

When I

DREAM

*I
see
real things*




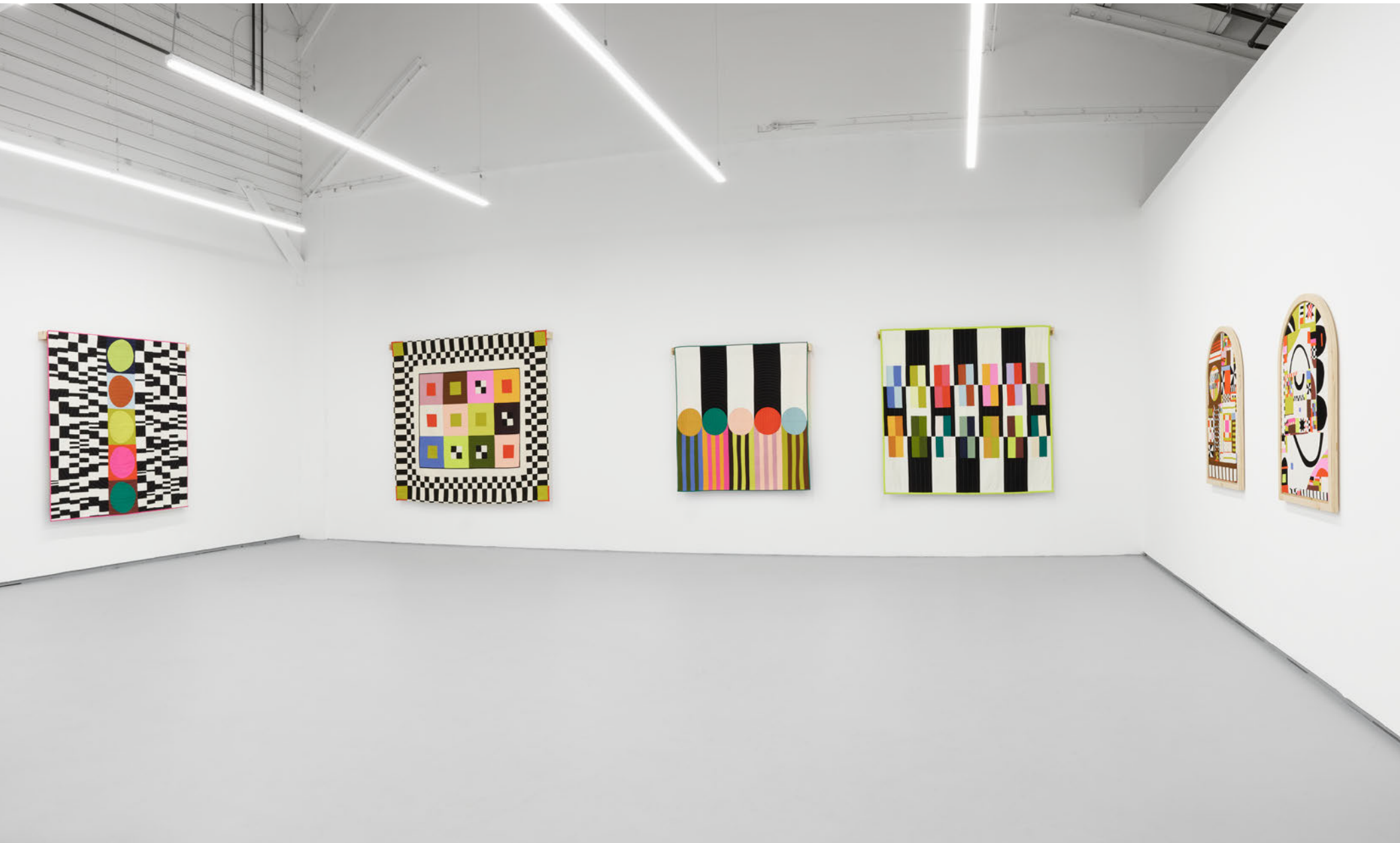
When I Dream I See Real Things

Sydney Lee

Terminal Project Report

Committee:
Charlene Liu
Stacy Jo Scott
Jovencio de la Paz (chair)

