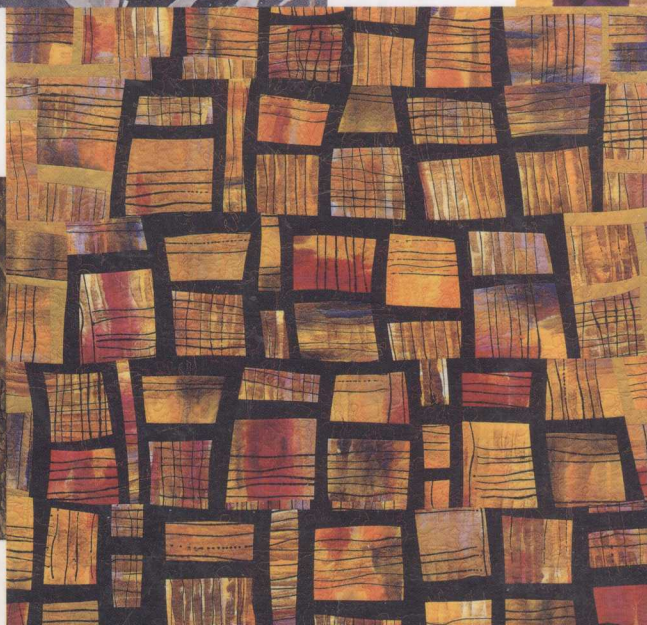
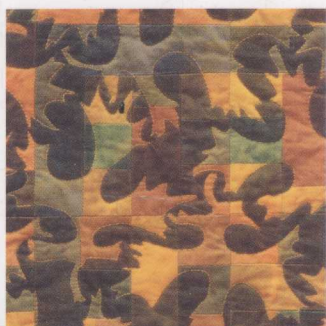


The Quilter's Book of Design

Ann Johnston



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CIP

TO MY PARENTS, EDWARD AND MARION DOHERTY,
AND TO MY BROTHER, FRED DOHERTY

All the fabric in *The Quilter's Book of Design* is hand dyed by the author. The techniques she uses are thoroughly explained in her two books about dyeing fabric: *Dye Painting!*, 1992, and *Color by Accident*, 1997.

