

# OKTA



## LORETTA BENNETT

08.01.2007

Loretta Bennett, daughter of Qunnie Pettway, is a “new generation” quilter from Gee’s Bend. Inspired by the *Quilts of Gee’s Bend* exhibition in Houston in 2002, she recalls:

“There my eyes were opened, and it touched me in a way as to question myself; can I make a quilt that someday might hang on the wall of a museum? At that time, according to me, the answer was, No way, no way—not after seeing my relatives’ quilts hanging in a museum; they had been making quilts for generation after generation. Several months passed and the *Quilts of Gee’s Bend* exhibition opened in New York; still I had not made any quilts. Finally, after hearing all the great news reports about my ancestors’ quilts, I decided to

try my hand at it. After all, I am an offspring of some of the great quiltmakers from Gee’s Bend. I came to realize that my mother, her mother, my aunts, and all the others from Gee’s Bend had sewn the foundation, and all I had to do now was thread my own needle and piece a quilt together.”<sup>1</sup>

We spoke to her at Paulson Press in October 2006.

—Kenneth Caldwell

**Q:** How is making quilts at Paulson Press different from making them at home?

**A:** I’m making the pieces smaller. I did some practice runs before I got here.

**Q:** When you started quilting, was there less of a practical need for them in Gee’s Bend because of central heating?

**A:** I caught the tail-end of that period.

The house that I grew up in still was kind of airy.

**Q:** How old were you when you started?

**A:** At about 12 or 13 I pieced my own quilts.

**Q:** Was your mother pressuring you to learn quilting? Or how did you come to it?

**A:** I wouldn’t say pressured. It was just the way of life. You tried to sew just like your mom. We just knew that was expected of us. And whenever we went to our aunt’s house, if we wanted to play, we had to sew first.

**Q:** So how is your work different from that of some of the other Gee’s Bend quilters?

**A:** I’m a little bolder even though I’m quiet—I think I am. The generation gap is



Loretta Bennett in the studio.

### Forever (For Old Lady Sally), 2006

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and softground etching; Paper size: 29 1/4" x 44"  
Edition of 50

<sup>1</sup>Gee’s Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt, Tinwood Books, 2006



**Blues, 2007**

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and softground etching; Paper size: 42 3/4" x 31"  
Edition of 50

a little different. I finished high school, turned 18, got married. My husband was in the military, so as soon as I got married—about four months later—I went to Germany. So I did a lot of traveling, seeing different places, got a chance to try different food and learn how to knit over in Germany, and got a chance to speak the language and go to museums there and little antique shops.

**Q:** I want to talk about the younger quilters. Are they all women?

**A:** You have some young men also.

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“When I’m looking for something, I like to stick with the same material or feel. So I don’t like to mix polyester with denim, or corduroy with velvet or velveteen. But sometimes I will mix them if I really like the color, like the navy blue and hot pink quilt, where I mixed a pink velvet with a blue corduroy. That’s my favorite quilt. I think the reason it is my favorite is because hot pink is my mother’s favorite color. She taught me how to sew and quilt, and I wanted to do something to honor her.”<sup>2</sup>

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**Q:** So younger people are interested?

**A:** There are more – especially since the quilts have been reborn. With better houses, there wasn’t a really big need for a lot of quilts. And, of course, they all had quilts that they had made years ago. I think that the quilt has really taught the young ones to open up their minds back to the past and to keep things going, because it was starting to be a dying art. With some of the young ones that came on some of the trips, like the first opening in Houston in ’02 – I think



**No Way, No Way, 2006**

Color aquatint, spitbite aquatint and softground etching; Paper size: 39 1/2" x 36"  
Edition of 50

that was really important—especially for me. I always made quilts, but I just only made them occasionally for babies—not big quilts—to give away. I think you’re going to see a new generation of quilters.

**Q:** When you are quilting, what is it that’s going through your mind?

**A:** I quilt with music. If there’s a good song on, I stop and dance because that runs in the family. And that’s what gets me going. I just let it happen. I like to lay my pieces out. I like to get a good color first and good music, and Loretta goes to work. ✂

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Paulson Press is pleased to announce the inclusion of four of our artists, Louisiana Bendolph, Mary Lee Bendolph, Loretta Bennett and Loretta Pettway, into F.A.P.E.’s (Friends of Art and Preservation in the Embassies’) Lee Kimche McGrath Original Print Collection. As part of the Collection, each year a distinguished American artist creates an edition of original prints for display in U.S. embassies. Chuck Close, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Elizabeth Murray, Robert Rauschenberg, Susan Rothenberg, Ed Ruscha and Frank Stella are all past participants.



**Yellow Jack, 2006**

Color hardground and softground aquatint etching; Paper size: 26 1/2" x 26 1/2"  
Edition of 50



Louisiana and Loretta at the U.S. State Department Balcony, Washington D.C., 2007

<sup>2</sup>Gee’s Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt, Tinwood Books, 2006