



OCTOBER 2015

Making Old into New

Child's Crazy Quilt with Embroidered Rooster



VISIT THE BMA's
new Center for People &
Art and see *Child's Crazy*
Quilt with Embroidered
Rooster in the *Imagining*
Home exhibition.

Detail, *Child's Crazy Quilt with Embroidered Rooster*, 1880–1910. New Jersey, United States. Wool and cotton; wool and cotton embroidery threads over paper. 39 x 42½ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Linda and Irwin Berman, St. Simons Island, Georgia, BMA 1984.326

**BALTIMORE
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A little more than a century ago, a woman who was skilled with needle and thread decided to make a quilt to keep a small child warm. To save time and money, she found an old worn-out quilt, cut it down to size, and then made a brand-new patchwork for the top by stitching together scraps of old cloth. Most probably came from old shirts or trousers that nobody needed anymore. For the main attraction, she embroidered a rooster with fabulous tail feathers right in the center.

Perhaps the woman who sewed this quilt was the child's mother or grandmother—we don't know. But we might guess that she and the child lived on a farm with animals, fruit trees, and a vegetable garden. A bird, a duck, and a small red rooster are embroidered here and there on the quilt, along with half an apple, a squash plant, and a tiny spider web near the bottom of the yellow vine next to the rooster.

During the late 1880s, popular ladies' magazines featured illustrations of fashionable "crazy quilts," which were made of oddly-shaped patches sewn every which way instead of lining up in neat rows or patterns. The most elaborate of these were made by affluent city women who outlined their scraps of luxurious silk, satin, and velvet in fancy stitchery and decorated them with an abundance of ribbons. Although a farm woman would likely have had mostly workaday woolens and cottons in her scrap bag, she could still read the same magazines, follow the same crazy quilt instructions, and display her fancy stitchery on a quilt for her family. Best of all, she could copy a pattern for embroidering a fine rooster that would delight a child.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Explain how this quilt might teach us to "reuse and recycle." What could you create with scraps of cloth? How many patches were cut from green striped cloth? Which patches might have come from the same plaid shirt? One fancy stitch is named "Wheat Sheaf." Which might it be?

Compare *Child's Crazy Quilt* to *African-American Strippy Quilt* <http://bit.ly/1MhtKSg> and *Baltimore Album Quilt* <http://bit.ly/1R1f88Z>. Which quilter planned the design in advance? Which quilters liked to improvise? Do you like to follow a pattern? Or do you create as you go?

For an eye-popping sight, Google "crazy quilts" and click on "Images."

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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