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**BOWERS
MUSEUM**

American Stories in Fabric: Bowers Museum Explores the History of Quilts & Commerce



Detail of Crazy Quilt, 1888. Gift of Jennifer K. Hans, Trustee, Vincent and Geraldine Orbish Trust, 2013.4.1 © Bowers Museum.

Santa Ana, CA – April 30, 2026 – Bowers Museum is proud to present *The American Quilt: Cloth and Commerce*, a new exhibition that explores the history of American quilting through the lenses of trade, industry, innovation, and community. This exhibition is in conjunction with the nation's Semiquincentennial, marking the 250th anniversary of the United States. It will feature over 40 quilts and coverlets, dating from the Revolutionary Era to the present day. These pieces are drawn from the Bowers Museum's permanent collection, as well as loans from the family of renowned quilter Jean Ray Laury and other lenders. The exhibition will be on display from May 23, 2026, to August 30, 2026.

The American Quilt: Cloth and Commerce explores how fabrics, dyes, and quilting techniques evolved alongside centuries of economic change, technological advancement, and global trade, tracing materials such as cotton, silk, wool, rayon, and polyester across 2.5 centuries of American quilting history.

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Visitors will encounter remarkable examples of American quilt-making, including a rare whole-cloth wool quilt from 1776, an early Bethlehem Star quilt with chintz appliqué, and a handkerchief quilt commemorating the American Centennial in 1876.

Bowers Museum invites visitors to discover the artistry, novelty, and historical significance woven into every stitch of *The American Quilt: Cloth and Commerce*, a timely exhibition celebrating the enduring legacy of American quilting at the nation's 250th anniversary.

Exhibition Highlights:

- **Lucretia Smith, Wholecloth Quilt, 1776:** The earliest works in the exhibition, this indigo-dyed wool quilt embodies colonial resistance. Its fibers were likely grown, spun, and woven entirely on American soil, made just as the First Continental Congress boycotted British goods.
- **Snowball Quilts, 1920s:** The vivid colors of this rayon, silk, and wool quilt trace back to synthetic dye secrets Germany was required to share with Allied nations after WWI — sparking a quiet revolution in American textiles.
- **Novell Hendrickson and Various Artists, California Quilt, 1975:** Made for the nation's Bicentennial, this collaborative guild quilt celebrates California through the lens of the 1970s quilt revival, a decade that transformed quilting into a celebrated American art form.
- **Sarah Angelina Andrews Whitman and Gertrude Spurr Whitman, Centennial Handkerchief Quilt, c. 1883:** A charming New York quilt pieced from handkerchiefs.

Details:

- **Exhibition Dates:** May 23, 2026 – August 30, 2026
- **Location:** Bowers Museum, 2002 North Main Street, Santa Ana, CA 92706
- **Opening Hours:** Tuesday - Sunday, 10 AM - 4 PM
- **Admission:** General \$18, Seniors (62+) and Students (with valid ID) \$15, Children (under 12) and Members Free

Media Preview: May 21, 2026, from 10 AM to 12 PM. Accredited members of the press are invited to attend and experience the exhibition before it opens to the public. Please RSVP to laguilar@bowers.org by May 19, 2026, to secure your place.

About Bowers Museum: Bowers Museum is a nonprofit institution located in the historic heart of Orange County in Santa Ana, California. For 90 years, it has showcased art and artifacts from cultures around the world through nine permanent collection galleries and dynamic rotating exhibitions. As the largest museum in Orange County, Bowers has been voted “Best Museum” by OC Register readers for 32 consecutive years (2025). In partnership with world-class

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institutions, its renowned exhibitions have included *Terracotta Warriors; Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt, Treasures of the British Museum*; and *Guo Pei: Art of Couture*.

About Tara Miller: Tara Miller is guest curator of Bowers Museum’s featured exhibition, *The American Quilt: Cloth and Commerce*. A quilt historian, pattern designer, instructor, and speaker, Miller brings extensive expertise in American quilt history and textile traditions. Her curatorial vision helps illuminate the exhibition’s exploration of the relationship between cloth, commerce, and community from Revolutionary-era America to the present day.

In addition to her curatorial work, Miller served as a panelist in a series of quilt history discussions from 2021 to 2023, *The Six Know-It-Alls*, contributing her knowledge and insight alongside leading voices in the field. Her work has also been featured in *Quiltmania*, *Quiltfolk* (Issue 30: Georgia), *Simply Moderne*, and *Simply Vintage*. Through both her writing and design work, Miller explores the powerful intersection of history and design.



The American Quilt: Cloth and Commerce is organized by Bowers Museum and curated by Tara Miller. The exhibition is supported by Flying Geese Quilters and Repiecers – Southern California Study Group.

Detail of *California Quilt*, c. 1975. Gift of Novell Hendrickson, 75.23.1. © Bowers Museum.

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