



LABOURS OF LOVE

AUSTRALIAN QUILTS 1845-2015





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AUSTRALIAN QUILTS 1845–2015

Hazelhurst
REGIONAL GALLERY & ARTS CENTRE
A facility of Sutherland Shire Council



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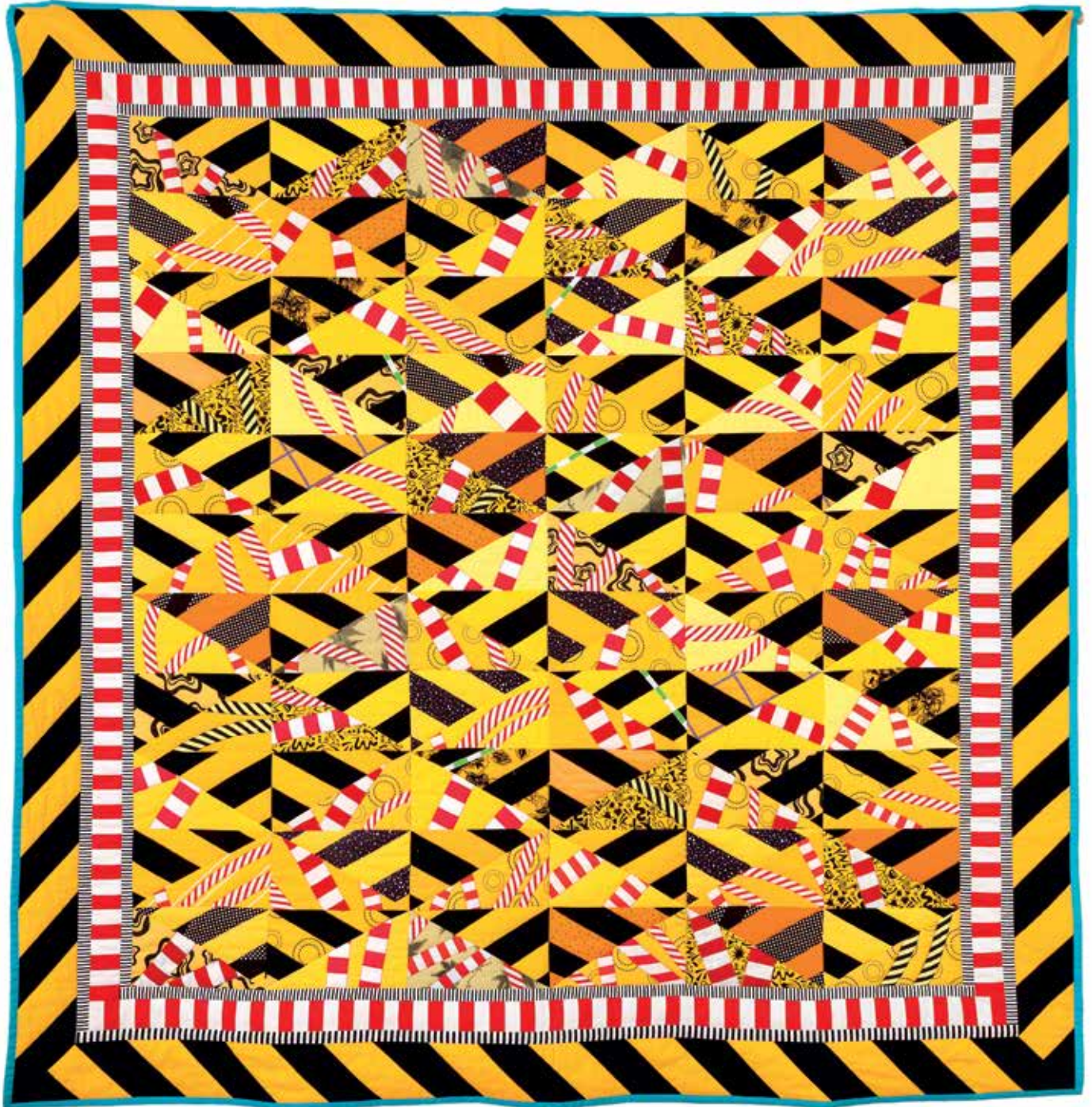
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Left: Crazy quilt, machined and hand embroidered by Joan Elms (nee Bolton). Cotton 217 x 178 cm. Pioneer Women's Hut, donated by Joan Bolton 1987. Crazy quilts (patchwork made with irregularly shaped pieces) originated in America about 1880. This cheerful 'crazy', made from fabric off-cuts outlined with red embroidery, was made in the 1950s for a holiday cottage on the NSW coast.

Publication sponsor





... a rare opportunity for Sydney audiences to see these treasured objects together ...

Labours of Love: Australian Quilts 1845–2015 celebrates the skill and artistry of generations of quilt makers. It presents some of the finest examples of heritage quilts held in private and public collections in Australia alongside creations by contemporary quilters and artists.

Quilts offer a lens into Australian history taking us into the world of the makers, inside the drawing rooms and verandahs where hours were dedicated to meticulous workmanship. Many of the hand crafted quilts and items of memorabilia in the exhibition were created in towns and on properties across NSW. They were handed down through generations before being acquired and preserved in public collections. This is a rare opportunity for Sydney audiences to see these treasured objects together and we are grateful to the exhibition lenders including the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, the National Trust of Australia (NSW), the Australian War Memorial, the National Museum of Australia (quilt and showcases), as well as regional museums and private collections, for entrusting us with their care.

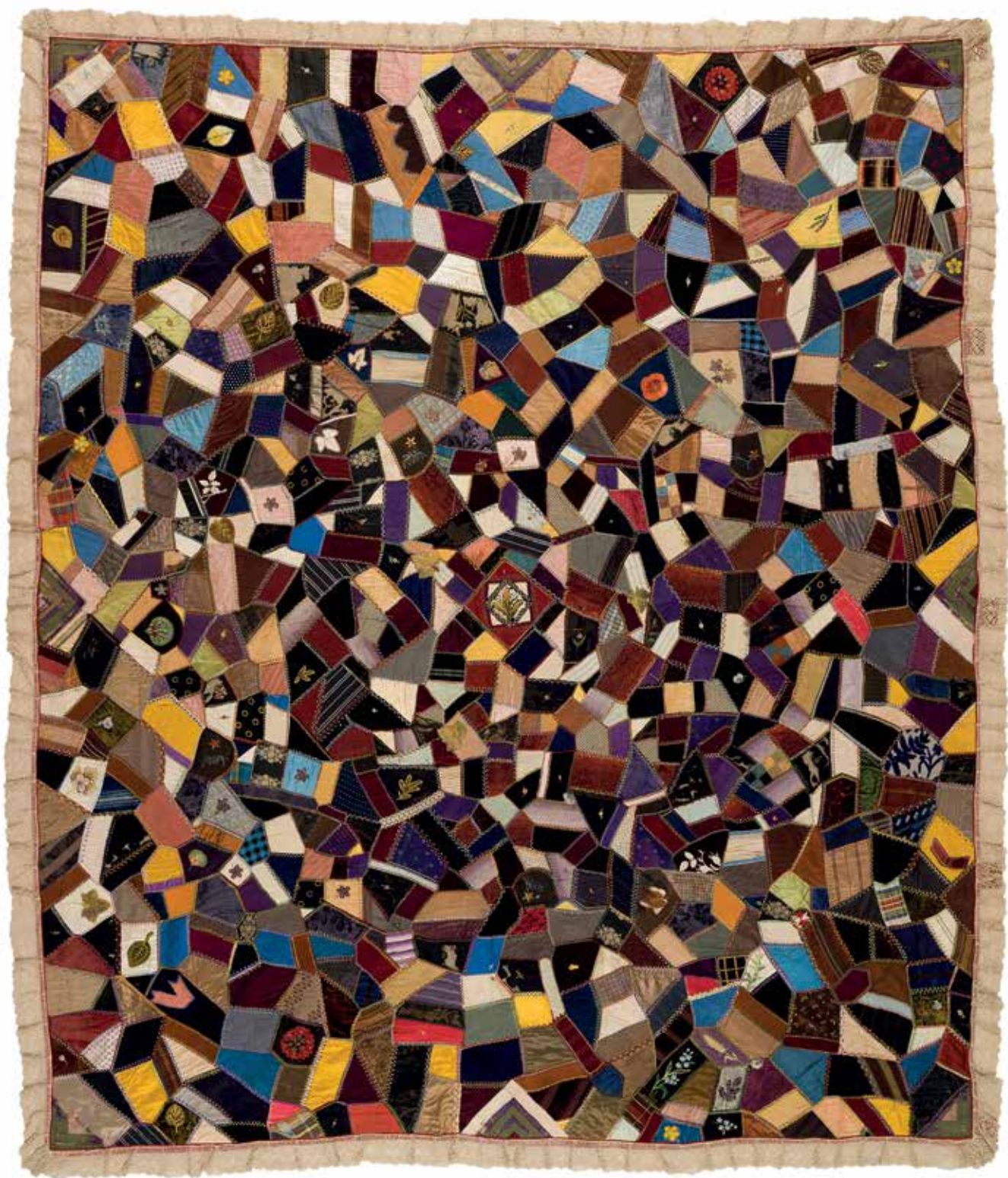
Labours of Love is the first exhibition of the decorative art of quilts at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre and it continues our commitment to bring great art and design to our southern Sydney region. It is also an opportunity to reconsider the role of quilts as works of artistic expression and objects of historical significance.

Thank you to Louise Mitchell, our guest curator, for her expertise and dedication over the past two years to realise this ambitious project. Thanks also to Robert Bell at the NGA for his encouragement as we embarked on the project and his contribution to this publication. Thanks to the Gordon Darling Foundation for their support of this publication and to Museums and Galleries NSW for the curatorial grant.

We are delighted that Philip Holt and The Holt Group, long time supporters of Hazelhurst, agreed to be the Principal Sponsor for *Labours of Love: Australian Quilts 1845–2015*. Their assistance enabled us to present this fascinating exhibition. ❧

Belinda Hanrahan

Director
Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre



With the exception of a few scraps of ribbon – it was all made up with pieces from friends far and near... I called it the ‘Friendship quilt’ and to me it was a labour of love and given to you as my eldest grand-daughter. I am sorry I cannot write a history of it – for as the eye is dazzled by the many colours of the different bits, so the mind is puzzled by the loving memories of dear friends who contributed and took an interest ... I must add I spent many a happy hour on it...

Marion Gibson, ‘Narringa’, Gunbar, near Hay, New South Wales, 18th August 1898ⁱ

A quilt is more than a quaint bedcover. Often they are repositories of memories and family histories; and they form part of a vibrant craft tradition. They are often admired for their aesthetic beauty, their richness of pattern and colour, and the skill with which they are made. They reflect changes in fashion, trade and immigration histories and technological advancements. In the late 20th century, quilts were hung on walls as art and were appreciated as one of the few forms of artistic expression available to women before the modern era. The broad range of quilts presented in *Labours of Love: Australian Quilts 1845–2015* traces the developments in quilt making from the mid 19th century to the present day.

