

# “The Art of Hopi Mythology Quilts”

*This text is provided courtesy of the International Quilt Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*



International Quilt Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

*This Hopi Tiles Quilt was made by Rachel Nampeyo Sahmie in First Mesa, Arizona, dated 2013.*

Members of the Hopi tribe live in twelve villages in northeast Arizona. The regions where they live are referred to as First Mesa, Second Mesa, and Third Mesa. They have a long history of making cotton and wool blankets, robes, belts, and ceremonial sashes.

Today, the Hopi people are also known for making quilts. The quiltmaking tradition among the Hopi people dates to the late 1800s. At that time, Christian missionaries came to reservations and taught quiltmaking. Today, quilts are made by the Hopi as gifts and as artistic expression. Quilts are often given to members of the tribe when they leave the reservation for college or work. Quilts are part of baby naming ceremonies, too. Some quilts are also made to sell.

Hopi makers have taken the quilting tradition and made it their own. They use patterns and **motifs** that appear in other Hopi artwork. Their brightly colored quilts often show important figures from Hopi stories and traditions. Here are a few examples of significant Hopi figures shown on quilts and their stories.

### **Masaw, the Hopi Earth God**



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*Masaw, Hopi Earth God Quilt, made by Vonette Monongya in Third Mesa, Arizona, dated 2013*

This quilt was made by Hopi quiltmaker Vonette Monongya in Third Mesa in 2013. It shows Masaw, the Earth God. The quilt has a background with red, orange, and yellow fabric. It has nine white blocks, each with Masaw painted on it in a repeating pattern.

Also known as the Skeleton Man, Masaw is an important figure in stories passed down by the Hopi throughout history. In the Hopi creation story, Masaw taught people about **agriculture**. He was also the Guardian of the Underworld who warned the Hopi people about the dangers on Earth. In some stories, Masaw was a trickster who made humorous mistakes.

## Hopi Clown (Koshare)



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*Hopi Clown Quilt (Koshare) made by Elsie Talashoma in Third Mesa, Arizona, dated 1975*

This quilt was made by Hopi quiltmaker Elsie Talashoma in Third Mesa in 1975. It is called “Hopi Clown (Koshare)” and is made out of nine white blocks with a Koshare on each one. The Koshare is a sacred Hopi clown.

In Hopi tradition, masked members of the tribe dress up as kachina, or clowns, for most ceremonies. When Hopi men wear the costume and body paint, they believe they are **embodying** the spirit of the kachina. Sometimes called a jester or trickster, kachina entertain the audience. Kachina also appear in skits that may be funny, but also teach important life lessons.

Like in the quilt pictured above, the Koshare is a man who has painted himself with black and white stripes to hide his identity. During ceremonies, the Koshare often makes noise with a rattle and a drum.



## Mudhead



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*Mudhead Quilt, maker unidentified, made in Third Mesa, Arizona, dated 1996*

This quilt was made by an unknown Hopi maker in Third Mesa in 1996. Images of the Mudhead Kachina, or Koyemsi, appear on four white blocks. Each block is surrounded by turquoise and blue fabrics that have traditional Hopi designs on them.

The Mudhead Kachina is another Hopi kachina, or clown, that appears at ceremonies alongside other kachina. Mudhead Kachina drum and dance. During music breaks, they play games with people in the audience.

In two of the blocks on this quilt, you can see the Mudhead Kachina dancing. The other two blocks show a close-up of the mud-painted face. When the Mudhead Kachina appear in ceremonies, their hair, bodies, and faces are heavily covered in paint, which is how they get the name “Mudhead”.

## Works Cited

NA. 2020. "The Art of Hopi Mythology Quilting." International Quilt Museum. University of Nebraska-Lincoln.