 6/13/24



When I Dream I See Real Things, installation shot, Ditch Projects, 2024



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THE DREAM

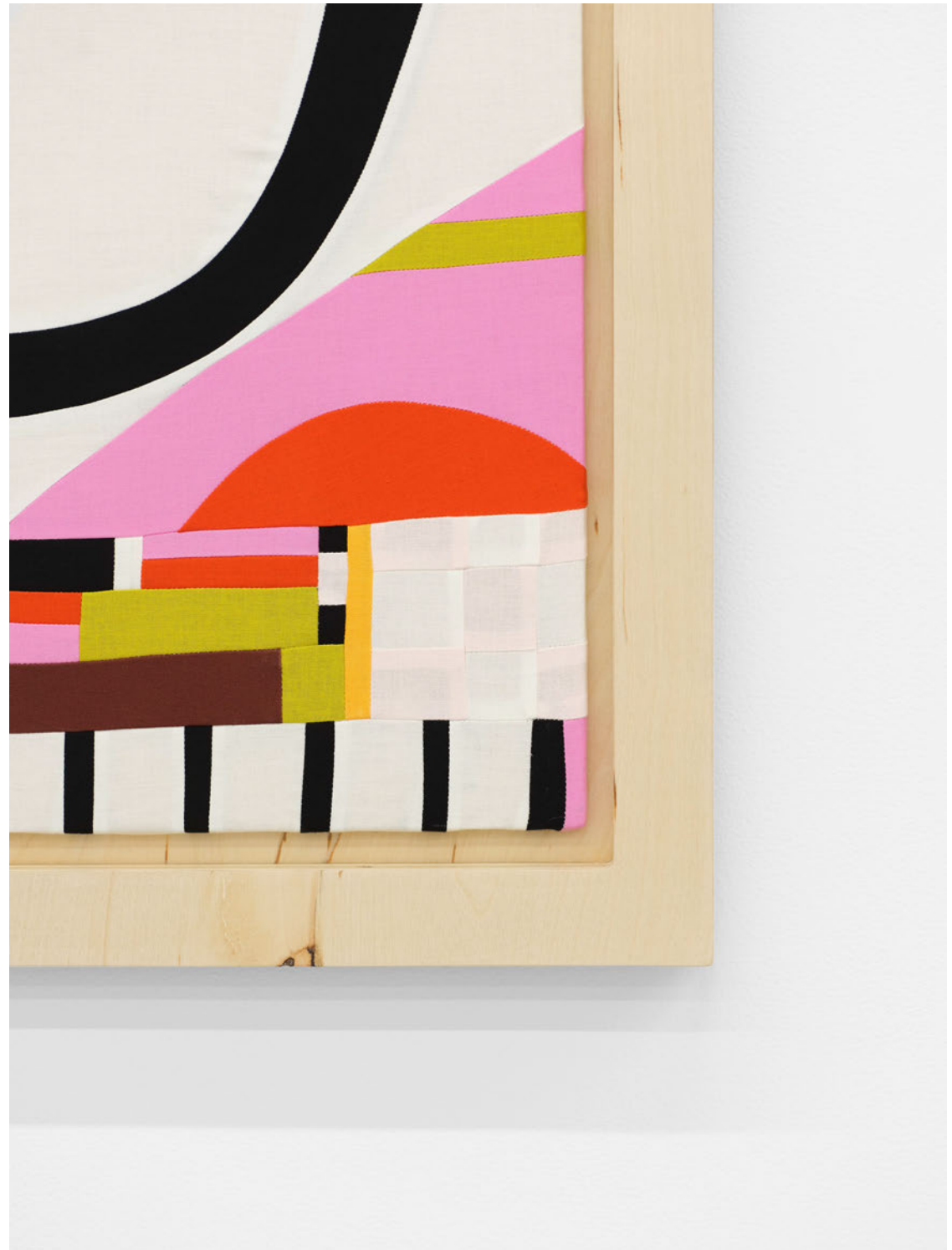


Detail shot of installation, 2024

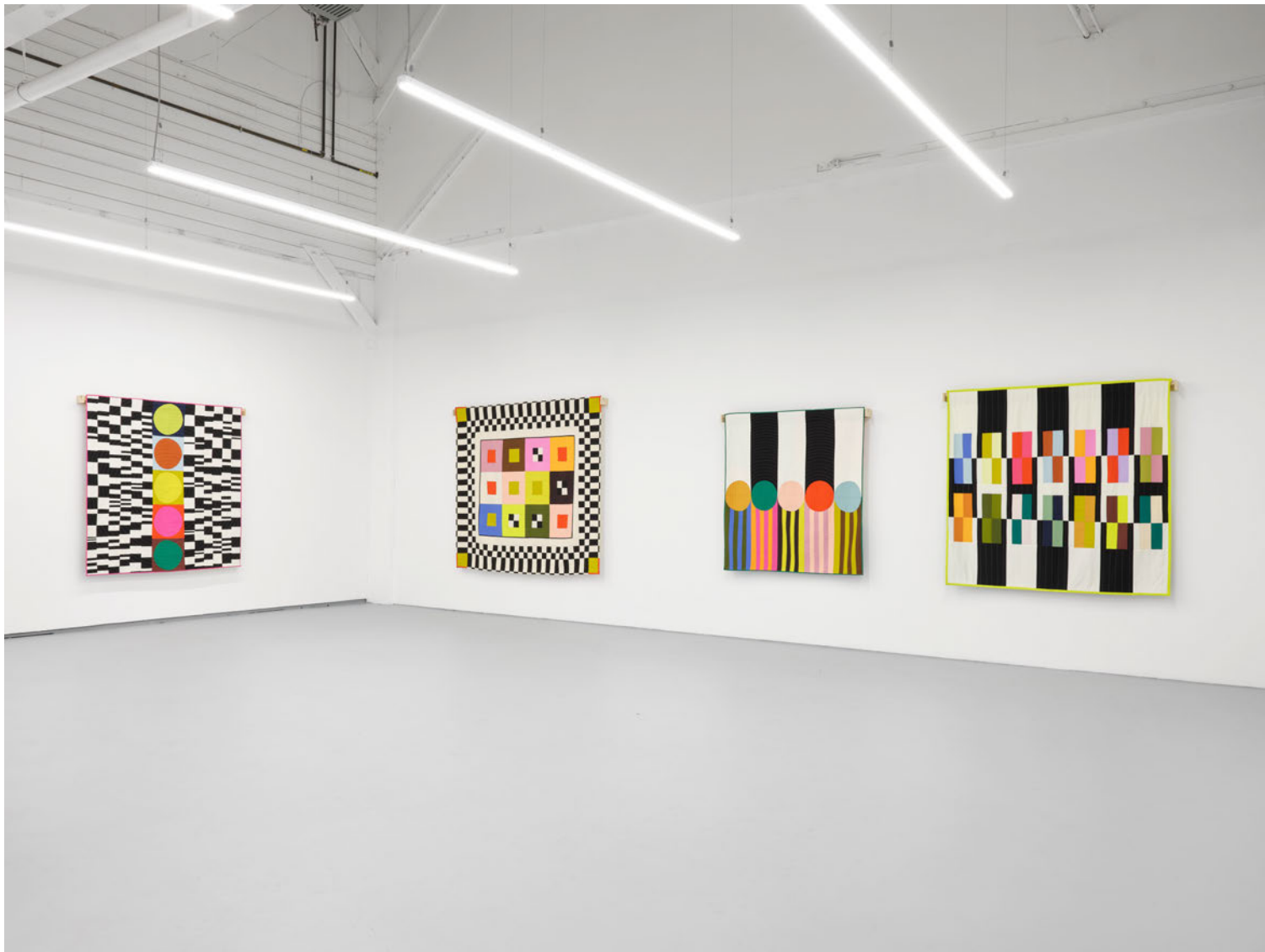
There is knowledge in our fingertips. My hands know the distance required between stitches better than my mind does, and they can understand the qualities of fabric just by rubbing a cloth between my pointer finger and thumb. My hands know the importance of generational knowledge and never resist the urge to reach out and touch to understand better. My hands are my hands, but they're also my mother's hands.

I am a seventh-generation quilter on my matrilineal side. My familial history informs how the quilted form is important to me for both its material richness and my connection with the medium. My decorative drive steers towards an interest in the surface, where composition and color become the main focus.

As my studio practice and research converge, I aim to position my terminal creative project as a bridge between craft and fine art, emphasizing traditional craft's strict technical discipline as the work's cornerstone. Elissa Auther, in her book *String, Felt, Thread*, discusses how quilts and their presentation on the wall align with contemporary trends in painting. This positioning allows quilts a new aesthetic significance, elevating them to the realm of high art due to their resemblance to the more “prestigious category of painted textiles.” (Auther, 128) I aspire to achieve exactly what Auther articulated — to grant quilts the same aesthetic standing as high art. There are several shared traits between these two categories, which will be evident in my research and the manifestation of the artwork. To me, this represents an active form of pedagogy regarding the status of contemporary craft in relation to fine art, which is the overall goal of my terminal project.



When I dream I see real things, detail, 2024



When I Dream I See Real Things, installation shot, Ditch Projects, 2024

My terminal project, *When I Dream I See Real Things*, focuses on large-scale quilts installed on the wall as a reference to painting. These quilts are fully functional as domestic objects but are rendered non-functional through installation methods. I am questioning the divide between craft and fine art by looking at both traditional textile craftswomen and minimalist painters from the 20th century. The functional quilted works are shown in tandem with large, arch-shaped textile collages set into handmade wooden frames that mimic the shape of the composition. The arch-shaped diptych negates the wall quilts' functionality by utilizing the same basic materials but acting as a purely visual object rather than a utilitarian domestic tool. The inclusion of both functional and non-functional painterly objects ties to my desire to blur the lines between craft and fine art by using both languages of painting and quilting.



