negative view of quilting also began to change. Rather than condemning, feminists began celebrating needlework as a unique voice for women, acknowledging that quilts were an important part of women’s art in the early days of the feminist art movement (Robinson, 1983). Amelia Peck, curator of American textiles at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, stated that American textiles were “...as close as many women get to being recognized as artists” (Danziger, 2007, p. 182).

**The beginnings of change.** The well-known artist and author Jean Ray Laury explored her sense of creativity through quilts in 1956 when she created a non-traditional quilt for a master’s level art class at Stanford University. She is considered by many to be the “mother of modern quilting.” Her quilts were unique and often humorous or political in nature, and she continued to write, teach, and create art until her death on March 4, 2011. Well ahead of the

times, she was making art quilts ten years before what is now referred to as the “quilt revolution.” She advised quilters to avoid kits and patterns, and stressed that there was no “right” way to work.

During the 1950s and 1960s, artists began to work with fabrics and explore quilts as a medium. Many of these artists were fine art graduates with specializations in painting, printmaking, ceramics, and other traditional art fields. Notable early fiber artists who were formally trained as fine artists then moved on to push the boundaries of quilts included Charles and Rubynelle Counts, who founded Rising Fawn Crafts in Georgia in the 1960s, and Katherine Westphal, who was a college professor and textiles designer in the 1950s. Westphal painted directly on fabric and explored dyes, Xerox copying, and heat transfer as part of her creative process. Another artist was Alma Lesch, who became known for her assemblage work, but also created non-traditional, whimsical quilts. Joan Lintault was inspired to start making quilts when she was outbid for a quilt at an auction. Painting was the original medium of Therese May, but she turned to quilting, using images on photographic slides as part of her process. Finally, one other important contributor who started out as a painter was Miriam Schapiro, who started incorporating lace, fabrics, and quilt blocks into her paintings in the 1970s (Ramsey, 1993).

Attitudes toward needlework began to change in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when fiber arts gradually left the realm of crafts and folk arts and began to be viewed as fine art. The unrest and disillusionment prevalent during the 1960s saw a renewed interest in original creations. Quilters were advised to begin developing their own individual style rather than copy the designs of others (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

The publication in 1972 of the first book in the *Foxfire* series began a revival of traditional “folk” arts and crafts of the Appalachian Mountains, including not only quilting, but

also basket making, spinning, and weaving. A return to the land and to a simpler life appealed to those who were tired of the “rat race.” As people moved to rural communities and to a simpler way of living, cottage industries sprang up in which folk arts flourished. The “back-to-nature” movement included individuals trying their hand at old-fashioned crafts, which included quilting (Breneman, 2006). Quilting co-operatives were established, providing income for participating artists. West Virginia provided incentives for artists to move there. Land was sold for twenty-five dollars an acre, and several co-operatives and craft fairs were established. Two notable quilting co-operatives were Mountain Artisans, which was founded in 1968 in Charleston, West Virginia, and disbanded in 1978 (Stelling, 2010) and Cabin Creek Quilts, which is still in existence and has employed over 2000 West Virginians since its creation in 1970 (Thibeault, 2010). By 1977, over 2000 people had relocated to West Virginia to pursue art and a rural lifestyle (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

In addition to the search for a simpler life and a revival in mountain arts, the approach of America’s 200-year birthday also helped revive the interest in quilting. Preparation for the 1976 bicentennial celebration included the making of quilts as the nation once again developed a passion for all things Colonial.

**Historically significant quilt exhibits and organizations.** Since the early 1960s, several momentous events took place that affected how quilts are made, how they are viewed, and how they have affected the arts and art education. In 1965, the Newark Museum in New Jersey had an exhibit titled “Optical Quilts.” *Time* magazine referred to the quilts on display as “Op art from prior centuries” (McMorris & Kile, 1996, p 47). Many people at that time were unaware of the technical and sewing skills, use of geometry, and sense of color choice and composition inherent in historic quilts. Seeing quilts being compared to Op Art and Pop Art, and

viewing them for their aesthetic qualities instead of their historic significance opened the eyes of many people in the art world.

The most momentous event that mobilized the change in attitude toward art quilts was the 1971 “Abstract Designs in American Quilts” exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York. The display was provided by Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof, who had both recently become collectors of quilts. A friend at the Guggenheim Museum had suggested they display some of the quilts from their collection, so they proposed an exhibit to a curator at the Whitney. The show was unique in that it did not display quilts in the traditional way of laying them across beds, but rather hung them on walls, as art. The focus was on assemblage techniques and color use, and raised controversy among both artists and quilters. Quilts had often been shown in textile or historical museums or homes, as examples of history, but rarely in art museums, as art. To determine which quilts to choose for the show, the two collectors spread all their quilts out on the lawn of artist Roy Lichtenstein and viewed them from his roof. Sixty-two quilts, all made between 1840 and 1930, were selected to be hung on the museum walls. Quilters were amused that Andy Warhol’s show of cow wallpaper was replaced with quilts owned by Holstein and van der Hoof (Levie, 2004). The goals of the show were to establish new criteria for the visual impact and design of quilts, and to bring acceptance of the new aesthetics to art establishments. The attitudes of the thousands of people who viewed the quilts were changed regarding what a quilt show should look like and what a “good” quilt is. Many traditional quilters, however, did not approve of many of the choices: The methods used were questionable, the work was often sloppy, with poor color choices and stitching, and some of the quilts were dirty (Zygas, 1993). Overall, the show was a huge success, though, and was the catalyst for the so-called “quilt

revolution.” After being taken down, the show traveled for almost four years throughout the United States and Europe, allowing thousands of people to view it.

Within three years of the Whitney exhibit of antique quilts displayed as art, a writer in *Art News* magazine reported that in a single month, ten museums in the nation were exhibiting quilts as art (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

Other milestones followed. In 1976, Elsa Sreenivasam from the University of Kansas and Patricia Campbell from the Kansas City Art Institute organized the first national Surface Design Conference at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. The fact that 600 people attended when only 200 were expected made it clear that an organization was needed that would provide education about the art of surface design and promote it as an art form. As a result, the Surface Design Association (SDA) was founded in 1977. With a current membership of 4000 members worldwide, the organization is devoted to the art and practice of surface design. Its mission is to educate people about the innovative manipulation and embellishment of textile surfaces. Their goal is to be a major resource for information about the textile arts, which they promote through education, publications, exhibits, and conferences. The conference was summarized in the *Surface Design Journal*, an eight-page, black-and-white newsletter. In 1987, a quarterly newsletter was started, which has grown into a 76-page full color magazine. The SDA website ([surfacedesign.org](http://surfacedesign.org)) was put online in 1999. “Confluence,” the annual international Surface Design Association Conference, runs for two weeks. In June of 2011, it will be held at the University of Minnesota on the St. Paul campus and the Textile Center, a national center for fiber art (Fiberarts, Nov/Dec 2010). Surface design is closely tied with studio quilts, because many art quilters design their own fabric as part of the creative process.

