



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER – May 2025

QUILTING SISTAH NEWS

African American Quilt Guild of Oakland

In Loving Memory

*The African American Quilt Guild of Oakland
is saddened to announce the passing of our long-time
member and friend*



FRAN PORTER

1925 - 2025

*Our condolences to her family. She will be
greatly missed for her humor,
creativity and kindness.*

In Loving Memory

*The African American Quilt Guild of Oakland
is saddened to announce the passing of our former
member and friend*



ORA MAE KNOWELL
1947 - 2025

*Our condolences to her family. She will be
greatly missed for her generosity
and her creativity.*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Since last writing to you, the African American Quilt Guild of Oakland held its annual Black History Month Family Celebration on February 22, 2025, at the West Oakland Public Library. This year, a new block was introduced to teach our guests, and they received an AAQGO patch to appliqué to their block. Due to outreach efforts by Guild member Ora Clay at a local elementary school, many children attended along with their parents. There were over 40 guests and 30 members present. A great time was had by all.

In April, the Guild mourned the passing of two longtime members: Frances Porter, who was 100 at the time of her death, and Ora Knowell. Both contributed quilts to the exhibit “Neighborhoods Coming Together: Quilts Around Oakland” and were mentioned in a New York Times article about the exhibit. Their contributions to AAQGO will not be forgotten.

Under the leadership of our 25th anniversary chair, Rosita Thomas, we are preparing and highly anticipating the publication of our 25th anniversary quilt catalogue and exhibiting the 25” by 25” quilts at a future date. Our Guild members out did themselves with their design, creativity, and quilting techniques. We appreciate the participation of all members in this project.

As summer approaches and many of you begin your travels, do not forget to look for new fabric to add to your already abundant stash. In closing, let us not forget:

Quilters ...
Cut with hope
Stitch with grace
Quilt with dreams
Bind with laughter
Share with love.

Blessings,

Marie dePorres Taylor

GUEST SPEAKER

April 2025



If you missed the AAQGO April 2025 monthly zoom meeting, you missed a jewel of a presentation and quilt journey education. I'm talking about Kena Dorsey.

As a Broadway actress, she was introduced to quilting by a local Guild as a way to authenticate the play she was acting in. She was hooked on quilting during that one lesson, an introduction to quilting. She completed her first-hand constructed quilt during the play production, while she was on breaks and not on stage. She still owns the quilt today.

Kena continued quilting, favoring the raw edge appliqué using African fabrics, making gifts for fellow actors, production staff and parties, and for her home. She eventually purchased a sewing machine, and much later a long arm quilting machine.

When she moved to the Los Angeles area, she started teaching in the theater arts: screenwriting, drama, acting, etc. Her knowledge, interest and understanding of quilting continues to expand. She opened a business of online quilting arts, to include: selfie portrait quilting, online classes, workshops, selling mud cloth and African fabrics.

Please visit her website for additional information.

Kena Quilt Studio

[www.https://kenaquiltstudio.com](https://kenaquiltstudio.com)

SMITHSONIAN EXHIBITION

Ora Clay



This is the first quilt I made with Marion Coleman in September 2015.

It is currently on display and part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC.

Marion and I received an Apprenticeship grant from ACTA (Alliance for California Tradition Arts) where she was the Master teacher and I was her apprentice. We worked together on a regular schedule for nine months. As I had never quilted, she started me on the Log Cabin block. I chose the courthouse steps variation of the log cabin block. It was a challenge for me as I

had never made a block. I had a hard time making my points match and making my blocks the same size. However, once I had a number of blocks sewn together, I felt the quilt wasn't complete and needed more. With Marion's approval and help, I turned the quilt into a story quilt about the landmark case, Brown vs Board of Education. The quilt included the named plaintiffs in the Supreme Court case outlawing school segregation in the United States, the lawyers bringing the case, and the lower court cases leading up to the Supreme Court. The story also honors Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, whose study with black and white dolls influenced the Court by demonstrating the harm segregated schools caused to children. This traditional quilt pattern, Log Cabin Courthouse Steps, seemed like an appropriate vehicle to tell the story of this landmark case.