When I dream I see real things, detail shot, 2024

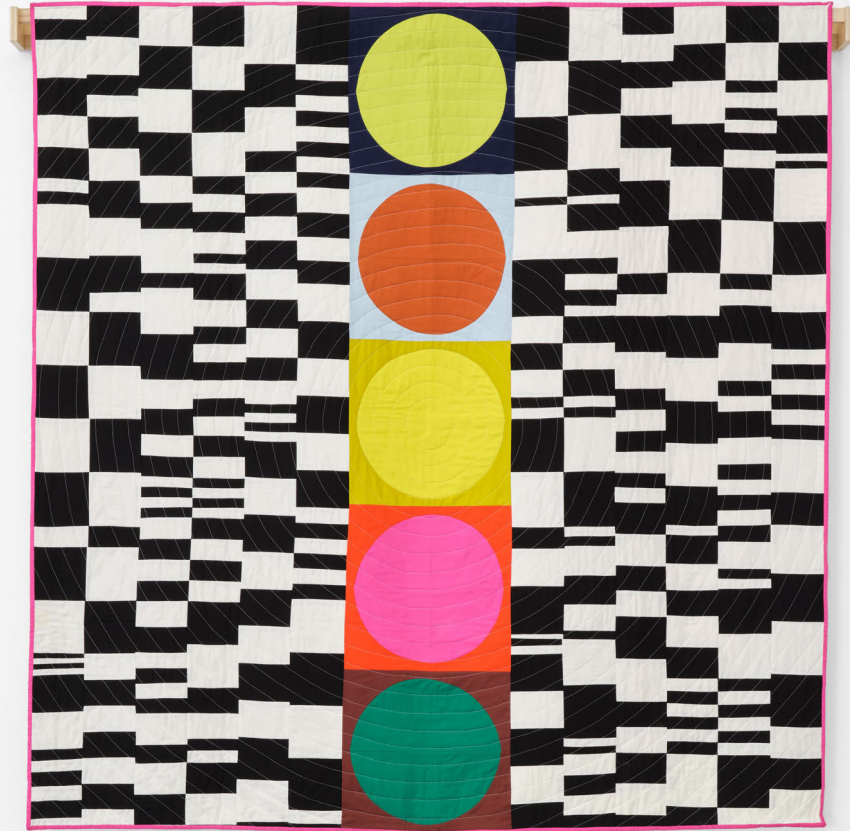
THE COLOR

"If colour is a cosmetic, it is also – and again – coded as feminine. Colour is a supplement, but it is also, potentially, a seduction."

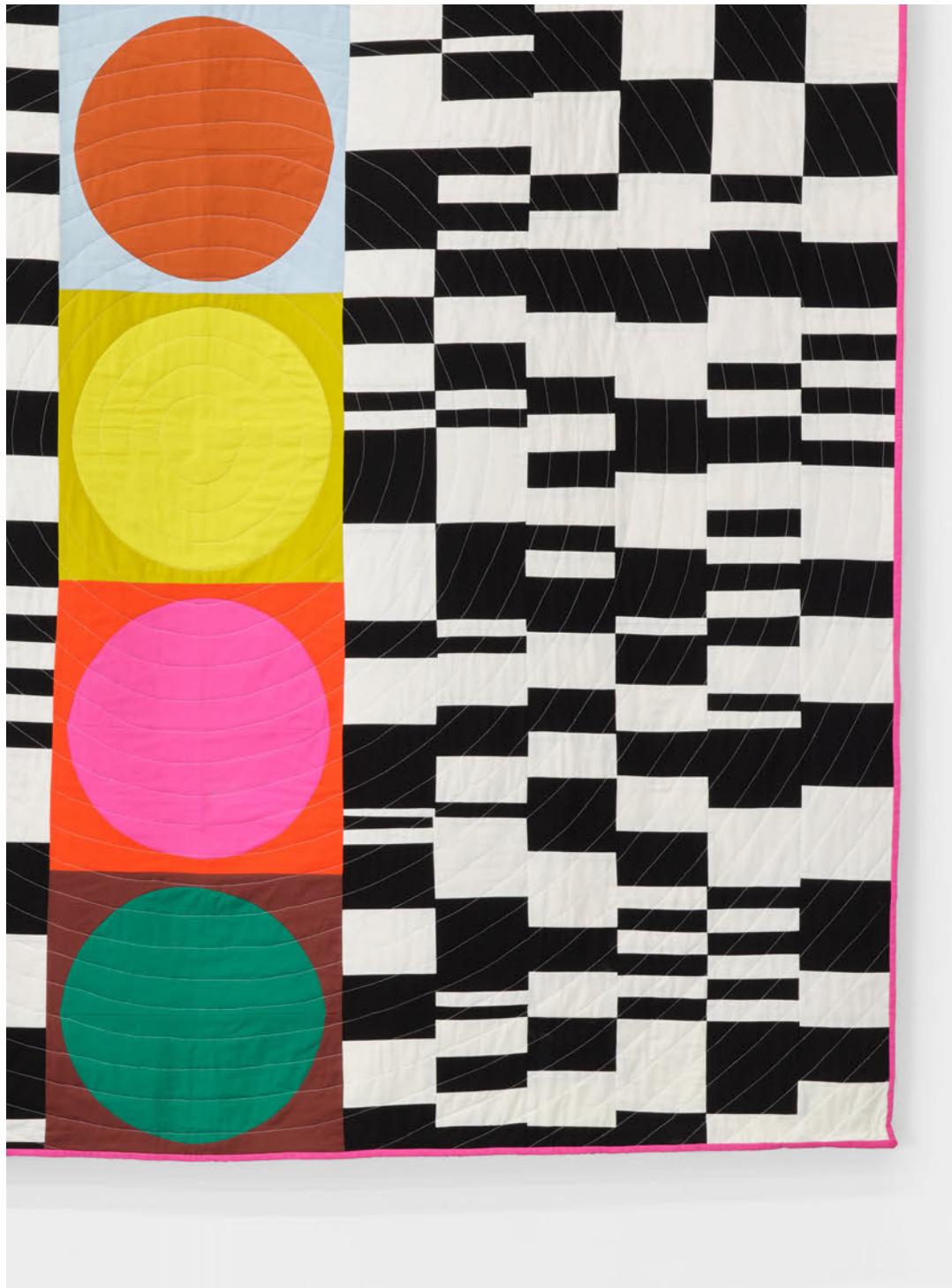
David Batchelor, *Chromaphobia*

Second to form, color is the key component of my work that carries through my practice as a language that connects form to content. Color acts as an inherent method of communication as a lens through which I see the world. David Batchelor's book *Chromaphobia* states, "If colour is a cosmetic, it is also – and again – coded as feminine. Colour is a supplement, but it is also, potentially, a seduction." My use of saturated, bright colors connects my work to that of the decorative, the feminine, and the trivial. In each piece, I am considering how to use color to convey a meaning, a feeling, and an understanding.

I am continuously exploring how colors interact and speak to each other: the vibrational pull between hot pink and bright red, the slow harmony of sage green and navy blue, and the exuberance of tennis ball yellow and chocolate brown. My color decisions are not arbitrary– they are made from a predetermined palette of cotton fabric, ensuring a cohesive color scheme for the work. I find myself reaching for strong, saturated colors that, when in combination, create a palpable tension. Black, white, and brown act as a neutral ground on which moments of neon and vivid colors coexist.



