
My Quilt

Approval Signature

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Abstract

My quilt provides a space for me to appreciate and acknowledge my ancestors. This hasn't always been easy for me as a mixed woman. I've felt the push and pull between both of my races for most of my life. My quilt tells the stories of my ancestors and of those in my immediate family who have had a large impact on my own story.

I've used braided acrylic yarn to symbolize my previous struggle with being bi-racial. Braids, in particular, were something I saw my family members and members of my community have but didn't feel that I could have myself because of my whiteness. It was something that always made me question my validity as a person of color. Using the acrylic yarn speaks to me embracing that my experience and identity is my own. Both sides have felt like planets far away from each other my whole life which has left me questioning where I belong. This work is a space for my ancestors to come together, for what feels like the first time. It's also a space for me to connect to my family, as a whole, for the first time

My Quilt

I grew up in a diverse area of California, the Bay Area, but not a very diverse city. My parents made a huge effort to get me out of our small town to see what Oakland or San Francisco had to offer. Most of what they had, that Alameda was lacking, was diversity and inclusion. At some point though, we had to go back to our townhome in the suburbs. I stuck out like a sore thumb, or at least it felt like I did. For a long time I tried to be like the people I was surrounded by. I was confused and unsure where and if I fit in. Hair, in particular, was/is a huge deal to me and something I struggled with as a child. I looked at both sides of my family and realized I didn't look like either of them when I was young. I just didn't understand how I could look so different from my own parents. Especially after seeing how alike my classmates looked to their families. I grew up watching my maternal grandmother curl her blonde short hair every morning. Then I'd also see my paternal grandmother put conditioner, rollers, and a silk scarf on every night. I was never sure how my hair fit in; But it was clear that hair, in general, is of high importance. Braids were something I always wanted but feared asking for.

I have made a braided quilt about my ancestry and my internal struggle with being mixed. The braids symbolize my attempts to be one race or the other. Braids were something I felt like I couldn't have because I wasn't Black enough or was too white. Since then I've realized I am simply both and am not too much of one or the other. The yarn is "man-made" acrylic and speaks to me creating my own experience with tools I have available. These tools are my ancestry and it informs my existence. This quilt is about embracing the awkwardness of being mixed and a refusal to be one or the other. I like to think of this project as something that has enabled me to tie both sides together. It points at the differences in both sides and the white supremacist logic that forces me one way or the other. But I have created a unified culture that is a resolution to

these issues. Rather than simply pointing to their differences and my struggle as a bi-racial child I found a personal resolution in my work. I unified my ancestors by telling their stories in my quilt and tied me and my own experience in with braiding. I braided their stories; I feel that this action brought me closer to my ancestors and helped reiterate that my existence and experience is informed by their own. I embraced and took influence from the traditions of my ancestors, quiltmaking, but made it my own. I illustrated the comfort in old stories being passed down with the look of a “traditional” quilt and the plushness of my braids . I also acknowledged that this unification of both sides is something new and tedious with a delicate and distinctive construction and composition.

My quilt has 20 squares total; Six squares about my immediate family and seven for my maternal and paternal lineage. Many of the squares have multiple meanings, however, the maternal and paternal side can be paired up into categories: place where grandparents met, significant part of grandparent’s lives, great-great and great-grandfather’s immigration, great-grandmothers passions, great-grandmothers origin, somethings each side is “known for”, and something each side is proud of. My research included accessing ancestry.com, speaking with family members, and looking at contemporary Black female quilt makers. My dad and I created an ancestry tree together when I was in middle school on a trip to Atlanta. We put in all the information he and my grandmother knew. My mom’s side is a bit better equipped when it comes to finding dates. We have a family bible and records that a family member gathered in her own research. When speaking to family members I tried to get them to tell stories so I would have something to abstract. Most of the subjects or events in my quilt I was not alive for or do not remember well so it was important for me to place myself in each period of time to design the square.

Each Square and Their Stories

Immediate Family

Three of Us

This square speaks to my still evolving family structure. After my dad passed we (Miles, my mom, and I) were all quite lost. He was a very strict guy, especially with the way the cancer messed with his hormones. At least for me it felt like the person who controlled every aspect of my life just disappeared. Well he did but not on purpose. I had had every photo I ever taken and text I sent or received examined and in the months leading up to his death phone calls supervised. No outfit was allowed out without approval from him first. Everything I did and had ever done my whole life was tediously monitored and it was a shock to not have that anymore. I can't imagine how my mom felt. She had been with him for over 30 years, since she was 18. I can't imagine building a life with someone I love so dearly just to have that ripped from me. She writes a lot about it and how she misses him. She has found widow groups that she goes on vacation with and writing groups where she can put her feelings to paper. My brother was 12 when my dad passed. Soon after his passing Miles lost all interest in sports. It was clear it was because my dad had been such a critical part of his athletic career up until that point. When he was able to take him to practice he loved to just watch, he would play with him at the park next door for hours, and even coached his basketball team twice and they won the championship together. This square is about the three of us moving forward in a world that often feels like a constant reminder of what we have lost. I chose to use blue in the background to signify this feeling of being constantly reminded of him because it was his favorite color. The three circles represent my mother (pink), my brother (orange) and me (green); I used all of our favorite colors.

