

Like the charm of a homemade quilt but feel too downtown and wild to pick something out at the county fair? With these simple designs, anyone can create patchwork quilts to accommodate the most decadent of modern city dwellers.

Quilting Beyond the Rainbow: Gay Patchwork Quilts

By Johnny Townsend

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Quilting Beyond the Rainbow



Johnny Townsend

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Like the charm of a homemade quilt but feel too downtown and wild to pick something out at the county fair?

With little more than a sheet of graph paper, a sharpened pencil, and a bit of imagination, quilter Johnny Townsend reveals how even the untrained can create patchwork quilts to accommodate the most decadent of modern city dwellers.

Author of numerous M/M romances, Townsend demonstrates ways to design beautiful, fun, and sexy gay quilts. Several of his works are housed in ONE Archives, the national LGBTQ archives in Los Angeles.

With dozens of simple patterns, along with tips to develop ideas of your own, *Quilting Beyond the Rainbow* will help you make quilts you'll love, even if you can't show them to Grandma.

Because you don't want to make her jealous!

Praise for Johnny Townsend

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

In *Sex among the Saints*, “Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that’s full of psychological empathy....he takes his protagonists’ moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance.”

Kirkus Reviews

Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire is “a gripping account of all the horrors that transpired that night, as well as a respectful remembrance of the victims.”

Terry Firma, Patheos

“Johnny Townsend’s ‘Partying with St. Roch’ [in the anthology *Latter-Gay Saints*] tells a beautiful, haunting tale.”

Kent Brintnall, *Out in Print: Queer Book Reviews*

Selling the City of Enoch is “sharply intelligent...pleasingly complex...The stories are full of...doubters, but there’s no vindictiveness in these pages; the characters continuously poke holes in Mormonism’s more extravagant absurdities, but they take very little pleasure in doing so....Many of Townsend’s stories...have a provocative edge to them, but this [book] displays a great deal of insight as well...a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

Gayrabian Nights is “an allegorical tour de force...a hard-core emotional punch.”

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

The Washing of Brains has “A lovely writing style, and each story [is] full of unique, engaging characters....immensely entertaining.”

Rainbow Awards

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Not Your Grandma's Quilt

(published in *RFD*, Issue #183, Fall 2020)

From the age of eight, I wanted to be a writer, and now, almost sixty, I've published almost 50 books. *The Abominable Gayman*, *Invasion of the Spirit Snatchers*, *Gayrabian Nights*, and many more. But there was a brief period in my thirties when, after teaching English for ten years, I went back to school to earn a Biology degree and realized that to do well, I could not afford to lose study time writing more stories about gay Mormons. *Zombies for Jesus* and *Mormon Underwear* would have to wait.

Yet the need to create was as strong as the need to eat, the desire for sexual intimacy. So instead of writing, I found myself learning to quilt. Just as TV commercials warn us that "it's not your father's Buick," I have to say that what I created "wasn't your grandma's quilt."

In addition to the academic challenges I was facing—this was New Orleans, who knew that Nutrition was a thing?—I was also in a committed relationship with a man who was quite ill and in constant pain. We were monogamous, which almost translated to celibacy, sex perhaps three times a year. So my creative outlet also functioned as a sexual release, and many of my designs turned out to be sexually explicit.

Have you ever tried creating a stream of ejaculate out of cloth?

What kind of print is best for illustrating assholes?

First off, I should clarify I had no background in sewing, other than a single embroidery lesson as a child. I did watch my mother and grandmother in rural Mississippi set up quilting frames in the living room and sew a quilt top to a quilt backing, with cotton batting in between, but the top wasn't pieced together with scraps. It was simply two long sections of cloth off a bolt sewn together on a Singer treadle machine. Mom called the end result a homemade quilt, but there was no art and little effort invested. She was a modern woman, only too happy to move away from the farm after graduating high school, her favorite song Petula Clark's "Downtown." But she felt a need to stay connected to her roots, and this seemed easier than milking cows in the suburbs. A few patchwork quilts from before my time were stored in the hallway closet, and I noticed hardly any of the corners matched where the pieces were stitched together. Quilting apparently required talent, and my paternal grandmother hung paint-by-number artwork in her bedroom. I did not have the genes for this.

But I had to deal with my testosterone somehow.

One day while hesitating over a blank sheet of graph paper for a class assignment, I decided to draw a picture. It was crude, all squares, but the subject was recognizable. I realized if I could decide how large I wanted the final quilt top—flaming queen size, naturally—it would be a simple

matter to determine the size each individual square needed to be, and I could try quilting this one time and see what happened. My partner had an old Singer treadle, sitting in front of it brought back my mother's wonderful laugh before she died of leukemia, and I pieced together my first quilt top.

Every single corner of every tiny square lined up with the squares next to them. I was dumbfounded. This wasn't even hard.

I began watching quilting shows on PBS, bought some better quilting supplies, and drew more designs. I tried hexagons, and while piecing them wasn't impossible, it was more annoying than satisfying, so I went back to simpler forms and developed a host of pictorial designs using only squares, rectangles, and two different triangles. I finished my degree before advancing to curves and never quilted again after reigniting my passion for writing. I lugged twenty-five quilt tops from apartment to apartment and finally decided I had to find them a better home. Most now reside in ONE Archives, the national LGBTQ archives in Los Angeles.

I designed Rainbow flags with solid colors, Rainbow flags alternating solids with prints, Rainbow flags using denim, Rainbow flags using dyed suede. I designed a Leather Pride flag out of denim, then a quilt with a large pink triangle in the center surrounded by smaller pink triangles, and a Bear quilt using the traditional bear paw pattern but inserting the faces of two hunky "bears" in the center. I put two grooms on top of a wedding cake, pieced together an AIDS ribbon, and put a huge black tornado against a gray sky, bordered with a yellow brick road, poppies, and emeralds. Dorothy's house, flying through the air at forty-five degrees, could be formed easily out of five small triangles.

