

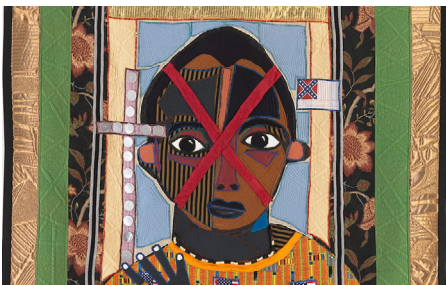
FIBER : MICHAEL A. CUMMINGS



MEET Michael Cummings and **WATCH** a video that features the artist at work and shows her connection with the Wearable Art Movement. **MAKE** an artwork inspired by these artists and **REFLECT** on your finished artwork as you consider what you might want to make next.

MEET

MEET MICHAEL A. CUMMINGS,
quilt artist.



Top: Michael A. Cummings, *James Baldwin: Born Into a Lie*, detail, 2019.

Above: Michael A. Cummings, *African Jazz #10*, courtesy of the artist.

"I use a zigzag stitch to attach my fabric to the foundation and I use a contrasting color thread to give some dimension to some degree."

—Michael Cummings

MICHAEL A. CUMMINGS moved to New York and started his career in painting. When he met the artist Romare Bearden, an African American artist known for his work in collage, he saw Bearden as a role model and was inspired to change his focus from painting to collage. Cummings liked the idea of narrative collages and storytelling. After creating a banner with fabrics, he then began creating quilts. His quilts tell stories about the African American experience across historical, cultural, philosophical and mythological realms.

Cummings integrates silks, linens, mixed cottons, and various types of printed fabrics along with applique techniques. He draws on the fabric with chalk, pins pieces, and then sews the fabric together. He thinks of his sewing machine as his "dance partner" because it knows all his so-called dance moves. His quilts focus on stories and historical connections with people, places and events, celebrating the culture that came out of the slave ships as well as Southern culture. Cummings views his quilts as giant collages, likening the process of construction to painting on canvas.

The artist sometimes creates his quilts in a series, allowing him to explore the subject matter in greater detail. His longest series, *African Jazz*, consists of 12 quilts that he created, one quilt every thirty days, over one year.

WATCH



SEE AND LISTEN TO Cummings talk about his process and how he incorporates history and mythology into narrative quilts.

<https://youtu.be/byGr5acD3PA>

After viewing the segment, recall and consider the following:

- What impressed you most about the artist and the way he works?
- The artist started out as a painter, and then he made collages out of paper. How are his quilts like those earlier paintings and collages?
- What do you recall about how Cummings challenges himself in the artmaking process?
- Do you think history is important to the artist? How do you know?
- Do you think his narrative quilts might spark conversations? Why or why not?
- How are Cummings' quilts like other quilts you have seen? How are they different?

MAKE

Make a fabric quilt that tells a story about someone who is important to you. This might be someone you know or someone whose life story is important to tell.



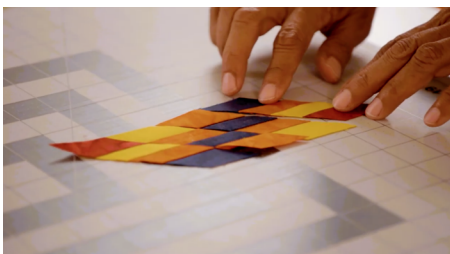
Michael A. Cummings, *Young Obama*, 2009, courtesy of the artist.

PLANNING

- Who will your quilt portrait honor?
- What kind of quilt portrait will you make? A portrait can be a realistic depiction of an individual, but it can also be symbolic. A symbolic portrait might show objects or symbols that have special connections to the individual.
- Consider the kind of message or story your quilt portrait will convey. How will you represent your person/image on your quilt?
- How important is it that your quilt tell a story? What will you need to think about for it to do so? What story are you telling?
- How large or small should the quilt be? It's helpful to think about how your quilt will be used. If this is your first quilt, you may wish to start small, creating a quilt that you might hang on a wall or use as a potholder.
- How will you use fabric to create your quilt? Refer to the FIBER: MEDIUM & METHODS sheet in your packet for instructions.
- What would you need to think about if you decide to create a quilt out of paper instead of fabric?
- How will you display or use the quilt?



Piecing: https://youtu.be/j_jHCL6SXuE?si=by6fvtXxRCIMYbox&t=598



Piecing: <https://youtu.be/a-RcgAYazf8>



Gees Bend quilters: <https://youtu.be/i8EntXf4HhM>



Carolyn Mazloomi binding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQp6YCF-Jwk&t=82s>

PROCESS

PREPARATION ■ Plan your quilt by sketching ideas first on paper. Choose fabrics. Once you have selected fabrics, transfer your drawing to a piece of fabric that you have chosen as your “base” piece.

PIECING ■ Sew cut pieces together to create your design. You may choose to pin and then sew pieces together, joining “right” sides together while maintaining a 1/4 inch seam allowance. Alternatively, you may choose a less formal way of creating your quilt top, placing fabric pieces where you want them and then, with your sewing machine set to “zig-zag” stitch, sewing pieces where you want them on top of the base piece, as if you were gluing paper together in a collage. Your completed design is your quilt top.

IRONING/PRESSING ■ Quilters often use an iron to press seams flat between each step to ensure a smooth finish.

QUILT SANDWICH ■ Layer the backing (right side down), batting, and quilt top (right side up). A quilt sandwich is the foundational three-layer assembly of a quilt, consisting of a backing fabric (bottom), batting (middle), and the finished quilt top.

BASTING ■ Secure the three layers together using pins or safety spray to prevent shifting.

QUILTING ■ Stitch the layers together (by machine or hand) to add texture and durability.

BINDING: Sew a binding strip around the edges to seal the raw edges.

FINISH ■ For added flair, use decorative edge scissors and applique and/or embroidery on your quilt. You may choose to use batting and another layer of fabric to be the back of the quilt. You will need to decide whether the quilt will be three layers (front, batting, back) or one layer of fabric with no backing..

REFLECT

LOOK at your finished portrait quilt. Think about the process.

- Look at your finished portrait quilt. Think about the process.
- Are you pleased with your finished project? Why or why not?
- What will you do the next time you make a quilt? What message do you hope to share?
- What else would you like to make out of fabric?