At its simplest definition ‘quilting’ is a method of stitching layers of fabric together. There is a top, a back (or reverse), and, in between, an insulating layer for warmth and definition (called wadding or batting). The top of a quilt is often decorative and designs fall into two categories: whole cloth in which the design is formed primarily through the stitching, and patchwork where the design is made up of pieces. In modern quilting practice a quilt has three layers, however during the 19th century, the term was used loosely and included works of one or two layers such as bedcovers, coverlets and counterpanes (bedspreads). In *Labours of Love*, the majority of the ‘quilts’ made before the 1980s have been pieced, or patched; many aren’t quilted and were evidently made for display rather than warmth.ⁱⁱ

Australian quilt makers in the 19th century took their lead from England and developments in textile technology. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, household textiles were valuable – recorded in estate inventories and part of inheritances. Household textiles were redesigned for new fashions, sold on the second hand market or passed from master to servant. Rather than utilitarian bedspreads offering comfort and warmth, quilts were high style décor for the home and were made by professional quilt makers or by wealthy women skilled in needlework.ⁱⁱⁱ

Inventions in England from the 1750s (such as Arkwright’s spinning frame; Crompton’s spinning mule; roller or cylinder printing onto textiles) set the scene for an explosion of printed cotton, which shattered the monopoly of India in the production of cotton.^{iv} Quilt making shifted from an elite craft, requiring expensive and precious imported fabric, to an everyday activity. Tailors and dressmakers capitalised on consumer demand by offering fragments, cuttings and ready-made

Left: *Friendship quilt*, 1892, by Marion Gibson. See page 46.

patches for use in patchwork and appliqué. Quilt makers took advantage of a wider range of patterned cloth to experiment with new patterns. By the early 19th century, colourful patchworks made from recycled or unused cotton were a decorative alternative to the woollen blankets and rugs, and cotton counterpanes readily available.^v

While the earliest surviving whole cloth bed quilt dates from the 14th century in Sicily and pieced bedcovers were made in England in the early 18th century, very few Australian made quilts survive from before the 1850s.^{vi} The earliest quilts in *Labours of Love* are in the mosaic geometric style made by piecing over paper (pages 14–19). Later in the 19th century, as cotton became more available and consequently less desirable, fashionable quilts were made in silks in vibrant colours made possible by the introduction of chemical dyes (pages 23–5). The sewing machine, available in Australia from the 1860s changed the look of quilts as makers added borders and bindings attached with long machined seams. New types of quilts were adaptable for the sewing machine. The strip pieces forming the ‘log cabin’ design (page 47), popular in the late 19th century, could be machine sewn to a foundation fabric. Conversely, while sewing machines cut the time required for plain sewing, it allowed more time for decorative hand sewing or fancy work and the trend for hand embroidered ‘crazy’ quilts took hold in Australia in the 1880s (pages 26–7).

Making a beautiful quilt was not only a way to express artistic skill but also a way to demonstrate proficiency as a homemaker.

As the examples in *Labours of Love* attest, quilts made in Australia during the late 19th and early 20th century feature a multitude of formats and fulfilled a variety of purposes, from practical to symbolic. Many of the quilt styles – ‘medallion’, ‘mosaic geometric’, ‘crazy’ patchwork, ‘log cabin’ and appliqué – also appeared in other parts of the English speaking world and reflected the whims of fashion and taste as well as international patterns of trade and consumerism. An important influence was the Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century, which advanced ideals for the beautification of the industrial world. For quilters, inspiration came from international trade exhibitions, luxury fabrics, Japanese decorative arts and the revival of interest in traditional embroidery and the handmade.^{vii}

At the same time, a ‘democratisation’ of quilt making occurred as women around the country and across socio-economic classes made similar quilt styles from patterns disseminated by word of mouth, publications and direct mail. Through the late 19th and into the 20th century quilt making, as a thrifty use of time and materials was a trend practised at all economic levels, often using scraps or materials at hand. Making a beautiful quilt was not only a way to express artistic skill but also a way to demonstrate proficiency as a homemaker. The practice of ‘making do’ was further enhanced during the Great Depression of the 1930s through ‘waggas’, a type of utilitarian quilt made from recycled fabric or old clothing (see page 52).^{viii}

Quilt making fell out of fashion after World War II. Despite this, the craft was sustained through competitions at fairs and shows where judges valued fine workmanship over original design. In the late 20th century the medium was revitalised, spurred by counterculture philosophies that celebrated the handmade; feminist perspectives that questioned gendered readings of art history and revalued

women's traditional creativity, and modern art movements that blurred the lines between high and low art. Traditional quilts were displayed in art museums where their colours and geometric abstract patterns were viewed akin to modern art such as abstraction, Op Art and colour field painting. New ways of looking at art led to new ways of looking at quilts and much debate was generated about fine art versus craft, and female versus male art forms.^{ix}

The American quilt revival movement was a strong influence in Australia.^x Extensive and decorative quilting (the stitching which holds the layers of a quilt together), became mainstream in Australia after the 1970s due to influences from the United States. From the late 1970s and early 1980s the link between Australian and American quilting included the transmission of skills, aesthetics, organisation structures and other practices of quilt making. Australian museums began to collect quilts (the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney began in 1971 and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra in 1981) and a National Quilt Registry was established in 1985 with the opening of the Pioneer Women's Hut in Tumbarumba^{xi}. In 1988, Australia's bicentenary provided a boost in terms of new opportunities and incentives to quilt makers^{xii}. The seminal exhibition project, *Quilt Australia '88* (organised by the Quilters' Guild of NSW Inc., established 1982) included a display of historic Australian quilts that demonstrated Australia's quilt heritage,^{xiii} and nine of these are included in *Labours of Love*.

Quilt making continues to evolve as a form of creative expression as artists bring new perspectives to the craft and tradition. Interspersed with *Labours of Love's* thematic exhibits of heritage quilts made in NSW from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century, are the works of 11 contemporary artists from NSW. While some choose to work within traditional formats, reimagining how a quilt should look within parameters, others purposefully push the medium, creating textile works that test the limits of what a quilt is and what it can mean. The geometric abstraction of quilts continue to be valued in the contemporary art world, but it is quilt making's historical, social and political meanings that resonate with contemporary artists whose work enables the traditions of the medium to be recast. ✘

Louise Mitchell

Curator

- i Copy of letter to grand-daughter, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, object file.
- ii Australian quilt historian Margaret Rolfe has suggested that the ready availability of manufactured woollen blankets and the smaller population has meant few quilts were made in Australia. Furthermore, Australia's climate of high humidity and intense light, the lack of storage space in homes without attics and basements, meant not many quilts survived. Margaret Rolfe, 'Quilting: Its Absence in Australia', *Uncoverings*, 1988, Volume 9.
- iii For the early history of quilts and patchwork, see Sue Prichard, *Quilts 1700–2010: Hidden Histories, Untold Stories* V & A Publishing, London, 2010; Linda Baumgarten and Kimberly Smith Ivey, *Four centuries of Quilts, The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2014; Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection* Abrams, New York, 2007.
- iv Douglas Farnie, 'Cotton, 1780–1914', *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, vol. 2, ed. David Jenkins, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 723–27.
- v Old Bailey court documents record multiple thefts of patchwork from less elite members of society including weavers, shoemakers, and other craftsmen after 1780. Prichard, *Quilts 1700–2015*, 51.
- vi For further reading about Australian quilt history consult Margaret Rolfe, *Australian Quilt Heritage*, Fairfax, Sydney, 1998; Annette Gero, *The Fabric of Society, Australia's Quilt Heritage from Convict Times to 1960*, The Beagle Press, Sydney, 2008
- vii See Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875–1900*, Second Miegunyah Press Series, Melbourne, 2000
- viii Wendy Hucker, 'Waggas', *Textile Fibre Forum*, No 26, 1989, 41
- ix The Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition titled *Abstract Design in American Quilts* in 1971 attracted enormous publicity and proved a major influence in the public perception of quilts as works of artistic expression. For overview of the convergence of influences that led to the quilt revival movement in America see Catherine Morris, *'Work by Hand': Hidden Labor and Historical Quilts*, (exhibition catalogue) Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2013
- x For overview of the craft movement in Australia and the revival of quilting see Grace Cochrane, *The Craft Movement in Australia: A History*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1992, 368–370
- xi The National Quilt Registry (NQR) became an online database documenting the stories and histories of quilts made between 1850 and 1970. Although currently unavailable, the NQR will be managed in the future by the National Wool Museum, Geelong.
- xii Grahame, E. 'Quilting in Australia and the 1988 Bicentennial Celebrations', *Uncovering* 14, 1993, 169–187
- xiii *Quilt Australia '88* was curated by Margaret Rolfe. Other exhibitions in NSW that featured heritage quilts include *Sydney Quilt Stories 1811–1970*, curated by Sheridan Burke for the Historic Houses Trust of NSW in collaboration with the Sydney Branch of the Quilt Study Group of Australia at Elizabeth Bay House in 1998; and *Historic Australian Quilts*, curated by Annette Gero for The National Trust of Australia (NSW) at Old Government House, Parramatta, in 2000.



Experiencing quilts in the National Gallery of Australia collection

ESSAY ROBERT BELL

The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) holds one of the largest collections of Australian historic quilts. These form a large proportion of the gallery's collection of 19th and early 20th century textiles, which in turn a part of its Australian Decorative Arts and Design collection, focused on all craft media and spanning from 1800 to the present. In this collection, the generic collective term 'quilt' is used for a variety of approaches to textile construction focused on patchwork, pieced fabrics, embroidery and appliqué. A number of works are lined but do not have the internal filling or padding that would strictly define them as quilts, and many were made as lightweight counterpanes (bedspreads), bed or table coverings or wall hangings.

These quilts, dating from 1841 to the 1950s, were mostly acquired by the NGA during its first 20 years, an intense period of building the national collection across all areas of art practice. This coincided with the revival of interest from the 1960s in Australian crafts, as both contemporary practice and as preservation and interpretation of historical practices, including artistic trades, crafts and folk art.¹

The concept of Australian applied arts and crafts produced by makers locally trained in art and craft techniques began to influence Australian design in the late 19th century, providing an alternative to the plethora of imported goods that defined Australian consumption of decorative and applied arts through the 19th century. Imports from first European settlement brought not only practical and aspirational goods to our fledgling societies, but also valuable skills, with accomplished tradesmen and crafts practitioners already trained in the production of objects in current styles, many working with skilled and experienced retailers. While many were engaged in commercial businesses such as silversmithing, jewellery and furniture making, others, the majority of them women, arrived with essential homemaking skills including needlework, sewing, dressmaking and embroidery. Their skilled work, essential for the flourishing of family life and comfort in colonial Australia, was seldom part of commerce and has largely survived through being valued as artistic craft and passed down through families, until being collected by textile connoisseurs and museums.

It is at this point that the understanding of such textiles changes and deepens as their meanings are researched and interrogated in the context of social changes and histories broader than the worlds of the original makers. While the NGA's collection of Australian decorative arts is extensive across its 215-year scope, with a collecting period of only 40 years it cannot be encyclopaedic in each of its collecting areas. In the textile collection, a relatively small number of high-quality works represent broad scopes of practices, regional styles and techniques within each type of work. Styles of quilts popular in Australia are represented through textiles from

Left: *Wedding quilt*, embroidered and appliquéd by Mary Jane Hannaford (1840–1930), made in Blandford, near Murrumbidgee, NSW. Cotton, wool, glass, 195 x 169 cm. National Gallery of Australia, gift of Miss Joan Swanson 1997. Although it is unknown who this quilt was made for, it is assumed it was made to commemorate a wedding, circa 1922.



Above: *Time quilt*, embroidered and appliquéd by Mary Jane Hannaford (1840–1930), made in Blandford, near Murrumbidgee, NSW, in 1924. Cotton, linen and wool 164 x 154 cm. National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1982. The theme of this autobiographical quilt, made when the artist was 84 years old, is human mortality.

known and unknown makers from several states. Nine very different examples of these from New South Wales are included in this exhibition, adding fine examples to the extraordinary range of historical quilting skills practised in the state.

When exhibited in the wider context of the NGA collection, such works offer different readings for visitors. The gallery's most well-known historical textile, *The Rajah quilt*, has a worldwide reputation as the only intact and dated quilt made by a group of convict women on their enforced journey to Tasmania on the RMS *Rajah* in 1841.¹¹ When last displayed, it was in visual proximity to two other of the gallery's most well-known works, the American artist Chuck Close's 1975 realist painting, *Bob*, (which appears as a patchwork of tiny pixelated painted dots) and the British fashion designer

Vivien Westwood's 1993 tartan *Wedding ensemble*, a witty homage to Queen Victoria.ⁱⁱⁱ While the visual and contextual surprises of these unplanned juxtapositions may seem like tenuous connections, such discoveries are part of the experience of visitors to a broad national art collection. On another occasion, Sophia Wilbow's 1893–96 pieced hexagon quilt (*Miss Jane's quilt*, page 45) could be seen in visual juxtaposition with the gallery's most famous work, Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles*, (1952) both dealing with the concept of randomness within a controlled structure.

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As many of the NGA's quilts were made in the period of massive expansion of Britain's textile industries, they exist in parallel with the industrially produced textiles that were traded internationally and imported into Australia in large quantities. Many quilts were made from the fabric samples of these industries, scraps, and recycled from worn or out-of-date clothing and furnishing fabrics. As such, many are micro-museums of contemporary textile design, particularly of printed fabrics, many of which are surprisingly modern for the period. The *Rajah quilt* is a particularly important example of this design history as its printed fabrics, sourced for the transportees by Elizabeth Fry from British manufacturers' superseded stocks, cannot be later than 1841, accurately placing the then modern fabrics in time, even if the quilt's overall design comes from an earlier period.