Also in 1976 was an exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City. The exhibit was called “The New American Quilt” and it included many contemporary quilts that incorporated new techniques, styles, and subject matter (McMorris & Kile, 1996). The influence of the Pop Art movement was beginning to be seen in quilting, and people were beginning to pay attention to quilts and finally start looking at them as a form of art.

The first “Quilt National” exhibit, a juried, biennial, international competition accepting quilts as art, took place in 1979 (dairybarn.org, 2011). The show was comprised of non-traditional quilts by artists of the Athens, Ohio, area. These quilts were meant to be hung as art, not used as bed coverings: The unusual color combinations and structure of these quilts made them unacceptable in traditional quilt shows. Needing a venue in which to display, Nancy Crow, Françoise Barnes, and Virginia Randles teamed with area residents in 1977 to preserve an historic dairy barn that had been built in 1914. The structure was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and turned into a non-profit arts center. The barn had its original concrete floors, the stanchions and trenches still in place, bare windows, and flies, but that did not deter artists from exhibiting their works, or viewers from attending. Applications for admission into the juried show came from 196 artists, with 390 works submitted. The team chose fifty-six quilts; the forty-three artists accepted came from twenty states and one foreign country. Gary Schwindler, one of the jurors, stated that quilting was emerging as a vital form of fiber arts and held enormous potential as a means of artistic expression (Schwindler, 1979).

The purpose of Quilt National is to show the changes taking place in quilting, and to help promote quilting as an art form. Still an integral part of the Quilt National foundation, the Dairy Barn Arts Center exhibits quilts and offers educational opportunities, artist residencies, workshops, summer art camp, seasonal events, and a gallery store. The Dairy Barn draws 15,000

visitors a year (dairybarn.org, 2011). This year sees the seventeenth annual juried exhibition of contemporary art quilts in the Dairy Barn, running from May through September 5, 2011.

Another major contributor to the growth of the art quilt movement was the first public television series devoted to quilting, which first aired in 1981. The show, which was broadcast from Bowling Green, Ohio, was called *Quilting* and was hosted by Penny McMorris (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

The popularity of the show inspired an exhibit of contemporary studio quilts at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery: In 1984, sixteen quilt artists were invited to create huge, impressive pieces specifically for the display. Titled “The Art Quilt,” the show opened September 30, 1986, drawing thousands of visitors and breaking the gallery’s attendance records (McMorris & Kile, 1996). The exhibit then traveled across the United States, going to seven sites over a three-year period. The term “art quilt” was coined because of the exhibit. The book with the same title was first published in 1986. Many of the artists who participated continue to make significant contributions to the field of art quilts.

Two participants, Nancy Crow and Linda Fowler, started holding annual Quilt Surface Design Symposiums in Columbus, Ohio, every June. The two-week long conference offers advanced design classes, and celebrated its twenty-first year in 2010. Nancy Crow also designed her own line of fabric, and wrote numerous books on art quilting, as has Ruth McDowell, another participant in *The Art Quilt* show (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

Another participant, Yvonne Porcella, founded the non-profit organization Studio Art Quilt Associates, or SAQA, in 1989 (La Polla, 2007). Its mission is to promote the art quilt through education, exhibitions, professional development, and documentation. In 1992, the SAQA developed a registry of art quilts that were hung in corporations, institutions, and public

agencies in the United States. A registry of art quilts that are hung in museums' permanent collections was also begun. Both these registries help confirm that art quilts are being viewed as fine art. Beginning in 1995, numerous conferences were sponsored, and in 2008, SAQA teamed with the Surface Design Association (SDA) to collaborate regional conferences. SAQA continues to provide resources for members, exhibition and education opportunities, and information on upcoming conferences.

In 1985, quilters in California organized Quilt San Diego. The goal of the organization was specifically to promote quilt making as an art form. Within ten years, it had become an international group, and established the show "Quilt Visions," which is held in alternating years with Quilt National.

Also in 1985, the Women of Color Quilters Network was founded by Carolyn Mazloomi (Sielman, 2008). This non-profit organization's purpose is to research, document, and share information about African-American quilters and quilts, and offers services to women of color who are involved in quilt making. Some of the things they offer are a mentor program for young quilters, an online show of current exhibits and tour dates for each, workshops, lists of resources, contact information for galleries and museums that exhibit art quilts, and news about related events (wcqn.org, 2007). In addition to the many resources listed, the website has information and comments about past shows, and photos of the quilts in current shows. Sandra German wrote in 1993 about how isolated African-American quilters felt. Very few were involved in quilting guilds, and there was a general lack of representation in either quilting or art circles. In 1989, in conjunction with the "Houston International Quilt Festival," the first Women of Color Quilters' Network quilt show was held. Similar shows followed, such as the 1993 exhibit "A Spirit of Cloth: African American Fiber Artisans," which received praise from art critics

(German, 1993). Carolyn Mazloomi recognized the need for encouraging and preserving the quilt making of African-Americans, and the Women of Color Quilters Network continues to meet that need.

Researching, locating, and documenting quilts and their history are paramount to understanding how quilts have evolved. In 1995, Robert Shaw stated that 48 states were in the process of searching for quilts, and had at that time documented over 140,000 historic quilts. The Kentucky Quilt Project, which was started in 1981, was used as the model for other states in their documentation of quilts.

The Iowa Quilts Research Project registered approximately 3000 quilts in Iowa between 1987 and 1990, all dating from before 1925 (Fons & Porter, 2000). Liz Porter and Marianne Fons, who have worked together on numerous projects over the years, including teaching, writing, hosting television shows, and designing fabric, were on the steering committee. They are well known for their many books and magazine articles on quilting. Projects like the Iowa one were started across the nation, as people became more aware of the historical and artistic significance of quilts, and of the importance of displaying and preserving that legacy.

In 1991, the Museum of the American Quilter's Society, a non-profit institution established to educate, promote, and honor the diversity of contemporary quilt makers, opened in Paducah, Kentucky ([quiltmuseum.org](http://quiltmuseum.org), 2011). It was the only facility in the country designed with the purpose of displaying quilts as works of art. In order to show its importance, an act of Congress in 2008 resulted in the museum being renamed The National Quilt Museum (Roy, 2009). Traditional galleries often do not have the wall space to exhibit many quilts at a time due to the large size of many quilts. The National Quilt Museum addressed that issue by

constructing 39 movable walls, which can be rearranged as need be for optimum display space in the three galleries that are housed in the facility.

