

### Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics Discussion Guide

#### Special thanks to our Exclusive Industry Sponsor Hoffman California Fabrics International

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### Welcome to the Discussion

Welcome to the "Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics Discussion Guide," a companion to the nine-part documentary series "Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics." This series will change the way you think about quilts. It's an exploration of quilts with a capital Q that takes you on an amazing journey. Episode by episode, this series introduces new ideas and uncovers the unsuspected size and depth of quilt culture. Delve into the inner workings of the art world, explore behind the scenes in the marketplace, and journey into the complicated, kaleidoscopic world of quilts: explore two centuries of history; watch as women gain power from their handiwork; consider the nature of art itself; and more.

I'm thrilled to say that this landmark series has been extraordinarily well-received, and the second phase of this project is what you now hold in your hands. The "Discussion Guide" was created because we didn't just want people to watch the series, we wanted them to discuss it. Through the use of this Guide, I hope you will be a part of keeping this conversation going.

Within the Guide you'll find questions for each episode as well as specific questions for targeted groups. A great deal of thought went into creating these questions. They were designed by a wide variety of people – academics, quilt makers, collectors and artists – who volunteered their time and talent to make this Guide a reality.

I hope you'll find questions and ideas that speak to you and questions that push you out of your comfort zone. The Guide is meant to be a flexible working tool and more of a blueprint for your discussion, so feel free to skip around in the Guide or add your own questions. If you hit a hot topic we've missed, we'd like to know so we can share it with our larger audience on our blog, and through social media.

We've also included a "How to Host" section, to give you a few suggestions on how to use the Guide in a group setting so you can put all your energy into the discussion itself.

I challenge you to add to the "Why Quilts Matter" conversation, raise new questions and take the discussion to the next level. Whether you are a quilt maker, a student, or a lover of art, you have a unique perspective to be shared. By the end of the series discussions, I feel pretty confident you'll look at quilts in a whole new light, even if you've been making quilts for years.

But enough from me. Now it's your turn to do the talking, so let the conversation begin!

Yours truly,

Shelly Zegart

Executive Producer and Host

"Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics"

### **How To Use This Guide**



This "Discussion Guide" is a companion to the "Why Quilts Matter: History, Art & Politics" series. Go through the questions after watching an episode and answer them in a group setting or on your own. They are meant to be a starting point for you to create discussions around the series. Have fun with it. Create your own questions. Mix up the questions. We would love to hear from you. Be sure to connect with us on our social media sites and let us know what new questions your group raises (facebook.com/whyquiltsmatter, twitter.com/whyquiltsmatter and youtube.com/whyquiltsmatter).

We've also included a "How to Host" section (page 41) in case you need ideas on how to use the Guide in a group setting. Our goal is to make this Guide as turnkey as possible so you can put all your energy into the discussion itself.

Additional resources and information are on page 45 titled "Resources," so explore it all before you begin. Learn more about all the featured images in our "Image Resource Guides." If you are hosting a quilt exhibition check out our "Exhibition Programming Opportunities" guide. Visit the "Events" section on our site to see what others have been doing to develop programming.

We hope all of it will stretch your limits and provoke conversation. Most importantly we hope the Guide will help you to think about quilts in new ways.



## **Quilts 101 -**

What is a quilt? This episode introduces the audience to the brave new world of the American quilt, where that question has many different answers. If a "real" quilt is a three layer fabric sandwich sewn together and folded over a bed, how do we define the quilt that is an amalgamation of fabric, photography, print making and other media, and hangs on a gallery wall? Our experts contribute varying perspectives, setting the stage for the complexity of the series' primary topic — why quilts matter and how they relate to history, art, and politics.

- What kinds of emotional connections do we have with quilts, and why do they engage us? How do they speak to our inner heart?
- Despite the fact that people have different definitions of what a quilt is, what characteristics do you think quality quilts from all eras share?
- If you own a quilt, what are your plans for its future? What are some things you should record about it to help future owners understand its history?
- Are there regional differences in the styles of quilts past and present?
   Today, the east and west coasts are described as having more studio art quilts. What about other more specific areas? With antique quilts for example, how is a New England quilt different from one made in Georgia?
- In what ways do quilts reflect their eras, their makers, and their communities?