SDSU

My parents met in Zura hall at San Diego State University in 1984. My mom was dropped off at the dorms by her parents who left her with a six-pack of beer. Once her parents left she followed the music she heard down the hallway with her beer. She found herself in a dorm room with my dad and all of his friends. My dad had begun college at Laney in Oakland in 1982 and had just moved into the dorm. My mother had just graduated from her highschool in Santa Barbara. My dad stayed at San Diego State for about three years and then moved back to the Bay Area to finish school at San Francisco State. He began working with the FBI as a mail clerk and rose in the ranks when he transferred. He and my mom were long distance until she graduated and moved to San Francisco with him in 1988. They were together ever since they met in 1984 and were together for a total of 32 years when he passed. I chose the colors for this square to mimic those of the San Diego State colors. Zuro hall, and San Diego in general, was also famous for their Spanish architecture and large arches. I decided to abstract the famous arches and assign them the school colors.

Fentons

When I was born my parents lived in Oakland, California. We lived off of Piedmont Ave on Montgomery St. We actually lived across the street from the drummer for Green Day and the members would often offer to help my pregnant mother bring in groceries. Piedmont Ave is a pretty popular area to shop and eat in the East Bay. In particular it has the world famous Fentons Creamery. It was featured in the movie UP! My parents would walk down the large hill from our duplex every Sunday to get my mom a ice cream sundae while she was pregnant with me.

Growing up I often chose to go to Fentons for my birthday or other celebrations; I've always seen that area as my start.

Zebra

My Zebra square is about my father's second battle with cancer. His first was prostate cancer when I was four. This time it was neuroendocrine cancer and I was 15 turning 16 when he was awaiting diagnosis. My dad had been acting odd for the past year or two. The six months leading up to my 16th birthday were especially treacherous. We later found out the cancer he had greatly affected his hormones which made him irritable, anxious, depressed, and paranoid. Once he was diagnosed he went on meds to better manage mental health. When he was first diagnosed we were told that it was caught early and at the most he would need one shot a month for the rest of his life, which they implied would be long. It quickly progressed to needing emergency chemo. Then chemo one a week. We researched and began cooking new foods that were better for him. We also bought him all new clothes since he had lost weight and found a place that my grandparents could stay at for weeks at a time to help my mom out. It was hectic, everyone was wearing all of the hats so we could get everything done. His health continued to decline until he was hospitalized then put into hospice. It had spread from his pancreas and into other organs to the point there was no recovery. He passed June 6th, 2017. It was particularly hard not having a reason for losing him other than him simply being sick. It was also hard to dodge calls from the organ donors. I woke up the night he died to my mom screaming into the phone that his eyes were ours. I now have a necklace with his ashes as do my mom and brother. We have taken family trips to spread his ashes as well. He and my mom shared an oncologist (basically a cancer doctor), Dr. Marshall. At her own personal appointment with the doctor she was

discussing how in her research she found that neuroendocrine cancer is caused by carcinogens. To preface this my dad worked for the FBI for over 30 years. The doctor revealed that there were other FBI agents and employees that had also been diagnosed with extremely rare cancers. Dr. Marshall believed my dad had inhaled carcinogens almost 16 years before when he worked the September 11 crash site at the Pentagon. This has caused me to be extremely careful when it comes to what materials and chemicals I surround myself with. Particularly in my artwork. It was important for me to make my thesis safe and accessible. I was previously using hot glue to adhere the braids but after considering what fumes are let off from melting plastic in my room I decided to move to sewing. Sewing is also more traditional since I am making a quilt. I chose to represent his cancer by abstracting the mascot for his type of cancer. The mascot was a zebra holding a teal balloon. The zebra signifies the rareness of the cancer within the cancer community. I chose to do teal and royal blue zebra print for this square. The zebra print and teal color clearly come from the information on the cancer; I chose to use the darker blue for the other color in the pattern because it was my dad's favorite color and he is the reason I know so much about this cancer.

The City

My brother Miles was born on December 28, 2004. I had just turned four and had a hard time coping with sharing my room and attention from my parents. My brother and I shared a room up until I left for college when I was 17. I remember arguing with him for a week to allow him to allow me to put my Lorde poster on our door. It was very hard to convince a 10 year old

boy that her nearly black lipstick is super cool and that no one would even notice. He combatted this decision by creating a frame for my poster out of San Francisco Giants stickers. He is a very talented athlete and takes pride in his extensive experience in baseball. Through his teenage years he has found a love for fashion that mimics that of our dad. He also has my dad's dry humor and stubbornness. My mom and I often jokingly call him Mike (my dad's name) when he is being a pain because of his inflexibility. I chose the Bay bridge to illustrate my brother because when I think of him I still think of the giddy little boy who insisted on dinner in San Francisco for every birthday.

