

THE Secret Codes

African Nova Scotian Quilts CURATED BY DAVID WOODS



**EDUCATION
GUIDE**



ABOUT

The Secret Codes: African Nova Scotian Quilts explores the unique tradition and evolution of the quilting tradition in Nova Scotia's Black communities over the past century. Presenting works by twenty-five quilters and painters, the exhibition highlights the ways that quilts have functioned as decorated blankets, as coded communication for people escaping slavery, as documentary records of community and family history, as a celebration of Black women and Black culture, and as a foundation for other art forms.

The exhibition features quilts using traditional patterns, as well as original designs inspired by contemporary interpretations of Underground Railroad "secret code" patterns. These coded quilts were said to have been hung on porches and clotheslines to convey messages to help Black people escape slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Curator David Woods travelled throughout the province documenting the people, stories, and experiences of several African Nova Scotian communities. He created a collection of drawings inspired by his journeys and, in 2007, the Vale Quilters of New Glasgow started interpreting Woods' designs in their quilts. Each quilt conveys the maker's individual sense of design and detail, collectively imbuing the scenes with the many voices of the community. The exhibition also features poems by Woods and paintings by four contemporary artists who are inspired by the stories and quilts of African Nova Scotian communities.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD LEGEND



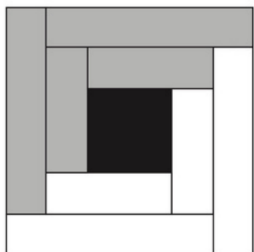
Flying Geese

A signal to follow the direction of the flying geese as they migrate north in the spring.



Drunkard's Path

Use a zig-zag route as you go along to confuse pursuing dogs and slave catchers.



Log Cabin

A safe house along the Underground Railroad route.



Bowties

Travel in disguise or change from the clothing of a slave to those of a person of higher status.



Crossroads

You have arrived at the main crossroads with several routes to freedom and must choose a path.



North Star Underground

Follow the North Star to Canada and freedom.

LEARN

WEB

BLACK LOYALISTS IN N.S.

The Canadian Encyclopedia

"The Arrival of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia," Laura Neilson Bonikowsky
<https://rb.gy/i8dw6>

"Black Enslavement in Canada (Plain-Language Summary)," Fred Glover & Celine Cooper
<https://rb.gy/ui khk>

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Canadian Encyclopedia

"Underground Railroad" by Natasha Henry
<https://rb.gy/pfvmp>

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN COMMUNITIES & ART

Studio Magazine

"Secret Codes " by Marilyn Smulders
<https://rb.gy/bj06g>

Visual Arts News

"In This Place: The Lasting Impact of Nova Scotia's First Exhibition of Black Artists' Work" by Chris Shapones
<https://rb.gy/tlvp0>

Halifax Examiner

"Stitching together a history of quilting in ANS communities" by Matthew Byard
<https://rb.gy/a7e19>

CBC

"An exploration of Black communities around Nova Scotia"
<https://rb.gy/acgkl>

ORGANIZATIONS

Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia (BANNS)
Dartmouth, NS
<https://banns.ca>

Black Cultural Centre of N.S.
Cherry Brook, NS
<https://bccns.com>

Black Loyalist Heritage Centre
Shelburne, NS
<https://blackloyalist.com>

Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute
Halifax, NS
<https://dbdli.ca>

BOOKS

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN HISTORY

- Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities*
- Wanda Taylor, *Birchtown and the Black Loyalists*

QUILTING TRADITIONS

Jacqueline Tobin & Raymond Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*

- Susan Goldman Rubin, *The Quilts Of Gee's Bend*
- Joanne Cubbs et al., *Mary Lee Bendolph, Gee's Bend Quilts & Beyond*

CHILDREN'S

- Christine Welldon, *Children of Africville*
- Patricia McKissack & Cozbi A. Cabrera, *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*

- available through Halifax Public Libraries

QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS

- Does your family have any quilting traditions?
- Has the exhibition altered your perception of what a historical record can be? How so?
- How do the picture quilts shift your ideas of what a traditional quilt is?
- What quilting style do you prefer, picture quilts or traditional patterns? Why?
- In which quilts are you able to see the traditional "secret codes"?
- How do the painters in the exhibition incorporate quilt designs into their works?



ARTISTS & CONTRIBUTORS

PHOTO BY Nick Pearce

TOP (L-R): Ibe Ananaba, Sara Donovan, Andrea Tsang Jackson, Shawn Skeir, Pamela Edmonds, Celeste Bernard, David Woods.

BOTTOM (L-R): Shirley MacKenzie, Heather Cromwell, Marlene Dorrington, Myla Borden, Melinda Clayton Patterson

Organized by
The Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia
and **The Vale Quilters of New Glasgow**

11 MAY - 6 AUGUST, 2023

QUILTMAKERS

Myla Borden, Marilyn Brannan (1955–2022), Robin Cain, Anja Clyke, Edith Colley (1920–2014), Heather Cromwell, Sara Donovan, Frances Dorrington, Marlene Dorrington, Laurel Francis, Rosella Fraser (1932–2010), Debra Jordan, Susan Lawrence (1931–2008), Shirley MacKenzie, Frances 'Fanny' Miller (1852–1933), Melinda Clayton Patterson, Andrea Tsang Jackson, Annie Whalen (1909–1980)

PAINTERS

Ibe Ananaba, Justin Augustine, Letitia Fraser, Shawn Skeir,
David Woods

CURATION, POEMS & SELECT QUILT DESIGNS

by David Woods



Dalhousie Art Gallery
6101 University Avenue, Halifax, NS B3H 4R2
artgallery.dal.ca / [@dalhousie_art_gallery](https://twitter.com/dalhousie_art_gallery)



Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts Conseil des arts
du Canada

HALIFAX

anna Gallery Systems
Leonowens

NSCAD
UNIVERSITY

COVER PAGE

Myla Borden, A Visit From Mamay

ABOUT PAGE

Sara Donovan, No. 347 Langford Rd