- Why do you think studio art quilt makers sometimes incorporate "found objects," like cigarette packages, into traditional quilt forms?
- What does the statement, "A quilt is a recycled work of art" mean?
- How has the evolution in quilt definitions, styles, and techniques reflected quilt makers' developing relationship with the nature and purpose of quilting?
- This episode showed both contemporary traditional and studio art quilts. Which appeal to your aesthetic sensibilities, and why?
- Some have argued that quilts, especially antique quilts, "matter" because of their "centrality to American culture." What does this mean?
- Given the variety of fabrics and notions available today, what would it take to move you out of your comfort zone to try a new style?



### **Quilts Bring History Alive**

We all wonder how people dressed, traveled, and behaved in generations past, and we need only to look to quilts to find out. Since quilts were made, not by artists, but by ordinary women whose lives they closely reflect, they are founts of information about the people and periods they represent. In this episode we will explore the quilt's unique ability to preserve, not only our own family histories, but the history of America beyond the reach of memory.

- In what ways do quilts reflect the eras in which they were made?
- How did late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century economics influence what became a distinctly American style of quilt?
- How did women's use of quilts as a fundraising technique illustrate women's role in 19<sup>th</sup> century American society? How did quilt making allow women to circumvent limitations imposed by their culture?
- In what ways does a quilt's historical significance enhance its value?
- How do quilt designs indicate the socio-economic status of the maker, place of origin (rural or urban), education, and available quilt materials?

- What was America's major contribution to quilt styles? Why do you think the repeating block style flourished in America?
- How have the field of quilt studies and the advent of the studio art quilt affected the stature of quilts?
- How do family quilts provide insight into a person's family history and into the larger historical developments that affected a family's narrative?
- In what ways were quilts used to celebrate rites of passage? Are quilts used in similar ways today?
- How do quilts keep community history alive?





- How does sales price equate with "museum quality," or does it?
- If you are buying contemporary quilts for your museum, where are you buying them? Does your organization use Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) and other online site resources to find quilts?
- Many museums are now acquiring antique quilt collections, as opposed to individual quilts. How do you present a quilt collection to the public with a specific point of view? Is it important to present the collection in the way the original collector envisioned?



	CREATE	YOUR	OWN	QUESTIONS	OR	TAKE A FEW	NOTES:
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### What is Art?

You think you know art when you see it, but this episode of "Why Quilts Matter" may make you think again. Turns out the quilt is the perfect test case for a dozen theories about what makes art, well...art. Take the art verses craft debate: As a domestic object made by women for a practical purpose, the quilt falls squarely into the "craft" category, and a humble one, at that. But do some quilts become "art" when exhibited like paintings, on a museum wall?

- Britannica Online defines art as "the use of skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others." Do you think this is a good definition? Under this definition, is there any medium that does not have the potential to be art?
- Have you ever thought about quilts as art? After watching this episode, has your opinion changed? How?
- One of the ways we designate that a quilt is art has to do with where the piece winds up. How do museums either fuel or defuse the "art verses craft" debate?
- How important is good technique to art? Why?
- How important is innovation in the creation of art? Why?

- What role does "originality" have in the art verses craft conversation?
- Is there a difference between a quilt that was not made to be functional, but could be, and a quilt that was made to be functional, yet is so visually interesting it might find its way onto a wall? Is either one art? Are both art? Why?
- Consider for a moment your personal choices in creating your home environment. What place do beauty and visual pleasure have in your life?
- Consider the eclectic range of materials that are used to make quilts or quilt-like objects today, as well as experimentation with forms. What criteria should we use to define an object as a quilt? Does it matter that we still designate a separate category called "quilts?"
- When it comes to quilts in the art world, they carry domestic historical baggage. What do you think this statement means?



## **Gee's Bend: "The Most Famous**

In 2002 the art world was rocked to its foundation by a group of unusual, abstract quilts made by African American women from an obscure hamlet in southern Alabama. People lined up around the block to see them. Join us as we trace the journey of the quilts of Gee's Bend from the clotheslines of the South to the exhibition walls of the country's greatest museums.

