

# Manuscript Cowl

Kristen C. Howard



*This cowl is knit in the round from the bottom up. I was inspired by medieval illuminated manuscripts when designing this cowl. The charts draw from pen-flourished initials in holdings of McGill Library's Rare Books and Special Collections, especially a group of excised initials and a fifteenth-century Italian antiphonal (MS Medieval 073). For more information on this manuscript, please see page 3.*

## **Pattern Notes**

All charts are read from right to left, beginning at the bottom right corner. Chart A is a 12 st x 8 row repeat, with no floats longer than 5 stitches. Note that the final five rows of Chart A are off-pattern. You will choose one initial chart for your cowl, each of which are unique 44 st x 62 row charts and have some very long floats. It is recommended that you catch every other or every third float for long floats (5+ stitches).

## **Details**

### **Size**

One size (approx. 21" / 63cm in circumference and 11" / 28cm tall)

### **Yarn**

Two contrasting colors of fingering weight yarn; approx. 35g (160 yards) each

### **Suggested Yarn**

Knit Picks Palette, 100% wool (50g/231 yds)

### *Colors used in B sample:*

Main Color (MC): Cream  
Contrast Color (CC): Black

### **Suggested Needles**

Main: US 4 (3.5 mm), 16" circular  
Ribbing: US 2 (2.75 mm), 16" circular

Above: Excised Initial B from a medieval manuscript, Italy, late 14<sup>th</sup> to early 15<sup>th</sup> c. McGill University Library, Rare Books and Special Collections - Manuscript Collection - MS Medieval 074.

## **Notions**

Nine stitch markers, tapestry needle, and scissors; a row counter is recommended

## **Gauge**

26 stitches and 30 rows = 4" in stranded colorwork on larger needles

*\*Gauge is not critical for this cowl, but a different gauge will affect size and yarn use.*

## **Abbreviations**

BOR: Beginning of round

CC: Contrast color

K: Knit

MC: Main color

P: Purl

## **Directions:**

With CC and smaller needles, cast on 140 stitches.

Place BOR marker and join for working in the round.

Work in 2x2 ribbing (*K2, P2*) for 1" (2.5cm).

Switch to larger needles, and MC (do not break CC). Knit one round with MC, placing markers as follows:

*\*K12, PM, repeat from \* seven more times (eight times total), K44.*

You will have one BOR marker and 8 other stitch markers indicating repeats of Chart A and the beginning of Initial Chart.

With CC held dominant, knit Chart A eight times, then Initial Chart one time, for 62 rows.

Knit one round with MC, removing all markers (except BOR marker). Break MC.

Knit one round with CC.

Switch to smaller needles and work 2x2 ribbing (*K2, P2*) in CC for 1" (2.5cm). Bind off all stitches in pattern. Weave in ends and wet block the cowl.

## ***Customization Options:***

Feel free to knit the ribbing in MC instead of CC, or with another contrast color (*budget approx. 70 yards/15g*).

Use duplicate stitch and a yellow or golden yarn to add illumination, mimicking illuminated manuscripts' use of gold leaf (*budget approx. 15-25 yards/3-5g*).

It is easy to customize the size of your cowl! Keep in mind any changes will require more yarn.

### *To make a taller cowl:*

Option 1: add rows of MC before beginning and after completing the colorwork charts. Add 2 rows before and after (+4 rows total) to add approx. 1/2" (1.25cm).

Option 2: Add length to your ribbing at top and bottom of the cowl as desired.

*To make a wider cowl:* add more stitches to your cast-on in multiples of 12 to knit more repeats of Chart A. Each 12-stitches added will add approx. 1.75" (4.5cm) to your cowl's circumference.

# Manuscript Cowl

## *Inspiration*

Before the advent of the printing press, hand-written books called *manuscripts* held the written record, ranging from Bibles to tax records. *Illuminated manuscripts* include decorations such as illustrations and miniatures as a supplement to the text. Another regular feature of illuminated manuscripts are *initials*, in which the first letter of a word is enlarged and heavily decorated, often with additional colors and gold leaf.

The colorwork charts for this cowl were inspired by illuminated initials from items in McGill University's Rare Books and Special Collections, in particular Manuscript 73 (MS Medieval 073) and a group of excised initials (MS Medieval 074). These manuscripts are from Northern Italy and written in fifteenth-century Gothic script by several different hands. They feature many notable initials with fine linear embellishments in colored inks produced with a thin pen. The emphasis on red and blue is characteristic of the late Romanesque and Gothic periods (12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Manuscript 73 is an *antiphonal*, a choir book which contains the portions of the Divine Office (or canonical hours) that are sung. Unlike standard musical notation today which is written on a five-line staff, this antiphonal features the four-line staff commonly used to represent musical notation in the Middle Ages. It contains only selected feasts or liturgical occasions: St. Ursula and the 11,000 Virgin Martyrs of Cologne; Corpus Christi; Moving of Thomas's relics; Conversion of Paul; Common of Saints; Sexagesima Sunday; and Quinquagesima Sunday.

A number of my initial charts, such as the A, B, and C, are my attempts to duplicate initials found in this manuscript. Some letters, such as K and J, are infrequently used in medieval Latin and so I simply looked to the manuscript for inspiration. The all-over colorwork pattern (Chart A) is easy to memorize and knit, and provides the illusion of curves, mimicking the curved linear embellishments featured in the manuscript. I recommend using the darker contrast color to border the cowl in order to duplicate the manuscript's dark leather covers, and suggest employing a yellow or golden thread and duplicate stitch to illuminate your Manuscript Cowl!

This manuscript has been entirely digitized and can be viewed online, as can more than 3,000 other items digitized by McGill's Rare Books & Special Collections!

*To view the manuscript:*  
<https://tinyurl.com/1c8ycu39>

*To learn more about the music in this manuscript:*  
<https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/source/680970>

*With special thanks to Jacquelyn Sundberg, Outreach & Special Projects, and Ann Marie Holland, Associate Librarian (ROAAR, McGill University).*

