



QUILTING BEE

Thinc Design takes quilts up a notch for the American Folk Art Museum

Next March, Manhattan's historic Park Avenue Armory will be transformed into a three dimensional display of color and design when the American Folk Art Museum presents *Infinite Variety: Three Centuries of Red and White Quilts*. And the team at Thinc Design created an exhibition that will bring the centuries-old tradition of quilting into the new millennia.

More than 650 red and white American textiles (making up the largest quilt exhibition ever presented in New York City) will be on loan from Joanna Rose, a private New York collector, and will be dramatically installed in the Armory's 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall from March 25 to March 30.

"We don't typically do gallery shows. They came to us because they really wanted to do something different and go beyond what a typical curator might be

thinking at a folk art museum. They really wanted to make an impression and celebrate the collection," says Thinc design director Steven Shaw.

Suspended from the ceiling, the quilts will appear to spiral in mid-air, filling the enormous volume of the Drill Hall and creating circular pavilions that invite visitors to experience the quilts in a three-dimensional environment. Highlighted quilts will be arranged on viewing platforms for closer appreciation. Incorporated into the floor-to-ceiling design will be strategically placed benches and ottomans.

"The Armory has an 80-foot high ceiling, so we wanted to take advantage of that space and use it to literally elevate the stature of the quilts. The entire show is hung. We wanted it to be about the quilts and not about the support structure, like walls or trusses, so we gravitated towards

[hanging the quilts with] cables and cardboard tubes," Shaw says.

Designers were inspired by the notion of quilting circles. Quilting is usually a community activity, so the double-sided cylindrical display spirals in the exhibition imitate that tradition.

The Thinc team wanted it to be open, light, and install quickly, and the whole thing can go into the recycling bin after the show. Curators have selected about 150 of the most interesting patterns to be at eye-level, some of the highest in the display will be up to 45 feet in the air. All the quilts will be boxed beforehand, so when the quilts arrive onsite they will be taken out of the boxes in the order in which they will be installed.

Designers went through the quilts to sort by sizes and evenness to the patterns, so the entire exhibition will have a nice, even visual flow.

"It represents 300 years of American quilt making; there's a simplicity and a real authenticity to the design," Shaw says. ■