- The quilts of Gee's Bend were described as innovative and imaginative, and yet they were created in an isolated community.
   Where do you think the quilt makers of Gee's Bend got their inspiration?
- Gee's Bend quits are often referred to as the most famous quilts in America. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- How do some of the Gee's Bend quilts visually evoke a sense of time or history?
- Why might the Gee's Bend quilts be overlooked by the general quilting public?
- Does your experience and understanding of the Gee's Bend quilts change depending on where you see them (examples: on a bed, hanging on a clothesline, on a museum wall)?

- Compare and contrast Gee's Bend quilts with abstract paintings. What are some of their differences? What are some similarities?
- Why do certain concepts appear in different art forms at the same time, yet in completely unrelated places?
   For example, artists like Mark Rothko, Elsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns, and the Gee's Bend women are contemporaries.
- How have the women from Gee's Bend, or their quilts, changed since their quilts became worldrenowned? Does success change the quilt makers and the art form?
- Images of the Gee's Bend quilts as stamps were issued by the United States Postal Service. What other art images have you seen on postage stamps and what art images would you like to see on stamps in the future?
- Why did the quilts of Gee's Bend cause a negative reaction among some quilt makers?



### **Empowering Women**

In this episode we look at the quilt's historical and current roles as an avenue of personal expression, a sly medium of social and political opinion, and a building block of financial security for women. Curators, quilt makers, and scholars discuss the surprising number of ways in which the quilt has been and continues to be, woven into the histories and psyches of our mothers, our sisters, ourselves.

- Has your opinion of the political content of quilts changed after watching "Why Quilts Matter?" Explain.
- Why do historians and artists
   oftentimes simultaneously describe
   women's quilt making activities as
   both a form of oppression and a
   source of liberation?
- Name some ways that women in the past felt like quilt making liberated them?
- What do you think people mean when they talk about "women's work?" Do they use the term in a positive or negative way? Explain.
- Do quilts speak only to women? Why or why not? How have men related to quilts in the past? How do they relate to them now?
- In the past decade, more men have become quilt makers. Should quilting remain a woman's domain? How does the presence of men alter the field of quilting?

- How do contemporary expressions of political concerns in today's quilts differ from political expressions in 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century quilts? What do these differences say about women's changing roles in American society?
- What does Carolyn Mazloomi mean when she says that the quilt has a "soft voice?" Is it effective, subtle or too late?
- Some historians argue that the messages in quilts are becoming less covert than they once were and more confrontational and obvious. Do you agree or disagree? If there is a change what might account for it?
- In the series, John Begley said that "Grandma had an agenda." What does that phrase mean to you? Have you ever made or bought a quilt that had an agenda? Explain.
- Describe a specific social, economic and/or political cause that you are passionate about, and explain how you would use quilt making to address your concerns.



### **How to Host**

You have the guide, you're excited to get this conversation going, but you may be a bit unclear on where to start. Our "How to Host" section will help give you ideas on different ways to use the guide. Remember, this is flexible so feel free to take bits and pieces and make it your own!

#### WHEN:

Frequency – There are nine 27-minute episodes within the "Why Quilts Matter" series, which can be broken up in several ways. There is also a 10<sup>th</sup> discussion titled: The Big Picture - Looking Forward.

- POWER THROUGH (2.5 hour evenings) Make it about a month-long commitment by showing two episodes each week. This means longer evenings but a shorter overall time commitment. Spend the first hour showing 2 episodes and the next hour to hour and a half discussing the episodes with the questions from the guide. On the final week show the last episode and spend time viewing the extra footage at the end of the DVD and celebrating the completion. Serve refreshments!
- Make It a year-long group (1.5 hour evenings) If your group is in it for the long haul, extend the discussion to one episode a month. Take your time and dive deep into each episode. Spend the first 30-minutes watching the episode, and the next hour discussing.
- DISCUSSION-ONLY EVENTS (1 hour evenings) If your group is very pressed for time, have members watch the suggested episode(s) in advance and show up for the discussion portion only. This will allow you more time to talk and removes the need for a TV set-up. It does require members to each have their own copy of the DVD.

#### WHERE:

Location – For the location make sure you have a large enough screen so all can see and enough seating. (Of course if members are watching episodes prior to coming to the event then this isn't an issue). To help make conversation easy, make sure to arrange seating in a circular setting, or a set-up that all can hear and be heard.