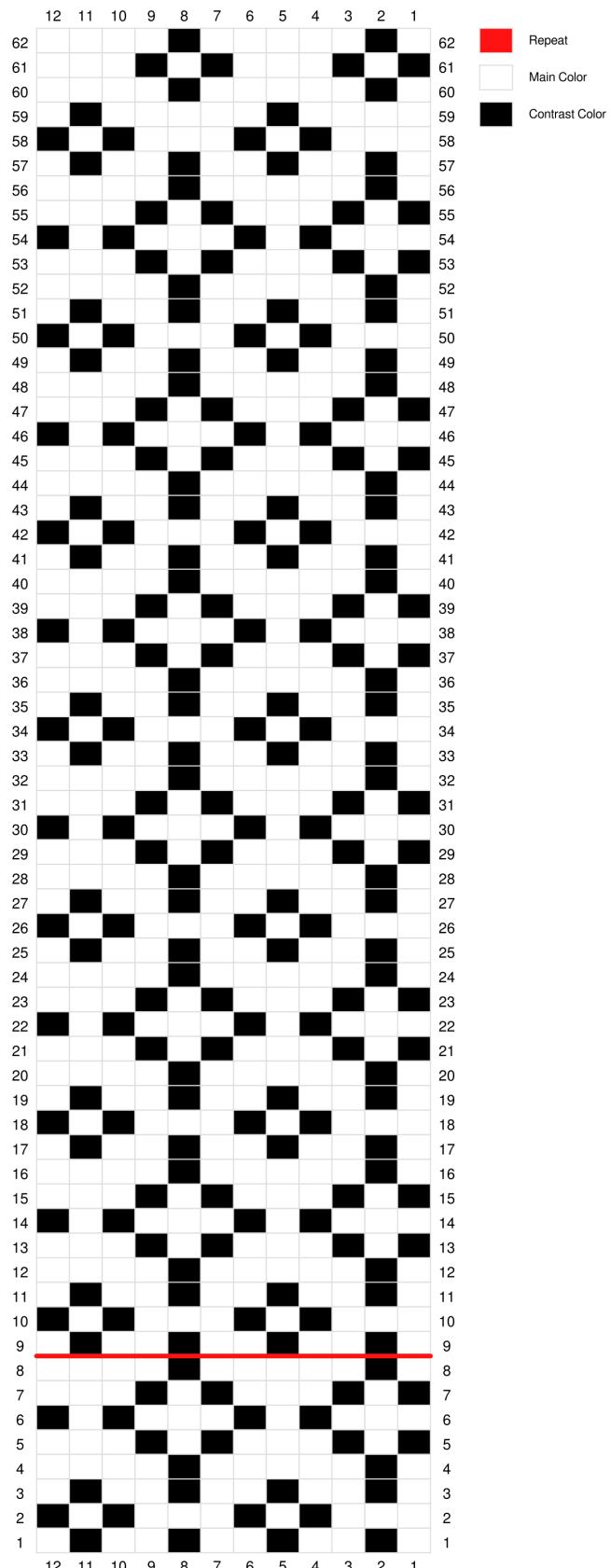
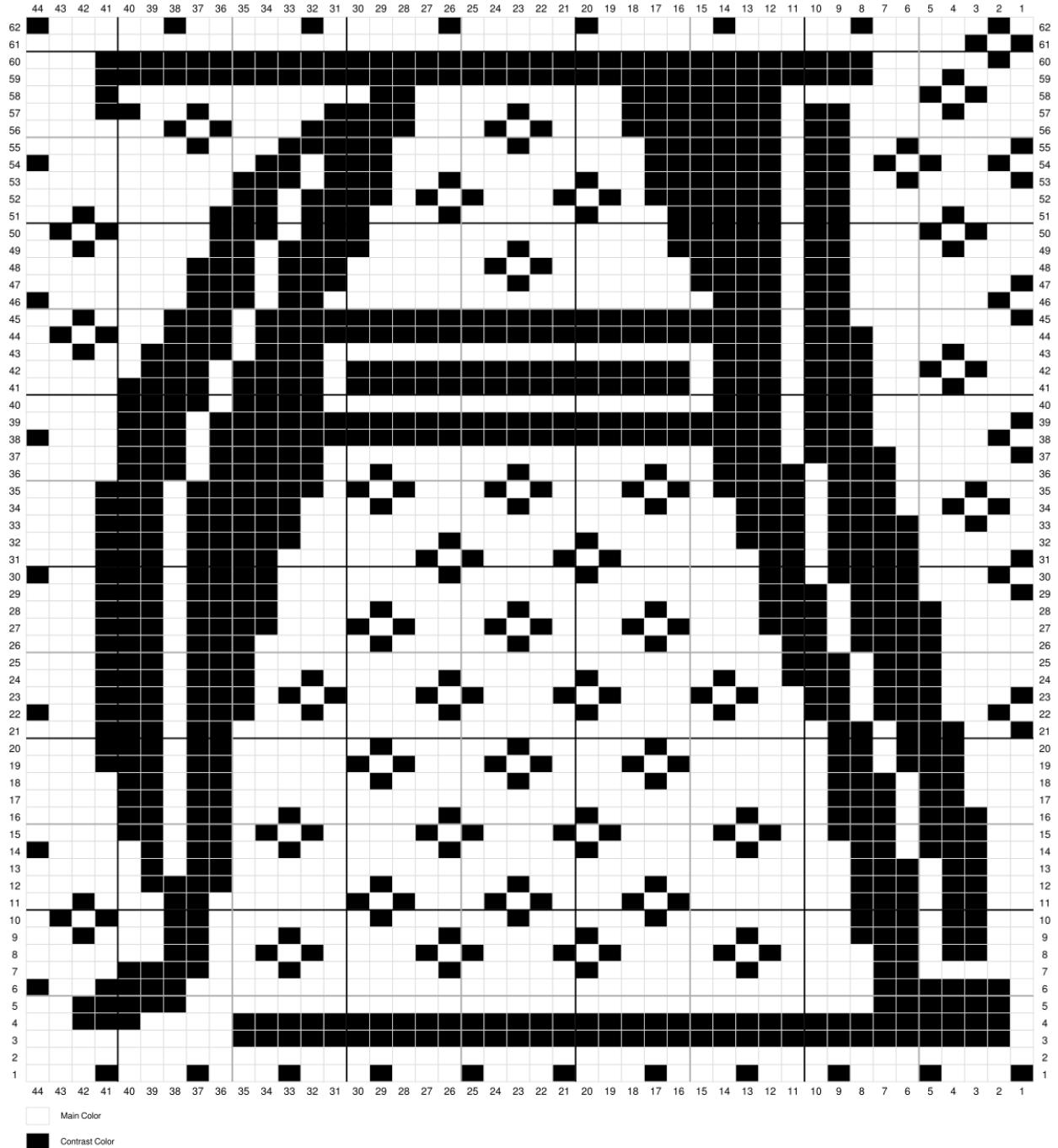
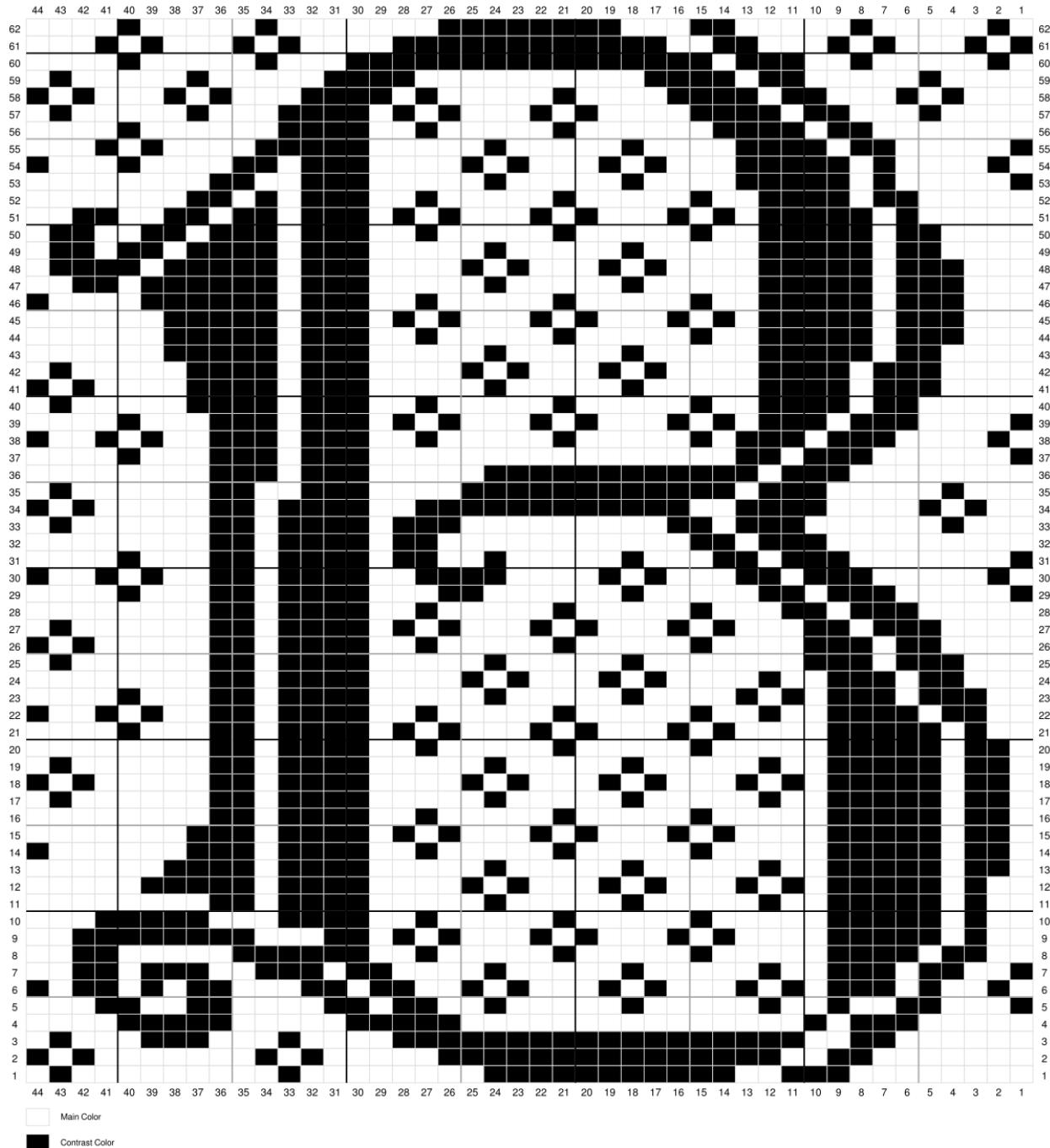