Breast Cancer

My breast cancer square is about my mother's diagnosis with breast cancer. I had just turned 14 and began at a new art school. My mom went in for her typical mammogram but was called back for more testing. The night she got her diagnosis my brother was at a sleepover and my dad was working late. I knew and was also anticipating the phone call. I thought that since it was so late in the day we probably wouldn't hear anything. My mom and I were watching NCIS together as we did every Friday night when she got a call that she took back to her and my dad's room. I waited a moment to hear her door shut and got up to listen in. I stood on the other side of her door and listened to her get diagnosed with cancer. I walked away as soon as I realized it wasn't good. I waited for her up front. When she was done we cried together and called my dad and told him to get us pizza. We decided not to tell Miles, my brother, since he wasn't even 10 and it was almost Christmas. Once they had a treatment plan we figured that we'd tell him when it's closer to when it actually begins. We told him about two weeks before her surgery. We all held it in for about three weeks. After her surgery she soon began radiation. She then got quite

sick from the radiation and infections from the radiation as well. All this while recovering and having physical therapy for surgery. She also went to work the days she had radiation and worked from home through most of her surgery recovery. Everyone was coming to visit and help take care of my brother and I. My grandparents set up a “meal train” where everyone signs up to bring us dinner once a week. This really helped my mom and dad out. It also helped all of us not feel so alone. It was clear we weren’t fighting this alone. It was a really terrifying year or two but she made it and has been cancer free for 7 years now. For this square I illustrated the commonly known pink breast cancer sash. I added a purple shadow and yellow background. I chose these colors because of the timing of her cancer. I had just begun high school and it was really scary because my mom was sick. I often wished to go back to the year before where I was in middle school. I used purple and yellow, my middle school’s school colors to represent this wish to go back in time.

Maternal Side

Shovel Pin

My maternal grandparents had my mom at a very young age; my grandmother was 19 and my grandfather was 21. My grandpa began going to community college and getting construction certifications. He was introduced to the waste water industry and stayed in it for nearly 50 years. Their family lived in San Diego until my mom was 12 and then they settled in Mission when my mom graduated from high school. My mother and uncle both joined the water industry. My mother eventually left but my uncle still works in the industry and is extremely successful. His son, my cousin, is working in the industry in Arizona too. The shovel symbolizes a shovel clip that everyone with a certain amount of years in the industry receives. My grandfather, my mother, and my uncle all have one. There are two to show my mom and uncle succeeding by continuing tradition.

Arizona

My maternal great grandmother, Nine Mae Barnes, was born in 1925 in Prescott, Arizona. In 1930 her family moved to San Diego, California. This is where she went to school and raised her three sons, one of them being my grandfather. My grandfather would take my cousins and me out to Arizona during the summers to visit our family that is out there. He would tell us how lucky we are that there is air conditioning. He said that his family would drive through the night so it was cooler; still, a large box of ice in the center of the car was necessary. Going back to Arizona and spending time with our family there was always important to him. I

depicted my great grandmother's move from Arizona to California by using the skyline of both cities; Arizona when she was born and San Diego when she moved there.

Bowling Ball

My maternal great grandmother, Nina Barnes, was an excellent bowler. I don't have many memories of her but I remember her super deep 9 ft swimming pool and how she had two houses. One for her and one for her mom, I always thought that was sweet. The interior of her house was still stuck in the 70s but it was in an endearing grandmother way. My mother's memory of her is not anything like the older woman I met. She was athletic and driven. I chose this to symbolize her because it is always what I think of when I think of her or even San Diego. She was the best bowler in her, having bowled a perfect 300 several times. Opening a bottle one evening the glass cut her so severely the nerves in the dominant hand were permanently damaged. She then taught herself to bowl with her left hand and got so good she bowled a perfect 300 with that hand too. I wanted to honor her passion and pride for her talent at the sport. I chose to represent her with a bowling ball rolling across the square. I chose a teal background because I inherited a teal bowling shirt from her when she passed. I decided to depict the bowling ball as purple because it was her favorite color; my mother picked out a bright purple dress for me to attend her funeral.

