

September Block of the Month

“Honoring All Our Ancestors”

Karen G. Fisher

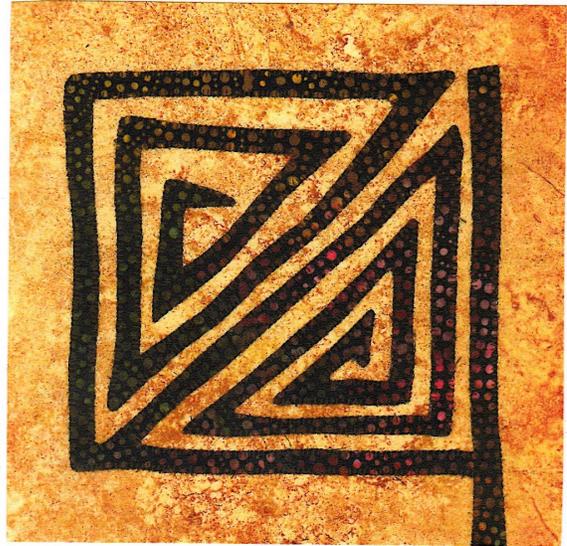
Several years ago, in a ceramics class, I was adding border designs to some pieces. Another student saw what I was doing and told me the designs were Navajo, and I shouldn't be appropriating them for my own use. When I showed her my carefully resourced Greek border designs, she was very surprised, and we were both intrigued by how similar they were, almost identical.

I have since discovered that these kinds of “key” and “fret” designs show up in many cultures on essentially every continent. I am fascinated by art history, and cultural anthropology, and all these patterns make me wonder if they were a way our ancient ancestors worldwide were trying to codify a sense of order within the seeming chaos of nature around them. The beginnings of these patterns could have been created with the simplest of tools as they were incised into weapons, drawn on stone, and later woven into textiles and carved in wood.

My source for this pattern is the Watchtower at the Grand Canyon, built by Mary Colter in the 1930s. Her source was a larger “fret” design in the Canyon de Chelly, one of the many ancient Indigenous ruins she visited to source the final design of her famous structure. She visited many ruins in the Four Corners area, then designed her watchtower to honor them, while copying none of them.

I chose to use “rock” fabrics for backgrounds, and batiks for the foreground figure. I purposely chose to run one end of the design off the edge—those ends can come together to create a secondary pattern when arranging the blocks in groups of four.

I also think this pattern could be very “modern” by doing it in two high contrast colors or values, such as black and white.



My favorite applique method:

Cut fusible interfacing the size of applique shape. Do not use a product that fuses the two pieces of fabric to each other—you are making your applique fabric more stable. If you are using a variety of fabrics, cut the number of pieces of interfacing you need for the blocks you are making.

Fuse interfacing to the wrong side of your applique shape fabric. **MAKE SURE** the whole surface is securely fused so that it does not peel apart as you cut it apart.

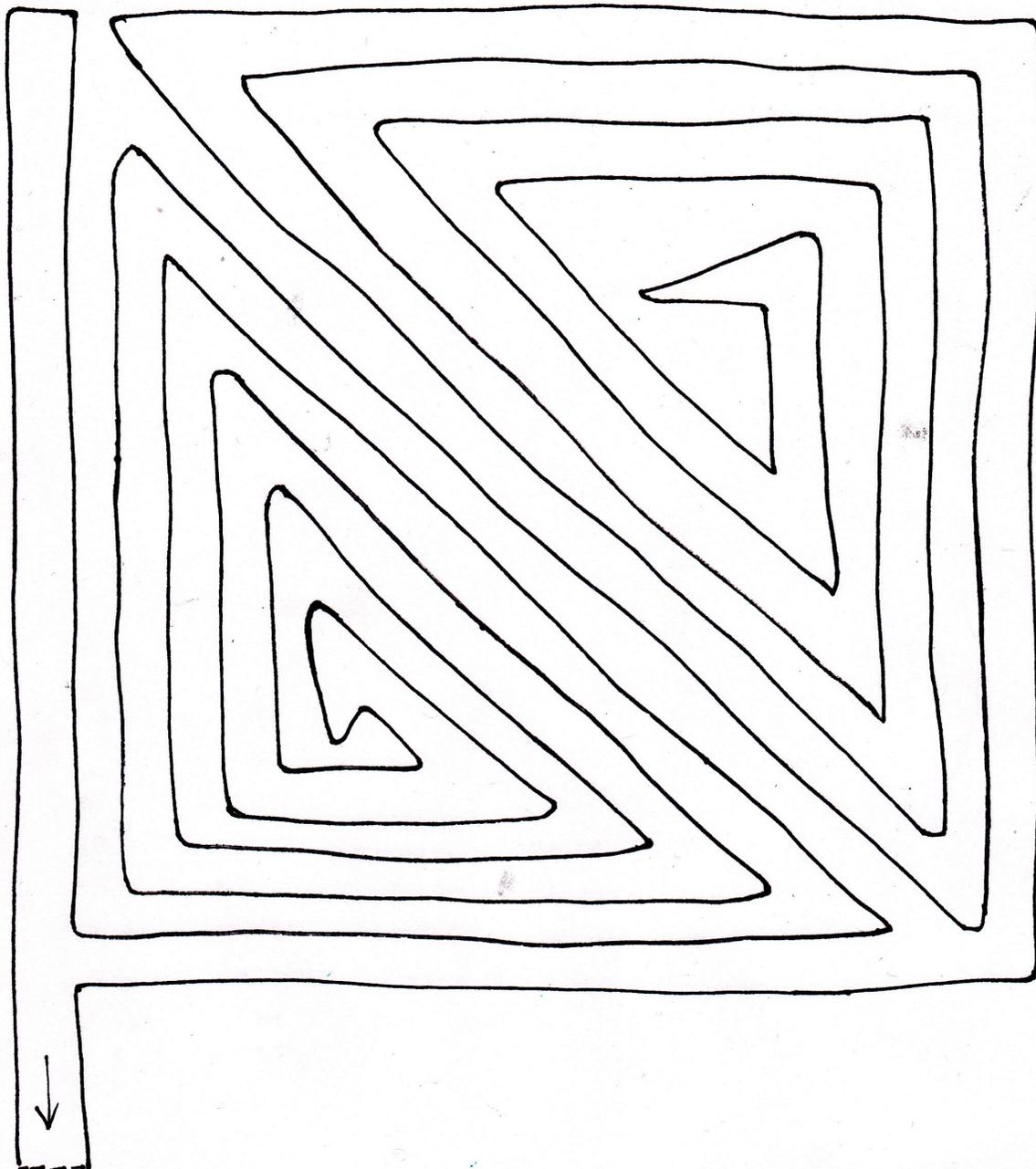
As you cut out the “key” shape, you will end up with two useable pieces if you make one long cut from outer edge to center. These interior shapes can be used for another project.

Stitch down. A small zigzag or blanket stitch gives a sturdy finish and adds a bit of detail.



Full size applique pattern for 8" block. Cut background piece of fabric 9 1/2" square. Center applique shape and stitch, with long end running off edge of fabric. Trim block to 8 1/2" square.

If you want a more "modern" look, you can re-draw the shape with straight edges. Reduce or enlarge for other block sizes.



A secondary "spinning" effect can be achieved where four blocks come together.

