COLOR MACHINE

BY

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Jaime David

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Date Defended: Wednesday, March 11, 2015
The Thesis Committee for Jaime David
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

COLOR MACHINE

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Chairperson Mary Anne Jordan

Date Approved: Monday, May 11, 2015
COLOR MACHINE

Abstract

*Color Machine* is a continued exploration of the manipulation and perception of color. By paying homage to modernist paintings, I attempt to question whether a quilt can transcend its function and become a field of color in which the viewer can feel the color relatedness. I have always been drawn to modernist works in both architecture and design. Having a degree and professional career working as a designer, I tend to have an analytical process of creating that is often rooted in the function of the work. Simultaneously, I am fascinated by the historical context and personal meaningfulness of the traditional art of quiltmaking. My desire to reconcile these aspects of my personality drives the work that I make. I hope this quilted work can offer a point of contemplation for the artist, designer and quilter alike.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Quilts.................................................................3
Color.................................................................5
Machine...............................................................9
Random Generation.............................................11
Data Sets...........................................................14
Quilted Color Field.............................................28
Conclusion........................................................30
Color Machine Gallery View
“Everyone loves the quilt, and everyone knows what quilting is, since for centuries it has been an art traditionally practiced by the women of many lands. If studied as an applied art, and properly understood, it is not only capable of a high development, but is in itself a vast field for the display of individual taste and self-expression.”

Quilts

There seems to be a discrepancy between what one considers art or craft. Quilts have a tendency to exist between these boundaries while continually blurring them. It is important in the work I make to understand the overall historical context of this divide.

“By most accounts, the art world “discovered” quilts in 1971, the year of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s exhibition Abstract Design in American Quilts. This show featured a group of bold, geometric, pieced quilts belonging to the collectors Jonathan Holstien and Gail van der Hoof. Like an earlier exhibition at the Newark Museum of Art in 1965 titled Optical Quilts, the Whitney exhibition, in both its selection of pieced quilts and their installation on the wall, complemented current trends in abstract painting, granting quilts a new aesthetic status as high art by virtue of their perceived likeness to the more prestigious category of painted textiles.”

Many argue that the merits which Holstien determined were important in choosing the quilts showcased at this exhibition, point to a male-dominated high art world.

Furthermore, the dedication of this show to anonymous women quiltmakers was seen as a way to acknowledge the maker yet conform to the priorities of a male-dominate painting world. Susan Bernick, whose work has concentrated on the changing

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1 Hall, Carrie. *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt.*
2 Author, Elissa. *String, Felt, Thread.*
aesthetic status of quilts after 1970, divides quilt making into three “cultures”: the art quilter, the feminist quilter, and the traditional quilter.³

Working as a textile artist and more specifically, a quilter, I find that I am constantly shifting the context of where my artwork fits. Although, I understand the distinctions of Bernick’s quilter “cultures,” I seek to find ways in which my work can exist in all these cultures. I am drawn to the boldness and the abstractness of modernist paintings, probably much the same way as Holstien was. I intentionally chose traditional quilt methods to create a large-scale “color field” that refers to the male dominated high art of painting. *Color Machine* is about me becoming the machine, exploring and experimenting in formal academic art exercises, using traditional and stereotypical female craft methods. The work is as much about this process as it is about the final art object. Of course the final destination for this work was an art gallery and the work was created specifically for this space. Does this automatically elevate the work from craft to art? The context of the art gallery is important in understanding the contemplation of the quilts role in the art world.

³ Author, Elissa. *String, Felt, Thread.*
Color

I have always been fascinated by the perception of color. I wonder if the way I see red is the way someone else perceives pink. Color descriptions are variable based on the person describing them. In this capacity color is a personal thing. Our associations with color and memory could cause us to love certain colors, while despising others. Whether we realize it or not, we all have colors that we respond to more than others. Working as a designer, I was expected to be an expert of color. Although colors can rise and fall in popularity, I felt this was truly a matter of personal taste. In interiors, the main objective was to put together a pleasing palette of colors and patterns that matched and was generally benign. Painted wall colors that would fall into the
background and be quite unnoticed, with an accent color, supplied by changing accessories was the standard approach to client satisfaction.