The largest public collection of quilts in the world is located in the International Quilt Study Center and Museum, which was founded in 1997, and moved into a new facility in 2008. Located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Quilt Center is part of the Department of Textiles, Clothing, and Design in the College of Education and Human Sciences. Although not dealing exclusively with art or studio quilts, the Center does offer both a masters and a doctorate program in Textile History with a quilt studies emphasis.

In 2002, seventy quilts created by African-American women near Selma, Alabama, were exhibited in the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. The women had developed a quilting style based on traditional American and African-American quilts, but similarities to Amish quilts and modern art were apparent. “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” exhibition went on to the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and then on tour to twelve other American cities. According to the Gee’s Bend website ([quiltsofgeesbend.com](http://quiltsofgeesbend.com)), the Gee’s Bend Quilters Collective was formed in 2003 as a means to market the quilts. In 2005, *Anthropology Today* published a response by Joyce Hammond to an article written by anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes about the quilts. Hughes had noted that major retailers such as Bloomingdale’s of New York would purchase only the quilts that conformed to their specifications for perfection, and not the quilts with uneven stitches and irregular sizes. The quilts on exhibit and receiving recognition as art were ones that did not conform to the guidelines of retailers, and were often compared to the paintings of Henri Matisse or Paul Klee (Hammond, 2005).

Also in 2002, Martha Sielman, executive director of Studio Art Quilt Associates and author and curator for the exhibit *Masters: Art Quilts* and book by the same name, founded the

organization Fiber Revolution (Sielman, 2008). The purpose of this group is to educate people about art quilts and find opportunities to exhibit the work of the members, all professional textile artists.

There are countless quilt shows, publications, and organizations, such as the National Quilting Association, The American Quilting Society, and the Alliance for American Quilts (Levie, 2004), devoted to traditional quilting. Record numbers of specialty shows, festivals, and quilt guilds have sprung up throughout the United States. Those will not be explored in this paper, but are mentioned here as evidence of the breadth of the subject and the tremendous interest in quilting.

**Quilts used in other art.** In the 1970s, artists started reproducing the patterns found in decorative objects such as quilts, tapestries, carpets, wallpaper, etc. as part of their paintings. The pattern was the subject of the painting. One of the more renowned artists who used patterns was Miriam Schapiro, who painted directly on fabric, and often used quilt patterns in her art. Male artists who were influenced by their exposure to quilts and quilters in their personal lives included David Bates, David Schirm, and James Valerio. These artists featured quilts in their paintings (McMorris and Kile, 1996).

In 1978, Sondra Freckelton painted her watercolor, *Still Life*, which showed a basket of fruit spilling out onto a quilt draped over a table. In the early 1980s, Barton Benes, a mixed media artist, did a series of collages using shapes adapted from a fan quilt his grandmother had made. Numerous examples can be found, showing how quilts were being used in fine art. Their popularity was spilling over into the daily lives of artists in numerous ways. Even at the National Quilt Museum, this is seen in the stained glass windows throughout the building. Each window was specially commissioned and was based on a contemporary quilt within the building.

**The current quilt scene.** With the groundwork laid by the previous efforts, quilting has come a long way from the traditional pieced bedcovering of the past. The important organizations and events of the past forty years have persevered and blossomed. In addition to the organizations and conferences listed above, below are covered a sampling of additional quilt shows and facilities devoted to art quilts.

**Specialty shows.** “Visioning” is the annual SAQA Conference, to be held in Denver, Colorado, in May of 2011. “Confluence,” the annual SDA textile conference, to be held in St. Paul, Minnesota, in June of 2011, continues to draw international attendees in ever-growing numbers. The Quilt National exhibit in Athens, Ohio, displays quilts as an art form in the restored dairy barn. Throughout the United States and abroad, conferences and juried exhibits are held every month of the year. More and more art museums are displaying quilts as art, giving credence to the acceptance of studio quilts as art.

From December 17, 2010, through April 3, 2011, the International Quilt Study Center and Museum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln held an exhibit titled “Revisiting the Art Quilt,” a reprise of the original groundbreaking 1986 quilt show ([quiltstudy.org](http://quiltstudy.org), 2010). The guest curator was Penny McMorris, one of the two curators of the original exhibit, and co-author of the book *The Art Quilt*.

The Oceanside Museum of Art in Oceanside, California, joined with Quilt San Diego/Quilt Visions to hold its fifth exhibition of “Quilt Visions,” which displayed 39 art quilts selected from 600 entries. The show ran from October 24, 2010, through March 13, 2011, and had quilts ranging in design from representational to abstract. Another major exhibit is the yearlong show “The Year of the Quilt,” which will run through October 16, 2011, at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City. The quilts are all from the permanent collection

of the museum; some are newly acquired and some have never been displayed before. Held on three floors, the show covers three centuries of quilt making by American women, and focuses on the visual impact and historical importance of the tradition of quilts. The exhibit includes special events and educational programs. Running in conjunction with this exhibit at the Lincoln Square Branch of the museum is “Super Stars: Quilts from the American Folk Art Museum,” which will run through September 25, 2011. On continuous display at the main museum is the “9/11 National Tribute Quilt,” which was made as a memorial to the victims of the attack on the World Trade Center (folkartmuseum.org, 2011).

One of the shows running throughout this year and the coming year is the SAQA’s “Travelling Trunk Show,” which will run from February 1, 2011, through December 31, 2012. Members hope that by highlighting art quilts, the show will help define quilts in an unconventional manner, thereby furthering the acceptance of art quilts into the fine art realm.

*Textile galleries and museums.* The popularity of quilts has led to an abundance of museums, galleries, and art centers that feature quilts in some way. Several museums in the United States are devoted entirely to quilts, and many museums have developed permanent quilt collections or gallery space devoted to textile art.

The United States has several museums and galleries devoted just to textile arts. Already mentioned above, one of the most well known facilities is the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which also houses the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery. The gallery has the largest collection of publicly held quilts in the world. The website <http://www.quiltstudy.org/> (2011) provides a wealth of information about the center, has an online database through which quilts can be researched, and provides links to 24 other museums that highlight quilts or textile arts.

Some of the other museums devoted to fiber arts are the Textile Museum in Washington, D. C., the Texas Museum of Fiber Art in Austin, Texas, the La Conner Quilt and Textile Museum in La Conner, Washington, the Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Art in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, and the Latimer Quilt and Textile Center in Tillamook, Oregon. In addition, many museums have quilt displays or galleries within their facilities, even though they are not devoted entirely to quilts. Examples of some of those would be the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon, the Mint Museum of Craft and Design in Charlotte, North Carolina, the American Folk Art Museum in New York City, and America's first museum, the Charleston Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, founded in 1773 ([charlestonmuseum.org/home](http://charlestonmuseum.org/home), 2011).

