

QUILTS WITH A MESSAGE

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MAKING QUILTS WITH MEANING

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Many of us quilters make quilts to keep our friends and family warm, to show our appreciation, or to commemorate the big milestones in life. These are noble and beautiful reasons to quilt, though there are other motivations.

Quilts can also be media for self-expression going beyond the usual. Are there issues that pervade your life to which you'd like to give voice? Consider making patchwork that conveys your ideas, your passion, or your rage. At right is my own tribute to Trayvon Martin, made in 2013. It's a collage of appliquéd self portraits meant to confront the politics of identity and fashion in the US at the moment.

There is a long history of quilters using quilts as the venue to communicate their woes and concerns. The Kentucky Graveyard Quilt, made in 1843 by Elizabeth Roseberry Mitchell, is a mourning quilt depicting a graveyard containing coffins labeled with the names of members of her family. She moved the appliquéd coffins from the border to the centered graveyard as they passed away.

During the American Civil War in the mid-to-late 19th century, quilters on both sides of the divide made quilts using fabrics printed with political figures and slogans, solidarity colors, and state-themed blocks. This political association continues to this day.

With the advent of art quilting in the mid-20th century, quilters began to use their artwork to express their opinions on all sorts of issues. Katherine Brainard made a "[divorce quilt](#)" in 1990 that was a sensation at the time. A darkly humorous expression of her anger and grief, it is a powerful use of "women's work" to make a statement. In this same vein we find Tracey Emin's early 21st century [appliquéd coverlets](#), which are textual feminist confrontations of the most bold order.

These historical examples are also quilts made from the heart and provided emotional outlets for the makers. Why not consider making your own?



1 Please note that Underground Railroad code quilts have been soundly debunked.

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