

From Sketch to Stitch

with
**Jan
Beaney**

The ideas, inspirations
and techniques used to
create
Red Centre

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL WICKS

In and Out of Shade. 32 x 31 cm approx.

The work illustrated on these pages reflects my continuing involvement with the Red Centre in Australia.

'In and Out of Shade' is a panel that celebrates my responses to the enormous range of colours to be seen once you have looked more intently. First observations seemed straightforward. The sun shining on the rock surface of the Olgas (Kata Tjuta) showed it to be luminous tawny-orange whilst the rock in the shade initially appeared a colourless grey. On attempting to make closely observed colour sketches, dozens of rich hues revealed themselves in and around the conglomerate make-up of the

rock face. It was surprising and exciting, and once 'tuned into' the colours, others came to the fore. These revelations, partnered with the historical and spiritual presence of this special place, proved to be totally absorbing.

I have chosen to present most of the Australian pieces within simplified horizontal bands, enabling the colour to be of prime importance. However, in 'Dawn Walk 1', while colour was important, the main focus I wanted to express was the spatial effects and distant view. This piece was inspired by Kings Canyon, a magical place. My husband and I climbed to the top of the ridge before dawn, and the sight of the sun rising and

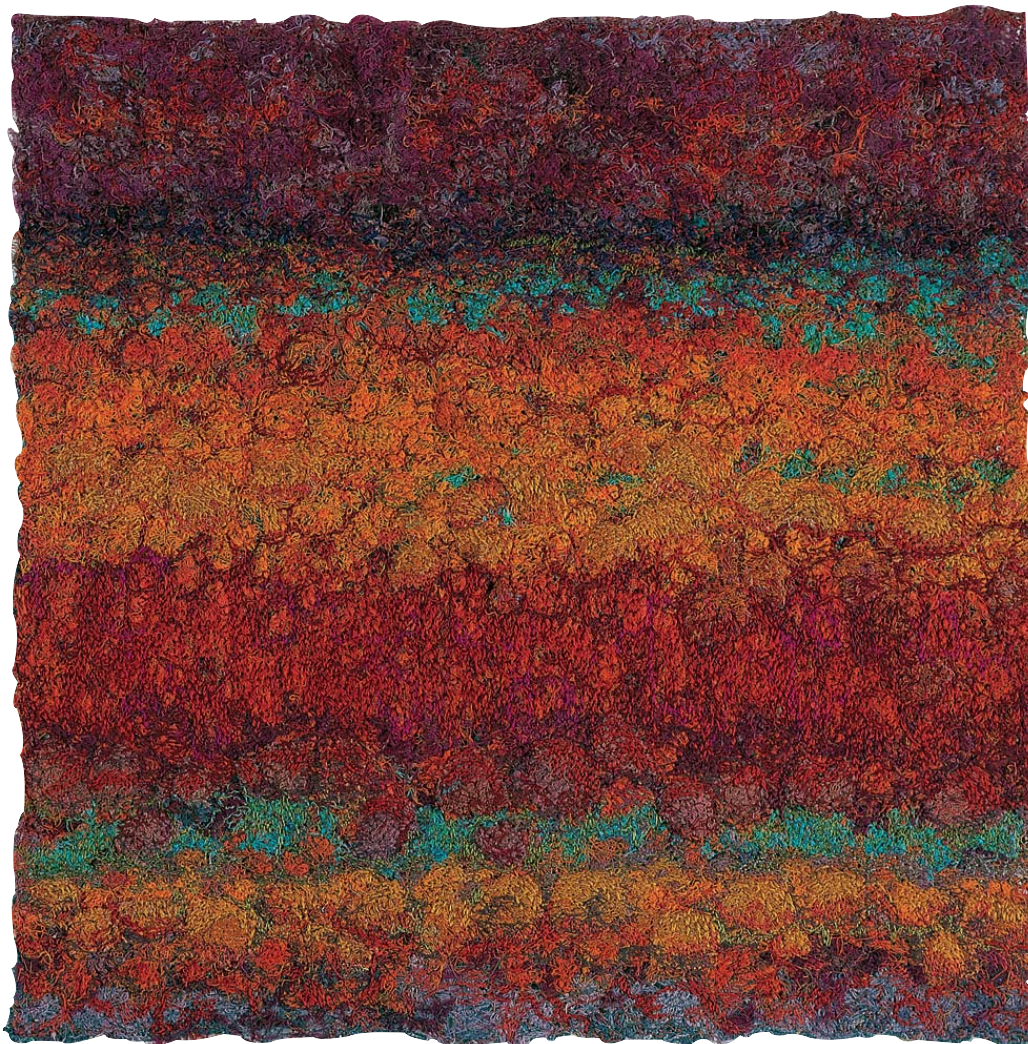
lighting up the canyon rock face was awesome. We walked over creviced slabs of richly coloured stone and clambered over the unique layers of rock, some honeycombed in shape. Although reds were present, the landscape displayed unusual colour combinations of gingers, ochres, maroons and rusts.

