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BLACK NATIVITY: A SEASON FOR CHANGE

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and Lou Bellamy**

**Directed by Dominic Taylor
Presented by Target**

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Previews December 1 & 2**

Contemporary African American Quilting

The quilting tradition has remained an important part of African American culture and has a strong following today. Below are some of the more prominent examples of current quilting practices, exhibitions and quilting collectives. The wealth of material available at present is a testament to the important legacy African American textile artists have left behind.

You may check the footnotes for the URL to follow these descriptions to their original website addresses. *The copy presented below is excerpted directly from the respective websites and is included for informational purposes only.*

Penumbra Theatre Company's Quilting Circle Series

In 2007 Penumbra launched the Quilting Circle Series. Twenty women came together to create a unique quilt that is featured in this year's performance. This quilt tells many stories. Stitched into its fabric are the bonds of family, friendship, mentorship and spirituality. Quilting has long been an important tradition for African Americans. As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Black Nativity*, we are thrilled to celebrate the start of a new holiday tradition!

Quilting Sisters: African-American Quilting in Michigan¹

This exhibition of fifteen quilts from the Michigan State University Museum's extensive textile collections represents the diversity of quilting traditions found within historical and contemporary African-American communities in Michigan. From very conservative to highly innovative styles, the quilts reflect these themes:

- 1) records of patterns of migration and settlement;
- 2) expressions or documents of ethnic identity;
- 3) quilters as artists/quilts as art;
- 4) documents of personal, family, and community history; and
- 5) quilting traditions. The inclusion of photographic portraits of individual quilters taken by Kalamazoo-based artist Mary Whalen and excerpts from taped interviews make this exhibition a truly enriching experience.

¹ http://museum.cl.msu.edu/museum/tes/AfrAm_Quilts.htm

This exhibition has been displayed at Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University, Niagara University, NY; Ella Sharp Museum, Jackson, MI; Flint Institute of Art, Flint, Michigan; Kalamazoo Valley Museum, Kalamazoo, MI; Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI; Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, MI; Port Huron Museum, Port Huron, MI. And is currently on display at Gallery 194, Lapeer Center for the Arts in Lapeer, Michigan through November 3, 2007.

The Gee's Bend Collective²

Gee's Bend is a small rural community nestled into a curve in the Alabama River southwest of Selma, Alabama. Founded in antebellum times, it was the site of cotton plantations, primarily the lands of Joseph Gee and his relative Mark Pettway, who bought the Gee estate in 1850. After the Civil War, the freed slaves took the name Pettway, became tenant farmers for the Pettway family, and founded an all-black community nearly isolated from the surrounding world. During the Great Depression, the federal government stepped in to purchase land and homes for the community, bringing strange renown — as an "Alabama Africa" — to this sleepy hamlet.

The town's women developed a distinctive, bold, and sophisticated quilting style based on traditional American (and African American) quilts, but with a geometric simplicity reminiscent of Amish quilts and modern art. The women of Gee's Bend passed their skills and aesthetic down through at least six generations to the present. In 2002, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in partnership with the nonprofit Tinwood Alliance, of Atlanta, presented an exhibition of seventy quilt masterpieces from the Bend. The exhibition, entitled "The Quilts of Gee's Bend," is accompanied by two companion books, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, and the larger *Gee's Bend: The Women and Their Quilts*, both published by Tinwood Media, as well as a documentary video on the Gee's Bend quilters and a double-CD of Gee's Bend gospel music from 1941 and 2002.

The "Quilts of Gee's Bend" exhibition has received tremendous international acclaim, beginning at its showing in Houston, then at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the other museums on its twelve-city American tour. *Newsweek*, National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation*, *Art in America*, *CBS News Sunday Morning*, PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, the *Martha Stewart Living* television show, *House and Garden*, Oprah's *O* magazine, and

² <http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/history/>

Country Home magazine are among the hundreds of print and broadcast media organizations that have celebrated the quilts and the history of this unique town. Art critics worldwide have compared the quilts to the works of important artists such as Henri Matisse and Paul Klee. The *New York Times* called the quilts "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced." The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is currently preparing a second major museum exhibition and tour of Gee's Bend quilts, to premiere in 2006.

In 2003, with assistance from the Tinwood organizations, all the living quilters of Gee's Bend — more than fifty women — founded the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective to serve as the exclusive means of selling and marketing the quilts being produced by the women of the Bend. The Collective is owned and operated by the women of Gee's Bend. Every quilt sold by the Gee's Bend Quilt Collective is unique, individually produced, and authentic — each quilt is signed by the quilter and labeled with a serial number. Rennie Young Miller of Gee's Bend is the Collective's president.