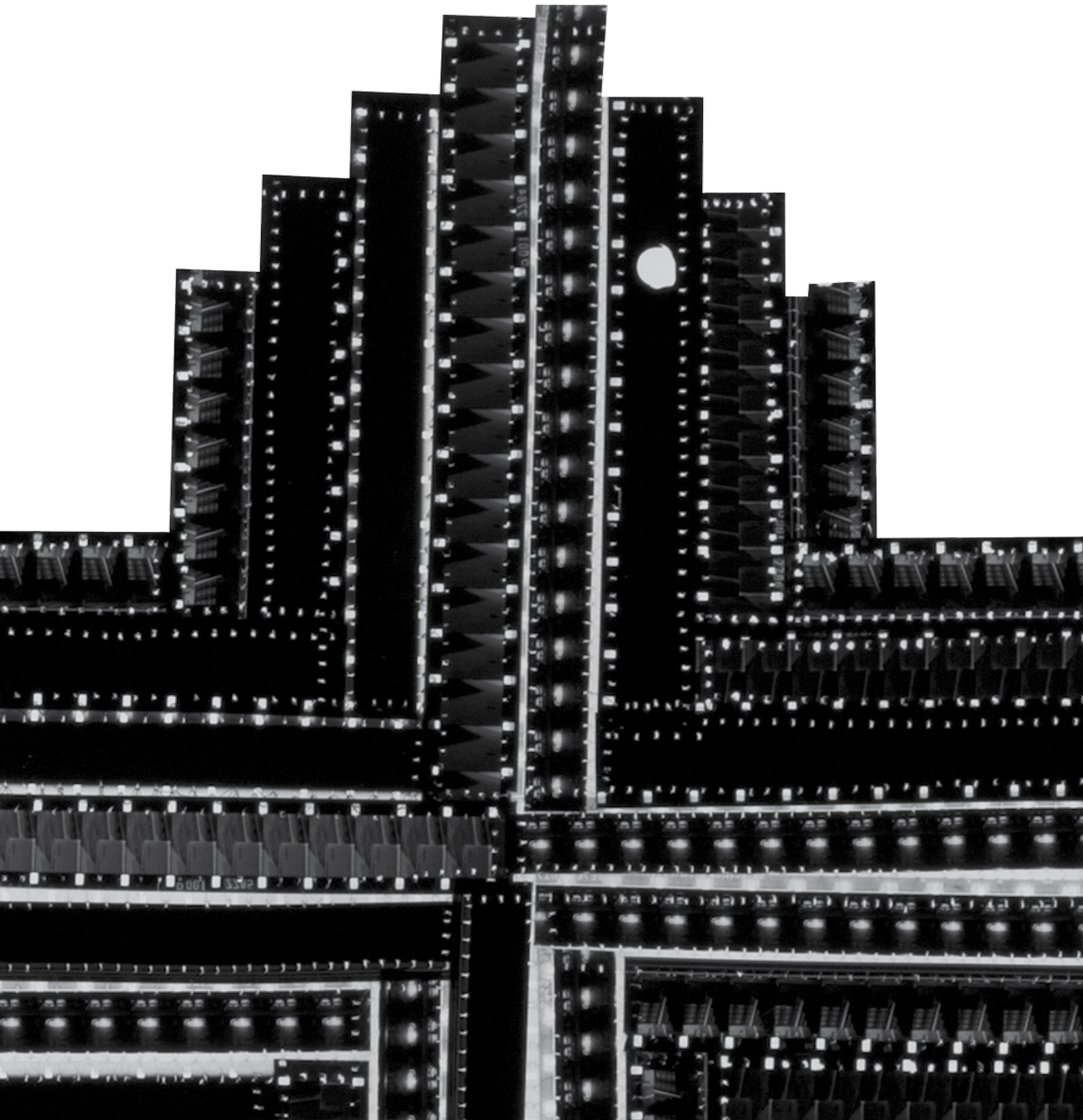


FILM QUILTS BY
SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER

SUNSHINE and SHADOW



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CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

HERE AND THERE: DUALITIES IN SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER'S FILM QUILTS

by Sarah Archer

Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square, a geometric touchstone in the center of an old, well-crafted American city, is a fitting location for the first exhibition of Sabrina Gschwandtner's "Film Quilts" in Pennsylvania. About eighty miles west of Philadelphia, the Lancaster Quilt and Textile Museum holds a renowned collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century quilts made by the German and Swiss settlers whose culture, food, clothing, and decorative arts are now instantly recognizable as "Pennsylvania Dutch." Amish and Mennonite women have made extraordinary quilts in this region for over two centuries, balancing a religious mandate to live simply and separately with a bold, distinctive sense of geometry, pattern, and color plainly evident in their work.¹

For several reasons, an Amish quilter transported through time and space from nineteenth-century Lancaster County to twenty-first-century Philadelphia would probably find one of Gschwandtner's "Film Quilts" unintelligible, not least because the technology of film (obsolete though it may be, from our point of view) would be a foreign concept. More importantly, the "Film Quilts" are "nonfunctional" in the purely domestic understanding of the word. Made from acetate or polyester, materials that could not be less cozy, they lack the *raison d'être* of most quilts: comfort. Gschwandtner's creations offer a subtle rebuke to the notion that in order to be valid, women's labor must be of use to someone, or, more specifically, should serve the well-being of their families. Gschwandtner's quilts decouple the relationship between the personal, tactile pleasure of creation and the domestic utility of a quilt as bedclothes or even decor. Looking at Amish quilts today, I wonder if quilters "got away with" spending so much time and effort on their quilts because their ultimate use was the perfect embodiment of maternal duty. Perhaps they did, and perhaps the very act of quilting was consciously subversive. Alas, we will never know.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a growing awareness of the vast reservoirs of unattributed female labor (the products of which are evident all around us) inspired feminist filmmakers, artists, and craftspeople to capture, record, and interpret activities such as quilting. This visual legacy forms yet another distinct layer in Gschwandtner's work. Pat Ferrero's 1981 documentary *Quilts in Women's Lives*, which features prominently in Gschwandtner's piece of the same name, is a bit like a film quilt flipped inside out: the women Ferrero interviewed tell their quilting stories on camera one by one, and these narratives are stitched together to form a larger whole. The stories represent individual lines of technique and creative passion, in some cases passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. In other cases, quilting is lauded, in pitch-perfect second-wave feminist style, as a physical demarcation of feminine space and place.

Julia Bryan-Wilson points out in her interview with Gschwandtner that the artist's "Film Quilts" cause the physical artifacts of the filmstrips to straddle two worlds: they exist simultaneously as translucent representations of another place and time and as physical objects in their own right. In that sense, they wryly nod to Gschwandtner's own history as a semiotics student at Brown University in the late 1990s. Even as the quilts are present before us, they signify another physical reality altogether. They also reward close inspection and physical proximity. Though they glow radiantly in photographs, only by peering at them a few inches from the surface can a viewer behold the tiny narratives that form the quilts' patterns. An astonishing array of "scenes" becomes visible in each quilt: lines of text, washes of color, and glimpses of the people featured in the various films modeling clothes or telling stories, disembodied, but still present, even highlighted.

Standing in the galleries at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, visitors may also be aware that they are inside a former domestic space, the Wetherill Mansion. What is now public was once private, which provides a very particular cultural and architectural subtext to every exhibition presented here. In so many ways, Gschwandtner's "Film Quilts" embody dualities and invite viewers to revel in their complexities: light and dark, present and past, physical and ephemeral, soft cotton and tough polyester, traditional and conceptual, here and there.

NOTES

1. Though in certain contexts their creations could stand toe-to-toe with paintings by Frank Stella, the quilters' gendered and religious anonymity means we will likely never know their identities.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

by Glenn Adamson

In the subject of which I treat, our manners and motions, testimonies and instances; how fabulous 'soever, provided they are possible, serve as well as the true. Whether they have really happened or no, at Rome or Paris, to John or Peter, 'tis still within the verge of human capacity, which serves me to good use. I see, and make my advantage of it, as well in shadow as in substance; and amongst the various readings thereof in history, I cull out the most rare and memorable to fit my own turn. There are authors whose only end and design it is to give an account of things that have happened; mine, if I could arrive unto it, should be to deliver of what may happen.

—*Michel de Montaigne*¹

Sabrina Gschwandtner is many things: activist and organizer, editor and critic, filmmaker and sculptor, artist and artisan. But here I would like to introduce her as a specialist in the imaginary. Perhaps it is a coincidence that the title of this exhibition project, "Sunshine and Shadow," so closely echoes the above-quoted words of Michel de Montaigne, inventor of the essay form in literature, but I enjoy the (admittedly far-fetched) idea that they are kindred spirits. Gschwandtner, like Montaigne, is a creature of the archive, as engaged with texts as she is with textiles.

Montaigne wrote about more or less everything: grand classical subjects, yes, but also themes rooted in the everyday—like smells, clothing, and, of course, books. As he constructed his essays, Montaigne referred constantly to his library, leather-bound books filled with legendary tales. They made him wonder about many things. Will a man grow horns if he dreams about bullfighting? Can a cat strike a bird dead through the sheer force of its gaze? Might a doctor grow mad by too much study of insanity? A better philosopher,

he concedes, might try to reason his way through these questions. But Montaigne concluded that he cannot know the truth of them—which suited him just fine. Imagination, he wrote, “has a very piercing impression upon me.” And it was in the domain of the imagination, unconstrained by accuracy, that he wanted his essays to find their value.

