

FORT GANSEVOORT



Credit: Photo by Ben Rollins
Dawn Williams Boyd in her studio.

The Scene:

Craft in Atlanta

By Cinqué Hicks – May 05, 2025

Soon after the closing ceremonies of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, an idea was proposed to Atlanta's Olympic planning committee: give quilts as gifts to the visiting delegations of all nations who would be arriving in 1996. It seemed fitting that this signature art form of the region would represent the city as the entire world came to its doorstep.

FORT GANSEVOORT

The idea gave rise to a massive statewide project involving hundreds of quilters. These dedicated craftspeople fashioned approximately 400 unique quilts, one for each Olympic Chef de Mission (the individual responsible for the well-being of that nation's athletes) and one for each delegation's flag-bearer. The exercise was repeated for the 103 nations participating in the Paralympic Games that same year.

"Atlanta," the motto goes, "influences everything." This was certainly true of the Olympic gift-giving tradition which, before 1996, had consisted mainly of the presentation of small mementos characteristic of the host country. The gift of two full-size, handmade quilts for each participating nation was a significant departure from the past. In 1998, this new, grander practice was taken up in Nagano, Japan, at the Winter Olympics, as the Japanese quilting magazine *Patchwork Quilt Tsushin* fostered the creation of more than 2,300 mini quilts, enough to give each visiting athlete a unique gift.

Then and now, Atlanta collectors and artists alike have evinced a significant commitment to maintaining and advancing quilting along with other Southern crafts. The Souls Grown Deep foundation, headquartered in Atlanta, is one of the primary organizations collecting and preserving the quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Quilts also feature prominently in the High Museum of Art's Southern Objects collection, housed within the Decorative Arts and Design department. Gorgeous 19th- and 20th-century examples by makers Black and white, known and no longer known, serve as reminders of the centrality of quilts as storytelling engines and memory storage devices. Other objects in the High's collection include seminal ceramic works by the enslaved Edgefield potters of South Carolina; a range of furniture such as pie safes and cabinets; and pristine turned wood vessels by Edward Allen Moulthrop, the father of modern woodturning, who—although born in New York state—spent many years teaching at Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

Contemporary practitioners in Atlanta have extended these craft traditions. In addition to artists featured in this edition of *American Craft*, Etienne Jackson and Corrina Sephora have produced metalwork in both functional and fine art in national and international venues. Textile traditions have been pushed forward by artists such as Lynn Marshall-Linnemeier and Amanda Greene. And Brandon Franklin, one of the premiere hatmakers in Atlanta, has made the craft compatible with contemporary lifestyles, including by making hats for big hairstyles like dreadlocks and Afros.

Atlanta, a city for which relentless renewal is almost a religion, also embraces new technologies and practices. Samuel Thurman, founder of Maygra Studios, is pioneering AI-assisted furniture design that results in one-of-a-kind chairs and lamps from beyond human imagination. Georgia Tech's Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking exhibits a steady stream of innovative paper craft at the edges of engineering. And the region's academic art programs—including those at Georgia State University, Savannah College of Art and Design, University of West Georgia, and University of Georgia—Athens—push students toward newer and fresher approaches to textiles, ceramics, and more.

The Atlanta craft ecosystem is fed by a robust network of support infrastructure. Major studio complexes such as The Goat Farm and South River Art Studios host several artists working in textiles, jewelry, metal, and wood. A central feature of the Hambidge Center in North Georgia is its prized ceramics studio, which receives a steady stream of Atlanta artists seeking to advance their craft while bouncing ideas off the many painters, poets, photographers, and dancers also on the campus.

The Olympic quilt gift tradition began in Atlanta but has continued with versions taking place in Sydney, Australia; Salt Lake City; and Torino, Italy. It's just one of the many ways that Atlanta—already a magnet for artistic talent across the South—not only takes in global influence but returns it out to the world.

FORT GANSEVOORT

Cinqué Hicks is the former editor in chief—now editor at large—of ArtsATL. He has written for numerous national and international publications and cofounded Idea Capital, an organization facilitating small cash grants to Atlanta-area artists. Hicks has called Atlanta home since 2005.



Credit: Ben Rollins

"La Croix de Guerre" (2009) created by Dawn Williams Boyd with assorted fabrics and embroidery floss.

I was born in Neptune, New Jersey. My father's family lived in Asbury Park, though they were originally from Climax, Georgia. I grew up in the Mozley Park and Adamsville neighborhoods of Atlanta, my mother's home. I moved to Denver in the late 1970s and moved back to Atlanta in 2010.

Since 2001, I've worked in fabric. I refer to my textile works as "cloth paintings" because their creation combines both my painting and sewing skill sets. Lately my work has been talking about the political and cultural rigors we are coping with right now: women's rights, immigration, climate change, institutionalized racism, pollution, voting rights, democracy, and so on.

The best part about the Atlanta art and craft scene is the diversity and the sheer number of talented artists and craftspeople who call it home. Unlike many large metro areas where artists are concentrated in a neighborhood or specific enclave, Atlanta has art venues scattered all over the city and surrounding communities.

FORT GANSEVOORT

In addition to the various fine art institutions, Fulton and DeKalb counties exhibit contemporary works by local artists in their libraries, government buildings, and regional art and senior centers. In the warm months there is an art festival *somewhere* in the metro Atlanta area every weekend, in addition to major summer events like the Piedmont Park Arts Festival.

One unique aspect of the craft scene in Atlanta is the emphasis on quilting. I am most familiar with local quilters due to my association with the Atlanta Quilt Festival. That medium is enjoying prominence partly because of the High Museum of Art's recent additions to its collection of Black quilts and the exhibition *Patterns in Abstraction: Black Quilts from the High's Collection*. The High purchased several quilts from local artists, including myself, O.V. Brantley, and the late Marquette B. Johnson. I will also emphasize that Atlanta artists are buoyed by the support of the community. Many of the art and event spaces I frequent are jam-packed with art lovers. Thanks go out to the many generous local artists who welcomed and embraced me when I arrived here like a guppy new to the ocean.