Quilts of the Women's Cancer Program

ARTWORKS WITH SPECIAL MEANING
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Beauty, creativity, women’s energy, vitality and serenity all describe the art quilts given to the Mayo Clinic Women’s Cancer Program and portrayed in this brochure. The art quilt has emerged out of an age-old tradition, and combines art, technique and creativity to produce a unique artform. Numerous books detail the evolution of the quilt to its present status as fabric art. Contemporary magazines, such as Quilting Arts and Surface Design, display the works of internationally recognized artists and describe threads, fabric and techniques used to create these masterpieces. Art quilts have assumed a status like that of contemporary tapestries and their appraised values place them equal to other artforms.

On behalf of the women we serve and their families, the Women’s Cancer Program thanks the quilt artists for the gift of these quilts. They bring hope, joy and inspiration to all who see them. In particular, we recognize Eunice M. Hill, internationally renowned quilt designer, for the many quilt artworks she has created for us. Each of her quilts presents a unique concept about women’s cancers and pays tribute to women with breast or gynecologic cancer.
“Women and Their Journeys: Personal Expressions”

1997 and 1998, created by patients and Rochester area women to honor women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer
“Women and Their Journeys: Personal Expressions” are two quilts created to commemorate women with breast cancer and to increase breast cancer awareness. Each quilt consists of 40 blocks, with pink ribbon garlands embellishing each corner. The 80 individual heart blocks celebrate a different woman or group of women whose journey after the diagnosis of breast cancer is remembered by the quilter.

More than 120 women participated in the project. Quilters Sharon Sandberg and Rosie Seegmiller provided expertise in guiding the design and quilting of the pattern [“Sweet Sixteen,” Seely A, Stewart J. Sisters and Quilts - Threads That Bind©], used with permission of the designers. The poignant words of those who created the quilts speak common themes: respect and admiration for women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, fear and personal vulnerability and are about their relationships with women diagnosed with breast cancer. They often tell of a life-journey with those women. One participant summarizes the participation of the quilters in her commemoration:

“Women…gather together with threads of courage, conviction and compassion…to laugh…to mourn…to encourage…to deepen one’s faith – one’s trust…to drink of the cup of life…to become a heart united with passion…and, as ‘sisters,’ to journey into the unknown, renewed and refreshed for more steps of THE JOURNEY OF THE HEART.”
“Great Hat”  
1998, Eunice Hill
The Women’s Cancer Program has received several quilts from internationally recognized quilt designer, Eunice Hill.

“Great Hat,” 1998, is the first of these quilt artworks. Ms. Hill’s design is intended to highlight the personal beauty that exists in the face of many physical changes. The hats represent the impact of the side effects of cancer treatment on both the physical and mental aspects of the lives of women with cancer. The variety in these hats portrays the unique and creative ways that women devise to overcome these side effects.

The stars create the sense that these women become “stars,” radiant with the beauty from within and providing strength and warmth; pastel colors evoke the feeling of gentleness. A pink ribbon, international symbol of breast cancer, is unfurled diagonally to show breast cancer awareness for all women. The faces without features emphasize the unidentified person; the variety of skin tones represents all women.

The different hats also signify a separate personality for each woman. The stitching emphasizes the stars and outlines the individual women, to underscore their special beauty of self and the importance they have to those people around them.
“Suspensions”
1999, Eunice Hill
“Suspensions,” 1999, features a bridge as the main subject of the wallhanging. This symbolizes that persons diagnosed with cancer enter a new world. The bridge emphasizes the sense of being suspended over very deep water, depicting the unknown. The many triangle and block shapes of the water are abstract representations of the concerns of each individual in the cancer experience. “Suspensions” recognizes that the time after a cancer diagnosis is not an easy period of life. The far edge of the bridge is clouded in fog: the outcome is not revealed at this time. The bridge extends into the borders of the design, signifying life as a continuing journey.

The road and bridge clearly exist, even though the future, represented by the fog that extends into the border of the wallhanging, is unclear. The gulls convey a feeling of free spirit, of freedom, being above and beyond problems.