Montaigne lived a long time ago—nearly half a millennium—yet he often seems profoundly contemporary. In this particular passage, I find a curious convergence with today’s art. The redeployment of existing material is a crucial aspect of contemporary practice; appropriation and collage, once avant-garde techniques, have become standard. The result is that the world itself has been redefined as an archive, which can be sorted, altered, and displayed at will. Susan Sontag once observed that “the omnipresence of cameras persuasively suggests that time consists of interesting events, events worth photographing,”² and artistic appropriation has that kind of effect too. If you go to Gschwandtner’s studio, or that of most any other artist nowadays, you will find drifts of material: books with underlinings, images pinned on the wall, notes and sketches, found objects in profusion. This is research material, of a kind, but only rarely will it be systematically organized. Instead, like Montaigne, the artist sifts through the detritus in search of the “most rare and memorable.” What lies in shadow, uncertain and unverified, is just as valuable as that which is clearly true. Like a dreaming man, a staring cat, or a studious doctor, the artist brings about new a reality, just by thinking about it.

As an editor, Gschwandtner excels at assembling the work of others into new arrays, more provocative than the sum of their parts. (See her book *KnitKnit: Profiles and Projects from Knitting’s New Wave*, which functions as a how-to guide and much more.) In her art, too, Gschwandtner is a consummate arranger of preexisting material. She is especially drawn to found film and photographs, sometimes setting them within an interactive situation that prompts further reflection, as in her zeitgeist-defining work *Wartime Knitting Circle*, described by the artist as “a mechanism for meditation on war, an outlet for political expression, and a provocation for dialogue among people with differing political viewpoints.” Gschwandtner composes her work in constant response to the thoughts of others, and it is no coincidence that she finds inspiration in essay films, in which existing and fabricated footage is assembled into an argument, just as Montaigne assembled his writings through the continual interpolation of citations. Like the French essayist, she has built a thoroughly individual voice mainly out of quotations—a process

that renders her work open and available, and fundamentally social in character.

The six “Film Quilts” that make up the present exhibition are the latest and most poetic exponent of this artistic persona. They are made out of found film footage that is redolent with the freighted histories of craft. To make each quilt, Gschwandtner cuts up several yards of archival film stock, yielding the gentle frisson that destroying historical objects always has (one thinks here of Ai Weiwei’s broken and overpainted pots). Yet the film she uses was otherwise destined for the garbage dump. The works may be made through a process of creative destruction, but they also preserve these images, which would otherwise be lost to history. Presented with strong backlighting, they are made up of light and shade in multiple senses. Positive and negative space seem to trade their usual roles—the figures in each frame tend to be dark, and the backgrounds light. When set into a pattern reminiscent of traditional “sunshine and shadow” quilts (named for the strong contrast of the patterns) they enact a fictive reunion, bringing together an extended community of textile crafters from across space and time.

The film quilts bring us back, full circle, to Montaigne’s argument about imagination: if it is prompted by the fragments that come our way, we should simply take pleasure in that fact. Rather than seeing “testimonies and instances” as a form of evidence, we can use them to prompt new thoughts about what might have been, and what might yet be. Gschwandtner’s appropriated filmic images are scarcely legible at first sight, becoming clear only under close examination. Yet in their very elusiveness, her illuminated quilts offer innumerable windows into the past. Basking in their glow, we might think about the stained glass that perhaps surrounded Montaigne as he wrote his lines: “the image of the world glides away, even as we live upon it.”

NOTES

1. Michel de Montaigne, *Selected Essays*, ed. William Carew Hazlitt, trans. Charles Cotton (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2012), 68.
2. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), 11.



Pages 7 and 38:
Installation views, "**Sunshine and Shadow**," Philadelphia Art Alliance, 2013, Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media

