

ADVOCACYNET 361
Monday May 3, 2021

Quilt Show in North Carolina Tells the Story of COVID Across Three Continents

An art museum comforts an anxious community



A major exhibition of advocacy quilts in North Carolina tells the story of the COVID pandemic in all its frustrating detail through 138 deeply personal stories from Asia, Africa and the US that have been painted or embroidered onto fabric.

Dazzling yet at the same time deeply sobering, the exhibition opened on April 22 at [the Cameron Art Museum](#) in Wilmington NC. It is jointly sponsored by the museum and The Advocacy Project (AP).

Twenty-eight stories were commissioned by AP from Nepal, Zimbabwe and the US and assembled by American quilters. The remaining 110 squares were made by supporters of the Cameron Museum in the Wilmington area and put together by Bobbi Fitzsimmons, who is active at the museum and also coordinates AP's advocacy quilting program.

The exhibition is part of a global effort by AP to provide a creative outlet and encourage community initiatives during the crisis. Several artists attended the opening and said that the opportunity to tell their story – and be part of a community effort - had lifted their morale.



Connie Moser, from Wilmington, appliqued a blue heart in memory of her mother, who was diagnosed with COVID two days before she passed away at the age of 95. “Blue was her favorite color. It was important for me to have a way to make this tribute.”

Sadie Thomas, 5, and her mother Dorothy, also from Wilmington, used the project to record their disappointment when Sadie’s 4th birthday party had to be held online last year. They painted four candles and pictures of their Zoom invitees (photo) and now gain some consolation

from seeing their art featured alongside that of other pandemic sufferers.

“We are really thankful to be able to make something that expresses what we went through,” said Dorothy. “It is kind of cathartic to look back at the picture and be like ‘Oh my gosh!’”

Bobbi Fitzsimmons agreed that the quilts will provide a unique time capsule of a deeply depressing period. “(They) are going to be a record of this pandemic, and what we’ve all been through,” she said during an interview with local television. “The times when we were feeling lonely or desperate, we kept going. And hopefully we’re almost through this.”



While the crisis may be easing in the US, the exhibition is a stark reminder that the pandemic is worsening in other parts of the world.

One powerful quilt describes the harsh government lockdown in Zimbabwe, where cases are starting to rise. [The quilt was assembled by Colleen Ansbaugh in Wisconsin.](#)

COVID cases are surging in Nepal, which borders India and has relied heavily on Indian vaccines that are no longer available. The impact is described in painful detail in [seven](#)

[embroidered stories from midwest Nepal](#) that were quilted by Anne Watson, who herself came down with COVID-19 at Christmas (photo).

Anne was particularly moved by one square, made by Kushma Chaudhary, that shows a couple in Nepal resigned to death while a bulldozer disposes of bodies in a mass grave. “It was quite emotional. I was very lucky because I have such good medical facilities here. I can understand how difficult it must have been (in Nepal).”

Staff at the Cameron Museum distributed over 130 kits with fabric and markers in advance and were pleasantly surprised to get back 110 completed stories. This, they

said, showed the value of the museum as an emotional and cultural anchor for the community during the crisis.



The theme of community also features in many of the stories. Dr Kyle Horton used her square to celebrate scores of “superhero sewists and volunteers” from the area who have made over 10,000 facemasks for health centers. Several squares are dedicated to medical workers and vaccines.

Other stories celebrate simple acts of kindness. Layla Kherbouch is among nine students at the Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, who helped each other through the crisis and told their stories through embroidery. Layla’s square shows

her family offering care packages to needy families in her community. Layla and three other Wakefield artists attended the Wilmington exhibition (photo). **[Their quilt was assembled by Beth Suddaby.](#)**

This mixture of creativity and compassion continues to inspire. AP will shortly receive 40 powerful embroidered stories from the settlements of Kangemi and Kibera in Nairobi, where the virus is surging and the distribution of vaccines from India has been halted.

AP is also actively promoting the project. A team of skilled volunteers from **[Givology](#)**, the online giving platform, is producing a digital exhibition of the quilts. AP will shortly start work on a COVID quilt catalogue and post profiles of all the artists online.

- **[Contact us](#)** to tell your COVID story through art or embroidery!
- View press coverage of **[the Arlington quilt](#)** and **[Wilmington exhibition](#)**
- Meet the **[quilt artists from Zimbabwe](#)**
- Meet the **[quilt artists from Nepal](#)**
- Meet the **[quilt artists from Arlington](#)**
- **[Contact us](#)** to exhibit the COVID quilts.

