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**Fall Exhibition to Feature
African-American Quilts from Alabama
October 3, 2003 – February 29, 2004**

June 6, 2003, Washington, DC — African-American Quilts from the Robert & Helen Cargo Collection will be on view at The Textile Museum October 3, 2003 - February 29, 2004. The 20 quilts featured in the exhibition are from Alabama; most were made since the 1970s although several of the anonymous quilts date to the early 20th century. All of the quilts are drawn from the Robert & Helen Cargo Collection at the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

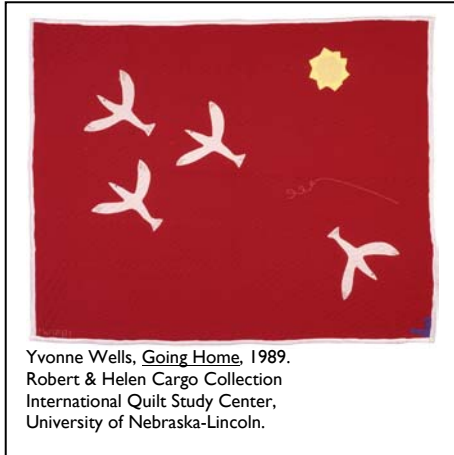
The Exhibition

Relying on techniques passed down through generations as well as those improvised, African-American quilt makers have traditionally used a wide variety of materials, colors, patterns, and textures to give form to their artistic vision. The exhibition reflects this tradition and includes a variety of quilt styles that display a unique sense of individuality and lively improvisation. Quilt styles on view include patchwork quilts, story quilts, strip quilts, and abstract original patterns. Many juxtapose bold design with bright or subdued colors and contrasting textures derived from a variety of new or recycled fabrics such as plaids, crepes, denims, flannels, twills, and in the older examples, pillow ticking and feed sacks. Nora Ezell, whose quilt Crazy is featured in the exhibition, has said, "I have made and sold many quilts. I do them my way. There is nothing that says you got to do it this way or that. ... A lot of people have asked me about colors. I don't care about color combinations. I do what looks good."



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Handmade quilts have long served as a medium for memorializing home, family and friends, and as a means of personal expression and individual creativity. As is the case with other artistic traditions, African-American quilts vary from region to region, from era to era,



Yvonne Wells, Going Home, 1989.
Robert & Helen Cargo Collection
International Quilt Study Center,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

and from person to person. Among the contemporary artists featured in the exhibition is Yvonne Wells, a renowned quilt maker from Tuscaloosa, AL who was awarded the Alabama Arts and Visual Craftsman Award in 1998. Wells is perhaps best known for her pictorial quilts that express narratives of personal and political significance. Being in Total Control of Herself is based on Wells' first trip to New York City and explores the theme of economic exploitation of African-Americans. In her politically-charged

Yesterday: Civil Rights in the South, Wells juxtaposes depictions of Martin Luther King, Jr., a lynching, the Ku Klux Klan, and a state capitol dome flying a Confederate flag. In contrast, Wells' quilt Going Home is a meditative, almost abstract study of four white birds in flight against a vibrant red background.

The International Quilt Study Center and the Cargo Collection

All of the quilts in the exhibition are drawn from the Robert & Helen Cargo Collection at the International Quilt Study Center (IQSC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The IQSC, 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.

Dr. Robert Cargo, professor emeritus of the University of Alabama and owner of the Folk Art Gallery in Tuscaloosa, Alabama began building his collection of Alabama quilts in the late 1950s after inheriting a number of quilts from his great-grandmother. Early on, Cargo and his wife Helen decided to focus their collecting efforts primarily in the state of Alabama. Since 1980, they have concentrated more on African-American quilts from the same area. Cargo explains: "As a group, these quilts have the qualities that excite me as I grow older – bold, eccentric, idiosyncratic, improvisational, brightly colored." Many of Dr. Cargo's quilts were purchased directly from the makers, some of whom he came to know quite well, visited

regularly over the years, and photographed at work in their homes. Quilt maker Yvonne Wells, one of the best known artists represented in the collection, said, “Robert Cargo was the most encouraging person I met in my early years of quilting. He came by my home almost every Saturday morning to look at the quilts I was working on and said, ‘Yvonne, keep on doing what you’re doing.’” The Robert & Helen Cargo Collection of 156 quilts was donated to the International Quilt Study Center in May 2000.

Educational Programming and Related Activities

A wide range of educational programs will be offered in connection with the exhibition. A complete list and further information about family programs, lectures, and tours can be found online at www.textilemuseum.org. Educational programming in connection with The Textile Museum’s presentation of African-American Quilts from the Robert & Helen Cargo Collection is sponsored in part by Washington Gas.

African-American Quilts from the Robert & Helen Cargo Collection is an anchor event for “Blues & Dreams: Celebrating the African-American Experience in Washington, DC,” a program coordinated by the Washington, DC Convention & Tourism Corporation and the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition. Between September 15 and November 30, 2003, cultural venues throughout the city will showcase unique programs in the areas of African-American history, visual arts, literature, music, theater, and dance. A special package will also be offered to encourage visitors to come to the city during this period. For more information, call (202) 789-7099 (media only) or visit www.washington.org.

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Founded 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 17,000 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, DC. The Museum is open Monday - Saturday 10 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5.00. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

For more information or images, please contact Jeff Marn at 202-667-0441, ext. 17, or by email at info@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.