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# CLOTHING REIMAGINED: Creating Quilt Memories

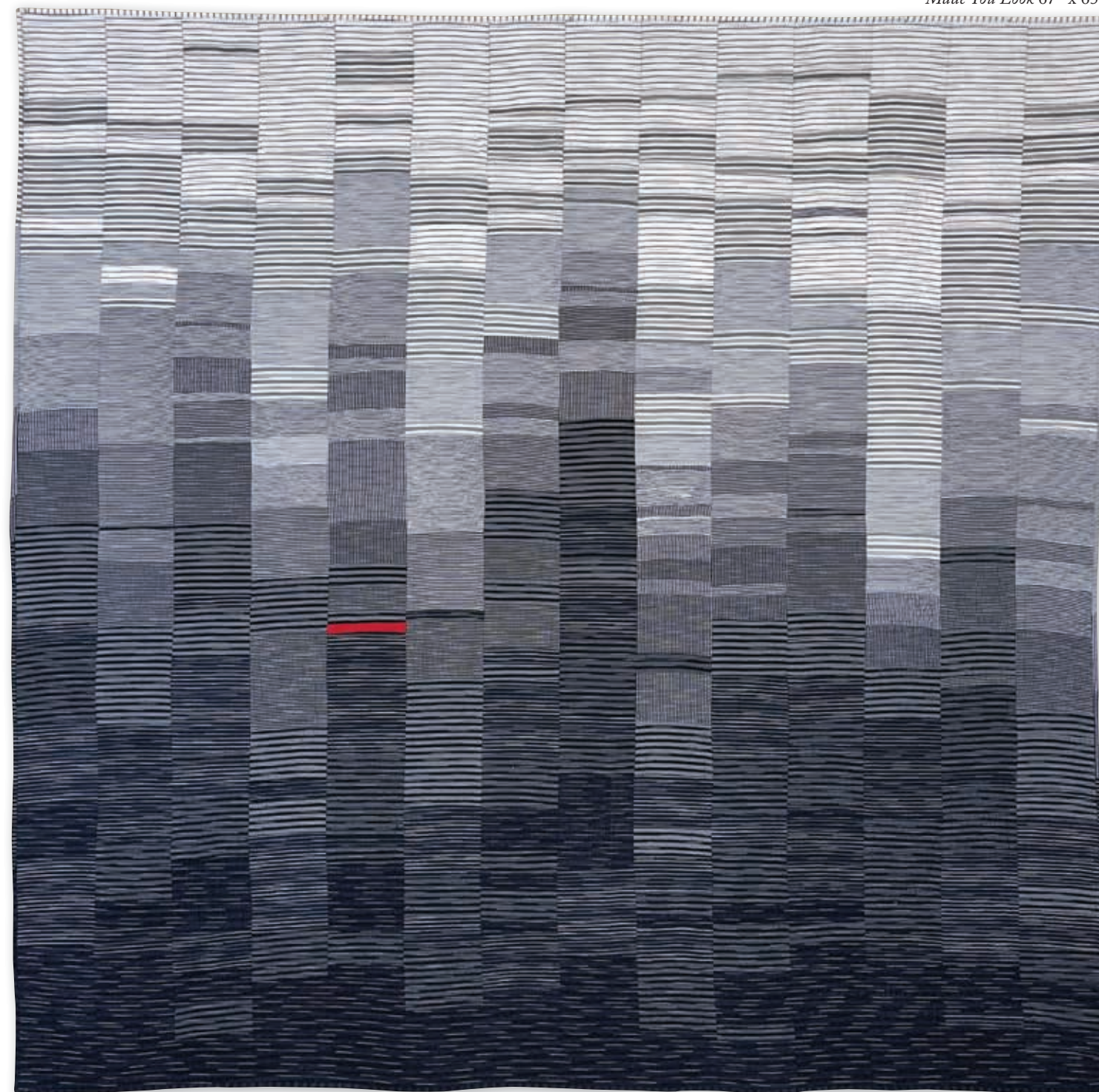
by Lorraine Woodruff-Long

My “Reimagined Quilts” series inspiration was twofold: to utilize and repurpose existing fabric — reimagining the fabric of clothing — in order to minimize the impact on the planet, and to create meaningful quilts from well-loved clothing. The creative process always begins with deconstructing the shirt, dress, or pants. Unlike yardage, using clothing requires a significant investment of time and effort to break it down into usable pieces of fabric, as well as to pull apart the various notions and elements.

Each of these quilts are unique. I imagine a pile of discarded clothing as a creation yearning to come together into a newly formed image. My 2018 New Year’s resolution was to only use fabric I had on hand, no new fabric purchases, so to start, I nabbed my husband’s collection of 24 different outcast shirts for myself and turned them into “Shirt Off His Back.” “Five Dresses” was made from five discarded linen/tencel dresses during the early months of the pandemic, when I found myself unemployed, anxious, and with copious amounts of time. This quilt was assembled with no plan in regard to color. It was such fun to sew and helped me embrace the freedom in the process.

