

# *Crafty Hour* Artist Highlight at home!

## GEE'S BEND QUILTMAKERS

### SUPPLIES

- Paper or canvas
- Your art medium of choice (colored pencils, markers, paint, watercolor, etc.)

### INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this month's Crafty Hour is to learn about the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers and create art inspired by theirs.

Begin by reading the included information and analyzing the images. When a specific quilt catches your eye, try to recreate it using your own art tools. What is it about that quilt that inspired you? Was it the quilt itself or the story behind the artist(s)?

More detailed information about the quiltmakers, the history of Gee's Bend, and more images of more quilts can be found at <https://www.soulsgrounddeep.org/history-gees-bend>



## **ABOUT THE GEE'S BEND QUILTMAKERS**

The Gee's Bend quiltmakers are a group of women and their ancestors from the Gee's Bend area of Alabama's rural Black Belt, whose quilts are celebrated as some of the most significant artistic contributions to American art history. Earning international recognition and acclaim, exhibitions showcasing their work have been held in museums and galleries across the U.S. and beyond. Through Souls Grown Deep's Collection Transfer Program, Gee's Bend quilts are now part of the permanent collections of more than 40 museums across three continents.

The area's rich quilting tradition dates back to the nineteenth century, born out of a need to keep warm in unheated homes during the winter months. Due to the scarcity of resources, the majority of quilts well into the twentieth century were made out of old work-clothes and other used materials such as fertilizer and flour sacks. Despite a wider variety of cheap fabric becoming available in the second half of the twentieth century, the recycling of old materials continues to be a central tenet of quilting in Gee's Bend.

The practice of reusing old materials has resulted in a proclivity for improvisational approaches to quilt design. Many Gee's Bend quilts can be called improvisational, or "my way" quilts as they are known locally, in which quiltmakers start with basic forms and then follow their own individual artistic paths ("their way") to stitch unexpected patterns, shapes, and colors. The transference of aesthetic knowledge and skills from generation to generation has been fundamental to the continuation of the Gee's Bend quilting tradition to this day.

## **HISTORY OF GEE'S BEND**

Gee's Bend, named for enslaver Joseph Gee who established a plantation there in 1816, became home to the Pettway family in 1845 when Mark H. Pettway acquired the land and 98 enslaved people. Enslaved individuals were forced to adopt the Pettway surname, obscuring their diverse origins.

After emancipation, exploitative sharecropping trapped families in perpetual debt. The Great Depression brought complete destitution when a 1932 raid seized their possessions. In 1937, Roosevelt's Resettlement Administration purchased the former plantation, enabling families to buy the land their ancestors had worked as slaves. Federal assistance built homes, schools, and a cooperative farm.

In the 1960s, white officials punished the community's Civil Rights participation by discontinuing ferry service until 2006. Martin Luther King Jr. visited in 1965, inspiring residents to march for voting rights.

The 1966 Freedom Quilting Bee cooperative brought economic opportunities, eventually employing 150 members. For generations, Gee's Bend women created distinctive abstract quilts using inherited techniques. After a landmark 2002 Houston exhibition praised by the New York Times as "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced," their quilts entered over 40 museum collections worldwide, securing their place in American art history.

**Information and photos from [soulsgrowndeeep.org](http://soulsgrowndeeep.org)**