Throughout the United States are also numerous facilities that provide classes, exhibit opportunities, and resources for fiber artists. One well-known facility is the Textile Center, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Formed in 1994 by a group of fiber artists, this organization is committed to promoting textile arts and making them more visible, and offers an enormous variety of opportunities. The center offers fiber arts classes throughout the year for children, adults, and teachers. One unique example is the mobile art class outreach program, in which fiber artists travel to different locations in order to provide classes, often for people who may otherwise not be exposed to art ([textilecentermn.org/](http://textilecentermn.org/), 2011).

The Houston Center for Contemporary Craft in Houston, Texas, was created to provide education regarding materials commonly used in the making of crafts: clay, fiber, glass, metal, wood, or found or recycled materials ([crafthouston.org/](http://crafthouston.org/), 2011). They also have an outreach program, exhibitions, artist resources, and an artist-in-residence program.

The list could go on for pages, but art centers and museums that accept quilts as art and work to promote quilting as an art form are abundant, and probably will continue to be established and flourish as the appreciation for and the aesthetics of art quilts continue to grow.

### **The Lucrative Business of Quilting**

When quilt making became a national craze in the 1960s and 1970s, businesses realized there was money to be made. Countless books and magazine articles were published about collecting, decorating with, and making quilts. New magazines devoted entirely to quilting were created. Consignment shops were established to sell hand-made crafts, including quilts and quilted items. Many women supplemented their income through the sale of their quilts. Department stores opened sales areas for crafts; Macy's department store held a weeklong crafts fair. Sales of hobby supplies doubled between 1965 and 1974 (McMorris & Kile, 1996). Quilt shops and quilt guilds were formed across the country, and schools and community centers began offering classes in quilting.

Today, fabric arts are a thriving, multi-million dollar business. Jo-Ann Stores, Inc., one of the largest fabric chain stores in the nation, netted \$2.079 billion for the past fiscal year, an increase of 4.4%. With 530 stores operating in the quarter ending in January 29, 2011, net sales for the quarter were \$624.1 million, an increase of 3.6% since the same period last year (joann.com, 2011).

Small, privately owned fabric stores can be found even in small towns, and the internet offers a countless variety of supplies for sewers. Almost 100 online fabric stores can be found for Wisconsin alone. There are quilting retreats, quilting cruises, and television shows devoted to the activity. Thousands of books are available, and numerous magazines are published on the subject. On November 14, 2009, Borders bookstore on University Avenue in Madison had 76

books on quilts on its shelves, and on February 7, 2011, had 1682 titles available online (borders.com, 2011). As of that same date, Barnes and Noble's online store offered 5987 books relating to quilts (barnesandnoble.com, 2011). Quilt patterns, acrylic templates, pre-cut fabric bundles, and step-saving tools such as rotary cutters and self-healing cutting mats are available at crafts, fabric, and quilting stores. Software is available for computers and sewing machines, and technology has contributed limitless options for creativity.

For those who do not have the time or feel they do not have the talent or patience to make their own quilt, the purchase of ready-made quilts is an option. Quilters and quilting guilds are often commissioned to make quilts. Quilts also can be found in quilting stores, galleries, and art fairs. Unfortunately, a more common practice is to purchase a quilt from a department store. Most major stores with a home accents or bedding department have quilts for sale, usually bundled into plastic zippered bags and stacked on shelves.

Judy Elsley wrote in 1993 about the rising problem of quilts being imported from China to meet the demands of the American consumer. In 1992, Lands End offered fifty handmade queen-size quilts for \$800.00 each. The catalog advertisement emphasized that the quilts were made in America, and included photos, names, and remarks of some of the quilters, affirming the uniqueness and individuality of each quilt. In contrast, however, in the same catalog was an ad for other queen-sized quilts, priced between \$190.00 and \$230.00 each. No personal information about the quilters and no photos of them were in the advertisement. The difference was that those cheaper, anonymous quilts were imported from China. That one example is an indication of how business is taking advantage of the recent quilt craze, and of how those practices are negatively affecting quilters.

The “Smithsonian Controversy” erupted in 1991 over the importation from China of copies of heritage quilts that were part of the Smithsonian’s quilt collection (Elsley, 1993). As quilts became more fashionable, the Smithsonian jumped on the retail bandwagon along with companies like Lands End, and signed a contract with American Pacific, a company that imports goods from China. Elsley reported that at that time, 100,000 quilts a month were being imported and sold inexpensively by that one company with annual sales at near fifteen million dollars. Quilters began to realize that cheap imported quilts were de-valuing not only the quilters in this country and their original, hand-made quilts, but also the quilters in China and other nations who are exploited by working for pennies a day and are not protected by fair-trade. Elsley draws a comparison between today’s under-paid laborers of other nations and oppressed American women of the 1800s. Over 25,000 quilters signed petitions protesting the Smithsonian’s actions (Shaw, 1995). The practice of American companies importing cheap quilts for resale is diminishing the perceived worth and historical significance of hand-made quilts, and reversing the recent progress quilting has made to be viewed as art rather than craft. This is the same effect that the advent of ready-made kits had on quilting in the early part of the twentieth century, which led to the decline of the Arts and Crafts Movement’s idea that originality is necessary in a work of art. Offering cheap products is profitable for businesses, but it has a negative economic impact on artists.

### **Fiber Arts in Education**

Bookstands are flooded with magazines on quilting, patterns, design, and current trends, all providing readers with over-the-counter education in quilting arts. Instructional DVDs can be ordered either online or through bookstores. One of the professional, non-“crafty” magazines available both in print and online is *Fiberarts*. This publication, which is published every two

months, with special editions printed each year, is evidence of the popularity of quilt making as an art form. Every issue contains advertisements for classes, retreats, and workshops; lists of colleges that offer classes and degrees in fiber arts; calls for artists; upcoming conferences, exhibits, and art fairs; and deadlines for applications for residencies and grants.

Textile and fiber arts are becoming increasingly common in educational settings. Non-professional workshops, retreats, and classes in quilt making are held worldwide. Some of them are lead by renowned studio quilters, such as Nancy Crow. One example of the popularity of quilting classes can be seen on the website Quilt Professionals, which has 23 pages of professional quilt instructors (quiltprofessionals.com, 2011).

Countless types of quilting classes are available across the nation. Many professional quilters and quilt artists offer classes, either at their studio or at various cities through workshops and festivals, or both. Most quilt shops have staff on hand or hire local quilters to teach quilting classes for all skill levels, from beginner to advanced abilities.

Fiber arts education is no longer confined to the private sector or to non-academic or local quilting instructors, however. Many colleges have become known for their fiber or textile arts programs. The Studio Art Quilt Associates website lists 122 colleges or universities in North America alone that offer degrees in fiber arts. A few of the more prominent ones have been mentioned below.

