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### **CREATED FROM THE FABRIC OF EVERYDAY LIFE, *THE IMPROVISATIONAL QUILTS OF SUSANA ALLEN HUNTER* OPENS MAY 10 AT THE GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM**

*Exhibition on view May 10 – August 25, 2013. Related programming includes weekend guided tours, hands-on studio activities for children and adults, and more*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., April 25, 2013** – The Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) announces *The Improvisational Quilts of Susana Allen Hunter*, on view May 10 through August 25, 2013, an exhibition of dynamic quilts from the collection of The Henry Ford. Susana Allen Hunter (1912–2005) used her innate flair for abstract design to create hundreds of colorful quilts throughout her lifetime, utilizing the fabric of everyday life—grain sacks, worn clothing, leftover fabric scraps, and more.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, Hunter lived in Wilcox County, Alabama, and created brightly-patterned quilts that reflected her life in that rural community as well as her experiences as an African-American woman. Though she did not consider herself an artist, Hunter turned the fabric of everyday life into eye-catching quilts with an abstract, asymmetrical and often modern aesthetic.

"There are many parallels between the quilts and works of art from other times, places, and media," said Cindy Buckner, Associate Curator at GRAM. "For example, the Interpretive Gallery within the exhibition makes the connection between improvisational jazz and Hunter's quilting process."

Hunter and her husband, Julius, made their living farming, growing crops such as cotton, corn, and potatoes. Wilcox County, also home to the quilting community of Gee's Bend, was among the poorest counties in the United States. Like everyone else in their community, the Hunters worked hard and resources were few. Hunter's genius was in creating beautiful, functional objects from what little material was available.

Quilts were fashioned from whatever fabrics were at hand. Blankets, bedspreads, and other household textiles were often reused and incorporated into quilts as backing, for pattern or color, and even as batting (filling material) to give a new quilt more warmth.

"She repurposed sacks from cornmeal, flour, and mule feed into her quilts—and even though these sacks came with instructions on how to remove the printing, she chose to incorporate the logos and text on the sacks into her design," said Buckner. "While Hunter did not necessarily set out to create works of art, she still made the same kinds of choices painters make, for example, when composing a painting."

Hunter's improvisation required a constant stream of creativity through the entire design process. Though she was working with preexisting quilt formats, such as strip and medallion quilts, she was not following a set pattern and made design decisions as she went. She worked quickly, using 3-4 stitches per inch, a number far fewer than other precisely constructed, strictly

decorative quilts. Hunter also often left her knots visible above the surface, which allowed her to create her quilts more rapidly. Since these quilts were functional items to keep her family and friends warm, she worked quickly to turn out a large number of quilts over the years.

**Interpretive Gallery:**

Explore the exhibition's Interpretive Gallery and immerse yourself in the creative process! Guests can experience the Quilt of Sound, an interactive website where they can create their own improvisational work of art by layering and juxtaposing sounds and images from nature. Click on different panels to develop a visual symphony combining textures and music, and discover how the musical elements respond to one another, forming new patterns and sounds.

In addition, guests can use one of the several iPods stationed in the gallery to listen to and explore spirituals and improvisational jazz, drawing a connection between Hunter's works and the creative processes of renowned jazz groups.

The Grand Rapids Art Museum presents a selection of Hunter's colorful quilts, on loan from The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan.

Learn more about this exhibition at [artmuseumgr.org](http://artmuseumgr.org).

**RELATED PROGRAMMING:**

**MAY**

**May 9** - Member Preview - 7:00-9:00 p.m. GRAM Members can preview the exhibition, join a lecture, and learn more about the works of art on view from GRAM docents (volunteer art educators) stationed throughout the galleries. Lecture: 7:30-8:00 p.m., featuring Jeanine Head Miller, Curator of Domestic Life at The Henry Ford. Docents in galleries: 8:00-9:00 p.m.

**May 9** - The After Party - 9:30 p.m. - Midnight. Free for GRAM Members, \$5 cover for non-members. Everyone is invited! Be among the first to view The Improvisational Quilts of Susana Allen Hunter. Enjoy a cash bar, live music by Antrim Dells, and galleries open until midnight.

**May 11** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**May 12** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**May 16** - *Creativity Uncorked*: Improv Chop Shop. 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Registration required. Let your artistic side flow in this hands-on studio program for adults. Doors open at 6:15 p.m. Arrive early and enjoy a drink at the cash bar before the event starts.

**May 18** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**May 24** - *Friday Night Conversations*: The Music of Susana Allen Hunter iPod Tour. 5:00-9:00 p.m. Enjoy a curated playlist of music on the GRAM iPods during *Friday Nights at GRAM*.

**May 31** - *Friday Night Conversations*: The Art of Improv with Mary Jane Pories.

**JUNE**

**Saturdays in June** - Saturday Drop-in Family Activities: Abstract Quilting Adventures. 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Free with Museum admission.

**June 7, 8, 9** - Festival of the Arts 2013: Community Quilts Mural at GRAM. Share with the community what the arts mean to you! Join GRAM in celebrating Festival of the Arts 2013 by making your mark and designing a colorful patch to add to a collaborative textile mural. Located

outdoors on Wege Plaza. Different times for each day of Festival; visit [artmuseumgr.org](http://artmuseumgr.org) for details.

**June 8** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**June 8** - Festival of the Arts 2013: Community Quilts Mural at GRAM. 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.

**June 9** - Festival of the Arts 2013: Community Quilts Mural at GRAM. 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

**June 13** - *Creativity Uncorked*: Improv Chop Shop. 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Registration required. Let your artistic side flow in this hands-on studio program for adults. Doors open at 6:15 p.m. Arrive early and enjoy a drink at the cash bar before the event starts.

## JULY

**July 13** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**July 16, 23, 30** – Course: Textile Arts. Guests of all skill levels are invited to experience contemporary quilting techniques for themselves in this three-session course led by award winning quilter Nancy Roelfsema! More information coming soon. Dates: Tuesday, July 16, 23, and 30 from 1:00 - 4:00 pm.

## AUGUST

**August 10** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

**August 24** - Guided tour of the exhibition. 1:00 p.m. Meet in the lobby. Free with admission.

### About the Grand Rapids Art Museum

The mission of the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) is: to inspire discovery, enjoyment, and learning about art; to serve as a welcoming and inclusive cultural resource; to collect, conserve, and interpret works of art of the finest quality. Established in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, the new Art Museum is internationally known for its distinguished design and LEED Gold certified status. Established in 1910 as the Grand Rapids Art Association, GRAM has grown to include more than 5,000 works of art, including American and European 19th and 20th century painting and sculpture and more than 3,000 works on paper. Embracing the city's legacy as a leading center of design and manufacturing, GRAM has a growing collection in the area of design and modern craft.

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