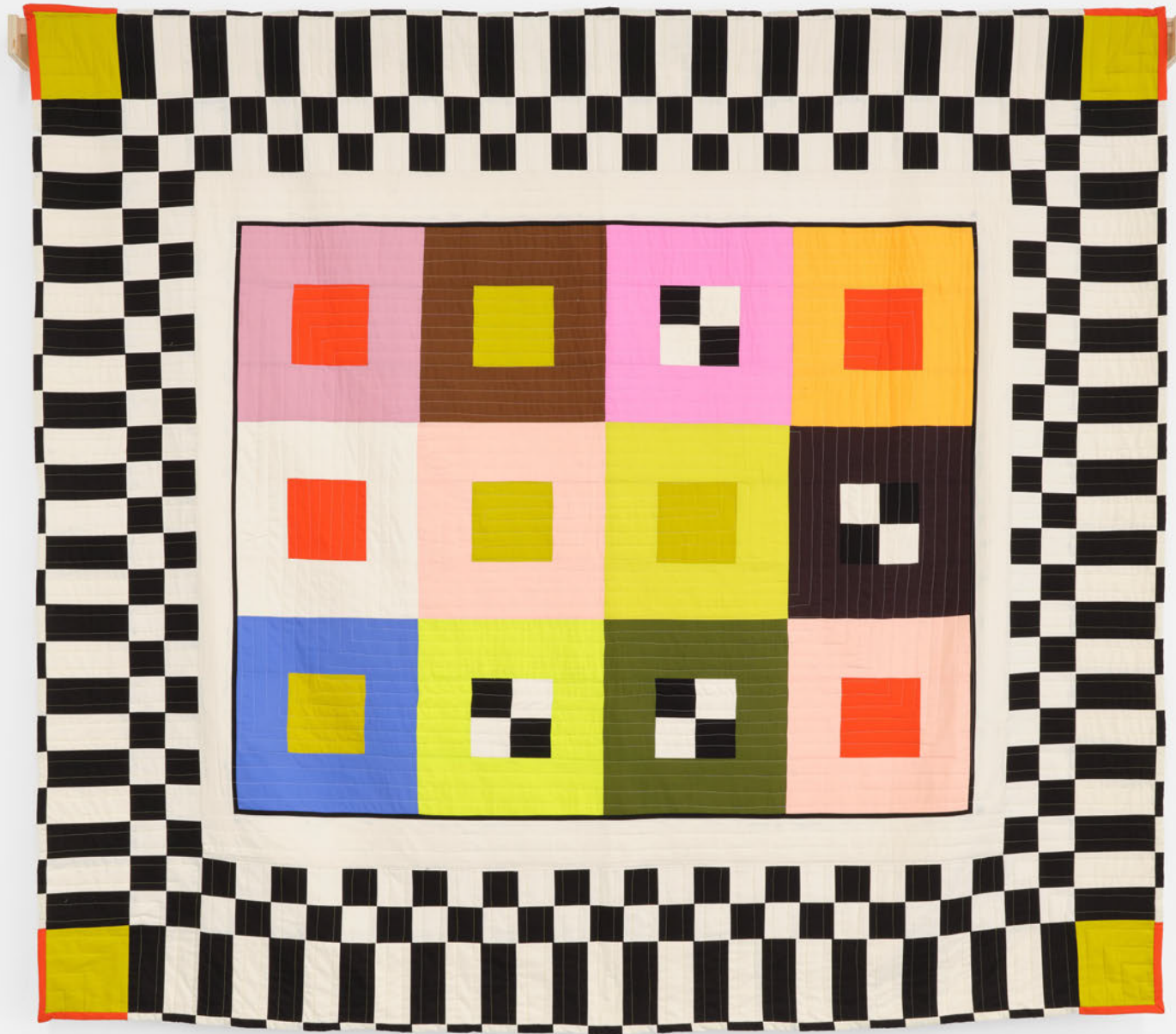
A hand hastily played, 2024



A hand hastily played, detail shot, 2024

My color decisions are born from a lifetime of observation— not just seeing the world but looking at things around me and how colors feel when combined. I think about how a blue sky looks when a white contrail slashes through it, or how the vibrant orange of a traffic cone stands out against the desaturated tone of asphalt. These observations of the life around me inform my palette and choices. I am an insatiable collector of objects and images, constantly seeking out imagery that captures the essence of color in everyday life.

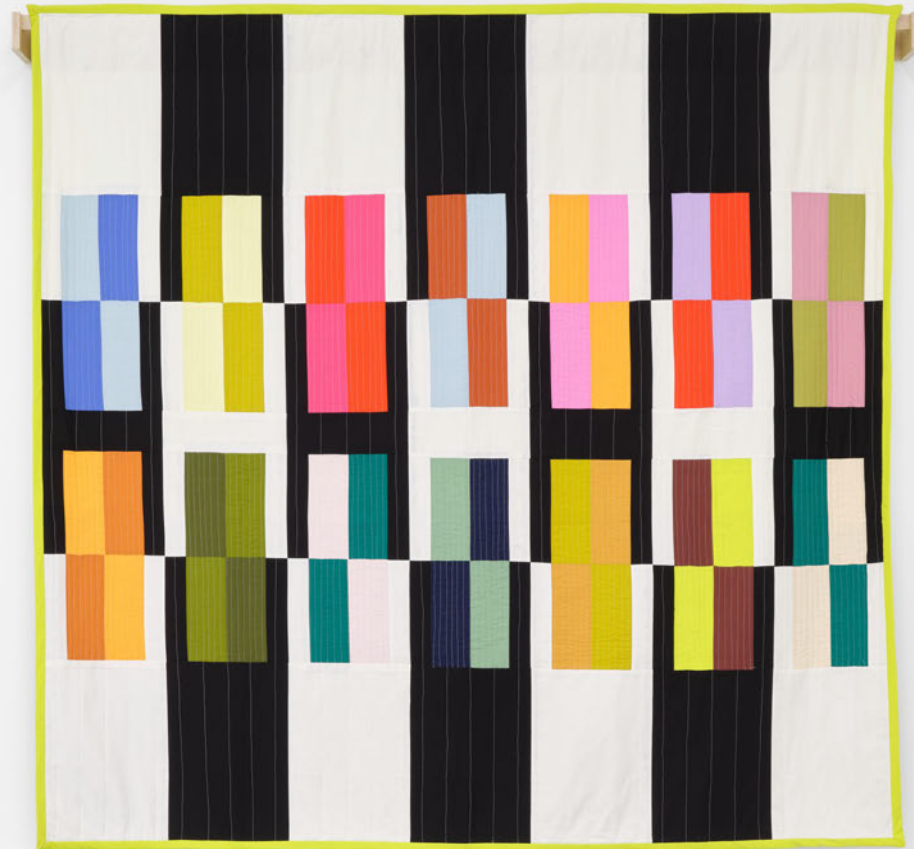
The bright, saturated hues I use are often associated with playfulness, joy, and energy, yet they can also evoke feelings of nostalgia, longing, or discomfort. I aim to challenge viewers' perceptions by juxtaposing unexpected color combinations and eliciting various emotional responses. The use of color in my work is more than a mere visual element; it is a powerful tool for narrative and expression. It bridges the gap between the tangible and the intangible, the seen and the felt. Through color, I create a dialogue between the artwork and the viewer, inviting them to experience the world through the soft surface of the quilt.



I take the parts that I remember and stitch them back together, quilted cotton, 2024

