

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

Albany Institute of History & Art

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NEWS

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HISTORIC TEXTILE EXHIBITION TO OPEN AT ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

Undercover: Revealing Design in Quilts, Coverlets, and Bed Hangings will open October 11

ALBANY, NY— In the private space of the bedroom, the world takes center stage. Politics, international trade, social events, religion, and cultural affairs come alive in the elaborate designs and patterns displayed on American quilts, coverlets, and bed hangings.

On Saturday, October 11, 2014, the Albany Institute of History & Art will open *Undercover: Revealing Design in Quilts, Coverlets, and Bed Hangings*. The exhibition investigates the designs and patterns that decorate American bedcovers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. In addition to the textiles, early illustrated books, paintings, ceramics, and more are included to show sources of inspiration for textile designs.

The earliest bed cover in the exhibition, a set of crewel (wool-embroidered) bed hangings and matching coverlet, was started by Mary Stanton of Stonington, Connecticut, during the 1740s. Although Mary began this ambitious embroidery project, she left the bed hangings unfinished at the time of her death in 1748. Her daughter Mary (Stanton) Mason ultimately picked up where her mother left off and finished the project in the following years. The hangings were cherished heirlooms that descended through family members and eventually arrived in Albany through marriage. Spread over the creamy linen fabric are dozens of fantastic flowers, clusters of fruit, and birds worked in bright, richly colored wool yarns, all dyed from natural materials. Mary and her daughter most likely based their designs on imported East Indian textiles or on European textiles inspired by Indian fabrics. The bed hangings introduced the exotic world of East Indian trade into the family's bedroom.

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Woven cotton and wool coverlets made during the nineteenth century frequently feature a wealth of designs that reference contemporary politics, popular entertainment, architecture, and interior decorating tastes. Several coverlet weavers working in the area of Dutchess County, New York, have left more than 125 surviving coverlets similarly decorated with patriotic American eagles and symbols associated with Free Masonry including the square and compass and the pillars of Boaz and Jachin. "AGRICULTURE & MANUFACTURES ARE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR INDEPENDENCE. JULY 4, 1829," reads an inscription woven into the corners of the Institute's Dutchess County coverlet along with the name of the woman for whom it was made, Anna Wheeler. Was Wheeler's husband a member of the Masons? Or did she order the coverlet to demonstrate her patriotism? Other coverlets in the exhibition show connections to contemporary trends in architecture and interior design, particularly the influence of neoclassicism as revealed by the use of urns, lyres, and scrolling acanthus leaves.

The diverse range of printed textiles and patterns used in American quilts reveal connections to international design trends, community events, and national happenings. The log cabin quilt pattern, so named for the long, thin pieces of fabric that make up the design, resemble logs stacked one on top of another. Quilt historians have documented the pattern to the early 1860s during Abraham Lincoln's presidency. Lincoln was known as the "rail splitter" during the 1860 campaign and he was often associated with his humble birthplace in a log cabin in Kentucky. Quilters from the 1860s to the 1890s configured the fabrics in log cabin quilts to show a variety of patterns. A colorful example attributed to a quilter named Ida Barnard, possibly of Albany, features wool chalice fabrics arranged in the courthouse steps variation, a pattern that indeed resembles a flight of steps. Barnard's quilt is just one of several in the exhibition that connect to broader historical topics.

Undercover: Revealing Design in Quilts, Coverlets, and Bed Hangings is on view in the Albany Institute's newly renovated Lansing Gallery from October 11, 2014 through March 8, 2015. Exhibition related tours, activities, and special events may be found on the museum's website, www.albanyinstitute.org.

The Albany Institute of History & Art is located at 125 Washington Avenue in Albany, New York. The museum is open Wednesday-Saturday 10AM-5PM, Thursdays until 8PM*, and Sunday Noon-5PM. On Tuesdays, the museum is open to registered groups only. The museum is closed on Mondays and some holidays. Admission is free for Institute members; \$10/adults; \$8/seniors; \$8/students with ID; \$6/children 6-12; FREE/children under 6. We are now offering free admission on Thursdays from 5PM-8PM. For more information, visit www.albanyinstitute.org or call (518) 463-4478.

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SAMPLES OF TEXTILES ON DISPLAY



(detail) Crewel Embroidered Bed Hanging Valance
Mary Stanton and Mary (Stanton) Mason, Stonington,
Connecticut
c. 1740-1760
Linen ground with wool yarn, wool tape
Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Mary Eleanor
Crounse, 1951.5.2b



(detail) Anna Wheeler Coverlet
Unidentified weaver, probably Dutchess County, New
York
1829
Linen warp, wool weft
Albany Institute of History & Art Purchase,
1944.105.9



(detail) Log Cabin Quilt
Probably Ida Barnard
c. 1870-1880
Wool and cotton
Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Susan Van
Rensselaer Dayton, 1948.31.131

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(detail) Compass Rose Quilt
Unidentified maker, American
Mid-nineteenth century
Printed cotton
Albany Institute of History & Art, u1978.163.2

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Founded in 1791, the Albany Institute of History & Art is New York's oldest museum. Its collections document the Hudson Valley as a crossroads of culture, influencing the art and history of the region, the state, and the nation. With more than 35,000 objects and one million documents in the library, it is an important resource for the region, giving our community a sense of the part the Hudson Valley played in the American story, and our own place in history. Permanent and temporary exhibitions are open year-round and create a sense of place, allowing visitors to meet the people who helped shape this region. Over 25,000 people visit the Albany Institute of History & Art every year, enjoying the collections, workshops, school programs, and lectures, helping to build an understanding of the history and culture of our region. Among the museum's best-known and most-loved collections are the 19th century Hudson River School landscape paintings by artists like Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, the 19th century sculpture collections, and, of course, the famous Albany Mummies that came to the museum in 1909 and have been on view ever since. For more information, please visit www.albanyinstitute.org and be sure to follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/albanyinstitute) and Twitter (@AlbanyInstitute).

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