A narrow binding of neon color fabrics provides an emphasis of hopefulness, the bright prism of the rainbow. The border is a vibrant print; the intensified colors emphasize the colors within the quilt and underscore the variety of emotions contained there. The sweep of the wind and clouds are quilted into the design and enhance the sense that this is not a permanent situation, it is a changing time. Multiple circles, quilted as part of the rainbow, have breaks in their continuity, representing the broken promises in life –“Everything was going to be perfect; now it isn’t.” Yet the rings are done in rainbow colors, to convey a promise of better things to come.
“Nepenthe”

2000, Eunice Hill
The definition of “Nepenthe,” the name of this quilt, is derived from the ancients and means “a potion that provides forgetfulness of pain and sorrow.” In this quilt, Ms. Hill portrays the Phoenix rising from ashes to depict letting go of sorrow. The design was inspired by a photograph showing the regrowth of the land around Mount St. Helens a few years after the massive destruction caused by the 1980 volcanic eruption. Ms. Hill used bright colors and various symbols and techniques to evoke a feeling of hopefulness and of new life after the diagnosis of cancer.

Ms. Hill often incorporates old and well-known quilt patterns into her compositions to reflect all aspects of life. In this work, she uses the “Broken Dish” pattern to signify disruption in the journey of life. The butterfly image appears in the center of the dish, and bespeaks joy emerging in the midst of sadness. The dark color behind the fireweed symbolizes devastation. The bright pink fields of fireweed represent regrowth and revitalization after disaster. Many unopened buds at the tips of the fireweed plants signify many beautiful moments yet to come. The colors of the border are vivid, representative of the leftover embers of the heat of the volcanic eruption fires – a space for remembrance of a time now past.

The stitching includes metallic highlighting threads to create a feeling of something mystical, of transparency, the reminder that the Phoenix is not something you actually see, it’s a spirit.
“Facing New Beginnings”

2001, Eunice Hill
“Facing New Beginnings” is dominated by two flowers: the one created of the more vibrant colors represents a young woman; the other, the more mature woman. Together these signify that breast cancer affects both young and old.

The background reflects the structural lines of the Gonda Building’s multi-level atrium. The wall hanging includes many design and stitching components that are symbolic of medicine. Research is represented through images of a flask and a test tube. The spiral structures in the lower right corner depict cell growth out of control and silhouettes in the upper right corner are representative of women in general. There are stylized arms reaching out, to suggest someone bending to give care.

Fractured borders were used to signify putting things back together: rebuilding hope, re-establishing life. The pink ribbon is dominant in the design. Viewed all together, the many symbols affirm that the combined strengths of research, awareness and our humanity enable women to flourish despite a cancer diagnosis.
“Colors of Courage”
2002, Eunice Hill
The motif of “Colors of Courage” includes the pink ribbon of breast cancer awareness and the star shape, which alludes to the personal heroism of women surviving and continuing their lives despite cancer. The design echoes the U.S. postal stamp created to support breast cancer research.

The woman is Athena, the goddess of wisdom, a pre-eminent goddess of Greece. She represents bringing together all the resources of research in breast cancer. Ms. Hill said, “Athena is a statement that research is powerful – very strong arrows to have in your quiver.” Other images in the design are the butterfly, symbolic of the metamorphosis of life, and the heart, representing love and the core of life. The daisy symbolizes innocence, purity and gentle beauty. Through these combined symbols, Ms. Hill has created a plea for a strong emphasis on breast cancer research.
“Window of Hope”

2003, Eunice Hill
“Window of Hope” projects the impression of a stained glass window.

The stained glass window, a radiant light shining through it, creates a sense of spirituality and the reassurance of light in the darkness. The artist appliquéd the quilt, starting with a whole piece of black cloth and cutting it to reveal the colors that create the brilliant design. The totally black surface that is the base of the design is a reminder of all that is unknown to the patient when a cancer diagnosis occurs. The completed quilt, with butterflies, flowers and ribbons, reflects optimism and the feeling of hope for today and for the future.

Eunice Hill at work in her studio.
“The Pink Ribbon”

2003, Charlene Hughes and her Honolulu quilters’ group
“The Pink Ribbon” quilt was made by Charlene Hughes and her quilters’ group in Honolulu, Hawaii. Charlene is a retired oncology nurse, master quilter and quilting instructor. Together with her quilter friends, Charlene made a pink ribbon quilt for the then newly elected Governor of Hawaii, Linda Lingle, after she underwent a biopsy for a breast lump. The quilt represents and shows support for all women who are faced with possible breast cancer. Ms. Lingle’s biopsy was benign, but all women who have gone through this diagnostic process know the feelings experienced during this waiting period.

This wall hanging, created with Hawaiian and hand-dyed fabrics, uses some of the “extra” blocks from the quilt made for Governor Lingle. Ms. Hughes gave the wallhanging to Rochester’s Mary Amundsen, her roommate in nurses training many years ago and a breast cancer survivor. Ms. Amundsen has, in turn, presented it to the Women’s Cancer Program to continue the expression of shared concern for all women whose lives are affected by breast cancer.