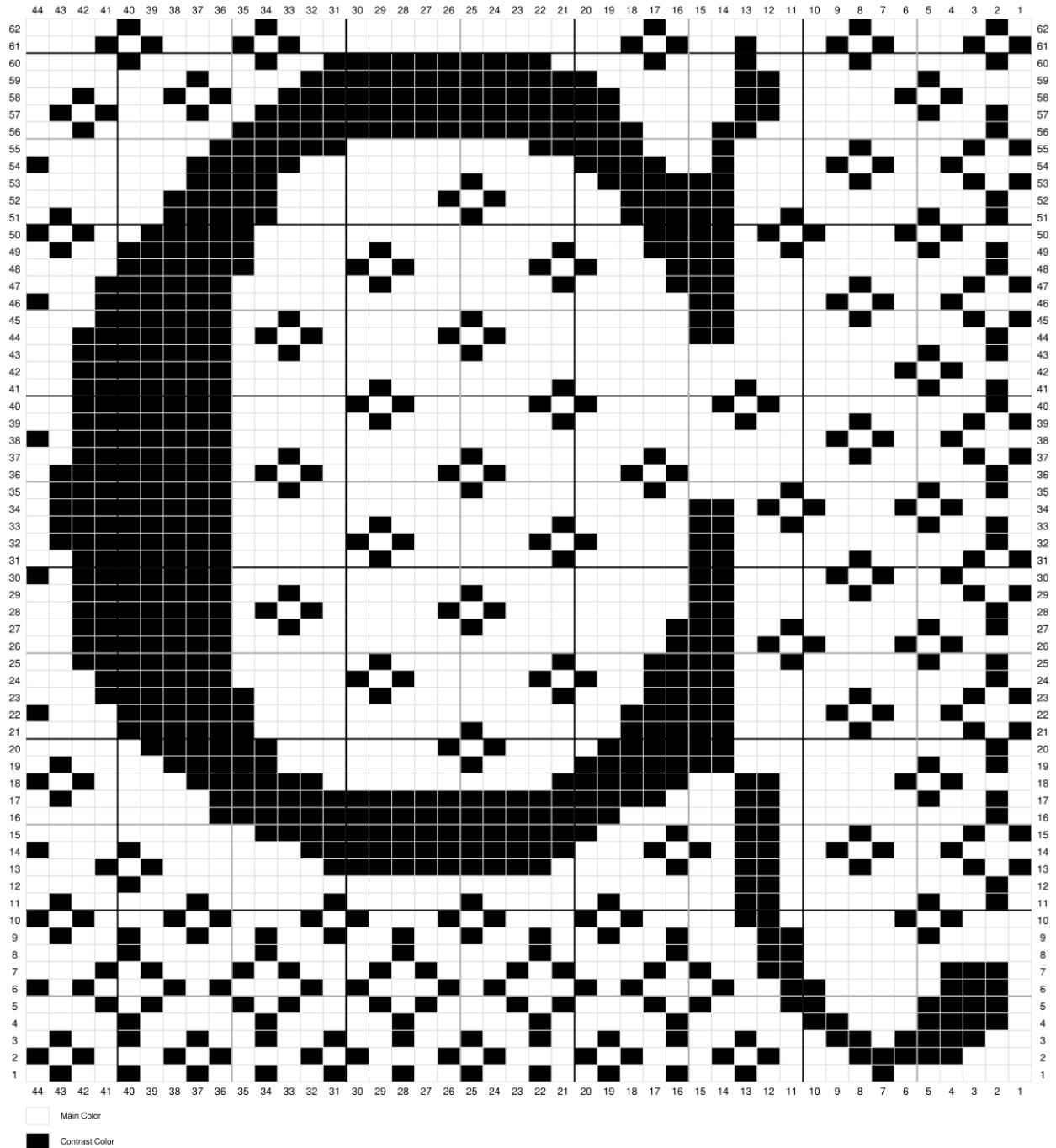
Chart A

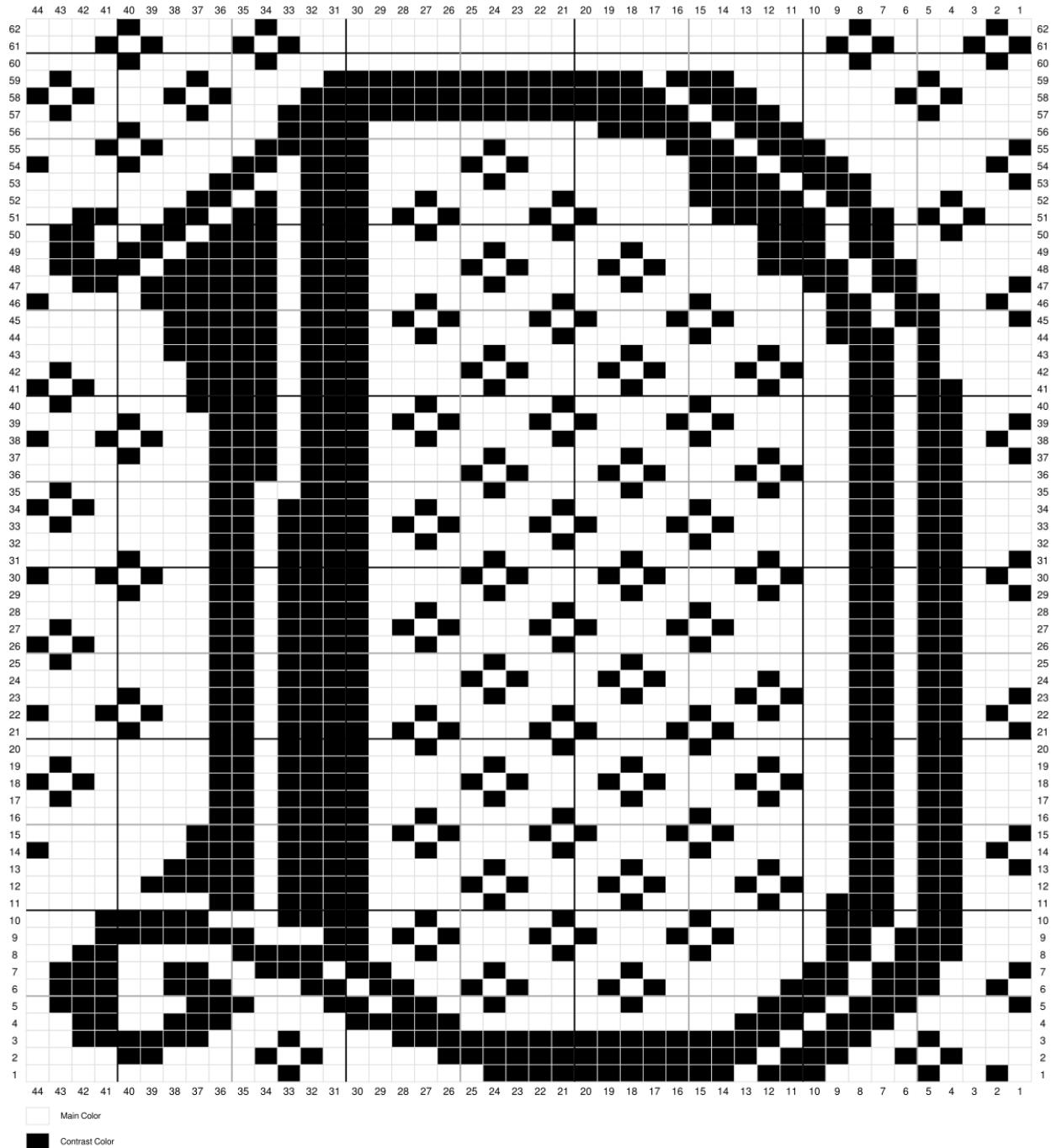


Initial Chart: A

