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**African American Quilts: From Traditional to Contemporary
On View at the Mercer Museum**

DOYLESTOWN, PA: (January 10, 2018) – The Mercer Museum will host a dual exhibition of the work of African American quilters. *Unpacking Collections: The Legacy of Cuesta Benberry, an African American Quilt Scholar*, showcases the textile collection of the late Cuesta Benberry, one of the 20th century pioneers of research on American and African American quilting. Also on view is *The Friendly Quilters: 21st Century Traditions*, featuring the quilts of the Bucks County based guild of African American women known as The Friendly Quilters, who produce both traditional and innovative textiles that push the boundaries of African American quilting. Both exhibitions are on view from January 20 through April 15.

Unpacking Collections features 15 important quilts from scholar, Cuesta Benberry’s collection. Benberry’s research into African American quilting challenged the (still widely held) perception that African American quilts had to have a certain set of visual criteria like bright colors and asymmetrical designs. Some of the quilts on view include pieces by well-known African American artists like Faith Ringgold “Kiss 1, Kiss 2,” and Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi “Black Family Series #1: The Family of 3.” Benberry also collected quilts that depicted African American stereotypes, like a 1930 “Mammy” or “Aunt Jemima” quilt, and “Little Brown Koko,” which she felt were important documentations of ethnic stereotyping and racism. *Unpacking Collections* also includes the only work Benberry ever quilted, along with her notes and quilt patterns. *Unpacking Collections: The Legacy of Cuesta Benberry, and African American Quilt Scholar* is a Michigan State University Museum/Great Lakes Quilt Center activity, and is made possible by a Creating Inclusive Excellence Grant from the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives at Michigan State University with additional support from an anonymous gift.

As a companion to the Cuesta Benberry quilts, the Mercer is also showcasing the work of The Friendly Quilters, a Bucks County based guild of African American women whose members have retired from careers in finance, engineering, art and education, and have turned to quilting for artistic expression. The exhibition, *The Friendly Quilters: 21st Century Traditions*, features 25 quilts from these artists who infuse 21st century sensibilities and technology into quilting tradition. According to the exhibit's curator and Friendly Quilter, Cassandra Stencil Gunkle, "The Friendly Quilters challenge each other to use traditional skills and modern technology to visualize their culture on cloth, in all its varied hues and experiences." The adinkra embroidery featured in the "Adinkra Symbols" quilt are computer generated. A "Barak Obama" quilt, is a fiber art piece which involved tracing a black and white photo of the former president onto freezer paper. Other works on view are, "Memories of Trayvon," and a "Sudoku" quilt featuring hand-sewn adinkra symbols.

In conjunction with the exhibits, the Mercer Museum will be hosting a number of quilt-related programs including *Quilting in the African American Community* on Sunday, February 11 at 2 p.m., a workshop, *Artful Fabrics for Modern Quilts-Adinkra Printing*, on February 25, from noon – 4 p.m., *21st Century Essentials-A Quilter's Accessories* on Saturday, March 17 at 2 p.m., and Family Craft Activity: Make a Diva Bag, on Saturday, April 14, from noon – 3 p.m. For more quilt-related programs, visit mercermuseum.org

Unpacking Collections: The Legacy of Cuesta Benberry, an African American Quilt Scholar and *The Friendly Quilters: 21st Century Traditions* are included with museum admission. Mercer Museum admission is \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors (65+) and \$8 for youth ages 8-17.

Unpacking Collections: The Legacy of Cuesta Benberry, an African American Quilt Scholar and *The Friendly Quilters: 21st Century Traditions* are locally sponsored by: The African American Museum of Bucks County, Melissa V. Bond, Attorney with programming support provided by Barbara Figuera Harrison.

About the Mercer Museum

The Mercer Museum, one of Bucks County's premier tourist attractions, offers visitors a unique

window into pre-Industrial America as seen through the implements used in everyday life. The Museum's collection includes more than 50,000 objects exhibiting the tools of more than 60 different crafts and trades, providing one of the world's most comprehensive portraits of material culture in America. The Mercer Museum is located at Pine Street & Scout Way in Doylestown and is open for self-guided exploration 7 days a week. For more information, call 215-345-0210 or visit www.mercermuseum.org.

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