

Quilting 'Til There Ain't Nothin' Left--Part 1: T-Shirt Quilt[©]

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Quilters, especially from back in the day, have been known for their thrift by making useful items out of fabric scraps and old clothing. I recently had a chance to tap into this frugal tradition when asked to make a T-shirt quilt for my nephew Jacob who was graduating from high school. His mother sent me a big box of T-shirts from his many years of sports, band camps, church retreats, etc.

The T-shirt quilt was pretty straightforward. I cut out the logos and interspersed them with a background fabric with his school colors. (Many thanks to Stephanie Dingle of Asheville, NC who did the machine quilting.) →

When I was cleaning up my sewing space, I found one extra T-shirt logo that had fallen behind my sewing table--an important one!--so using some extra fabric from the backs of the shirts I made a coordinating pillow. ↓



I still had quite a bit of cotton left over from the backs of the shirts so I cut the backs into squares, sewed them together then added batting and pieced-together leftovers of the background fabric. I call this a "Mama quilt" because Jacob's mama can wrap herself in it whenever she's missing her boy away at college. I added a pocket making it a "quillow" (a quilt that folds up into a pocket making a pillow.) ←

I still had a big pile of back and sleeve cotton so I started randomly cutting and piecing the scraps together, then fused the blocks onto a stabilizer and over-sewed the seams with black cording and bias strips, using leftovers from previous projects, to create a modern Mondrian-inspired throw or wall hanging. →



Finally, I used the smallest scraps (what I call "scrippy scraps") to make earrings, hair scrunchies, bookmarks and coasters. The finished quilt, along with all these extras fit perfectly into the box his mama had used to send me the original shirts. Same box but with radically transformed contents!



Quilting ‘Til There Ain’t Nothin’ Left--Part 2: Thrift Store Finds[©]

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I consider thrift stores to be fabulous fabric stores. I especially like to pick up sturdy, colorful cotton clothing items—medical scrub tops are my favorite—and cut them up, along with some new fabrics, to make hexagons for my colorful hexagon quilts. ↓



I had a number of leftover clothing pieces after “harvesting” all the hexagons I needed so, inspired by my friend Marilyn Sobanski of Rainbow Recycling in Black Mountain, NC, I decided to challenge myself to see how much of the leftover thrift store fabric I could use.

I sewed together squares, strips and scraps from the leftover fabric to make a lap quilt, table runner, place mats and coasters. →



I still had leftovers so I made a set of matching napkin rings by cutting up a toilet paper tube, gluing on the quilted leftover coaster scraps and brushing with a sealer. ↓



I had enough additional scraps to make more coasters which turned into an experimental open work/negative space quilt which I’ve titled “*The Marilyn Effect.*” →



Finally, I took the tiny leftovers from cutting out the circles and made a piece titled *Quilted Lace*. Like *The Marilyn Effect*, it was floated above the background for a 3-D effect.

←

What I found most interesting about this challenge is that the smaller and more limited my materials became, the more interesting and fun the work became. Less waste, more creativity, more fun. The next time you complete a creative project, I invite you to keep working with whatever is left and see what else emerges.