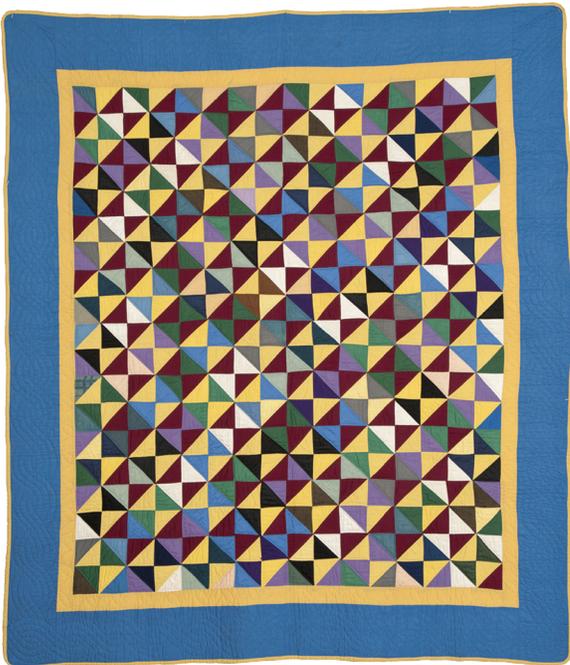


Amish Quilts at the Flint Institute of Arts

(Flint, MI) The Flint Institute of Arts will open the exhibition **Amish Quilts** to the public on September 10. The exhibit will feature Amish quilts dating from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century from the private collection of Marsha and Tom French and illustrate the history of Amish quilt making and the importance of this ongoing tradition. Examples from Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana demonstrate noteworthy distinctions between regions and reflect the creative choices in color, pattern and styles passed down through generations of Amish women within the framework of the structured society in which they live.

The Amish are a religious sect that emigrated from Europe to America around 1730 in an effort to escape persecution. Encouraged by William Penn's experiment in religious tolerance they settled near Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Often confused with their Mennonite cousins, the Amish led by Jakob Ammann, broke away from the Swiss Mennonites in the 1600s primarily over differences involving the strict enforcement of shunning and other customs. Today, the distinction between the two groups is primarily that of dress and manner of worship. Amish communities are located in twenty-four states across the U.S. and in Canada, although 80% of the nearly 150,000 Amish reside in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana.

The quilts highlighted in this exhibition were intended as "Sunday" quilts made for special occasions or as gifts to family and friends. By the 1960's quilts were being made for sale to the "English" or non-Amish tourists or collectors. After the landmark American Quilts exhibition held at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1971, these formerly utilitarian objects acquired the new status of works of art and demand for them grew. This elevation of quilts to the level of art by the outside world was in direct contradiction to Amish beliefs. The creation of quilts for sale was the compromise they accepted as a way of supporting their Amish lifestyle.



Amish quilts are known for their exceptional needlework, colors and graphic designs. As explained by quilt experts Dee Dadik and Molly Butler, "Pennsylvania quilts are often characterized by the use of large pieces, bold saturated colors and elaborate quilting. Ohio quilts show a preference for a pieced block with smaller pieces, a format with the blocks set on point and much use of the color black as a background color. Indiana quilts use more white and light green in a block format with small pieces." Most of the antique quilts in this exhibition were made from scraps of fabric used in the outer ware of garments. The more colorful pieces came from scraps of children's clothing where there was more flexibility from the rules that strictly governed the color and style worn by adults. So it was through the tradition of quilt making that Amish women were able to develop an outlet for creativity and personal expression.

The **Amish Quilt** exhibition will continue at the Flint Institute of Arts through November 13. Information and schedules for related programs including: lectures, teacher workshops, films and children's activities will be posted on the FIA website www.flintarts.org or call 810-234-1695. The FIA is located just two blocks off I-475 in the Cultural Center Park between the University of Michigan-Flint and Mott Community College. Museum hours are Mon-Wed and Fri 12p-5p; Thu 12p-9p; Sat 10a-5p and Sun 1p-5p. There is a charge for non-members to the exhibit. Saturdays are Target Free.

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