The next chapter was to enter this “Brown vs Board” quilt in several exhibits locally and nationally, which Marion encouraged me to do. I shared the quilt at show and tell at AAQGO and also entered it in the Alameda County Fair where it received a Blue ribbon.



In 2019, Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, quilt collector, curator, and promotor of African American quilts, curated a quilt show titled “ We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest” and I entered this quilt. After the exhibition Dr. Mazloomi acquired the quilt for her collection.

In 2024, recognizing Dr. Mazloomi’s contribution in the field of African American Quilting and as founder of the Women of Color Quilters Network, The Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. selected some of the quilts from her collection for the museum’s permanent collection.



“The Art Truck is here again to pick up paintings and quilts for two exhibitions in Washington, D.C. this summer.”
Carolyn Mazloomi.



Brown vs Board is now part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC. It is currently in ***We Gather at the Edge Exhibit*** at the Renwick Gallery until June 22nd. Scroll to the bottom of the link to see all the quilts and exhibitors in the exhibit.

<https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/black-women-quilters>

The artists featured in “We Gather at the Edge” honor the Black story quilt tradition with work that envisions a more just and connected world. The exhibition highlights SAAM’s recent acquisitions of quilts from the collection of Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi and celebrates her legacy as the founder of the

Women of Color Quilters Network. Three of Marion Colemans quilts are included in this exhibition.

<https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/black-women-quilters>



<https://go.americanart.si.edu/e/980712/hibitions-black-women-quilters/j6wq2/827659276/h/grMHbflc9NL2lRTjPuHjHBC2 RO-bCbHVFBinXvufks>

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

Loretta Henry, AAQGO Historian

ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

*Terms used in this article: Language is always evolving. Slaves are now referred to as enslaved men/women/persons and their owners are called now called enslavers.

Early this year, AAQGO's education chairperson, Ernestine "Ernie" Tril, suggested that the Guild use the *Underground Railroad Sampler* by Eleanor Burns and Sue Bouchard, which was based on the book *Hidden In Plain View*, for our block of the month project. My immediate reaction was NOOOOO, because some quilting authorities considered the book to be a sham. It has been suggested that the authors of the book had been taken in by a con artist. Ms. Tril asked me to help her by explaining the symbolism behind each block and I agreed. Standing before the group in March, I felt like I was telling lies and I also felt a lot of negative energy in the room. There was a gigantic elephant in the room. If we had to recreate a quilt made by enslaved women, why use this discredited book?

Later that evening, I realized that I had no idea if the facts in *Hidden in Plain View* were true or not and I needed to read the book. In fact, I had to read it several times before things became clear. The kindest thing I can say is that the authors' research did not support their thesis. The dots just did not connect. When I finished reading the book, I was so angry that I was shaking my fists towards the heavens demanding that one of the authors, Raymond Dobard, who had died, come down HERE NOW and explain to ME why he had written a book full of such shoddy research. Once I calmed down, I thought but does that make the story a myth? Was there any truth? I read it again focusing on what the woman at the center of the controversy, Ozella McDaniel Williams, had actually said to Jacqueline L. Tobin, the other author. For me, her story was not about the Abolitionists quilts hanging on clotheslines or the Underground Railroad, but about her enslaved great grandmother's recollections about how symbols were used on quilts at one plantation to instruct possible runaways. This was a personal tale.

According to Ms. Williams' family history, the seamstress on the plantation where her ancestor lived had made a series of quilts, each one illustrating a different instruction for possible runaways to follow. The quilts were decorated with symbols that the enslaved persons would recognize from their African culture and were hung on the fence one at a time detailing a plan of action. The first suggested that if anyone was thinking on leaving, they needed to decide on a plan. The next quilt showed them that they need to collect tools and supplies for the journey and so on. The problem arises from Ms. Williams use of modern quilt block names who were supposedly created after 1870 such as Monkey Wrench, Drunkard's Path, and Shoofly. This led to many questions: Did she not realize that using the names of modern blocks would lead to her story not being believed? Did the seamstress used a different variation of the classic quilt

blocks? Did enslaved quilters really quilt using those blocks? What symbols and codes were used? How did they learn the patterns? What happened to the quilts?

