

Basic Detail Report

**Title**

The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake

Artist

Bisa Butler

Date

2020

Dimensions

94 1/8 × 54 3/8 × 3/8 in. (239.1 × 138.1 × 1 cm)

Medium

Cotton, silk, wool, and velvet quilted and applique

Classifications

Textiles and Fiber

Credit Line

Purchased with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott

Object number

2020.35

Published References

Edquist, Grace, "Depth, History, and Reverence: The Intricacies of Bisa Butler's Quilted Portraits," in *Vogue*, March 3, 2020.

Billie Jean, Nikki, "The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake: Frederick Douglass by Bisa Butler," in *All Things Ankara*, March 5, 2020.

Gossling, Emily, "Bisa Butler's work aims to 'reorient angst and despair' faced by Black Americans," in *Creative Book*, March 17, 2020.

Close, Cynthia, "Bisa Butler is Having a Moment," in *Art and Object*, April 23, 2020.

Applebaum, Lauren, *Radical Tradition: American Quilts and Social Change*, Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art, 2020, p. 40-41 [exh. catalogue].

Finley Cheryl et al. *Free As They Want to Be: Artists Committed to Memory*. Bologna, Italy, Damiani, 2022.

Exhibition History

Harlem, New York, Claire Oliver Gallery, *Bisa Butler: The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake*, February 29 - June 27, 2020. Cincinnati, OH, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, *'Free as they want to be': Artists Committed to Memory*, September 30 - November 30, 2022.

Label Text

Bisa Butler's quilted portraits—made entirely of fabric—display a painterly use of vibrant colors and textures. She uses West African wax-printed fabrics, kente cloth, and Dutch wax prints to connect her subjects to their African roots. Butler's portraits are based on historical photographs and rendered at human scale, often engaging the viewer eye to eye. "I represent all of my figures with dignity and regal opulence because that is my actual perspective of humanity," she says. This quilt portrays the American social reformer Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), who, after escaping slavery, became an influential orator, writer, and leader of the abolitionist movement. Based on several photographic sources, the portrait conveys a powerful and confrontational presence. The work's title references a famous line from Douglass' July 5, 1852 speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?," in which he condemns the celebration of freedom during a time of chattel slavery: "It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced."

On View

Toledo Museum of Art (2445 Monroe Street), Gallery, 01