Colorado State University, the Tyler School of Art at Temple University, San Francisco State University, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, and the Virginia Commonwealth University all offer master's degrees (MFA) in fiber arts. Bachelor's degrees in fiber arts (BFA) can be earned at the Kansas City Art Institute, the California College of the Arts, the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Wayne State University in

Detroit, and the Oregon College of Art and Craft. In addition, the Oregon College of Art and Craft has collaborated with Pacific Northwest College of Art to offer a Collaborative MFA in Applied Craft and Design.

The University of Kansas and the Moore College of Art and Design both offer a bachelor's degree in textile design, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln not only has a master's program in Quilt Studies, but also a doctorate program in Human Sciences with a specialization in textiles, clothing, and design.

Although fiber arts degrees may not yet be available, numerous colleges now offer classes in fiber arts or textiles. Examples are the Maryland Institute College of Art, Berea College in Kentucky, the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. In addition, many non-degree schools concentrate on fine crafts and arts. A few include the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Tennessee, the Espanola Valley Fiber Arts Center in New Mexico, and the Brookfield Craft Center in Connecticut.

### **The Modern Art Quilt**

**The quilt as artistic expression.** Quilts are like most other forms of art in that they often address political issues, historic events, or the tragedies and joys of everyday life. Art quilts can be representational, mimicking the realism of a photograph or the simplicity of primitive art, or they can be abstract. Sentiments of both happiness and despair can be illustrated through the manipulation of fabric and thread. Art quilts sometimes are embellished with an assortment of items ranging from buttons, threads, and beads to elements from nature, articles from industrial settings, or found objects. John Lefelhocz has used sugar packets, aluminum flashing, and weed-whacker cord in his whimsical quilts, which often have puns as part of the message. Pamela

Allen uses recycled thrift shop clothing instead of purchasing fabric, and embellishes it with plastic food, safety pins, polymer clay, and bugs (Sielman, 2008).

**Contemporary techniques and innovations.** Artists are merging the techniques of the past with the possibilities and technology of the present. Even with the seemingly limitless variety of patterned fabrics, and the variety of textiles available, fabric artists are rendering fibers to suit their needs. Fabric surfaces can be altered using dyes, batik, printing, stamping, stenciling, painting, and various discharges. Fabrics are subjected to ripping, piecing, cutting, and re-piecing. Once again, wool is sheared, carded, dyed, and spun by hand. Artists are making their own fabrics and papers. Quilts are being embellished with yarn, threads, buttons, trinkets, paper, beads, netting, diminutive clay creations, found objects, or shells and other natural materials. Quilting of the pieces ranges from a few knots or embroidery stitches to all-over free motion machine and hand stitching or embroidery.

A challenge to quilters of the 1960s and 1970s was the poor fabric choices. Polyester knits were the main fabric that had to be used, or at best, cotton/polyester blends. Polyester was difficult to work within because of its stretchy quality. One hundred percent cotton in the color and pattern choices that are seen today did not become readily available until the 1980s, when polyester finally went out of fashion. Also in the 1980s was the arrival of rotary cutters and cutting mats, which revolutionized the quilting industry (Breneman, 2001).

Traditional quilts are divided into a few key groups: pieced, whole cloth, appliquéd, and quilted counterpane, which is also called trapunto. Some artists today are hesitant to refer to their fabric creations as quilts, and indeed, some creations are barely recognizable as such. Alternative terms commonly used are art quilt, contemporary quilt, fiber art, studio quilt, textile art, rendered fabric, mixed media, or soft painting. There are numerous “types” done today:

landscape quilts, photo quilts, computer-generated image quilts, portrait quilts, abstract quilts, and numerous innovative works that defy labeling. Some of the more innovative methods being used currently are explored below.

***Digital quilts.*** Today's digital technology and the capability of anybody with access to a digital camera, computer, scanner, and a printer has led to many fiber artists adapting those devices for use in quilting arts. Michael James is a professor and chairperson in the School of Textiles, Clothing, and Design at the University of Nebraska and a faculty fellow of the International Quilt Study Center. Trained as a painter, he was a judge and one of the artists who exhibited in the first Quilt National show. Mr. James started exploring the use of digital technology in textiles in 2002, as he was exhausting his ideas for surface design using geometric designs and traditional hand painting of fabrics (James, 2003). The majority of manipulation can be done using simple software programs like Adobe Photoshop© and a digital camera. Artists without large printers that can accommodate wide fabric have the option of sending their designs to companies that will print their fabric for them, usually inexpensively. Mr. James stresses, however, that it takes more than equipment to make a work of art: innovative modern equipment cannot replace a lack of good visual design.

In an article written for *Fiberarts* magazine in 2003, Mr. James referred to the works of Patricia Mink, associate professor of art at and head of the Fibers program in the Department of Art and Design, at East Tennessee State University; Caryl Bryer Fallert; and Vince Quevedo, a teacher at Kent State University in Ohio. These are all fiber artists who use digital technology in their quilting designs. Patricia Mink used an Epson C-80© desktop printer for a quilt that was included in Quilt National 2003. Vince used a Mimaki© printer for his work of nudes, and Caryl

Fallert uses Bubble Jet Set©, with which fabric is pre-treated before being run through a printer (James, 2003). The treatment makes the finished fabric machine washable.

In 2000, 76 percent of serious quilters owned computers and 57 percent of them logged on daily, for an average weekly time of 2.1 hours on quilt-related web sites (Levie, 2004). New translucent vellum was created that could be put through a home printer and on which quilters could trace, photocopy, or scan designs.

***Hand-dyed fabric.*** Artist who desired colors that are more natural, or who wanted a look not achievable with the use of commercial fabrics started dyeing their own fabric. This became especially popular in the 1980s. Many of those artists ended up with more dyed fabric than they needed, so they started selling the excess (Levie, 2004). That led to the formation of several companies, such as Artfabrik by Laura Wasilowski, Skydyes, by Mickey Lawler, and Caryl Bryer Fallert's Bryerpatch Studio. (Ms. Bryer Fallert recently stopped hand-dyeing fabric for resale, but she provides links on her web site to alternative companies.) Hand-dyed fabrics provide material that is truly one-of-a-kind, and add to the uniqueness of any quilt.

***Modern appliqué.*** The traditional appliqué quilt has blossomed into intricate works of art that rival most paintings. Fusible webbing can be used to attach fabric to fabric, or the more traditional method of turning under raw edges and sewing them down with invisible stitches. Modern appliqué is often combined with painting or other techniques of altering the fabric. Artists like Hollis Chatelain, Velda Newman, and Laura Wasilowski excel at the ability to portray realistic images (Sielman, 2008).

