Sew We Don’t Forget

NAMES Project captures Quilt on CD-ROM—while it still can

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Thousands of poignant displays of the AIDS Memorial Quilt over the course of eight years have begun to take their toll on many of the fabric panels themselves. So before the earliest contributions deteriorate beyond repair, the Quilt’s caretaker, the NAMES Project Foundation, has embarked on an ambitious project to archive all 31,000 panels. The process entails photographing each three-by-six-foot panel—a task estimated to take two to three years in itself—after which the picture and any mementos or information accompanying it will be stored digitally on CD-ROM. Professors at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst will then code and catalog each image in a specially designed database. When finished, the archive project will allow schools and libraries worldwide access to every part of the Quilt either on-line or through multimedia AIDS education packages. Still one of the most visible symbols of the AIDS epidemic, the Quilt will continue its annual schedule of 1,600 public displays and will once again be assembled in its entirety in Washington, D.C., next October, when it will comprise 45,000 panels and cover 32 acres.

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