My Grandparent's First Date

My maternal grandparents began dating on October 12th, 1962. As she tells it in a text message to me "We went to dinner at The Gourmet Room at Town and Country and went to the Loma theater in Point Loma to see the movie Cleopatra with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard

Burton. Papa bought a suit for it and I borrowed a dress from a girlfriend because I didn't have any semi dressy dresses." My grandparents are the only couple close to me that was together when I grew up and is still together. Although they bicker and drive each other crazy; their story always warms my heart. They are truly better together and are like grandparents from a Hallmark movie?. They are so loving and are constantly proving/providing infinite love for my mom, my brother, and me. They moved down the street from us when my dad passed to help my mom and sent money to my ex-boyfriend on his birthday because everyone in his family forgot. I decided to depict their union by abstracting elements from the menu of the restaurant they had their first date at, The Gourmet Room at Town and Country. I found a copy of it from 1962 and used the cranes and the stars on the cover to make my square. I used red as the background because it was the background of the menu.

Education

My mother was the first woman in her family to graduate from college. She graduated from San Diego State in 1988 with a degree in Telecommunications, Film, Radio and Television. My mom talks about it in terms of her high school education

All the women in the family didn't work outside the home in careers. I wanted to have a career as a psychologist or in broadcasting. My high school had English classes in a wide range of classes that included broadcast media and journalism. I loved it and researched college options in broadcast communications. SDSU had a great program in Television, Communications and Film. It was a great merge of journalism and broadcasting.

England

A great aunt of mine had the same love for ancestry research as I do. She did a deep dive in the 1960s using a family bible. This bible was printed in the 1830s and has been in my family since then. It contains everyone's birth, death, descendants, as well as obituaries or newspaper clippings if available. It was given to me for this project. My aunt traced our family to our origins in North America. We come from the Lovelands who arrived in 1638. "Widow" Loveland arrived in Wethersfield, Connecticut with her three sons. From her sons came Abigail Smith who married John Quincy Adams the 2nd president of the United States and birthed the 6th (their son) John Adams. We are related to them through Abigail. I chose to do more research on where the Lovelands resided in England. They lived in Norwich, England. Through my research I was able to find that they were a family of merchants that lived across a field from a church. There was a photo of the church including the large field surrounding it available. It is suspected the drawing is an almost exact view of what they saw out their front door since the church has not changed since they were alive. I used this image to attempt to tie in and feel a connection to my more distant relatives. I abstracted it by changing the colors, I wanted to keep the view of the church somewhat recognizable.

Avocados

My great-great grandfather Fredrick J. Hansen has always been a mythical figure to me. Everyone speaks of him so highly and he continues to make impacts with his foundation. My great grandmother, Rose M. Cady was his adoptive daughter. I became familiar with him through the signs from his farm and antiques that my family kept of his. My grandmother has a sign directing passersbys to his farm. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1888 and worked his way up in

the business world in Chicago. He moved to San Diego, California in the mid 1920s. He bought lots of land on Mt. Helix and began an avocado farm. It was quite fruitful. He had a beautiful home that my grandma and mother had the privilege of visiting frequently growing up. A biography that my grandma sent to me I feel best tells his story. It was sent just as a document so the original source is unknown.

How does a poor immigrant make a fortune, survive setbacks, and leave the world a better place? As an immigrant to the United States with only a fourth-grade education, Fred J. Hansen employed brilliant entrepreneurial skills, innovative spirit, and perseverance to enhance the lives of his family, his community, and, eventually, inspire young people from all over the world...In January of 1925, Fred J Hansen stood near the top of a 1,300-foot peak. He could see the city of San Diego nearly fifteen miles away, the blue rim of the Pacific beyond, the distant Coronado Islands to the south, and a view of the mountains if he faced east. Around him grew scrubby bushes and dry brush among rocks and huge boulders. A cool breeze refreshed him from his hike up the dusty trail. If he could return to any of his former abodes that day—the tiny farm on the island of Ronne, Denmark where he'd chopped wood as a boy, or the “urban jungle” of Chicago when his penniless family first arrived in 1888, or in Waukegan or Canada—he might be seeing snow and ice instead of a cloudless sky and bright sunshine.

Paternal Side

Chicago

My great grandparents began their family in Evanston, Illinois. There they had 9 kids, some were twins. My grandmother was the first girl, she was the fourth child. My great grandparents worked for rich families in Chicago as maids or butlers and were gone most of their children's lives because they were working. My grandmother would often complain about cooking and explain it was because she cooked for all of them as soon as she was able until she was married and moved out of her familial home. This piece has the current Chicago skyline behind their familial home in Evanston, Illinois. I placed the skyline halfway through the house to illustrate the dividing of my great-grandparents time between work and home.

Rancho

I was able to piece together where my paternal grandmother's family were likely enslaved. It was in Abbeville, South Carolina. The man's name was Armistead Burt, he was a part of congress until he moved back in 1863 to oversee his Orange Hill Plantation in Abbeville. His mansion hosted the Confederate president and is known as the death place of the confederacy as it is where the president decided to end the war. It is now a wedding venue.