***Miniature quilts.*** Traditional quilts were made as bed coverings and were usually made in sizes to cover twin, double, queen, or king sized beds. Also popular were crib quilts, made for babies: these quilts were generally 36 inches by 45 inches in size. Some art quilters today work

in miniature. Their quilts range from standard crib size down to just an inch. Sometimes smaller quilts are grouped to make a larger whole, but that is not usually the case. The miniature quilt has become more popular in recent years. An exhibit of just miniature quilts was held at the national Quilt Museum in 2010. Many of the quilts on display were smaller than twelve inches square, and all showed incredible skill, technique, and artistry.

***Machine quilting.*** In 1983, clear nylon thread became available. That, along with smaller needles, made sewing machine stitches more even and needle holes less visible. One of the most controversial techniques used in the past twenty years (and most criticized by traditional quilters) is machine quilting. In 1989, Caryl Bryer Fallert won the top prize, the purchase award of \$10,000, at the American Quilter's Society show in Paducah, Kentucky, for her 76-inch by 94-inch contemporary quilt *Corona II, Solar Eclipse*. With the re-discovery of the walking foot and the darning foot, free-motion machine quilting became possible. Many quilters began using machine quilting, and thread suppliers started providing more variety in colors, luminosity, thicknesses, and textures. The thread became a design element in many quilts.

The biggest contribution to machine quilting happened in the 1990s, when long-arm quilting machines became available for private use (Levie, 2004). They had been used for over 100 years to quilt commercial bedspreads, but with their availability for home use, a revolutionary new world of quilting was opened up. Although the cost was prohibitive for the majority of people, individuals and shops who could afford them either allowed customers to use them (for a fee), or did the quilting for others, charging for their time and services. (Having other people do the quilting of a piece is acceptable. Award-winning quilt artist Nancy Crow creates the tops for her quilts, and pays other quilters to do the quilting.)

*Unique treatments and new messages.* Quilts have always been associated with sentimental and idealistic themes – small town America, moral integrity, Christian charity, and the “good old days.” Quilts provided comfort and safety from the darkness; they are understood through touch more than any other art form, as explained by Robert Shaw when he said, “No other type of art enjoys such close and easy access to the essence of our daily lives and to the elemental mysteries...which define us” (1995, p 12). Many contemporary quilts, however, stray far from convention, employing new symbolisms and metaphors, and sometimes causing viewer reactions other than tranquility and nostalgia.

The aura quilts of Anna Von Mertens are an example of how quilting and photography have been combined. Some photographers have explored making photographic portraits that depict the supposed aura around the subject (Gschwandtner, 2010, p 42). Intrigued by that technique, Von Mertens explores the relationships between artists and their famous portraits (such as the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci), and interprets it in her own style. She brushes up to seven or more layers of protein chemical dyes onto stretched cotton, projects a pattern onto the cloth, outlines it in chalk, then hand-stitches the fabric. The result is a soft, blended rainbow of color, embellished with thread.

Other artists assemble different materials together to create their art. Diane Savona combines salvaged cloth and garments with domestic items, hand stitching over them. Believing that sewing is becoming a lost art, she states that people are too willing to part with their heritage, selling lace and crocheted items made by their grandmothers at garage sales. In *Domestic Markings #3*, she displays sewing tools and notions between layers of vintage linens, hand quilting around them. By layering together once important everyday objects, she hopes to honor disappearing domestic arts (Cochran, 2010, pp 52-55).

**The quilt as wearable art.** Some fiber artists are also fashion designers (and vice versa). Quilted clothing has been around for thousands of years, in various forms. Statues of Egyptian soldiers show them wearing what looks like quilted garments. Medieval knights wore quilted undergarments for added protection and warmth beneath their armor. Women in France wore quilted petticoats, which were proudly displayed through openings in the outer skirt. Go to any contemporary art fair and you will most likely see at least one person wearing a quilted or patchwork garment, or carrying a quilted handbag or satchel.

**Political and social themes.** Quilting guilds and quilts have been used as a springboard for awareness and change. Susan B. Anthony first started speaking in public at quilt guilds (Hawkins, 1993), knowing that her message about women's rights would be heard and spread by the women attending. Politics and history were often the theme of quilts, which were used to show important events and figures. The past forty years have seen a rise in the use of textiles and fiber art (like other art forms) as a podium to broadcast discontent, injustice, and political, environmental, and social issues.

The *9/11 National Tribute Quilt*, on continuous display at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City, was created as a memorial to the victims of the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The quilt was made by the Steel Quilters of the United States Steel Corporation and has blocks from all fifty states, plus Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Spain. The quilt is thirty feet wide and eight feet high, and has 3,466 quilt blocks, each three inches square. Using the list of names as of June 2002, each block has the name of one person who died because of the tragedy. The quilt was started on September 13, 2001, and was finished on July 4, 2002 (folkartmuseum.org, 2007). A book with the quilt lists the location on the quilt of each victim's name, the name of the quilter of each block, and the

names of everybody who donated time and materials. It is a prime example of how a quilt can be used to commemorate an event (either good or bad) and help the emotional sorting and healing process.

The *AIDS Memorial Quilt* is another example of how emotional tragedy can be dealt with and at the same time provides public awareness of an important issue. The idea was first conceived of in 1985 by Cleve Jones, a gay rights activist in San Francisco. Started in 1987 with the formation of the NAMES Project Foundation, the quilt is the largest ongoing community art project in the world. There are currently over 44,000 blocks, each one memorializing the name of one person who died from AIDS. Over 14 million people worldwide have seen the quilt, and it has led to monetary donations of over three million dollars, which go to AIDS service organizations throughout North America (aidsquilt.org, 2007). Although both the *9/11 National Tribute Quilt* and the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* are remarkable in their effect, scope, size, and dedication, there are less publicized quilts that embody the same need to make the public aware.

Beginning in the 1960s, quilters started addressing issues of inequality and stereotyping. Quilting was used to work through problems like racism and oppression, and to affirm the rights of all to be treated fairly and without prejudice. Artists that have explored social concerns through their quilts include Faith Ringgold, Miriam Schapiro, and more recently Hollis Chatelain, who often portrays the people of West Africa, where she lived for 12 years. Her quilts are masterful portrayals of the people she has met and lived with, and promote her personal belief that everybody has a right to education, clean drinking water, a safe and healthy environment, and freedom from exploitation (Sielman, 2008). Other artists have created quilts that addressed current topics such as Hurricane Andrew, the Los Angeles riots, terrorism, species extinction, and genocide (Shaw, 1995).