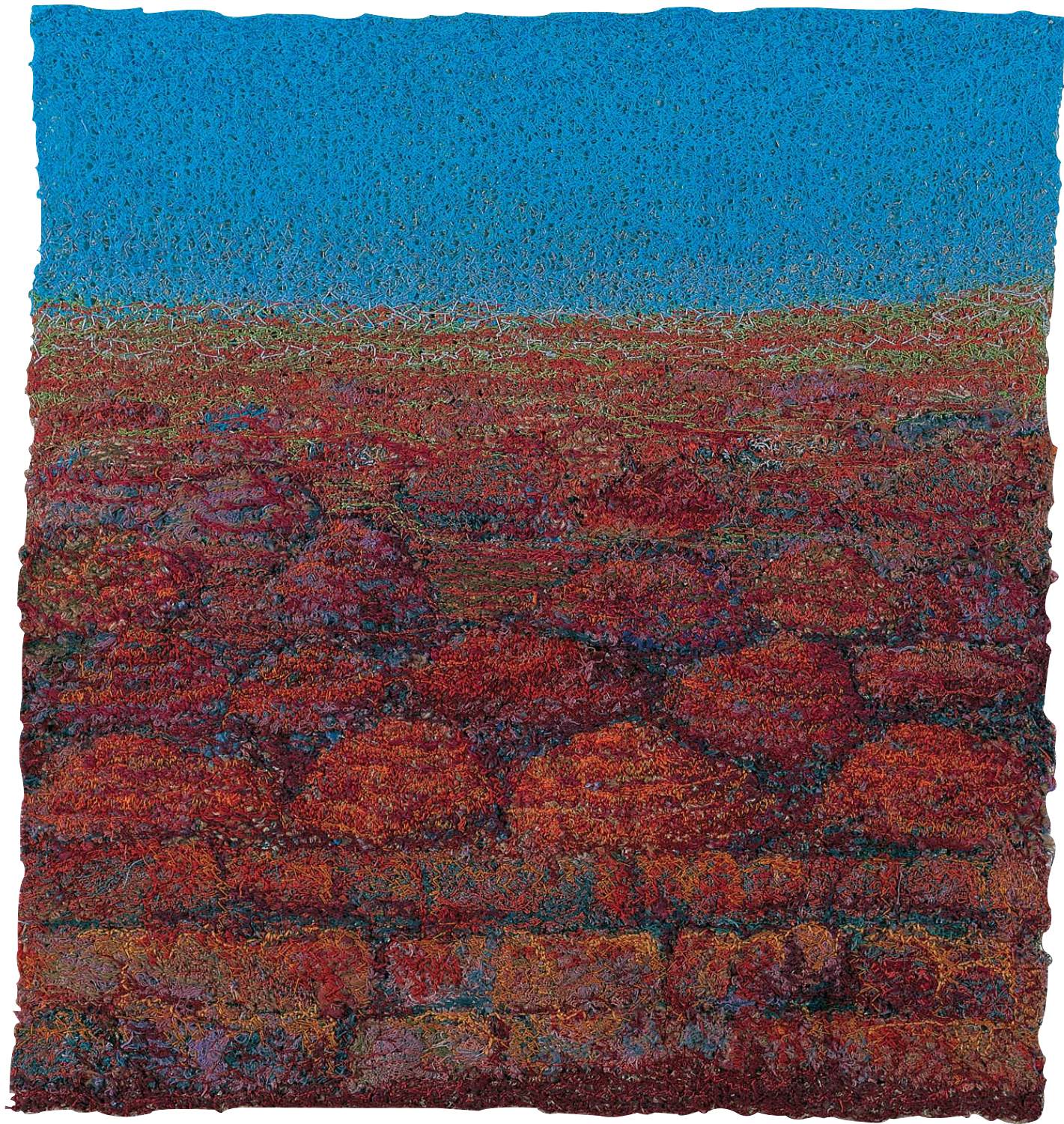
The views over the oddly shaped domes spreading into the far distance were reminiscent of a colourful moonscape and this aspect was the one I aimed to create. I opted to leave out extraneous trees and scrub in order to promote the simplicity of the piece.