Through the collection we can see how individual quilt makers amassed their fabrics from a wide variety of sources: drapery shops, worn family clothes, imported quilter's fabrics, samples from tailors, dressmakers and upholsterers, commemorative ribbons and flour and produce bags. A spirit of creative and inventive thriftiness pervades the collection, allowing us to see, albeit in tiny fragments, the work of 19th and early 20th century textile pattern designers that would otherwise have not survived the ravages of time and the vicissitudes of fashion.

The exploration of the NGA's quilt collection takes place for visitors and researchers in a context of both historical and contemporary art. For contemporary textile artists, particularly those working with the visual languages of quilting and engaging with current concerns for the environment and sustainability, these early examples of recycling and repurposing of materials encourage them to consider their current practices within a meaningful and relevant Australian context. ✕

Dr Robert Bell AM

Senior Curator Decorative Arts and Design
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

i For account of quilts in the National Gallery of Australia's folk art collection see: John McPhee, *Australian Folk and Popular Art in the Australian National Gallery*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1988; and Jim Logan, *Everyday art: Australian folk art*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1998.

ii Initiated and coordinated by a free passenger on the RMS *Rajah*, Kezia Hayter, a protégée of the prison reformer and Quaker, Elizabeth Fry, it is an example of 18th century domestic patchwork, embroidery and *broderie perse* appliqué. For a detailed history of *The Rajah quilt* see: Robert Bell, 'The Rajah quilt', in *Quilts 1700–1945*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2013, 98–103.

iii Queen Victoria's embrace of all things Scottish came at a time of enforced land clearances which spurred a rise in Scottish immigration to Australia in the same period as convict transportation.





We spent the morning in the drawing-room end of the veranda, where Lady Mary had established herself with her work. She is most industrious, and is now preparing for the annual fancy bazaar for the School of Industry
Annabella Boswell, Port Macquarie, Thursday 4 March 1847ⁱ

TRADITIONS FROM HOME

Identity, domesticity and gentility

The earliest quilts made in colonial Australia (1788–1900) were made from printed cotton fabric. Most were pieced or patched, and made in the English paper template technique. This technique involved pieces of fabric, which were cut to size, wrapped and basted over paper templates to create and assemble repeating tessellated fabric shapes. The template method of patchwork was introduced to Australia from England via women's periodicals and actual examples. Immigrants to the colony brought traditional sewing methods and tools (needles, pins, thread, and cloth) and taught the next generation.

It is tempting to assume that pieced quilts made of fabric scraps were born out of necessity. On the contrary, colonial quilts made in the mid 1800s were decorative, carefully planned, time consuming and often complex to sew. Commercially produced fabrics were readily available throughout the world by the mid 1800s and quilt makers, with the time and means, produced patchworks that showcased skill and reflected advances in textile production. ✕

ⁱ Morton Herman (ed) 'When the Governor Came', *Annabella Boswell's Journal*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965, 125.

Left: Detail of unfinished silk and cotton hexagon mosaic patchwork made by Lady Mary Fitzroy (1780–1847). National Trust of Australia (NSW), gift of Yvonne Perceval 1998. Lady Mary Fitzroy was the daughter of the Duke of Richmond and arrived in the colony in August 1846 as the wife of Governor Sir Charles Fitzroy. Sixteen months later she died in a carriage accident at Government House, Parramatta. A memorial obelisk was erected at the site in 1888.





STAR AND DIAMOND PATCHWORK QUILT

circa 1850

Attributed to Frederica Mary Josephson (1833–1907)

Made in Sydney

Cotton, dress and upholstery

260 x 240 cm

National Trust of Australia (NSW), gift of Mr P Bell

This quilt was created by hand sewing fabric pieces over paper templates cut in the shape of diamonds and hexagons. The centre consists of six-point hexagon stars, a radiating pattern of large hexagons alternating with tumbling blocks and four-piece hexagon diamonds creating a kaleidoscopic effectⁱ. It is lined with cotton, has no wadding and is not quilted.

The fabrics and overall pattern date this quilt to the mid 1800s. Precisely patched, the distribution and arrangement of colours and fabric patterning indicate that the design was planned from the outset, not as an afterthought.

The National Trust of Australia has attributed the quilt to Frederica Mary Josephson (nee Miller), the daughter of a convict upholsterer who married Emmanuel Josephson, son of convict silversmith Jacob Josephson, in 1853. The couple lived in Riverview Cottage at Longueville from 1853 to 1873 and it is speculated that the quilt was made for this home. Riverview Cottage was a handsome sandstone cottage with a verandah overlooking a garden designed by Frederica Mary Josephson. The cottage was demolished and the area is now part of St Ignatius College.

REFERENCES:

Elsie Ritchie, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor*, Roland Nigel Davies, Sydney, 1997.
National Trust of Australia (NSW), Sydney, object file.

ⁱ The kaleidoscope (invented 1816) is sometimes credited as the inspiration for quilt designs based on repeating stars or geometric motifs. Other suggested sources include traditional weaving and floor tile patterns, particularly from the Middle East. See Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection*, Abrams, New York, 2007.





HONEYCOMB PATTERNED QUILT

1840–60

Unknown maker

England/Australia

Cotton

221.5 x 207 cm

National Gallery of Australia, gift of the Canberra Quilters Inc. in memory of Jim Logan 1999

Constructed of multi-coloured printed cottons, this coverlet has no wadding and has not been quilted. The reverse is printed cotton featuring a striking Chinoiserie pattern of repeated Chinese temples set in vertical stripes.

In 1835, the first patchwork pattern published in *Godey's Lady Book* [a magazine for women published in the United States (1830–98)] was for hexagonal patchwork. Known in the 19th century as 'honeycomb', hexagon quilts were typically made of commercially produced cotton printed with small-scale designs.ⁱ

This quilt was passed down through several generations. The quilt was owned by Marjorie Campbell (1895–1967) from Victoria, and it is believed that her grandmother, and possibly her mother made it. The fabrics date the quilt to the first half of the 19th century and the overall pattern, as opposed to a pattern with a central focus, came into fashion mid century. Different stitching indicates at least two people worked on this quilt. The uncertainty about the maker's identity, the early fabrics and multiple workers, has led to speculation that the quilt may have been started in England, then worked on during transit to Australia, and finished in the colony by a different generation.

REFERENCE: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, object file.

ⁱ Hexagon patchworks have remained an enduring pattern for Australian quilt makers (see pages 21, 25, 45, 62). In the 20th century the pattern was called 'Grandmother's flower garden'.



Pieced together from the remnants of unfinished patchwork projects, these self portraits draw on the improvisational and ‘make-do’ qualities of patchwork quilts. There is a parallel between the commemorative aspects of quilting and the historicising aspect of portraiture. The stories are in the patterns and textures, the fragments and layers.

Adrienne Doig, *Splendid*, Martin Browne Contemporary, 18 September–13 October 2013

THE VIEW (HONEYCOMB)

2013

Adrienne Doig (born 1963)

Made in Katoomba, NSW

Cotton, linen, wool, leather and nylon

181 x 152 cm

Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

An appliqué silhouette of the artist is superimposed on a background of hexagon patchwork. The ‘grass’ is contemporary printed cotton and the patchwork is pieced from recycled craft projects sourced through eBay. The colourful printed cottons that form the patchwork date from the 1930s and 40s and are characteristic of fabric used in American feed sacks. The work is appliqué to a canvas backing.

Artist Adrienne Doig explores notions of identity and personal image. *The View (honeycomb)* was one of a series of works in which the artist portrayed herself holding placards stating: ‘SPLENDID’; ‘GOOD ENOUGH’; ‘VERY INTERESTING’; and ‘NOT WORTH IT’ (see page 66). These are comments others have made about Doig’s artwork.

Doig’s art practice crosses a variety of media including embroidery, appliqué, drawing, sculpture, video and multimedia. Her use of patchwork is a recurring theme and she often recycles existing textiles such as tea towels and tapestries. In an earlier series *My Life as a Doll* (2001–02) Doig commissioned professional doll-makers to create porcelain dolls in her likeness.

Art school trained, Adrienne Doig is self-taught in patchwork, embroidery and appliqué. She enjoys the tactile quality of textiles and the revival of traditional skills is an important aspect to her work. In its humour and attention to detail, Doig’s work challenges and comments on the cultural prejudices that dismiss women’s domestic and decorative arts as ‘not worth it.’





The advantages of making patchwork ... are its moral effects ... So patchwork often plays a noble part, while needlework is encouraged and brought to perfection, and idle time is advantageously occupied.

Cassell's Household Guide, 1870sⁱ

A VIRTUOUS PAST TIME

Skill and taste on show

From the 1860s onwards fashionable colonial quilts were most likely made from silk rather than cotton. Developments in dye technology, including the invention of aniline dyes, lead to the availability of a new palette of vibrantly coloured silks and trends in patchwork shifted from 'old fashioned' cotton to 'modern' silk. Coloured silk patchworks – often embellished with appliquéd motifs and decorative embroidery – were usually seen draped over a table or sofa in the parlour (the public sphere of the home). These works suited the eclectic taste of the period and showed off needlework skills as well as the maker's perseverance and hard work; values much admired during the 19th century.

Although mosaic patchworks in the paper template technique continued to be made through the late 1800s, a new style of patchwork pieced from many irregular-shaped pieces of fabric, and stitched on top of a large piece of foundation fabric, became popular. Called 'crazy' quilts, they were typically embellished with fancy embroidery and appliqué, and were probably inspired by displays of traditional English hand embroidery and Japanese decorative arts seen at international trade exhibitions, particularly the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 which promoted the Aesthetic Movement. The irregular, asymmetrical arrangement of fabric patches, may have been inspired by Japanese ceramics with a cracked glaze, called crazed or crackle.ⁱⁱ ❧

ⁱ 'Patchwork', *Cassell's Household Guide: Being a Complete Encyclopaedia of Domestic and Social Economy and Forming a Guide to Every Department of Practical Life*. Volume 11, 1870s London, 3.

ⁱⁱ Marin F. Hanson and Patricia Cox Crews, 'American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870–1940', University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 2009, 128–32.

Left: Detail of silk octagonal patchwork tablecover made by a member of the Woods family, late 1800s. Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, Sydney. Gift of the Woods Family 1984. A pattern for an octagon patchwork appeared in *The English Women's Domestic Magazine* in 1860 as well as the Australian publication *Weigel's Journal of Fashion* in 1889. This luxurious silk patchwork is typical of the 'fancy work' popular in Victorian times. The Woods family was a large and successful family who ran a horse and dray business and owned several homes in Fairfield, in western Sydney.





TUMBLING BLOCK TABLE COVER

circa 1860

Amy Susanna Staniforth (Wales 1790–Australia 1868)

Made in Deniliquin, NSW

Silk and cotton

160 x 117.6 cm

National Gallery of Australia, purchased 2002

This patchwork is constructed of silks in the paper template technique. Hexagons and diamond shapes surround the central medallion pattern of a star. The contrast between patterned and plain silk diamonds, plain-coloured silk and black silk damask creates the optical illusion of the three-dimensional cube pattern known as 'tumbling block'. It has no wadding and has not been quilted.

This jewel-like patchwork was a table cover made for show. Its maker, Amy Susanna Staniforth (nee Lowley) was the widow of a Sheffield surgeon. The couple had 12 children. As a widow, Staniforth immigrated to Australia in 1853, with two sons and three daughters. Staniforth was a writer who published a book of poems titled *Australia and other poems* in 1863. She resided with her youngest daughter, Georgina, who married Henry Ricketson (1830–1900), one of the largest landowners in New South Wales. This lavish patchwork was probably made for Barratta Station, a homestead Ricketson established on the Edwards River in Deniliquin, where Staniforth lived before she died.



HIGH STYLE ‘CRAZY’ QUILT

circa 1880

Christina Brown (Scotland 1815–Australia 1895)
Lithgow, NSW
Silk
183.5 x 149 cm
National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1989

This ‘crazy’ quilt features more than 167 fabric shapes sewn onto a foundation fabric. The whole is appliquéd and embroidered with flowers, household items and Kate Greenaway images of children at playⁱ, motifs popularised by the Aesthetic Movementⁱⁱ. The patches are joined with hand sewing and the panels joined with chain stitch machine stitching. It is lined but not quilted.