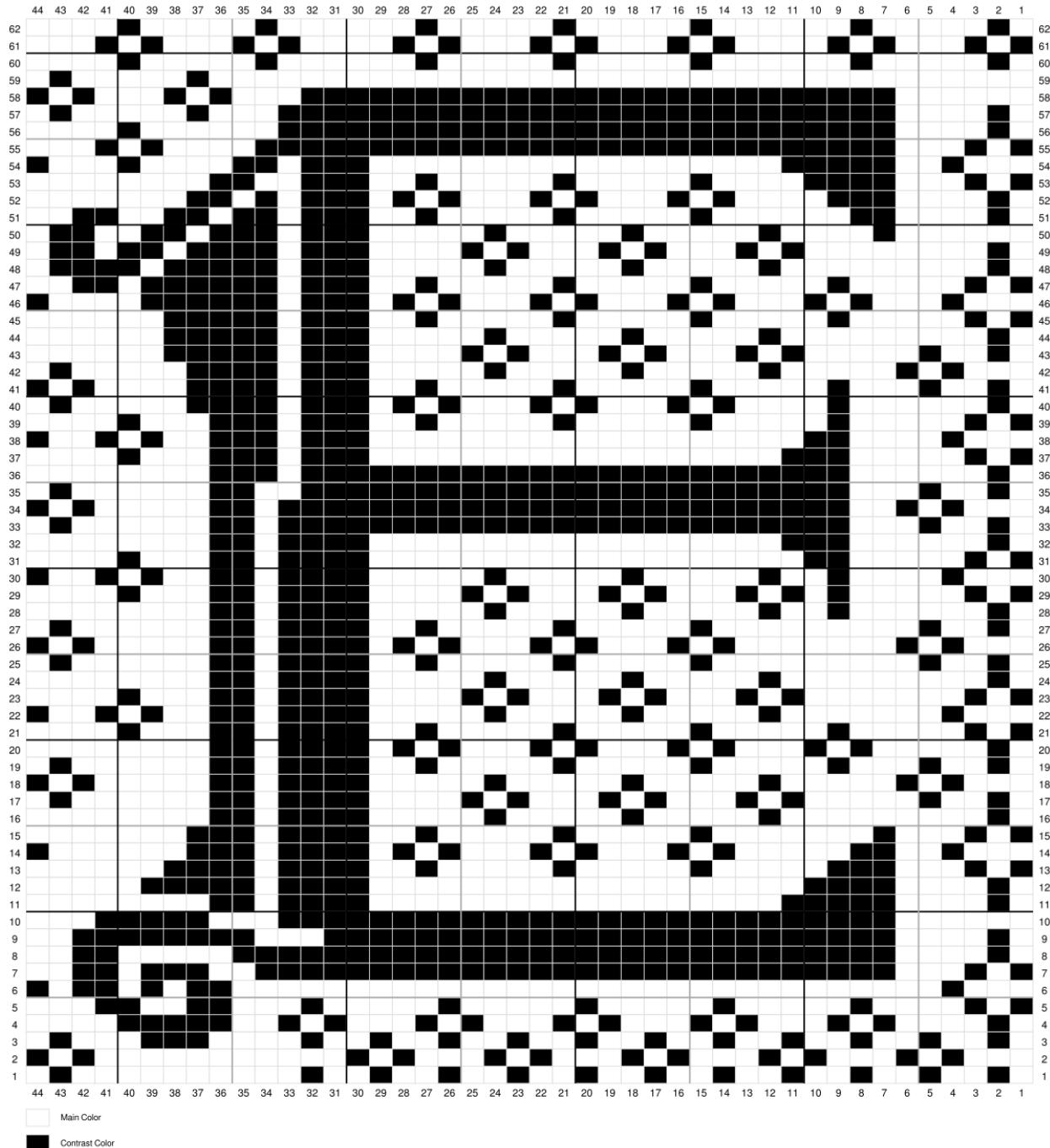


Initial Chart: B

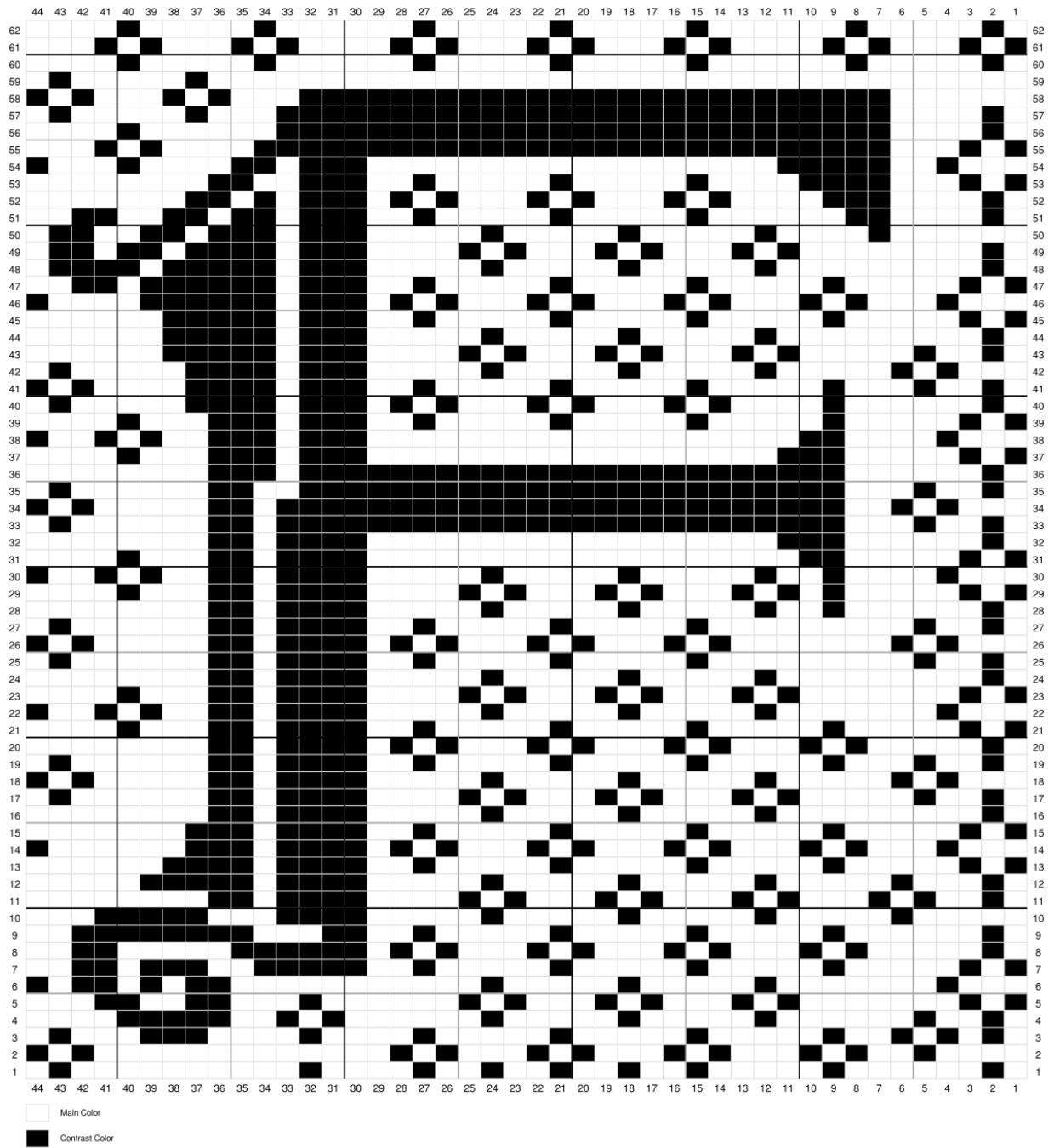




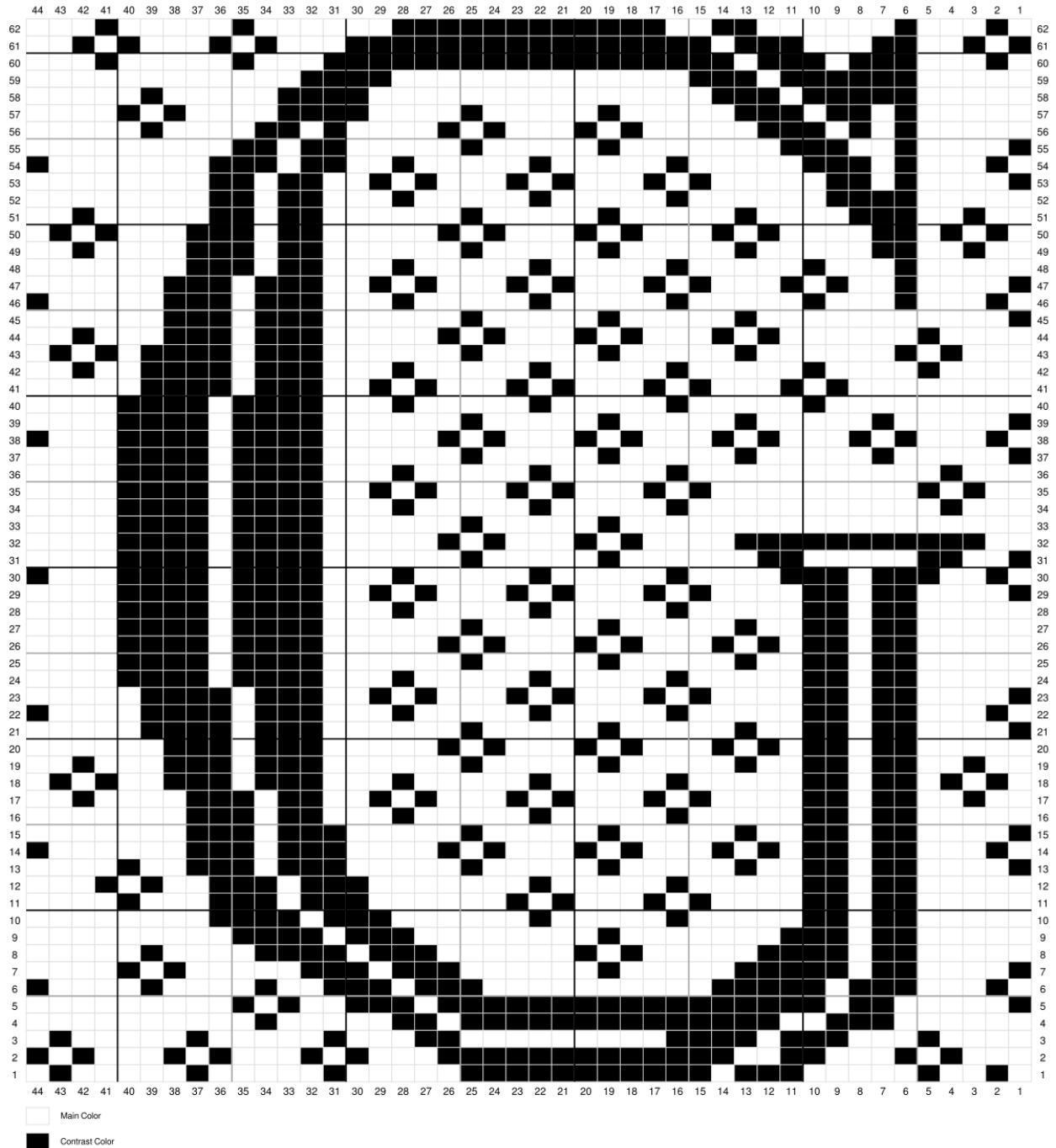