Then I moved on to a couple of bearded men kissing, their tongues interlocked. I designed a quilt of two nude army buddies jacking off, using various colors of olive drab and camouflage fabric. I pieced together four penises ejaculating toward each other, a quilt showing a dick heading into a man's ass, a dick spurting into the open mouth of yet another bearded man. I designed a quilt top consisting of twenty penises, each in its own block, another quilt featuring rows of men fucking each other in a long train.

When I spent every day in the Animal Behavior lab over Spring Break to catch up on a project, my professor was impressed. "You don't have anything better to do during vacation?" I could hardly tell him my stamina to play with cloth dicks, high as it was, had its limit. So I directed the conversation to a book I'd just discovered, *Biological Exuberance*, detailing the hundreds of other species known to participate in same-sex coupling. At home, I considered designing a quilt depicting gay horses, but even for me, that felt like a step too far. I did take one afternoon off, though, to roam the French Quarter doing some "window shopping." I came up with a design depicting a man's torso wearing a leather harness. That was animal enough for me.

Once I was free to write again, I published *Sex Among the Saints* and *Sex on the Sabbath* and *Strangers with Benefits*, but during those four stressful years, all I had was Organic Chemistry and quilting to get me through.

Still, not every quilt was sexually explicit. I designed one showing a bookcase, the titles of seminal LGBTQ literature on the spines of the books. I would have needed an embroidery setting

to do that effectively, but really, most of these designs were surprisingly easy. The hardest part was resisting fabric sales, only buying what I needed at the time. And, of course, to quilt without unnecessary stress, I quickly discovered the necessity of dedicating an entire room.

And making sure mice didn't get into my fabric stash again.

The only other difficulty with designing and piecing gay quilts is that I didn't often get to share them with other quilters, the majority straight women of a certain age, living in a region not particularly open to the subject matter. To be honest, even some of my gay friends looked at my quilts in horror. But that's the norm for any writer or artist. Many of my friends are no more impressed with my books. *Have Your Cum and Eat It, Too* is not a novel you can pull out at work during a lunch break if you don't want to be called in for a meeting with HR.

One of my other quilts depicted a tractor plowing a field, with gentle hills in the background, which I gave to my dad one Christmas, the only gift I'd ever given him that he appreciated. If I could sew butch quilts, his astonished smile told me, maybe having a gay son wasn't so bad, after all.

That's the beauty of quilting. People can see your work and appreciate it instantly. For a writer, that's extraordinary. We're used to readers investing twenty minutes, two hours, three days reading something we've written before we have a clue if they like it or not. But with visual art, you know immediately. And that's gratifying in a way that writing isn't. It's probably why I've moved on to writing op-eds for newspapers. The time investment for readers is minimal and the reaction is immediate. My essay collections, *Am I My Planet's Keeper?* and *Human Compassion for Beginners*, may not always generate rave reviews, but if no one is ever intrigued or challenged, what's the point of creating anything in the first place?

I find beauty in an ejaculating penis. It doesn't have to *mean* anything.

For those who've long been drawn to homemade quilts but have been worried that quilting is too complicated, that you just don't have any natural talent, I'd encourage you to give it a try. If something doesn't turn out right, you can get a seam ripper and sew the piece again. You can trash a quilt halfway through and start something better. No writer pens a masterpiece on their first attempt, and you're not likely to create an award-winning quilt on your first try. But even "mediocre" patchwork quilts are pretty damn charming, whether the corners match up or not. If your dad or sister or cousin never come around to accepting your partner, just give the beloved bigots in your family an attempt that didn't turn out so well.

I no longer have the physical space in my home to do any quilting, and my eyesight has deteriorated over the past couple of decades. But that period of my life when I cranked out design after design to stay sane will always remain an important part of my personal and artistic development. Online, you can find dozens of better quilters who have created far more spectacular LGBTQ quilts. No one needs to remain limited to squares and triangles or even hexagons.