I try to record as much information as I can in my sketchbook, but pressures of time during a journey often result in less than appealing drawings. However, essential information is gathered, accompanied by full descriptions of tone, colour and texture, alongside memories of certain emotional responses to the time and place. These factors can often be enough to bring back the imagery and thoughts first experienced. Photographs can be useful, but it is the selection or rejection of certain aspects in the first spontaneous drawings that present the most honest interpretation and may suggest ideas to work from.

At home I paint various design ideas, sometimes full scale and at other times as small colour compositions which stop me from putting in too many details and diversions. Keeping one or two key words or phrases on my noticeboard helps to keep me on track.

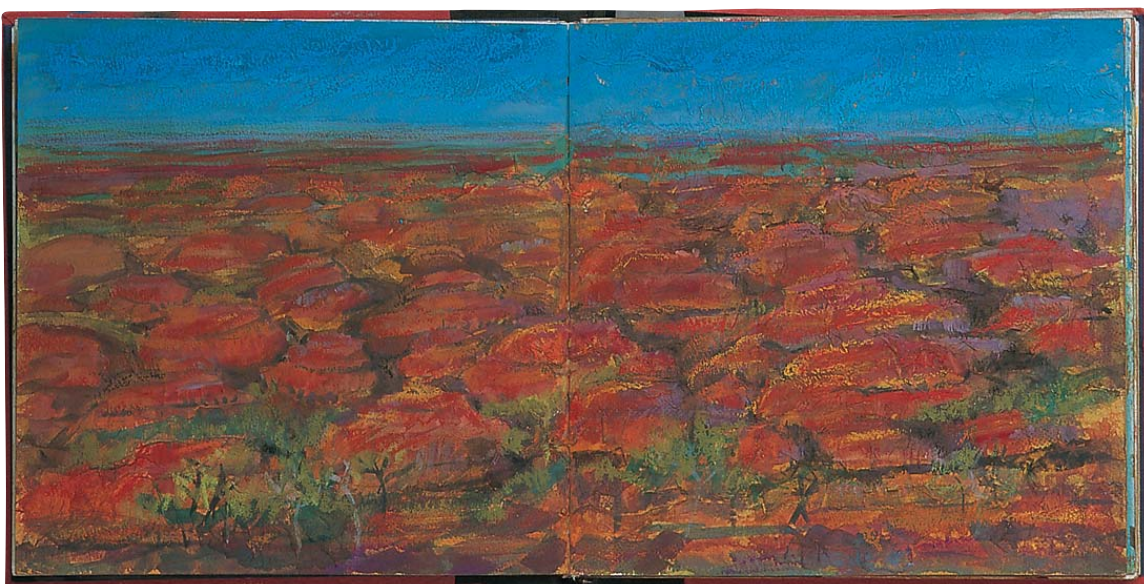
Having decided on the general composition of the