When I began making quilts, I naturally approached the process of selecting fabrics in a similar way. I would look for contrast in value, but overall I wanted a cohesive and pleasing palette of fabrics for my quilts. I would spend hours curating combinations and over time I began to realize that the colors and fabrics that were dominating my quilts were revealing my preference for certain colors and patterns. I realized that although I was taking time to carefully choose fabric for my quilts, I was ending up with a predictable palette. I started to notice this with the work of my quilting peers too. Then I began to notice with my students and classes that the choices people made in regard to their fabric was reflected also in the clothes they were wearing and even their homes. Breaking free from the impulses to edit certain colors can be more difficult than one would imagine.

These observations about color preference inspired me to study color and eventually experiment more with color in my work. By working from principles in Josef Alber’s book, *Interaction of Color*, I began to exert a refined level of control of color in my work. For my thesis work, I was eager to get into an active working mode. I was desperate for the idea to spark so that I could become a making machine. It is through working with my hands that I begin to understand the meaning of my work. Not wanting to be bogged down with color choices, but knowing that I wanted color to be a part of my work, I determined that the fastest way for me to get working was to
devise a way to select my color randomly. This would free me to do the making and the learning.

However simple this solution may have seemed at the time, I was still not free from decision-making. Would I dye the fabrics myself, would I use purchased fabrics and why? I decided to use Robert Kaufman’s Kona cotton solid fabrics primarily because of the quantity of colors and the ability to derive a system of color selection around these parameters. With 272 colors available, I knew there would be plenty of colors that I loved and hated, but I concluded they were all going to be considered equally and personal preference was forbidden. Hand dyeing the fabrics would have allowed for numerous color options and combinations, but would have been a challenge to reproduce exact colors and maintain an even color throughout a piece of cloth. Because I was seeking controlled results in experimenting with color combinations, I determined that using manufactured cotton fabrics was the best option. Commercial dyeing processes can reproduce color more accurately than dyeing fabric by hand.

This was only part of the information needed to begin making a quilt. In reading *Interaction of Color*, I learned how the quantity and proximity to other colors changes how the color is perceived. I decided that for my experiment to work, I needed to start with simple elements in the equation. I chose to make stripe quilts 42” wide by 10’ tall. The stripes varied in thickness from 1-12” in whole integers, a reference to the linear foot. Sewing strips is fast and would allow me a long length of fabric to contemplate the color combinations moving through my hands under the needle of the sewing
machine. It was in these moments of sewing that I realized that the combination of two colors was always a surprise. Two colors I might never choose, sewn together, would become something beautiful. Combinations of bold colors, sewn into sections of pastels would run into whites or browns. Each time I expected a disaster I was surprised by the outcome. In the end, whether it’s a paint choice, a quilt palette or a random generation, people are excited by color.
The machine aspect of this work is two-fold, the computer program and the artist as the making machine. The first aspect is the creation of the computer program that created the quilt sets. I began referring to it as the Color Machine. What started as an idea to quickly and randomly select color, turned into a fun and visual computer algorithm that responded with magical color sketches. The computer is a great machine in the artist’s toolbox. Although naming the computer program the Color Machine was seemingly a thoughtless gesture I began to understand that my artist practice often revolves around the making process. I see the way in which I work as an artist as mechanical. I seek to reduce a redundant process in a streamlined and factory-like production mode.

My impulse was to become the engine of this giant quilt-making machine. When I first began sewing I was fortunate to be able to purchase a fine sewing machine, a Bernina. This uncertain purchase was intimidating because I was spending a lot of money for a machine that I was unsure I would enjoy. It turned out to be one of my better decisions. Learning to use this machine was easy and now I feel as though the sewing machine is as familiar and useful to me as my right hand. I use it fluidly, without thinking. Sewing is as comfortable to me as breathing. My concepts for making this work stemmed from thinking of ways to allow for time with the sewing machine. I wanted to illustrate my relationship with the sewing machine as an effortless yet laborious feat of
workmanship. When making a work of art, sometimes the lessons learned come from the making. This aspect of the artwork is important for me as an artist.

