

The House That the Jameses Built

I'm writing on Father's Day and realized that we often talk about our mothers and grandmothers in relation to quilting, but rarely are fathers mentioned. So, I thought it would be fitting to focus on a "father" whose baby has been a joy to all of us quilters: Robert James. The baby is the International Quilt Museum at Lincoln, Nebraska. Of course, there's no father without a mother, so Ardis is included too.

You can read about Robert and Ardis' life at the link below—including a spy connection! Who knew? We can just be glad that their collection took a turn to textiles. And what a collection it was. When they helped establish the IQM (then called the International Quilt Study Center), they gave a total of one thousand— that's right, 1,000— quilts. And you thought you had too many.

The collection was originally housed at the University of Nebraska Home Economics building, but the Jameses and others were instrumental in moving it to a separate facility, the building affectionately known as "Quilt House". I've been there a couple of times for American Quilt Study Group Seminars, but I never noticed that the lobby is designed in the shape of a needle. I guess I was too busy drooling at eye candy in the store, anticipating the quilts on display upstairs and looking forward to the "backstage" tour of the storage rooms. This is a quilter's bucket list must!

I definitely can't tell you about all of the James's quilts at the Museum. There are scores of Amish quilts, medallions and mosaics, crazy quilts and wholecloths, geometric patterns, albums and floral designs, modern quilts and kit quilts from Marie Webster. If you have time to see them all, there's a link below through IQM and a link to the collection on the

Quilt Index. There are 54 pages on the IQM site, so you could do one a week and still not be done in a year. But, in the meantime I can give you a representative peek.

There are currently seven Amish quilts from the James Collection on view through the IQM website (link below). Here's one from Wayne County, Ohio that just glows.



Thousand Pyramids

Probably made by L. Miller
Probably made in Wayne County, Ohio
Circa 1975

In addition to the original quilt donation, the Jameses continue to fund, through their Acquisition Foundation, the purchase of other quilts including these two modern ones. They were part of the exhibit Perspectives: Art, Craft, Design & the Studio Quilt which can be viewed at the link below.



Left: Colourwash Spillikins, Deirdre Amsden, Norfolk, England, U.K. 1998

Right: Dot Flag, Mary Anne Jordan, Lawrence, Kansas, 2006

Ardis was especially supportive of art quilters; her interest dated to the mid-70s when most of the country was busy with the Bicentennial (what a visionary she was!) When she passed in 2012, 26 quilters donated studio quilts to IQM in her honor. Here's the one by another Quilter's Hall of Fame Honoree, Michael James. The full collection of these gifts is linked below.



Michael James, Daybook: September 2006, 2006

Robert James's overseas work is probably the spark for the international aspect of the collection. Here are some examples, ranging between modern and traditional.





Left: From Canada, Willard, John. Knitted Neon. 1976-1999. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-3C8>. Accessed: 06/21/2020

Right: From Ireland, Hogan, Bridget. Medallion. c1834. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-3E9>. Accessed: 06/21/2020



