

# Raw Material

Quilts by NedRa Bonds



*Raw Material* offers an autobiographical declaration of Black Womanhood coupled with reflections on racial and social injustice, intimate encounters with the medical establishment, and Bonds' family legacy.

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 Center for Bioethics and Humanities  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS  
[www.coloradobioethics.org](http://www.coloradobioethics.org)

Exhibit webpage



<http://tinyurl.com/NedRa-Bonds>



*The Mommy Quilt*  
2008  
40"x41"



To “bear witness” is to show that something exists or is true; it is a proclamation of presence, a voice for something or someone that may no longer exist. Through narrative quilts, artist NedRa Bonds bears witness to the people, events, and experiences that have not only shaped her life, but more broadly the world that surrounds her.

*Raw Material* highlights selections from over 25 years of Bonds’ rich and provocative textiles, providing audiences a holistic view of her artistic journey. It offers an autobiographical declaration of Black Womanhood coupled with reflections on racial and social injustice, intimate encounters with the medical establishment, and her family legacy.

NedRa Bonds takes an unflinching look at our social institutions by connecting historical narratives to their present-day manifestations. In her work she quotes her grandmother who often said, “the words may be different, but the sentiments remain the same.” Bonds renders her sentiments through the images she creates in her quilts. “It’s a quieter way of making an issue relevant,” she says. Quilt making draws on rich craft traditions borne out of the South that fostered community and communication among their creators. As objects of utility, quilts provide warmth and comfort; as objects of art, they both are canvases and repositories of memory.

Together, these works operate as journals rendered in cloth. Some are protest quilts, others are affirmations of strength and perseverance, yet they all share a common thread of serving as a vessel of voice. “With quilting you can say anything,” says Bonds. “It’s just fabric.” Despite the softer medium, her messages still pack a potent punch.

This exhibition invites viewers to re-imagine their relationship with cloth by experiencing its capacity for preserving memory, honoring the past, and creating connection.

***Essay by Colony Little***



Real Wonder Women  
2014  
26"x29"

'Real Women' are multidimensional beings, possessing a tapestry of qualities, complexities, and imperfections that shape their unique identities.

**Real Wonder Women** reflects on the multicultural and multifaceted lives of women of color: **Harriet Tubman**, the abolitionist and pinnacle operator of the Underground Railroad, which ran through Quindaro, Kansas - Bonds' hometown; **Malala Yousafzai**, the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, recognized in 2014 at age 17, for her work as a human rights advocate for female education in Pakistan and globally; **Wilma Mankiller**, the first woman elected chief of the Cherokee Nation and an activist for Native American and women's rights; **Dr. Gloria Wilder Braithwaite**, a nationally renowned entrepreneur, pediatrician, public speaker and expert on poverty and social justice; and **Arzie Umali** who created the *Her Art Project*, celebrating Kansas City women in the arts and exploring challenges women artists face as they bring together motherhood, careers, and artistic fulfillment.

Each of these images serves as a reminder that 'landing on your feet' will look different for every real woman.



The Price  
2011  
27" x 31"



*Spirit of the Forest*  
2001  
24" x 26"



Get Off Me  
1994  
70" x 36"

**Get Off Me**, depicts a woman running away from the confining social labels, norms, and value systems that define women solely through childbearing; instead, NedRa Bonds portrays a liberated figure expressing freedom from restrictive societal pressures. Bonds explores her past identity as a Christian, and her enduring identity as a Black Woman, bringing together these different facets of her life.

This textile features a woman with a halo, her body posed in a crucifixion stance. The woman's legs are presented in a dynamic, motion-filled position, against a backdrop of an African flag. Her hand grasps a ring with tethers of fabric, representing the accumulation of lived experiences and life's obligations that have shaped her past and present.