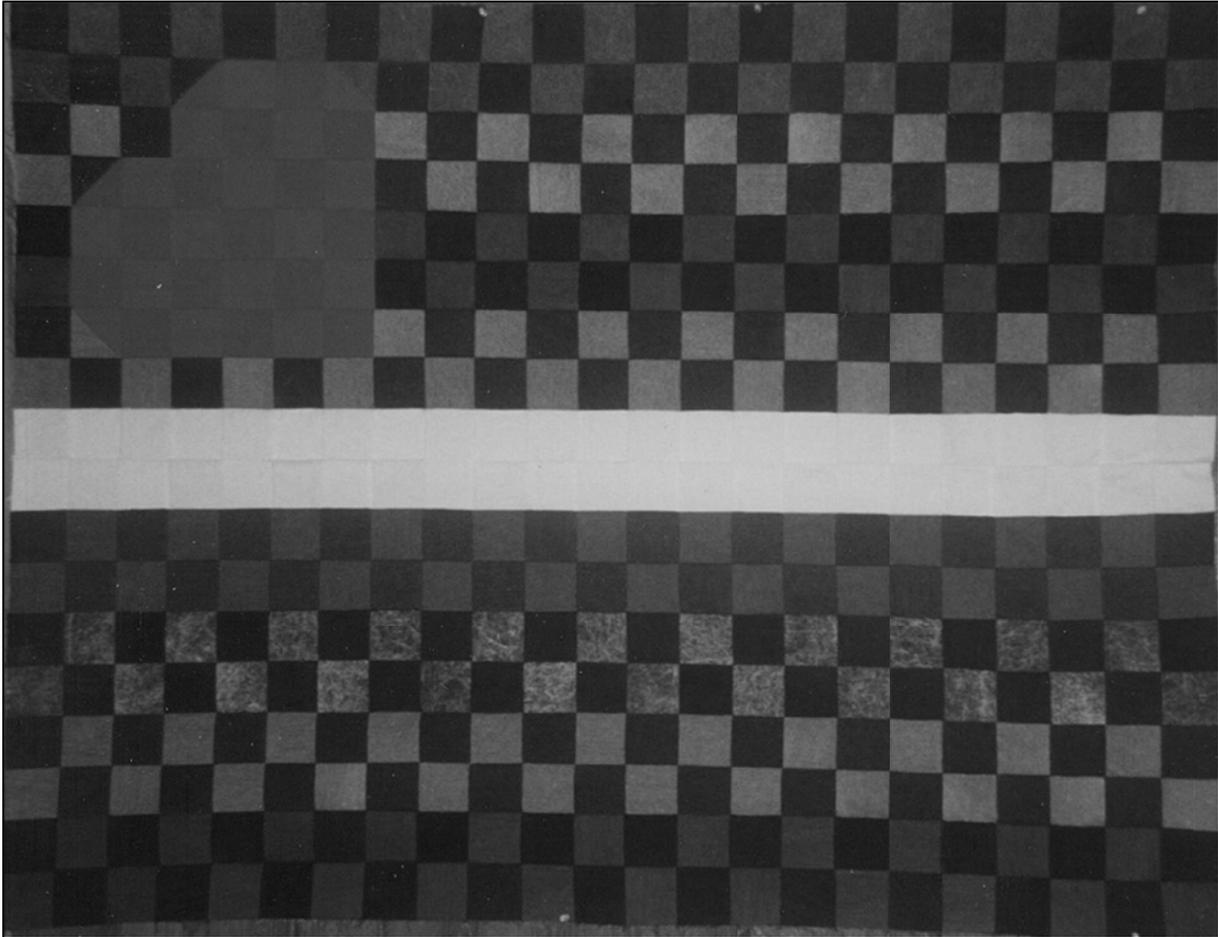
So if you have a little time, a little curiosity, and maybe a little too much testosterone, why not grab a piece of graph paper and see what happens?

Who among us, after all, doesn't want to sleep every night under a comfy five-foot penis ejaculating in a spectacular burst of joy?

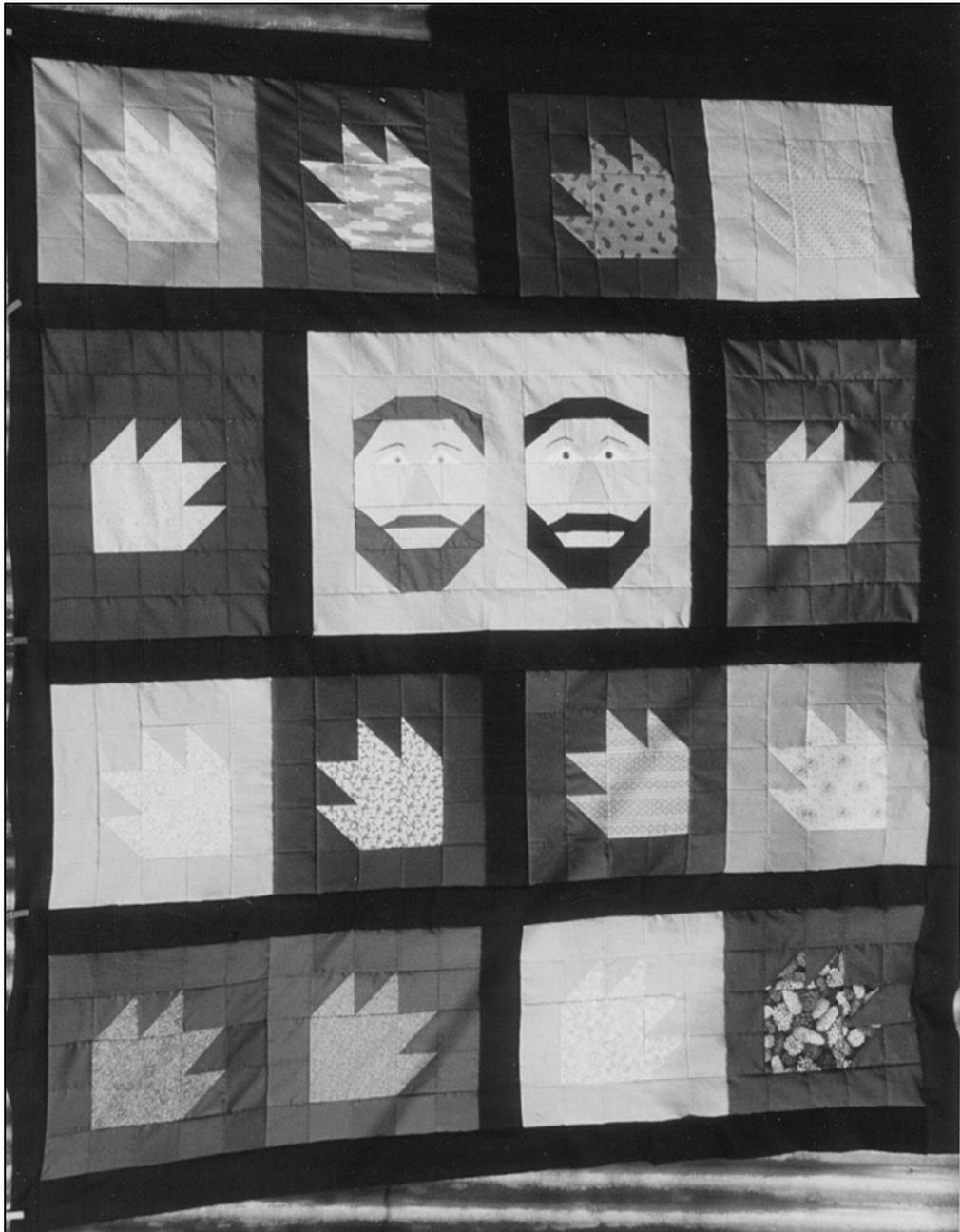
Rainbow Flag on display at Pride in New Orleans



