



THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

Cyndi Bohlin
Communications & Marketing Manager
(202) 667-0441, ext. 78 or cbohlin@textilemuseum.org

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Contact: Annie Laurie Sánchez, Communications & Marketing Assistant
(202) 667-0441, ext. 77 or asanchez@textilemuseum.org

Amish Quilts on View at The Textile Museum in Spring 2009

December 8, 2008, Washington, D.C. — The Textile Museum’s spring 2009 exhibition, *Constructed Color: Amish Quilts*, will feature the finest group of Amish quilts in the world. Through the display of 30 pieces, the exhibition will illustrate the visual connections between Amish quilts and mid-20th century art and show how variations in the quilts reveal the choices of individual Amish communities. The quilts are drawn from three collections at the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, each representing a distinct Amish community. **Constructed Color will be on view April 4 – September 6, 2009.**

Quilts as Art

Amish women, untrained as artists, have produced a distinguished body of visual art in the form of quilts. These fabric compositions resemble mid-20th century paintings — particularly because of their large single color areas — although the quilts have origins as early as the 18th century. The art world took note of the remarkable similarities between quilts and modern art in 1971 when an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York exhibited pieced quilts on walls normally reserved for works by contemporary artists. “The Whitney show forever changed the way people see and think about quilts,” said Rebecca A.T. Stevens, The Textile Museum’s Consulting Curator for Contemporary Textiles and the coordinating curator for this exhibition. “Today Amish quilts are studied both for their relationship to social history and as marvels of color construction.”



Center Diamond, circa 1920-1940, maker unknown. Probably made in Lancaster County, PA. International Quilt Study Center & Museum, 2003.003.0071.

Amish Quilt Types

Each Amish community produces distinctive quilts, the variations depending upon a number of factors: the availability and choice of materials, the influence from non-Amish neighbors and the relative

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Nine Patch, circa 1930-1960, maker unknown, made in Mifflin County, PA. International Quilt Study Center & Museum, 2003.010.0019.

conservatism of the group as determined by its community guidelines (*Ordnung*). *Constructed Color* highlights the differences in the quilts of each of the three groups: the Jonathan Holstein Collection, featuring quilts from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; the Ardis and Robert James Collection, focusing on quilts from Midwestern communities; and the Henry and Jill Barber collection featuring quilts from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania.

Classic **Lancaster County Amish quilts** typically include flat planes of saturated colors. Rich blues, browns, and tans are often used together in unusual combinations, creating striking visual compositions. **Midwestern Amish quilts**, in comparison, are usually distinguished by their dark backgrounds and the use of repeat patterns. These quilts often include brilliantly colored, polished cottons, giving the fabric a

beautiful sheen. **Mifflin County, Pennsylvania** is home to three different Amish groups: Nebraska Amish, Byler Amish, and Renno or Peachey Amish, each distinguished by its own quilt-making tradition. **Nebraska Amish quilts** normally incorporate shades of brown, blue, purple and gray in named patterns such as One Patch, Four Patch, Nine Patch and Bars. **Byler Amish quilts** use many of these patterns but also include bright shades of pink, yellow, orange and blue. **Renno/Peachey Amish quilts** are similar to Midwestern Amish quilts, but are distinguished by their black backgrounds juxtaposed with bright fabrics of golden yellow, blue, purple and green.

Quilt-makers from each of these distinct Amish groups join the quilt layers—front, inner padding and back—together with intricate stitched designs. These designs include cables, fans, feathered wreaths, roses and other flowers, and are often used in conjunction with one another. The quilting adds both pattern and textual effects to the overall aesthetic.



Nine Patch, circa 1950-1970, maker unknown, made in Mifflin County, PA. International Quilt Study Center & Museum, 2003.010.0011.

Amish Culture

Amish groups began migrating to North America in the mid-18th century to escape the religious persecution and economic hardships of Europe. The Amish espoused a strict separation of church and state, practiced voluntary adult baptism rather than infant baptism, and refused to participate in the military as it ran counter to their view of Christ's teachings of nonviolence.

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The first Amish settlement in the United States was founded in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Since their arrival in this country, Amish groups have continued to migrate and form new communities while abandoning unsuccessful settlements. At present, well over 200 Amish settlements exist in North America. Amish women have been creating quilts since their arrival in Pennsylvania and perhaps before. The quilts not only serve a practical purpose but also serve as a vehicle for relaxation and socialization when women gather for a “quilting bee” — an occasion for sewing and conversation.

The International Quilt Study Center

All of the quilts in the exhibition are drawn from three collections held by the International Quilt Study Center (IQSC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: the Jonathan Holstein Collection, featuring quilts from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; the Ardis and Robert James Collection, focusing on quilts from Midwestern communities; and the Henry and Jill Barber collection, featuring quilts from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. The International Quilt Study Center, established in 1997, encourages the interdisciplinary study of aspects of quilt-making traditions and seeks to foster preservation of this tradition through the collection, conservation and exhibition of quilts and related materials.

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About The Textile Museum

Established in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 18,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 ‘S’ Street, NW in Washington, D.C. The Museum is open Monday through Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free with a suggested donation of \$5.00 for non-members. For further information, call 202-667-0441 or visit www.textilemuseum.org.

For more information or images, please contact Annie Laurie Sánchez at 202-667-0441, ext. 77, or by email at asanchez@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.