

Gather Together

Quilting Niagara



Curator's Foreword

Quilting is a tradition that radiates the warmth of being together.

Together is found in the laughter of friends, gathered to quilt alongside one another.

Together is found in the stitching, every back and forth joining layer to layer.

Together is found in the narratives, memories, and emotions committed to fabric.

Quilts are works of art made possible by the bringing together of material, meaning, and motivation.

Every aspect of quilting threads into one another, from the use of mathematical concepts like scaling through to the choice of fabric and color composition in making each new pattern.

As a traditional art practiced in the 21st century, quilting has seen a rapidly growing development of new technologies, new tools, and new methods of sharing and building community.

Found throughout the world in communities near and far, quilting continues to play an intimate role in the lives of quilters and their friends, families, loved ones, and neighbors.

Featuring traditional and contemporary quilts by local quilters from the Kenan Quilters' Guild, and developed in collaboration with the Kenan Quilters' Guild and the Kenan Center, *Gather Together: Quilting Niagara* explores the core concepts that underpin the quilt tradition.

Edward Yong Jun Millar, Curator of Folk Arts

The **Kenan Center** is an arts and community center located in the City of Lockport, New York on grounds owned by Mr. and Mrs. William Rand Kenan, Jr. Dedicated in 1969, the Kenan Center has grown into a complex that includes the Kenan House, the Taylor Theater, the Education Building, the Kenan Arena, and the Kenan Grounds. As one of the premier facilities in the Buffalo-Niagara region for arts, education and recreation programming, the Kenan Center continues their founders legacy of community service.

The **Kenan Quilters' Guild** is an affiliate of the Kenan Center that preserves and promotes the art of quilting. As a gathering space for quilters, the guild provides a space to share ideas, expertise, and fellowship among its members. The guild engages in a wide number of community projects, including making cuddle quilts for local assisted living facilities, storybook quilts for early childhood education at libraries and schools, and teaching quilt workshops. The guild's biennial quilt show in the Kenan Arena features well over one hundred quilts made by local quilters.

Glossary of Quilt Terms

Quilt – a padded textile art made up of three layers: a quilt top, the batting, and the backing.

Quilt Block – the section of design for a quilt: quilts are often made up of multiple blocks.

Piecing – the putting (sewing) together of different fabrics to create a block.

Quilting – the stitching that binds together the three layers of a quilt. Patterns include straight (running), echo (outline), and feathers (decorative).

On Point – placing a block at a 45 degree angle (diagonally).

Sleeve – pocket sewn or pinned to the back of a quilt, enabling it to be displayed on a rod.

Quilt Sandwich – a term for the three layers of a quilt that are quilted together, before the binding is sewn on.

Quilt Top – the top layer of a quilt, made up of the pieced together quilt blocks, and other embellishments like applique.

Batting – the middle layer of the quilt, made up of typically cotton filling.

Backing – the bottom layer of the quilt.

Basting – the temporary connecting of the quilt top, batting, and backing to prepare for quilting or tying.

Binding – the edging of the quilt, may be hand sewn or machine sewn.

Tied Quilt – method for joining quilt layers through knotting and tying, rather than quilting.

Quilting, Sharing & Community

Communities of every type and size – from friends and family to neighbors and fellow quilters – have an influence on the making and using of every quilt.

Whether sparking the inspiration for a design or the motivation to make a quilt itself, quilts bear the influence of community and people in every stitch.

Gatherings like quilting bees, quilt parties, and sewing groups provide opportunities for quilters to quilt alongside friends, nurturing those lifelong bonds.

Community organizations like the Kenan Quilters' Guild provide opportunities for quilters to participate in major group activities including annual quilt shows and creating quilts for local initiatives and projects.

With the rise of digital media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, the communities quilters belong to and that marketplace of ideas to draw from, continues to expand.

Quilting is a tradition rooted in the bonds that connect us to one another.

"I watched my great aunt quilt, who had a quilt frame, and she'd have the quilting bees. You could sit underneath but you'd get poked with the pins as they come through. But I've always been the kind to watch what they do...and eventually all that information just sinks in." – Susie Spicer

"When I give a baby quilt...that thing is for that baby to love. Four years from now, I hope that thing is in shreds. It is like me being there to give them a hug. Whenever they've got it, that's what I want them to get out of that quilt." – Donna Kathke

"I've always had a needle in my hand...and now with all the embellishing; the embroidery, the beading, the quilting. It's all come full circle. And maybe that's where I was headed but at the time I didn't know it." – Stephanie Drehs



Stephanie Drehs, *Summer Penny Garden*, 2016, primitive cotton muslin and hand dyed wool



Donna Kathke, *When Downton Meets Bali*, 2019, cotton and batik



Susie Spicer, *Connect the Dots*, 2019, cotton

Art + Math = Quilting

Mathematical concepts like geometry, proportion, and tessellation are used in the making of every quilt.