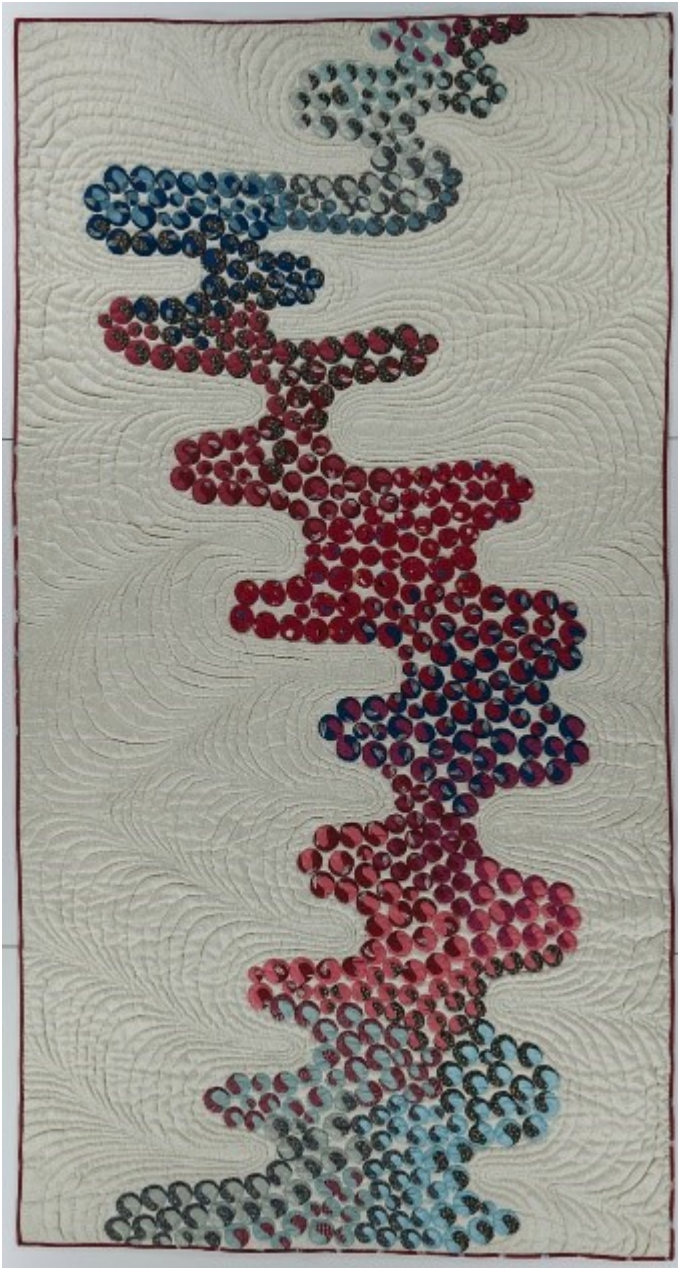
Maker, Unknown. Medallion. c1880. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-4A9>. Accessed: 06/21/2020



From Germany: Rauch, Ursula. Judge and Victim. 1976-1999. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-4D6>. Accessed: 06/21/2020



From Japan: Kuroha, Shizuko. Poetry of Indigo. c1985. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-43E>. Accessed: 06/22/2020



From France: Clarmont, Mariel. Bleu, Rouge, Marine (Triptyque) [right]. 1976-1999. From International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis and Robert James Collection. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kid=60-DC-320>. Accessed: 06/22/2020

There are also five quilts from China, including the 1992 Reproduction of Bride's Album [E.J. Baile (1850-51)] and Reproduction of Harriet Powers Bible Quilt. It may seem odd that the Jameses chose to collect these mass-produced copies rather than textiles in traditional Chinese style, but they are historically significant as representative of the "knock off" market trend.

Starting with these modest examples in the James Collection, the International Quilt Museum is now truly international, with textiles from 50 countries and numerous cultural groups. You can find Russian, Ralli or Native American quilts, quilts representing the Black experience, Hawaiian quilts (which aren't international to us, but definitely cultural), and of course European antiques. It's exciting and comforting to know that textiles are made and treasured the world over.

There's lots more to be found on the IQM site, but I'll let you poke around on your own. For now, let's just say Happy Father's Day to Robert James, and thank him and Ardis for all they've done to make Quilt House a home for quilters.

Your quilting friend,

Anna

Biographical info
<https://quiltershalloffame.net/ardis-robert-james/>

James Collection IQM
https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/collections/search?title=&field_quilt_primary_pattern_tid=All&field_quiltmaker_value=&field_quilt_geo_origin_country_tid=All&field_quilt_geo_origin_state_reg_tid=All&field_quilt_predominant_technique_tid=All&field_quilt_object_value=&field_quilt_collection_tid=3212&field_quilt_date_range=&field_cultural_group_tid=All

James Collection Quilt Index
http://www.quiltindex.org/search_results.php?keywords=Ardis+and+Robert+James&search=go

Amish quilts
<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/exhibition/variations-theme-virtual-pop>

Perspectives exhibit
<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/exhibition/perspectiv>

[es-art-craft-design-studio-quilt](#)

Ardis

Tribute

<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/exhibition/tribute-ardis-james>