

# Contemporary

## Inspirations

### 20th Century Decline...

By the middle of the twentieth, quilting seemed a dying art. The widespread availability of commercially produced homewares and central heating made the quilt a less necessary item. Following the “make-do-and mend” ethos of the Second World War, people wanted to move away from old-fashioned crafts and embrace man-made glamour.

### 1970s Rebirth

During the 1970s, feminist artists realised that the quilt could be a provocative form of artistic expression. The homely, cosy associations of quilting allowed them to deliver political messages, challenging viewers’ assumptions about this traditionally female craft.

Patchwork and quilting began to grow in popularity as a leisure activity, rather than a practical necessity. This two piece bikini set was made by Jean Amsden for a competition run by Sanderson fabrics. The Daily Mail featured it under the headline: ‘Its the itsy bitsy teeny weeny Women’s Institute Bikini’, May 30th 1970.



Jean Amsden, *Patchwork Bikini* (1970)

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1975	First major quilt exhibition in the UK: <i>Abstract Design in American Quilts</i> at The American Museum, Bath
1978	BBC series <i>Discovering Patchwork</i> airs
1979	The Quilters’ Guild established with 300 members
1985	<i>Quilt Art</i> established
	City and Guilds Patchwork and Quilting course runs for the first time
1988	<i>Quilt Art’s</i> first major exhibition at Nottingham Castle Museum and The Barbican Centre, London
1998	British Quilt Study Group established
2002	<i>The Quilters’ Guild</i> Contemporary Quilt sub-group established, now with over 250 members
2003	1st Annual Festival of Quilts
2008	The Quilt Museum opens in York
2011	<i>Quilt Art</i> begins a 3 year tour of the USA
2013	BBC produce <i>The Great British Sewing Bee</i>

### Art or Craft?

The establishment of professional groups of quilt artists was not without controversy. Following *Quilt Art’s* first exhibition, a letter to *The Quilter’s Newsletter* stated ‘it is hard to avoid the impression that the impetus behind its formation is a desire to distinguish its members from the quilting plebs’. However, increases in museums and art galleries exhibiting quilts over the last 30 years have coincided with an uptake in quilting as a hobby. Internationally renowned textile artist Sarah Impey has commented that it is often only those who quilt themselves who understand the technique and needlecraft skills that finished pieces display.

For quilters, the skill of needlecraft and the artistry of the finished piece are inseparable. This exhibition brings together work by quilters who have experimented with new ways of printing, producing and designing with those who rework traditional forms to make quilts for the twenty-first century.