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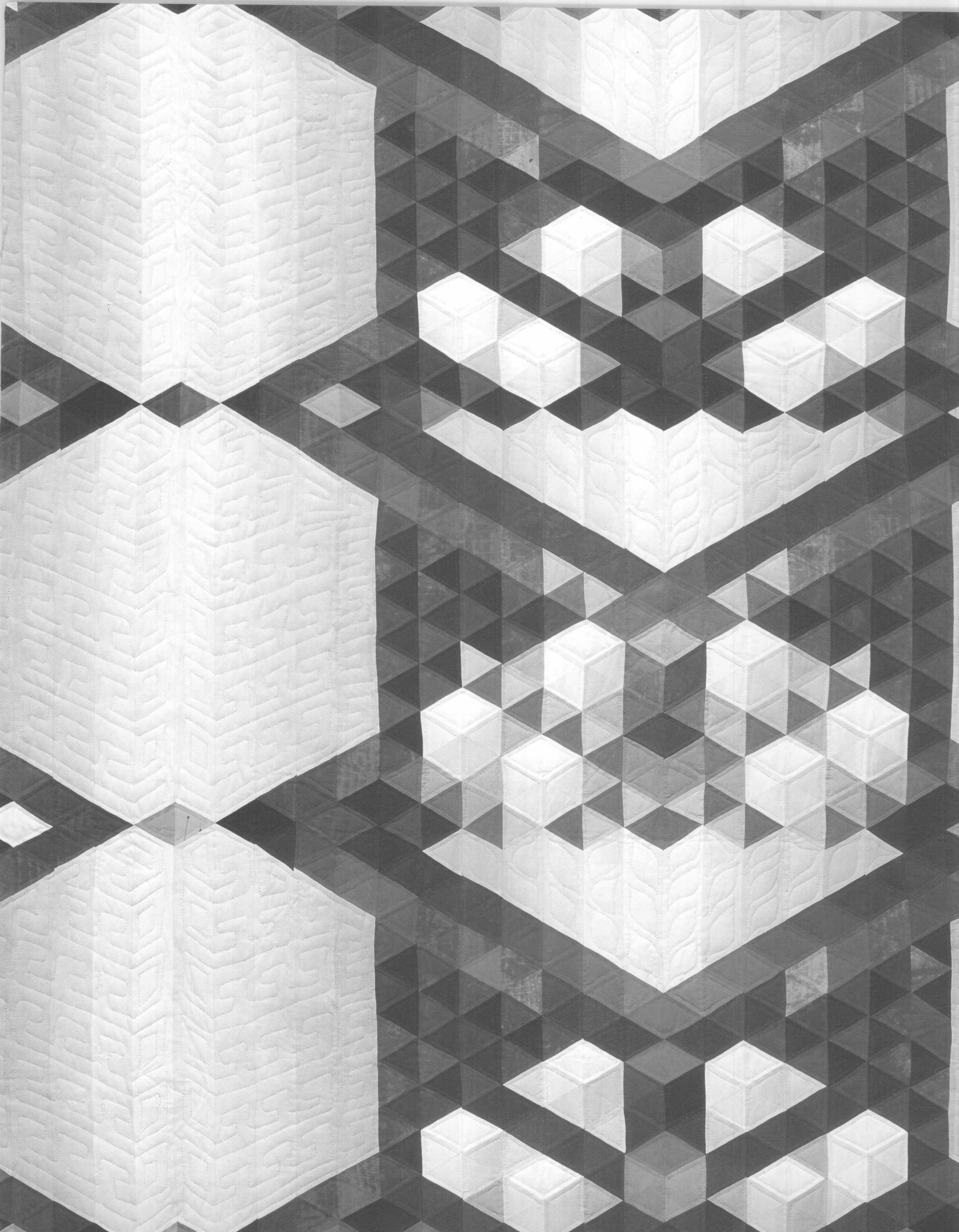
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