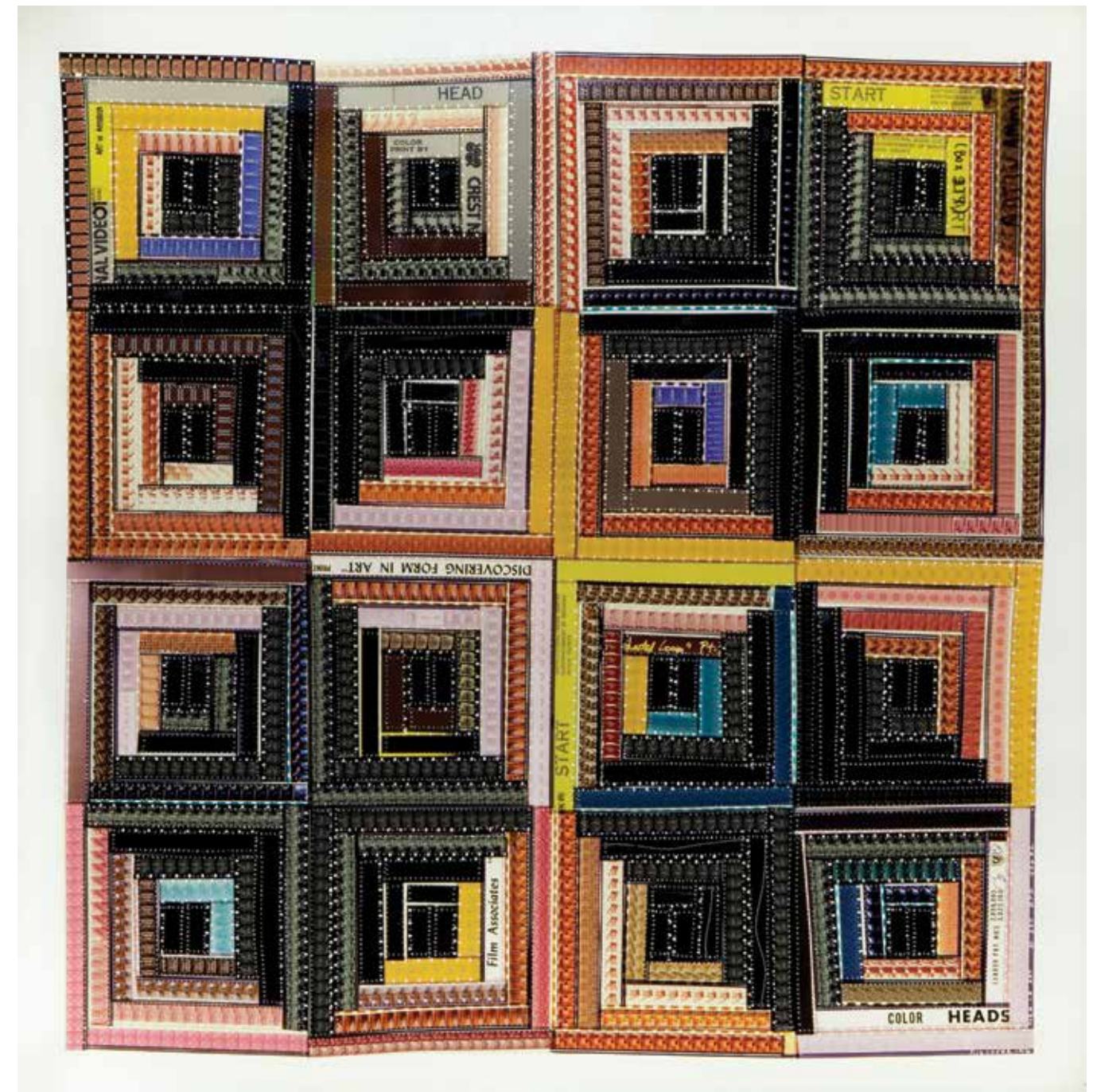
ARTS AND CRAFTS, 2012

16 mm film, polyamide thread

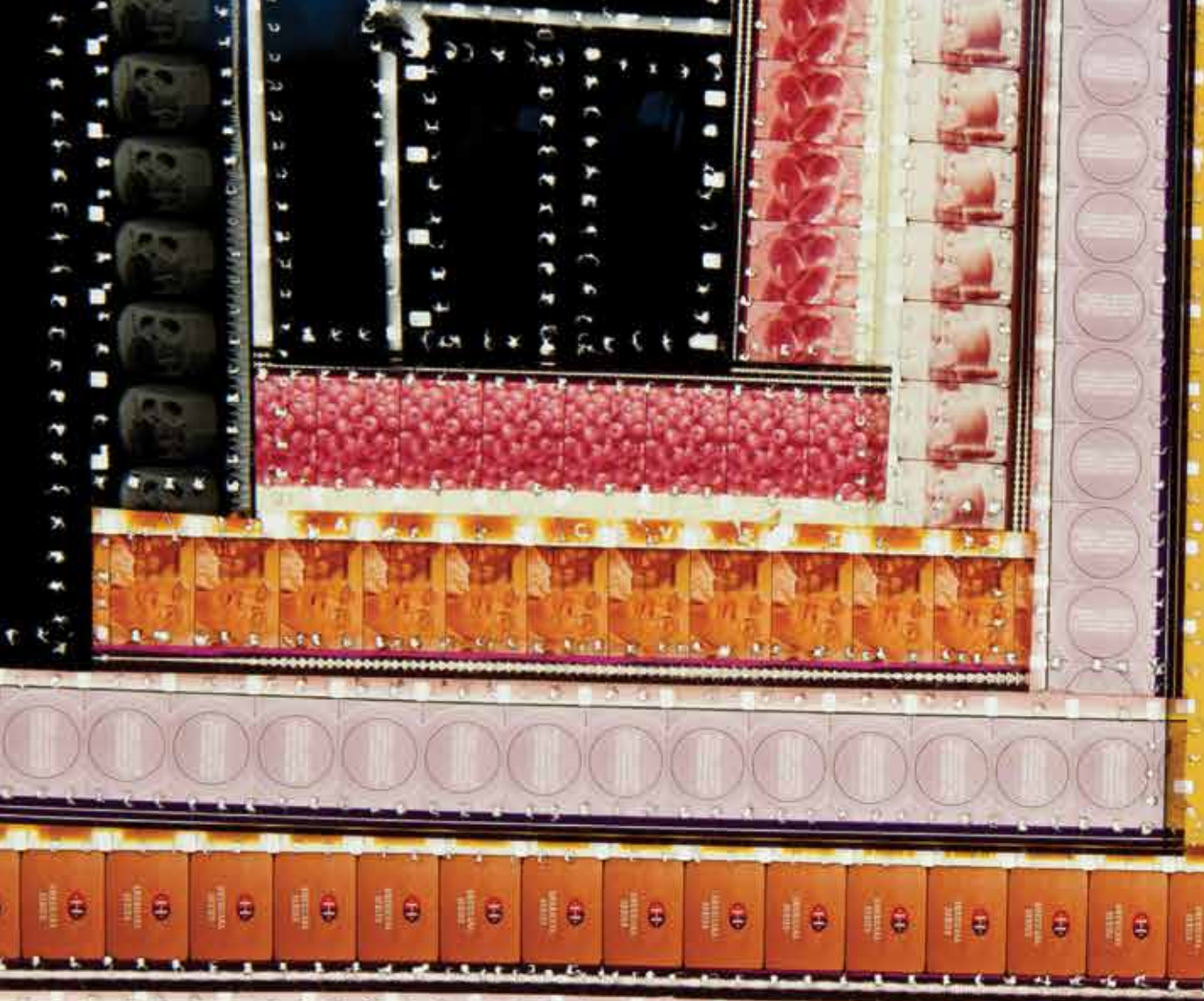
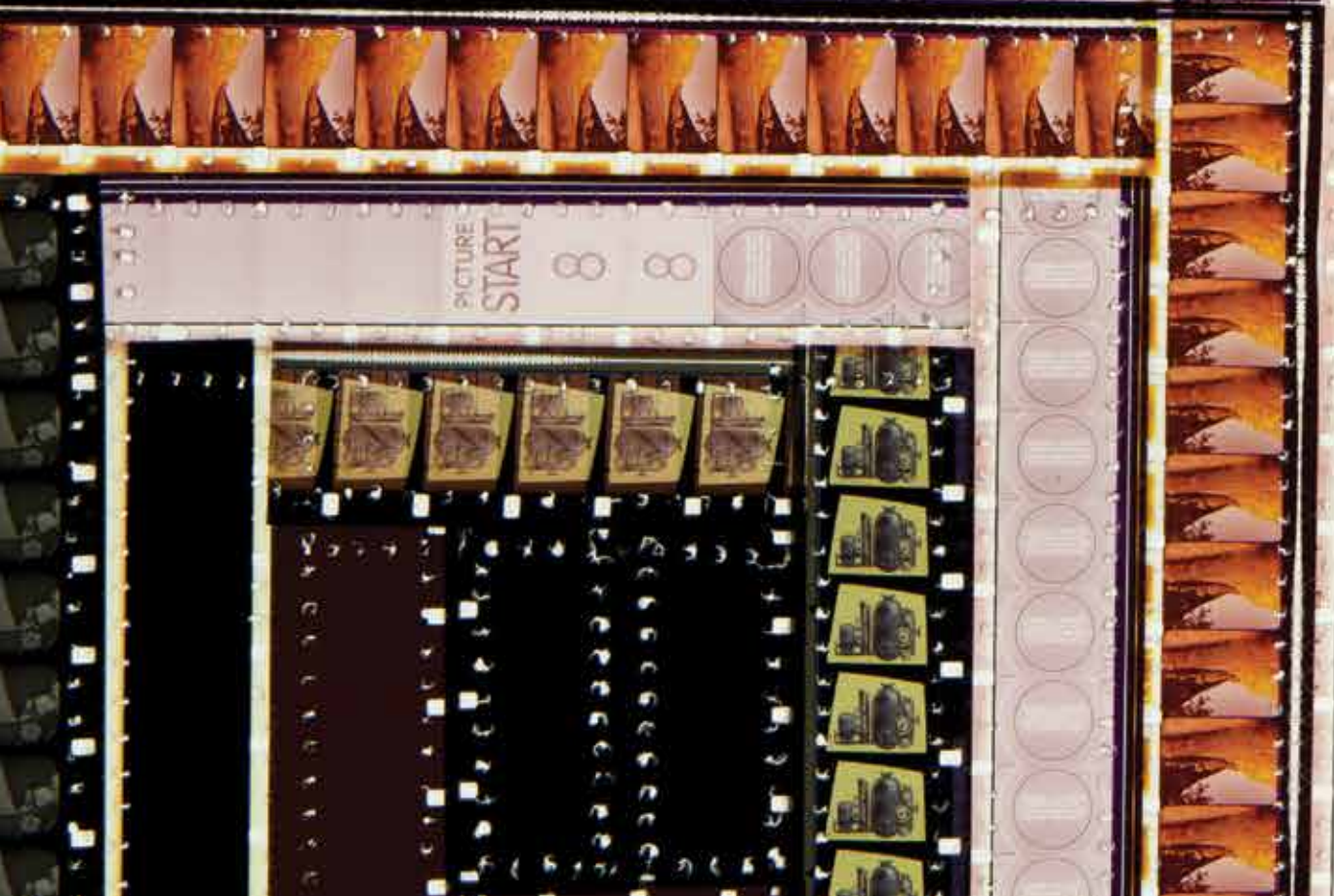
23½ x 23 inches

Collection of Jerrie Whitfield and Dick Motika

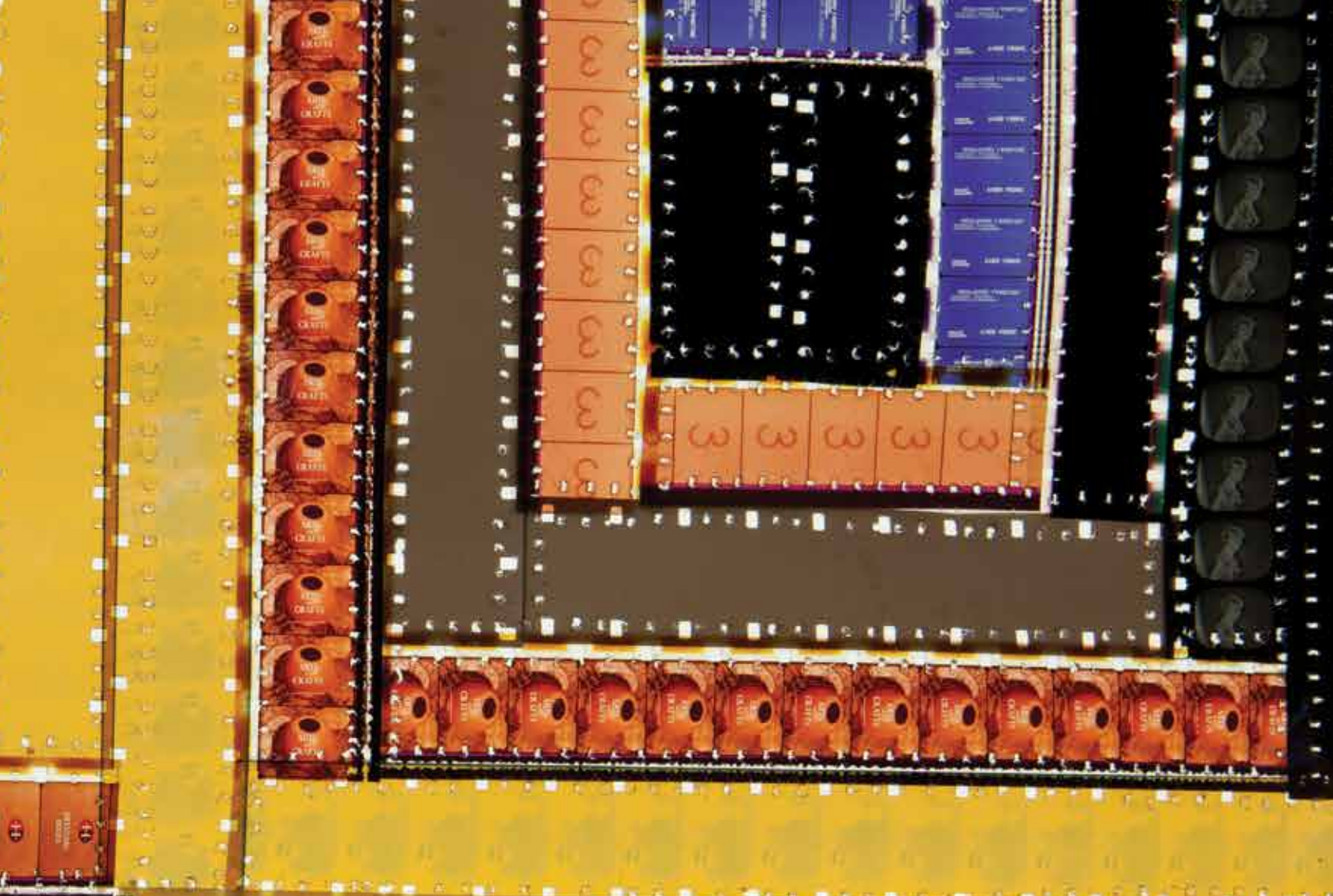
Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media