*60 Years After  
Brown v. Board of Education:  
Now What?  
2013  
44' x 44''*





Drowning in the Ocean of You  
2016  
32" x 36"



In Times Like These  
2021  
64" x 50"



*She Thought She Bought Enough To Be*  
2011  
28" x 45"



Windows  
2011  
60" x 74"

While receiving treatment for breast cancer, NedRa Bonds gazed out the windows of hospital rooms. Isolated from the outside world, patients were identified primarily by their medical wristbands.

To reclaim her identity beyond that circumscribed label, Bonds translated her observations into a quilt, using color-blocked windows to depict the lives transpiring behind the glass. Whether it served as a way to connect with fellow patients, cope with her circumstances, or fuel daydreams, looking out the windows became a tool for imaginative storytelling.

The quilt represents the multitude of lives behind the glass panes, each with stories that extend beyond the confines of their hospital rooms and barcode identifiers.



*I Have Cancer.  
It Doesn't Have Me.*  
2021  
21" x 25"

Black women are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer than non-Hispanic white women.\*

A patient's cancer diagnosis, prognosis, treatment options, and outcomes are all shaped by disparities in healthcare access, insidious medical racism, socio-economic inequalities, and other systemic forces. In the face of a triple-negative breast cancer diagnosis and the physical and emotional toll that its grueling treatment takes, NedRa Bonds expresses her defiance in ***I Have Cancer. It Doesn't Have Me.***

Bonds' practice of art as therapy provides a way to counteract the dehumanizing process of becoming a patient who must relinquish control in a fight for her life.

Siddharth S, Sharma D. Racial Disparity and Triple-Negative Breast Cancer in African-American Women: A Multifaceted Affair between Obesity, Biology, and Socioeconomic Determinants. *Cancers*. 2018; 10(12):514. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cancers10120514>





The Fist and the Finger:  
It's Really About You  
2014  
17" x 23"



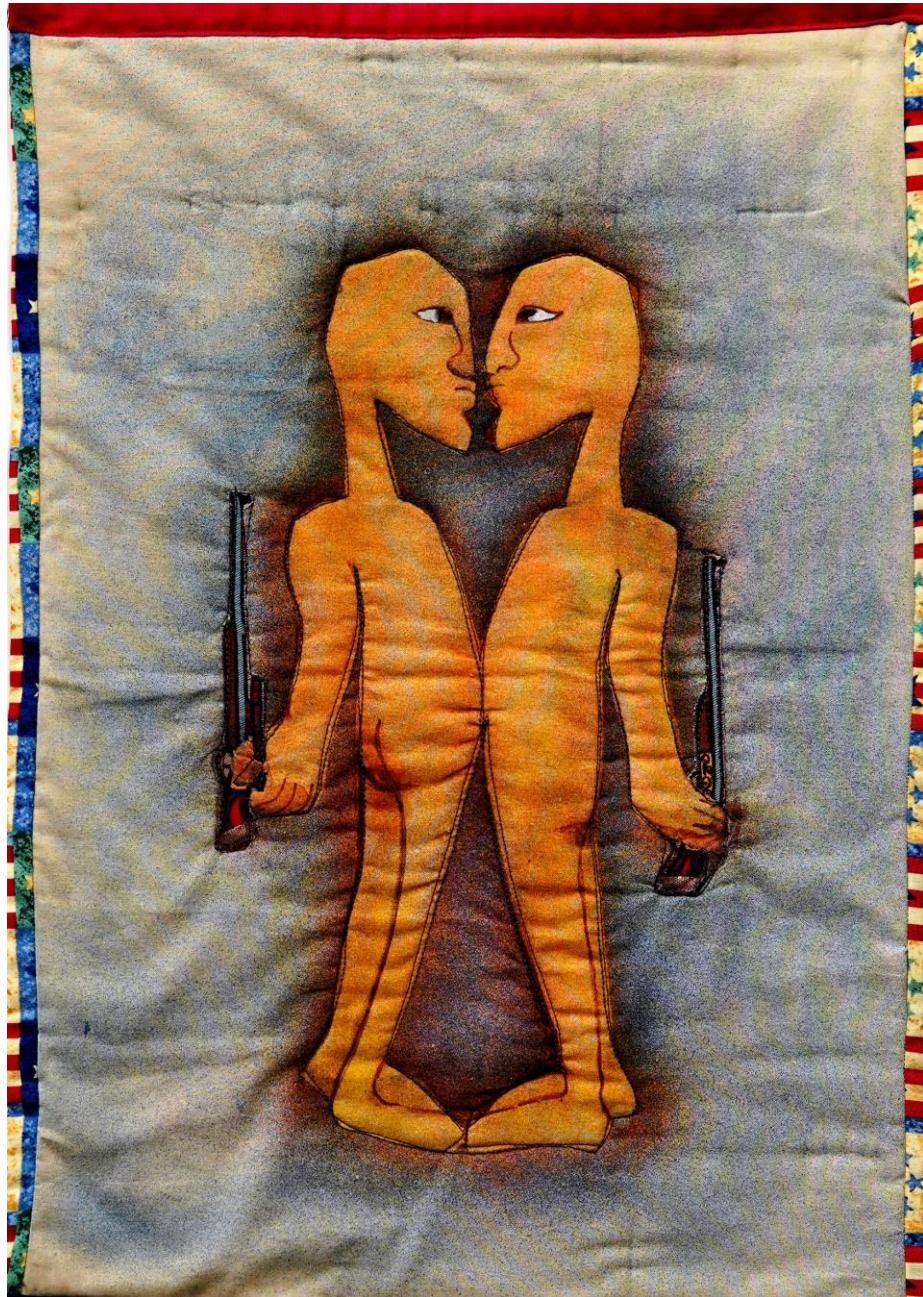
*Working While Black*  
2008  
31" x 19"