“We come to know in art work that we do not clearly know where we will arrive in our work, although we set the compass, our vision; that we are led, in going along, by material and work process. We have plans and blueprints, but the finished work is still a surprise. We learn to listen to voices: to the yes and no of our material, our tools, our time. We come to know that only when we feel guided by them our work takes on form and meaning, that we are misled when we follow only our will. All great deeds have been achieved under a sense of guidance.”

I am not insulted when my work is recognized for its technical proficiency, rather I see it as an acknowledgment of craftsmanship that illustrates a level of understanding about who I am as an artist. I am like one with my sewing machine. I am the Color Machine.

“In quilting as in all other lines, the highest type of artistry has come only through patience, practice and study with a careful observation of the accumulated experiences of quilters both past and modern days.”

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4 Albers, Annie. *Selected Writing On Design.*
5 Hall, Carrie. *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt.*
Generative design is a design method in which the output is generated by a set of rules or an algorithm. The initial concept for my thesis work was to create a quilted color field, but the thought of designing the patchwork pattern of color was overwhelming. In addition to Art, Mathematics was my favorite subject. It seemed to me that this would be an opportunity to apply a method of probability and statistical data into the making
of this work. By creating a random generating computer program, I could follow a series of self-imposed rules for creating my quilted color field. The idea for this work is simple; the computer will generate color strip sets, I will assemble them as quilted units, then I compose an arrangement of them to fill the gallery wall as a giant color field quilt. The parameters were: 1”-12” width strip, 272 Kona fabric color choices, and generated quilt sets in 10’ lengths. The random nature of this generation results in a beautiful representation of color. By eliminating my control over which color comes next, I can allow each color to exert a power of its own.

The perception of color is further complicated when one introduces the computer into the equation. Although this work was not focused on the visual nature of a computer monitor, it brought to light some new thoughts on how color is created using hexadecimal code. Due to the time limits of this project, I consulted a colleague to write a computer algorithm for me, but I learned some interesting things about computer color. There are millions, seemingly infinite, variations of color written through hexadecimal code that can be created using a computer. As humans, our color memory and color perception is unreliable. I wondered from these millions of variations of computer color, how many would we reasonably be able to distinguish? And how would Josef Albers’ ideas of color proximity work in this digital arena?

For Color Machine, I created a spreadsheet of data that assigned a number to the Kona fabric colors and also listed their approximate hexadecimal code. This allowed the computer renderings to resemble the actual fabrics I would use to make the quilts.
The program would create a visual rendering and text/data output. This is the information I used to construct fourteen quilted panels that would become my color field.

Because the generation of these stripe sets was a swift click of the key, I would make several in one setting. To keep with the random selection nature of this project, I decided that I could not simply select my favorite sets, but I needed a way to choose just a few. I decided that I could use random ways to select numbers from the sets. One series was from a fortune cookie’s lucky numbers. I also used a variety of random number generators through various websites. This allowed for a selection process that was not influenced by my preferences. It was difficult not to skew the outcome to favorable quilt sets.
December 18: Set 11, Quilt 2

- rich red
- hyacinth
- seafoam
- garnet
- ocean
- chestnut
- cyan
- ash
- coffee
- oyster
- stratosphere
- oyster
- silver
- willow
- honey
- orange
- kiwi
- corn yellow
- pomegranate
- kale
- ice frappe
December 23: Set 3, Quilt 3