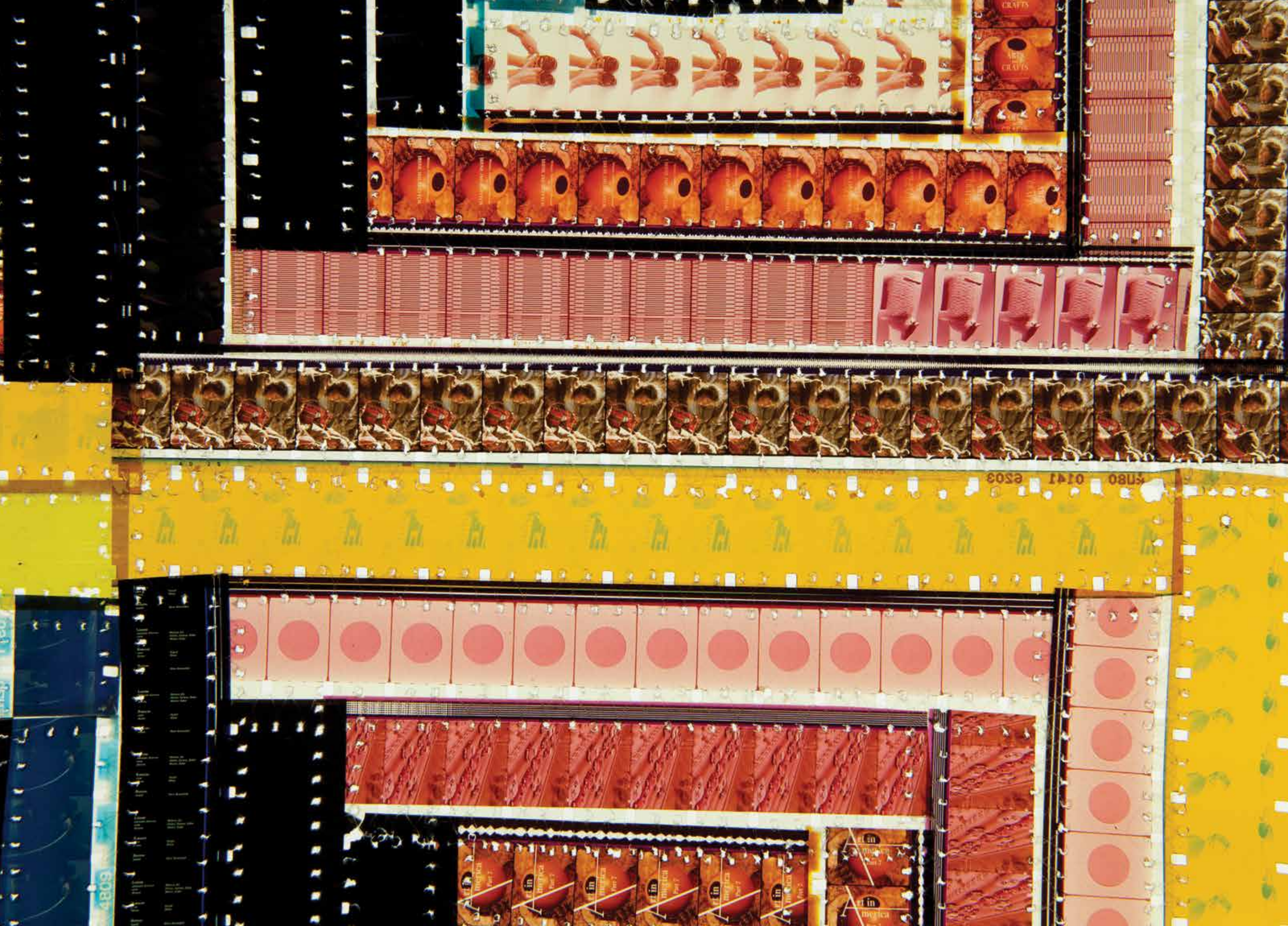


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QUILTS IN WOMEN'S LIVES III, 2012

16 mm film, polyamide thread, cotton thread,

lithography ink

19 x 19 inches

Collection of Willem J.M. Kevenaar

Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media





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22

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100%



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SUNSHINE AND SHADOW, 2012

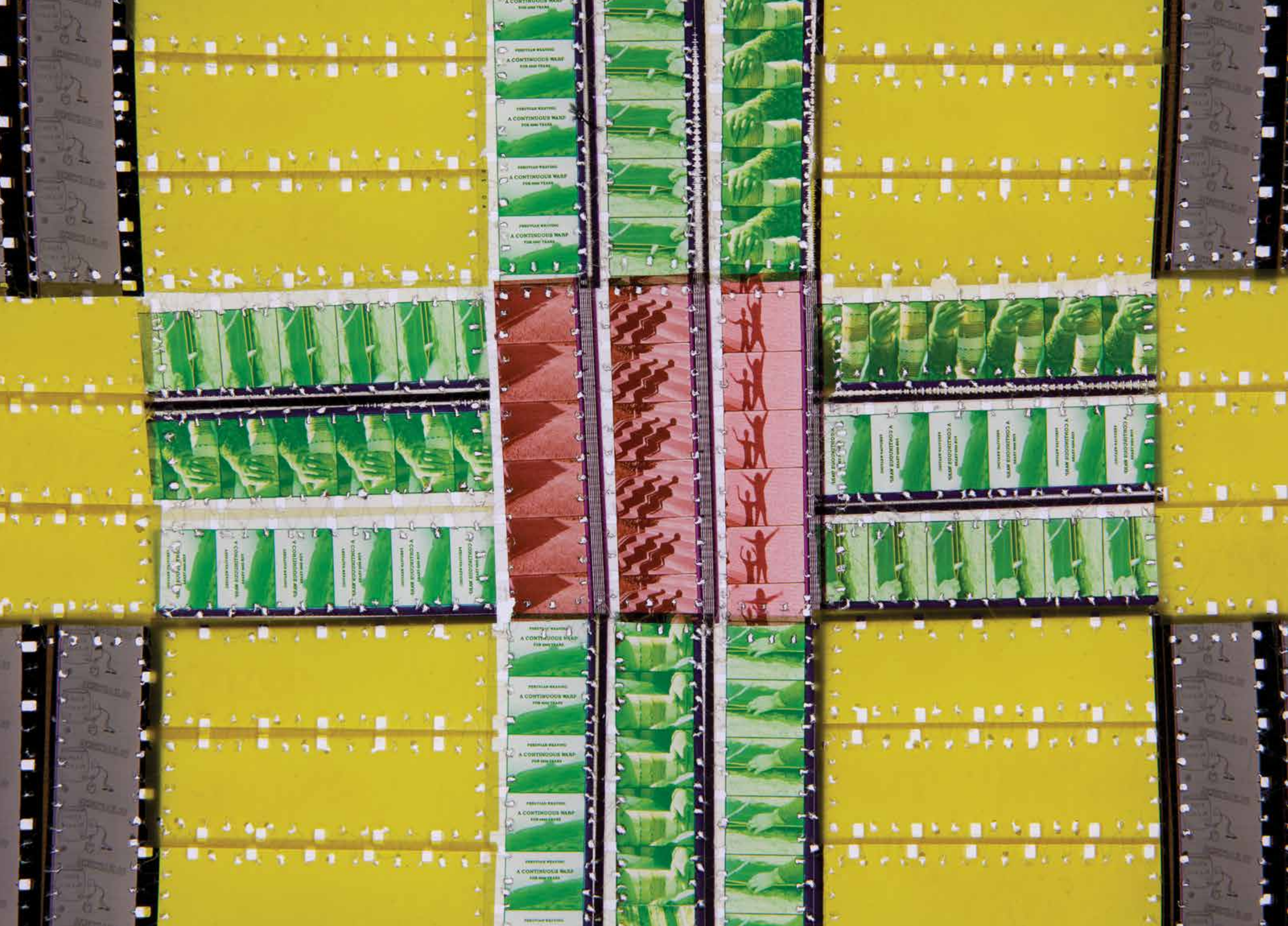
16 mm film, polyamide thread

22 x 22 inches

Collection of Aryn Drakelee-Williams
and Jesse Williams

Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media





PERPETUAL READING
A CONTINUOUS WARP
FOR ONE YEAR

PERPETUAL READING
A CONTINUOUS WARP
FOR ONE YEAR

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FOR ONE YEAR

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A CONTINUOUS WARP
FOR ONE YEAR