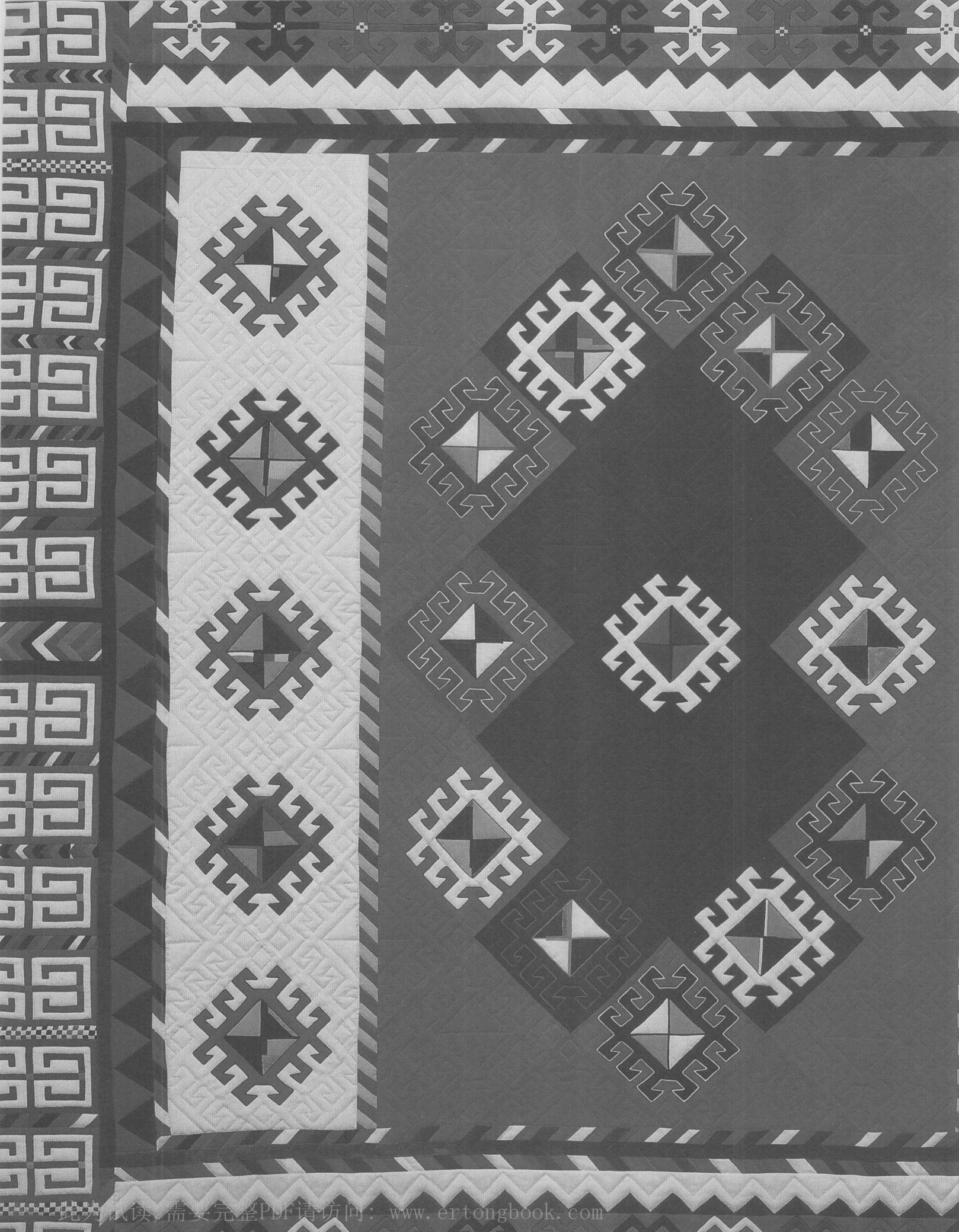
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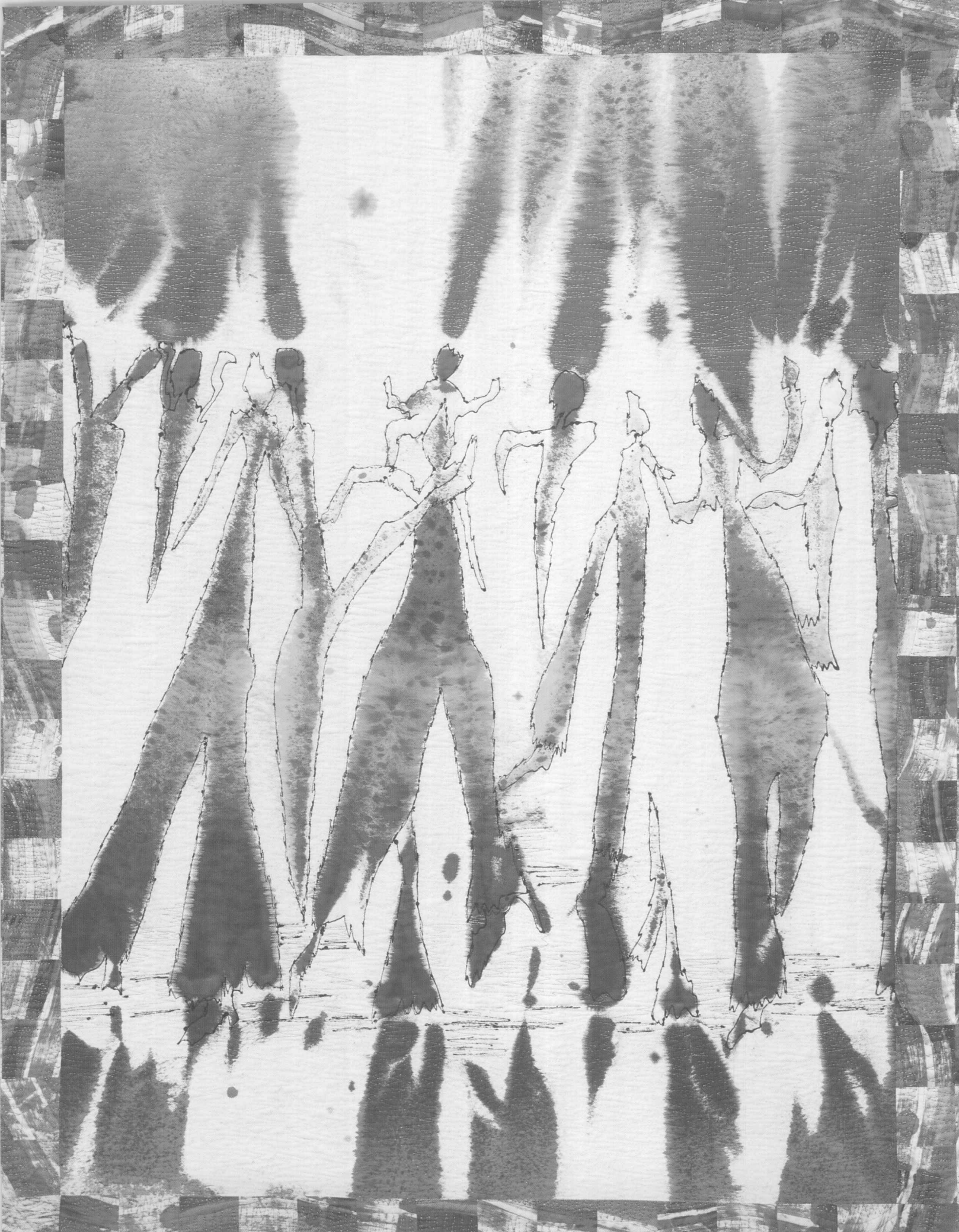