Denim Leather Pride Flag

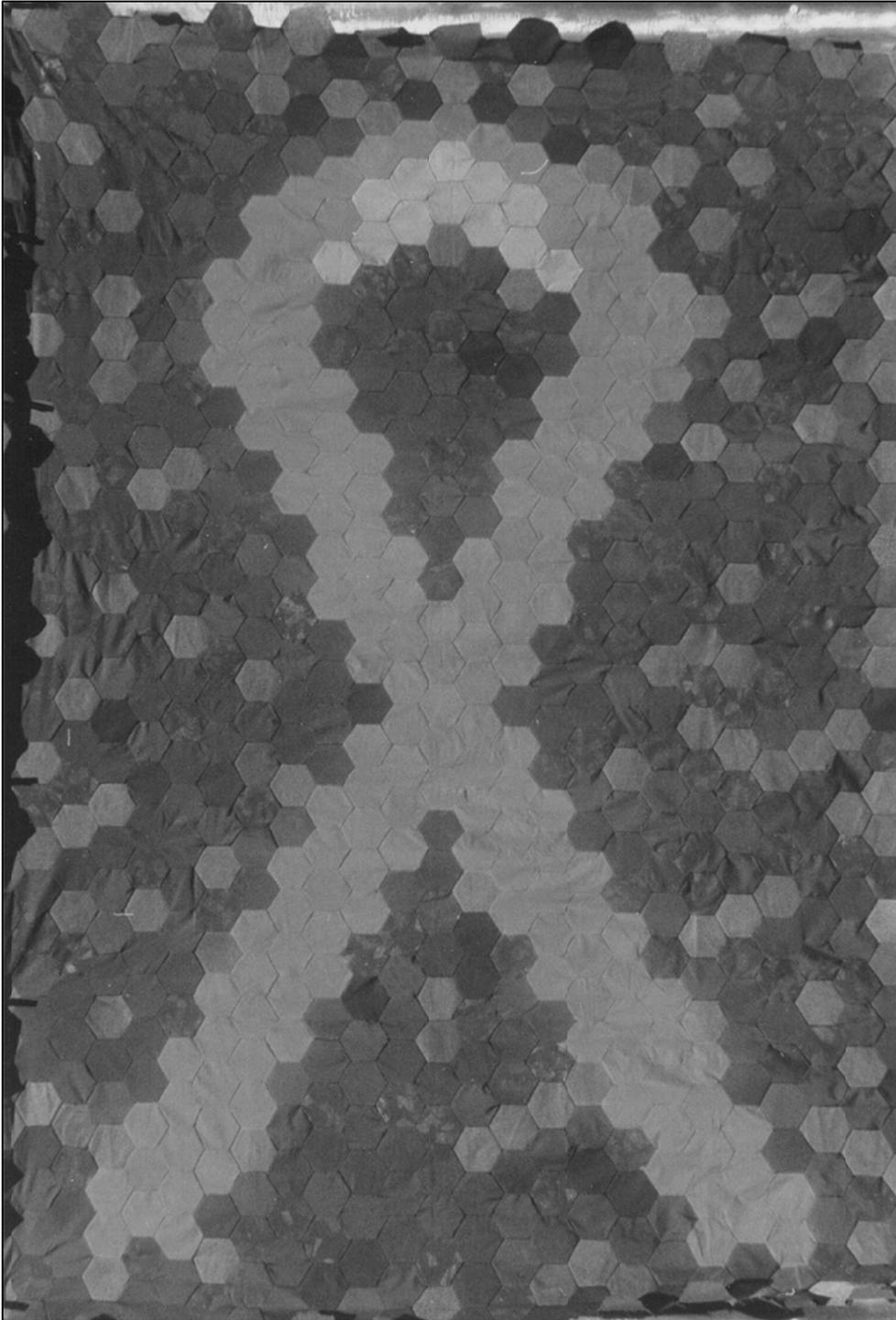


Bear Quilt

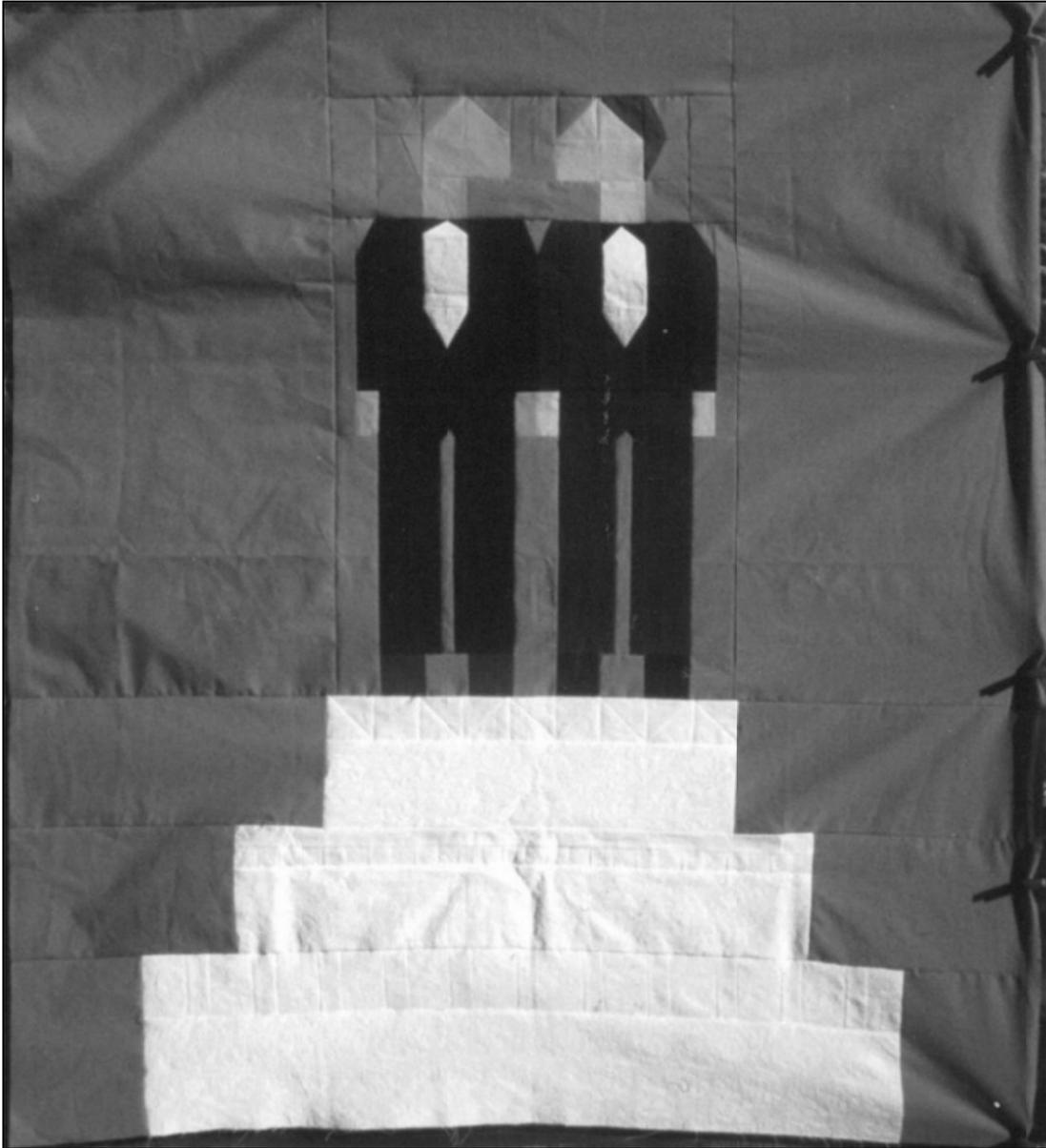