Christina Brown (nee Henderson) immigrated to Australia from Scotland with her husband, Andrew, in 1842. The Browns settled on their property ‘Coerwull’ at Bowenfels, near Lithgow, raising three children and establishing a flour mill, which later converted to a woollen mill. The Browns were ardent Presbyterians and generous philanthropists. Christina Brown was aged in her seventies when she made this quilt. Like many makers of crazy quilts, she incorporated meaningful initials to honour friends and family. It is speculated that the blue flower entwined with the initials AB references a flower that flourished on the Coerwull estate. The name originated from the local Aboriginal word for the flower.ⁱⁱⁱ

REFERENCES:

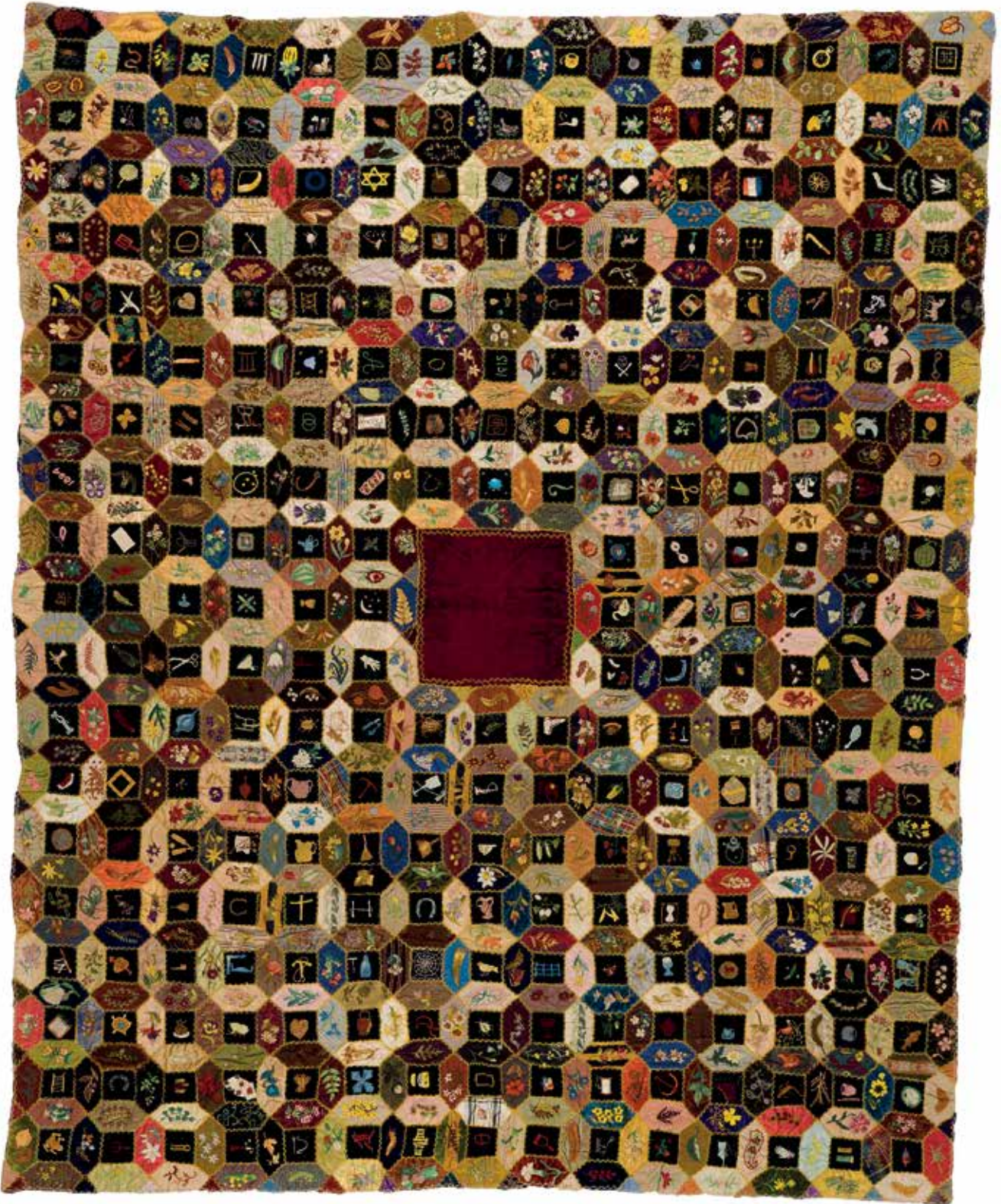
Ian Jack, ‘Andrew Brown, laird of Coerwull’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 73, no. 3, Dec 1987, 173–186.
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, object file.

ⁱ Kate Greenaway (1846–1901) was a popular 19th century children’s author and illustrator.

ⁱⁱ A late 19th century European arts movement, which championed for the beautification of the industrialised world – ‘art for arts sake’.

ⁱⁱⁱ Correspondence from Ian Jack, historian, 6 June 1991, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, object files.







AUNT CLARA'S QUILT

1890–1915

Clara Bate (1859–1914)

Gingkin, near Jenolan Caves, NSW

Silk, cotton, sequins, beads

199 x 163 cm

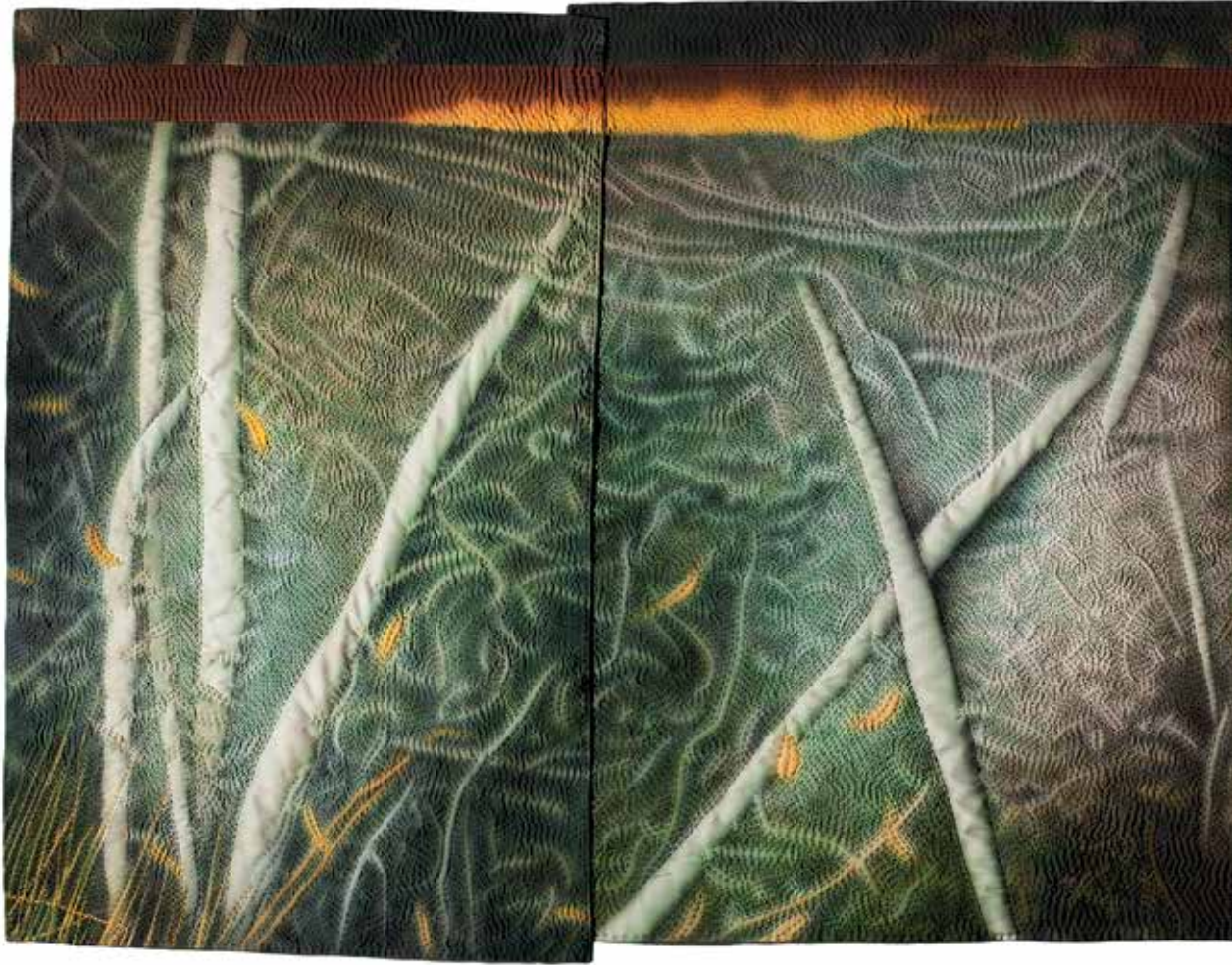
Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Gift of the Hughes family, 2004

This mosaic patchwork is exceptional for the extraordinary array of embroidered and appliqué motifs. The overall design features a central square surrounded by octagons created by four hexagon rhomboids (592 in total). Each piece of fabric is embroidered with a motif, and occasionally a date, initial or name. The work is lined and quilted.

'Aunt Clara' was Clara Bate (nee Hughes) who began working on the quilt in the late 1880s when she and her husband ran a guesthouse and 1200-acre property called 'Frankfort' at Gingkin, near Jenolan Caves. Clara Bate may have owned a copy of Caulfeild and Seward's *Dictionary of Needlework* (1885), which illustrated a similar patchwork pattern with embroidered motifs. According to family history, the quilt commemorated the maker's relationships and significant events by incorporating initials, dates and pieces of fabric embroidered by friends and visitors. It was worked on over 25 years and completed after Bate's death by her sister, Emma.

REFERENCES:

Karen Fail, 'Discovering Aunt Clara's Quilt', *Craft and Home in Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 7, no 1, 1995, 49-50.
Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, object file.



BONES OF PATHS

2015

Jan Irvine-Nealie (born 1950)

Made in Gulgong, NSW

Silk and wool

110 x 280 cm

Collection of the artist

Photographs of bare roots exposed by the many steps of bushwalkers in a national park were the starting point to this triptych quilt. The images were digitally manipulated to create a backdrop behind the stretched silk to maintain proportions within the composition, after which layers of colour were built up by airbrushing with acrylic pigment. Hours of hand stitching followed to give the work definition and movement. The quilt has been filled with wool.

With its painterly tones and mysterious chiaroscuro, created by overlays of colour and intricate stitching, *Bones of Paths* combines the skill of a master craftsman with artistic creativity. Irvine-Nealie's quilts are a personal response to the Australian landscape and humankind's interaction with the environment.



Growing up on a rural property in South Australia, Jan Irvine-Nealie comes from a family of women who embroidered, crocheted, knitted, made rag rugs, and sewed their own clothes. Teaching textile skills to Pitjantjatjara women in the desert of South Australia during the mid 1970s began her interest in quilt making. Irvine-Nealie started by piecing together scraps of fabric to make images. Later she developed an airbrush technique to dye the work. More recently, she has used a computer to expand the possibilities of her artwork, however stitching on cloth remains integral as Irvine-Nealie states:

Technically I draw on the tradition of quilting but I use the stitch as a design element to emboss and mark the composition. The fully stitched textile gives a drape-like quality and the overall result is a beguiling tactile surface.ⁱ

Since graduating from art school in South Australia in 1970, Jan Irvine-Nealie has worked as a teacher, an artist-in-residence, a curator, craft consultant, freelance artist and designer. She was actively involved in the many projects that made up the *Quilt Australia '88* project [a seminal event for the quilt revival movement in Australia]. *Aerodrome* (1987), Irvine-Nealie's response to Australia's bicentennial celebrations, was acquired by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, in 1989 and is included in this exhibition.

ⁱ Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM 23 May 2015.



