

Quilters' Works Achieve Quality That Puts Them on the Wall

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

THE Gallery in Hastings-on-Hudson's Municipal Building on Maple Street is aglow with the work of 28 quilters. A show numbering 36 items, it runs from actual quilts — one of them an antique — to clothes and includes objects that have no purpose other than to be themselves.

But such is the quality overall, it would take courage bordering on Philistinism to do anything with even the functional pieces but hang them on a wall. It is a sad sign of the times that fine craftsmanship, once taken for granted as a necessity, must now, as it were, be quarantined as high art to be appreciated, much as endangered species are preserved in zoos.

Happily, this exhibition contains enough works with esthetic as well as technical merit to keep the art-versus-craft bogeyman at bay, but there are some exceptions. The most conspicuous of these is Jean Ray-Laury's rectangle of white cloth on which are scattered small rectangles of color screen-printed but emphasized by hand-quilting.

This design incorporates a comment inscribed on it that goes:

"These is not art all these squares and things . . . real art has — you know — like a Madonna in it." By quoting this criticism of her work, made in the guest book for a previous show, and by including the silhouette of a Madonna, the artist strikes a blow of sorts for education and culture. But it is a paltry revenge, especially because the bad grammar is more likely to be misspelling by someone whose first language is not English and the reference to a Madonna may simply be a reflection of a religious upbringing.

Even so, the anonymous, unlettered critic is vindicated, because this is the one bad work in the show, with "The Flying Wallendas Reincarnated as Cats," a small whimsy by the same artist, its only serious rival.

The quilted clothing, though beautifully made, also poses problems. Jo Diggs's kimono is a tour de force of appliqué, but its chief ornament — a huge spray of stylized flowers and leaves in browns and beiges relieved by red and white and laid on a dotted navy blue ground — would be more at home on upholstery.

Yvonne Porcella's color sense runs from violent reds and purples to bright greens, as pieced together in a jacket and vest ensemble that is tied

in front with little bows. Here, as in a kimono composed of machine-pieced black and white checkerboards interspersed with diagonals of red, this artist, too, seems less concerned with the prospective wearer than with expressing her own virtuosity.

