

Kuiki Eko

Kristen Morris, Cornell University, USA

Keywords: Hawaiian Quilting, Repetition, Echo Stitch

Kuiki Eko is a fiber art piece, done in the style of Classic Traditional Hawaiian Quilting (Arthur, (2010). This quilt is an artistic impression rather than a well-designed utilitarian home accessory.

When translated, Kuiki Eko, means “stitching echo,” homage to the type of stitch used to manipulate the quilt’s surface. Inspired by the use of the echo stitch in Hawaiian quilts, *repetition* is explored through the surface design, motifs, and process of creation. The rhythm of the echo stitch is an aspect of this style. Just as an echo can never take the place of the original voice, this fiber art piece interprets the traditional method of Hawaiian quilting in a modified way. A sort-of 21st century offshoot of the original quilt process- another echo.

The Classic Traditional Hawaiian quilt style has four distinct characteristics: 1) Use of whole pieces of fabric for the applique and background; 2) “snowflake” method of cutting the applique design at one time; 3) use of only two colors of fabric; and 4) using an echo or outline style of quilting that follows the contour of the appliqued design throughout the entire quilt (Arthur, 2010; Root, 1989). These four features are unique to quilting and are said to have emerged because of the fabrics and style of garments worn during the period when quilts were gaining popularity. Early whaling and trading ships brought the basic woven fabric and sewing skills to the islands (Root, 1989). The Hawaiians created muumuu-like garments from the woven fabrics, using the whole piece of fabric and therefore did not have scraps for patchwork quilts of the style taught by American missionaries upon their arrival in the



1800's. For the islanders, it was illogical to cut big pieces of fabric into smaller pieces, just to sew them back together again. Instead, quilters in Hawaii created their own style of applique cutting from whole pieces of fabric. The echo stitch pattern appealed to rhythm and repetition of nature, mimicking waves and tides undulating around the islands. Many quilters believe that the spirit of the person stitching the quilt became an integral part of the finished work, giving it an added dimension – a sense of life (Root, 1989).

In media theory, repetition is understood, “to signify the act of repeating something (action, words, objects) as well as the result of this act – the repeated action, work, or object” (Repetition, n.d.). Repetition may be thought of as occurring in a linear progression; repetition in time, bridging the past and present. Repetition or reproduction shares all the qualities of the repeated and yet is another (Repetition, n.d.). This quilt, Kuiki Eko, is a repetition of past Hawaiian quilt techniques, but adapted to fit the modern production modes. Additionally, the stitch method reinforces the repetition.

The intent of this fiber art piece was to reproduce the Hawaiian quilt style in a modern environment, but do so in a way that is approachable to modern fiber artists. This quilt, retained the four pillars of Hawaiian quilt style while still advancing the method so that it may be repeated in today's fast-paced society.

The applique motif is an original design and was inspired by the wisteria flower. Being that this quilt is documenting a joyous moment, a wedding, the wisteria flower reminds us to have humility and reflection when embarking into new love. The repetition of the motif creates a pattern, which naturally grabs the attention of the viewer and then creates a comfort familiarity with the design. The applique motif was created using Adobe Illustrator, and was cut directly from the cloth using a laser cutter. The applique was then machine stitched to the background cloth. These three methods, all modern, set the ground-work for the echo stitch finishing work. There are approximately 90,000 stitches repeated throughout the 90" X 90" quilt. Although the exact amount of time committed to covering 100% of the surface of the quilt cannot be calculated, master Hawaiian quilters require about one year to complete a quilt.

The innovation and contribution of this fiber art piece is the modern application of technology while upholding the four pillars of Classic Traditional Hawaiian Quilting. Technology bridges the past and present, introducing a beautiful quilt style to a new generation of enthusiasts. Future exploration of this technique will explore the use of negative space in a repetitive fashion to add visual interest, adding yet another dynamic to surface design.

Root, E. (1989). *Hawaiian Quilting: Instructions and Full-Size Patterns for 20 Blocks*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Repetition. (n.d.). The Chicago School of Media Theory. Retrieved from <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/reptition/>

Arthur, L. B. (2010). *The Hawaiian Quilt: A Unique American Art Form*. Waipahu, Hawai'i: Island Heritage Publishing.