Johnny Townsend

AIDS Ribbon

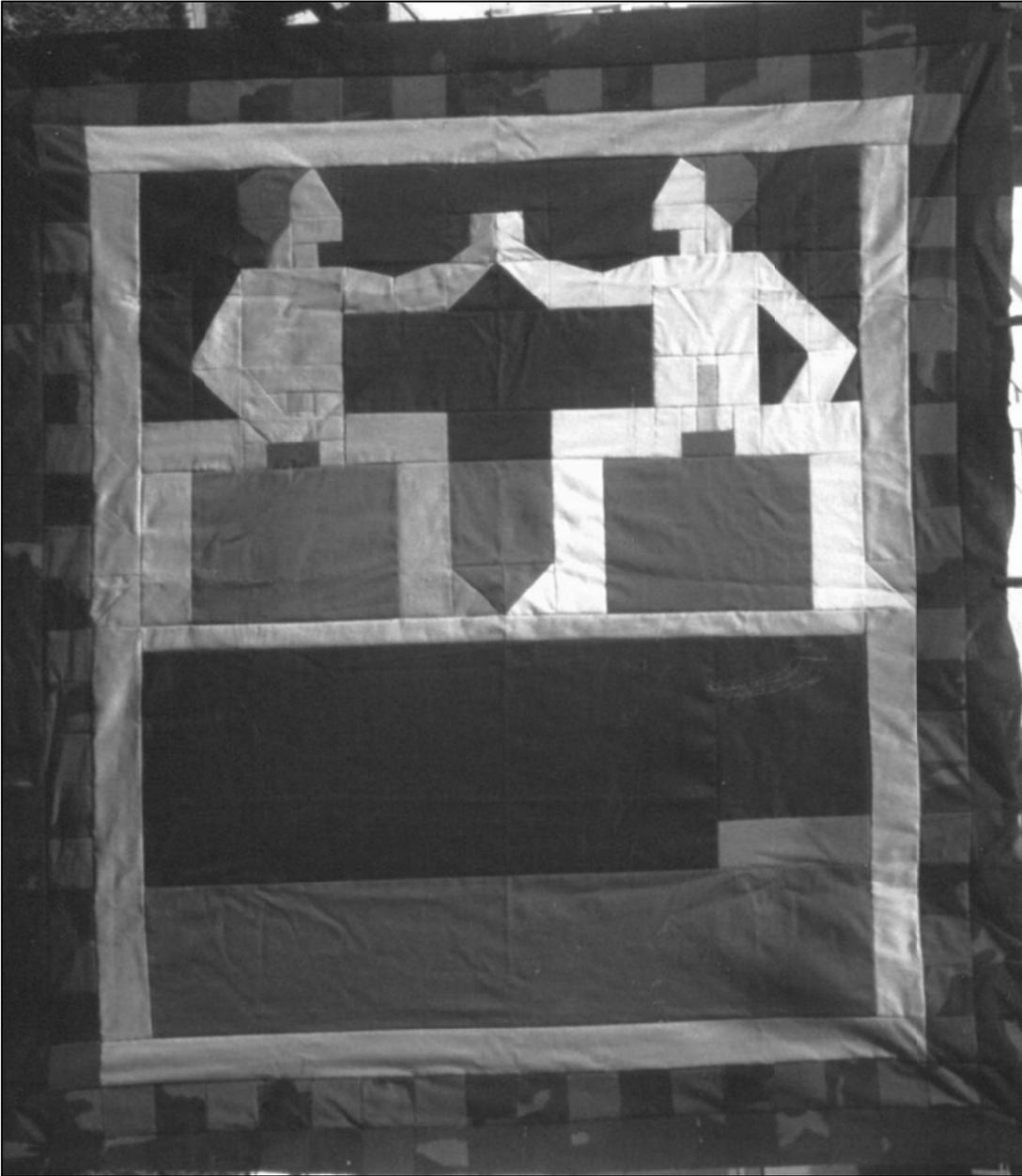


Gay Wedding Cake



