

African American Quilting Traditions



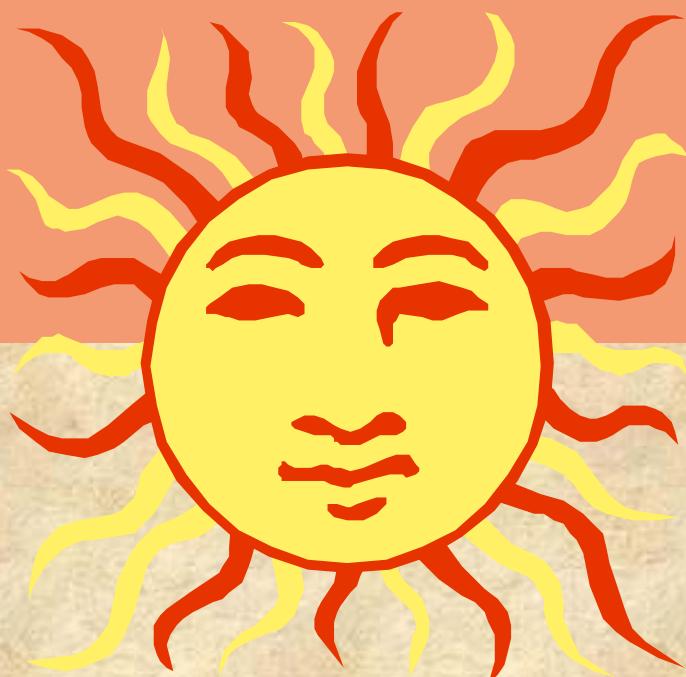
By Rebecca Schultz



Quilting Traditions

- Quilting is a unique tradition because it has been developed as a **union** of different ethnic and cultural traditions.
- Quilting has come to symbolize the union of African and European traditions in a unique manner, as a union, rather than a separation, of two, often contrasting or forcibly separated cultures and traditions.
- Quilting has become a type of symbol used not only for individual artists and authors, but a symbol for a country.

Quilting Themes



Quilts and quilting are used to convey certain themes of:

- Self expression
- Union of opposite values or people
- The formation of close bonds among women and kin, heritage, history
- Family
- Comfort
- Love
- Commitment

Loom House



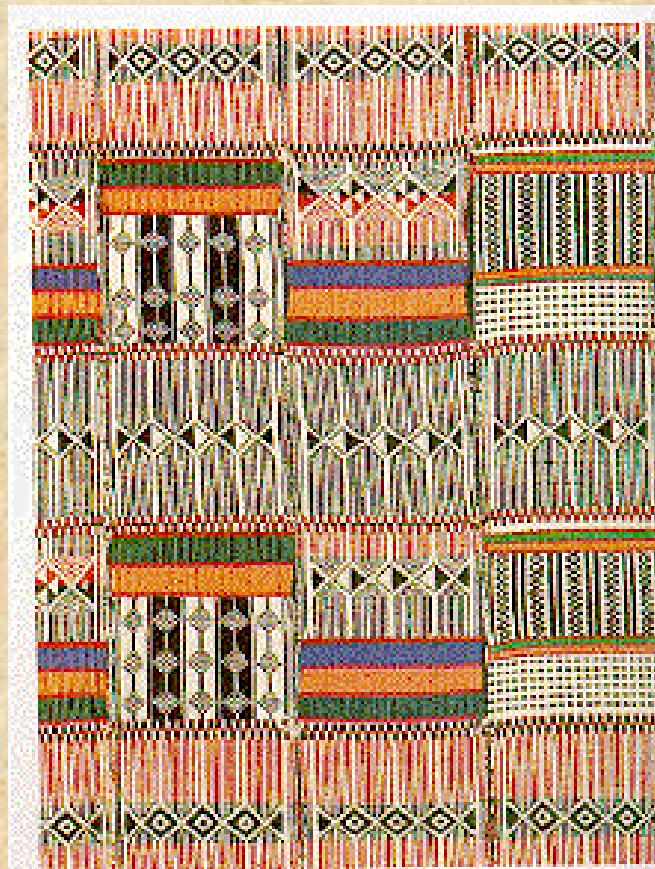
- This is where quilts began.
- It is a loom house used by slaves on the Melrose Plantation.
- What do you think the inside looked like?

Interior of a Loom House.



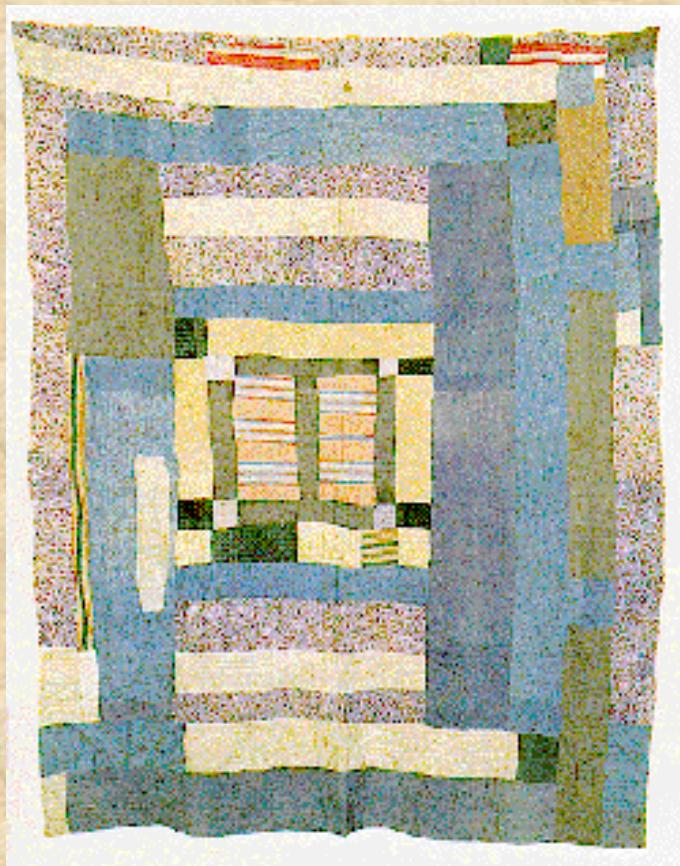
- This is the interior of a loom house on Melrose Plantation.
- Do you think this was hard work?