RETURNING

2014

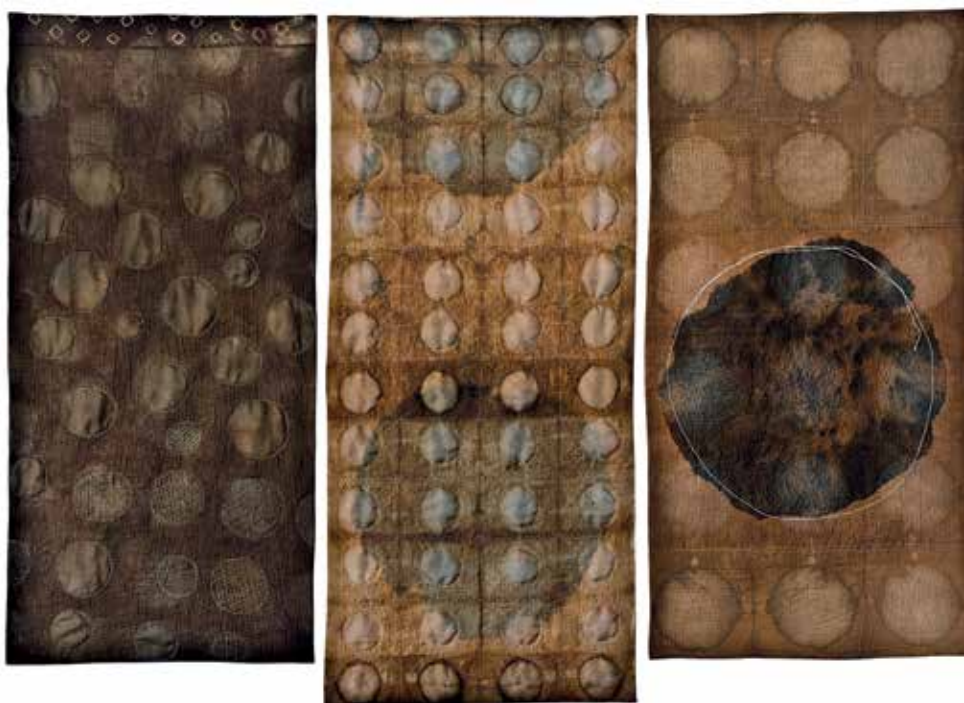
Carolyn Sullivan (born 1949)
 Made in Bundanoon, NSW
 Wool and cotton
 117 x 153 cm
 Collection of the artist

This quilt consists of three panels of hand and commercially dyed wool with all over machine and hand embroidery in wool and cotton thread. The work has an inner layer and is backed with cotton. The hand stitching becomes the quilting.

The title is a reference to the artist's recollections about living in the Sutherland Shire. Sullivan was raised in Como West when the area was surrounded by bushland. While raising her family and teaching geography in high schools, she built up her skills over many years taking classes in needlework. Dissatisfied with following traditional patterns, she began designing her own quilt patterns. Sullivan spends up to three hours per day stitching and regularly exhibits her work in guild competitions. Her meticulously embroidered quilts are inspired by her local environment and interest in worldwide needlework techniques. Sullivan explains:

I like to cover large expanses of textile with close stitching which expresses the vastness of the Australian landscape while acknowledging the variations that occur from place to place and within a place.ⁱ

ⁱ Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM 15 May 2015.



WEREKATA SUITE

2015

Pamela Fitzsimons (born 1948)

Made in Mt Vincent, NSW

Silk

130 x 150 cm

Collection of the artist

This quilt consists of a three panels of silk and wool coloured with plant dyes using shibori techniques.ⁱ The cloth has been layered, machine and hand sewn.

This triptych responds to the maker's home, at Bow Wow Creek Gorge, a 100-hectare conservation property in the lower Hunter Valley of NSW. Fitzsimons's interest is in the detail rather than the grand or heroic landscape; patterns, colours, textures, changing shapes, and nature's cycles are recurring themes. Her exquisitely dyed and densely quilted textiles celebrate and interpret the landscape and the artist's place within it.

Formally trained as a painter, Pamela Fitzsimons has always sewed. During the 1990s she became interested in the possibilities of the process-driven nature of textiles and began dyeing her own textiles and experimenting with stitching.

REFERENCES:

Sarah Tucker, *Time and Place: Contemporary quilt textiles by Pamela Fitzsimons*, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney, 2006.
Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM 15 May 2015.

ⁱ Shibori is a Japanese word referring to a variety of methods to embellish, shape and secure cloth before dyeing. There is no equivalent word in English.



Advance Australia Fair



*‘Advance Australia!’ distant echoes sound,
And stately mansions through the land abound;
Millions of acres teem with living things,
And commerce through each creek and river springs.*

Amy Susannah Staniforth, 1863ⁱ

PATRIOTIC VOICES

Nationalism and participation

Quilt making is often seen as a parochial activity but it can also reveal an engagement with a wider world beyond immediate family and friends. Inscriptions and imagery found on quilts made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries include patriotic symbols that reveal developing nationalism. Awareness of contemporary political and social causes is also seen in the time-honoured tradition of selling handcrafted items, made by women, to raise money for national causes. Using quilts for philanthropic ends was linked to religious organisations and ladies aid societies. Participation in causes built upon women’s role as society’s moral compass rooted in the home.

The craft revival movement of the late 20th century saw quilt making reclaimed as a way of questioning government actions, to commemorate national history, and to express pride in female ancestry. Today, quilters continue to demonstrate awareness of political and social concerns. In *Labours of Love*, their activism calls attention to issues including environmentalism, gay rights and national identity. ✕

ⁱ Mrs Amy Susannah Staniforth (Late of Sheffield, Yorkshire), *Australia and other poems*, Wilson and Mackinnon, Melbourne, 1863, 31.

Left: Detail of *Advance Australia* quilt, by Mary Jane Hannaford. See page 40.



GRANNIE BROWN'S MEDALLION QUILT

circa 1857–1900

Amelia Brown (Devon, England 1817– Australia 1905)

Bowling, NSW

Cotton

228 x 197.2 cm

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Purchased 1990

The central appliqué motif on this patchwork medallionⁱ quilt features an unofficial Australian coat of arms. The quilt is hand pieced, lined with patched white cotton and quilted.

The unofficial coat of arms emblem, depicting an emu and kangaroo flanking a shield and looking outwards, was in use since the mid 1800s and was commonly accepted as colonial symbols in the Gold Rush years [1850s to late 1860s]. The maker of this quilt, Amelia Brown (nee Parsons), arrived in Sydney from Devon, England, with her husband and seven children in 1857. Her arrival at the height of the Gold Rush may explain the use of the coat of arms.

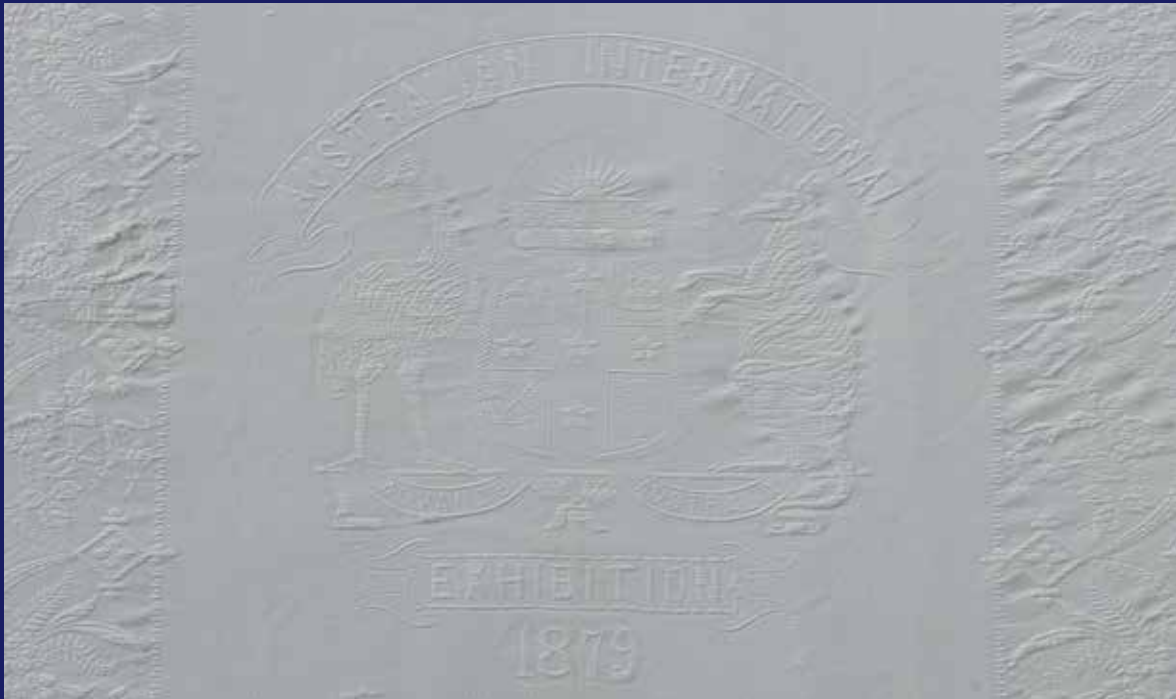
The Brown family settled on a farm near Yass. At some point this quilt was given to a family friend, Margaret Swann, who lived in Bowling, near Yass, between 1877 and 1880 before moving to Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta. In 1968 the quilt was found among the belongings of the Swann family with a note that read: 'made by Grannie Brown of Bowling for Margaret Swann'. Due to its patriotic motif this quilt featured on the logo for the bicentennial exhibition *Quilt Australia '88*ⁱⁱ.

REFERENCE: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, object file.

ⁱ Medallion quilts typically have a centre square surrounded by a succession of borders reaching out to the quilt's edge. Pieces are seamed together without papers being stitched to the fabric.

ⁱⁱ *Quilt Australia '88* was an exhibition in 1988, which marked a resurgence of the genre in Australia.





MARSEILLES TYPE WOVEN QUILT

circa 1879

Maker unknown

Most probably Bolton in Lancashire, England

250 x 233 cm

Cotton

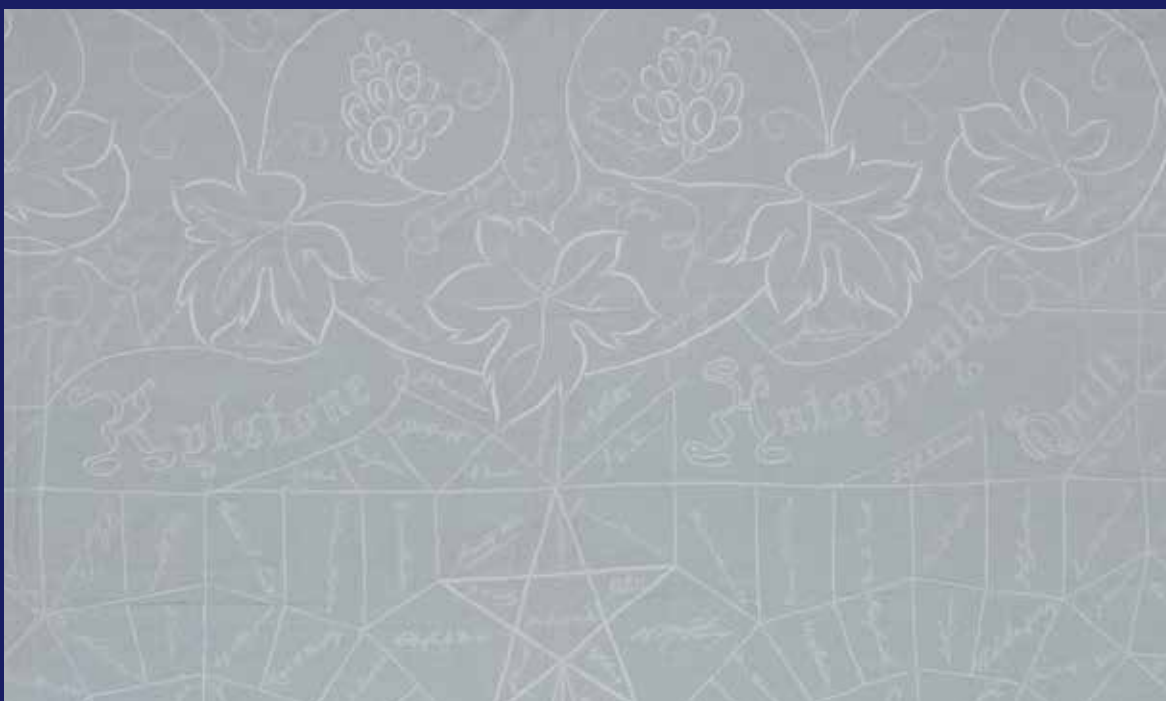
Yass and District Historical Society

A quilt with a central medallion featuring an unofficial Australian coat of arms depicting a kangaroo and emu with the words 'ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR' and 'AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION 1879'.