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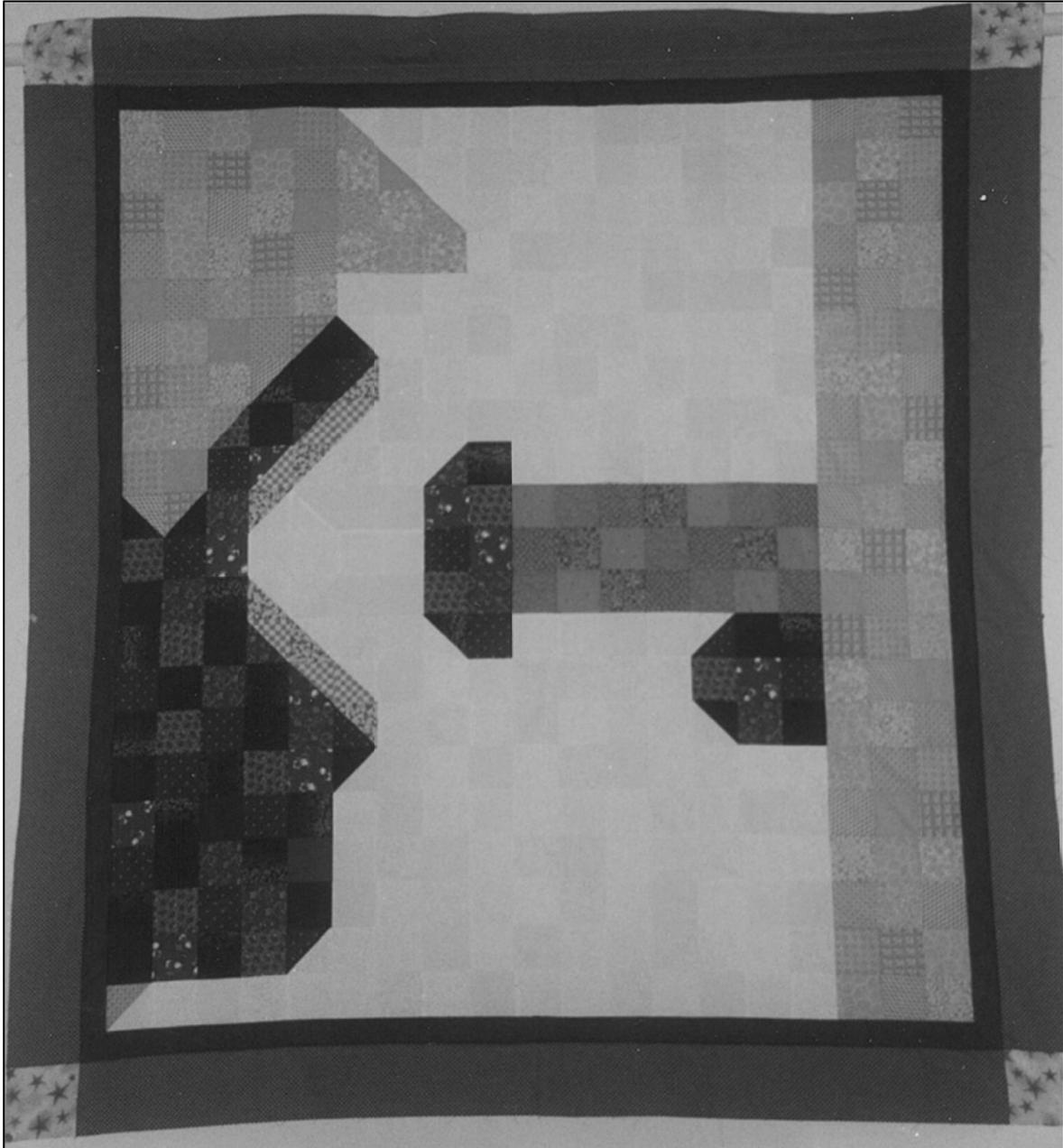
Army Buddies



