



20TH
BIENNIAL
COLLECTOR'S
EDITION

QUILT NATIONAL 2017

THE BEST OF
CONTEMPORARY QUILTS

Dairy Barn Arts Center

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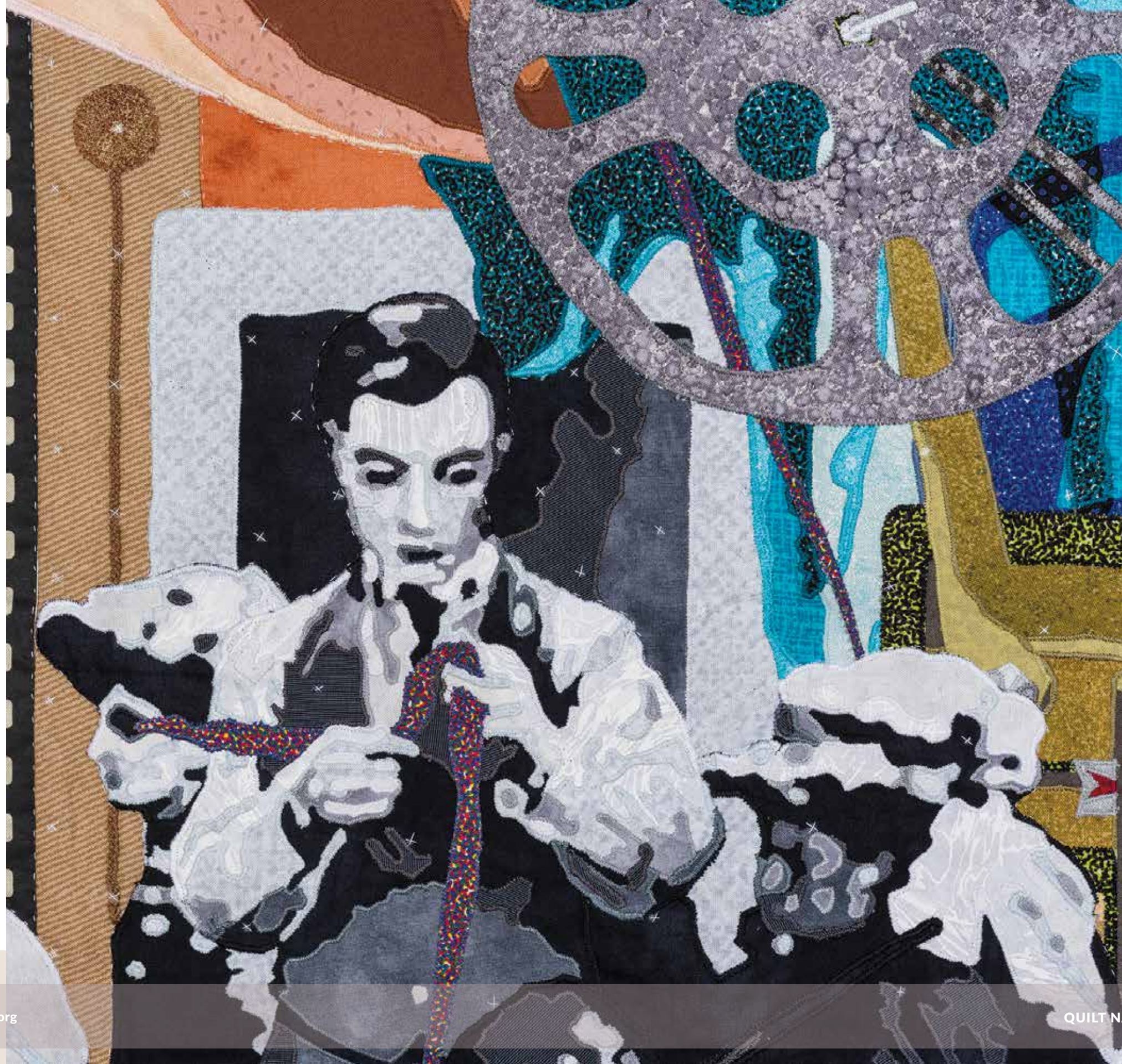
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*Dedicated to Karen Nulf,
former Quilt National
catalog graphic designer,
board member, and friend.*



THE DAIRY BARN ARTS CENTER

USE & REUSE: THE VALUE OF PRESERVATION

Many of today's artists make use of recycled materials such as bottle caps, paper, and fabric. The terms upcycle, recycle, reimagine, repurpose, and adaptive reuse pepper the statements of artists and curators alike. Many of these words are new to our language, but the concepts of reusing material, of eliminating waste, and of preserving our past are deeply embedded in our culture—quilt making, which sprang from the desire to make use of fragments of fabric, embodies these ideals.

