

The journey from Gee's Bend, Alabama to New York City is 1093 miles and for me it brought the Gee's Bend quilts from obscurity into brilliant illumination. In 2003 I traveled from Washington, DC to New York City to see the quilts, which I had heard so much about - the quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama. The exhibit, "The Quilts of Gee's Bend" at the Whitney Museum of American Art resonated with me in such a way that I've never forgotten their beauty and the feeling of awe as I walked through the exhibit.

The Quilts: The quilts are abstract, free creative expressions of color and strong geometric patterns sewn on 3 dimensional palettes. Not tethered to traditional quilts with straight lines and predictable rhythmic patterns, these quilts feel like jazz! Creating their own unique sound, using abstract improvisations, as color periodically steps out to perform a solo. View the work of Annie E. Pettway whose repetitive irregular triangles dance on the fabric. Celebrating a life of their own. As soon as you're confident that you know what is going on in the work the center panel of patterned triangles remind you that this is free form expression where the unexpected is expected. The quilt delights the eyes while inspiring the soul through it's soaring freedom.



This work by Nell Hall Williams creates a rhythm different from that of Pettway. In this quilt she creates an emphasis on line that is punctuated by color. The two elements encourage the eye to move from one abstract line to the next noting how freely the lines move in and out of perfection and dart around the irregular borders to the left and right of the piece. The quilt has elements of both predictable rhythm and abstract form which delight as one delves into it's details.



The History: (*I know why the cage bird sings*) These quilts were born out of necessity. Gee's Bend, Alabama is a small rural black community surrounded on 3 sides by the Alabama River. The city was isolated because residence had limited avenues to leave the peninsula because whites shut down the ferry to prohibit black Gee's Bend residence from registering to vote in 1967. This isolation fostered the necessity to use materials on hand to make needed items such as quilts to stay warm during cold nights. Because of the limited access to outside travel and money for material black women used items on hand to create these beautiful master pieces of American art. Old jeans, worn out men's works shirts and left over scrap material all became mediums for their artistic expression. The isolation created a creative vacuum for the Gee's Bend quilters allowing them to work uninterrupted by the influences of outside elements and assuring that their work remain a unique and unmarred form of free expression. The New York Times art critic, Michael Kimmelman, compared them to the work of great artist such as Matisse and Klee.

The work of the nearly 68 black women that make the Gee's Bend Quilter's Collective filled my heart the day that I saw their work at the Whitney. I feel proud that the calling to create is stronger than adversity and these women spoke to me saying don't stand still get up and dance to the music right where you are.

For more information on the quilts of Gee's Bend watch this Youtube video clip;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eqhuelb9TnA>

As a fine art and furniture appraiser I've supported clients in assessing the value of their prized possessions. Getting a formal appraisal is pricey and can cost more than the item itself. Celeste Davis, LLC offers a Professional Opinion of Value (POV) for clients interested in getting a professional opinion that does not require as much research time as a formal appraisal. If you have an item, and aren't near an Antiques Road Show location ☺, we can provide a POV for a base price of \$175. Send us a photo and we will take it from there.

References in text ; <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/fabric-of-their-lives-132757004/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/29/arts/art-review-jazzy-geometry-cool-quilters.html>

<http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>