“I never liked art classes, because I never liked my finished product. I’m science based and math based: that’s where I excelled. I think quilting fit that, because you have a pattern to follow that’s all mathematically figured, and you can come up with a product that is beautiful through following those instructions.” – Jan Jordan

“Oh Lord no, I am not a mathematician by any stretch of the imagination. I really tend to be someone who gets a pattern and follows that pattern. I think actually that I don’t do well making things up on my own because of the math that would be involved.” – Kim Jeffree

“I really think designing my own quilt is the most fun...like this rail fence. It’s a traditional pattern so you don’t really need a pattern, but I like to draw it out and design it. Rail fence doesn’t have to be a zigzag, but it is because of how I laid it out, with the black and white fabrics. This block goes this way; this one goes that way...” – Georgia Spanoudakis McDonald

The crisp lines of a pieced quilt block do not happen by chance but through mathematics.

Mathematical tools like graph paper and rulers are used by quilters to take the exact measurements that guide the creation of every quilt.

Equations like addition and subtraction may be used to figure out the length of fabric needed for each part of a design or to estimate the size and number of blocks in the planned quilt.

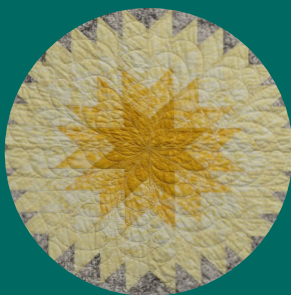
Geometrical shapes like squares, triangles, and parallelograms are found in traditional and contemporary quilts. These shapes can be arranged and placed in different combinations to create a wide range of designs.

Tessellation is a term for the tiling of repeated geometrical shapes without any visible overlaps or gaps between them and is used to both create and connect quilt blocks.

The connection between math and quilting continues to grow as new quilt design software and longarm quilting machines with integrated computers enable quilters to draw, measure, scale, and quilt: all underwritten by lines of coding.



Jan Jordan, *Houses on the Hill*, 2019, cotton



Kim Jeffree, *The Yellow Room Quilt*, 2015, cotton



Georgia Spanoudakis McDonald, *Rail Fence with Glimmer*, 2019, cotton and batik

Always New

Every quilter started quilting in some way: whether it began with watching a family member quilt, the encouragement of a friend to take a class, or simply the challenge of trying something new.

Quilting is a tradition of constant learning, through direct instruction or experimentation.

Within classes, quilting bees, and sewing groups, quilters are immersed in environments to learn and exchange new ideas, new techniques, and new designs.

Through practice and the passage of time, quilters develop new methods and approaches to quilting that work and are tailored especially for them.

These can include anything from creating a spreadsheet to manage and organize their quilt stash, to books and notepads filled with mathematical charts for scaling designs, through to the use of non-standard tools like chopsticks to help measure out seam allowances.

**Quilting involves
new creations,
new tools,
new techniques,
and new starts.**

“I made my first quilt and it was a nightmare...I didn’t even use any of the right tools. I had a lot of learning to do, but I was hooked. It was so calming, and it was such a fun process. It was the beginning of my journey. But I’m really thankful for that because I realized how much more there was to learn, and now...it just gave me something to reflect on to see how much I’ve grown.” – Dotti Timkey

*“I like to create my own vision of what I want to see out of something...to manipulate the different pieces of fabric and the creativity that it might give me. I like the resourcefulness of looking and my eye is always open.”
– Mary Ann DeMaison*

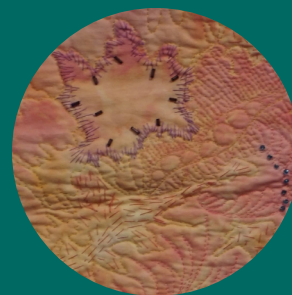
*“I love the variety of quilting; you can never get bored. There’s an infinite variety of things to do.”
– Martha Krupa*



Dotti Timkey, *Japanese Dolls*, 2011, cotton



Mary Ann DeMaison, *Flowtation*, 2015, cotton and cotton linen blend



Martha Krupa, *Organic Pink*, 2016, snow dyed cotton and beads

Let's Talk Fabric

Fabrics can inspire the design of a quilt, or a design can guide the selection of fabrics.