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width: 4 kona color: 161 hex color: 005D87
width: 4 kona color: 64 hex color: F9CADB
width: 8 kona color: 108 hex color: 617EBF
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width: 4 kona color: 243 hex color: C9C4AE
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width: 7 kona color: 81 hex color: F8C1D9
width: 6 kona color: 10 hex color: F9E0B8
width: 2 kona color: 24 hex color: F68937
width: 4 kona color: 191 hex color: 028568
width: 1 kona color: 135 hex color: 19488C
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width: 6 kona color: 26 hex color: F37338
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width: 3 kona color: 97 hex color: DEBDD7
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width: 6 kona color: 31 hex color: EE3A24

artichoke
kale
celestial
baby pink
lapis
cayenne
bone
parchment
green tea
petal
mustard
school bus
holly
riviera
slate
crimson
persimmon
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- banana
- burgundy
- punch
- chocolate
- yarrow
- lt. parfait
- petal
- peacock
- sand
- cayene
- coffee
- pearl pink
- natural
- copen
- raisin
- lt. parfait
- glacier
- stone
- capri
December 23: Set 39, Quilt 5

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width: 7 kona color: 149 hex color: B3E1E7 aqua
width: 3 kona color: 206 hex color: 9AA441 bonsai
width: 3 kona color: 123 hex color: 508ECB copen
color: 231 hex color: 523F30 cappuccino
color: 212 hex color: C5D975 cactus
width: 11 kona color: 109 hex color: 5B78BB hyacinth
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width: 11 kona color: 65 hex color: F7C7D0 peony
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width: 9 kona color: 107 hex color: 2C4B94 deep blue
width: 5 kona color: 176 hex color: 5D815C laurel
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width: 1 kona color: 160 hex color: 367840 Teal Blue
width: 11 kona color: 110 hex color: 97B2D5 Dresden Blue
width: 9 kona color: 45 hex color: 611D22 Brick
width: 11 kona color: 79 hex color: F6A8C0 Woodrose
width: 2 kona color: 236 hex color: 431F17 Brown
width: 7 kona color: 85 hex color: 4F1A48 Eggplant
width: 3 kona color: 226 hex color: AA9D8D Stone
width: 4 kona color: 100 hex color: D3BBD8 Orchid
width: 8 kona color: 205 hex color: 99CC66 Peridot
width: 2 kona color: 137 hex color: 225AA9 Surf
width: 1 kona color: 38 hex color: A11D2A Chinese Red
width: 3 kona color: 126 hex color: 38587A Cadet
width: 4 kona color: 67 hex color: F6C5C5 Primrose
width: 6 kona color: 57 hex color: F9B5AD Peach
width: 5 kona color: 269 hex color: 313238 Charcoal
width: 5 kona color: 166 hex color: 04B4C4 Breakers
width: 1 kona color: 54 hex color: F06187 Punch
width: 3 kona color: 196 hex color: 015143 Kelly
width: 8 kona color: 263 hex color: 93A2A4 Shale
width: 2 kona color: 40 hex color: AF272D Ruby
width: 9 kona color: 89 hex color: 5F3974 Eggplant
width: 1 kona color: 237 hex color: 66433B Mocha
width: 2 kona color: 59 hex color: FE87A9 Lt. Parfait
width: 3 kona color: 192 hex color: 3BBDAE Cypress
December 30: Set 1, Quilt 10

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Blue
Maize
Nightfall
Deep Rose
OD Green
Honey
Parsley
Lake
Raffia
Spice
Maize
Hibiscus
Corn Yellow
Raffia
Celadon
Water
Pansy
Pond
Crocus
Laurel
Olive
Butter
December 30: Set 4, Quilt 11