Initial Chart: D



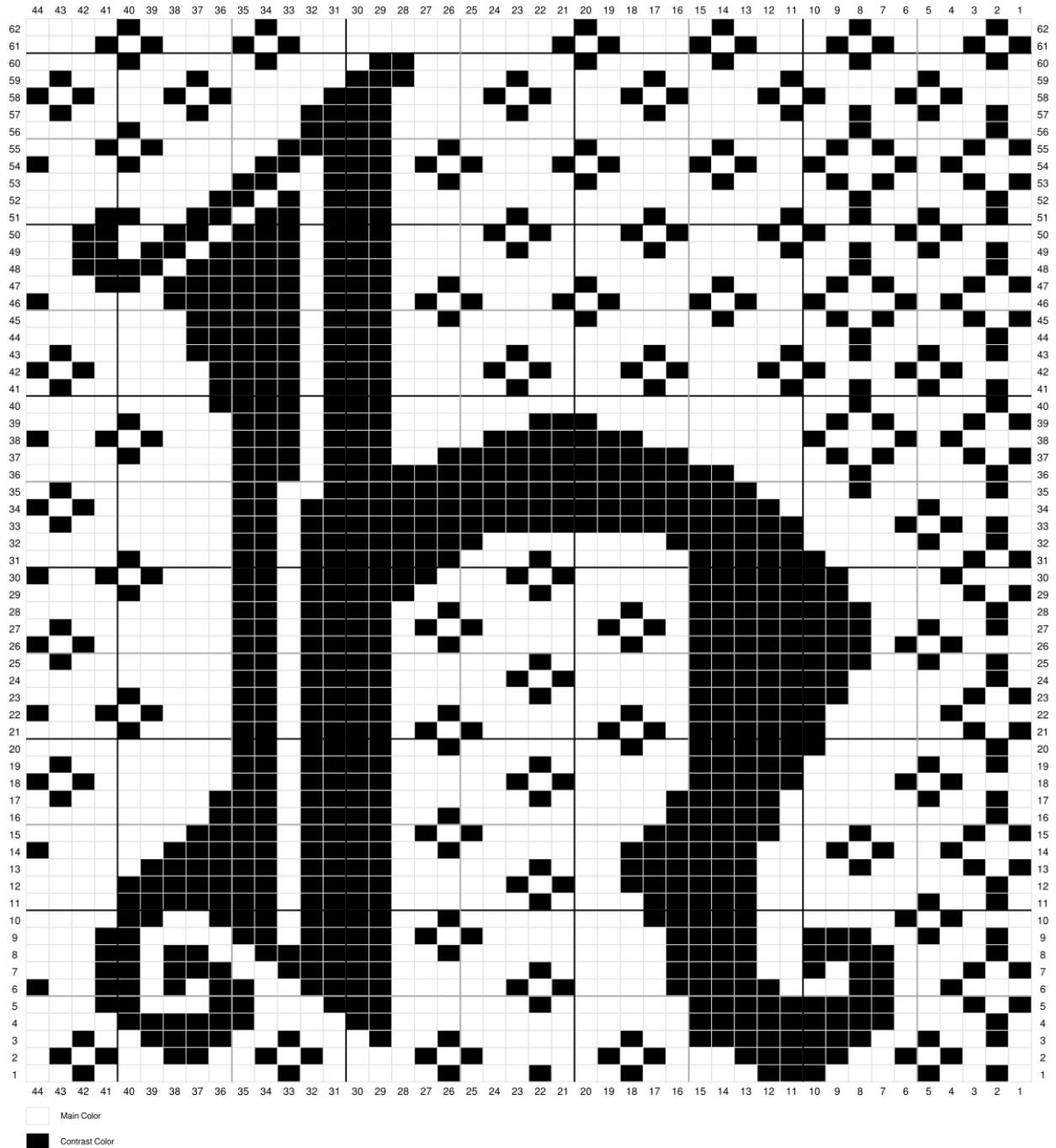
Initial Chart: E



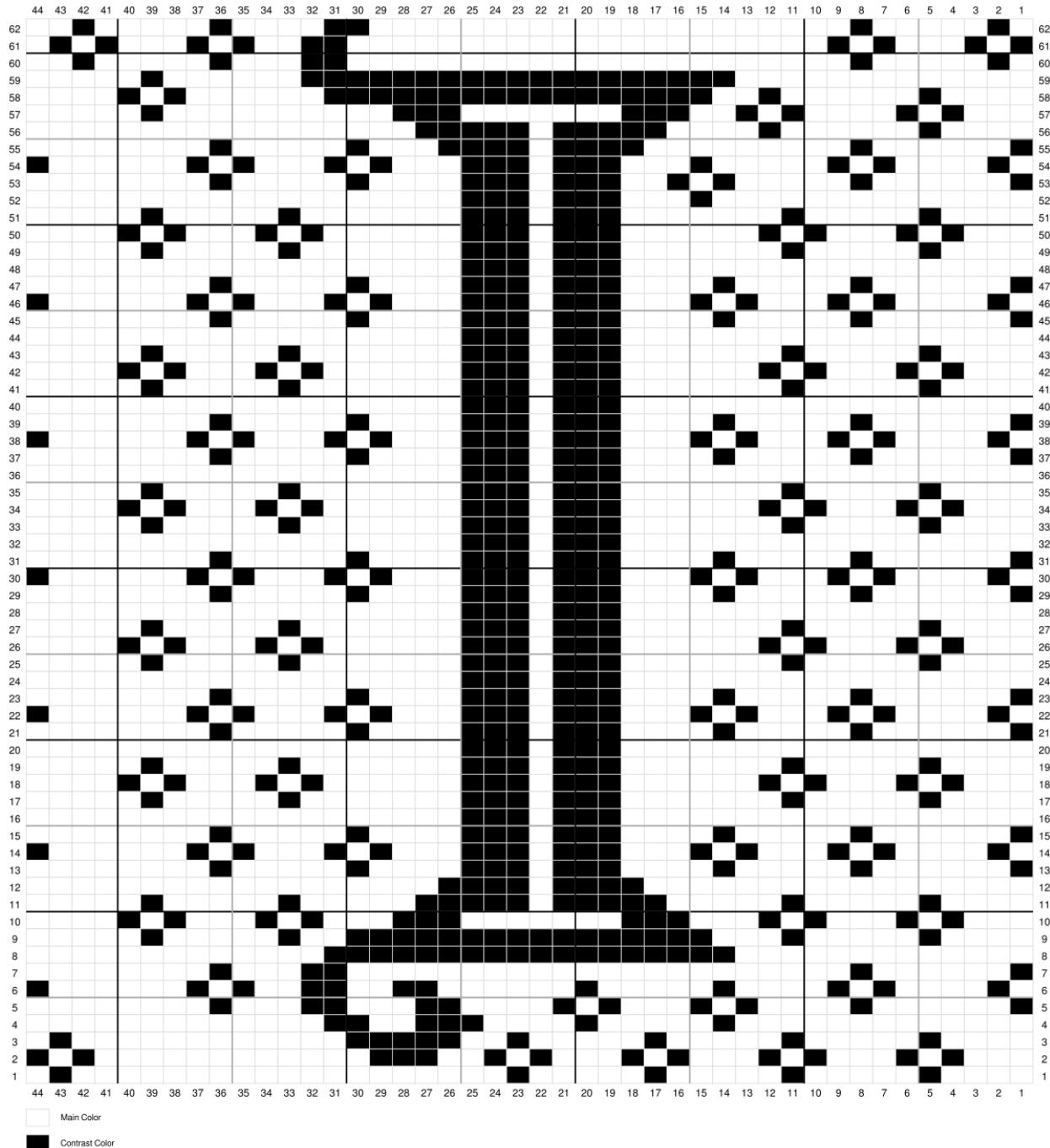