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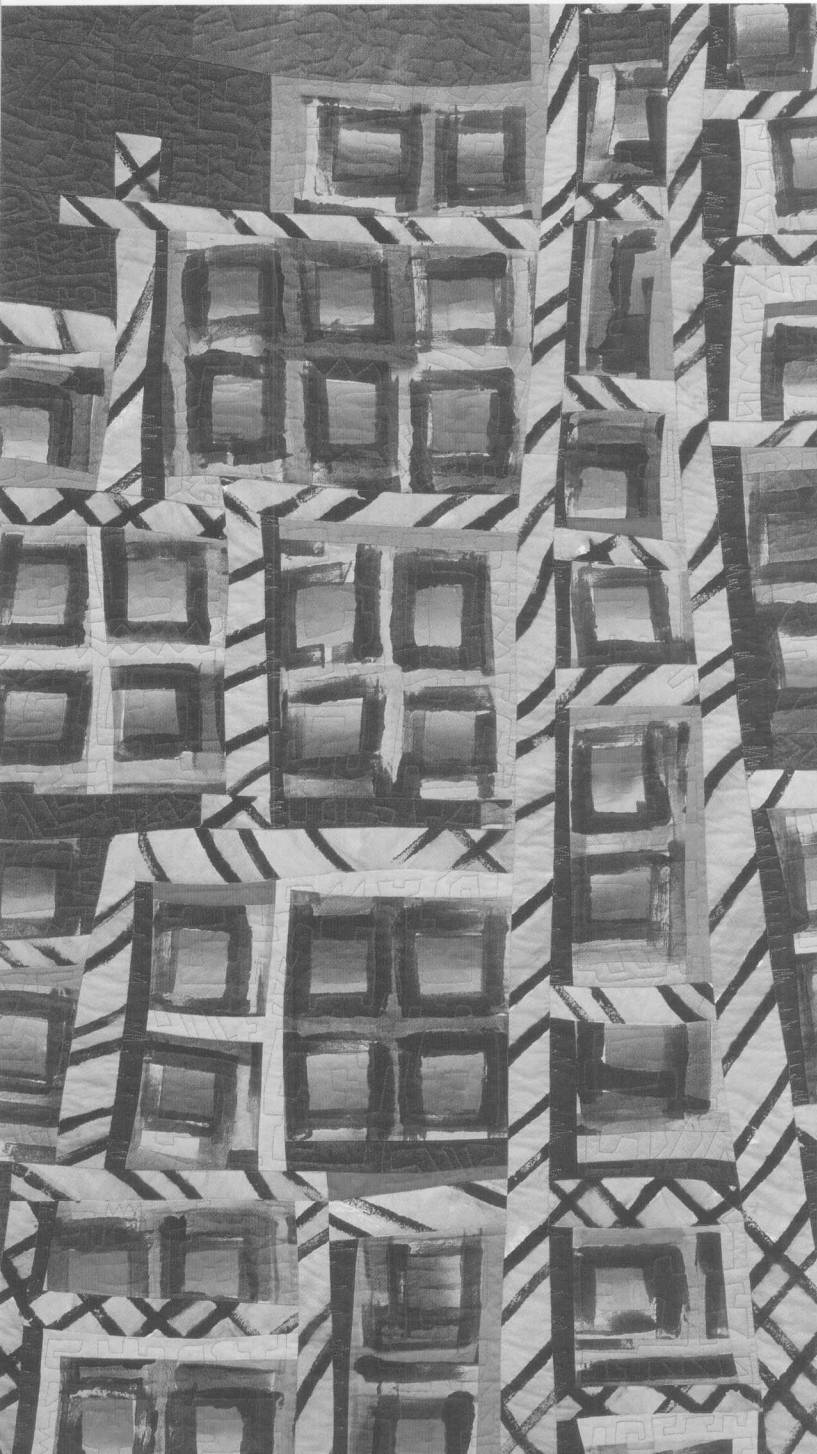
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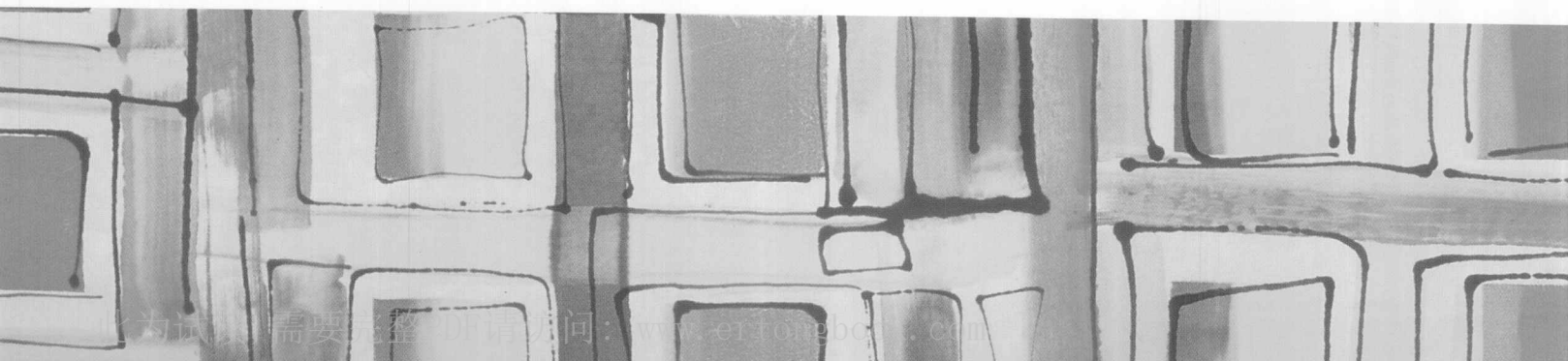
