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Art Forum

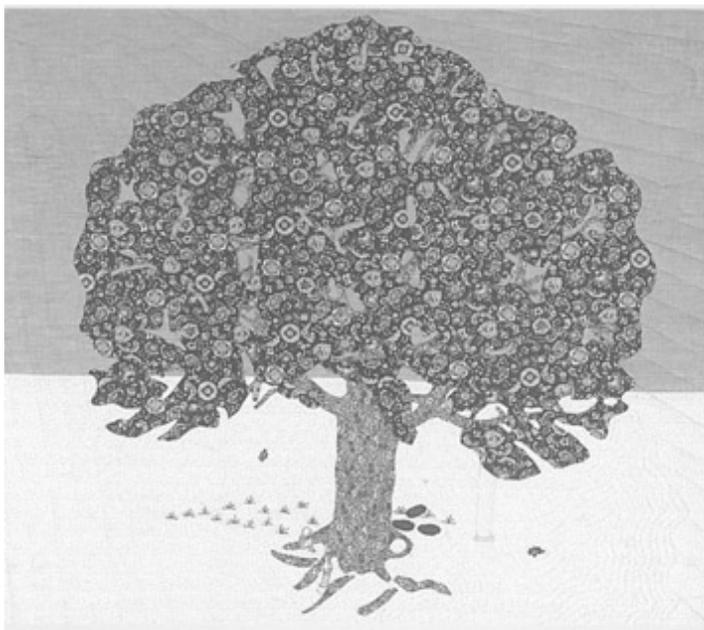


First Night Art

Escape the chill at First Night Raleigh by warming up to some local art

By Clarice Moran

If you're looking for a little relief from the cold and crowds at First Night Raleigh, check out the exhibits at Artspace and the Raleigh City Museum. The galleries are a great place to warm up and escape the fray, and the art just may leave you inspired for the New Year.



P'Like by Gladys Baker

At the Raleigh City Museum, you can wrap yourself up in the quilts of Gladys Baker. The museum, which is right on Fayetteville Street Mall in the old Briggs Hardware building, is a great, homey environment for Baker's beautiful work. The museum will be open during the First Night celebration, and your First Night button gets you in. It's the perfect venue for quilts, as the blankets seem at home displayed against the worn, hardwood floors of the historic building. Their vibrant, warm colors contrast sharply against the bright, white walls of the museum.

Baker, who is 92, taught quilting in Raleigh and worked with the Capitol Quilters Guild. She is something of a quilting prodigy, as she took up quilting after she retired from teaching in the 1970s. During the past 30 years, Baker has created quilts that reflect the heritage of Wake County and remind us of the painstaking, time-forgotten art of putting needle and thread to cloth.

Her work depicts places as well as ancestral patterns, and serves as documentation of several historic landmarks in the state. Hatteras

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Lighthouse and Tree at Bunn High School are small, wall hanging-sized pieces that recall two of Baker's favorite places. Bouquet Brasilia II is a huge, bed-sized quilt done in beautiful, deep greens with a tiny, vivid blue and red butterfly in the center. Dark green vines wind around the edges and suggest comfort and security to the user of the quilt.

In addition, The Wake County Quilt is an historical record of local courthouses, Yates Mill, the N.C. State Capitol building and other important Wake County structures. The buildings rest on blue circles, while double red lines separate each circle. The white background completes the patriotic theme.

Baker's images are inspiring, charming and so fragile that they seem to transcend their purpose as mere bed coverings. Sleeping on them would be a crime.

Over at Artspace, two exhibits will be open during the New Year's Eve festivities. If you haven't been to Artspace recently, duck inside for a quick look at this unusual place where visual artists work and display their pieces under one roof -- sort of like a mall, minus the GAP. Artspace is located at the corner of Davie and Blount Streets in City Market, and admission to the galleries is free with your First Night button.

At Gallery One, check out the "C.O.U.C.H." exhibit. The exhibit, whose acronym stands for "Contemporary Objects and Utilitarian Crafts for the Home," consists of quirky pieces that you conceivably could use in your home.

Jesse Menayan's Indoor Bench, for instance, is a smooth, caramel-colored bench made of Honduras mahogany. The seat has a beautiful, light-reflecting quality, and the corners are smooth and round. Amy Flynn's Vanity is a whimsical, mermaid-shaped piece of wood with tiny drawers and pulls of fish and stars. The wood is painted with the image of a curvaceous, long-haired mermaid, who is holding a small hand mirror in which she and the user can peek. In addition, Jane D. Benjamin's delicate Sake on the Silver Line cups are adorable, sterling silver cups shaped like flowers with their stems set in beachstone.

But then there are the others -- the objects you wouldn't dream of having in your house. Although interesting as art, their true practical purpose remains a mystery. Take Sherri Wood's blanket (please). Made of an afghan, tablecloth and toilet seat cover, it is a bright, brash throwback to the '70s. Its fluorescent orange, red and lime green colors would give me a headache, and I can't imagine actually snuggling up in it. In addition, Brian Rulifson's Steam Chair, which is amusing in its construction from cast iron radiators, looks about as comfortable as sitting on an actual radiator. But all practicalities aside, the exhibit does make you reconsider everyday objects and wonder what things in your house could be viewed as art.

Across the hall, at Upfront Gallery, Kathy Ammon's exhibit "Spirit" is an uplifting look at human relationships. Ammon's paintings focus on experiences in which the human spirit has been touched and enhanced. The paintings emphasize the spiritual side of being human and how our relationships with one another can recharge and empower us.

The large painting Spirit, for which the exhibit is named, suggests a Christ-like figure with his arms outstretched, protecting a mass of humanity. The figure is looking heavenward, and a yellowish light bathes him. Humanity, which consists of several downcast figures done in darker turquoise, purple and black, seems unaware of the

figure's protection.

In *Nothing to Fear*, a parent comforts a child, while a light source shines over the parent's shoulder, suggesting that God gives the parent inspiration and protection, while the parent shelters and protects the child. It is a symbiotic relationship explored by all of the paintings in Ammon's "Spirit" exhibit.

Be Still My Heart shows two figures kissing and suggests the embrace and passion of lovers through its reds and purples. And *Be Careful with Each Other* features an intertwined circle of man, woman and child, each dependent on the other.



Spirit by Kathy Ammon

The works remind the viewer that human

relationships are important and fragile, and each of us touches not only the body, but also the spirit of our loved ones. Now that's a message to take into the New Year.

"Tradition & Community: The Quilts of Gladys Baker" continues through Jan. 15, at the Raleigh City Museum, 220 Fayetteville Street Mall, Raleigh. 832-3775 or www.raleighcitymuseum.org.

"C.O.U.C.H." continues through Jan. 20 and "Spirit" continues through Dec. 31, at Artspace, 201 E. Davie St., Raleigh. 821-2787 or www.artspace.citysearch.com.

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