My paternal great grandmother (my dad's maternal grandma), Jessie Davis, was born in Abbeville in 1907. The census lists her family as farmers and farm laborers through her childhood. The man who enslaved her ancestors was also the man to write South Carolina's "Black" laws that made life unbearable for her and her family. As a

young woman she moved to Chicago with my great grandfather. We all call her granny or grandmommy. Their family grew quite a bit once they arrived in Illinois. She had nine kids so there were eleven Dunns total. My grandmother was the first to really leave home without being taken by the military like her brothers. She took my grandfather and dad to Oakland, California. The rest of the family continued to grow in Chicago as more grandchildren were born. Granny ended up moving to California as well. She moved to Fresno where her eldest son had become famous in the area for being the first Black doctor in that region. There she took in and ended up raising several of her grandchildren. Over the years more family moved to Fresno and still after her passing we have her precious house. When in Fresno grandmommy's house isn't referred to as grandmommy's house it's called Rancho, named after the street it's on. All the houses are named after their street names but of course Rancho is the most important and is always the meeting ground.



Figure 1, Finished Rancho square with border

Dunn Smile

The Dunns are my paternal grandmother, Patricia Dunn's, family. Although I did not inherit it, everyone on that side of my family has gapped front teeth. My grandma used to tell me that everyone knew she was a Dunn growing up from her smile. Her older brothers were very popular football and track stars whose smiles were famous around their school and all of Evanston. From the teeth to the super strong high cheekbones, she definitely has the Dunn smile. At my great grandmother's house, Rancho, there is a photo wall of everyone in the family and it is full of their gappy smiles. I decided to use my dad's smile to represent the Dunn smiles as he was the one to introduce me.

Basketball

My dad was always a basketball guy. He would obsess over college basketball all March for March Madness and before my brother and I were born or while we were little he would go with my mom or his friends. He was known as "The Commish" in his March Madness group. My dad organized it and every year we would get tons of checks and cash from all his friends via the mail. My mom would count and note everyone who sent money for my dad after dinner those weeks. My dad coached my youth basketball team; we were called Orange Crush. The trophy company messed up and we all received Orange Crutch trophies. He also coached my brother. Their team was a bit more serious and competitive. They went to the championships every year and the team won the last year my dad coached. He would take us to Warriors games, events, and camps. We were lucky to run into Steph Curry (a super famous Warrior's player) in an elevator.

After that day my dad would complain about not asking for a photo too. He was way more excited than me or my brother. I chose to depict a basketball by abstracting the different parts of the ball. I chose to keep the orange of the ball so that it is easily recognizable. I chose red for the background and blue for the outline because my dad would always wear his K-Swiss to play ball with us on the patio.



Figure 2 , Finished basketball square with borders

Oakland

My paternal grandparents moved to Oakland from Chicago in 1966. My grandmother was a nurse at the Oakland Jail and Highland Hospital. My grandfather came to run his own photography shop on Broadway in Oakland. They lived on Grand Ave, just down the street from

the famous Grand Lake Theater. My grandma, my dad, and I went for a stroll on Grand a few months before he passed. My grandma pointed out where they would go for Black Panther Party meetings, in their friend's chicken shop. My dad pointed out where he would meet up with his friends and take the bus to the city. Both of my grandparents were involved in protests in the 1960s and early 70s. I remember my grandma telling me about how my Papa Bill was arrested in Chicago during a MLK protest. She would always note that the only reason she didn't get arrested too was because she was pushing my dad, who was an infant, in his stroller. They were both good friends with Huey P. Newton. My grandmother said he would come over often because he was good friends with them as a couple. She said that he would bring over his different wives as well for them to meet, one time three at once.

My dad would take me for drives as a child and show me his old house, my godfather's house, their k-12 schools, and pretty much every other significant place. Going into Oakland and seeing these special places was always meaningful to me and brought me closer to my dad. I decided to depict the significance of Oakland to my family by illustrating my grandparents house on Grand Ave in front of Lake Merritt a staple of Oakland. And something their house sat down the street from. I chose the Golden State Warriors (it used to be the Oakland Warriors) colors blue and yellow for the house and background. I decided to leave the lake green as it is in real life.

Miami

My grandpa, Billy Taylor, was born in Miami, Florida in 1934. His mother Cleo Watkins was a maid and his father Kenneth was a landscaper. My great grandfather Kenneth immigrated

to the United States in 1923 from Nassau, Bahamas. My grandfather, Billy, didn't like talking about his childhood. My dad would go and visit his grandpa Ken in the summers and said they did some landscaping together. The naturalization papers list my great grandfather as 20 years old, white (with medium complexion), 6'2 , being 145 pounds, having dark brown hair and light brown eyes, and a scar on his left arm when he entered the country on October 13th, 1923. He was not white but mixed native Bahaman (Taino) and British. He sailed here on the "Frances E" to be the service manager at a tire company. I decided to focus on his immigration for this square. I illustrated the island, Nassau, that he was from in front of a palm tree that signifies Miami. I chose to use vibrant colors for this square to represent the tropical climate.