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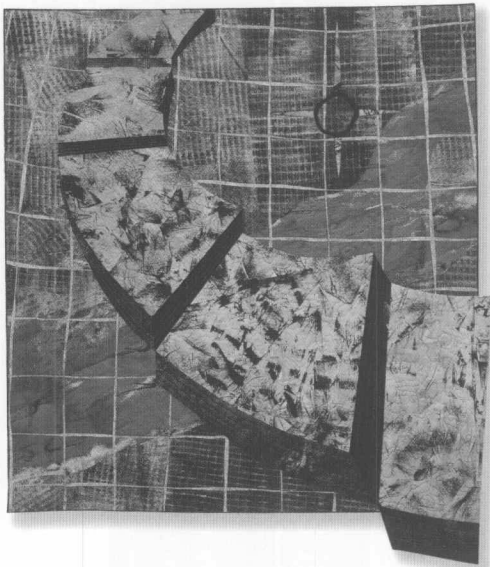
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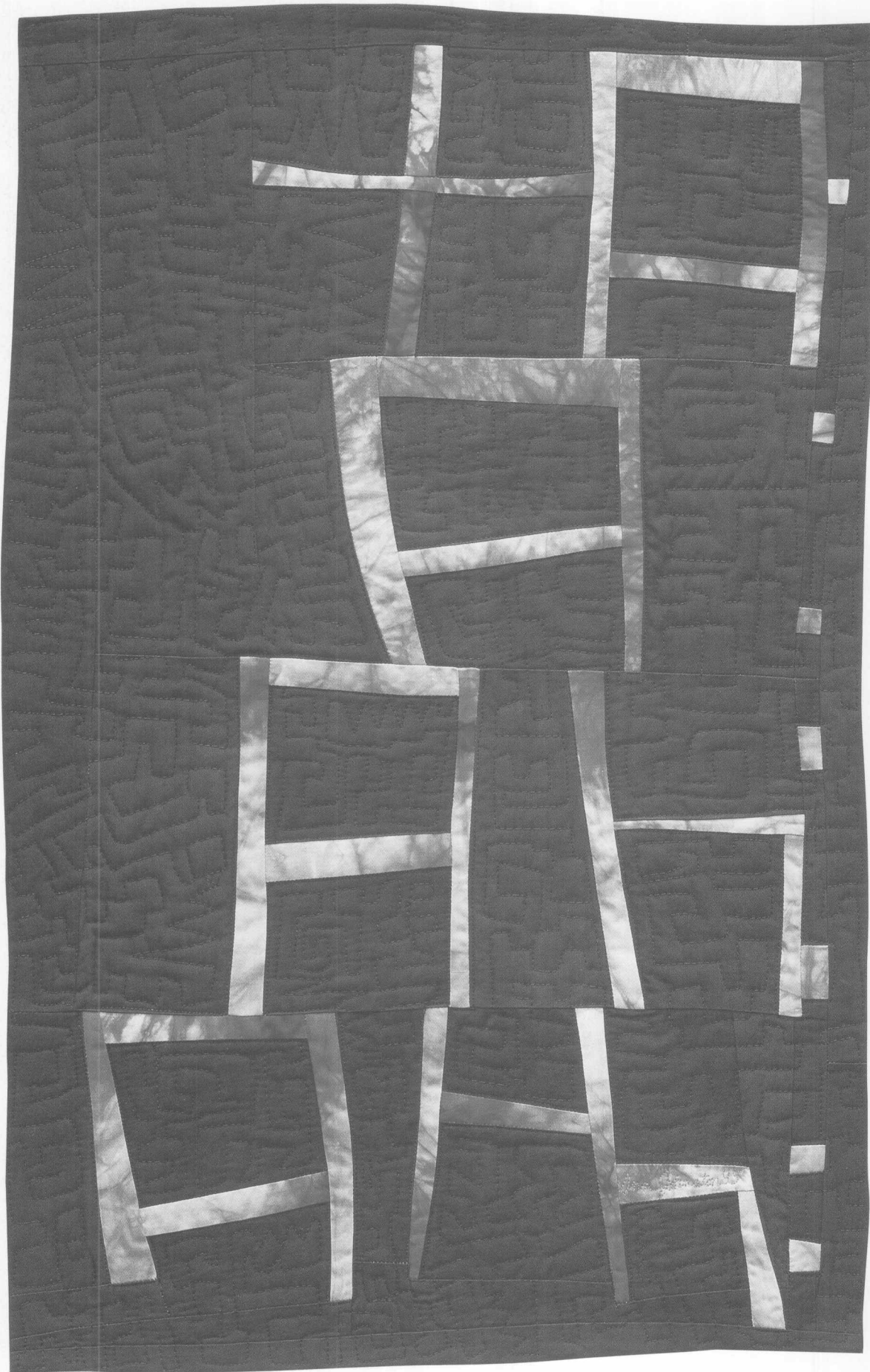


