



PORTSMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Caption to attached photo:

The Portsmouth Historical Society announces “Threads: A Community Quilt for 2020,” a collaborative project that will bring together and celebrate the resilience of the Seacoast population. Residents are being invited to contribute hand-made fabric squares to be assembled into a giant “community quilt” that will be the centerpiece of an exhibition of historical and contemporary quilts in the Historical Society’s galleries when it reopens after the current pandemic. *(Photo courtesy Portsmouth Historical Society)*

Portsmouth Historical Society Launches “Threads” Community Quilt & Exhibition

Contribute your own creative quilt square from home

PORTSMOUTH, NH—In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Portsmouth Historical Society proudly announces “Threads: A Community Quilt for 2020.” The highlight of this special exhibition—opening in early July—will be a large quilt to be stitched together from individual squares created by area residents during self-isolation. The quilt will commemorate this unique time in world history and will celebrate the threads that connect the members of the Seacoast community. Although the Society’s facilities are currently closed to visitors, it remains an active public resource.

“Even while we remain physically apart, the ‘Threads’ project will connect us with a tangible emblem of our community,” says Brian LeMay, the Society’s executive director. “We encourage Seacoast residents of every age, skill level, and gender to join in and contribute a square.”

Details of how to make a quilt square can be found at the Portsmouth Historical Society’s website, www.PortsouthHistory.org/threads/. The resulting quilt, to be assembled from the pieces contributed, will form the centerpiece of an exhibition that will open, provisionally, in early July. The completed quilt will hang in the Society’s galleries, adjacent to the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center. The complex of restored historic brick buildings at Middle and Islington Streets has served in the past as an arts academy, as the city’s main public library, and today is among the city’s best-loved public buildings.

The “welcome back” exhibition will also include colorful quilts from the Society’s collection, plus others from around the region, both contemporary and historical. Because of their large size and sensitivity to light, the Society’s important quilts are rarely placed on view. “Threads” will offer visitors a chance to see a number of these remarkable objects for the first time in many years.

“During times of crisis people tend to reflect on what they feel is truly important,” LeMay says. “In a way, it’s appropriate that a project like this, marking a major historic event, should be organized by a Portsmouth institution that’s so close to people’s hearts and lives. Historical societies like ours not only connect people with physical materials from the past, but they help make sense of the historic events, the cultural milestones, and the great art that define who we fundamentally all are. These things give insights you can’t get from TV, the internet, or really anyplace else.”

Quilts are particularly appropriate for a community-wide exhibition, according to Gerald W. R. Ward, the exhibition curator of "Threads." "Even though an individual quilt's patterns may represent just one person's vision," he says, "they often follow wider cultural traditions that form... well, the fabric of a community." Ward observes that "quilts are often seen just as useful objects, providing a home with color, comfort, and warmth, but they can also be exceptional artistic works, as worthy of display in museum galleries as canvases covered with paint." Quilts are now in every great art museum, and Ward reminds us that, in the past, their abstract compositions have strongly influenced some of the great masters of modern art.

Many of the greatest quilts, like so many household treasures, were created and preserved by women. They have often been passed down through the matrilineal lines of families, forming what Ward calls "icons of continuity." In this 100th anniversary year of women's suffrage, they continue to be a fertile medium for creative craft and design by countless quilt-makers of all gender identities.

This exhibition is made possible, in part, by the generous support of private donors, and these corporate sponsors: Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley & Roberts, PLLC and Performance Business Solutions, with additional support from Charles Schwab/Charles B Riopel, Piscataqua Savings Bank, and DTC Lawyers.

About Portsmouth Historical Society

Founded in 1917, the Portsmouth Historical Society is a nonprofit devoted to the history, arts, and culture of the Portsmouth region, through acquisitions, preservation, museum exhibitions, programs, and publications. It operates the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center and the 1758 John Paul Jones Historic House Museum and Garden, a national historic landmark. The Society also serves as the home of the Portsmouth Advocates for Historic Preservation, and the Portsmouth Marine Society Press. To contribute to the Society's work during this challenging moment in history, and to learn more about how to create a square for the 2020 Community Quilt, visit its website: www.PortsmouthHistory.org

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