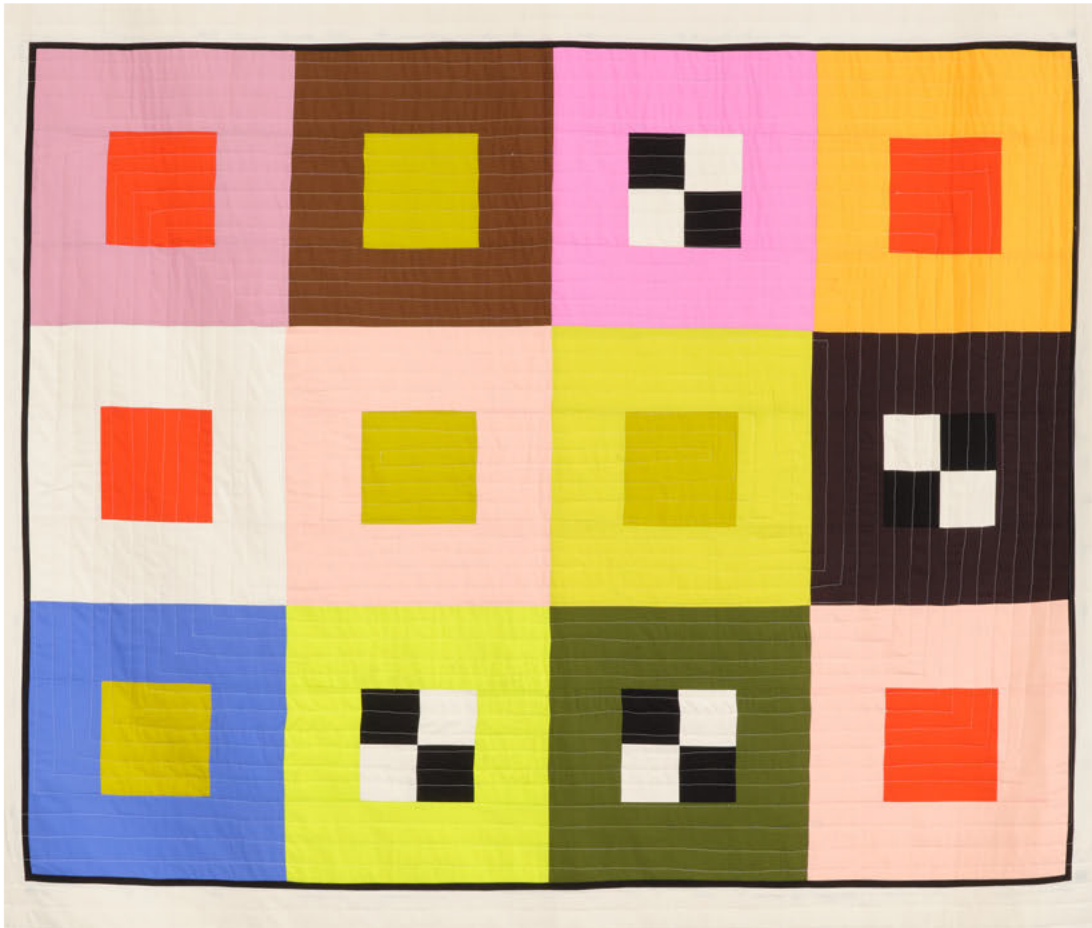
THE GRID

The grid is inherent in craft, expressed through the binary system of the loom, and manifests in textile practices through woven structures or sewn seams. Recognizing the grid in craft supports my desire to connect my practice to Modernist painting. The quilted form allows me to explore color and composition through traditional quilting's strict structures and the grid's adherence. In Modernist painting, the grid is a tool for formal experimentation and a conceptual framework for systematic art-making. Patchwork quilting utilizes these elements, embedding the grid into each piece through the use of straight seams. The rigid structure of the quilt allows me to explore color and composition within traditional quilting techniques, similar to how Modernist painters used the grid to organize space and create systematic art.

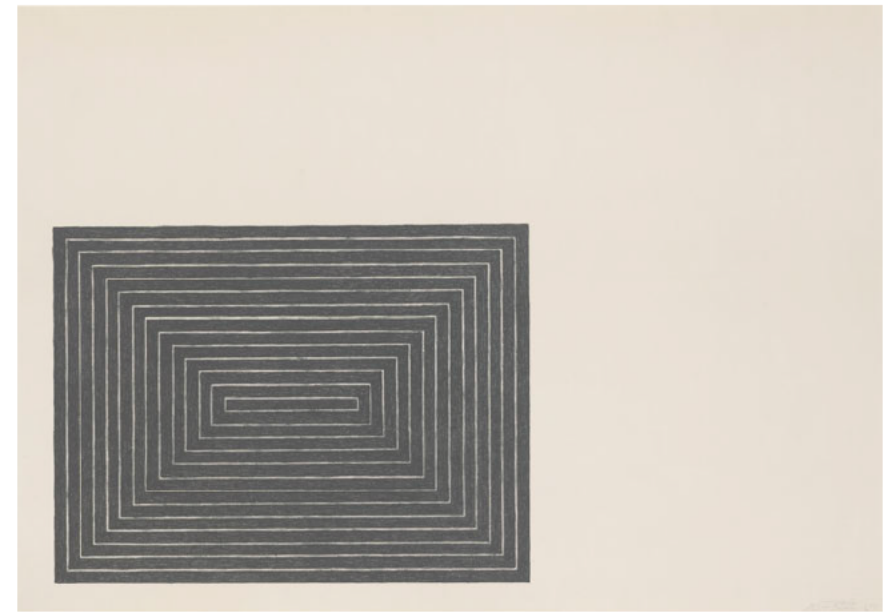


The voice wants to be a hand and the hand wants to do something useful, quilted cotton, 2024

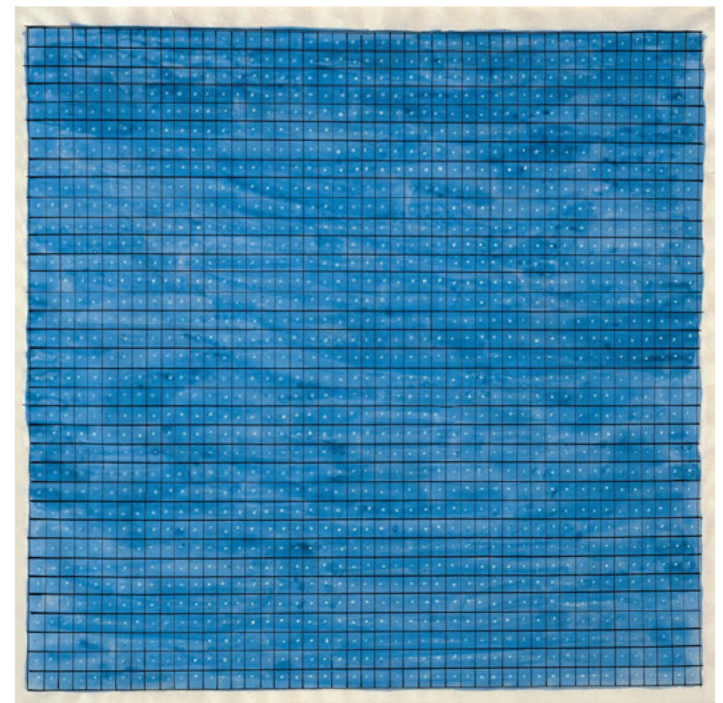
Artists such as Agnes Martin and Frank Stella used the grid to introduce order and organization to their works. The grid's predictable nature allowed Modernist painters to systematically investigate color, form, and structure. In quilting, the grid carries cultural and historical significance, which connects me to the long lineage of craft while pushing the boundaries of what quilts can express in a fine art context.



I take the parts that I remember and stitch them back together, detail shot, 2024