width: 2 kona color: 156 hex color: 10C2ED  Lagoon
width: 8 kona color: 244 hex color: D3CDB6  Khaki
width: 9 kona color: 160 hex color: 367840  Teal Blue
width: 1 kona color: 55 hex color: F48896  Melon
width: 1 kona color: 40 hex color: AF272D  Ruby
width: 7 kona color: 70 hex color: F6A4BD  Bubble Gum
width: 2 kona color: 266 hex color: 706D7A  Coal
width: 10 kona color: 75 hex color: EE378F  Valentine
width: 1 kona color: 180 hex color: ADCBC5  Seafoam
width: 3 kona color: 96 hex color: C588BB  Violet
width: 8 kona color: 254 hex color: F0E7DF  Oyster
width: 9 kona color: 115 hex color: 70A0D5  Blue Jay
width: 4 kona color: 26 hex color: F37338  Persimmon
width: 2 kona color: 193 hex color: 18B99F  Kale
width: 9 kona color: 102 hex color: 8383B0  Amethyst
width: 1 kona color: 258 hex color: E2E2E4  Silver
width: 4 kona color: 254 hex color: F0E7DF  Oyster
width: 5 kona color: 59 hex color: FEDBC4  Lt. Parfait
width: 1 kona color: 6 hex color: FFD150  Canary
width: 1 kona color: 253 hex color: FBF3E9  Bone
width: 11 kona color: 46 hex color: 421916  Mahogany
width: 5 kona color: 118 hex color: A8B9D9  Bluebell
width: 8 kona color: 97 hex color: DEBDD7  Petunia
width: 3 kona color: 59 hex color: FEDBC4  Lt. Parfait
width: 2 kona color: 131 hex color: 0C223D  Indigo
width: 3 kona color: 225 hex color: D5BEA4  Straw
December 30: Set 6, Quilt 12

- Width: 5 kona color: 47 hex color: 5F2826 Mahogany
- Width: 8 kona color: 68 hex color: F7B5CE Med. Pink
- Width: 6 kona color: 162 hex color: 06879A Glacier
- Width: 9 kona color: 79 hex color: F6A8C0 Woodrose
- Width: 3 kona color: 61 hex color: FDEFF5 Pearl Pink
- Width: 7 kona color: 67 hex color: F6C5C5 Primrose
- Width: 4 kona color: 59 hex color: FEDBC4 Parfait
- Width: 3 kona color: 74 hex color: EF5BA1 Brt. Pink
- Width: 1 kona color: 20 hex color: F79944 Amber
- Width: 6 kona color: 124 hex color: 365A92 Regatta
- Width: 2 kona color: 93 hex color: CFB5D1 Pansy
- Width: 5 kona color: 70 hex color: F6A4BD Bubble Gum
- Width: 8 kona color: 17 hex color: E2B471 Yarrow
- Width: 8 kona color: 231 hex color: 523F30 Cappuccino
- Width: 7 kona color: 221 hex color: 707F61 OD Green
- Width: 4 kona color: 256 hex color: F7F7F5 Snow
- Width: 4 kona color: 264 hex color: A69798 Smoke
- Width: 6 kona color: 92 hex color: B591C3 Wisteria
- Width: 2 kona color: 218 hex color: 526233 Avocado
- Width: 4 kona color: 260 hex color: C6C3C2 Ash
- Width: 6 kona color: 237 hex color: 66433B Mocha
- Width: 10 kona color: 135 hex color: 19488C Riviera
- Width: 2 kona color: 41 hex color: 76101D Wine
December 30: Set 7, Quilt 13

width: 6 kona color: 152 hex color: #71CDDC  Bahama Blue
width: 4 kona color: 58 hex color: #FCD4C4   Ice Peach
width: 9 kona color: 113 hex color: #83ACD0  Candy Blue
width: 4 kona color: 143 hex color: #B0D1DC  Fog
width: 5 kona color: 33 hex color: #D23034   Lipstick
width: 5 kona color: 20 hex color: #F79944   Amber
width: 2 kona color: 172 hex color: #C5E3C3  Mint
width: 4 kona color: 9 hex color: #F1C36D   Curry
width: 9 kona color: 135 hex color: #19488C  Riviera
width: 3 kona color: 31 hex color: #EE3A24   Tangerine
width: 8 kona color: 139 hex color: #174884  Pacific
width: 7 kona color: 261 hex color: #807F8C  Med. Grey
width: 1 kona color: 67 hex color: #F6C5C5   Primrose
width: 8 kona color: 12 hex color: #FFD693   Daffodil
width: 6 kona color: 39 hex color: #981A31   Rich Red
width: 8 kona color: 172 hex color: #C5E3C3  Mint
width: 2 kona color: 72 hex color: #F27395   Camellia
width: 11 kona color: 182 hex color: #CBE0AB  Green Tea
width: 8 kona color: 239 hex color: #9E8863   Biscuit
width: 4 kona color: 231 hex color: #523F30   Cappuccino
width: 6 kona color: 35 hex color: #9C1D20   Poppy
December 30: Set 27, Quilt 14