PART 1

Design Principles



North Is Up 75" × 65", 1997.



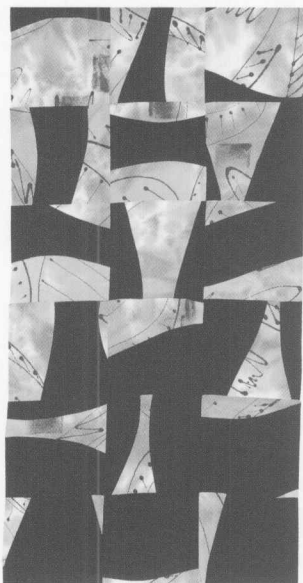
Balancing Act I 24" × 16" 1995.



B a l a n c e

Generally, people tend to seek balance in life, in nature, and in art. Balance is comfortable and imbalance tends to be uncomfortable. If we lean too far back in a chair, we are in a great hurry to get our balance back. A tipped picture on a wall catches our attention and makes us want to straighten it. Balance in a design is not as straightforward to judge as the *physical balance* we see in the world around us. It is easy to see whether a seesaw is or is not in balance, but judging whether or not a quilt design has balance is more difficult, because it is a question of *visual balance*.

Balance



Fallen Arches The yellow shapes are larger and closer together at the top, so the visual weight of the design is at the top.

VISUAL WEIGHT

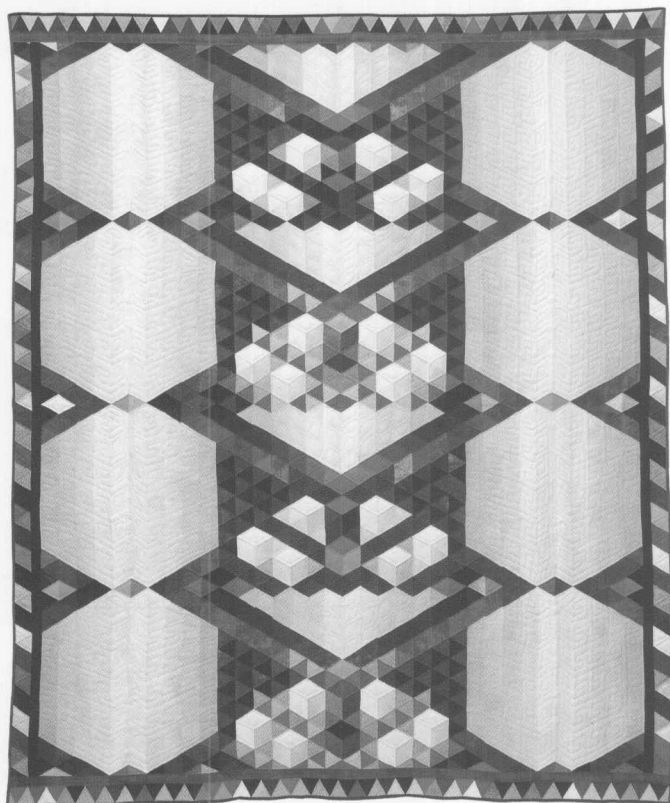
In a quilt context, the word *balance* is used to describe the distribution of visual weight in a design. *Visual weight* refers to the parts of the design that appear larger, that appear to come forward, or that appear to have more importance. The elements that attract the eye of the viewer and give emphasis change the balance of a design. Some examples are size, placement, color, and texture. They are the elements that determine the type of balance a design has and how it will affect the viewer. Experience is an excellent teacher, and practice can help develop an ability to sense the type of balance in a quilt design.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL BALANCE

