

everyone—students, teachers, and staff—for communicating thoughts and feelings.

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The Green Quilt: An Example of Collective Eco-Action in Art Education

Doug Blandy

Kristin G. Congdon

Laurie Hicks

Elizabeth Hoffman

Don Krug

At the 1994 National Art Education Association (NAEA) Convention in Baltimore we initiated two eco-action presentations that resulted in the making and display of a Green Quilt (Blandy, Congdon, Hicks, Hoffman, & Krug, 1994a; Blandy, Congdon, Hicks, Hoffman & Krug, 1994b). All of us have been coming to NAEA conventions for a number of years. Every year we have heard discussions on the gap between theory and practice. Discussed also has been the importance and need for activism within the NAEA. As a result of listening to these discussions, the five of us met at the 1993 convention to plan a session for 1994 that would be collaborative, active, political, and ecologically oriented. All of us have an ongoing research interest in eco-active art education.¹ Consequently, we planned

a session that would challenge conventional presentation formats by encouraging ongoing political activity. Consideration of the location of the convention, local activism, and the experiences of participants were deemed important aspects of political activity. Linking the NAEA membership with the "Green Quilt Project" was the result of our planning.

The "Green Quilt Project" is an international, grassroots effort. Founded in March, 1989 by Susan Shie of Wooster, Ohio, the project has generated hundreds of quilts created by individuals and groups. Shie, in her description of the project (undated) expresses her purpose "to create a network of positive energy concerning bringing the Earth back to balance" (p. 1). This energy has been variously referred to as a "prayer, meditation, affirmation." Green Quilts, according to Shie, are a visualization of "the situation you wish to create as if it is already the present reality" (p. 1). Her vision nests within the larger context of "healing quilts." Such quilts offer makers an opportunity to respond to issues of immediate and personal concern. Healing quilts derive their power through affirmative process. They are based on a belief that by affirming what we wish to occur, change becomes possible.

The five of us corresponded regularly over the course of 1993 and the first three months of 1994. Elizabeth Hoffman agreed to create the backing for the NAEA Green Quilt. Proposals for two convention sessions were submitted by the group. Our session proposals were accepted as a part of the Women's Caucus program. Sessions were organized to maximize participation by all five members of the group. All of us assisted in the creation of the quilt and in preparing theoretical and organizational material for presentation at the 1994 convention.

Participants attending the first session were introduced to contemporary environmental concerns and oriented to eco-actions initiated by artists in response. We emphasized that many contemporary artists are working as activists to recognize and celebrate a positive relationship to the Earth and other (often disadvantaged) individuals. Gablik (1991), in her book *The Reenchantment of Art*, focuses on many of these artists. For

example, beginning in the 1980s, Dominique Mazeaud has routinely walked in the Rio Grande River, filled garbage bags with debris and has written about her experiences in a journal. Other artists include Suzanne Lacy who coordinated performances by older women, Mierle Ukeles who has been an artist in residence in the New York City Sanitation Department, Krzysztof Wodiczko who is well known for creating a vehicle for homeless people, and John Malpede the founder of the Theatre for the Homeless in Los Angeles. These artists facilitate collective action through example. As such, they are exemplars of how artists can contribute to the larger spectrum of collective social action. The "Green Quilt Project" was presented within this context.

At the conclusion of this first session participants were invited to become activists by designing and embellishing six inch square fabric blocks (sewn into pockets) for a Green Quilt that would symbolize a positive, energizing narrative about their relationships with the natural environment. One hour later, sixty activists returned with their blocks to participate in the second session. Session organizers invited the participants to speak about their blocks and how they symbolized their relationships with the Earth. They then buttoned their blocks to a base quilt with four corner blocks representing air ("Birds in the Air"), water ("Storm at Sea"), earth ("Apple Tree"), and fire ("Fire Lily") (see Figure). These corner blocks were selected from the many traditional quilt block patterns available for their ability to represent the four elements.

Our purpose in this session was to concentrate on individual narratives and blocks. Time limitations prevented a discussion of how individual contributions related to each other and the whole. If time had allowed we would have included such a discussion. Exploring interconnectedness promotes systemic thinking, ecological awareness, and a consciousness of collective social action. Such a discussion can begin by considering recurring themes in the blocks; placement of blocks; the juxtaposition of blocks; and narrative similarities and differences.

