

TACK

Exhibit Review: "alt_quilts"

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While this reviewer won't attempt to dissect (or risk reductively summarizing...) the tradition and craft of quilting in its entirety, there are poignant similarities worth considering between garments and quilts. Not just as textiles-based objects, but also as objects that simultaneously express a story, an artistic point of view and a nuanced cross-section of the cultural moment they're made in. Though focusing on the parallels between the two may seem in some ways anachronistic, a new exhibit at the American Folk Art Museum, *alt_quilts*, succeeded in its attempt to draw connections between craft, technology and art in a 21st-century setting. Viewing the exhibit from a fashion perspective, it resonated immediately.

The exhibit's primary focus is contemporary, displaying recent work by artists Sabrina Gschwandtner, Luke Haynes and Stephen Sollins; but by placing these pieces among a diverse selection of antique quilts, the exhibit becomes something of an abstract Venn diagram: Historical artifacts and established techniques on one side, contemporary influences and mixed-media approaches on the other. And in the middle, the idea that object making borrows both from its own particular heritage yet also makes unique use of the present, producing bodies of work that can feel both old and new, but always *newly different*.

Maybe that much is obvious in all forms of art, but the topic seems especially germane to current discussions in fashion around the role of technology. Jonathan KYLE Farmer—who was recently featured in TACK, and who will soon be contributing a recurring critic's column called "craft:OLOGY" that addresses this idea specifically—believes our engagement with new and cutting-edge technologies is essentially a modern version of craft. With the introduction of things like 3D printing and high-tech fabrics—and designers like Iris van Herpen who are revolutionizing modern fashion design without losing sight of handmade details and traditional techniques—the midsection of fashion's own Venn diagram is starting to look awfully exciting (I imagine devoted quilt enthusiasts might feel the same way about the new ideas being applied to time-honored quilt shapes and patterns in *alt_quilts*). So while the exhibit is rather loosely linked to the fashion industry itself, it raises many of the questions fashion is trying to answer right now, just using a different vocabulary.

Below is a small sampling from the exhibit, which opened on Tuesday and will be on display at the American Folk Art Museum through January 5, 2014. All quoted text is courtesy of the museum.

