

DOUGLAS UDELL GALLERY

Biography for: Mary Lee Bendolph

Mary Lee Bendolph (b. 1935) and her daughter-in-law Louisiana Bendolph (b.1960) come from a strong tradition of quilt-making based in the small rural black community of Gees Bend in southwestern Alabama. The community, enclosed on three sides by a sharp bend in the Alabama River, has handed down through generations a unique quilt-making legacy.

The women of Gees Bend developed a distinctive, bold, and sophisticated quilting style based on traditional American and African American quilts. Their quilts combine simple geometric shapes such as bars, blocks, stripes, triangles and housetops. Often they work without patterns, prudently recycling worn-out clothing and letting the quirks of the material determine the form.

Using a technique called softground to produce these prints, Mary Lee and Louisiana lay each quilt on a copper plate coated with beeswax to produce an impression of the quilt. Next, the soft ground is etched in acid, transferring the impression of the quilt piece to the copper plate and recording all the seams, textures, and nuances of each different fabric. Then they hand-work the copper plates using the spitbite method, wielding a brush to paint a mixture of nitric acid, gum arabic, and water directly on the plate to create a watercolor effect. Once all of the plates have been made they are printed together to produce the final image.