“Julian’s Jeans,” a traditional courthouse steps quilt, is made from the denim and fabric from my son’s jeans and pants following a high school growth spurt one year. This quilt is one of my favorite reimagined quilts; I love knowing that it is made up of all the pants my once little boy outgrew during a crazy year of growth. “Made You Look” is the third quilt in my “7x7” series of seven quilts, each made using seven shirts. Also, “7x7” is a popular local reference for San Francisco, where I live, as the city is 7 miles wide by 7 miles across. While it looks like 10 woven-pattern black-and-white fabrics, it’s actually made from seven. I flipped them over and used some of the backs to make even more gradation from dark to light. →

*Made You Look 67" x 65"*





Julian's Jeans 45" x 47"



### SUPPLIES

- Basic sewing supplies
- Batting: cotton batting
- Fabric: repurposed men's shirting (24); backing, sheet; linen/tencel, repurposed women's dresses (5); denim & twill, repurposed boys' pants; cotton/poly blends, repurposed men's shirts (7)
- Longarm quilting machine: (HQ Sixteen)
- Sewing machines: (Brother - PS1500); (Janome - M7)
- Thread: pearl cotton

### TECHNIQUE

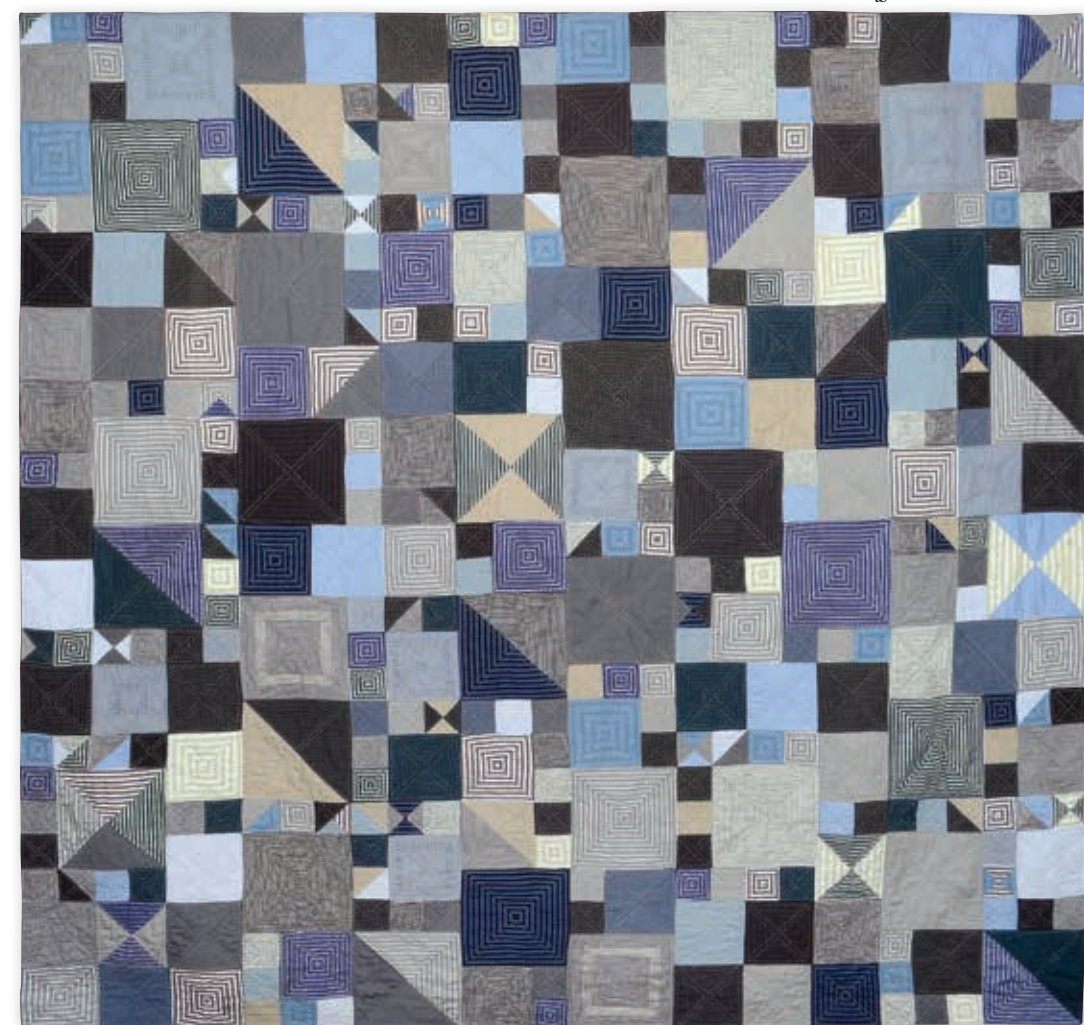
For "Shirt Off His Back," I was inspired by Kaffe Fassett's "Shirt Stripe Boxes" with mitred blocks made from four identical triangle patches, sewn together to form a block that looks like concentric squares. For some blocks, I made a half square triangle that finished at one of the three differently sized blocks. The blocks finish at 9, 6, and 3 inches, which can be assembled in a variety of ways as a puzzle. I cut strips of fabric that measured 9½ inches, 6½ inches, and 3½ inches wide. I used a 60-degree acrylic triangle template to cut alternating triangles across each strip. For the 9½-inch strip, I alternated making triangles that measured 9½ inches along the bottom edge, alternating the tip of the triangle at the top, then the bottom to cut one piece after another. I did the same with the other two sizes.