This quilt was woven on a loom designed to imitate hand quilting. The method of industrially producing cotton with a 'quilted' appearance, was developed by English weavers in the late 18th century. The style imitated white quilted bedcovers, hand made in France. The name 'Marseilles' comes from the French port from which they came.

By the time of Australia's colonisation, machine made bedcovers far outnumbered hand made quilts and patchwork. This rare commemorative example of a woven 'quilt' was probably made for the 1879 Sydney International Exhibitionⁱ. Although little is known about it, after being displayed the quilt was obviously used as it is patched.

ⁱ In September 1879 newspaper coverage of the exhibition mentioned 'one collection of cotton and wool exhibits, which have come from the manufacturing town of Bolton, consists of quilts made specially for the Sydney International Exhibition' *The Sydney Morning Herald* Friday 19 September 1879, 6. (<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13443319>).



SIGNATURE FUNDRAISING QUILT

1915

Maker unknown

Embroidered in Rylstone, NSW

Linen

252 x 175 cm

Australian War Memorial

A commercially produced single bed sheet autographed and embroidered in stem-and-chain stitch with the words *Rylstone Autograph Quilt*. The sheet is embroidered with names, a decorative scroll of grapes, vine leaves and tendrils.

During the First and Second World Wars signature quilts were used to fundraise. Money was collected from people who signed their name in pencil on the quilt. The names were embroidered on the quilt by a committee of women and then the quilts were auctioned or raffled to raise additional funds. The causes included the Red Cross and funds for soldiers, military hospitals, and Prisoners of War.

This quilt has over 900 names written in pencil and then embroidered. These include those contributing a donation, Australian ANZAC 'heroes' and the names of soldiers who had enlisted from the Rylstone district, in the Central West of NSW. Identification of servicemen has shown that some were killed during the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915 and all had enlisted between August 1914 and July 1915. This implies that the quilt was completed by mid 1915.

REFERENCE: Australian War Memorial, Canberra, object file.

ADVANCE AUSTRALIA QUILT

circa 1920

Mary Jane Hannaford (Devonshire, England 1840 – Australia 1930)

Made in Blandford, near Murrurundi, NSW

Cotton, wool, linen, silk, rayon, glass

164 x 155 cm

National Gallery of Australia. Purchased 1982

An appliquéd quilt with the words *Advance Australia Fair* at centre surrounded by a figure of an Aboriginal woman carrying a baby on her back, an Aboriginal man carrying a spear and boomerang, a kangaroo and emu facing each other and a kookaburra with a snake caught in its beak. Other motifs include birds (a magpie and rosella), a grasshopper, insects and an over-scaled angel. Some images have been cut using a template. A circular pattern surrounds the central motifs made from strips of fabric that have been sewn together and applied onto a foundation fabric. The quilt is hand sewn, unlined and with no wadding.

Appliqué quilts have been made since the 19th century. They are made by cutting shapes out of fabric and then sewing them onto a backing fabric to create an overall design. In contrast with piecing (or patchwork), appliqué enables the maker to create naturalistic designs and tell stories, rather than simply geometric compositions.

Mary Jane Hannaford is known to have made nine quilts, all after she had turned eighty. Three are included in *Labours of Love* (see *Wedding quilt* page 10 and *Time quilt* page 12). All are appliquéd and made from scraps of fabric, some of which may have come from haberdashery sample books. Although it is uncertain how her quilts were to be used, all Hannaford's quilts appear to be autobiographical and express the maker's patriotism, a preoccupation with time passing and lost opportunities, a strong Christian faith and a love of family.

Mary Jane Hannaford immigrated to NSW from Devonshire, England in 1842 with her family. Her father worked as a shepherd for the Australian Agricultural Company at Goonoo Goonoo outstation, near Tamworth. After her father's death in 1852 and her mother's remarriage, the family settled on a property, 'Balmoral', at Blandford, near Murrurundi. Although Hannaford never married, she had a daughter, who married in 1887, and whom she outlived by five years. She had nine grandchildrenⁱ and some of the quilts appear to be made for them. She remained in Blandford until her death, living with her daughter's family.

REFERENCES:

John McPhee, *Australian Folk and Popular Art in the Australian National Gallery*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1988.

Jim Logan, *Everyday Art: Australian Folk Art*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1998.

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, object file.

ⁱ One of Hannaford's grandsons, Alfred George Edward Cady, was a part of the initial Australian forces at Gallipoli. He enlisted under a false name, William Williams, and was wounded on 11 May 1915 and repatriated to Australia on the *Ballarat* in August 1915. Meegan Summers, email correspondence with LM, 30 Nov 2014.







*For all our days are passed away;
we spend our years as a tale that is told.
Fare well
my dear ones
Fare thee well.*

Mary Jane Hannaford, 1924ⁱ

REMEMBER ME

Family, friendship and love

By the late 19th century quilt making was no longer associated with gentility and high fashion. Women of all classes participated, often using scraps of materials at hand. The availability of inexpensive fabrics democratised quilt making, and women's periodicals disseminated patterns and fashions in quilting across socio-economic classes, and from urban to remote areas.

Increasingly, in the late 19th and early 20th century, many quilts were made to celebrate family, friendship and love. Quilts were created to honour relationships among friends and relatives; to commemorate a shared experience; to mark the occasion of a wedding, a birth, even death. Quilts could tie communities together and patchwork was ideal for incorporating fabric that had a sentimental significance. Quilts can often reveal hidden narratives of family life and personal history that inspire an emotional engagement. Contemporary artists who reference the heritage of quilts validate both the medium and the maker. ✂

ⁱ Embroidered on *Time* quilt, 1924, by Mary Jane Hannaford. See page 12.

Left: Detail of *log cabin* quilt,
1900–1910, by Jane Smith.
See page 47.



WEDDING QUILTS FOR DAUGHTERS

1880–1896

Sophia Wilbow (1829–1924)

Made in Pitt Town, Windsor, NSW

Cotton

Both quilts are entirely hand sewn using the paper template technique. *Miss Grace's quilt* is a tumbling block design lined with a red paisley-patterned cotton. *Miss Jane's quilt* is a hexagon pattern containing more than 7000 pieces. It is lined with printed cotton. The print is based on a simplified version of the 'Strawberry Thief', a popular design by William Morrisⁱ. The works are not wadded or quilted.

For the fabrics of both quilts, the maker sourced dress fabrics available from department stores. Both are characteristic of late 19th century and early 20th century trends in quilt making that saw quilts created out of small pieces from a wide variety of printed cottons to create a complex and colourful pattern.

Sophia Wilbow (nee Payton) was the daughter of convicts and was born in Pitt Town, near Windsor. She was well known for her needlework skills in the Hawkesbury district where her husband owned hotels and farmed. The Wilbows had 14 children and Sophia Wilbow reputedly made a wedding quilt for each of her nine daughters. Two are in this exhibition. Miss Grace and Miss Jane never married and lived with their mother until her death in 1924.

REFERENCES:

National Museum of Australia, Canberra, object file
Margaret Ginnings, Friends of Hawkesbury Art Community

ⁱ William Morris (1834–1896) was an English textile designer.

Above: *Miss Grace's quilt*, 1880 (detail)
220 x 187cm
Friends of the Hawkesbury art community
and Regional Gallery Inc.
Gift of Joyce Hedges

Right: *Miss Jane's quilt*, 1893–96
207.5 x 191.1 cm
National Gallery of Australia.
Gift of Joyce Hedges 1992





FRIENDSHIP QUILT

1892

Marion Gibson (Scotland 1824 – Australia 1908)

Made in Gunbar, near Hay, NSW

Silk, cotton and felt

227.5 x 193.5 cm

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Sydney. Purchased with funds donated by the descendants of Marion Gibson, 1990

This quilt in the crazy style is made up of fabrics from wedding dresses, ribbons, off-cuts from friends living and dead, pieces of necktie and even the crown of a man's hat. It is embroidered and lined with cotton.

A remarkable feature about this quilt is the description left by its maker detailing the quilt's construction, materials and reasons for making. In a letter to her grand daughter, Marion Gibson wrote: 'I called it the Friendship Quilt and to me it was a labour of love and given to you as my eldest grand-daughter'.

Marion Gibson (nee Gemmel) emigrated from Scotland to Australia in 1854 with her husband, John, to try their luck on the gold fields. After 20 years living in Colac, Victoria, where John Gibson worked as a boot maker, the family moved to Gunbar near Hay to farm sheep on a property called 'Narringa'. Marion Gibson finished the quilt in her sixty-sixth year, stitching her initials and the date (1892) in one corner. Referring to her decision to include scraps from all her neighbours, she wrote 'I went in for "Federation" on this quilt – for all classes are united.'

REFERENCE:

Edith and Lyn Lugsdin, 'The Gibson Family', Nancy Low (ed) *The Pioneers of Gunbar*, August 1974, 52-53.
Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, object files.



LOG CABIN QUILT

1900–1910

Jane Smith (1859–1928)

Made in 'Woodgrove', near Hall, NSW (now part of the ACT)

Cotton

213 x 181 cm

National Museum of Australia, Bessie Bardwell collection

Strips of cotton have been sewn directly onto a foundation fabric in square blocks to create a 'log cabin' pattern of alternating light and dark shades. The quilt is machine sewn. It is not quilted but is lined with furnishing fabric.

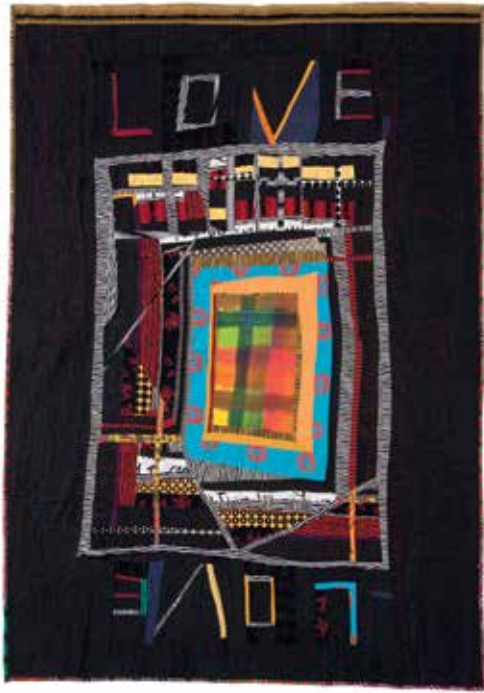
The log cabin pattern appeared in women's magazines after 1850 and was associated with American patchwork, its name symbolising the pioneer spirit. The most popular explanation for the design is that it represents an American log cabin house with the central square representing the hearth, and the dark and light strip illustrating shadows cast by the fire.ⁱ Other explanations attribute the source to the distinctive strip-farmed land of 17th century Scotland.ⁱⁱ

Jane Smith (nee Southwell) made the quilt with her five daughters from dressmaking scraps. Years later, Elvina, one of the daughters, could recall where many of the fabrics in the quilt had come from, including one she had worn on an outing to the Yarrangobilly Caves in Kosciuszko National Park.

REFERENCE: National Museum of Australia, Canberra, object file.

ⁱ Amelia Peck *American Quilts and Coverlets in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007, 66-68.

ⁱⁱ Janet Rae, *The Quilts of the British Isles*, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1987, 68.



LOVE WILL NAIL YOU TO THE CROSS

1996

Judy McDermott (1937–2004)

Made in Sydney

Cotton, linen and silk

200 x 140 cm

Private collection

A quilt created by pieced borders around a central pattern and worked from the centre, which is hand stitched, outwards. The quilt has cotton batting and is lined with pieced cotton. It is hand and machined quilted.

Collage-like in its assemblage of pieced motifs, this quilt combines words, borders, lips and bars in a design to convey stories of love and loss. The quilt is one of a series titled *Big House: Go to Gaol*, which explored the artist's experiences teaching pottery to inmates at Long Bay Correctional Facility. The quilt narrates multi-layered stories of the prisoners and the dislocation of family and relationships.