Block designs were varied. For example, Jane Maitland-Gholson's block contained a pencil with a short story written on the exterior in colored pencil and felt pen. Judith Ginsburg's turquoise block with a red circle and ikat fabric rectangles was dedicated to her mother and brought attention to the impact of pesticides on her mother's life. Patricia Ciricillo's block was a magenta/red flower appliqué with sequin, bead, and ribbon embellishments, while on the other side written words were interspersed with images signifying flowers, friendship, fun, fantasy, fox, fellowship, fortune, fish and fire.

At the conclusion of the second session, this collectively created quilt was displayed in the Convention registration area. Periodically we would visit it and answer questions from convention participants on its making and purpose. We also provided information on how to contact Shie for additional information.

Green Quilts may have several purposes. They may remind us of the importance of individual purpose within collective action. The power of a Green Quilt may reside in its maker's commitment to the Earth coupled with the idea of quilts as valued heirlooms and collectibles that are passed on generationally. Green Quilts may also be understood and appreciated within the context of a politically oriented quilting tradition in which quilts are created to bring attention to, and educate others toward special interests. Quilts may also encourage or facilitate action by initiating ongoing discussions or providing funds through auction or raffle.

The use of quilt making as a political vehicle for collective action has a long history in the United States. The fact that women, as primary quilt makers, were not enfranchised until the early twentieth century did not mean they were apolitical. Quilt block names such as "Lincoln's Platform," "54 Forty or Fight," and "Whig Rose" convey obvious political allegiances. Names of blocks chosen for use are often clues to the purpose of the quilt or the interests of the maker. For example, "Drunkard's Path" and "Temperance Goblet" — block designs that were popular in the early 20th century — illustrate the maker's stance

against domestic violence linked to the abuse of alcohol. These patterns were also popular as raffle quilts made to support early women's suffrage groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.).

There are several notable contemporary examples of politically oriented quilts: "The NAMES Project" (Ruskin, 1988), "The Ribbon" (Philbin & Lark Books Staff, 1985), and the "Boise Peace Quilt Project" (PO Box 6469, Boise, ID 83707) are exemplary. At the local level, many community quilt guilds respond to community needs as a part of their stated mission. For example, The Mary's River Quilt Guild which meets in Philomath, Oregon initiates projects to aid local fire victims, children-at-risk, people who are terminally ill, and the county museum.

For the next two years the NAEA Baltimore Green Quilt will be displayed and used for educational purposes at universities in Maine, Ohio, Florida, and Oregon. It is anticipated that blocks will be added at each site. Beginning in 1996 this quilt will be available to travel to other locations. We envision that this quilt will become a catalyst for continued eco-action that will transcend the time and space limitations of traditional NAEA convention practice.

Directions for Replicating the NAEA Baltimore Green Quilt

The following directions are meant to be general. We hope and anticipate that any use of our plan will manifest itself in a way that is specific to the makers and their context. Our purpose is to be suggestive rather than prescriptive. Identifying the salient features of the region, makers, and audience, and incorporating these factors into the "Green Quilt Project" will make the experience more meaningful to all those involved. We also recommend that materials and techniques used should have minimal environmental impact.

The NAEA Baltimore Green Quilt was based on Green Quilts created at the University of Oregon and at the University

of Central Florida. Students made double-sided, square "pockets" (blocks) in which they stuffed paper, photographs, messages, amulets, vegetable matter, and other materials. Emphasis was placed on recycling materials. Piecing, quilting, embroidery, gluing, drawing, painting, photo transfer, beading, knotting, and appliqué were all methods used. The only requirements were that the block contents were not too heavy, or too fragile, that the blocks had a mechanism to button them to the base quilt, and that the spirit of making was in line with Shie's purpose for the "Green Quilt Project."

