

O R T P

LORETTA PETTWAY

10.01.2009

Loretta Pettway journeyed to Berkeley with fellow quilters Mary Lee Bendolph and Loretta Bennett. The other two Gee's Bend artists had traveled to Paulson before, and they commented occasion-

ally during my conversation with Loretta Pettway. Although each of the artists made new, smaller quilts as the basis for their prints, hers express a different kind of bold immediacy. You can feel the fabric and see the uneven edges in her work.

They convey a sense of the piecing in progress. The prints feel very close to the quilts that originally stirred public interest in the women of Gee's Bend: strips of discarded fabric reused and pieced together to make coverings for staying warm that somehow transcend their practical purpose. Her comments stayed close to what was familiar.

After we finished talking, Loretta Pettway and Mary Lee Bendolph sang "Look Where He Brought Me From." Faith is never far from their thoughts.

—*Kenneth Caldwell*

Q: What are some of your impressions of being here in Berkeley?

A: The weather, the fruits, the vegetables. It's much cooler than it is back home. It hasn't rained since we've been here.

Q: What's it like making a quilt at Paulson Press?

A: I finish quicker than if I was at home making a big quilt. Since I'm making a print, I don't have to make it as large as I do my quilts. I love that.

Q: Are you making the individual pieces smaller?

A: Smaller.

Old Beauty, 2007

Color softground and spitbite aquatint etching
Paper size: 28" x 24"; Edition of 50



Lazy Gal, 2007

Color softground and spitbite aquatint etching; Paper size: 39" x 33"; Edition of 50



Q: What are some of your early memories about quilting?

A: When I was about 11, my grand-mamma told me, "You have to piece a quilt because you are going to have kids, and you're going to have to have cover for you and your family, so you'd better start to making quilts. Every night when you come home and do your chores, you're going to get those pieces and go to piecing on that quilt. You're going to piece that quilt till you make a quilt for your bed because I'm not going to be piecing quilts for you." I had to piece that quilt every night. It took me a whole year to make that quilt.

I set in the bear paw, and the big star, and the grandmamma green; I make my quilt to my mind. I said, "It's not the perfect

quilt, but it does what quilts do. It keeps me and my family warm."

Q: When you are piecing, what's going through your mind?

A: I was praying to the Lord that things would get better in my life because it was rough back then. Everybody was standing in the need of a blessing. Piecing quilts, I was just praying, "God, help it to get better. Help my last days and my golden years be my best years." One day out on a trip I said, "Lord, I prayed for you to bless me in a way that you would have to be blessed. And you blessed me." I didn't know how it was coming, but he blessed me.

He blessed me to get the quilts on the wall of the museum, and he blessed me

to get better now so I could go on some of these trips. I said, "I have faith that God's going to heal me to get on this boat before it's too late."

Q: Now that things are better in Gee's Bend, do you have a different kind of prayer? What goes through your mind now?

A: I still have to pray and ask him to help me and to give me strength and health. When I see my quilts on that wall in that museum, and all the people come in and look at our work, it just makes me feel good. God has blessed me. And I tell him, "Thank you for your many blessings. Continue blessing everybody." We all need a blessing. ✨



(above)
Remember Me, 2007

Color softground and spitbite aquatint etching w/chine colle Kozo
Paper size: 40" x 39"; Edition of 50

(left)
Loretta Pettway at Paulson Press in 2007





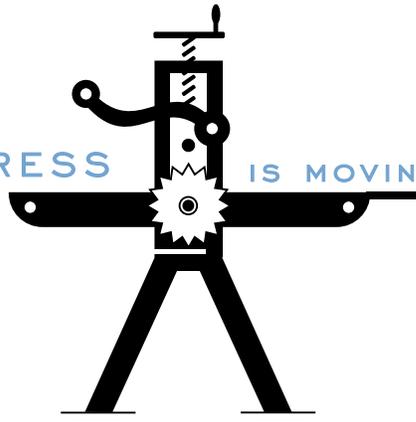
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