**PHILADELPHIA PAVEMENT,
RITTENHOUSE SQUARE, 2013**

16 mm film, polyamide thread, cotton thread
22¹/₂ x 22¹/₂ inches

Collection of Bari and David Fishel

Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media





START

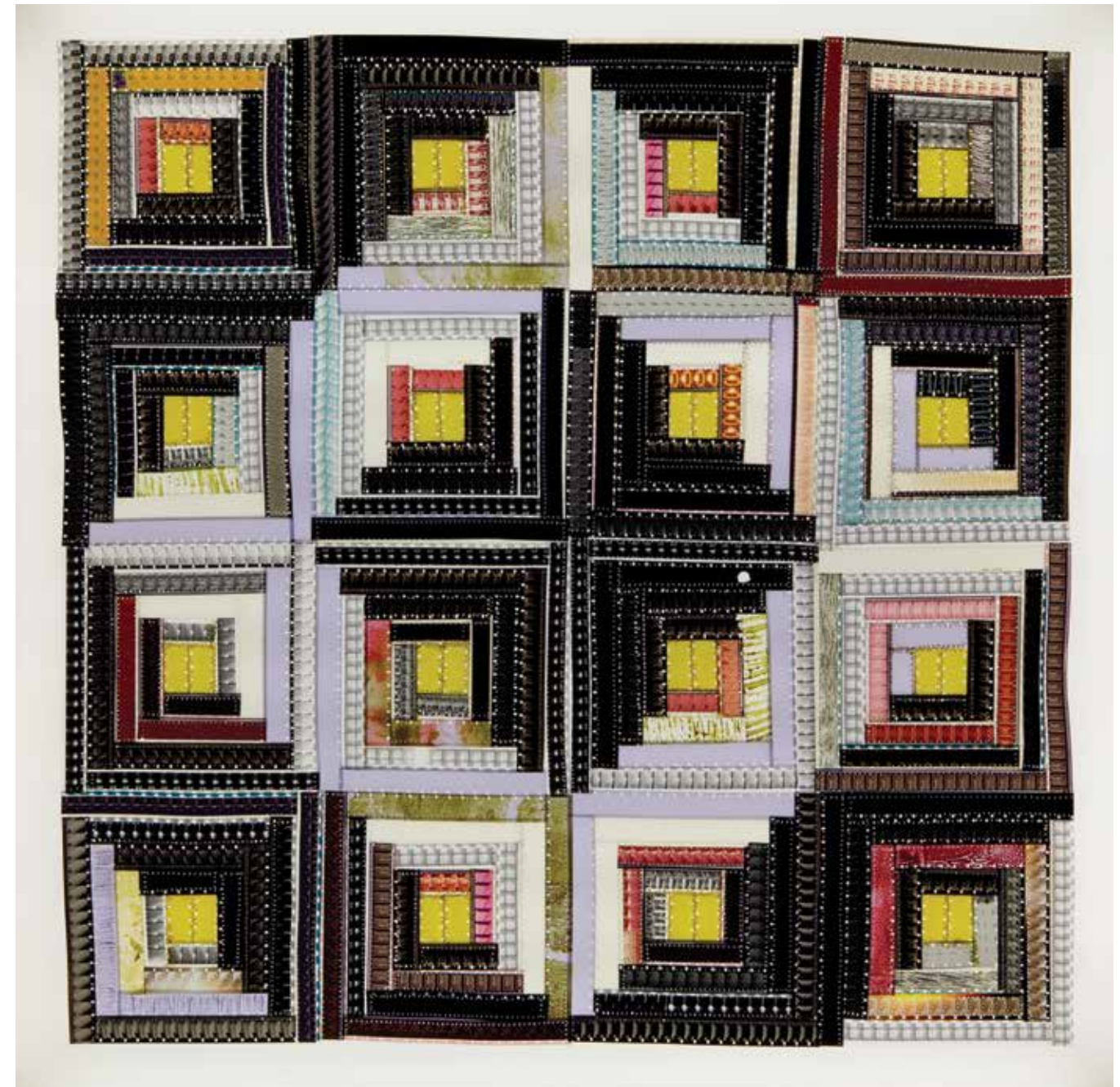
WAVE HILL SUNROOM II, 2013

16 mm film, cotton thread, polyamide thread, polyester thread, lithography ink, permanent marker

23 x 23 inches

Courtesy of the artist; LMAKprojects, New York; and the Philadelphia Art Alliance

Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media



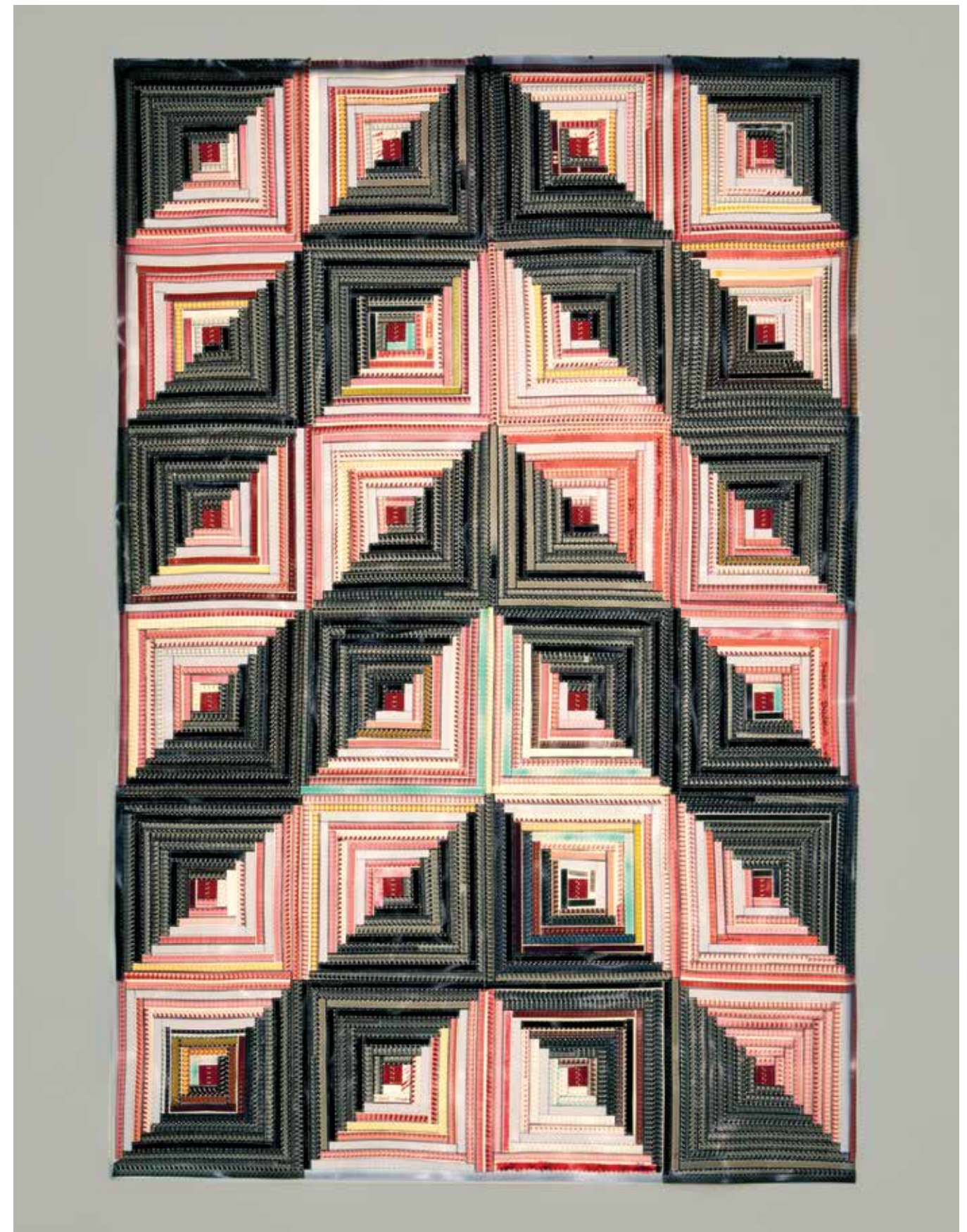
CAMOUFLAGE, 2012

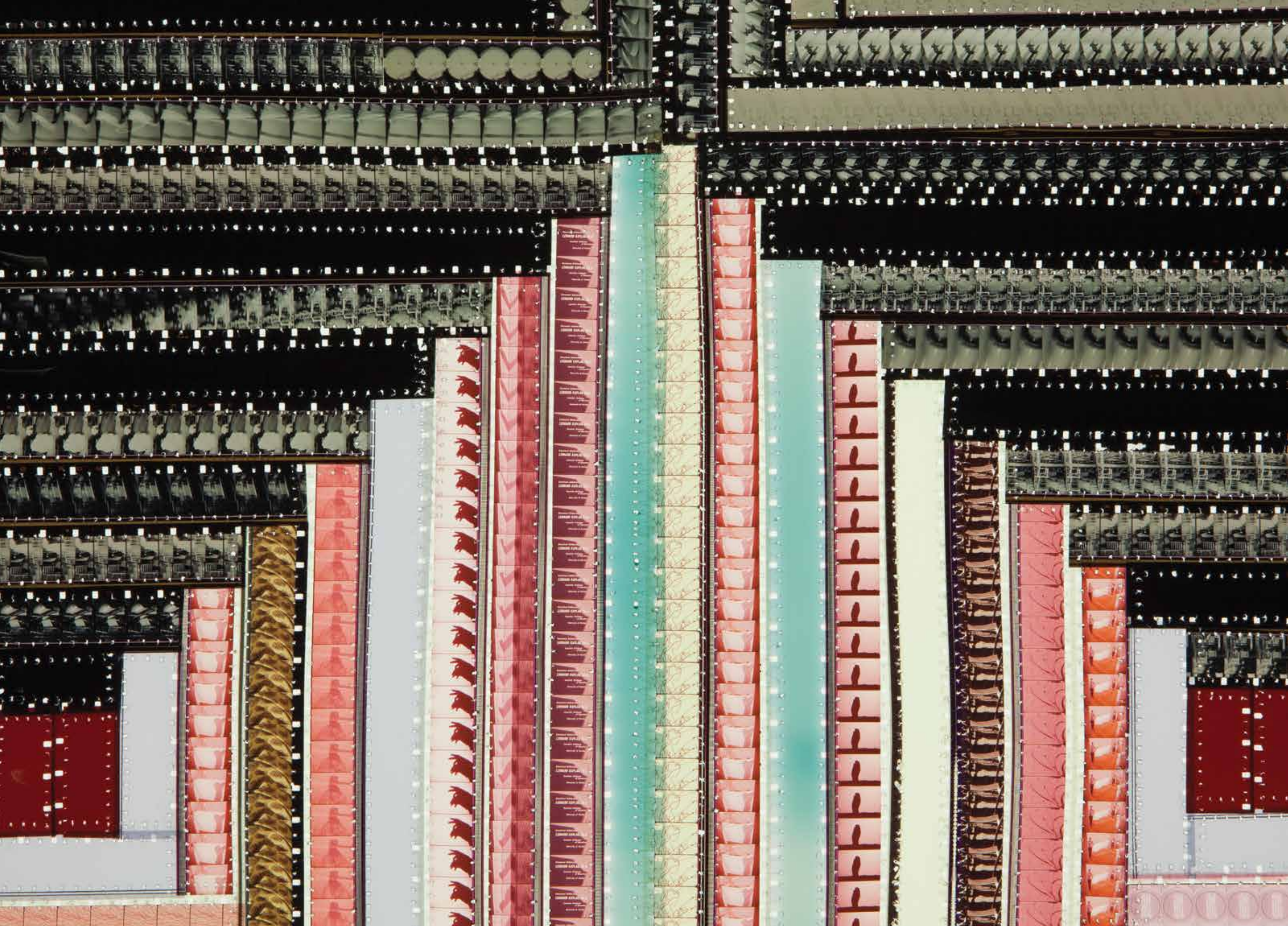
16 mm film, polyamide thread, lithography ink