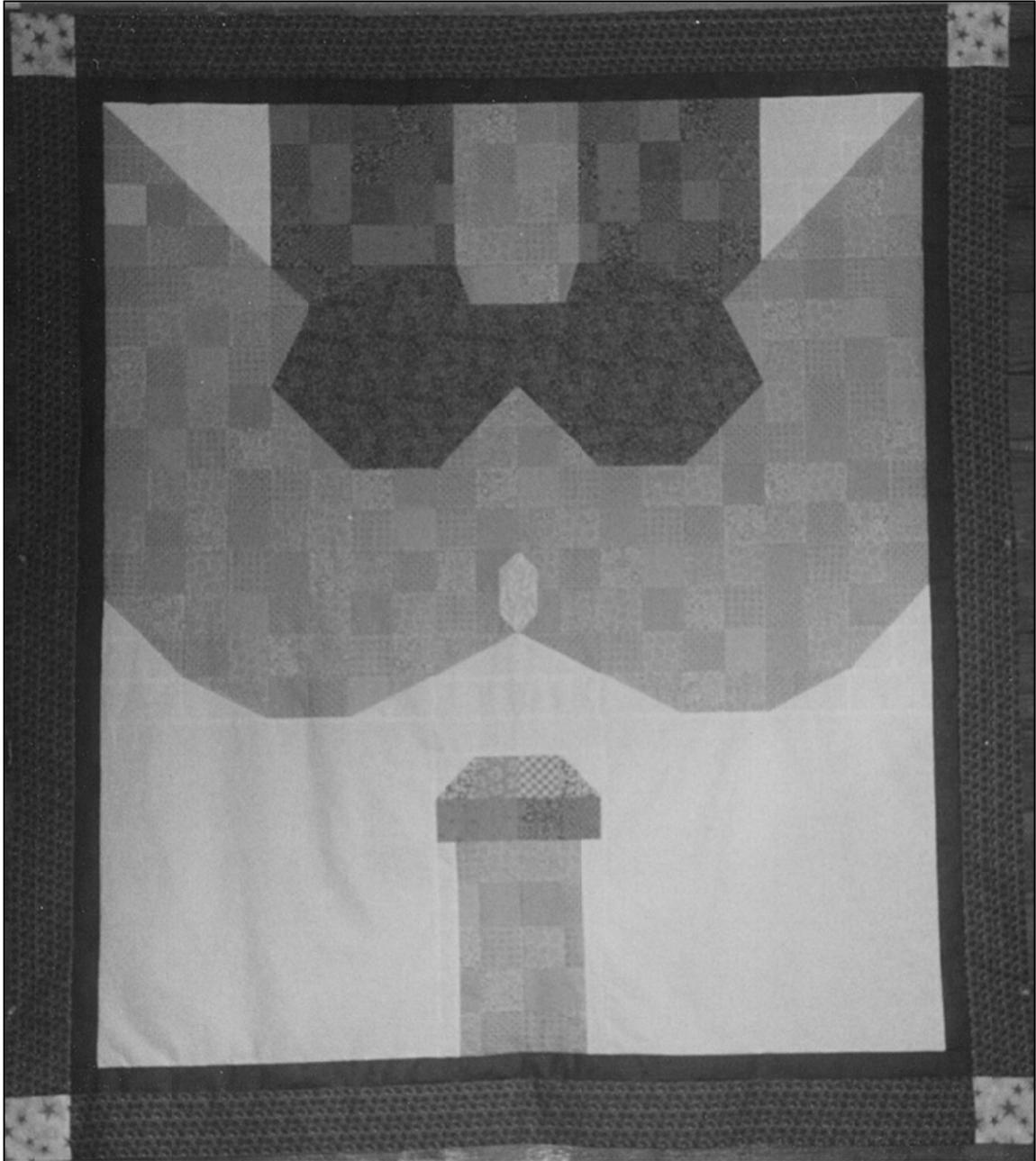
Men Kissing



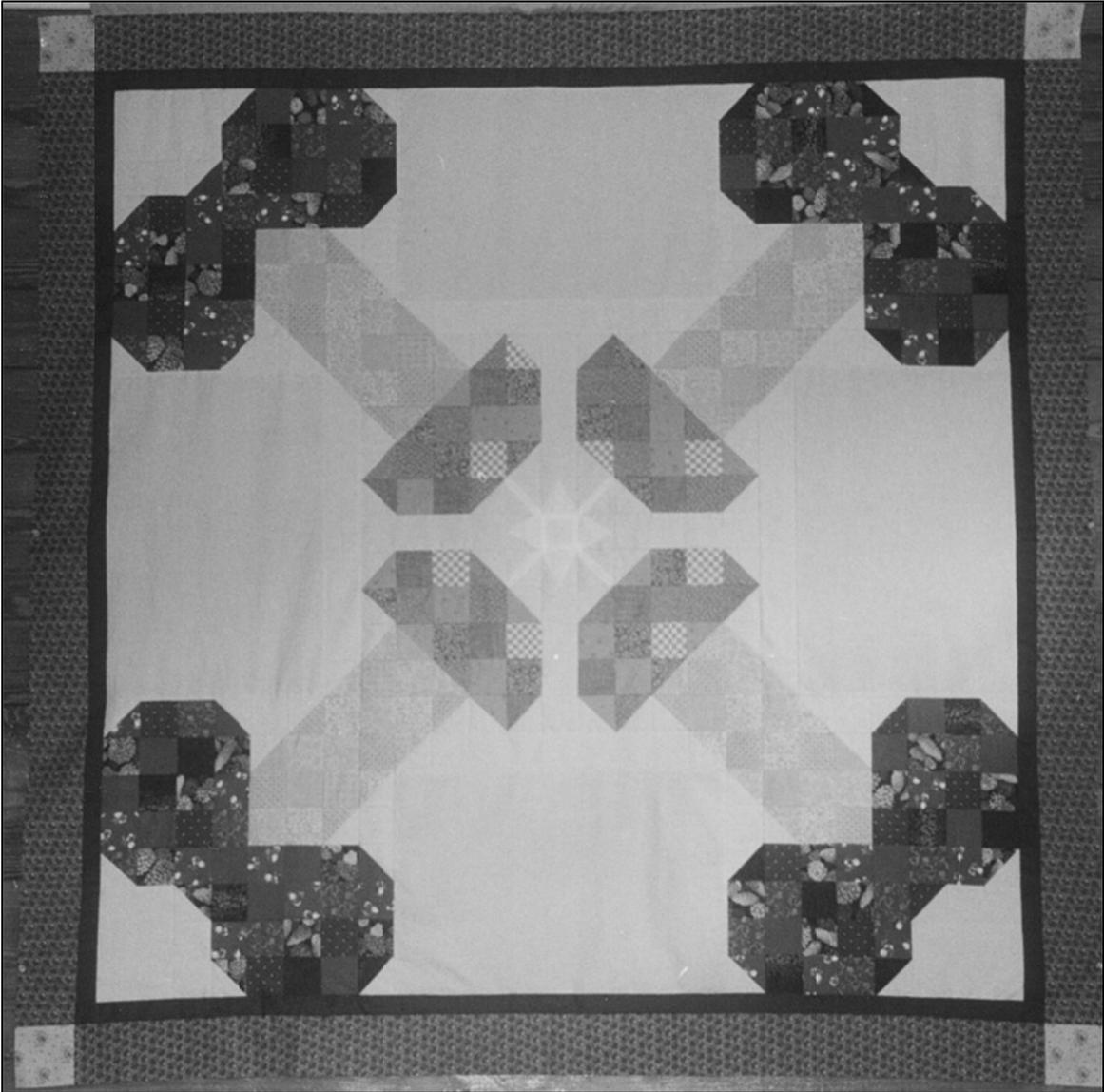
Blow Job



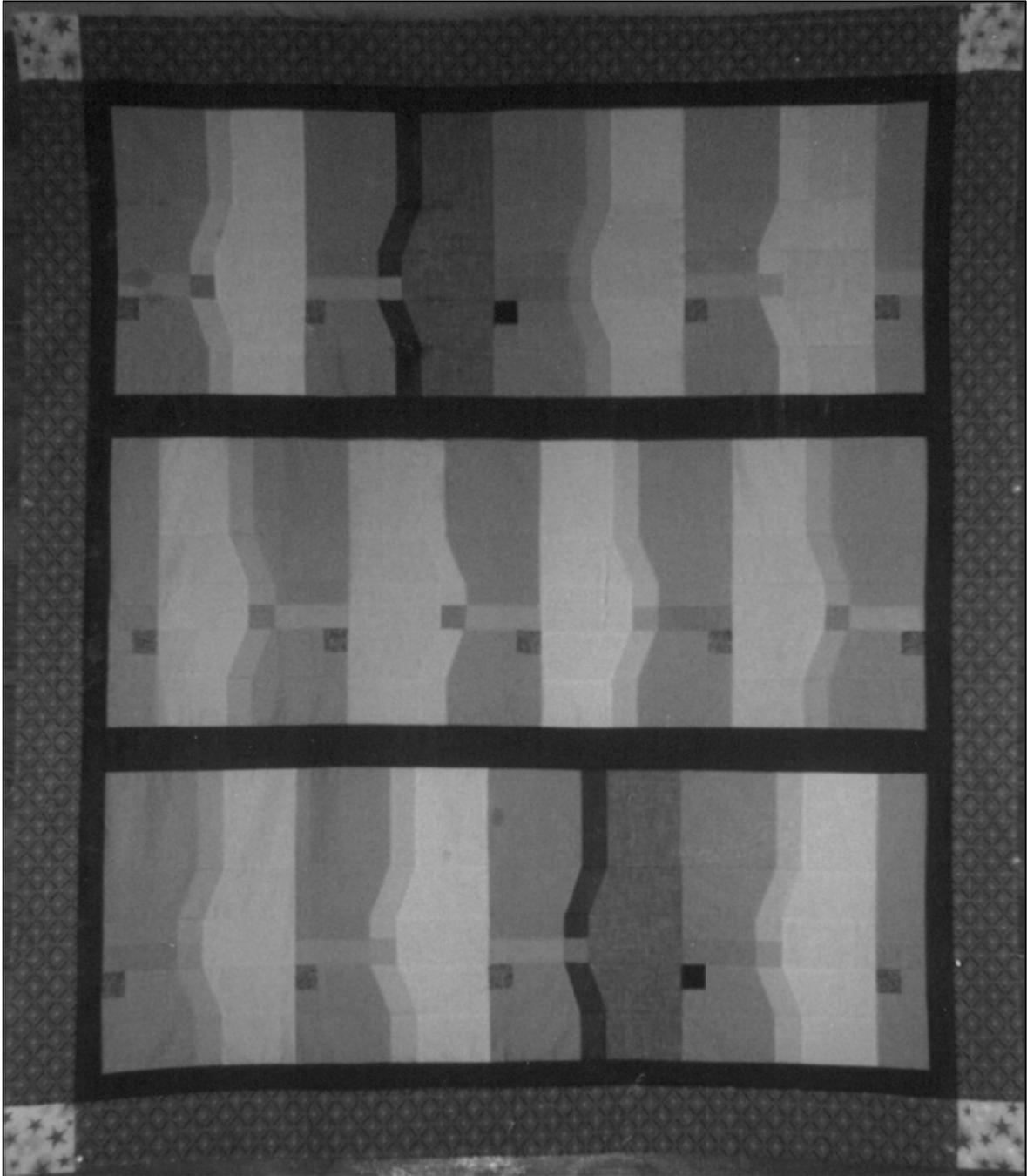