I matched up four pieces of triangles from the largest strip and sewed one half together, trying to match the stripes as much as possible. I repeated this process with the two others, and joined them down the middle to complete the block. I repeated the process with the other sizes, creating 32 unfinished 9½-inch blocks, 100 unfinished 6½-inch blocks, and 214 unfinished 3½-inch blocks. I organized blocks into strips, seeking to space out the various sizes, colors, and patterns across the quilt. Assembling the blocks into long strips matching the quilt length, I stitched them together. After failed attempts to machine-piece this giant on my domestic machine, I decided to hand-quilt it using pearl cotton thread. Over 200 hours later, it is a family treasure and my husband's favorite — and I kept my New Year's resolution!

For "Five Dresses," I cut up each dress so I could create larger sheets of fabric and organized the pieces according to size. I freely cut random strips as long as possible from each piece. I matched up similarly sized strips, alternating lights and darks, and spacing out sizes. I began to sew strips together, first with the large pieces, then the smaller ones, until I had enough to puzzle the quilt together. Where I had gaps, I filled them in with smaller pieces. In some cases, I added an applique piece or two to fill in a spot or cover a blemish in the fabric. I backed it with a flannel sheet that I had on hand, and quilted it on a longarm quilting machine using free-motion quilting with a mid-century modern pattern. For the binding, I used the remaining fabric.

To make "Julian's Jeans," I disassembled my son's jeans and pants into large pieces, and cut them into 1-inch strips. I sewed them using the traditional courthouse steps pattern, starting with a tiny center block, and alternating blue denim on one side and khaki pant strips on the other. For the orange center, I used a small piece of orange fabric from the khakis. Unfortunately, I didn't take into account that the fabric in all the pants had some stretch to them; so once I completed all the rounds of strips, the quilt was bowing from the center as if it was a four-sided tent! Despite all attempts, I was not successful in making it flat. I added a line of strips all the way around to see if that might have some effect on the bowing, but it did not. I put it aside for a year or more, occasionally pulling it out to revisit. After using pearl cotton to hand-quilt "Shirt Off His Back," I realized I might be able to use it to hand-quilt "Julian's Jeans." After (somewhat painfully!) hand-quilting each denim and twill strip all the way around, I was able to gather the hand-quilted lines in tiny amounts and flatten the quilt. Feeling elated and victorious about the result, I backed it with a fabric print from IKEA, and bound it with denim. →

Shirt Off His Back 92" x 87"







For "Made You Look," I took apart each shirt to create large pieces. One of my favorite blocks was making long, scrappy strips using my 6" x 24" ruler and sewing them together. I organized the fabric from light to dark, and cut long 6-inch-wide strips so all fabric stripes, once sewn together, would lay horizontally across the quilt. I organized 65-inch-long vertical pieces with the lightest fabrics on top and darkest underneath. I wanted the gradation to appear organic so the lights and darks did not match up in a line as the eye moved from left to right. As I built and added more vertical strip blocks from left to right, I made sure that it appeared random. To add more variety to each vertical strip, I flipped some fabric to use the backside. The result was a black-and-white spectrum, reminiscent of the image one sees on an electronic sound equalizer.

Once I pieced this top, it felt overwhelming with nowhere to focus your eye. My husband suggested a pop of color, so I stuck a sliver of red onto it from one of my son's shirts. I embroidered the phrase "made you look" onto the red piece, and applied it to the quilt. While the embroidered text is subtle and almost impossible to see, I like that the viewer has to look closely to read the text. I quilted the back with a used sheet we had on our bed from early in our marriage, and I pieced the binding to match the light to dark fabric all around the quilt.

*Lorraine Woodruff-Long is a self-taught quilter living in San Francisco, with a primary focus on color, improvisation, and recycled/repurposed fabrics. She is familiar under her quilting name Quilting in the Fog, and her work can be found on quiltinginthefog.com and on Instagram (@quiltinginthefog). Lorraine's work has been juried into museum art exhibitions, including the de Young Museum in San Francisco, the California Heritage Museum in Santa Monica, and Museo Museum & Cultural Center in Anaheim, among others. She has received numerous awards for her quilts at local, national, and international quilt shows. She currently teaches quilting at City College of San Francisco Extension and SCRAP-SF, as well as quilting workshops to guilds around the country.*