Frank Stella, *Tomlinson Court Park* from *Black Series I*, 1967



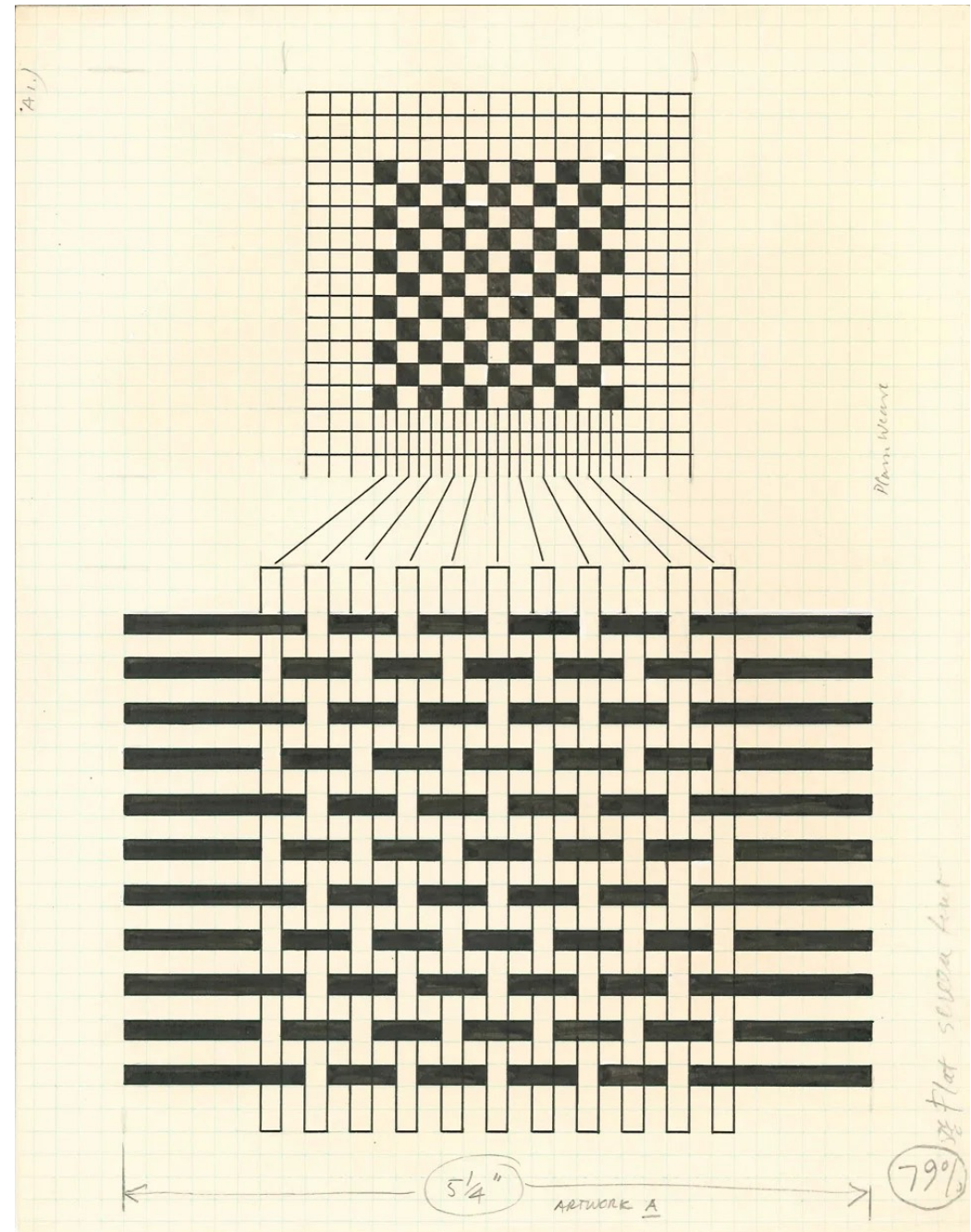
Agnes Martin, *Untitled*, 1965

THE SEAM

“The seam is the point where the components of a composition come into a direct and dynamic relationship with one another. It is a place of meeting and merging, but also of maintaining individual integrity.”

Anni Albers, *On Weaving*, 1965

In her book, *On Weaving*, Anni Albers spoke about the seam's significance in her work. Albers explored how the seam is not merely a physical joining of materials but a metaphorical and aesthetic device that creates boundaries and connections.



Anni Albers, diagram showing method of draft notation: plain weave, *On Weaving*, plate 10



I walk through your dreams and invent the future, 2024

I focus on the moments where two planes of color come together at a seam. A seam is the fault line where two colors meet, bound by tension and thread. The two colors merely touch at these points, but they do not mix or layer in the way they do in a painting. A seam is the only true moment where two colors meet but do not mix. I gravitate towards the stark and the saturated. Quilts are the ideal medium for me not only due to my familial history but also because I am interested in the heavily saturated colors of fabric and the distinct patterns that emerge when two or more pieces of cloth meet each other at the seam. The seam represents a powerful visual and conceptual element. The individuality of each color is maintained, yet the juxtaposition creates a new relationship dynamic in the larger scope of the work. The tension held by the thread binding these colors together emphasizes their distinctness while highlighting the tenuousness of the medium. The contrast of the seam as a mark is where I find the most compelling interactions in my work.

The use of heavily saturated fabric colors amplifies the impact of these seams. The purity and intensity of the colors are preserved, offering a vivid and striking visual experience. Unlike in painting, where colors can blend and create gradients, the sharpness of the seams in quilting allows for a clear and defined meeting of colors. The act of joining fabrics at the seam is both technical and meditative, reflecting the meticulous care and intention behind each piece.



A Ladder, A Portal, A Pinwheel, 2024

THE ARCHES





When I dream I see real things, 2024

The quilted works are displayed in conjunction with two arch-shaped textile collages set in birch frames. These arches serve as a counterpoint to the large quilts not only because of their form but also due to the contrasting visual dynamics happening within the patchwork. These pieces are created using an intuitive, improvisational method as I make design decisions on the fly. They incorporate fabric scraps from the larger quilted work to maintain a cohesive color scheme and pay homage to the historical quilting practice of utilizing leftover textiles. In creating these pieces, I draw inspiration from the piecing of castoff domestic textiles by the quilters of Gees Bend. In the spirit of Gees Bend, nothing goes to waste; nothing is discarded.

These pieces simultaneously challenge and uphold traditional quilting by combining the repetition of traditional quilt block patterns with sporadic, erratic piecing. They form worlds within themselves, ever-expanding and shifting as the viewer finds new visual footholds. A black and white ladder rises into a pinwheel portal, traditional sawtooth stars are nestled between sweeping arches, and peace is found in small moments of reprieve in the white and brown middle ground. Everything goes slightly wonky when stretched, instilling the pieces with a sense of life and movement. Stretching the patchworked fabric blurs the lines of the ever-present grid.

In the framed arch pieces, spatial relations take precedence. Circles, triangles, pinwheels, checkers, and stars puzzle together in a frenzy until a moment of stillness is found. These pieces capture a snapshot in time, a brief glance as colors and shapes learn to coexist before rearranging themselves. In this work, the grid acts as a realistic analytical tool on which formal hierarchies are both established and destabilized. Straight seams remain the primary method of mark-making, but these lines blur and warp when the textile is stretched, disrupting the strict grid structure present in the larger wall quilts. Unlike their quilted counterparts, the edges of the arch pieces are not definitive. They exist without binding and without a defined endpoint, giving the impression that the piecing could continue infinitely, expanding beyond the edges of the frame.



A Ladder, A Portal, A Pinwheel, detail shot, 2024



A Ladder, A Portal, A Pinwheel, detail shot, 2024

PATTERN AND DECORATION

In the 2020 MOCA exhibition catalog, *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985*, Elissa Auther speaks about Western civilization's desire to condemn surface, color, and ornament as feminine, emotional, cosmetic, or deceptive. The decorative is considered a surface that is gendered and sexualized, which poses a threat to truth. Like the female body—itsself marginalized as a decorative object. Through the revisioning of the surface as a concept, the decorative, ornament, femininity, and women's craft traditions can be kept in dialogue with painting and high art rather than replacing or canceling out the other. Quilting, a traditionally feminine domestic practice, has been a profound source for numerous artists rethinking the materiality of painting along feminist lines.

