

Conakys Quilts
Veronica Mays
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Summary by Emily Steiner

Veronica Mays crossed her own frontier when she switched from teaching high school English to quilting as her profession. She is passionate about quilting, and decided to pursue it full time. Attention to more craft-oriented work may be becoming more common as people are moving away from mass produced items and craving originality.

Veronica, a native of Newport, graduated from Rhode Island College with the dream of writing and acting. This was not her outcome however. She moved to California after college where she met her husband. After having her three daughters, she and her family moved to Alaska, where she earned a master's degree and learned how to quilt. Upon returning to Rhode Island, she started quilting again. This return to her hobby led her to realize she loved not just traditional quilting, but more specifically art quilting, which involves more unique patterns. Veronica shared many of her quilts with us, all exquisitely beautiful and unique.

Much of her work shows African influence, expressing her pride in her African heritage. She created a "Black Lives Matter" quilt in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as a quilt entitled "Shades of Protest." Other quilts include one made to honor Angela Davis and one in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King. This quilt was donated to the Martin Luther King Center in Newport, where she spent much time in her youth. She uses her art to make an impact. For example, she made a collaborative quilt with women of Mali, which was auctioned after completion to raise money for these women to create their own businesses. As a self-proclaimed and proud feminist, she designed a quilt to support the "Me Too" movement. A favorite of mine from her examples was the "She's Just Coolin" pattern she created, which is of a woman in a dress, in different poses. She had many variations of this pattern, and they were all so fun and vibrant. She even makes mailable quilted postcards. In addition, she turns portraits and photos into quilts, such as a quilt she made in honor of her Great Great Grandma Kate. Much of her work is shown at festivals, such as the "Tap It Out! Nicholas Brothers: Black Gold" quilt and "Josephine Baker" quilts which were shown at the North Charleston African Arts Festival.

Along with standard quilts, she uses her talents to make fashion items. She makes what she calls "hobo bags," a coat for her mother made with blue fabrics (her mom's favorite color), along with her "My People" jacket. She also won a ribbon for her first quilted sweatshirt. Quilted sweatshirts involve removing a sweatshirt's neckline and cuffs, cutting it up, and reassembling with quilting. The "This Writer's Journey" jacket features expressions about her life and her writing experiences. Veronica Mays is truly an interesting and talented woman. When she set out to cross a new frontier, switching from teaching to quilting, I doubt she knew the impact she would create. Her quilts are art, and she uses her art to get across messages of activism and love, all while creating masterpieces to honor lives and moments in a permanent way.