69 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 45 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches

Courtesy of the artist; LMAKprojects,
New York; and the Philadelphia Art Alliance

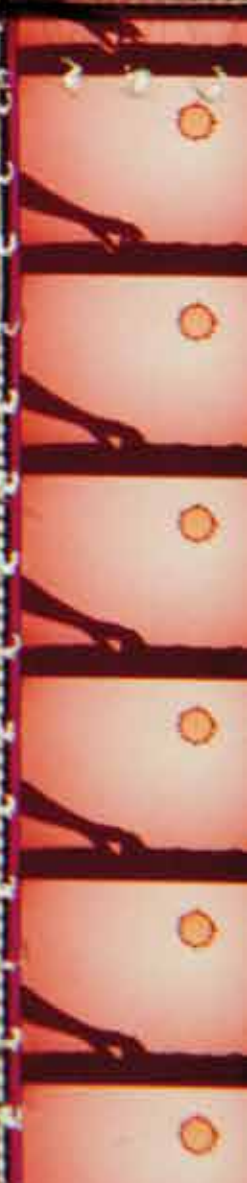
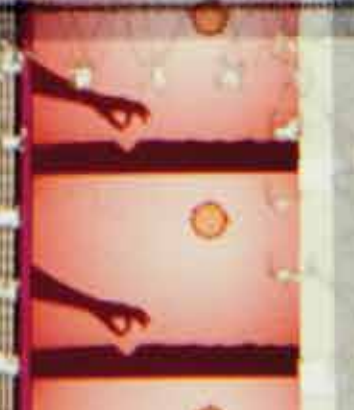
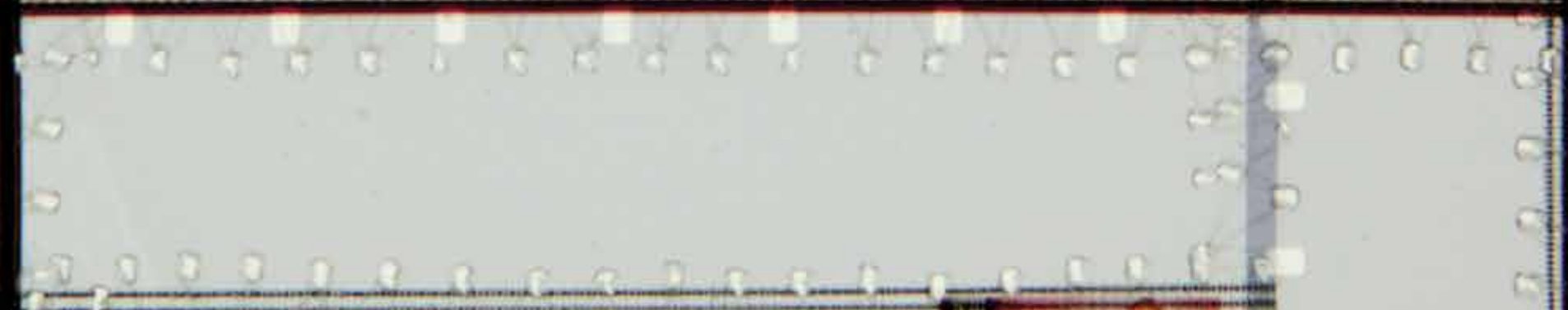
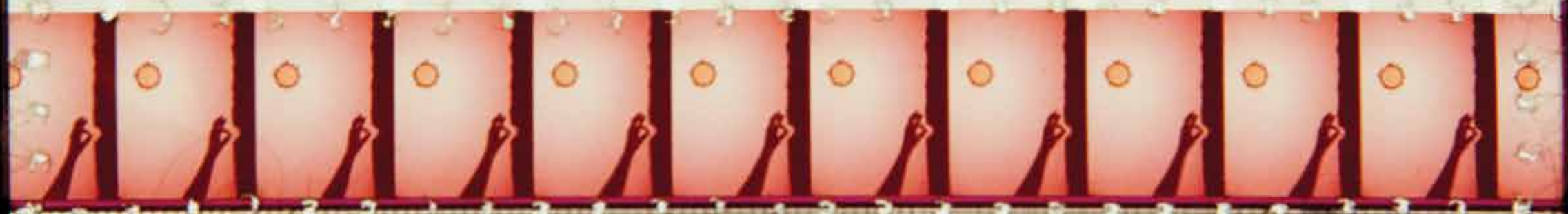
Photo by Matt Suib, Greenhouse Media





END

DOUGLAS COUNTY E. S. D.
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KnitKnit zine, issue #4, 2004;
*KnitKnit: Profiles and Projects
 from Knitting's New Wave*, 2007;
 Courtesy of the artist



TACTILITY AND TRANSPARENCY: AN INTERVIEW WITH SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER

by Julia Bryan-Wilson

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON: We're having this discussion on the occasion of "Sunshine and Shadow," an exhibit at the Philadelphia Art Alliance featuring your "Film Quilts" series, but I want to start by talking more broadly about your long-standing interest in a range of analog technologies and your consistent interpenetration of screen-based media and textile handicraft. You have a formal academic background in film theory and semiotics, as well as a deep but informal relationship to methods of craft like knitting (that is, you did not study craft in any organized institutional setting). Can you say more about how you came to handicraft through, or in opposition to, or in relation to, your interest in film?

SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER: I had learned to crochet as a child, from my mother, but relearned crochet and also knitting from my college roommates. We shared a not-very-well-insulated apartment in Providence, and the kitchen was the warmest room, so we would gather in there late at night and knit. Knitting was a much-needed break from reading semiotic theory. I developed a pattern of

reading, and then knitting or crocheting, and then back to reading again.

JBW: So did they become almost parallel discourses for you?

SG: No, not parallel—I'd say they were part of the same thing, very complementary. I was doing so much thinking that was expressed through writing, filming, or editing, and textiles allowed me time to step back from that more removed way of working and just be physically in the work. What I enjoyed so much about knitting was working directly, and abstractly, with color and texture.

JBW: Much of your practice has tried to merge these two modalities by making film very somatic and tangible.

SG: I think that tangibility is why handicraft clicked for me. Beyond being able to empty my mind and work in a more meditative, improvised, abstract way, I was drawn to the ways in which textiles are like film—both involve separate, interlocking segments of time. And because I was reading a lot of feminist film theory at the time, handicraft gave me related content to think about in my film work.

JBW: I want to come back to your relationship to feminist theory, but first, to establish more of your background. Let's keep with this thread about your early formation and talk about *KnitKnit* (2002–2007), which you created and edited. It was first a small alternative publication and then became a book published by Stewart, Tabori & Chang in 2007. Did you think of yourself as consciously participating in a wider zine culture in the DIY, post-punk tradition?

SG: Yes, though some of what was happening with DIY craft I didn't yet know about when I did the first *KnitKnit*. So for the first one I was maybe more thinking DIY in the punk tradition: a zine that was about my personal interests. Then, as it progressed, it snowballed

into this thing that encapsulated the DIY craft movement and its relationship to contemporary art, but the whole time I was interested in having it be cross-disciplinary. The goal was to get it into art bookstores like Printed Matter and museum shops as well as bookstores that sell zines, and craft fairs, yarn shops, and so on.

JBW: In retrospect it stands out as a hugely useful time capsule that did cross over in all kinds of ways and reach different audiences. It's been six years now since you stopped: Do you mourn *KnitKnit*? Do you miss it?

SG: No, not at all.

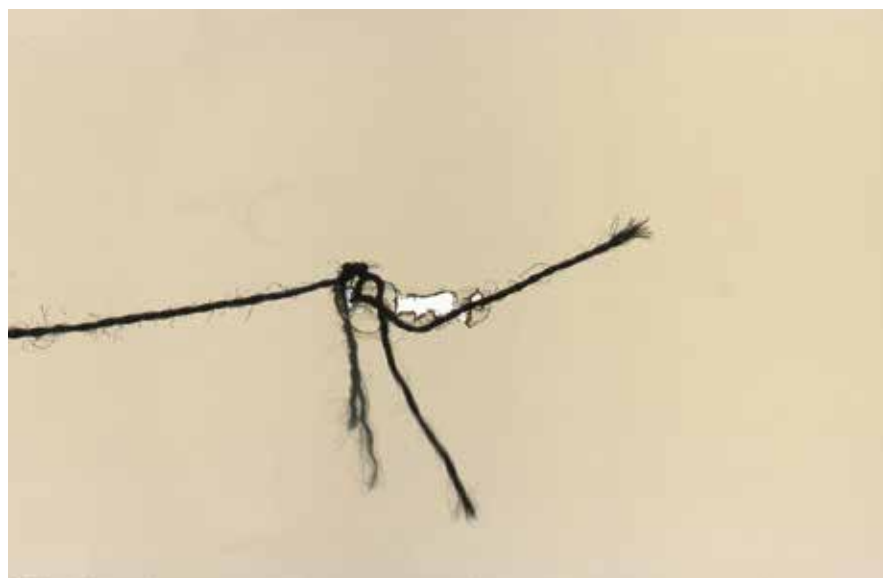
JBW: Why? Did you feel like it ran its course?