Judy McDermott's polemical and enigmatic narrative quilts challenged the conventions of quilt making. McDermott's training and background was in ceramics but after major surgery left her without the strength for the medium, she began quilting in 1989. Over two decades, McDermott created a significant body of quilts which were exhibited widely in Australia and overseas.ⁱ

REFERENCE: Sarah E. Tucker, 'Performing the Quilt: The Block to the Blog and Back Again', 2010 *Textile Society of American Symposium Proceedings*, Paper 56. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/56> accessed June 2015.

i Solo exhibitions include *The Big House: Go to Gaol*, (1999), Object Galleries, Customs House Sydney; and *Quilting Hill End*, (2001), Bathurst Regional Gallery, NSW.



URBAN LANDSCAPE

1995

Judy Hooworth (born 1947)

Made in Sydney

Cotton and cotton blends

211 x 208 cm

Tamworth Regional Gallery

Judy Hooworth used readily available commercial fabrics in this machine pieced and appliquéd quilt. The fabrics form a repeating design inspired by the barriers seen at roadwork sites. The quilt is framed by a striped border, layered with batting, backed with cotton and machine quilted through all layers.

Urban Landscape is part of a series of colourful and distinctive pieced quilts by Hooworth that reference traditional geometric patchwork. By alternating shapes and colours, Hooworth was able to reimagine what a pieced quilt could look like.

A leading Australian quilt maker, Hooworth has maintained a studio practice since 1985. Art school trained, she began to experiment with patchwork and quilting in the 1970s. Her quilts have changed in technique and focus. The more recent *Dora Creek* series from 2014, also in the *Labours of Love* exhibition, uses a subdued palette of fabrics mono-printed and painted by Hooworth, to capture nature's subtle moods.

REFERENCE: Interview with LM 2014.



THE WEDDING QUILT

2013

Lucas Grogan (born 1984)

Made in Melbourne

Cotton and mixed media on bemsilk

200 x 200 cm

Collection of the artist

A quilt featuring 4000 fabric roses applied onto synthetic silk. A central medallion depicts an embroidered and appliquéd motif with text such as: 'AND LOW AND BEHOLD THE SKY DIDN'T CAVE IN'.ⁱ

For Lucas Grogan, the potential of the quilt lies in its ability to act as a vessel for personal and political messages. *The Wedding Quilt* beckons the viewer to contemplate Grogan's frustration with current Australian law that prevents him celebrating his love and commitment for his partner through marriage. In the centre of the work is an incomplete date. Grogan has intentionally left the stitch undone until marriage equality is legalised.

Lucas Grogan grew up in the Hunter Valley, NSW. He started working with textiles while at art school in Newcastle. He moved to Melbourne in 2010 where he paints, creates murals, embroiders and quilts, as well as collaborates with fashion and homeware designers. Grogan stated: 'On average, I make only one quilt a year – they're bloody hard work. But I love it.'ⁱⁱ

ⁱ The bedspread was originally displayed at Craft Victoria, Melbourne, in 2013 as part of an installation comprising a double bed and rainbow mural painted on the wall above the bedhead.

ⁱⁱ Interview with LM, 19 June 2014.



BETWEEN MUM AND I

2015

Gillian Lavery (born 1984)

Made in Sydney

Silk, DVD 5 minute 10 seconds looped

114 x 202 cm

Collection of the artist

An embroidered silk organza is overlaid with an animation of a spiral being stitched, making the process of sewing visible.

This work was designed and created for the *Labours of Love* exhibition. The artist responded to the exhibition's themes, in particular the quilts made collaboratively by a mother and her daughters (see *log cabin quilt*, page 47). Over the past summer, Lavery and her mother (Catherine Broady) stitched together once a week working on one spiral each using a different shade of thread to mark each time they met. This time spent together became a figurative layer within the quilt. Gillian Lavery explains:

And as we stitched we caught up on the previous week. This led to other lines of conversation, and then ... quiet, all but the sound of thread passing through the cloth, the tightening of an embroidery hoop, positions shifting to make room for the others. There was choreography to this quilt. We talked about the past, debated the details of events. I learnt about her experience as a young mother, her relationship with her own mother. We talked about failure, about being average, about children and dying.ⁱ

A UNSW Art and Design graduate with a background in textiles, Gillian Lavery's practice encompasses installations, drawings, sculpture, embroidery and quilting with a focus on the exploration of repetition in mark making.

ⁱ Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM, March 2015.





*This is the only genuine Wagga Rug.
Take three wheat and corn sacks and sew them together.
Nothing more is needed*
The Bulletin, 1906ⁱ

UTILITY AND THRIFT

The beauty of making do

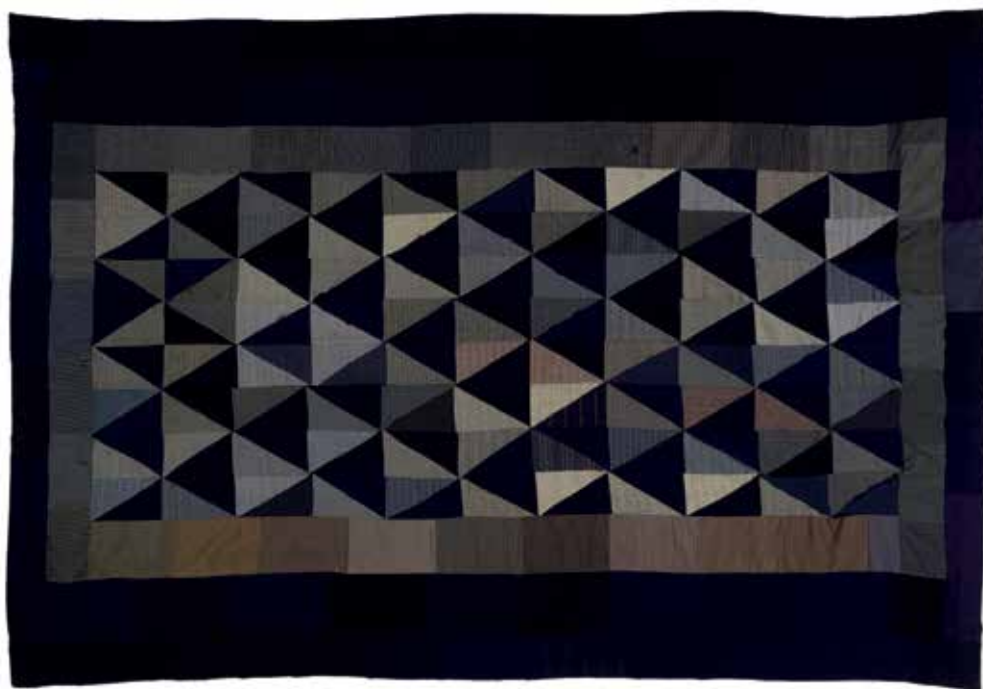
While quilt making and patchwork have had periods of high fashion, by the 20th century it was often associated with resourcefulness and thrift, particularly during the Great Depression (1929–32), the 1930s and 40s, when utility quilts known as ‘waggas’ were made across Australia.

The first waggas were made from wheat or flour bags, sewn together with twine by shearers and bushmen. The name came from the wheat farming and milling district, near Wagga Wagga, in NSW. Domestic waggas were made by women for use in the home or for their menfolk to use while out camping. The essential characteristic of these quilts is they are made from recycled fabric or old clothing, and covered with some kind of decorative cover. Made out of necessity during times of poverty, waggas were made well into the 20th century by women whose philosophy was one of thrift and resourcefulness. ❧

ⁱ *The Bulletin*, (Sydney), 9 August 1906, quoted in Sheridan Burke, *Sydney Quilt Stories 1811–1970*, Elizabeth Bay House, 20 June – September 1998, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Glebe, 1998.

Left: Detail of a domestic wagga quilt, by Mary Annetts (1905–1997) circa 1935. Wool and cotton 138 x 104 cm, Pioneer Women’s Hut, Tumberumba, NSW. This quilt was made during the 1930s from old clothes and a commercial quilt for a house in Adelong where it was used in a sleep-out verandah.





QUILTS MADE FROM SUITING SAMPLES

circa 1930

Caroline Mary West (1872–1947)

Made in Trundle, near Parkes, NSW

Wool

The tops of these patchwork quilts are pieced from men's suit fabric. The woollen swatches were cut into shapes without templates and machine sewn together. Both quilts have an interlining of a woollen blanket and the quilt from the National Gallery of Australia is reversible.

These quilts would have been quick to assemble, as they are mostly machine sewn. However, the striking effect of the pattern design would have taken some time to devise. Quilts made from suiting samples were widespread in Australia, the United States and Europe. They were warm, practical and considered suitable for a boy's bedroom.

Caroline West (nee Bray) was the wife of a grazier, Everett Pearson West. The couple married in 1905 and lived on a property in the Central West of NSW with their six children, four girls and two boys. Family history passed down with the quilt recounts that they were made out of tailor's samples obtained from the local tailor, Tom Ellis, whose shop was in Trundle.

REFERENCE: Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, file notes.
Margaret Rolfe, *Australian Quilt Heritage*, J.B.Fairfax, Sydney, 1998, 68.

Left: 205.4 x 145.1 cm
National Gallery of Australia.
Gift of Florence Rose Burbridge 1988

Above: 203 x 144 cm
Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Ian Foster 1985



LUCKY SWAG

2015

Paula do Prado (born 1979 Uruguay)

Made in Sydney

Wool, cotton, acrylic, seed beads, key ringⁱ

155 x 98 cm

Collection of the artist

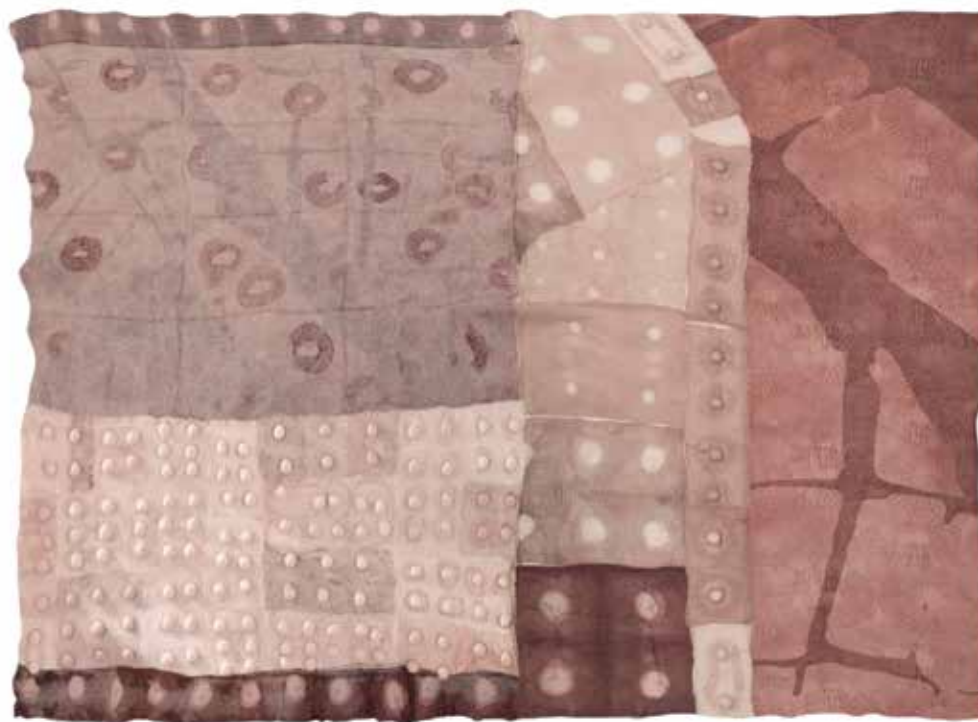
Made from commercial fabric samples, off-cuts and trims, *Lucky Swag* is pieced without templates and hand and machine stitched. The quilt has a wool batting and a pieced cotton lining featuring a print of sailing ships. The top is hand painted and embellished with beading. The layers are quilted.

At the centre of Paula do Prado's art practice is an exploration of the complexity of identity and her work sits at the intersection between the personal, historical and cultural. *Lucky Swag* references the wagga quilt, adorning it with Australian slang words – 'tinnie time', 'hard yakka' and 'buckleys' – painted on top of white self-portraits.

Of mixed Afro-Uruguayan and European heritage, Paula do Prado immigrated to Australia in 1986. A UNSW Art and Design graduate, her work spans textiles, photography, collage, text, painting and installations. Do Prado says that despite a lack of needlework skills, she is drawn to creating quilts stating: 'I can see no better form than that of the quilt with its layers of intimacy and its billboard like surface to express my thoughts and relate my experience.'ⁱⁱ

ⁱ 'Proud to be Australian' is a souvenir key ring gifted to do Prado by fellow artist Deborah Kelly.