"I often see a type of fabric and think: 'Oh I'd like to make a quilt like that.' Then I think do I want to cut the pieces big, do I cut them small. Is it a big print and do I want to ruin that nice big design? The fabric tells me what to do."
– Barb Sanford

"For me it goes both ways. Sometimes, it is whatever strikes my fancy when I'm there. But other times, I might be looking specifically for a fabric, maybe I have a big piece at home and need something to go with it for a particular pattern...log cabins have been one of my favorite quilts to make. I love the order and the freedom of color choices." – Linda Davis

"I've tried many different things, but I think that my favorite fabrics to work with are batiks. I like the feel of them, the way they sew together..." – Judy Schryver

Quilters choose fabrics for their quilt with great scrutiny, paying attention to not only the print design and color of a length of fabric, but also its feel.

Selecting the right quality and look is extremely important, as making a quilt takes significant time and effort.

The placement of fabric pieces drives the design and appearance of a quilt, with quilters paying attention to balance between bright and dark colors, and large and small prints.

Cotton is the most common – and traditional – type of fabric material used in creating every layer of the quilt: the quilt top, the backing, and the batting.

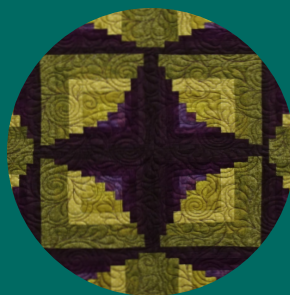
Other types of fabric used include wool and batik dyed cotton. Batik is a style originating in Southeast Asia which has become popular for quilters to use due to their vibrant colors, tight weaving, and dual-sided prints.

Aside from purchasing new fabrics, every quilter also has their quilt stash: a large collection of fabrics that might be arranged according to color, print design, or fabric type.

Quilt stashes are an important resource for every quilter, providing the space to store, reuse, and source material for new quilts.



Barb Sanford, *Spellbound*, 2019, cotton



Linda Davis, *Turkish Floor*, 2015, cotton



Judy Schryver, *French Braid*, 2008, cotton and batik

Placing Puzzle Pieces

Every quilt design is made possible by the bringing together of different fabrics and the quilting together of layers, through a range of techniques.

Quilts may be quilted together by machine, by hand, or a combination of the two: a quilter might machine quilt the three layers together with a domestic machine, but hand stitch on the binding to finish it.

Other techniques used to create a design out of the selected fabrics include fussy cutting, paper piecing, and applique.

Fussy cutting is the process of cutting out a specific section of a fabric's print design to capture and make use of in the quilt.

Paper piecing is a technique for piecing together the separate fabrics of a quilt block through the use of paper as a temporary pattern template.

Applique is a form of embellishment found in quilting and in other textile arts, where a design is stitched onto the quilt top, creating a three dimensional, raised image.

Creating a quilt is like a puzzle: every piece, from design to technique, fits into one another in a specific way.

"The fabrics in my stash: they're my paint palette. I need that palette in order to create, since I make a lot of detailed applique. Recently, I was looking for fabric for a particular flower. So I found in my stash one that I really liked, but the flower has five or six petals in it, and it's going to be boring if I use the same fabric for all of them. So I looked for a few more." – Kathleen McIntosh

"Paper piecing is basically like sewing backwards. You're not looking at the fabric but the paper. It is very precise though. That's what I like most about them. I like the precision of them and the way they look. It's just perfect." – Debbie Colaizzi

"The fabric that I found: the purple and black...the deep blue. It was intriguing. There was such movement in the print, but if you cut it up you could change the whole character of it. When you take a fabric...you look for the gems in it. The parts that sparkle, step up and shine. You work with those." – Barbara Krombein



Kathleen McIntosh, *Peacock*, 2019, cotton, seed beads, crystals, novelty buttons and handmade glass buttons



Debbie Colaizzi, *Boxful of Crayons*, 2019, cotton



Barbara Krombein, *Midnight Dream – Daytime Work*, 2018, cotton

Quilting Inspiration

Quilters draw inspiration from their own experiences and from fellow quilters.