I am influenced by conventional quilting, such as the work from Gees Bend and Amish quilters, painters like Frank Stella, Hilma af Klint, and Helen Frankenthaler, and contemporary artists such as Rebecca Morris and Bisa Butler. The Pattern and Decoration movement is a touchstone for my practice due to the material usage and language as a method of striking a balance between fine art and craft. Faith Ringgold, Mariam Schapiro, and Joyce Kozloff are staples of the P&D movement that act as guidance for me due to the way they saw their work as straddling the border between the two worlds; they refused to forgo the definition of craft in the grander sense of their work through the lens of fine art. The Pattern and Decoration movement shows a love of decorative elements and patterns in a direct oppositional response to the minimal trends of the 1960s and 1970s.



Faith Ringgold, *Windows of the Wedding #2: Breakfast in Bed*, 1974



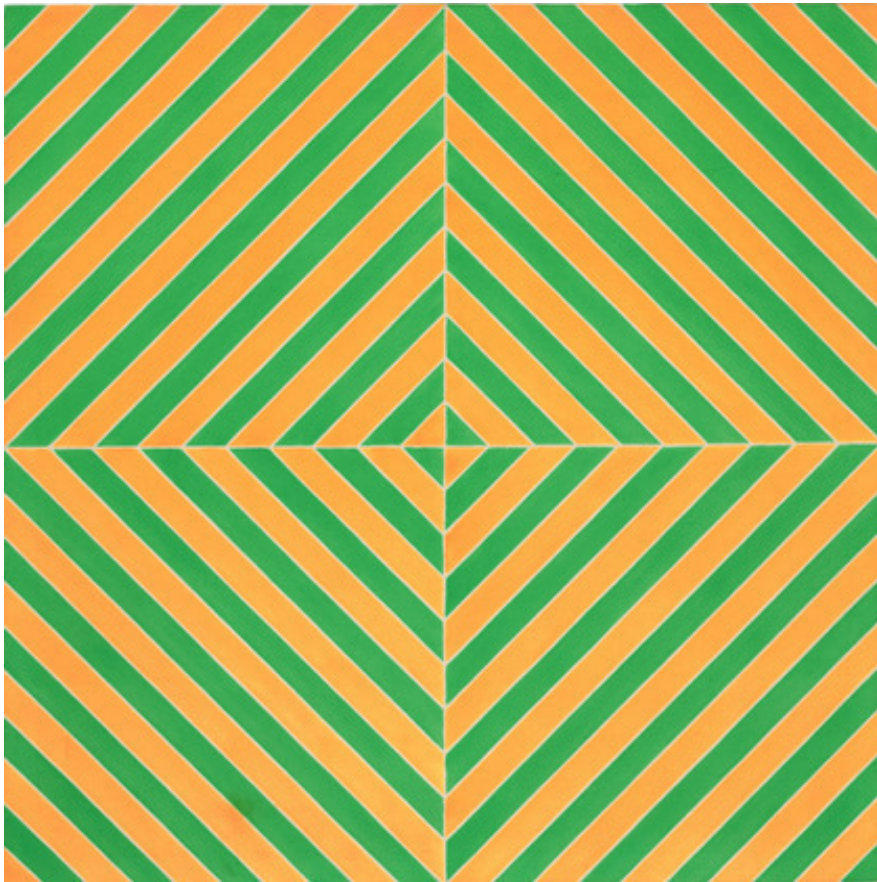
Ella Mae Irby, *Texas Star*, 1973



Miriam Schapiro, *Cabinet for Fall*, 1974

The works of Pattern and Decoration artists largely display a refusal to transcend the origin of the motif as a key principle of the movement. The goal was to raise craft and folk art to the same level as fine art by refusing to distance themselves from craft traditions. In addition to this mindset, Pattern and Decoration sought to reject the autonomy of the maker as the work is constantly referencing historic craft tendencies. Therefore, a work is constantly being co-authored by an anonymous craftsman from history. By embracing and utilizing these methods of making and motifs, the artists found a balance between high and low art. While my method of quilting uses different visual elements than the traditional, I find myself using historical quilt blocks as a jumping-off point for my work. The same could be said for many minimalist painters of the 1960s. Looking back, it is clear that the fingerprints of traditional quilting are present in countless works of art by minimalist painters of that era.

Frank Stella, who played an integral role in American abstract painting, emerges as a key reference for many of the Pattern and Decoration artists. Stella is not considered a member of the P&D movement, but rather, his focus on color, pattern, and interlocking shapes acts as a touchstone for these decorative works. Stella's works were included in the 2019 Pattern and Decoration retrospective, *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, which further drives the point that decorative work can coexist with abstract painting histories without the need for a divide between craft and fine art. Stella received recognition at the start of his career for being a touchstone for minimalist painting, but his later works became extravagant and decorative for the sake of decoration, which roots him as an artist with ties to the Pattern and Decoration movement.



Frank Stella, *Fez II*, 1964



Nellie Pettway, *Pig in a Pen Center Medallion*, c. 1960

The works of Frank Stella influenced my terminal project body of work for their bright, saturated color and their geometric simplicity. Drawing upon Stella's paintings, I used quilting lines as a drawing tool which emphasizes geometry and the grid on the surface of each quilt as both a functional and decorative element. Quilting lines are the traditional technique used to adhere all three layers of a quilt together, but for the first time in my practice, I used this technique as a deliberate design element that contributes to the visual composition and reinforces the grid present in the work. In turn, this adds a layer to the work that is akin to drawing or printmaking.



Frank Stella, *Hiragla Variation I*, 1969

By using quilting lines as a surface design drawing tool, I am able to emphasize and integrate patterns directly into the quilt by utilizing the functional stitches as deliberate, aesthetic mark-making. These lines echo the structure of the larger shapes on the quilts and highlight the ever-present grid. The quilted lines go beyond their traditional role and become integral to the work's composition. The lines reinforce the structural guidelines of the quilt and act as pathways to guide the viewer through the composition.



A Hand Hastily Played, detail, 2024

MANIFESTO

(For Abstractionists and Friends of the Non-Objective)

BE A FORCE

Don't shoot blanks

Black and Brown: that shit is the future

Triangles are your friend

Don't pretend you don't work hard

When in doubt spray-paint it gold

Perverse formalism is your god

You are greased lightning

Bring your camera everywhere

Never stop looking at macramé, ceramics, supergraphics, and Suprematism

Make work that is so secret, so fantastic, so dramatically old school/
new school that it looks like it was found in a shed, locked up since the 1940s

Wake up early, fear death

Whip out the masterpieces

Be out for blood

You are the master of your own universe

Abstraction never left, motherfuckers

If you can't stop, don't stop

Strive for the deeper structure

Fight monomania

Campaign against the literal

ABSTRACTION FOREVER!

© Rebecca Morris, Los Angeles www.rebeccamorris.net

Rebecca Morris's *Manifesto (For Abstractionists and Friends of the Non-Objective)*, was read aloud by Hamza Walker during the opening of Morris's first solo exhibition at the Renaissance Society (Chicago) in 2005. The piece of writing was later published in *Artforum's* September 2005 issue to announce the opening of Morris's 2006 exhibition at Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin. This tongue-in-cheek statement was written as a rally call to abstractionist across all mediums who were facing backlash over their love of the non-literal. Morris is a touchstone for my practice due to her unabashed experimental language and her use of the grid as a visual structure in her paintings. Her works are both tense and fluid, beautiful and ugly, masterful and deskilled. Her attention to spatial relations acts as a guiding hand when I am in the studio working on improvisational patchwork, and her non-conventional engagement with color drives me to be bold with my palette. Her manifesto is a studio battle-cry for all chromophiliacs, lovers of metaphor, and artists interested in the non-definitive. I am inspired by contemporary artists working in this in-between space, such as Heidi Parkes, Trudy Benson, Coulter Fussell, Josh Faught, and Pia Camil.