Initial Chart: F



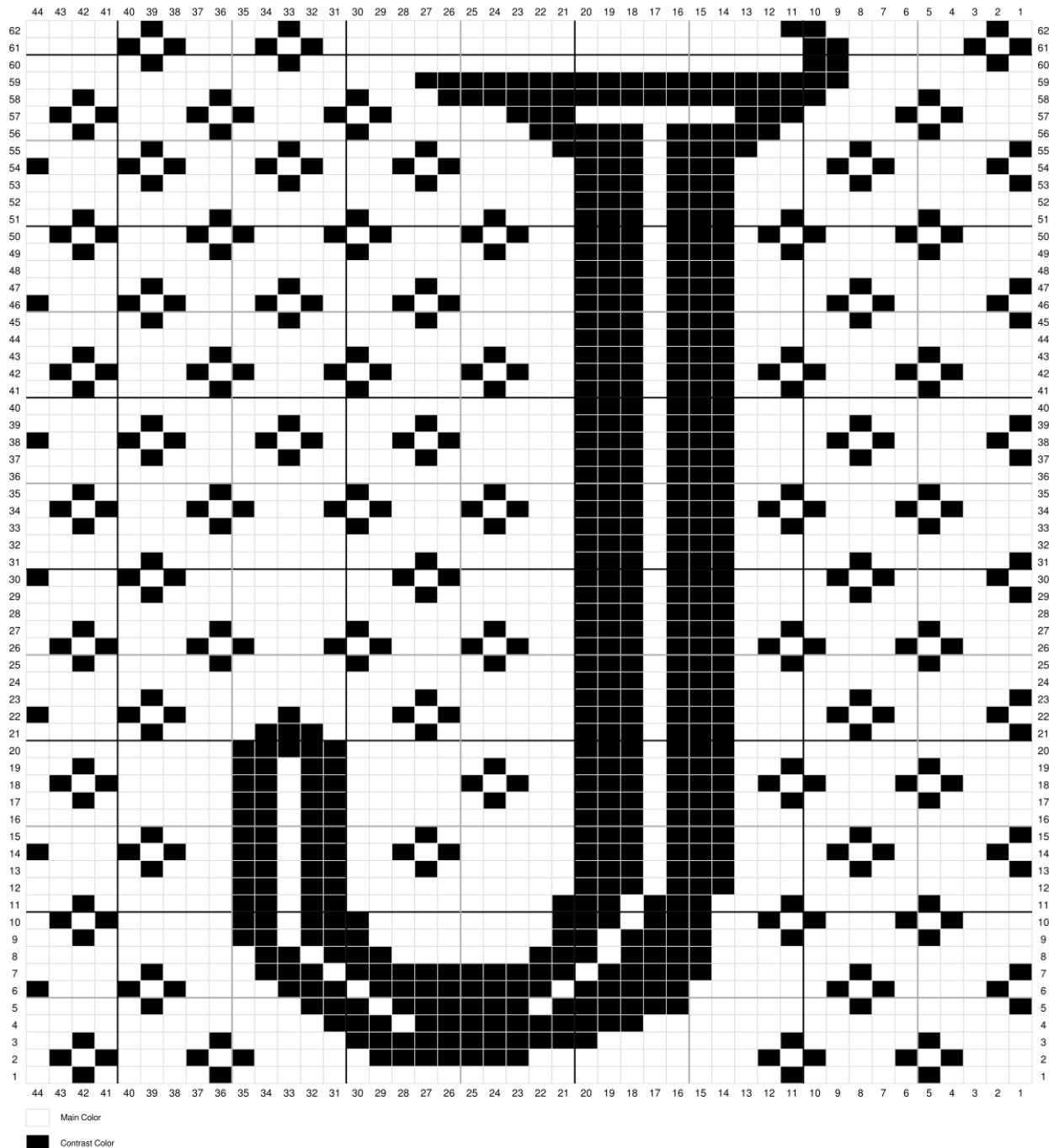
Initial Chart: G



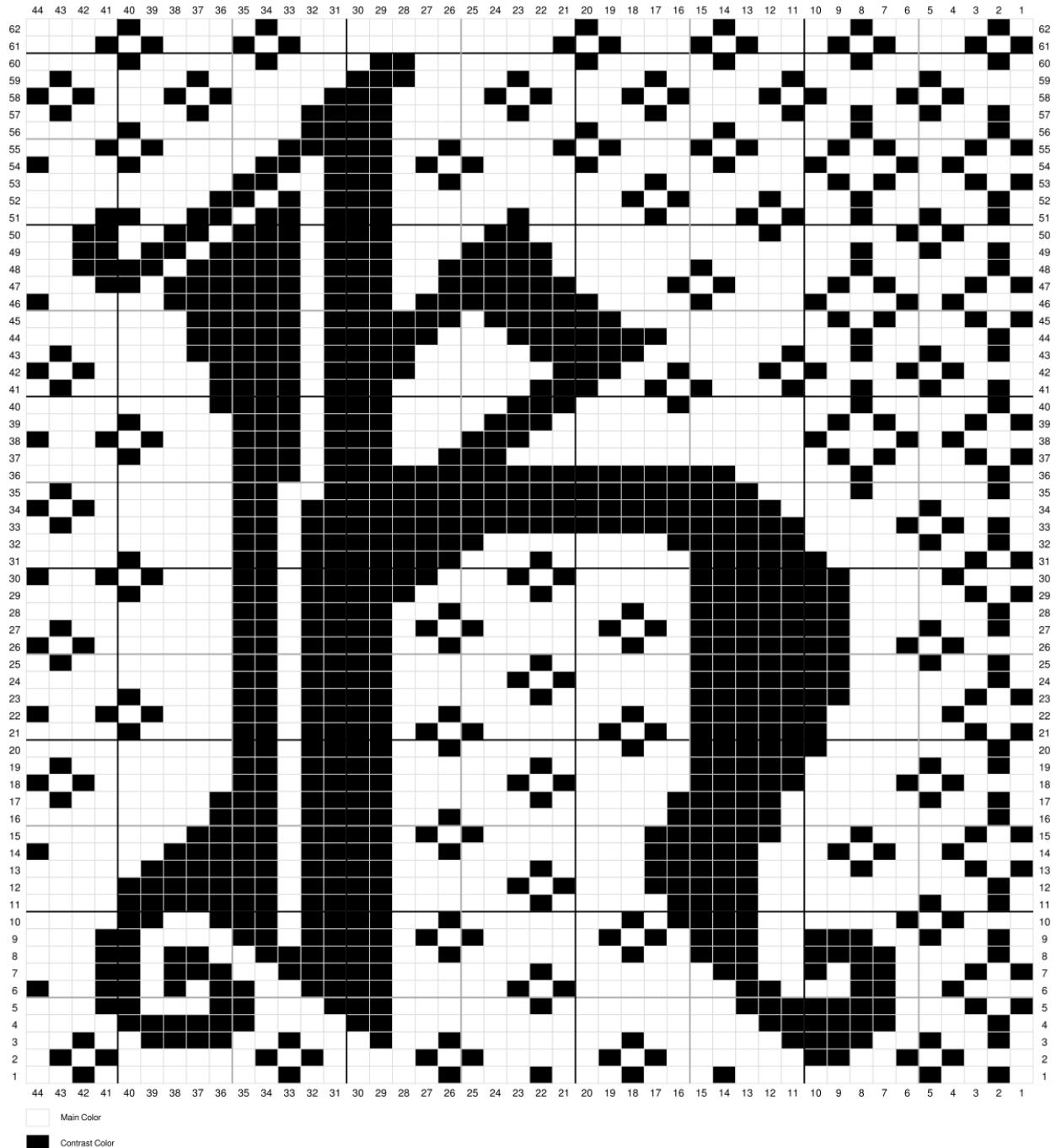