**Folk art versus fine art.** Usually considered “woman’s work,” quilting most often was placed in the category of a craft, not an art. Men who quilted or who appreciated the aesthetics of quilts were few. As artists developed unique ways to express themselves through fibers, their quilts evolved into works of fine art. A new spin was put on the traditional quilts of the past. Quilt artists started re-thinking old techniques and styles, and began exploring new technologies and new ways to apply old methods. As studio quilts began to resemble paintings and sculptures, the art world slowly started to accept them as fine art.

As stated earlier, folk art was defined as art made by people who had no formal, academic training, but the art created by those individuals followed traditional styles and construction (Frank, 2006). Some contemporary quilt artists have had no formal training, but that fact alone does not put their work into the category of folk art. The word traditional is what seems to set art apart from craft. Another consideration is that many contemporary quilt artists have been trained formally as artists, and have shifted their focus from the medium they were trained in to fabric. Many have bachelors and masters of fine arts, and even doctorate degrees in art. If those artists made traditional quilts, those quilts would not be considered fine art. However, the resulting quilts may be labeled as folk art, due to the patterns and methods of construction used.

McMorris and Kile (1996) stated that millions of fine quilts (and many that are not so fine) are made each year by thousands of quilters, but only a fraction of those qualifies as “art.” Although the lines often are blurred between traditional quilting and studio quilting, some distinctions are obvious, and some criteria have been accepted to distinguish art quilts from non-art quilts.

## **The Criteria for Accepting Studio Quilts as Art**

During the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 1800s, artists set the criteria for what comprised a work of art: The piece had to be intended as art, have originality, and use quality materials and techniques. Those parameters apply to art quilts as well. Most people would agree that the bold colors, geometric composition, and skillful construction of a traditional Amish quilt make it a thing of beauty. Although Amish quilts have in the past 40 years often been displayed and appreciated as art, those attributes of color, composition, and construction do not necessarily make an art quilt. It is in some ways easier to say what an art quilt is not than what it is.

Any quilt that is made from a pattern, that is a duplication or copy of another quilt, or that is made from a kit is not an art quilt. A quilt whose pattern has been mass-produced is not an art quilt. Quilts sold in a department store's bedding section are not art quilts. Quilts made in other countries solely to be imported for resale by United States are not art quilts.

According to Judy Elsley (1993), a quilt is a cultural metaphor that has replaced how we view our cultural diversity and national identity as a melting pot, and the tradition of original quilts being made by hand is one that needs to be preserved. This applies to both traditional and art quilts. It is important that the emphasis remain on the quilter and the quilt's place in history – on the quilt as art, rather than craft.

Eleanor Levie stated in her 2004 book, *American Quilting: 1970 – 2000*, that the catalogs for the “Quilt Visions” shows said that something qualified as a work of art if it was in some way extraordinary. The purpose of a quilt is not to shock, but it has to invite the viewer to see the world or be inspired in a new way. That interpretation is not very objective, though, and in many instances could be said of any quilt that the viewer finds inspirational or unusually beautiful.

Fiber artist Becky Kemble believes that an art quilt has to be a unique, one-of-a-kind creation. Like new styles of fine art in the past, acceptance of some art quilts has been slow. Kemble (2008) reported that her work *Mother of Us All* was rejected for the “Special Exhibit of Sacred Threads” show at the “Mountain Quilt Festival” in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, because the town was very small, conservative, and family friendly. The jurors obviously felt that the artist’s portrayal of a nude pregnant woman did not meet the town standards of modesty. Kemble was surprised and somewhat pleased that her work was considered controversial. In contrast, the same artist was delighted when one of her more abstract fiber pieces was selected for entry into a Des Moines, Iowa, juried show that was not specifically for fiber work. A similar example of controversy surrounding a contemporary art quilt was seen in the quilt *Amigos Muertos* by Jonathan Shannon. The quilt commemorates artists who have died from cancer and AIDS, and shows among other things, dancing skeletons in honor of the “Day of the Dead” celebration. The American Quilter’s Society banned the quilt from their 1994 competition, fearing it would upset viewers (Shaw, 1995).

The art world sometimes attaches a stigma to artists whose medium is quilts – a stigma that negates the creativity of the artist and denounces the studio quilt as fine art. Becky Kemble also stated in an article posted in 2008 on her website that some studio quilters fear being prejudged by people associating the word quilt with the bed coverings their grandmothers made, and prefer to call themselves fiber or textile artists, or mixed media artists. Robert Shaw also stated that some quilt artists are reluctant to use the word “quilt” when describing their work, and prefer to use the term “fabric collage” (1995).

The 1987 “Quilt National” entry form specified that all entries “must be an original design of the entrant, not a copy of a traditional design or a variation on an original design of

another artist. Original interpretations of traditional design elements are acceptable. The work must be fiber (although not exclusively) and two or more of the following terms must be applicable: pieced, layered, stitched, stuffed” (Roe, 1987, p. 7). The 1987 “Quilt National” show had 915 submissions, represented by 430 artists. Jan Meyers, one of the three judges, commented that most submissions for that particular show did not vary from the customary format of batting layered between fabrics, but a few stood out from the rest because of the way elements were layered, making the overall quilt more important than the parts from which it was composed. She also felt that a plateau had been reached in that the majority of submissions used basic principles of design and color (Roe, 1987). The quilts for that exhibit were chosen for their construction, not because they functioned as quilts.

One specification that appears in the majority of writings about what defines an art quilt is that the quilt’s purpose is to hang on the wall, not be displayed on a bed. This criterion seems to suggest that any quilt that is used as a bed covering, or in any other utilitarian way, would be refused status as art, no matter how creative or innovative the work was.

## **Summary**

Quilting has been in existence for thousands of years. Clothing was made from quilted fabric in ancient China and Egypt, during medieval times, and during the 1700s, but over the past 300 years, bed coverings were the most common quilted item. The ones that have survived, however, are the ones that were made to be displayed, not to be used. Generally thought of as a utilitarian item, quilts have only recently been recognized as an art form. Quilting and quilts have gone in and out of style several times over the 400-year history of the United States.

An interest in reviving traditional handcrafts developed in the 1960s as many people migrated from cities to adopt a more provincial lifestyle. In addition, preparation for the United

States 1976 bi-centennial celebration saw a resurgence of quilt making to commemorate the event. Quilts entered the realm of American folk art, and the business of quilting was born. Magazines published articles with directions and patterns, home magazines featured quilts in home decor, and department stores started selling quilts, often importing cheap imitations from China and other countries, to meet the demand. Thousands of books and articles have been written on the subject of quilting, fabrics, studio (or art) quilts, and related areas of fiber arts, including thousands of how-to books. Quilt, hobby, and fabric shops have flourished since the 1970s, and many timesaving tools have entered the market in the past twenty years.