The guide can be scanned so that it can go through your computer to a big screen.

- PICK A LOCATION AND STICK WITH IT Select one location that is conducive
  to screening. Pros: It makes it easy for your guests to remember. If it's a setup that works, then why change? Possible Cons: This also puts the burden
  on the hostess in terms of clean-up and refreshments.
- ROTATE THE GROUP If your group would rather share the responsibility,
  have each person sign up to host a Club meeting for one month or one
  week. Pros: No one person is stuck with hosting duties. Possible Cons: The
  set-up from location to location may not be ideal. Make sure they have a
  DVD player, a large-enough screen, and seating.
- Consider locations outside the home Check out your local library or art center to see if they have rooms available. Be sure to ask about the audio-



visual equipment so there are no hidden charges or surprises. Also, think about existing meeting places you use for your guilds or other groups.

#### WHO:

Invitees - Plan out the size of the group and who you want to invite.

- SIZE Pick a group size that you can accommodate. If you have the space
  to host a large group, consider breaking into groups of smaller numbers (10
  or less) during the discussion portion. This smaller size may make it more
  comfortable for some people to participate.
- Who to invite The series is designed to spark conversation with quilters and non-quilters alike. While quilters may naturally gravitate to such an event, don't leave out your non-quilting friends. Think of it like a book club, not everyone is a science-fiction fan, but they can still take part in a widegenre of books. Sometimes it is good to get people out of their comfort zone.

#### How:

Flow of the event – From the time you send the invite to saying goodbye to guests, here is our recommended flow.

- THREE WEEKS PRIOR TO THE EVENT Send a general invite to friends, fellow
  quilt makers, and community members. Using the suggested text, explain
  what the Conversation Club is and the time commitment. Include details of
  the first event date, location, time, what to bring.
- One week prior to the event Send a reminder out making sure everyone has a copy of the "Discussion Guide."
- EVENT DAY, BEFORE GUESTS ARRIVE Provide adequate seating so everyone can see and hear the series. Consider a table with refreshments appetizers and drinks. If you are hosting the series during dinner time you may want to turn your event into more of a potluck occasion.
- DURING THE EVENT Introduce new members. The conversation may flow
  easier if people are comfortable with one another. After introductions give
  a brief overview of that evening's episode(s) (you can read the descriptive
  paragraph included in the guide) and then play the episode. Once the
  episode concludes take a brief break or launch right into the conversation
  guide questions.
- FOLLOW-UP Let us know how your conversation went! Be sure to stop by www.facebook.com/whyquiltsmatter or www.twitter.com/whyquiltsmatter to tell us any hot topics that arose. If it was a good conversation in your group we're sure our fans will also want to hear. Take pictures of your group as well and share on our social networking sites. We'd love to feature them!
- Repeat Be sure to send out reminders and invites for the next event via emails, social networks or mail.



## **Acknowledgments**

The making of the "Discussion Guide" was truly a group effort from funding to question writing. We could not have pulled together this project without the help of many, as well as all of our Kickstarter backers, especially those listed below:

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Special thanks to our Exclusive Industry Sponsor Hoffman California Fabrics International

In order to spark conversation among a wide audience, we thought it best to recruit a diverse group to create the guide questions. Our thanks to the contributors who took their time and talent to voluntarily create questions for the Guide. Their perspectives are what make this Guide so unique.