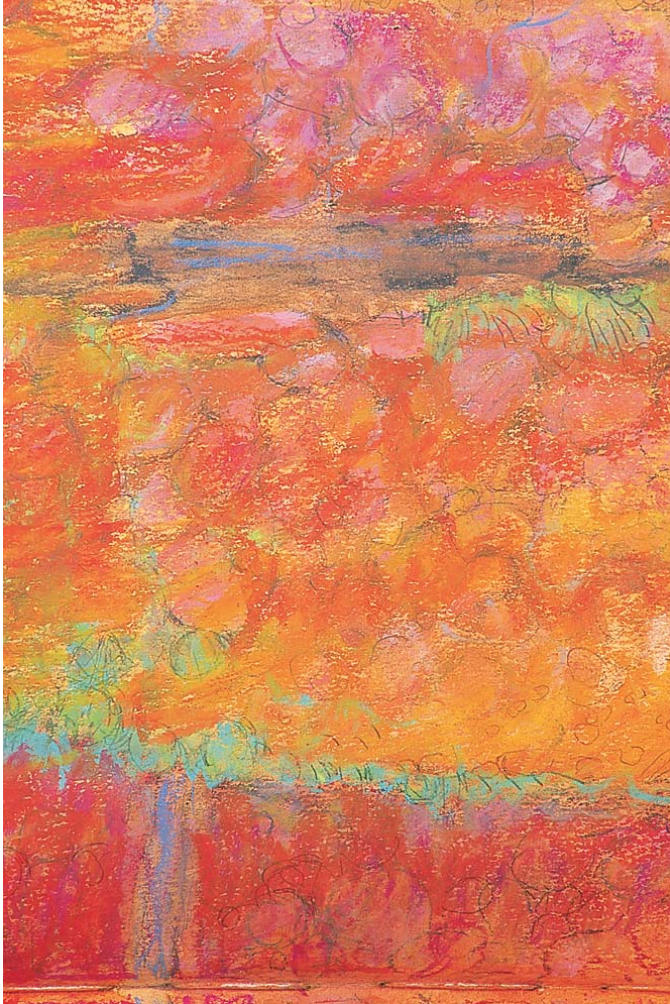




Above: *Dawn Walk* 1. 32 x 31 cm approx.

Left: Sketchbook page: View from the top of Kings Canyon





Sketch: Rock face – The Olgas

joined. The colours of the top and bobbin threads need to reflect the colours within the design so that if any of the base areas do peep through they tone in with the layers of top-stitching. The mesh is covered with fairly open free zigzag stitch before the serious layering of stitches begins.

The choice of a straight or zigzag stitch depends on the textural quality envisioned. Even the smallest change of stitch direction or density can affect the way the light reflects on the surface.

Extra 'fabric' was made in order to apply pieces to the base cloth to build up a unique textural quality. Conventional material would

not easily be integrated to a fabric with such different characteristics.

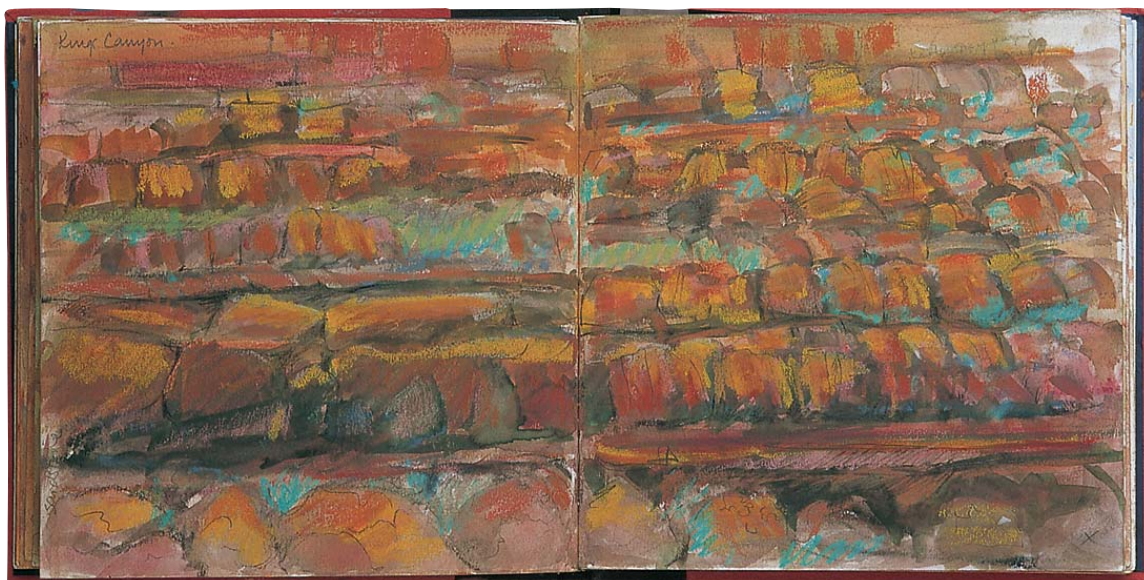
On completion the panels were rinsed several times in bowls of warm water, with a final rinse of fabric conditioner to give a softer feel. The panels were then stretched by pinning out on a board and left to dry naturally. Any misshapen edges or holes in the cloth were trimmed or overstitched.



panel in order to emphasise the main elements to be featured, the construction of the piece begins. I have found the technique of making a new cloth by machining on soluble fabric is the most sympathetic for some of my recent themes. In general, I use Vilene Solusheet, as I find this is the easiest and most reliable soluble fabric to use as a base. The piece is measured, allowing for the fact that dense machine-

stitching shrinks the fabric, and the outlines of the main shapes are drawn on with a crayon or marker pencil. Sometimes crayons are used to denote the main areas of colour, especially if the piece is fairly large.

These pieces do not feature the lacy openwork that is generally characteristic of this method. A basic grid of machined straight stitches is worked as a mesh to ensure that all parts of the cloth are



Above: A set of tiny colour designs

Left: Sketchbook page: Rock face – Kings Canyon