Many significant events occurred in the past forty years that changed the way quilts were viewed, beginning with the 1971 “Abstract Designs in American Quilts” exhibit at the Whitney Museum. In 1976, the exhibit “The New American Quilt” opened at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City. The first “Quilt National” exhibit, a juried, biennial, international competition accepting quilts as art, took place in 1979, held in the Dairy Barn Arts Center, a restored historic barn. “The Art Quilt” show opened in 1986 in the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery, then traveled the country for three years. In 1991, Paducah, Kentucky, saw the opening of the National Quilt Museum. The International Quilt Study Center and Museum, holding the largest public collection of quilts in the world, was founded in 1997. Two major annual art quilt shows are SAQA’s “Visioning,” and “Confluence,” the SDA textile conference. Another annual event is the “Quilt Surface Design Symposium.” In 2002, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston opened the exhibit of the “Quilts of Gee’s Bend.” Also in that year, Martha Sielman founded Fiber Revolution.

Important organizations also came into being. The Surface Design Association (SDA) was founded in 1977. In 1985, the Women of Color Quilters Network was founded by Carolyn

Mazloomi. Also in 1985, quilters in California organized Quilt San Diego to promote quilt making as an art form. It has become an international group, and established the show Quilt Visions. Studio Art Quilt Associates, or SAQA, was founded in 1989. Other groups focusing on the promotion of art quilts and the artists who create them will undoubtedly continue to form as the movement grows.

The long road to acceptance of art quilts by quilting and artistic groups can be compared to the struggle that artists of the nineteenth century underwent when they started new movements such as impressionism, cubism, and pointillism. Just as the traditional artists and the general public of that era were shocked at the new, radical art movements, traditional quilters of today are often aghast at and critical of the studio quilts being produced. At times, there has been tension between contemporary art quilters and traditional quilters, who view the non-traditionalists as people who “broke the rules.” In many cases, however, the new techniques are not new. Embroidery, painting on fabric, stenciling, stamping, dying cloth, and transferring photo images onto quilts has all been done in the past. (Photo images were being transferred onto fabric as early as the late 1890s.) The difference is not the techniques, but in how the techniques are applied, and in the subject matter (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

In summary, this paper has explored the history of quilts and the evolution of quilting from the category of craft to that of art. The status of the quilt has risen from a humble utilitarian household necessity to acceptance as fine art.

The existing literature on the topics leads to the following conclusions. Technology and quilting methods have progressed to the point that if one can imagine something, it can be created. Artists are no longer confined by available fabric choices or archaic conventions in thinking. As in all forms of contemporary art, anything goes. Creativity is once again in vogue.

It has become more common to see fiber arts displayed as art, not crafts, in museums and art galleries across the nation. Examples are the quilts of Gees Bend, Alabama, where African-American women have been creating quilts for over 100 years, traditional Amish quilts, mixed media works by Miriam Schapiro, and the representational fiber art of Faith Ringgold. The work of these fiber artists elevated what was traditionally considered crafts into the realm of fine art (Auther, 2010).

Referring to the cheap, imported, mass-produced copies of quilts now available, Judy Elsley quotes Walter Benjamin in stating that when authenticity is gone, the function of art is reversed and quilts become meaningful only in terms of profit (1993). Control of the quilts is turned over to businesses. The quilt makers and the history of the quilts become anonymous and control over their creations is lost. In the case of women, this results in returning them to a lack of status and importance, and loss of their “voice.”

By definition, in order for a piece to be called a quilt, it has to have at least a top and backing piece of material, with a layer between, and held together by some form of stitching. Other than that, the creative possibilities are limitless for an art quilt. Pieces that do not meet

these requirements cannot technically be called quilts (of any kind), and for that reason, some artists prefer to refer to themselves as mixed media, fiber, or textile artists (Kemble, 2009). Many artists prefer the terms art quilters or studio quilters, and they are accepted as such by fellow artists and galleries. This is just one more example of how the field of fiber arts has changed, especially in the context of art. Art has evolved to the point of acceptance of literally anything as art by the artworld; if that lack of criterion *is* the criterion for art, then art quilts should not be any different.

Thomas Young (2001) provided another view on acceptance of art. He stated that providing knowledge is a criterion for consideration as art. If that is true, *all* quilts can be considered art. Quilts have brought together people of different backgrounds, who shared patterns, food, recipes, beliefs, encouragement, and news. Quilts offer a view into the past, reflecting the joys, the sorrows, and the triumphs of life. Quilted pieces of the past provide insight to life of an earlier time.

Richard Florida (2002) claims that positively affecting the economy is one of the roles that art plays. The obsession in the past half century with quilts and quilting definitely has played that role in and has benefitted the current economy. People who long for the décor or perceived lifestyle of an earlier time or who want to revive and learn the skills typical of past generations, explore history through handwork, or adapt old traditions to new styles, have boosted the business of suppliers of quilting products and quilts. Consumerism is a positive ever-growing force in the art world, and directly affects retail business. It is a double-edged sword, however. The increase of the demand for quilting supplies has grown since the 1960s. This has affected all aspects of fabric and sewing businesses, from the sale of cloth and thread to the production and improvement of sewing machines. On the other hand, the sheer volume of

quilts being made may have the negative effect of reducing retail prices due to flooding of the market. Not all quilts are quality products, and some crafters have started businesses only as a means of income, not because they are skilled or passionate about their art or craft (McMorris & Kile, 1996).

Supplying fabric artists with the necessary supplies has become a lucrative business. A survey in 2000 conducted by *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* and the "International Quilt Market and Festival" found that quilting is an art form on which nearly 20 million adult Americans spent \$1.84 billion per year (Levie, 2004). Quilt museums, shows, and exhibits draw people to communities, providing income for area restaurants, hotels, gas stations, area businesses, and transportation providers. Flourishing businesses feed the economy, and the ever-growing interest in fiber arts has provided a demand for businesses that can provide the supplies needed and the finished products desired.

The social activity of quilting has provided a basis for social change and transfer of knowledge. The artistic activity of quilting has provided a creative outlet for self-expression and exploration. As artists continue to render fibers into new and exciting art forms, those creations increasingly will come to be accepted into and respected by the artworld.

There are very few professional, academic writings about the transition of quilts from craft to art, and the information that does exist is seen repeatedly in numerous articles, books, and on quilting websites. This presents a challenge, and makes it obvious that there is a need for more academic research on the subject of studio or art quilts. There does not appear to be a widespread consensus as to what comprises an art quilt. That, however, is a common problem with art in general.

In an age where creative expression is applauded no matter what form it takes, studio quilts seem like a natural choice to be included in the category of fine art. It makes sense to continue to explore the transition quilts have been making and the techniques and innovations that have been implemented over the past half century.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that more research on the differences between traditional historical quilts and modern art quilts be done. A survey of fiber artists, museums, and art galleries would be in order, to establish a standard by which to judge quilts to determine their qualification as fine art.

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