



Dragon Crab and Turtle is pleased to present "*A Gift From God*", *Quilts from Gee's Bend 1990-2017*

A trip to Gee's Bend has been a long time in the making for Katherine Bernhardt, who has a deep admiration for the work by the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective. She has always been surrounded and inspired by their work through books and seeing their work at the Outsider Art Fair and other shows in New York. The nine-hour drive from St Louis to Camden, Alabama was necessary to experience the American landscape that echoes in the American pastime of quilting. A ferry ride along the large bends in the river was covered with sunbathing alligators, which sent her on one last drive to Gee's Bend, Alabama. Open skies and green grass greeted Katherine and her family. The vast space was only interrupted by large quilts displayed on free-standing posts and the buildings the quilters live and work in.

Mary Ann Pettway, a quilter and manager at Gee's Bend, is one of roughly 20 quilters still working in the small remote community in Alabama. Pettway generously opened her studio in a day-long visit while sharing her work and stories of the community and history. She recalls a beautiful white sign with hand-painted red letters that welcomes visitors but has since been replaced with a reflective green sign with white letters enforced by the city. The white buildings, homes, and studios to the collective were painted beige but were once a bright white. Gee's Bend is a self-sufficient community with beautiful gardens that supply much of the food for the community.

Each woman brings their unique interpretation and translation of their visual tradition of taking fragments and remnants of their lives and themselves to make some of the most innovative and beautiful quilts. Each quilt tells a story, with pieces covered in color, pattern, and shapes. The women that make them share their masterful skills from one generation to the next, passing along a bit of themselves to keep this long and robust tradition alive with constant innovation.

Mary Ann Pettway was asked if she was inspired by African textiles and landscape and Gee's Bend — she replied that her quilting "was a gift from God." She does not work with preconceived designs or plans; it comes to her as she makes it. She receives all her ideas and color combinations, literally everything this way. There was no other inspiration for her other than what God gave her.

The quilts in "*A Gift from God*" were all made during 1990-2017. Eleven quilters are represented in this show: Bettie B. Seltzer, Arlonzia Pettway, Lue Ida Bennett, Caster Fuller, Lola Pettway, Emma Mooney Pettway, Janice Pettway, Louella Pettway, Lucy Witherspoon, Jessie T. Pettway, and Lue Ida McCloud.

To honor the land and practice of the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective, all the quilts are displayed on wooden hanging systems and lay on wooden pedestals. Benches, stools, and tables surround the quilts to reflect the rural landscape and bending rivers of Alabama surrounding the Gee's Bend community and the practice of recycling remnants. The structures are made from discarded wood from Bernhardt's studio to carry through reusing and recycling to create something new, just as the Gee's Bend quilters do.