Peach Cobbler

My great grandmother, Jessie Dunn, was quite the cook. My mom describes my dad's love for her for peach cobbler " I remember she stayed with Daddy and I for a week about a year after we had gotten married and moved to Alameda. She promised to show me how to make all your dad's favorites - including peach cobbler. she and dad went shopping for all the ingredients, they went to 3 stores to get the best peaches. She came home and showed us how to make it. It took 2 hours. The crust was like butter as he used to say, flaky and the peaches were firm but soft and the sauce was sweet but not too sweet. We never added ice cream, it was perfect without it. She used to make it in a huge catering pan that took up the whole rack of our oven. We ate it for days and days. He didn't even take any to work, it was all for home.

That trip she showed us how to make her roasted chicken, greens and biscuits. I could never make them like her. She never used a recipe, she just did it from feel.” I wish I had the chance to taste her cobbler, but hearing stories about how it brought them together is just as sweet.

I chose to fill the quilt in with green. Green is my favorite color and I see it as something extra to tie my own story/experience into the stories of my ancestors. I have always loved green. Growing up my brother and I’s room was half seafoam green (for me) and gray (for him), we each got two walls. My parents didn’t want to know my gender when I was born so all my baby clothes and toys were green and yellow. I think that's why I like it so much. It’s always been a neutral for me. I specifically chose this shade of green because it is more of a gem tone and fits into the Kool Aid color palette.

I was introduced to the palette through the contemporary Black quiltmaker Bisa Butler. Butler frequently uses the palette. The Kool Aid color palette was coined by the group Afri Cobra in the 1960s in Chicago. It's a color palette made by Black people intuitively. It uses vibrant and saturated colors as well as gem tones, speaking to our roots in Africa and the dyes used there. Along with “american colors” like denim blue.

Butler's image sourcing was a large influence for me as well. She uses photos of Black people from the National archive, however, these images don't provide a name, place, or time. Many of the photographs are of people standing on the street. Butler says they are forgotten because they were never correctly acknowledged. And they were nearly actually forgotten until she accessed them. Although Butler's quilts don't provide details such as dates or names they provide a place to properly remember this person. My quilt is a place for me to properly remember, acknowledge, and make a connection to my ancestors.

These subjects are tender so I wanted to abstract the images I used to protect myself. I have been interested in abstraction for some time but Rosie Lee Tompkins and the Gee's Bend quiltmakers inspired me to bring that into my own quilt. A quote stuck with me as I looked at Tompkins abstract quilts and quilts of Gee's Bend Maude Southwell Wahlman states in her book **African Arts** (1986)¹ "Their contribution suggests that the unique way in which any culture encodes beauty in the seen world is an indispensable tool for coping with an indifferent or hostile reality." (Wahlman, 76) Rosie Lee Tompkins grew up quilting but did not begin quilting seriously until the 1980s. Tompkins enjoyed keeping her family and art fame separate. Despite this her works are deeply personal. For example, Tompkins' work *Three Sixes* (1986) is about her family member's birthdays that are all on the 6th². I really appreciate this gift of personal information with boundaries. She redefined the tradition of quilt making to unify the subject and material while abstracting her experience for personal safety.

¹ Wahlman, Maude Southwell. "African Symbolism in Afro-American Quilts." *African Arts* 20, no. 1 (1986): 68–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3336568>.

² Smith, Roberta. "The Radical Quilting of Rosie Lee Tompkins." *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/26/arts/design/rosie-lee-tompkins-quilts.html>.

After I completed the abstraction of my chosen stories digitally, the design of the quilt was complete. (see fig. 1) The making process began. I didn't piece it together like a typical quilt. I decided to create my own way of constructing the quilt as it speaks to me creating my own experience. I wanted to find a physical solution to fit all of my ancestor's stories as well as my own experience into one piece.

