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WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF?
 by Tom McCabe

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Quilt

continued from page 1

The quilt "has a fresh new look," she said. "Anyone dating it will say this is a fresh, contemporary piece."

Bollini's "Borgoyne Surrenders" is part of an exhibition featuring nearly 35 contemporary and vintage quilts at two local galleries. "Stars and Stripes Forever" opened this past week at both the Springfield Museum and the Shelton-McMurphy-Johnson House and will run until Aug. 10. The exhibition showcases vintage and contemporary handmade quilts displaying patriotic themes.

"The colors just sing," Jensen said. "It's a particularly startling color combination."

The exhibition includes quilts from as late as the 1850s to the present day. No matter in which time frame the quilts were made, many contain geometric forms, such as triangles, squares and diamonds, attached atop a solid background. The geometric forms are often made of different fabrics and colors. If the same colors are used, quilters would often sew in different patterns within the colors. What may look like a simple pattern from afar becomes more complex at each viewing.

These vagaries and nuances are exactly what the quilters were striving for, said Shelly Zegart, president of the board of directors for the Alliance for American Quilts.

"Women were making art," she said. "They just weren't sitting around making quilts because they were freezing to death."

While some may argue that a quilt's benefit is in keeping people warm, Zegart said that quilts' most important uses are as objects of expression and memory. Many quilts were created to commemorate a specific event, a place or person.

"You name it, and they make quilts for it," Zegart said.

As styles come and go, she said, patriotism is the most enduring theme of American quilt making.

"I can't think of any larger theme," Zegart said. "I think everybody responds to it. With patriotism, everyone basically feels the same way."

Patriotic themes could take the form of placing the faces of the president and vice president on a quilt, or the faces of a presidential candidate, or it could be a motif surrounding a American icon such as Monticello.

Many of the quilts in the show use red, white and blue to express a patriotic feeling of the country.

Zegart said patriotic themes in quilts often popped up during great events in United States history, such as the first centennial, in 1876, or during a major war.

During wartime, quilters made quilts for many different reasons. While many were sent off to soldiers in the field, quilters also sold or raffled quilts to raise money for organizations like the Red Cross.

During these raffles, each person could pay for the quilt, a star on the quilt, or they could pay to have their name sewed on the quilt. A Red Cross quilt is being displayed at the Springfield Museum.

Along with different themes and styles, the art of quilt making has also enjoyed fluctuations in popularity. One local quilting appraiser and historian said that the United States is presently experiencing a quilting renaissance.

"We are in an explosion now," Ann Rogers Pfrender said. "There is lots of stuff going on."

There are at least four quilting groups in the Eugene area. Students can learn quilting at the EMU Craft Center, and elementary students are learning how to quilt at the Brattain Elementary School in Springfield. Zegart said that quilting is now a \$2 billion per year industry.

As the quilters become more networked and work together in groups, many of them are pushing the traditional boundaries of quilts and creating new styles. There are also a lot of reproductions of older fabrics, especially from the Depression era. However, there is still an traditional group of quilters expressing themselves with more traditional styles and quilting methods.

"There is room for everybody in quilting — whatever you're interested in," Pfrender said.

John Lieberhardt is a freelance reporter for the emerald.

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