“For me, I think my favorite part is the design. There’s something about stacking cut fabric and counting it and making sure it’s ready...and then standing there, staring at the wall, having them up there and deciding what goes where. It’s that getting lost in it, I don’t know how I could describe it.” – Nancy Smith

“One of the things that I do when I’m trying something new whether it be a new block or a new design, I get out fabric I don’t want to use, and try it out of that, to make sure the design is going to work...” – Sue McKenna

“I like to experiment, try new things, and push my limits, so I started quilting a couple of years ago. Figured I’d give it a shot. With the jacket, I set one main parameter: to not have two same-patterned pieces visible on the same side. The quilt pieces are raw-edge, simpler than piecing for a contoured quilt and for a beginner. The contours in the arms, the lapels, the shoulder, and the neck involved some trial and error. My wife is an experienced quilter and coached me while I was making it.” – Mike Miller

Designing a quilt is like a journey.

Quilters navigate what fabrics will fit into the design, the sizes to cut each piece, how to arrange them within their block, and how those blocks line up with one another.

All this while keeping in mind the end vision of what the completed quilt should look like.

Traditional quilt patterns feature geometric shapes arranged into different patterns and configurations, with the wide range of designs made possible through the placement and contrast of fabric pieces.

Contemporary designs are more flexible and open ended. They might be inspired by a traditional pattern, the life experience of a family member, or even depict a favorite flower found in a botanical garden.

In addition to self-designed quilts, many quilters also create quilts designed by another: whether learned through a direct class, found in a book, or seen online.

Making a quilt designed by someone else continues the tradition of quilting as an art of shared creation.



Nancy Smith, *A Nine Letter Word For...*, 2007, cotton, photo transfer fabric and flannel



Sue McKenna, *One Block Wonder – Kauai*, 2007, cotton



Mike Miller, *Men's Jacket*, 2013, cotton, fusible web applique and raw edge

Stitched Stories

Throughout Western New York, quilters continue to make and create works that reflect the cultural life and history of the region.

As a traditional art, quilts are not only something to look at and use, but also an educational tool for learning about a cultural community.

These communities may include a regional culture like Western New York, a group of people such as their family, or the community of local quilters bound together through the practice of a shared cultural tradition.

Through the material chosen, the design of the pattern, and the content of a quilt, viewers learn not only about the quilter but also about the cultural context in which it was made.

For example, a quilt might feature a local historical landmark, reinforcing and sharing its importance to the quilter and their community.

Narrative quilts provide the most direct example of quilts as a storytelling and educational medium by combining words and images to tell a specific story.

Every quilt tells a story, through words or images: about its maker, their culture, and our history.

“One of my daughter’s assignment for interior design at Villa was to go to a Frank Lloyd Wright house. So one weekend we decided to go and we went to the Buffalo one and the one down by the lake. In the gift shop I went through the books and I was so amazed to find one of his books because I never had seen it before. For a little while I did nothing with it, but I finally decided I’m going to make a quilt of it. I had my daughter picked out all of her fabrics for hers, and made it for her...then my other daughter wanted one too. Then I made a third one...”
– Carolynn Sherman

“My cousin lived at the Martin House years ago when I was a child, back when UB had possession of it and I remember visiting them there. I’m a big Frank Lloyd Wright fan and also a stained glass artist: I started making stained glass about 15 years ago. I’ve always loved all the different colors and the light going through them, and maybe seeing the windows at the Martin House sparked that.” – Lynn Urban



Kenan Quilters' Guild, *Niagara County Bicentennial Quilt*, 2008, cotton, beads, embroidery floss and photo transfer fabric



Carolynn Sherman, *Frank Lloyd Wright Heath House*, 2019, cotton and batik



Lynn Urban, *Wright Buffalo*, 2015, cotton



Kenan Quilters' Guild and Dale Association Quilters, *The Mossell Quilt*, 2015, cotton, embroidery and photo transfer fabric

Exhibit Checklist

Quilting, Sharing & Community

Stephanie Drehs, *Summer Penny Garden*, 2016, primitive cotton muslin and hand dyed wool