When we look at a design, we often unconsciously assume that there is a centerline down the middle and sense the balance to the right and left of that centerline. In doing so, we are looking at *horizontal balance*. There is also a *vertical balance* to each composition: the visual weight above and below an assumed line across the middle of the composition. *New Persian* has both vertical and horizontal balance, even though the elements are not identical on both sides or from top to bottom. The center top area does not match the corresponding area at the bottom of the

quilt, and the figures in the center diamond are each different colors. Even though the colors in the small triangles vary widely throughout the quilt, they all fit in the same general pattern and are balanced horizontally and vertically by the light and dark shapes.

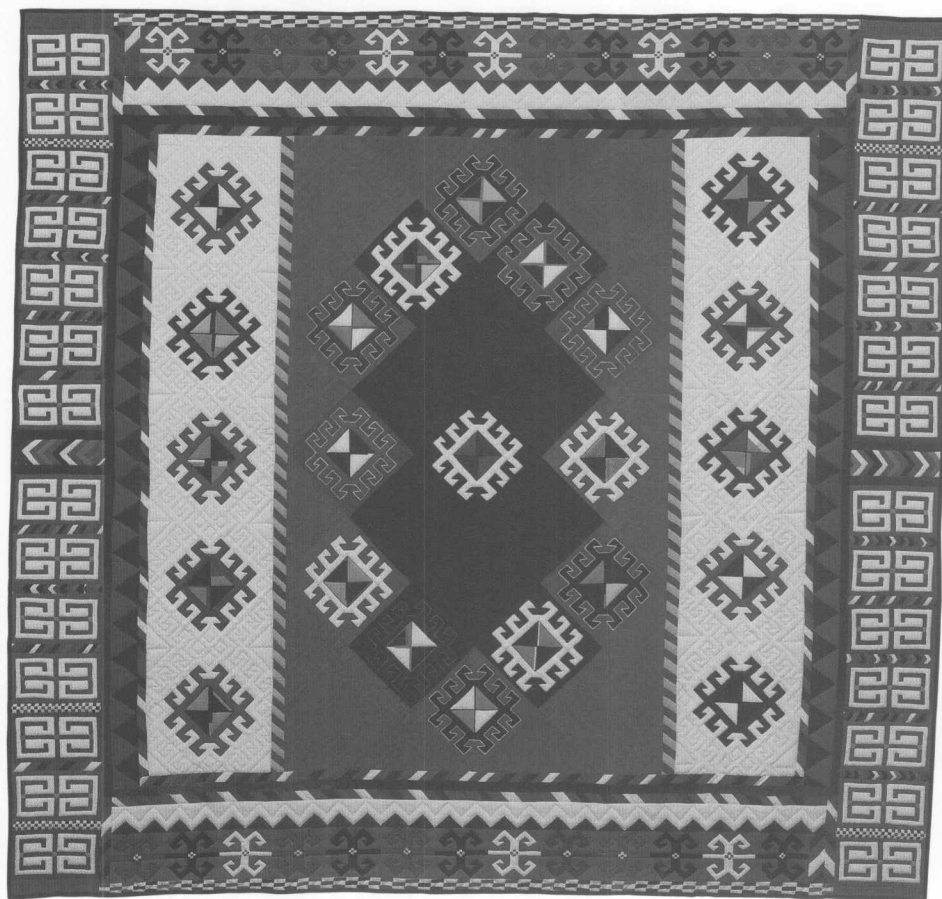
We tend to expect to find the visual weight in the lower part of a composition, because we live with the solid



New Persian 118" × 99", 1996. Quilted by the Oswego Quilters. This design has both vertical and horizontal balance in the light and dark shapes, even though elements are not identical on both sides or from top to bottom.



Shock Waves 41" × 46", 1996. The figure at left creates unequal balance and is part of the idea of the quilt.