REAL THINGS

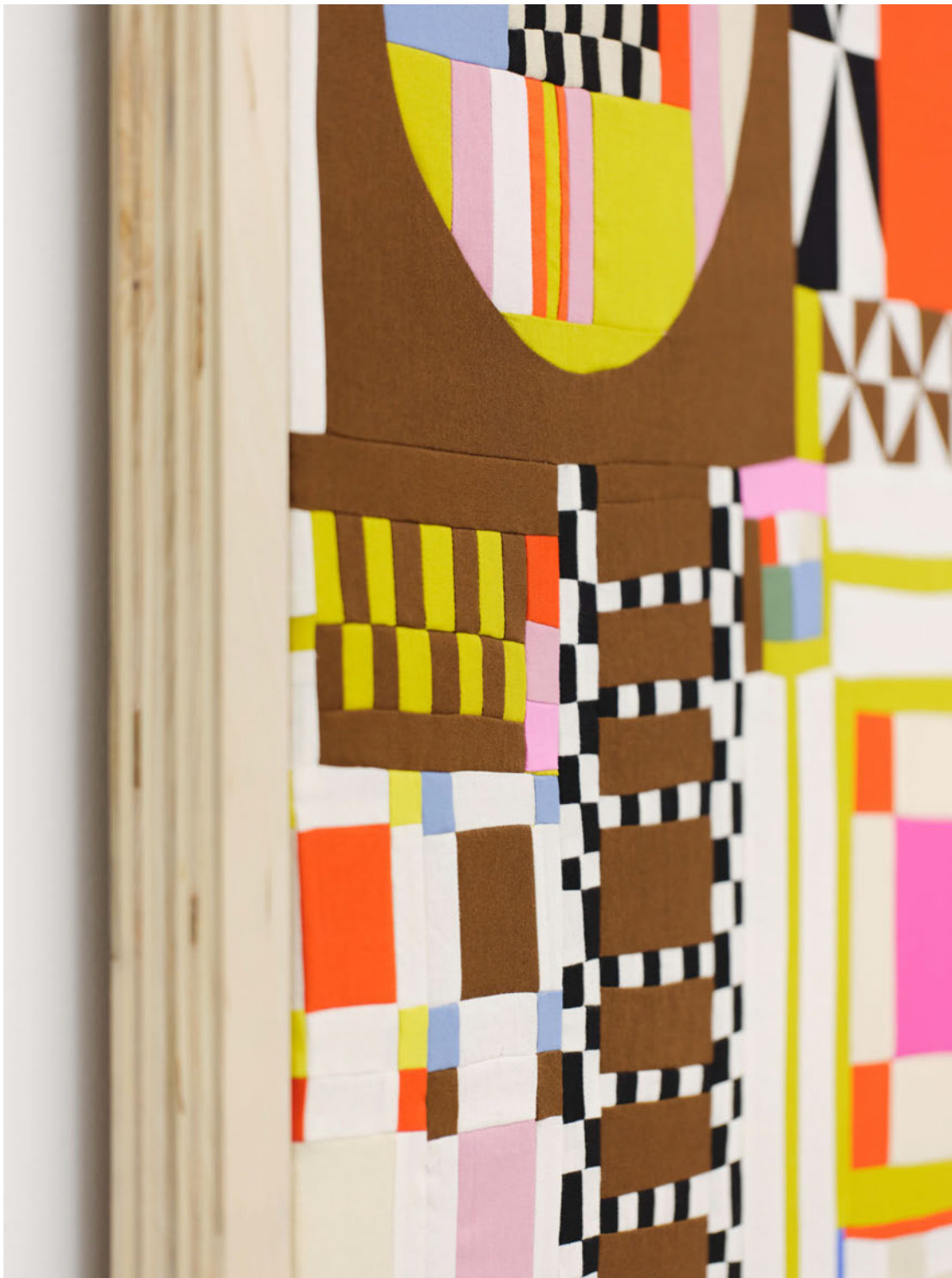


When I Dream I See Real Things, install shot, Ditch Projects, 2024



When I Dream I See Real Things, install shot, Ditch Projects, 2024

When I Dream I See Real Things includes four large-scale quilts hung off the wall in reference to painting. The size of these quilts refers to traditional domestic quiltmaking while also considering the monolithic abstract paintings of the late 20th century. For all intents and purposes, these quilts serve as functional domestic objects. Although these quilts are created using conventional quilting methods—constructed, sewn, and bound with the same techniques as their functional counterparts—hanging them slightly off the wall recontextualizes them as art objects. This underscores their dual nature as both functional and aesthetic objects. The act of hanging these quilts off the wall blurs the line between craft and fine art, challenging traditional perceptions and inviting viewers to consider the quilts in the context of painting.



Two arch-shaped textile collages, set in handmade birch frames, are displayed on the wall opposite the quilts, which contrasts the large-scale quilted works. The collages counter the traditional ideas of the large-scale quilts due to their non-functional nature, presenting themselves as purely visual pieces rather than utilitarian objects. The arches are crafted from cast-off scraps from the larger works, directly referencing the historical craft practice of reusing textiles to extend the life of an object.

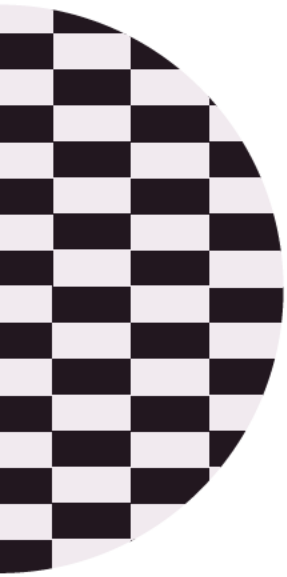
These collages, created using an improvisational style of piecing, rely heavily on spontaneous design decisions. This approach allows for a dynamic and fluid studio process, where the act of making becomes an exploration of form, color, and composition. The intuitive nature of this method of piecing infuses each piece with a sense of immediacy and authenticity, capturing my creative process in real-time. The collages also include traditional quilt blocks such as the Sawtooth Star and Pinwheels, grounding them in quilting techniques. With their precise geometric forms and historical reference, these recognizable patterns provide a structured counterpoint to the more fluid and organic shapes that appear throughout the arches.

A Ladder, A Portal, A Pinwheel, detail shot, 2024

The exhibition *When I Dream I See Real Things* redefines the boundaries of quilting, positioning it within the broader discourse of contemporary art. By referencing domestic and artistic traditions, these large-scale quilts challenge viewers to reconsider textiles' cultural and aesthetic significance.



When I Dream I See Real Things, install shot, Ditch Projects, 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my mother, Karen, for everything. All roads lead back to you.

To the rest of my big, wild, beautiful family: Joel, Carter, Erin, Camryn, and Gillian— I am so grateful to have you in my corner.

Thank you to my best friend and creative guiding light, Andrew Hilts, for half a lifetime's worth of laughter and tenderness. Lucky to know you and be known by you.

Thank you to my show-mates, Ashley Campbell and Noa Taylor, for being my sounding boards and confidants. May our paths continue to cross.

Thank you to Adam DeSorbo for always being a helping hand. You saw the vision and shared your craft with me.

To the rest of my cohort— thank you for the hours of conversation and for making the studio a joyful place to be.

Thank you to Jovencio de la Paz, Charlene Liu, and Stacy Jo Scott for your guidance and support over the last three years.

Woodworking and documentation by Adam DeSorbo.
Cover page by Andrew Hilts.



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