

## Fabric of a Nation

### American Quilt Stories

October 10, 2021–January 17, 2022

Ann and Graham Gund Gallery (Gallery LG31)



Bisa Butler, *To God and Truth* (detail), 2019. Printed cotton, pieced, appliquéd, and quilted. John H. and Ernestine A. Payne Fund, The Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection, and Arthur Mason Knapp Fund. © Bisa Butler and Claire Oliver Gallery.

Credit

Quilts and coverlets have a unique capacity to tell stories: their tactile, intricate mode of creation and their traditional use in the home impart deeply personal narratives of their creators, and the many histories they express reveal a complex record of America. Quilts have also been used in North America since the 17th century, and their story, told by many voices, has evolved alongside the United States.

Upending expectations about quilt displays—traditionally organized by region, form, or motif—“Fabric of a Nation: American Quilt Stories” is a loosely chronological presentation in seven thematic sections that voices multiple perspectives. Visitors see and hear from artists, educators, academics, and activists, and the remarkable examples on view are by an underrecognized diversity of artistic hands and minds from the 17th century to today, including female and male, known and unidentified, urban and rural makers; immigrants; and Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and LGBTQ+ Americans. The exhibition invites visitors to celebrate the artistry and intricacy of quilts and coverlets and the lives they document, while also considering the complicated legacies ingrained in the fabric of American life.

A standout of the exhibition is Pictorial quilt (1895–98) by Harriet Powers. Born into slavery in 1837, Powers was an exceptional artist and storyteller. But who gets to tell her story? By looking at Powers’s life and work through the lens of history and hearing from a variety of individuals, visitors are encouraged to make resonant connections to their own lives. Among other highlights are Bisa Butler’s *To God and Truth* (2019), a vibrantly colorful and elaborately patterned quilt based on an 1899 photograph of the Morris Brown College baseball team, and Carla Hemlock’s *Survivors* (2011–13), in which figures and names of 48 First Nations and Indigenous groups that survive today are stitched around a traditional pattern. Together, the masterpieces in this exhibition tell inclusive, human stories that link us across time and articulate a rich, and richly complicated, story of our shared history.