Initial Chart: H

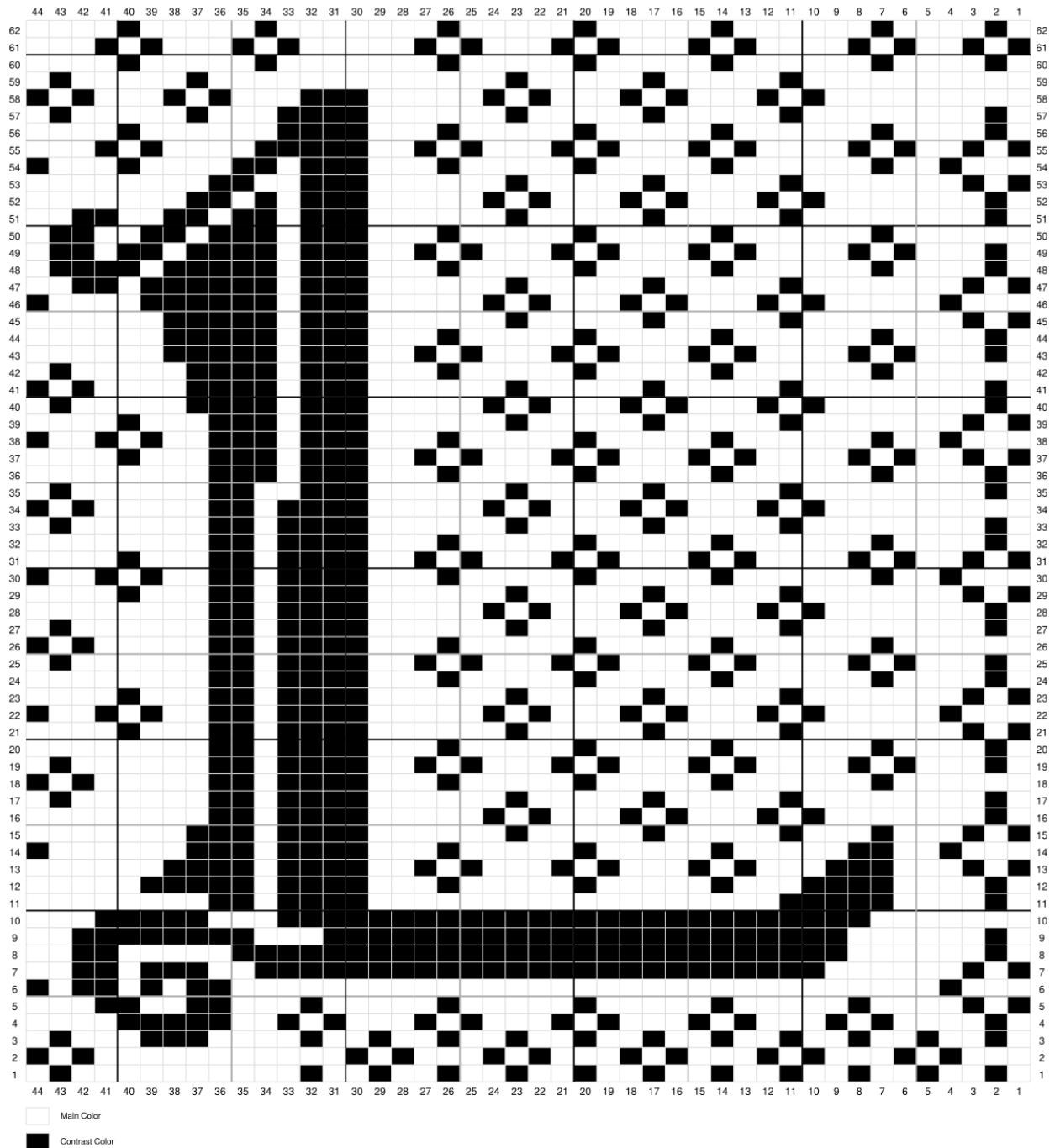


Initial Chart: I

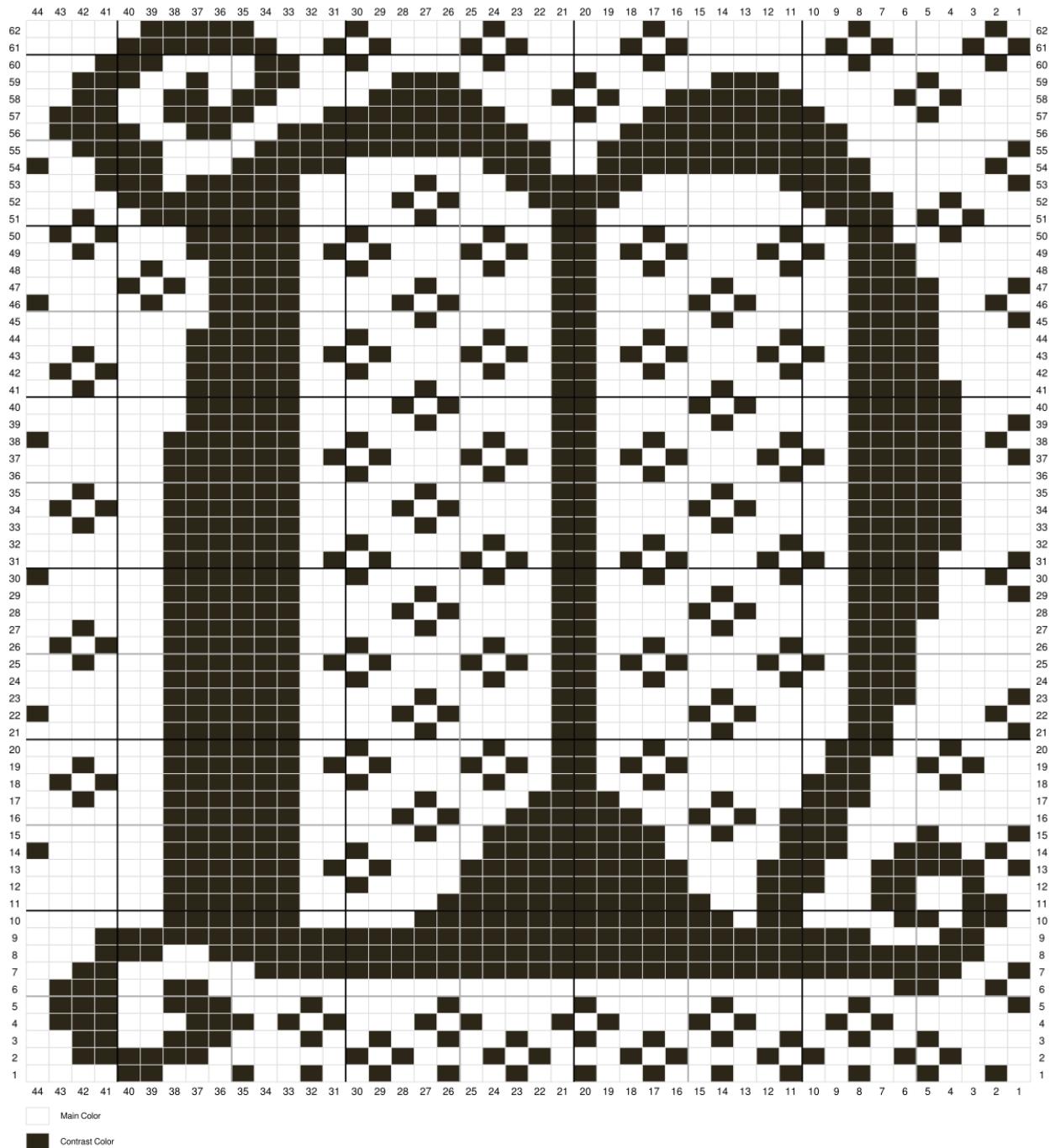