SG: It was so much work—the production of it was one thing, but then the distribution was a whole separate job, and putting together events around its publication was a third job. Beyond that, yes, I felt it ran its course. It ran its course for me, first of all. I felt I had found or helped create this network (not my favorite word) or community (also a fraught word). I realized there was an audience that shared my interests, and that we could work together in other ways beyond making a zine. I also felt drawn to making artwork that had the elements of community and active participation that I had experienced in doing the *KnitKnit* events. Finally, the material the zine was covering started to get covered in other forums, like knitting magazines and art journals, so I didn't feel a duty to bring that material to light anymore.

JBW: Yes, it was through *KnitKnit* that much conceptual craft was being publicized. Beyond the *KnitKnit* "network," you have also been a very active solo maker. Some of your projects have been very insistent on merging film with textiles, such as *Crochet Film* (2004), and *Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides* (2004). In these pieces, you are dismantling the apparatus of film by using it as an obdurately physical object to be manipulated. This seems directly related to your interest in a corporeal engagement with your materials. How much were you thinking about structuralist film in projects like *Phototactic*, where you sew onto the stock itself?

SG: I love structuralist film, but in that work but I was really thinking more about craft. It came directly from the craft ethos of mending and recycling, although Annabel Nicolson was an influence for me as well.

JBW: Her handmade, abstract cinema seems like an important echo for you. You have also



Phototactic Behavior in Sewn Slides, 2004; 35 mm slides, Kodak Ektapro slide projector, cotton thread; Dimensions variable; Courtesy of the artist

consistently been intrigued by obsolescence, by technologies on the wane, as in your *Found Footage Dumpster* (2005), a dumpster at Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens in which you placed discarded slides, films, VHS tapes, and other analog moving-image media for others to pick up and use. Visually, this tangle of stuff makes me think of Robert Morris's *Threadwaste* (1968). It's a very distinct and original track you have taken with craft, in which film has become like yarn for you.

SG: In my earlier work, around 2004, I was thinking about ways to make the film tactile. I was using it as one would use yarn or thread. And I was thinking about demystifying the film medium in a way that's more related in theory to structuralist film, as you pointed out. But in structuralist film the content is the formal operation of the work. For me, what related my work more to "craft critique" (as you have called it) and to feminist traditions was that the labor of the work was being done by me, with needle and thread or yarn—these things that signify what has historically been labeled "women's work," just like film editing has been.

I've related the physical, obsolescent, often educationally based material of film to yarn in order to offer edited narratives having to do with feminism, labor, recasting history, and so on. There is a real narrative drive in what I do, even though I do not make narrative films.

JBW: But you have in fact made experimental documentaries: *No Idle Hands* (2008), a meditation on knitting, is a great film that succeeds as a film. It does tell stories, and it does have a skein of narrative interest even if it doesn't have a conventional story arc.



no idle hands, 2008; Super 8 film transferred to video; 9 minutes, 43 seconds; In color with sound; Video still courtesy of the artist

SG: Thanks. I love that film, but it never really took off. It premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music but then got rejected from the film festivals I sent it to. I feel like it's one of the most engaging and gratifying things I've made.

JBW: I wonder if, though it makes sense to inject film into a craft context, it feels more difficult to insert craft into film contexts, for all kinds of gendered reasons, perhaps?

SG: Yes, film is incredibly gendered. Even though my undergraduate film program was helmed by Leslie Thornton and included students like Xander Marro (who went on to cofound a feminist art collective), there was sometimes a heavy macho vibe there. I remember thinking that I should get a Swiss army

Found Footage Dumpster, 2005; Plastic, film, video, slides, VHS tapes; Dimensions variable; Courtesy of the artist and Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, New York



knife because all the guys in my film classes had one. They were obsessed with mastering the technical aspects of film—mounting cameras and rigging up lighting in complicated ways that scenes didn't necessarily call for. You can see how being an editor, cutting and splicing bits of film together using agile sewing fingers, was a job relegated to women in the early days of Hollywood.

JBW: To press further on temporality, gender, and labor—and pointed political content—these issues all came most explicitly to the forefront in your *Wartime Knitting Circle* (2007), in which people could knit and talk about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the context of an exhibit at the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City. A few important things to mention about this piece are its participatory nature, its creation of a space for learning and talking, and also its use, again, of the interpenetration of what we might call technological methods of reproduction with textile handicraft—i.e., the photo blankets. Photo blankets are an interesting hybrid of screen technology and craft that is accessible a larger audience. How did you learn about the phenomenon of photo blankets?

SG: I think I found out about them online, when I was researching the relationships between knitting and war. Photo blankets are very of-the-moment: you can take a digital picture and have it turned into something you can touch when your loved one gets deployed to war.

JBW: It's a literalization of the idea of a photo as having a comforting "presence." You used these photo blankets to demarcate your site and to provide some historical imagery about the legacy of wartime knitting. This backdrop became a spark for conversation for those sitting at the table and those who were just spectating. Could you say more about the historical range you utilized here? How did you decide on what photos to use for the MAD installation?

SG: I needed enough blankets to fill the space I was given at MAD, so I knew I needed nine. *Wartime Knitting Circle* was in part inspired by Phyllis Rodriguez, whom I learned about from Bernice Yeung's 2006 article "Weeping With the Enemy" in the *Village Voice*, which was printed with a full-page photo of Phyllis knitting. The article described how Phyllis, whose son Greg died in the World Trade Center on 9/11, moved out of a place of bitterness through her friendship with Aicha el-Wafi, the mother of Zacarias Moussaoui, who is serving a life prison sentence for conspiracy offenses related to his role in the attacks. I wanted my knitting circle

to provoke dialogue among people with differing political viewpoints, so I gathered together images representing the different ways that knitting has been and is still used during times of war and had them printed as photo blankets: first, that image of Phyllis knitting a poncho for her daughter, to represent knitting as therapeutic distraction; then a photo of British women knitting covers for sticky bombs during World War II, to represent knitting as direct attack; images of Daughters of the American Revolution groups knitting blankets for troops during World War I, World War II, and today, as a form of civic participation; and, finally, a photo of knitters from the Canadian group Voice of Women, who sent over 30,000 garments to victims in Vietnam as an act of antiwar protest.

JBW: This ideologically diverse assembly of images is a provocation both to those who think that knitting is “inherently” conservative as well as to those who think it has taken on leftist/progressive tones.

SG: Yes. Together the images represented how wartime knitted garments can take on completely different, even directly oppositional meanings. This all served as a backdrop to a table where people could sit and knit present-day patterns distributed by the humanitarian group afghans for Afghans and Stitch for Senate, microRevolt’s antiwar project, among others.

JBW: Your description of your research process for that piece brings me to the “Film Quilts,” which you started in 2009. In the introduction to this volume, Glenn Adamson calls you “a creature of the archive,” which gives a vivid picture of this industrious being rooting through bins and boxes. Can you discuss the process of finding the footage that you use for the “Film Quilts”?

SG: A lot of rooting and unspooling takes place when I work in my studio, as I look for specific footage. Ninety-five percent of the “Film Quilts” are made from films deaccessioned from the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), and those films were given to me by Andrew Lampert, the Curator of Collections at Anthology Film Archives. FIT called him and said, “we don’t need these prints anymore; we don’t know what to do with them.” And he said, “give them to me.” He looked through them all, kept some for Anthology’s permanent collection, and then gave the rest away to artists who work with found footage. I’ve also picked up film prints here and there over the years, and when I started the “Film Quilts”



Wartime Knitting Circle, 2007; Acrylic, cotton, wood, various knitting notions; Dimensions variable; Photo by Alan Klein; Courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York

I soon realized I had my own work to cull from.

JBW: And they are instructional films, correct?

SG: Well, some are instructional.

JBW: What are the rest?

SG: I’d say they’re all documentaries, and as documentaries they vary in tone and style. A few of them came without credits and seem to be student films. One of those, for example, was probably made to show off a student’s thesis fashion collection.

JBW: Was he/she a talented designer?

SG: I prefer the film to the actual clothing. The film is great—it zooms towards and away from people’s bodies as they show off the clothes. The camera swirls around them in interesting ways, and it lingers on details like dots or fingertips. It reminds me of the short film *Geography of the Body* by Willard Maas and Marie Menkin. What interested me about the films as group was how, as they cover a time span of 1950 through 1980, they become progressively feminist.

JBW: How is that made legible?

SG: The style of the films. In the films from the ‘50s there’s usually an omniscient male narrator talking about, say, how dresses are important for women

to wear, and by the 1981 film *Quilts in Women’s Lives*, we are presented with women describing where they live and how they work in their own words. The film breaks from a controlling narrative about what things mean and opens itself up to embody the care, the improvisation, and the craft the women put into their quilts.

JBW: The “Film Quilts” are both a continuity of your previous work as well as a new direction, because they are discrete objects that relate not only to film and craft, but also to photography shown within lightboxes—were you thinking of photographers like Jeff Wall at all?

SG: No. The first quilts I made were shown on windows, and I love that display method. It really made the quilts into objects that worked with the exhibition space in a fascinating way. There was nothing else in the gallery.

JBW: And the outdoor light projected through them into the space ...

SG: There was nothing on the walls or floors—the places where art would normally be displayed in an exhibition space. And so they read like curtains in a way, which played with the category of decorative arts.

JBW: They also make one think of “show quilts” that are hung on walls and are not really meant to be functional.