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Folk Art Collector

Founder of Peace Postcards

Valerie White

Fiber Artist

# **Photo Credits**

The Charleston Museum Charleston, South Carolina www.charlestonmuseum.org



Page 1-2, 41-52	Page 11-14
Tumbling Blocks (detail)	Center Diamond Medallion (detail)
Maker unknown	Maker unknown
1870	c. 1910-1915
Cotton	Wool 35" x 40"
Photo by Geoffrey Carr Formerly in the collection of Shelly Zegart	From The Darwin D. Bearley Collection: Antique Ohio
Pornierly in the conection of shelly Zegart	Amish Quilts
Page 3-6	Bernina Sewing Machine Co. of Zurich, Switzerland;
Autograph Cross (detail)	2006
Maker unknown	Courtesy of Darwin D. Bearley
c. 1840-1860	
Cotton	Page 14
95" x 97 ½"	Reconciliation Quilt (detail)
From The American Quilt, Roderick Kiracofe,	Linda Ward Honstain
Clarkson Potter, 2004	1867
Photo by Sharon Risedorph Courtesy of Roderick Kiracofe	Cotton 97" x 85"
Courtesy of Roderick Kitacore	Item number 2001.011.0001
Page 4	The International Quilt Study Center & Museum
English Center Medallion (detail)	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Maker unknown	Lincoln, Nebraska
c. 1840-1850	www.quiltstudy.org
Cotton	14 K. Que;
104" x 104"	Page 15-18
Photo by Geoffrey Carr	Renaissance Revival (detail)
Collection of Eleanor Bingham Miller	Mariya Waters 2007
Page 6	86 ½" x 86 ½"
Hand Took (detail)	Item number 2009.01.01
B. J. Adams	The National Quilt Museum
Hand-dyed and commercial cotton, silk and wool, cotton	Paducah, Kentucky
poly and metallic threads, acrylic paint	www.quiltmuseum.org
46" x 75"	More info at www.quiltindex.org
Collection of John M. Walsh, III	(2) (3) (3) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4
www.bjadamsart.com	Page 17
P7.10	Off the Edge (detail)
Page 7-10 Postage Stamp (detail)	Anne McKenzie Nickolson 1999
Mrs. B. W. Riley	Cotton, pieced and appliquéd
1939	57 ½" x 68 ¼"
Cotton	Ann M. Stack Fund for Contemporary Art
80" x 75"	Item number 2003.169
Item number 1998.213	Indianapolis Museum of Art
Dallas Museum of Art	Indianapolis, Indiana
Dallas, Texas	www.imamuseum.org
www.dm-art.org	D10
Dage 7	Page 18 Grid with Colorful Past (detail)
Page 7 Historic photograph of a baby sitting in a chair	Michael James
From Quilts in Everyday Life, 1855-1955: A 100-Year	2008
Photographic History, Janet E. Finley	Cotton, dyes
Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, Pennsylvania; 2012	35 ½" x 46"
Collection of Janet E. Finley	Courtesy of Modern Arts Midwest
2 3	Photo by Larry Gawel
Page 8	www.unl.edu/mjames_quilts
The Mastectomy Quilt (detail)	D10 22
Suzanne Marshall 1992	Page 19-22  Housetop and Bricklayer blocks with bars (detail)
64" x 52"	Lucy T. Pettway
www.suzannequilts.com	c. 1955
1	Cotton, corduroy, cotton knit, flannel, even weave
Page 10	90" x 78"
Cigarette Silk Quilt (detail)	From Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt
Maker unknown	Paul Arnett, Tinwood Books, 2006
c. 1910	Courtesy of Matt Arnett
Silk ribbons, pre-quilted satin backing, velvet	Photo by Pitkin Studio
53" x 55" Item number 2008.042.003	
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"This series takes us on an informational, fearless, and fun ride through the world of quilts and quilt making, its rich heritage and the people for whom this art form is a way of life."

- Alex Anderson and Ricky Tims, Co-Founders & Co-Hosts of TheQuiltShow.com

"This compelling and visually rich series convinces us that quilts do matter... Verdict: This wonderful series would be an important addition for all museums, libraries and quilt guilds."

- Library Journal

"I can think of no better resource than "Why Quilts Matter: History, Art, & Politics" to introduce my students to one of the most visually compelling, historically rich art forms in our country."

- Marcie C. Ferris, Associate Professor, Department of American Studies University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

"The series was a real journey for me... all your very detailed and so well-presented subject matters were an enlightenment..."

- Brigitte Rutenberg, Artist

"My family has been in the business of producing quilting cottons for decades, and yet I couldn't believe what I didn't know about quilts until viewing "Why Quilts Matter." Our founder, Rube P. Hoffman, helped develop the Los Angeles textile industry and so, as a family, we couldn't be more pleased to be involved in helping promote the artistic, historical and cultural values behind quilts and quilting."

- Tony Hoffman, Executive for Hoffman California Fabrics International

Visit www.whyquiltsmatter.org for more information.

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