The University of Oregon quilt, upon which the following plan is based, consists of a backdrop and border in which 20 buttons are used to tie the traditional three quilt layers (top, batting, and back) together. Participants decided that four corner blocks of the "Maple Leaf" pattern would record, through color and placement, seasonal changes in Oregon. The border consists of scrap pieces of fabric in greens and browns, colors associated with the Pacific Northwest landscape. A three inch casing is sewn to the back of the quilt so a flat stick can support the quilt for hanging.

On the day it was completed, students chose the button site they wanted their block to hang from, attached their block to the quilt, and presented their narrative of why they chose the materials, symbols, colors, etc. for their block. After everyone added their block, a place for exhibition was chosen. By exhibiting the Green Quilt, (see figure 1) not only did further interest and discussion take place, but students were able to reaffirm their experience of collective eco-action.

Shie recommends that Green Quilts be identified as such through a label attached to the back that indicates its place of creation, makers, and date. This registration process contributes to the collective action that Shie promotes through the project. Though the registration process documents collective action, the legitimacy of Green Quilts comes primarily from the process of their making and the reflections of their makers. To register a Green Quilt, a slide of the quilt with identifying information should be sent to Susan Shie, 2612 Armstrong Drive, Wooster, Ohio 44691.

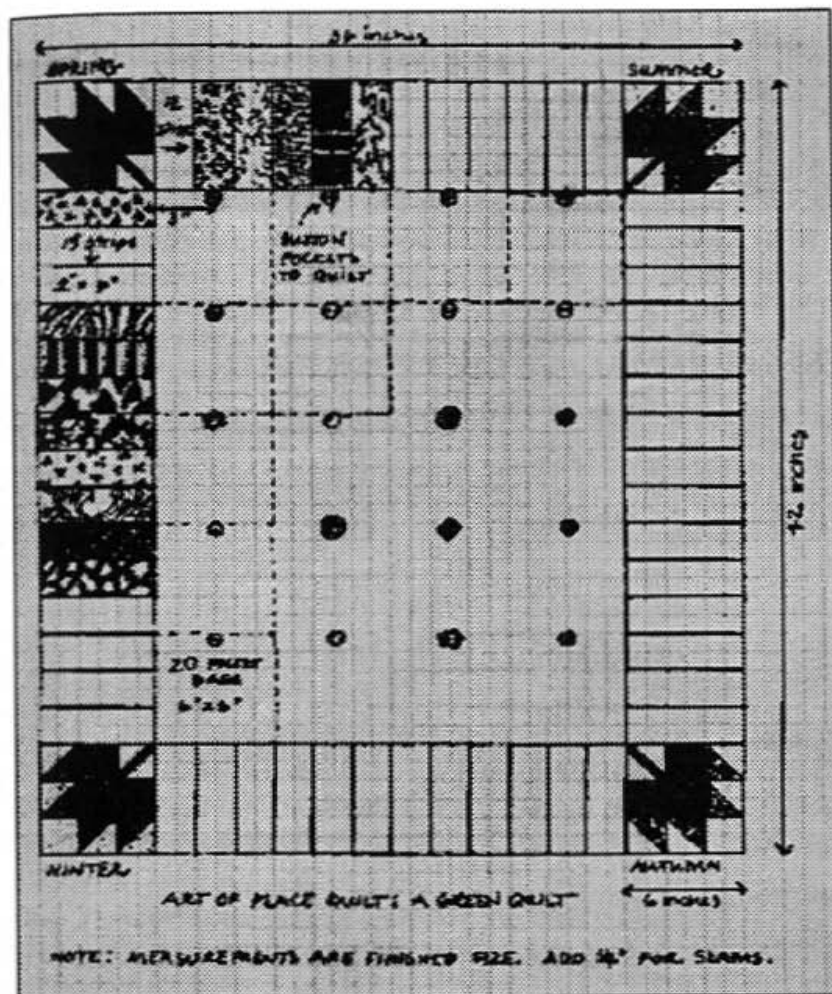


Figure 1: Design for the University of Oregon Green Quilt

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Footnote

¹ session planners have an ongoing research interest in eco-active art education. For example see Blandy and Hoffman (1993), Hicks (1992/93), and Blandy, Congdon, and Krug (1994). In addition, the session planners are indebted to the research of Adams (1990), Graff (1990), jagodzinski (1987), and McFee and Degge (1977).