Donna Kathke, *When Downton Meets Bali*, 2019, cotton

Donna Kathke, *Folk Art Fantasy*, 2019, cotton

Susie Spicer, *Connect the Dots*, 2019, cotton

Susie Spicer, *Little Brother*, 2019, shirt scraps

Art + Math = Quilting

Jan Jordan, *Houses on the Hill*, 2019, cotton

Jan Jordan, *3D Flying Geese*, 2015, cotton

Kim Jeffree, *The Yellow Room Quilt*, 2015, cotton

Georgia Spanoudakis McDonald, *Rail Fence with Glimmer*, 2019, cotton and batik

Always New

Dotti Timkey, *Japanese Dolls*, 2011, cotton

Mary Ann DeMaison, *Flowtation*, 2015, cotton and cotton linen blend

Martha Krupa, *Organic Pink*, 2016, snow dyed cotton and beads

Martha Krupa, *Butterfly Garden*, 2008, cotton, buttons, beads and yarn

Martha Krupa, *Sunflower*, 2012, cotton, yarn, buttons, beads, and glued napkin

Let's Talk Fabric

Barb Sanford, *Spellbound*, 2019, cotton

Linda Davis, *Turkish Floor*, 2015, cotton

Judy Schryver, *French Braid*, 2008, cotton and batik

Placing Puzzle Pieces

Kathleen McIntosh, *Peacock*, 2019, cotton, seed beads, crystals, novelty buttons and handmade glass buttons

Debbie Colaizzi, *Boxful of Crayons*, 2019, cotton

Barbara Krombein, *Midnight Dream – Daytime Work*, 2018, cotton

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Sue McKenna, *One Block Wonder – Kauai*, 2007, cotton

Mike Miller, *Men's Jacket*, 2018, cotton, fusible web appliqué and raw edge

Stitched Stories

Lynn Urban, *Wright Buffalo*, 2015, cotton

Carolynn Sherman, *Frank Lloyd Wright Heath House*, 2019, cotton and batik

Kenan Quilters' Guild and Dale Association Quilters, *The Mossell Quilt*, 2015, cotton, embroidery and photo transfer fabric

Kenan Quilters' Guild, *Niagara County Bicentennial Quilt*, 2008, cotton, beads, embroidery floss and photo transfer fabric

Follow the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, the Kenan Center, and the Kenan Quilters' Guild on social media to stay up to date on the latest programs, projects, and workshops that accompany this exhibit.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Jan and Nancy, co-presidents of the Kenan Quilters' Guild, for their assistance in organizing interviews, providing feedback, sharing their knowledge of quilting, and helping brainstorm ideas for designing and putting together the exhibit.

Special thanks to every quilter in the Kenan Quilters' Guild who participated in the exhibit, and for sharing their knowledge and passion of quilting in our interviews: Stephanie, Susie, Donna, Georgia, Kim, Kathy, Debbie, Jan, Barbara K., Judy, Linda, Barbara S., Mary Ann, Dotti, Martha, Sue McKenna, Mike, Lynn, Nancy, and Carolyn.

Special thanks to Parrish, Alyssa, Candy, and everyone at the Kenan Center for their assistance in making every part of this exhibit, program series, and collaboration happen.

Special thanks to Castellani Art Museum staff Michael, Michelle, Tara, Mary Helen, and Susan for their assistance with installations, marketing, and content review.

Special thanks to work studies and volunteers at the museum including Olivia, Phil, Hanna, McKenzee, Megan, and Dawn for their assistance with creating audio logs of interviews, inventorying the quilts, and shooting high resolution images.

Special thanks to my students Jennifer, Josh, Allison, Hope, and Trinity for assistance in taking measurements and assisting with the creation and sketching of the exhibit layout.

Cover images (from left)

Top row

Donna Kathke, *Folk Art Fantasy*, 2019, cotton
Georgia Spanoudakis McDonald, *Rail Fence with Glimmer*, 2019, cotton and batik
Kim Jeffree, *The Yellow Room Quilt*, 2015, cotton

Middle Row

Dotti Timkey, *Japanese Dolls*, 2011, cotton
Kenan Quilters' Guild, *Niagara County Bicentennial Quilt*, 2008, cotton, beads, embroidery floss and photo transfer
Barb Sanford, *Spellbound*, 2019, cotton

Bottom Row

Jan Jordan, *3D Flying Geese*, 2015, cotton
Nancy Smith, *A Nine Letter Word For....*, 2007, cotton, photo transfer fabric and flannel
Mary Ann DeMaison, *Flowtation*, 2015, cotton and cotton linen blend

All photos courtesy of Edward Yong Jun Millar, Curator of Folk Arts, Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, except where indicated.

Gather Together: Quilting Niagara is made possible through the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York Legislature.



Council on the Arts



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