Lift Those Legs!

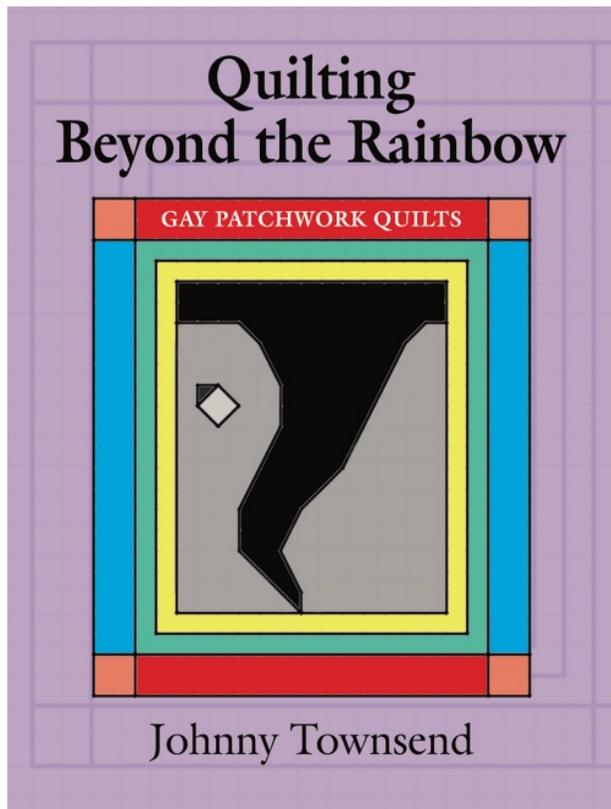


Four Penises



Party Train





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