

CROSSROADS OF IDEAS: THREADING THE STORY OF EARTH'S OLDEST ROCKS

Megan Mayhew



Quilting and geology? At Crossroads of Ideas: Threading the Story of Earth's Oldest Rocks, the unlikely pairing proved to be a beautiful and thought-provoking combination.

Crossroads of Ideas is a monthly lecture series during the academic year, designed to create dialogue and understanding about thought-provoking topics that matter to our community. The series kicked off in October with this special WiSciFest edition; the Wisconsin Science Festival is a 10-day celebration of science, art, and technology, spanning 56 counties in Wisconsin. This year, the festival's 15th, the theme was rock and roll, highlighting the music, motion, and geology that shape Wisconsin. This theme engaged audiences of all ages by blending earth science, physics, and music to create a dynamic, interactive, and appealing way for kids, families, and lifelong learners to explore science. In honor of the festival's rock and roll focus, the October Crossroads of Ideas highlighted an artistic expression of a geological discovery.



Art and science expertise meet at this Crossroads of Ideas panel discussion. Left to Right: Emily Mixon, Leah Evans, Brooke Norsted, Annie Bauer, and Tyler Blum. Photo credit: Jonas Tangen.

The panel discussion included perspectives from Leah Evans, a local textile artist, and scientists Tyler Blum, Annie Bauer, and Emily Mixon. By combining science and art, they told the story of Earth's oldest rock, Acasta Gneiss. Annie and Emily detailed their two-week trip to find this multibillion-year-old rock and discussed how this discovery impacts our understanding of Earth's early crust and tectonic activity.

Their scientific process mirrored Leah's process; both had to create a hypothesis or intention and then iterate on it to get to the final "a ha" moment: a finished quilt or geologic discovery. The final product was an intricate quilt that highlighted the scale and significance of the Acasta Gneiss discovery by combining close-up depictions of the rock, aerial views of the location in which it was found, and images of the Earth over time. Leah explained her own process and the passion for combining science and textiles that led her to create this quilt, which she unveiled at Crossroads of Ideas. Her work beautifully combines rich scientific ideas with creative expression, making science accessible to the community; Leah's piece will be on display at the UW-Madison Geology Museum.



Leah Evans' quilt - inspired by the Acasta Gneiss, Earth's oldest rocks. Photo credit: Jonas Tangen.

Crossroads of Ideas is a monthly, public event series that takes place during the academic year. Its blend of science and art is a perfect example of the Wisconsin Science Festival's goal to foster creativity and curiosity.

To learn more about upcoming Crossroads of Ideas events or to view recordings of previous editions, visit <https://illuminatingdiscovery.wisc.edu/crossroads-of-ideas/>.

Check out [WiSciFest.org](https://wiscfest.org) to stay up to date on the 2026 Wisconsin Science Festival!