

# OCULA

## The Gee's Bend Quiltmakers at Alison Jacques Gallery

1 December 2020

Defined by blazing colours and sharp geometric forms, the quilts created by the Gee's Bend Collective—a remote community of quilters located in Wilcox County in West Alabama—embody almost 100 years of American history.

Since the 1930s, the unique compositional and experimental processes of these quilts have been passed down through three generations, spanning the history of a community that has endured slavery, tenant farming, and the Great Depression.

Originating from a remote hamlet in the bend of the Alabama River, the styles of these quilts have developed outside of art historical classifications.



Ethel Young, *'Crosscut Saw' - (quiltmaker's name) - five diamond-pieced rows with bars* (c. 1970). Cotton. 182.9 x 177.8 cm. Courtesy Souls Grown Deep Foundation and Alison Jacques Gallery, London. © Ethel Young.

Assembled from fabric scraps and cut-offs, the quilts were developed out of scarcity, their eccentric designs being shared with other members of the community when hung outside to air or dry.

These designs form an important chapter of American art, and while embodying a collective past, they represent 'hope for the future', with quilts created by grandmothers, mothers, and daughters on view at Alison Jacques Gallery from 2 December.

Organised in collaboration with Souls Grown Deep Foundation—a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and promoting the work of African American artists from the Southern United States—this exhibition includes works by artists such as Rita Mae Pettway, who is showing alongside her grandmother Anna E. Pettway, as well as work from the 1950s by Aolar Mosely, showing with her daughter Mary Lee Bendolph, and her granddaughter Essie Bendolph Pettway.



Rita Mae Pettway, *'Pig in the pen' -block style* (2019). Cotton / polyester blend. 210.8 x 210.8 cm. Courtesy the artist and Alison Jacques Gallery, London. © Rita Mae Pettway / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and DACS, London.

In recent decades, these designs have been included in institutional exhibitions, with the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York staging exhibitions of the quilts in 2002.

Alison Jacques Gallery provides the opportunity to learn about the history of these works for the first time in Europe.—[0]