ⁱⁱ Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM, February 2015.



TOPOGRAPHY OF MEMORY

2014–2015

Emma Peters (born 1979)

Made in Sydney

wool, silk

160 x 253 cm

Collection of the artist

A quilt made of Australian merino fleece, naturally dyed silk remnants and digitally printed muslin. The silk is laid on top of the wool, stitched and then felted together.

Emma Peters's quilt offers a contemporary connection to the utilitarian wagga quilts. Its starting point is an aerial image of her family's farm in the NSW Riverina district. The quilt, with its laborious mark-making techniques becomes a receptacle of memories and personal narratives. Peters explains:

'I'm interested in embedding significant experiences into cloth by translating ephemeral recollections into layered and tangible textiles. This act confirms the importance of personal histories, despite being distorted or mythologised, upon our identities.'

Emma Peters has worked as a designer for commercial homeware companies and teaches textiles at UNSW Art and Design. This quilt is part of her Masters research that explores the implications of mnemonic textiles upon sustainable design.

REFERENCE: Interview and correspondence with LM, July 2014 and May 2015.





VANITAS STILL LIFE

2015

Belinda von Mengersen (born 1974)

Made in Sydney

Silk, paper, linen

110 x 163 cm

Collection of the artist

This quilt is designed in layers of silk voile, paper, linen and silk with a top layer of a direct digital print on silk voile of a photo of an old kitchen gas lamp. The surface has been stitched all over in varying directions and densities with running stitch in linen, cotton and silk threads.

Belinda von Mengersen's quilt is a response to her upbringing in rural NSW and her grandparent's property on Myall Park Road near Yenda. A still life, captured on layers of cloth using innovative textile techniques, conveys the muted grief experienced at the break up of a family farm and erasure of the family's presence there after five generations. The artist is fascinated by the power of domestic textiles to convey meaning and memories. This work strives to capture a sense of the ephemeral nature of cloth.

Belinda von Mengersen 'cannot remember a time when she was not stitching'. She learnt her needlework skills from three generations of women in her family and it is an indelible part of her life. In 2005 she completed a PhD at the School of Fine Art, University of Newcastle where she researched contemporary embroidery and its relationship to drawing. She combines her academic pursuits with university teaching and a studio textile practice and recently curated *Slipstitch* (2015), an Ararat Regional Art Gallery and NETS Victoria touring exhibition.

REFERENCE:

Interview with LM, 2014, and correspondence with LM 15 May 2015.





I love fabric and the journey into colour and value in quilting. I have made over 60 quilts of all sizes ... I quilt every day ...

Robert James, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre volunteer

BEST IN SHOW

Honouring and maintaining the craft

Quilt competitions have long been part of the quilt making tradition, providing opportunities for makers to share their creative works. In the 19th century quilts were exhibited in competitions at NSW country and agricultural fairs. They also featured at major expositions such as the Sydney Intercolonial Exposition of 1877 and the Sydney International Exhibition 1879.

Although quilting and patchworking declined after World War II, and needlework skills were in danger of dying out, competitions provided an opportunity for quilt makers to display and exhibit their work, and in doing so kept craft traditions alive.

Today regional and national quilt competitions provide quilt makers with an opportunity to exhibit their work within an accessible system. Rules for entry provide a framework in which individuals are able to appreciate and celebrate the technical achievements of others. Quilt guilds, such as the Quilt Guild of NSW, play an important role in supporting the growing rank of teachers and practitioners: both in affirming a quilting community and in hosting competitions that promote the tradition of quilt making. ✂

Left: *From Indigo to Silk* (detail), by Robert James (born 1942), 2014. Cotton and silk, foundation pieced and machine quilted, 296 x 201.5 cm (including border, not shown), collection of the artist. Robert James began quilting in 1999 after a career teaching drama. He is largely self-taught. This quilt won Most Creative Use of Colour at the 2014 Sydney Quilt Show.



GRANDMOTHER'S FLOWER GARDENⁱ QUILT

1957

Gladys Williams (1911–2001)

Made in Albury, NSW

Mixed synthetic fabrics: rayon, cellulose acetate, polyester

296 x 201.5 cm

National Gallery of Australia. Gift of Neil and Margaret Williams 2011

Fabric dating from the 1930s, 40s and 50s are pieced in a hexagon design which forms the top of a bedspread. The quilt is hand and machine sewn, not wadded or quilted, and the patchwork has been backed with a heavy moiré rayon.

Gladys Williams began working on this patchwork in the late 1930s using off-cuts from her sister's dressmaking business. The quilt was worked on as a creative project over 20 years before it was entered into the Arts and Handicraft section at the 1958 Royal Easter Show where it was awarded second place. Later that same year it won first place in the Albury Spring Show. Family history records the time Williams spent sourcing the fabric to complete the quilt through friends and the hours spent perfecting the prize-winning layout of colour, texture and patterns.

Gladys Williams was a mother of three, a volunteer charity worker and an expert knitter, cook and quilter. A keen competitor, she entered her textile creations in fairs, agricultural shows and charity events throughout NSW over a 56-year period.

REFERENCE: Neil Williams correspondence with LM, February 2014.

ⁱ Grandmother's flower garden is a 20th century term for a quilt made of hexagon pieces. In the 19th century the pattern was known as honeycomb, hexagon or mosaic.







SUFFOLK PUFF QUILT

circa 1967

Florrie Bingley (1892–1984)

Made in Murrumbateman, NSW

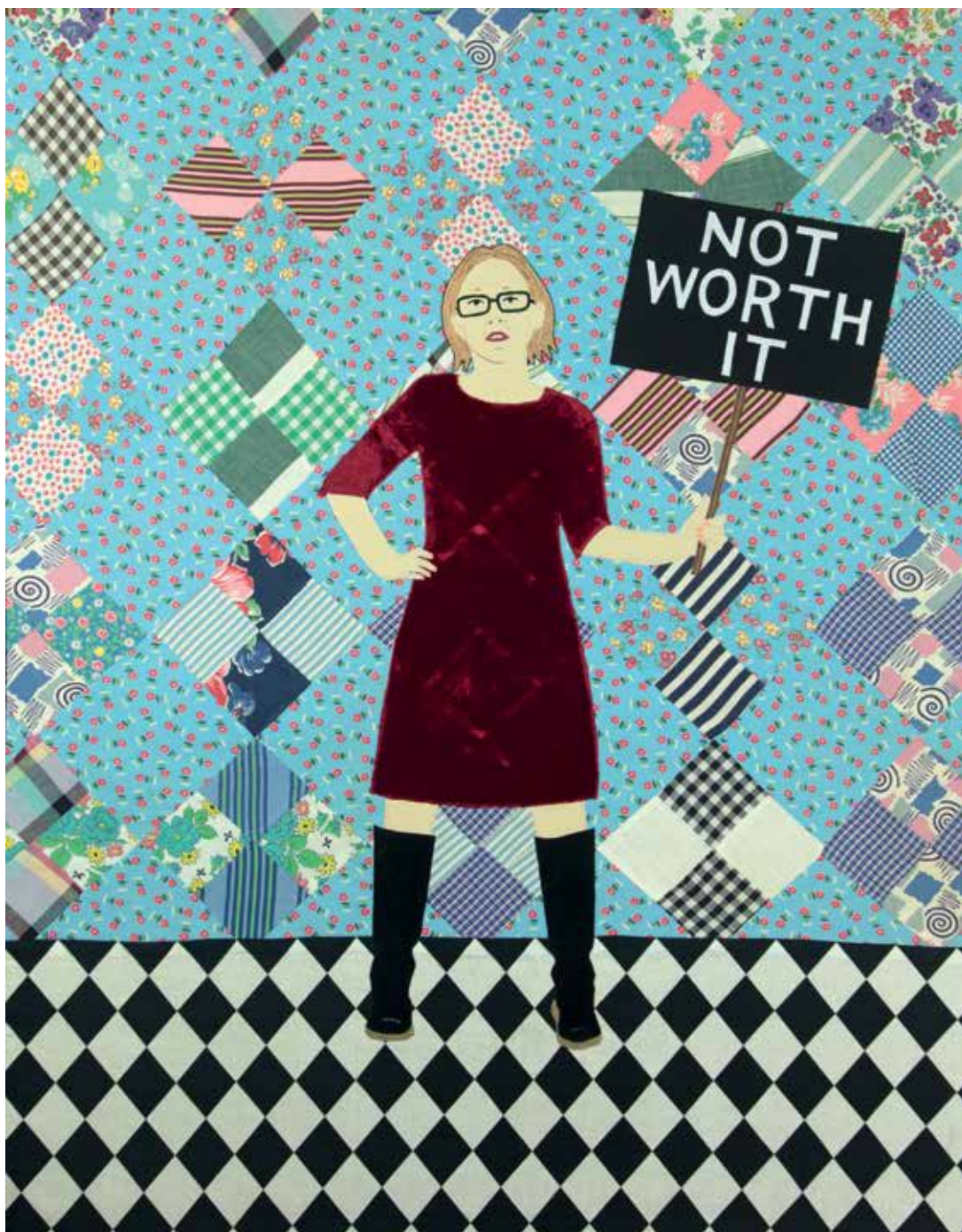
Cotton

125 x 134 cm

Yass and District Historical Society

To create the pieces that make up this patchwork, the maker cut over 800 circles of printed and plain cotton. After hemming each circle, the threads were pulled and tied to create a gathered puff effect. The 'puffs' were then flattened, centred, arranged and whip-stitched together at four points to create a textile form with open spaces between each round. The piecework is backed with tartan cotton.

The Suffolk Puff, (or Yo-yo patchwork, as it was called in the United States), was a novelty technique of patchwork that became popular in the 20th century. This example was made for show and exhibited in agricultural shows in the Yass district. The maker, Florrie Bingley, lived on a sheep grazing property called 'Hawthorn' in Murrumbateman for most of her life. A keen needlewoman and competitor, Bingley bequeathed her prize-winning quilt to the local historical society.



Above: *Not worth it (Four patch)* 2012

Adrienne Doig (born 1963)

Made in Katoomba, NSW

Cotton

99 x 75.5 cm

Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

I am grateful to Belinda Hanrahan for inviting me to curate this exhibition and for her support and enthusiasm. Thanks also to staff at Hazelhurst: Carrie Kibbler, Kate Milner, Andrea Merlak, Viola Soliman, Grahame Kime and Caryn Schwartz as well as Lucy Bannyan (exhibition designer), Jane Somerville (editor), Dee McKillop (conservator) and Sharyn Raggett (graphics). I'd like to thank Hazelhurst volunteers who have assisted, in particular Robert James.

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I'd like to acknowledge the museums that undertook costly conservation so their quilts could be included in the catalogue and exhibition: Fairfield City Museum and Gallery and the National Trust of Australia (NSW). In particular, I thank Jane Donnelly for her conservation of the Frederica Josephson quilt in collaboration with conservators at the International Conservation Services. Thank you also to volunteers Anne Thoroughgood and Kath Lyons at the Pioneer Women's Hut, Tumbarumba, and to Gloria Carlos and Cheryl Mongan at the Yass and District Historical Society for showing me their interesting collections and facilitating their loans.

Finally, I'd like to thank the artists in this exhibition.

About the curator

Louise Mitchell is a freelance curator and former curator of decorative arts and design at the Powerhouse Museum (now the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney) where she was responsible for collections of textiles, fashion and jewellery. She learnt to sew at school and from her mother and although not a quilt maker, she undertook to make a patchwork quilt for her daughter while developing *Labours of Love*, an activity she found 'worth it'. She dedicates this catalogue to all quilt makers with renewed appreciation of their skill and artistry.

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Labours of Love

Australian Quilts 1845–2015

8 August–5 October 2015

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Front cover image: *Unfinished silk and cotton
hexagon mosaic patchwork (detail)* by Lady Mary
Fitzroy (1790–1847). National Trust of Australia
(NSW), gift of Yvonne Perceval 1998

Inside front and back cover images: *Aunt Clara's
quilt (detail)* by Clara Bate (1859–1914), 1890–1915,
silk, cotton, sequins, beads, 199 x 163 cm, Museum
of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Gift of the
Hughes family, 2004



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