

Storyteller and Craftsperson: Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi

Spirits of the Cloth

The ability to create a piece of work that's graphically complex from a simple piece of cloth is fascinating. The ability to combine various pieces of cloth, various colors and textures of cloth, to create a graphic piece to me is mind-boggling... It's always about the story and the finished product. And I think as with all artists, all quilt-makers, as long as you're living, as long as you can think, you will always have stories. If you lived 100 lives, you can't get all these stories out...We will always have stories and you want to get them out, and that's the satisfaction of quilt-making.

They were made for family. They were made for friends. And for us, friends are family. In the past it was about taking those bits of cloth, and still now in the South, taking old clothes and making them into a quilt to give to the grandkids or to one's children. Again, you go back into that oral history about who we are and sharing who we are, and you know, sharing that with our families and friends. But that was the – that's the backbone of African American quilt-making. Even to this day, the majority of the quilt-makers make the work for their family. And they love to show references of the family, or people in the family, on the quilts. That just binds the family, bonds them closer together, you know... "I am quilting. This is my legacy for my children. This is what I leave for my children. I leave a bit of myself in these quilts for my children. I leave this for my family. This is who I am. This is who we are."



The Quilt Index





When the quilters are in sync with the social and political and the cultural currents in their community, they render that in their artwork. So, the quilts are community property. It's one of the ways that we as artists use this tool, these quilts, to foster knowledge. And it's about engaging other people in our culture as well.

But they're creating these community documents and actually they're cultural documents. They're pieces of history that tell the story of our culture, what's happening here in the United States. They're serious, serious cultural documents and I'm just in awe.

When you can look at something and it has the power to touch you and inform, then you've done your job as an artist. And I often tell the quilt makers sometimes you can make a quilt that's so powerful in story and it touches so many people. Then you have lost that quilt, because the quilt does not spiritually belong to you anymore. It belongs to the public. It belongs to the people that see it because it becomes a part of their spirit, and it's touched them in such a way that is so profound it becomes unforgettable.

**Dr. Mazloomi will be the Keynote
Speaker at Virtual AQSG 2020
Saturday, October 3, 2020.
“Surviving Blackness in America:
Quilts as Political Statement”
<https://americanquiltstudygroup.org>
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