Calling Butler a quilt artist doesn’t quite capture her mastery of this craft, nor her influence on the practice of artmaking. One room is full of the velvet, wool, silk, chiffon, and wax-cast cotton prints that Butler collects. The fabric will be cut, pinned, and appliquéd cotton, silk, wool, and velvet. 50 x 85 x 2 in.

Butler’s work is a fusion of traditional and contemporary art, balancing the historical and the modern. Her quilts are enchanting works of art that are reminiscent of the mixed-media installation pieces of contemporary artists like teamLab. The subject matter for her pieces is drawn from African American—specifically, Black American—history, culture, and art, including her family history. 

Her most ambitious project to date, a portrait of her great-grandfather, David Butler, is on exhibit at the Columbus Museum of Art. It will feature a piece in progress that the museum had already stated, unequivocally, they were eager to purchase.

Lauren Whitley had traveled to Butler’s home studio in 2019 to view the work that would eventually be acquired by the Columbus Museum of Art. It was the first time that Butler was commissioning someone else to make a quilt for her. The quilt was part of a series of works in which she is exploring ideas of identity and Blackness through the lens of the Great Migration. The piece is titled, “A Place Called Home, A Place Called Other.”

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From that point on she turned to quilting fulltime. As she said in an interview with Black Art Today, “It’s a way for me to focus, literally and figuratively. I can lead with my brain and then my hands.”

One of the reasons that Butler was able to successfully transition from fabric to quilting is that the medium itself is benevolent to a woman who is in-the-making. There’s a kind of primordial feeling she gets from the unsturdied, unsorted, and raw wool that she uses in her art. It’s as if the fabric wants to be transformed into something formidable.

The work that Butler makes is disruptive; it challenges the way we think about quilts. The medium itself is a form of resistance, and her work is a form of resistance as well. As a result, she is breaking new ground in the world of the art quilt.