



MOUNT HOLYOKE
COLLEGE ART MUSEUM



Soft Voices: Textiles and Memory

January 20, 2018–April 15, 2018

Soft Voices: Textiles and Memory

At first glance, these two objects may seem to have little in common. They were made through different processes, using different materials, in different centuries. Yet both prolong the lives of everyday objects and family memories while representing women's craft traditions. While voices, stories, and photographs may fade or disappear with time, tangible and deeply personal objects such as blankets persist as a mode of communication and connection across generations.

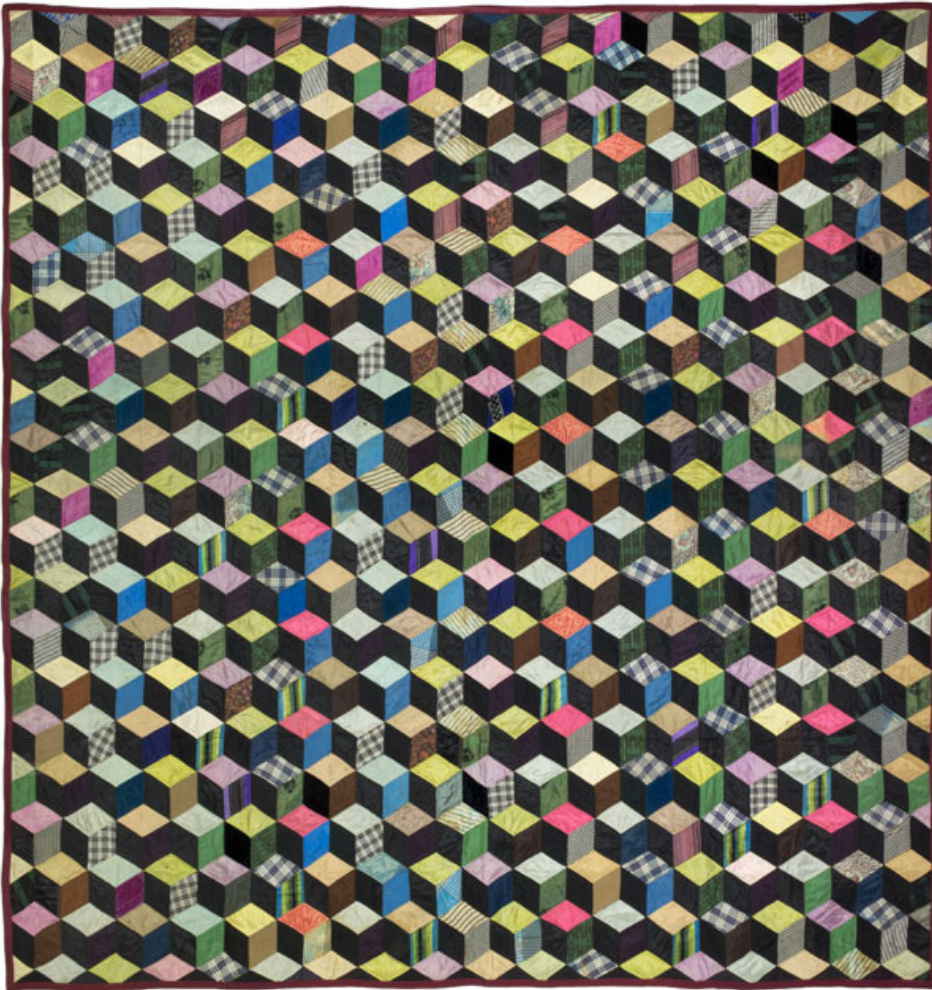
Quilters have traditionally incorporated pieces of old clothing into their bed covers, allowing garments to live on as useful—and beautiful—household objects. This 19th-century quilt was likely created by a single quilter, or a few women in the same family, for use at home. Often, fabric would be gathered over several years from clothing that had been patched and altered to avoid waste. The abundance of expensive fabrics seen here suggests this quilt belonged to a relatively well-off family. Heavier fabrics such as the green plaid and velvet could have come from a man's vest or waistcoat. The lightweight silk fabric was likely sourced from women's dresses. The quilt was created at a time when middle and upper class women were expected to be demure and soft-spoken, and to perform domestic duties in the home. Through quilting, women could assert individuality and, in some cases, gain public recognition for their skills.

When contemporary artist Michelle Grabner created this cast bronze sculpture of a crocheted blanket, the original object—likely made by a woman to welcome a baby into the world—was destroyed in the process. Yet the texture, shape, and pattern of the blanket is preserved in the enduring medium of bronze. Just as quilts transform old clothing into works of art, Grabner's sculpture gives new life to a worn-out blanket. By casting this everyday domestic object in bronze, Grabner memorializes a modest symbol of motherhood and family life.

- Cassie Peltier '18

John R. Stomberg Collections Intern

This Collection Spotlight is made possible by a grant from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation and the gifts of individual donors in support of Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's Diverse Voices Initiative.



Quilt with tumbling blocks pattern, ca. 1845–1885
American
Silk, satin, and velvet
Joseph Allen Skinner Museum,
Mount Holyoke College
SK 2006.1110.INV

Michelle Grabner (American, b. 1962)
Untitled, 2016
Bronze
Purchase with funds from Susan Abert
Noonan (Class of 1982) in honor of her
sister, Janice E. Abert (Class of 1982) for
all she does for MHC
2017.13