width: 5 kona color: 126 hex color: 38587A
width: 11 kona color: 153 hex color: 81CFD0
width: 3 kona color: 133 hex color: 222256
width: 4 kona color: 34 hex color: C7202A
width: 1 kona color: 120 hex color: B2CFE9
width: 8 kona color: 268 hex color: 6E8390
width: 2 kona color: 268 hex color: 6E8390
width: 4 kona color: 195 hex color: 006453
width: 5 kona color: 185 hex color: 72C279
width: 3 kona color: 56 hex color: F69483
width: 8 kona color: 250 hex color: FAEAD7
width: 8 kona color: 163 hex color: 247382
width: 7 kona color: 121 hex color: 5CB7E2
width: 7 kona color: 261 hex color: 807F8C
width: 7 kona color: 74 hex color: EF5BA1
width: 2 kona color: 193 hex color: 18B99F
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width: 11 kona color: 8 hex color: FCC853
cadet
capri
nightfall
tomato
blueberry
graphite
graphite
willow
sour apple
salmon
cream
everglade
stratosphere
med. Grey
brt. Pink
kale
ocean
candy green
butter
clover
pearl pink
corn yellow
Quilted Color Field

There were no rules or systems that were employed to create the layout. I simply went with what felt right to me. The dissection and arrangement of the quilted strip sets is the point in the work that is the most reflective of the artist hand. I made some choices that would allow the viewer some access to the assemblage of the work. Quilts were cut in half and separated but within close proximity, or inverted from top to bottom. The standard 42” wide quilt sets are the most predominant sets within the work. The quilting, although subtle, was done on either side to the seam line, one side with dark grey thread and the other with light grey thread. Those who wish to explore the work up close can have a small lesson on color value.

Before assembling the final composition, I was working under rules for making that I had imposed on myself. These rules were put in place in order to achieve specific objectives. Initially, I knew that I wanted to fill an entire gallery wall with color. Like the work of Color Field painters, such as Rothko, I wanted to fill the viewer’s field of vision with a massive and overwhelming scale. I was purposefully representing a male dominant art field and filling it, not perversely but intentionally, with a stereotypically female associated craft. I chose the simple pattern of the stripe due to the nature of quick construction and also for its lack of reference to a specific quilt block. The integers from one to twelve inches represent the linear foot, a clear system of measure for any architect or designer. This familiarity and memory of measure would lend a familiar scale for me to interpret the color lessons within the work. I was seeking an
experiment in color, not necessarily of pattern. I chose to have the computer algorithm vary the width of stripe to create visual rhythm and hierarchy.

“Color not only appears in uncountable shades and tints, but is additionally characterized by shape and size, by recurrence and placement…”

The act of quilting my work is important to me not necessarily because of the feminine associations, but because of the methods employed, the tactile nature of the making and the ability to be in sync with a sewing machine. These are the aspects of working in which I feel rooted. Here I am connected to a lineage of quilters, sewists, designers, engineers, and makers of all kind.

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6 Albers, Josef. *Interaction of Color.*
Conclusion

The final installation of this work is epic in scale. Building a 10’x47’ quilt is not a typical goal for a quilter. Yet making a quilt of this magnitude offers the viewer, quilter or not, a sense of wonder. It is clearly not meant to function as a quilt would in a standard utilitarian way. The quilter can wonder about how it was made so large, understanding the problems that one would encounter in sewing this on a sewing machine. The color field created on the gallery wall provides points of contemplation for all viewers.

Although I created the final composition, it was the random generating color machine that provided the source for the color combinations. This enables a truly immersive experience in color, in which the viewer can explore areas of interest and color relatedness. By creating a quilt as a color field painting, my hope is to start a conversation about learning through making and our everyday experience with objects.
Color Machine: experiment for color relatedness
References