

## A piece of art

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Quilts can keep you warm on a cold night, but for some people, it can be a chance to be creative.

When Lisa Dodson retired, she didn't know what to do.

"I had always sewn, so I thought 'well, some time, if I have time, I'm going to learn quilting,'" Dodson said.

While there are some quilters who work in traditional styles, there are other possibilities. Dodson works in art quilts.

"I think art quilts are getting more accepted into museum exhibits," Dodson said.

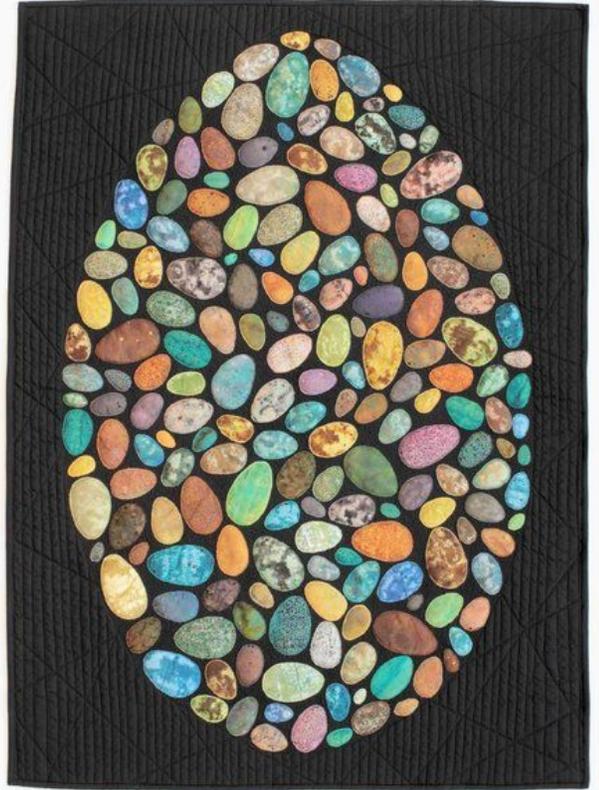
Kathy Kessler prefers a more traditional look. Working from patterns, Kessler finds her artistic needs fulfilled by choosing the fabrics. Kessler explained that some patterns include the fabric. But she prefers to find her own to create a one-of-a-kind quilt.

"I'll see a pattern, and I'll think, 'Oh, that looks pretty,' and from there, I'll go to the fabric," Kessler said.

Julie Higgins admits she loves "everything" when it comes to quilting. Not only does she quilt, but she also designs patterns and has written a technique book on English paper piecing and creative fabric weaving.

Higgins said she's been sewing since the age of 12 and made her own clothes as she was growing up. But it took some years before she finally decided to make a quilt.

"It always sounded like something your grandmother might do. I didn't realize how it could be creative," Higgins said.



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Courtesy photoConsider the Egg was created by Lisa Dodson for the Studio Art Quilt Associates call for entry exhibit, Food for Thought. It was one of 30 chosen for a worldwide traveling exhibit that will debut at the National Quilt Museum in April during the annual AQS Paducah Quilt Show.

## A warm gift

If you visited her home, Higgins said, you probably wouldn't be able to tell she's a quilter — unless you went into her quilting room. Higgins gives most of her quilts away.

“One of the first ones was for my brother-in-law who had open heart surgery,” Higgins said. “When you give somebody a quilt, you get a lot of emotion back from it. I didn't know it would have that effect on somebody. After that, I just kept going, I guess.”

Dodson also freely gives away her works. She's donated quilts for various fundraisers and gave away one of her favorite quilts for an Alzheimer's fundraiser.

“I look at them now on my website thinking, ‘Oh, I wish I had them back.’ But I knew they were going to Alzheimer's research,” Dodson said.

Kessler is currently working on her 101st quilt — a graduation gift for her grandson. For Kessler, seven grandchildren keep her busy. Each has grown out of their baby quilts, which means she must continue to quilt to keep up with their growing bodies.

She's also given quilts to friends and family members with one rule: You have to use the quilts. The rule comes from a quilt Kessler made for a family member who loved cats. Using cat fabric, Kessler made a quilt that the relative wrapped in fabric and stored in a closet.

When asked why she didn't use it, the relative said she didn't want it to get ruined.

“To me, quilts are meant to be loved. I would much rather see my quilts worn out from being used so much instead of looking like I just made it,” Kessler said.

Higgins is currently working on a T-shirt quilt for a friend. The T-shirts represent sports teams the recipient had played on as a young teen.

“That's not artistic at all, but for the people that get them, they really like them because that's their whole history,” she said.

Higgins also does portrait quilts. Her favorite was of a woman whose photograph appeared in AARP magazine. After getting permission from the photographer, Higgins created the quilt that she titled “Pauline, She's Got a Good Hand.” Higgins said she was drawn to the photograph because of the “sneaky” look in the subject's eyes.

Making portrait quilts does take a lot of thought and planning to get the shading right.

“It's kind of like using fabric and thread and stuff instead of paint and putting it together,” she said.

## A warm group

The Bloomington Quilters Guild promotes the continuation of quilting in the community. It meets the first Tuesday of the month at the North Central Church of Christ on North Dunn Street.

Meetings vary in programming with guest speakers, workshops and more. Each meeting also has a show-and-tell component where members can share their current projects. There are currently more than 170 members of the guild.

“You have a mini quilt show every time you go to a meeting. You feel so inspired when you leave,” Higgins said.

There are also bees, smaller groups of quilters who meet to work on and discuss projects.

New quilters are always welcome, and the group can often help with questions or problems. There isn't time to teach someone how to quilt, but there are opportunities to offer tips and advice.

Dodson said quilters are always learning about new techniques, new fabrics and new tools.

“One of the things that appeals to me about quilters is that they're so giving,” she said. “They're willing to teach their skills and help others.”

Just don't ask her for a piece of her fabric. Dodson said quilters often aren't willing to give up a piece of their fabric. Instead they're more likely to make you something with the fabric you like.

“We tend to be fabric collectors, and then some people, you get a piece of fabric that you love so much you don't want to cut it and make something out of it,” she said.

Higgins said quilters often joke about their “stash.”

“We all have our stashes, and they might be under the bed or in a closet. It's because we all hoard fabric and tools and buttons and threads,” she said.

Quilters also believe in UFOs, but in the quilter's world, that stands for unfinished objects.

Kessler talked of one quilt she started from fabric that she loved. Once she started putting it together, she realized it just didn't work.

“And I actually stopped. I think there's only been three quilts where I thought ‘I'm not happy with this,’” she said.

No matter what type of quilting someone takes up, many believe the work is not only fulfilling but relaxing. Sometimes, though, the call of the sewing room is too strong to ignore.

“Once you've been bitten by the bug, you know you've got it bad when you start forgoing sleep to work

on a quilt,” Kessler said.

If you go

**WHAT:** Bloomington Quilters Guild Quilts from the Heartland

**WHEN:** 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** The Bloomington/Monroe County Convention Center, 302 S. College Ave., Bloomington

**MORE:** See more than 200 quilts. There will also be a treasure shop, appraisals, vendors and demonstrations. Quilt appraisals will be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. For an appointment, call Donna Hogle at 812-876-1165.

**TICKETS:** \$6, \$3 for children ages 6-12. Free for children 2 and younger.