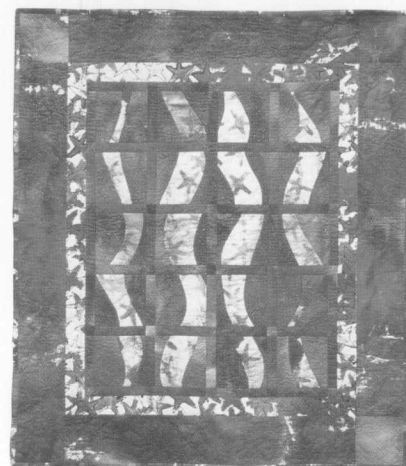
Myers Quilt 100" × 105", 1992. An example of formal or symmetrical balance; the design is the same on both halves of the quilt, as well as on the top and bottom.

earth below us and the light air above us. The quilt designer can plan to maintain this expectation, or to disrupt it to get corresponding results. In the unfinished quilt *Fallen Arches*, the yellow shapes are larger and closer together at the top, so the visual weight of the design is at the top. It is somewhat unexpected and so might put the viewer a little off balance. This may be the goal of the quilt, as it was when I pieced *Shock Waves*. I put the visual weight of the figure on the left side; the right side is empty except for waves: the imbalance contributes to the content of the quilt.

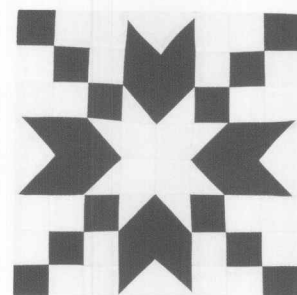
FOUR KINDS OF BALANCE

There are four kinds of balance, that is, four general ways to distribute the elements of a design. *Formal balance*, also referred to as *symmetrical balance*, repeats similar shapes, colors, values, lines, or other elements on both halves of the composition. This way of creating balance can give the feeling of calmness, clarity, rigidity, or rationality. *Myers Quilt* is a good example of formal balance, with an identical design on both halves of the quilt, as well as at top and bottom. Formal balance is frequently seen in traditional quilts based on blocks in a grid. *Stepping Stones*, a block used throughout this book, is a good example. Other examples are old favorites, *Nine Patch*, *Irish Chain*, *Log Cabin*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *Drunkard's Path*.

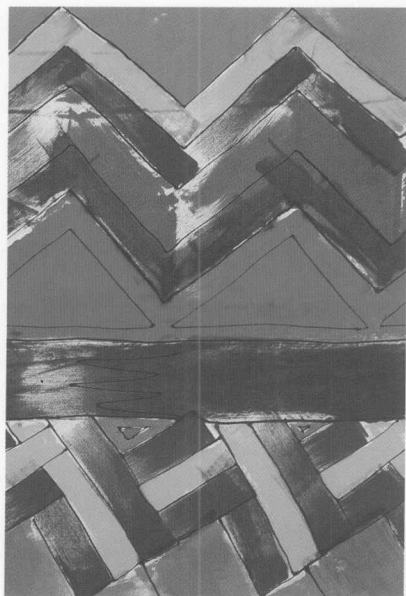
The formality of a grid can be used to lend some organization to a complex or busy image. The grid of straight-line sashing in *Kelp Forest* allows the eye to follow a pattern and take in all the complexity of curves and color behind it. The



Kelp Forest 49" × 42", 1994. The formal structure of the blocks, and the traditional set with sashing and borders, contains the complexity of colors and contrasts with curved piecing and irregular quilting stitches.



Stepping Stones This traditional block design has formal radial balance. Formal balance is frequently seen in traditional quilts that are based on blocks in a grid.



Guatemala This fabric design has informal balance to a high degree: the elements are not repeated on both sides of the middle.



Leopard Lily 33" × 40", 1987. The visual weight is mostly in the middle; the informal balance is subtle, at first giving the impression that both sides are similar.

formal border contains the design and contrasts with this complexity in the center of the quilt. This is a quilt with formal balance amid the chaos of its color.

Informal or asymmetrical balance uses dissimilar shapes with unequal visual weight to attract the eye. It can convey a casual, natural, or unplanned feeling. However, it is more difficult to plan informal balance because there are more decisions to make. It is harder to decide what is balanced when you are looking at different shapes, lines, colors, or other elements on each side of the design. Informal balance can be subtle, as in *Leopard Lily*, where the visual weight is mostly in the center and the impression is that both sides are similar. Informal balance can be more extreme, as shown by the design *Guatemala*. The elements are not repeated on both sides of the middle. Even though both sides are very different, the asymmetrical composition still gives the feeling of balance.

Circular or radial balance occurs when all the elements radiate from a central point in the design. The point from which the elements radiate may be in the center of the composition, in which case the design has formal balance, or the elements may radiate from a point off center, making the composition more informal. Many traditional quilt block patterns are radial. All the shapes in the *Stepping Stones* block radiate from a center point. A medallion setting for a



BAQ, 93 7½" × 7½", 1993. The wreath blocks in this quilt have radial balance, and the quilt design as a whole radiates from the center.