Finding the answer to those questions and more has become an obsession. I am so grateful to Ernie for planting the seed leading me on a journey of discovery. Although I am not a formally trained expert on the histories of fabrics, quilting or African American history, I am a passionate amateur historian. Since 2001, I have been my family's historian working on over 20 searches. I understand what tools are needed and how to use them to find. More importantly I know that doing any research on enslaved people before 1860 will be a long, difficult journey requiring exploring many resources. I also understand that even if some "facts" can never be proven, that does mean they did not happen. At an upcoming Guild meeting I would like to share what I have discovered so far. This is not just a story of the Underground Railroad. More importantly, it is a story of a proud peoples struggle for freedom. It is a story of resistance. As I once told my mother, our story is so amazing.



Underground Railroad Quilt made by the author in 2018

Five of the books used



Monkey Wrench Patterns
From Maggie Malone, 5,500 Quilt Block Designs





BIRTHDAYS

MAY

Artly Johnson
Felecia Germany – 6
Teloca McLinn - 7
Sandi Knight – 9
Deborah Reed-Salmon – 14
Jerry Oyarzo Hickey – 15
Loretta Henry – 26
Madlyn Jones – 26
Marie dePorres Taylor - 27

JUNE

Kelsey Tyler - 2
Pat Turner - 17
Angela Thomas - 20
Susan Cole - 30

JULY

Midge Robinson - 4
Elaine Yau – 13
Jennifer Mallett - 24
Darecia Miller-McCant - 29

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

Our condolences to Susie Faye Patrick on the loss of her mother.
Our positive thoughts and prayers to all members and their families who are facing
medical challenges.

EVENTS

<p>April 15 – June 15, 2025</p> <p>18th Annual African American Fiber Art Exhibition</p> <p>North Charleston City Hall North Charleston, SC</p>	<p>May 9 – 10, 2025</p> <p>Roseville Quilters Guild Presents: <i>Red and White Quilt Extravaganza</i></p> <p>William Jessup University Rocklin, CA</p>
<p>May 17-18, 2025</p> <p>Sierra Mountain Quilters Association present <i>Mountain Magic</i></p> <p>Oakhurst Community Center Oakhurst, CA</p>	<p>June 7–November 30, 2025</p> <p>Routed West: Twentieth-Century African American Quilts in California</p> <p>Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) Berkeley, CA</p>
<p>June 7, 2025</p> <p>Foothill Quilters Guild <i>Country Store</i></p> <p>Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall Auburn, CA</p>	<p>June 28, 2025</p> <p>Textile Arts Council present <i>Bay Area Fiber Artists video premiere</i></p> <p>Kimbal Educational Gallery of the deYoung Museum San Francisco, CA Includes former AAQGO member Alice Beasley</p>
<p>ENTRIES OPEN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL QUILT FESTIVAL JUDGED SHOW 2025</p> <p>All finalists and winners will be displayed at Festival in Houston this October 9-12</p> <p>Cash, non-purchase prizes in Best of Show, Master Awards, Categories, Judge's Choice, and Viewers' Choice.</p>	<p>July 10, 2025</p> <p>Pete Escovedo: The Cali Art Tour Painting by Pete Escovedo</p> <p>Curated by Eric Murphy Studio Eleven & The Grand Gallery Oakland, CA</p>

OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

September 1, 2024- August 31, 2026

Officers and committee chairpersons can be reached at aaqgoakland@gmail.com or
PO Box 31834, Oakland, CA 94604

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JUST A REMINDER - Our email address - aaqgoakland@gmail.com - is to be used for Guild business only. Names and addresses are not to be shared with other organizations or businesses. Please use your roster to contact individuals in the Guild.

MEMBERSHIP - Membership shall be open to anyone interested in the purpose and objectives of this Guild, and payment of annual dues. No discrimination shall be made with regard to race, color, creed, or sexual or national origin.

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