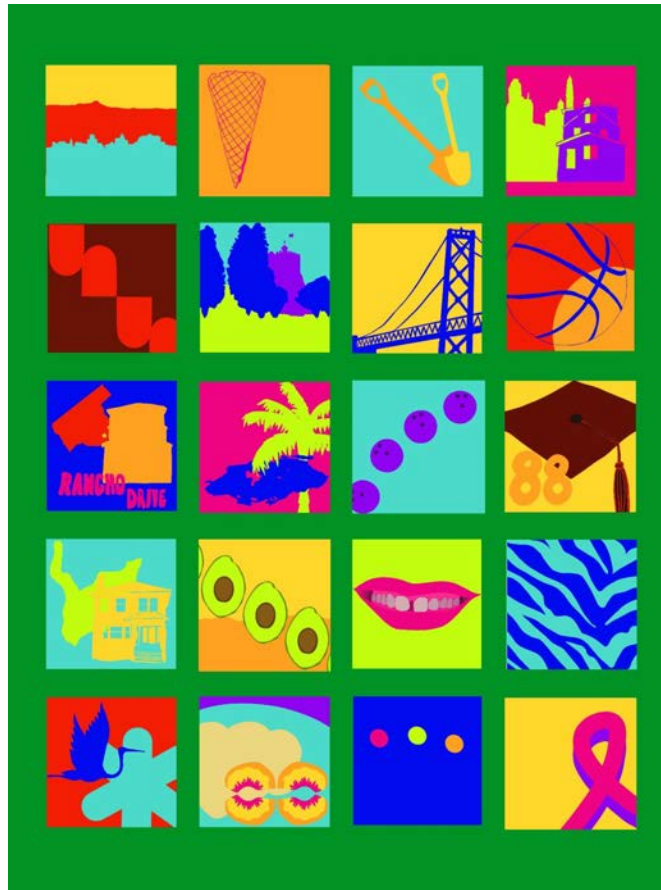


Figure 3, Digital quilt design

I began by gathering my materials. I decided to use embroidery mesh as my substrate and acrylic yarn as my mark making tool. I traced my designs on to the mesh to begin each square. Next I braided the different colors of yarn required to fill in the square. I then hand sewed each braid into the shape of the design. (see fig. 2) Once all the colors were where they needed to be I trimmed the edges and the square was done. Each square took a different amount of time but I

averaged out to about three squares a week. It was then time to make the borders. I cut and taped the embroidery mesh into 20 fitted frames for each of the squares. I then braided, sewed, and trimmed with the same method as the squares.



Figure 4, Back of Zebra square, showing sewing approach

Throughout this process I learned a few new techniques. I thankfully learned how to embroider. I had experimented with it for my last senior show of sorts but had refused to touch it since then. I was struggling with translating the amount of detail I initially designed into braids. It was difficult to have it super clean and detailed with even the smallest braids possible. (see fig. 3) My mentor, Sara, helped me to realize that I could simply embroider with the yarn to achieve the look I was searching for. I had been experimenting with applique and using buttons and

patches on top of my designs to enhance them. But embroidery allowed me to enhance my design while keeping the all yarn look I preferred. Before I began the quilt I performed various tests for how I will tie off the braid, to avoid them coming unraveled. I tried burning, using hair beads, and boiling the ends. I began the quilt by using small rubber hair ties. but quickly realized that the embroidery mesh was rigid enough to act as a board to tie off the braids. I also began the quilt by using white embroidery floss. This added a lot of time to my process. I had to be very careful to not allow the thread to show because it didn't match the yarn. I also had to go back after trimming and tease the braids to cover the white thread. On my fifth or sixth square I realized that if I separate my yarn I have thread, that is an exact color match, to my braids. Making the quilt was definitely a learning process and almost every time I had my weekly mentor meeting I had found a better way to do something or learned more about the materials. I am proud of the finished product and to be able to stand in front of it today. (see fig. 4) However, most of the work I have done was internal and had to do with the acceptance of who I am and came from and refusal to be one race or the other.



Figure 5, Close up of Arizona square; Showing my struggle with detail



Figure 6, Final work

Investigating the lives of my ancestors was exciting and opened my eyes to the nearly infinite amount of stories and perspectives within my own family.

This is something I realized early on however I didn't begin to consider the depth in our differences until my brother began school. We both have the same parents but turned out looking different; It's especially noticeable in our skin tones and curl patterns. As I remember it we often clung to one another in new spaces. We were usually the only two kids of color so stuck together. I thought his experience growing up would mimic mine since we were the same in my eyes. I realized our experiences were very different when he began elementary school. He was getting accused of everything that went wrong in the classroom. I remember my parents constantly getting calls and emails from his teacher. I was really confused how Miles got into so much trouble, he was always relatively reserved. The things he did do he usually got away with since he was so sneaky. It was his fifth grade graduation when it really clicked for me how blatantly racist the school has been and how vastly different our experiences were. The graduation ceremony was over and all the families were meeting their students back in their classrooms. The graduates were all sitting at their desks awaiting class photos. All of the Black and brown children, including my brother, were seated in the very back row towards the corner of the classroom. My family was awestruck at the sight, and were wondering if it had been this way the whole school year. I couldn't help but remember where my seat used to be in the classroom next door; the front row. At that moment I felt guilty and ashamed that I was treated better. I now realize that I am not the one that should feel guilt and I shouldn't be ashamed that I fit better into the mold white supremacy has casted. Our differing experiences have brought us as siblings closer. I think it's been difficult for both of us since our dad passed to figure out who we are and where we stand(racially). Miles was 12 and I was 16 so we were both in the stages of finding

and creating our identity. A huge part of who we are disappeared and It was hard, at least for me, to figure out what I still had “claim to” after his passing. It’s often Miles’s teenage arrogant attitude that snaps me out of that and reminds me I have a claim to whatever I’d like to (within reason of course).

