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Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

Yvonne Wells – 2019 Governor’s Arts Award Recipient

May 23, 2019



Yvonne Wells (American, born 1939), *Yesterday: Civil Rights in the South III*, 1989, Cotton, cotton/polyester blend, wool, polyester, and plastic buttons, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Kempf Hogan, 2004.20.8

The Museum wishes to celebrate artist Yvonne Wells (American, born 1939), a recipient of the 2019 Governor’s Arts Award from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

A Tuscaloosa native, Wells began quilting in 1979. Initially, she created quilts to keep her and her children warm during the cold winter by following patterns from a book. Sewing based on patterns felt unsatisfying, and in 1984, Wells began creating story quilts. A quiet and humble woman, she speaks both eloquently and powerfully through visual narratives that illustrate personal experiences as well as religious or sociopolitical issues. She has said, “Everything I create is like a story, a record of history to benefit people in the future.”

For example, in [Yesterday: Civil Rights in the South III](#) on view now at the Museum, Wells’ imagery serves to illuminate many difficult moments from the era, including the bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four little girls, Governor George Wallace standing in the schoolhouse door in an attempt to stop integration at The University of Alabama, and various acts of violence such as lynching and attacks on protestors with dogs and water

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hoses. Wells did not focus solely on the struggles of that period; she also depicted joyous celebrations and the hopeful changes that time has brought while honoring heroes of the movement such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among her many achievements, Wells created an ornament for the Christmas tree at the White House in 1993, and she received the Alabama Arts and Visual Craftsman Award in 1998. The Museum holds 18 of Wells' exuberant and sophisticated quilts in our Permanent Collection, and we presented solo exhibitions of her work in 1996 and 2013. In addition to the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, her work is included in national and international museums and private collections.

Congratulations to Yvonne Wells on receiving this well-deserved honor!