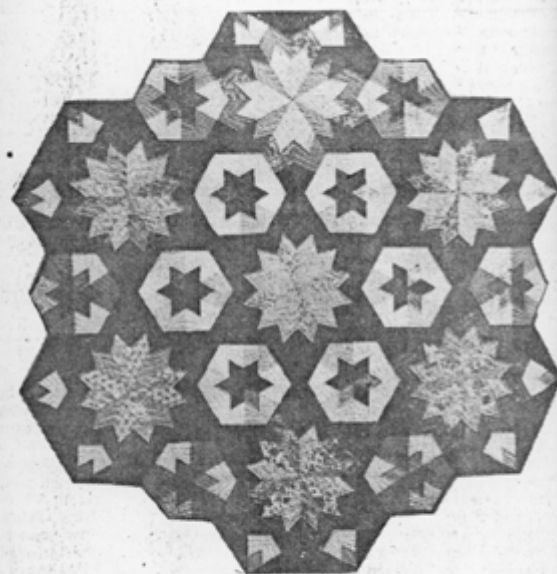
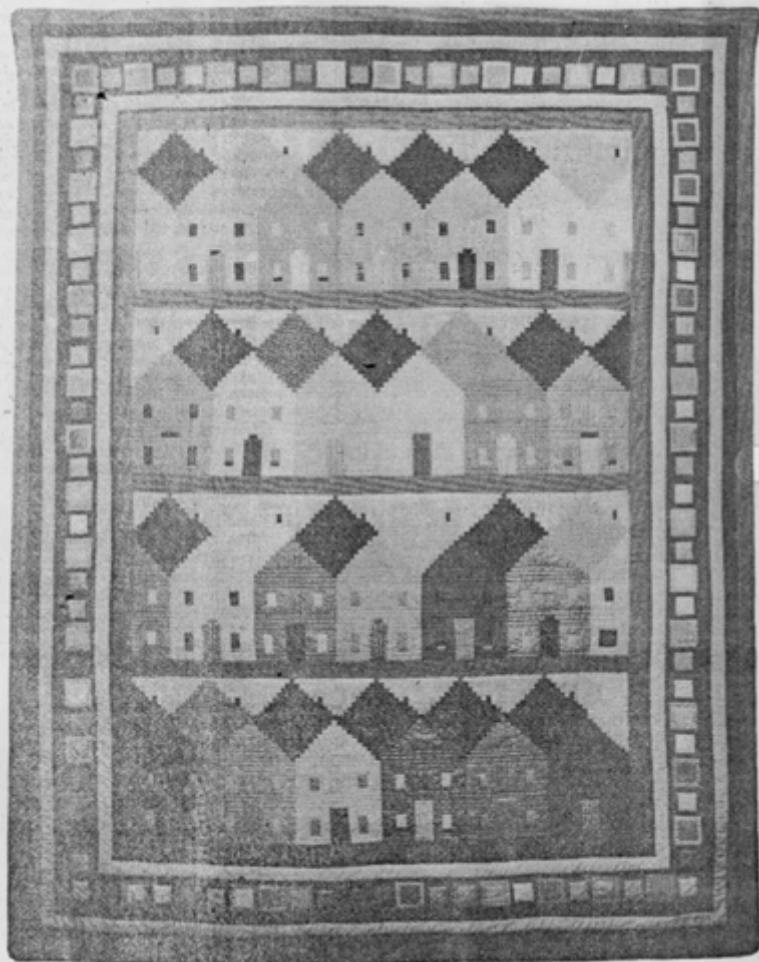
A more inviting garment is Maria McCormick Snyder's hooded cloak, consisting of triangular shapes made of overlapping cotton and satin strips in purples, maroon, cerises, pinks

and white that are separated by long ribs of black. All the same, it would overwhelm anyone who didn't have the stature and presence of a Fiji Islander.

So it was with some relief that this spectator turned to the quilts, especially to Flavin Glover's rows of row houses, couched appropriately in the "Log Cabin" style. The colors — muted blues, greens, yellows and red on the one hand, black, grays and

tans on the other — hang together in perfect equilibrium, as do the patterns of the fabrics.

Also impressive is Nancy Halber's machine-stitched "Hill Town," an intricate Cubistic landscape of facets denoting a warren of houses below and a pale sky above. Nancy Crow's handsome and vaguely American Indian-looking design of brightly colored diamonds enclosing crosses and edged with black and white stripes



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"Row Houses," at left, by Flavin Glover. Above, "Starshine" by Judy Dales.

catches the eye but is too dazzling to hold it for long.

Modern quilts tend to be more elaborate than those of the 19th century. The antique in this show, a red and white "Delectable Mountain" design of 16 squares, each containing the same geometrical motif, puts everything else to shame just with its simplicity and subtlety. Still it's hard not to admire the expertise in Nancy Siegel's composition of hexagons in patterned and solid-colored fabrics and in Judy Dales's rather similar design, "Starshine."

Though the principal aim of the show's curators, Nancy Kuckly, Collette Laico and Regina Silvers, was to prove that quilting remains true to its traditions, albeit with some modern innovations, they have included some

unorthodox examples that provide light relief.

One of these is a primitive scene of a family out fishing that, titled "The Day We Bombed Hiroshima," was designed but not executed by Edward Larson; another is Paula Nadelstern's 16 squares illustrating fairy tales and incorporating gold braid, colored stones, glitter, rickrack and what looks to be suede.

The reviewer's favorite in this category is Jerri Finch-Hurley's small trapunto trompe l'oeil scene of quilts billowing on a laundry line. The background of trees and water is painted, so are the quilts and the shadows they cast.

A nicely balanced selection, some of which is for sale, it remains on view through Jan. 19.