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## Finally, Mrs. Rose (and the Public) Can See All Her Quilts

By [JAMES BARRON](#)



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

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Quilts from the collection of Joanna S. Rose are being installed for an exhibition at the Park Avenue Armory in Manhattan. Workmen installed the quilts for the exhibition.

The first thing that Joanna S. Rose said was, “I’m not a collector.”

It was an interesting way to begin a conversation about 651 red-and-white quilts that she has — what? — amassed since the late 1950s.

“We used to say I’m an accumulator,” said Mrs. Rose, who was the longtime chairwoman of Partisan Review magazine, “but I’m a treasure hunter. A collector is always bettering what he has. I only have accumulations of things.”

Six hundred fifty-one quilts: If laid end to end down Park Avenue, they would go from the [Park Avenue Armory](#), between East 66th and East 67th Streets, to at least the [old New York Central building](#) at East 46th Street, and probably on into [Grand Central Terminal](#). (They are not all the same length, so this kind of back-of-the-envelope calculation can go

only so far.)

It turns out that Mrs. Rose has never seen them all at once. But now she will, and so will lots of other people. From Friday through Wednesday, all 651 will be displayed, not stretched down the avenue but inside the armory. The exhibition — note that word — is coordinated by the [American Folk Art Museum](#).

Clearly, Mrs. Rose had a hand in the preparations, from interviewing design firms that could hang the quilts in the armory to writing part of the full-color brochure. Only once in the brochure is there a mention of “Mrs. Rose’s collection,” and not in the part she wrote.

The brochure refers to only 650 quilts. No. 651 made it into the exhibition when Mrs. Rose looked at the design for the display and said, “You’re missing a quilt.” She was thinking of a favorite that bears the Lord’s Prayer. There was a search. It turned up in a closet.

And it was Mrs. Rose who suggested the title of the exhibition: “[Infinite Variety: Three Centuries of Red and White Quilts](#).” She said the inspiration was a line from Shakespeare’s “Antony and Cleopatra”:

*Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety ...*

So the quilts’ appeal is that they have retained their “infinite variety.” They have not turned “stale” with age.

The armory display was a birthday present for, and from, Mrs. Rose, who turned 80 several months ago. “My husband asked me what I wanted,” she said, referring to her husband, Daniel, the chairman of Rose Associates, a real estate development company. “I told him, two things: something I had never seen before, and a gift for New York City. I thought, one thing I’ve never seen is these quilts all at once.”

Mrs. Rose said she had no idea she had so many. “Someone asked, and I said, ‘Maybe 70,’ ” she said. “Somebody took pictures of them, and I was shocked to realize how many there were.”

The armory was the only place she could think of that could hold them all — specifically, the 55,000-square-foot drill hall, the eight-story home to antiques shows, art fairs and birthday galas for the likes of Brooke Astor when she was alive. Mrs. Rose’s family arranged a donation so that admission would be free for the six days of the exhibition.

When Mrs. Rose began buying quilts, they were selling for \$5 or \$10 apiece: “They were undervalued,” she said. “Gradually, quilts that cost me \$5 or \$10 went up to \$15 or \$20 and then \$50. When they got to \$150, you had to think twice.”

Before long, each purchase was a test of her visual memory. “I’d see a quilt and I’d think, ‘I don’t have that pattern,’ ” she said. She did not have a computerized index, or even photographs, and the quilts were stowed in a big cedar closet most of the time.

"I never checked to see if I had a pattern before I bought a quilt," she said.

A couple of minutes later, an e-mail arrived with an offer of a quilt for sale.

She looked at the photograph and gave the word: yes. The accumulating continues.