I am thankful for my ancestors and what they have provided me with. This project is about me illustrating my love for both sides of my ancestry regardless of how history has pitted them against each other. All of my work on my ancestry is not only for me but also for my brother, Miles. We may have different experiences but we come from the same people. My goal for this work is to continue to add squares about Miles and me and then pass it down as an heirloom of sorts so our descendants. It is also for people to consider what being bi-racial in the United States is like. And to consider what white supremacist ideologies still exist in a nation that is becoming more mixed. I illustrated my struggle with the push and pull between both of my races with my braids and embraced their differences and histories by sharing their stories in one piece.



Figure 7, Final work in 157 gallery



Figure 8, Close up of squares



Figure 9, My work and I

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Artist Statement

Veronica Taylor is in her last semester as a GFA major at Pacific Northwest College of Art. She grew up in Northern California and moved to Portland, Oregon in 2018 to attend college. Taylor often takes inspiration from her upbringing as a bi-racial child and the stories of her ancestors. She uses a variety of materials to abstract the subject of her works. The initial ambiguity of her works provide an entry point for the viewer. Taylor's goal is to make works that are visually intriguing but also speak to her experience as a bi-racial woman.

Proposal

Veronica Taylor

Braided Quilt

Fall, 2021

Sara Siestrem

Sara Siestrem

Proposal

For my thesis I propose to make a braided quilt about my ancestry and my internal struggle with being mixed. The braids symbolize my attempts to be one race or the other. It symbolizes all the little things on both sides that make me wish I was just the one. The acrylic yarn I plan on braiding with symbolizes the inauthenticity in that wish. It being acrylic and “man-made” speaks to me creating my own experience with tools I have available. These tools are my ancestry and it informs my existence.

Maude Southwell Wahlman discusses how Black art has improvised and grown throughout our history in the U.S. in her book African Arts (1986)³ “Their contribution suggests that the unique way in which any culture encodes beauty in the seen world is an indispensable tool for coping with an indifferent or hostile reality.” (Wahlman, 76) Looking at contemporary Black artists with this quote in mind reveals a variety of practices and traditions that have been fabricated to fit the needs of the artist. Rosie Lee Tompkins grew up quilting but did not begin quilting seriously until the 1980s. Tompkins enjoyed keeping her family and art fame separate. Despite this her works are deeply personal. For example, Tompkins’ work *Three Sixes* (1986) is about her family member’s birthdays that are all on the 6th⁴. I really appreciate this gift of personal information with boundaries. She redefined the tradition of quilt making to unify the subject and material while abstracting her experience for personal safety.

For my quilt I will be making six squares about my immediate family and seven for my maternal and paternal lineage. There is a chart of the squares and what they represent at the end

³ Wahlman, Maude Southwell. “African Symbolism in Afro-American Quilts.” *African Arts* 20, no. 1 (1986): 68–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3336568>.

⁴ Smith, Roberta. “The Radical Quilting of Rosie Lee Tompkins.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/26/arts/design/rosie-lee-tompkins-quilts.html>.

of this document. I am currently researching and speaking to my family members to better inform my squares. I have 14 of the 20 total squares designed. Once I finish designing all 20 I will begin braiding.

I will braid single braids in each color I need for a design; then hand sew them onto fabric that has my design drawn out. My construction is informed by Bisa Butler's. Butler layers sheer fabric to create shadows and I would like to do the same as this technique allows me to add more detail. After all 20 squares are completed I will arrange and sew them onto a larger piece of fabric. I will then braid long strands for borders and to fill in the rest of the quilt. In this part of the assembly, I would like to address the hardships my father's side has faced because they were Black. I will be creating a red border around the squares that are/were affected by redlining, a restriction legally imposed on them because of the color of their skin. I will also be doing borders around the squares where the white side of my family prospered because of the color of their skin; these borders will be red, white, and blue. I chose these colors because they make up the U.S. flag; It symbolizes what my maternal side has gained throughout the formation and growth of this nation. The flag's colors also symbolize traits within our country. Red is valor, blue is justice, and white is purity. I think it's interesting to consider this meaning when comparing the borders I plan to make. Making these borders will speak to the social and political issues I'd like to address in an abstract way that provides me with security.

Overall, I'd like the quilt to be 5 x 6 ft. As I am researching I am realizing that there are documents, photos, and items that I'd like to share. I am figuring out a way to incorporate them; I am considering some kind of collage of the materials I collected. I am considering having images or objects that correspond with each square. I imagine them mirroring each other or having the quilt hanging in front of the collection.

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