



O K T P



## MARY LEE BENDOLPH

04.01.15

For the past decade, Paulson Bott Press has collaborated with quilter Mary Lee Bendolph. The most recent prints continue her exploration of the human experience embodied in the worn clothing from which her quilts are constructed. Her unique geometric improvisations are part of the larger African American vernacular tradition as well as her own very particular history. She brings meaning to the castoff and worn-out fragments of cloth, reinvesting and redeeming them by reshaping them into her own testament of triumph over adversity.

Mary Lee Bendolph has lived her entire life in Gee's Bend, Alabama. Seventh of 16 children, she is no stranger to hard work. She has endured poverty, racism, loss, and illness, yet her buoyant, generous, and determined spirit has created a rich life of achievement and recognition. Her quilts and prints have been exhibited internationally and are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the U.S. Department of State; and the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies.

Mary Lee learned to quilt from her mother Aolar Mosley. In the book *Gee's Bend: The Women and Their Quilts*, she recalls the rhythm of quilting when she was young:

Families down here, they like to do together. See, we farm together, and the ladies in the family get together for quilting. In them days, they farm three months, then when the lay-by time come—'round the last of May, June—they go to piecing quilts. August, go back to the field. October and November, up into December—and then after Christmas and



### PUT TOGETHER, 2014

Color softground etching with aquatint and spitbite aquatint.

Image: 52" x 41"; Edition of 50



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Mary Lee Bendolph in the Paulson Bott Press studio. Courtesy of Matt Arnett.

#### **PATCH, 2014**

Color softground etching with aquatint and spitbite aquatint.

Image: 38" x 53.5"; Edition of 50

New Year over with—back to piecing and quilting. Piece by yourself; quilt together.

When you go to quilt, you beat the cotton out on the floor, first thing, to get the dust out. Then sweep the floor—collect the cotton—spread the lining out and put the cotton back on the lining, beat it out, put the top on there, get your thread and needles and hook

it in the quilting frame. Most of the families down here did the same thing—piece by themselves and come together to quilt. On my side, my family, we go fast, don't follow no patterns so close. Other families take more time, do slow work. They don't get out in the road much like us did. We just try to put it together and get it through with. We don't try to

style it or nothing. Folks call some of this kind of stuff "crazy quilts"—don't know which-a-way it going. I never did go by a pattern. Didn't none us. I mostly take after my aunt Louella, but I never make a quilt altogether like anybody. I watched Mama back when she could work, but she was slow and careful more than me.