Systemic injustices experienced by Black women in the workplace raise the question: "Can a person bring their 'whole self' to work?"

In ***Working While Black***, NedRa Bonds explores the suffocating surroundings she faced working part-time in a call center. The confining walls of her cubicle hindered connections with fellow co-workers, isolating her. The chains on the left and right of the figure symbolize the spiral phone cords that tethered her to the desk. To find solace in this restrictive environment, Bonds embraces her own identity by defiantly wearing African cloth to work, as depicted in the fabric attached to the quilt's bottom.

This expressive act challenged the ways such workplaces require employees to compromise their authenticity. Upon departure from this position, Bonds' autonomy and her commitment to social connection remained intact.





*Mask of Diplomacy*  
2003  
14" x 20"



Henrietta Moseley Thompson Feb 1 1990  
In the soft scenes of youth  
when cares are small and few  
I'll show to others of my age  
what busy hands can do

YOU BOUGHT MY SOUL  
FOR TONG AND LASH  
I GRIND THIS CLASS  
TO FIX YOUR ASS

Sweetness: The Serial Killer  
2019  
28" x 19"



*Mami Wata*, Ashlynn Bonds  
2022  
32" x 42"

I want to make memories every day for other folks and let my experience be a learning tool for them." NedRa Bonds' legacy lives in the practicing hands of her granddaughter and great-granddaughter.

Memories form the foundation of the quilt designs. According to Bonds, formal design education must come before radical and mixed media creations.

Ashlynn Bonds, granddaughter to NedRa, exemplifies her teaching in ***Mami Wata***, which was motivated by her daughter's love of mermaids and Yoruba Orisha mythology.



*Don't Play With Fire*, Ashlynn Bonds  
2024  
22" x 28"

She, Ella Marie Tyme Hill  
2024  
8.5" x 11"





NedRa and Ashlynn Bonds



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Exhibition Feedback

<https://tinyurl.com/Fulginiti-ART>

Kendall Taylor: Guest Curator  
Katie Rhine: Director of the Arts and Humanities in Healthcare Program  
David Weil: Manager of Operations and Educational Technology



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