Textiles



- Originally in Africa the textiles were made by men.
- Once slaves were brought to America, women took over the tradition.
- This example of men's traditional weave uses strips of reed and fabric which is also used in fabric quilting.

Bright Colors and Large Shapes



- Bright colors were used in African quilts.
- These colors helped Africans be able to recognize warring tribes and hunting parties from far away.
- This textile tradition of using large shapes has carried on into quilts made today.

Diamond Pattern

- Very prominent in African textile tradition in the use of the diamond pattern.
- The diamond is symbolic of the cycles of life.
- Each point represents a stage in life: birth, life, death, and rebirth. The circle shape is similarly representative of this cycle.

Quilt with a Diamond Pattern

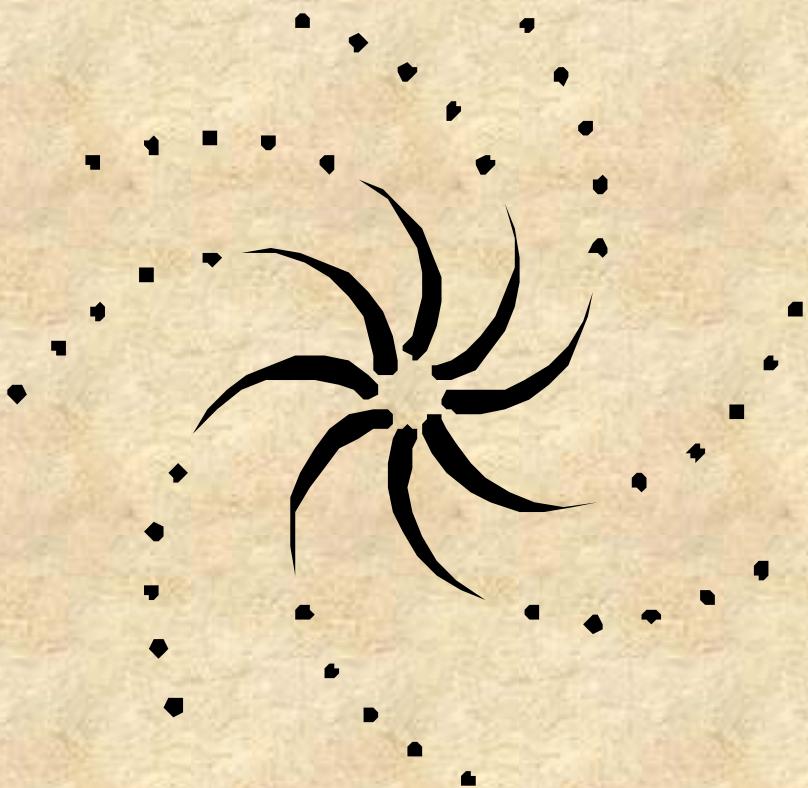




Pattern Breaks

- The ability to recreate and change old patterns was especially important to many African tribes.
- A break in a pattern symbolized a rebirth in the ancestral power of the creator or wearer.

Pattern Breaks



- A break in a pattern also helped keep evil spirits away.
- Evil is believed to travel in straight lines and a break in a pattern or line confuses the spirits and slows them down.



Traditions



- Often the owner's *status* was conveyed in the number of pattern changes or the cloth used.
- This tradition was especially important for royalty and priests -- it conveyed *prestige, power, status, and wealth*.
- The traditions of improvisation and multiple patterning also protect the quilter from anyone copying their quilts.
- These traditions allow for a strong sense of ownership and creativity.

This is an example of using many patterns and materials in a quilt.



Quilts

- Quilts were used to keep records of family traditions.
- They were used much like a “family album” that we would put together.
- Quilts were used to record family events such as....
- **(CLICK AND FIND OUT)**

Events Recorded in Quilts



Family Album Quilt

- The quilt on the right is titled Black family Album (1854).
- Representative of her black family's traditions, heritage, and lineage, its creator literally pasted her family album onto a lasting fabric.



Cultural Quilts



- On the left is a quilt made in 1938 that displays the same type of cultural information about the creator's family and plantation life.
- What do you think the quilt says about plantation life?

Charms

- Charms are used in many African and African American religious societies.
- They are created by a priest or conjure woman for the specific needs of its user.
- Charms can heal or ward off evil spirits.



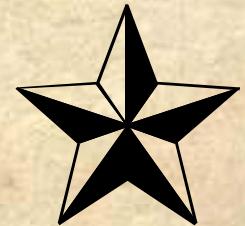
Quilts to Ward off Evil Spirits



- This quilt has the African American Vodun dolls for safe guarding the for the user from evil spirits of a specific threat.



Underground Railroad



- During slavery years, members of the **Underground Railroad** would use quilts to send messages.
- Log Cabin quilts made with black cloth were hung to mark a *safe house* of refuge.
- Some quilts marked *escape routes* out of a plantation or county.
- Others marked the *stars* that would act as a night-time map through the country to freedom.

Log Cabin Quilt



Conclusion

African American quilts symbolize much tradition and culture in each patch that makes up such a masterpiece.

NOW IT IS TIME TO
CHECK OUT THE REST OF YOUR SITES!



References

All text and graphics came from:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/quilt/atrads.html>