SG: I think the lightbox ones do that maybe more than the window ones, because the window ones had this really active quality. The other thing the window ones did, which I loved, was incorporate life outside the gallery, because they’re transparent. In order to see them, you also have to look through them to the world outside the exhibition space. That for me was very interesting because it enlivened this question: What does the world outside the gallery look like when seen through these images? They physically engaged the idea of shedding contemporary light on history. Also, they got bleached by the sun over the three-month run of the show, which took place in Sweden during the summer.

JBW: They are like a filter through which we process the world, one that actually is decayed in the act of that processing—like memory.

SG: Exactly. The bleaching was a filter, and the way they changed the light coming into the room at certain times of day was another kind of filter, and they also projected shadows on the floor.

JBW: Did you move to the lightboxes because you were confronted with gallery spaces that had no windows?

SG: The window display isn’t stable on a long-term basis. The framed light boxes were designed to protect the

Installation view, “Watch & See,” 2009; Gustavsbergs Konsthall, Sweden; Photo by Christian Saltas; Courtesy of the artist and Gustavsbergs Konsthall



footage. I chose LEDs because they are long-lasting and also very cool; film needs to be protected from heat.

JBW: Quilts, like film, are made up of units, individual squares that collectively, in aggregate, constitute a whole. They both also rely on patterns and repetition. I am curious: How, literally, did you make these? Was the process difficult to figure out? I picture film stock as slippery and challenging to work with, but maybe I'm wrong?

SG: The first film I made was a string quilt design, and I think it illustrates my working method well. String quilts are made from long, thin fabric scraps leftover from other projects. So I take a piece of film and sew it lengthwise to another piece of film, and continue until I have fabric. Then I use quilting tools like a rotary cutter, a cutting mat, and quilting squares to cut the fabric into shapes. Then I sew those cut shapes together to make a quilt. I have experimented with different threads and still use a variety of threads when I work, based on color choices. Depending on when they were printed, the film stocks I'm using are either acetate or polyester, both of which are pretty easy to work with.

JBW: The quilts are very delicate, very beautiful, and really invite close looking. All these details emerge: tiny, fragmented human forms, words, shards from the everyday world that have been slowed down and duplicated and therefore made strange.

SG: The goal is to make something that's both finished and unfinished. One thing I like about the quilt patterns—besides their historical meanings—is that they seem complete. A square seems like a complete, finished thing. A repeating pattern, once it's repeated enough, seems both finished and like you can imagine it being repeated further. So I take apart and reassemble these narratives and stick them into shapes that seem complete, but if you look within the shape, you see all these other bits of information that can be infinitely reinterpreted.

JBW: They seem to tell these oblique but frustrated stories that we could maybe make sense of if we look hard enough.

SG: Right. Like history. I want to produce a desire to connect to the material through some kind of narrative, and to feel that desire in a way that's more pronounced than it was in the original material.

JBW: The narratives here are much less explicit than in the original films, because they have been dissolved

and reassembled in your quilts, so they require more cognitive work on the part of the viewer.

SG: Yes, because questions for me are: How far have we come in depicting so-called "women's lives"? How were these stories used politically and representationally then, and how can we use them now? In *Camouflage*, for example, the largest piece in the Philadelphia Art Alliance show, I used two films—one was an educational film about a textile mill in Rhode Island.

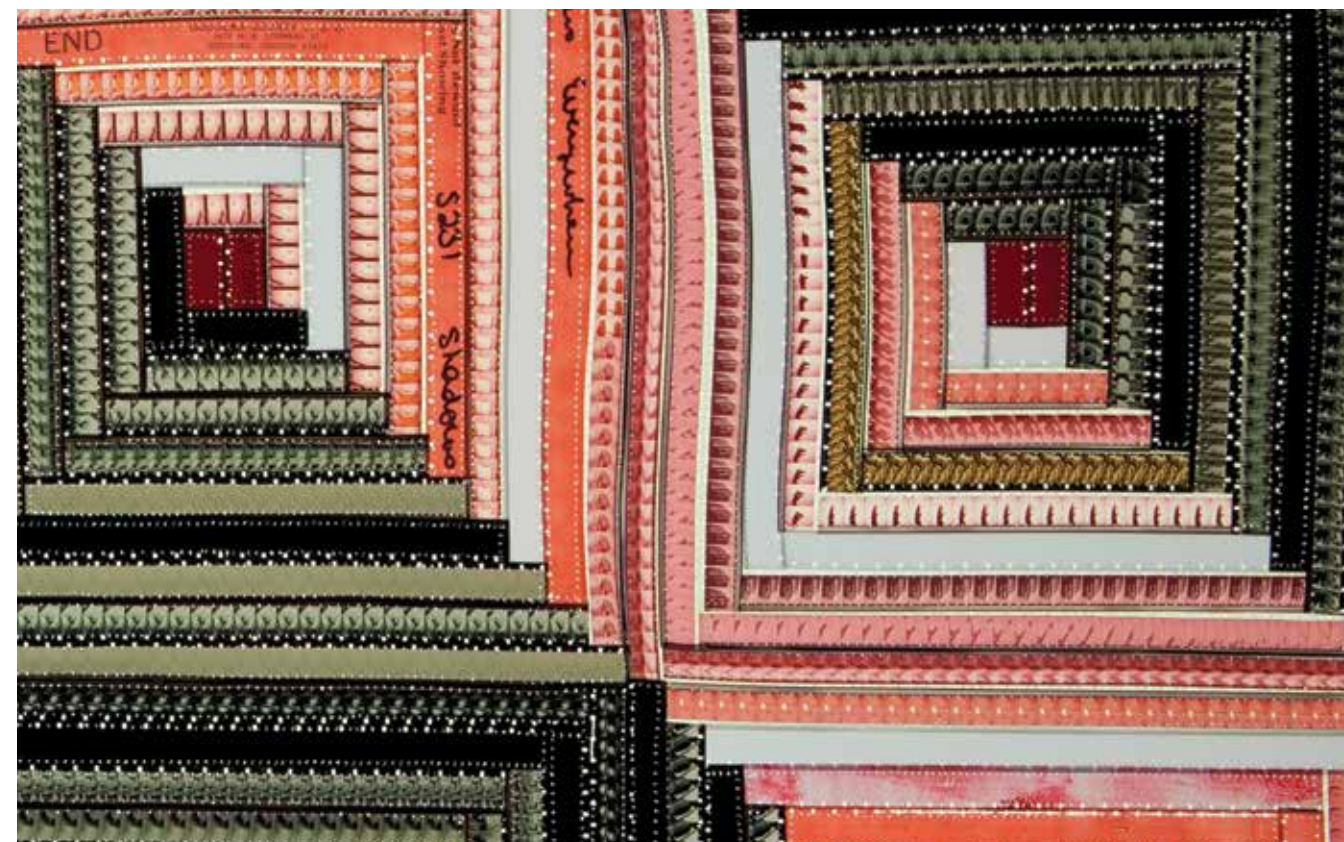
JBW: And the other?

SG: The other is called *Shadows, Shadows Everywhere*. It's an instructional film for children to teach them about shadows. The textile manufacturing film, which is about the Bradford Dyeing Association in Rhode Island, shows how fabric is made, dyed, and processed in the plant, and it paints a happy portrait of textile workers.

What the film doesn't show is that the company was the largest manufacturer of camouflage for the US army, and it has a terrible record of labor law abuses and environmental pollution. *Shadows, Shadows Everywhere* is a sweet little children's film that shows two children making shadow puppets in front of a piece of cloth and going outside to look at shadows created by the sun. In combining the two films I wanted to bring out the shadowy aspects of the textile mill film, and to represent this idea of "camouflage" in multiple ways. It's also an acknowledgment that whenever you shed light on something, you also make a shadow.



Hula Hoop (detail), 2010; 16 mm film and polyamide thread; 34 x 34 inches; Courtesy of the artist; Collection Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum; Gift of Chris Rifkin in honor of the fortieth anniversary of the Renwick Gallery



Camouflage (detail), 2012; 16 mm film, polyamide thread, lithography ink; 69 1/2 x 45 1/2 inches; Courtesy of the artist; LMAKprojects, New York; and the Philadelphia Art Alliance

JBW: Another thing that interests me about the "Film Quilts" is that you are bringing together two distinct strands of feminist thought from the 1970s—feminist film theory and also quilt history as a radical feminist reclamation (e.g. Patricia Mainardi's classic text *Quilts: The Great American Art*). It's almost as if the "Film Quilts" are putting into dialogue these quite different theoretical frameworks and ideological understandings of gender, domesticity, and power.

SG: Feminist film theory deconstructs how women are portrayed on-screen and Mainardi decodes what she terms the "secret language" of women's quilts. Both kinds of analysis have informed my work connecting the photographic, where narratives can be deconstructed, with the tactile, where revising can occur.

JBW: In the "Film Quilts," feminism works on all these different levels—it inflects both form and content regarding how women's labor is valued and represented. The "Film Quilts" were exhibited in the Smithsonian Renwick Gallery's show "40 under 40: Craft Futures" (2012), and now you are in their permanent collection. How do you feel about the rush to historicize (or even institutionalize) what started for you as a very DIY and improvised mode of working?

SG: I felt so sad that these images, framed as "women's work," were no longer considered useful, and so it

makes me happy that some of those images are now being preserved in permanent collections.

JBW: Absolutely. The "Film Quilts" also become kaleidoscopes, ways of refracting these fragments and recombining them for new audiences.

SG: Right.

JBW: What are you currently working on? What's coming for you next on the horizon?

SG: I want to finish quilting all the footage I got from FIT. I have no idea how long that will take. I want to shoot some more film.

JBW: Film of what?

SG: I want to film my life. I want to shoot the regular, everyday things and the exceptional experiences. I didn't film the Occupy Wall Street knit-ins I organized or the destruction caused by Superstorm Sandy. I'd like to create images of events in my lifetime that someone else can use, decades from now.

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