What more fitting a site for *Quilt National*, the premiere global exhibition of contemporary quilt art, than the Dairy Barn Art Center of Athens, Ohio, a building of Georgian Revival architectural influence that had fallen into disuse and was saved from demolition by a group of artists? The artists, led by Harriet and Ora Anderson, reimagined and created a future by preserving a piece of the past.

It has been said that, at its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.

-William Murtagh, first keeper of the National Register of Historic Places

Built in 1914 by The Athens Asylum for the Insane (later called the Athens State Hospital), the building served as a dairy barn, which furnished milk and dairy products for the institution and also provided therapeutic work and job training for patients, until the mid-1960s when the dairy was finally closed.

As Ora Anderson told the tale, one day in 1977, he and his wife, Harriet, an art teacher and professional artist, were enjoying fresh-caught fish and cocktails on their deck with five of their friends. They were lamenting the lack of places to display art in the Athens area, when Harriett said that there was an old, unused dairy barn out at the mental health

center that might be available. It had been abandoned for ten years.

The seven of them drove out to the barn right then to have a look, and found a crew already demolishing one of the outbuildings. The contractor told them that he had a contract to tear it all down. Faced with that inevitability, Harriet dug in her heels and said, "No, this is not going to happen!"¹



Harriet promptly crafted a letter to the Ohio Director of Properties for the Mental Health Centers of Ohio outlining a plan to turn the building into an arts center, to preserve an "architectural gem" and to "foster and preserve the skills, folk arts, and talents so abundant in Southeastern Ohio." She asked for time, "time to explore the possibilities, time to explore and plan curriculum, time to study financing, and time to determine the total extent of interest throughout the area."²

The following Monday, on Harriet's instructions, Ora, a former state lobbyist, went to Columbus to talk to his friend Governor Jim Rhodes about the barn. At the end of that meeting, the governor picked up the phone, called the director of the mental health department for the state, and told him that Ora wanted the old dairy barn, and he was to make sure Ora got it.

And so began the journey from dairy barn to art center.

The group of artists were given a \$5.00-a-year lease for three years, during which time they were to establish an art center that was recognized by the greater art community in the state. If they succeeded, the barn would be given to the organization they established.

The artists set about cleaning up this long-abandoned cow barn—which was no small feat. The milking area, including the gutters that held cow manure, had not been cleaned out for ten years; the troughs that had held feed, and the stanchions that secured the cows while they were being milked were still in place; the hayloft, full of "record setting cobwebs" and mounds of old, dusty, and broken-down hay, had gaps between the floorboards so that hay hung down through the cracks into the large area below. The roof needed repair.

The intrepid band of artists, which quickly grew to 10, and then 15, chipped out the manure troughs with pick and shovel. They wrote grants and enlisted volunteers to repair the enormous roof, to physically remove the stanchions, and to fill and seal the newly-emptied manure gutters and feed troughs with concrete. They also formed a nonprofit corporation, applied for grants, and began creating programming.

In 1978 The Athens State Hospital Cow Barn was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as being of value for its architectural, agricultural, and social history, and in 1979 they mounted their first full-scale art exhibition, *Quilt National '79*, thereby transforming an ending into a beginning.

— DairyBarn.org



¹ "Ora Anderson on Harriet and the Dairy Barn," www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbTixTuoHEc&list=PLDA69A7F4495AFBF

² "Letter to AMH from Harriet Anderson," <http://dairybarn.org>

While *Quilt National* has always embodied the transformations taking place in the world of quilting, this year is especially exciting, as we celebrate the historic 20th biennial exhibition. It represents a watershed moment in the history of the Dairy Barn, *Quilt National*, and the contemporary quilt itself. Much has changed since the first exhibition. The Dairy Barn has grown into a world-class exhibition venue and *Quilt National* has become known as a leader in the world of contemporary quilts. We hope that through the exhibition presented on these pages you will be inspired by the breadth of work presented, discover the compelling backstory behind our organization, and feel a connection with the rich history of the contemporary quilt and the people who have contributed to *Quilt National* throughout the years.

This is one of the strongest Quilt National exhibitions we have had in a long time! It includes a profoundly wide variety of approaches and techniques. There are so many new voices with really strong work as well as some artists whose work we have seen for many years but who have clearly been challenging themselves. It is going to be a smash!

– Nancy Crow
Quilt National Co-Founder

Pursuing the goal of being accepted into Quilt National has helped artists push themselves farther than they thought they could go. For that reason, Quilt National has definitely impacted all quilters, surface designers, and quilt artists.

– Tracy Rieger
Director, Quilt Surface Design Symposium

The launch of Quilt National was integral to the growth of the art quilt movement. Quilt National provided a structure for burgeoning quilt artists to come together. Quilt National was, and continues to be, an incubator for the contemporary quilt movement.

– Martha Sielman
Executive Director, Studio Art Quilt Associates, Inc.



THE DAIRY BARN ARTS CENTER