Initial Chart: J

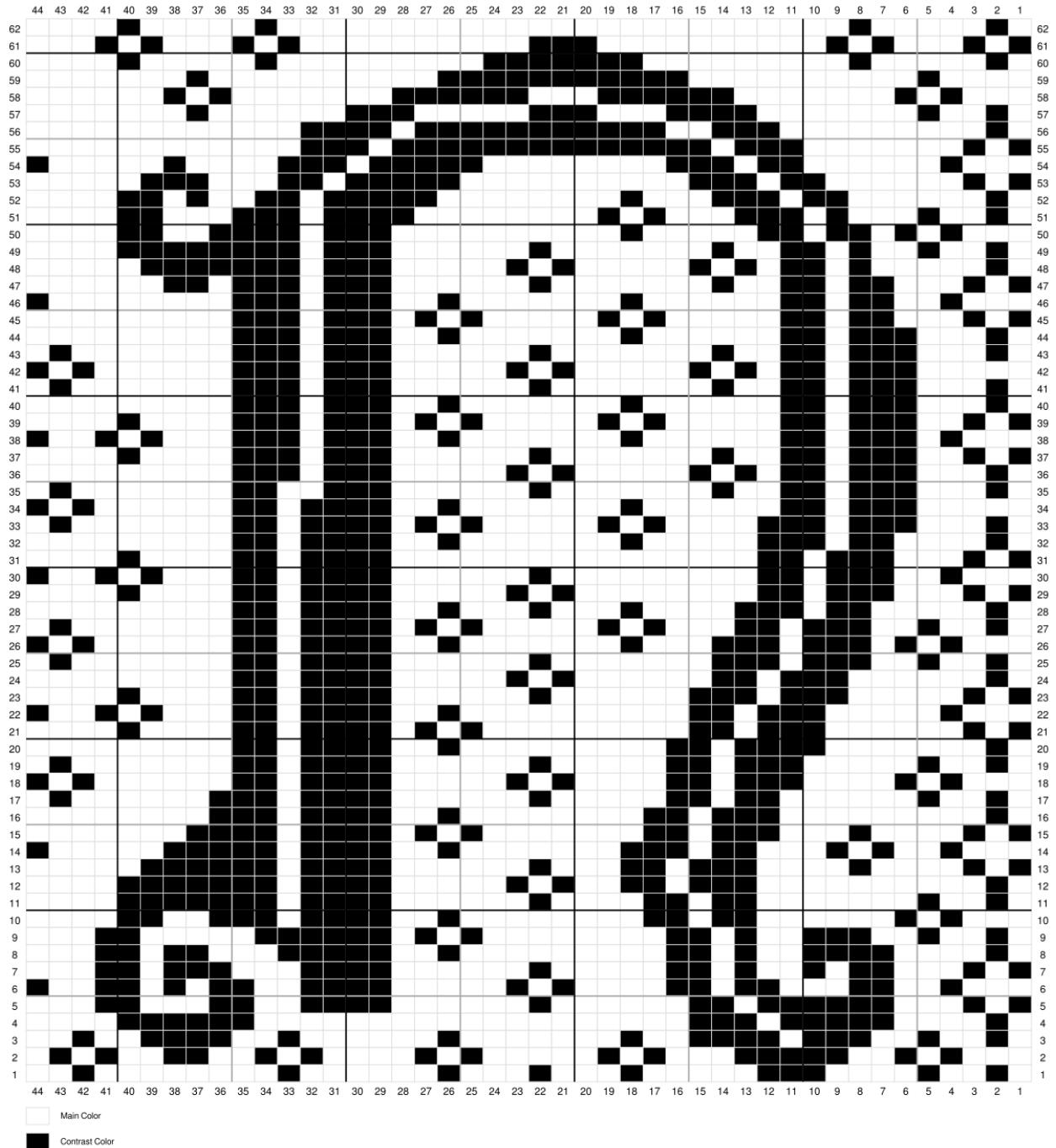




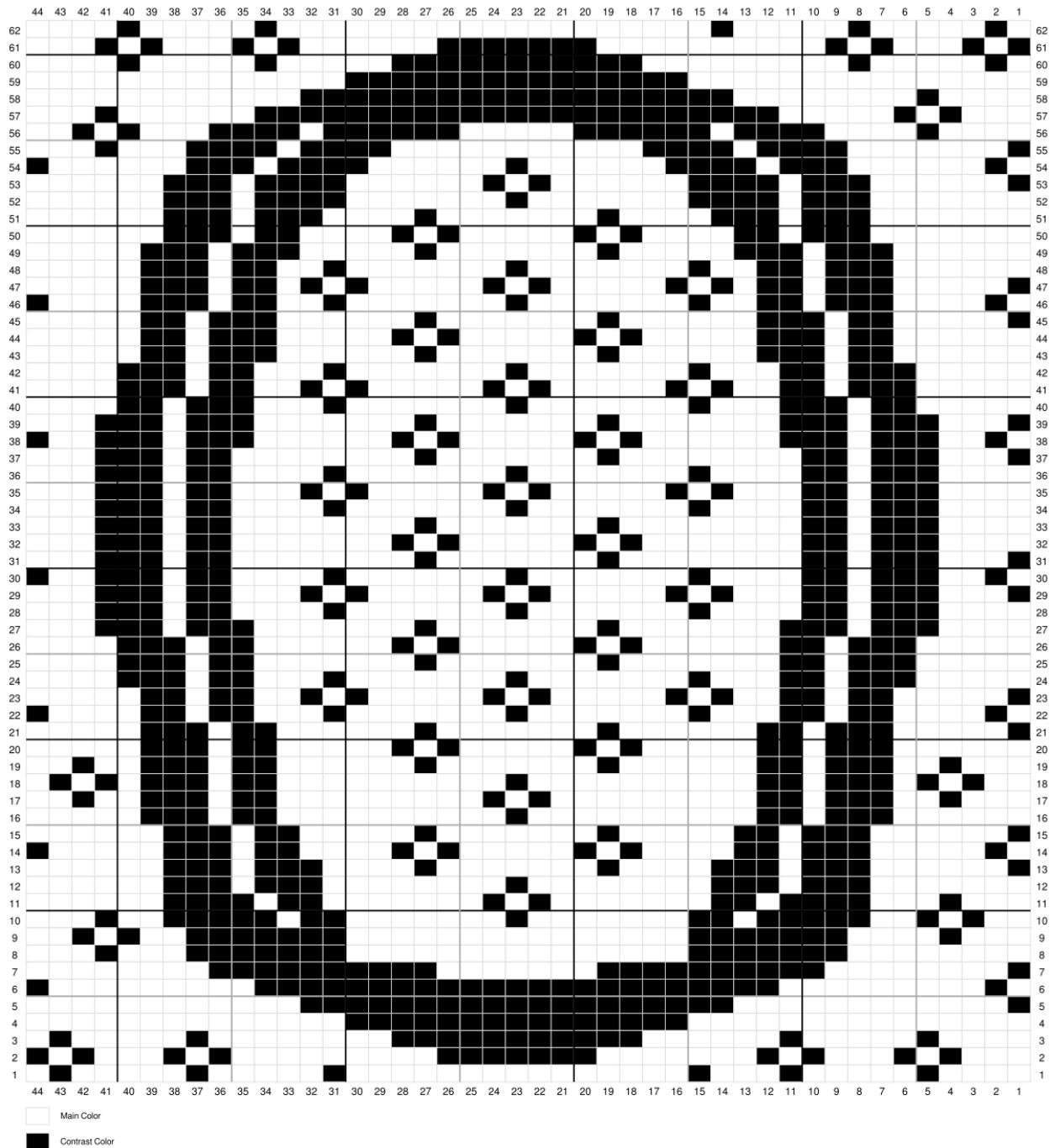
Initial Chart: L



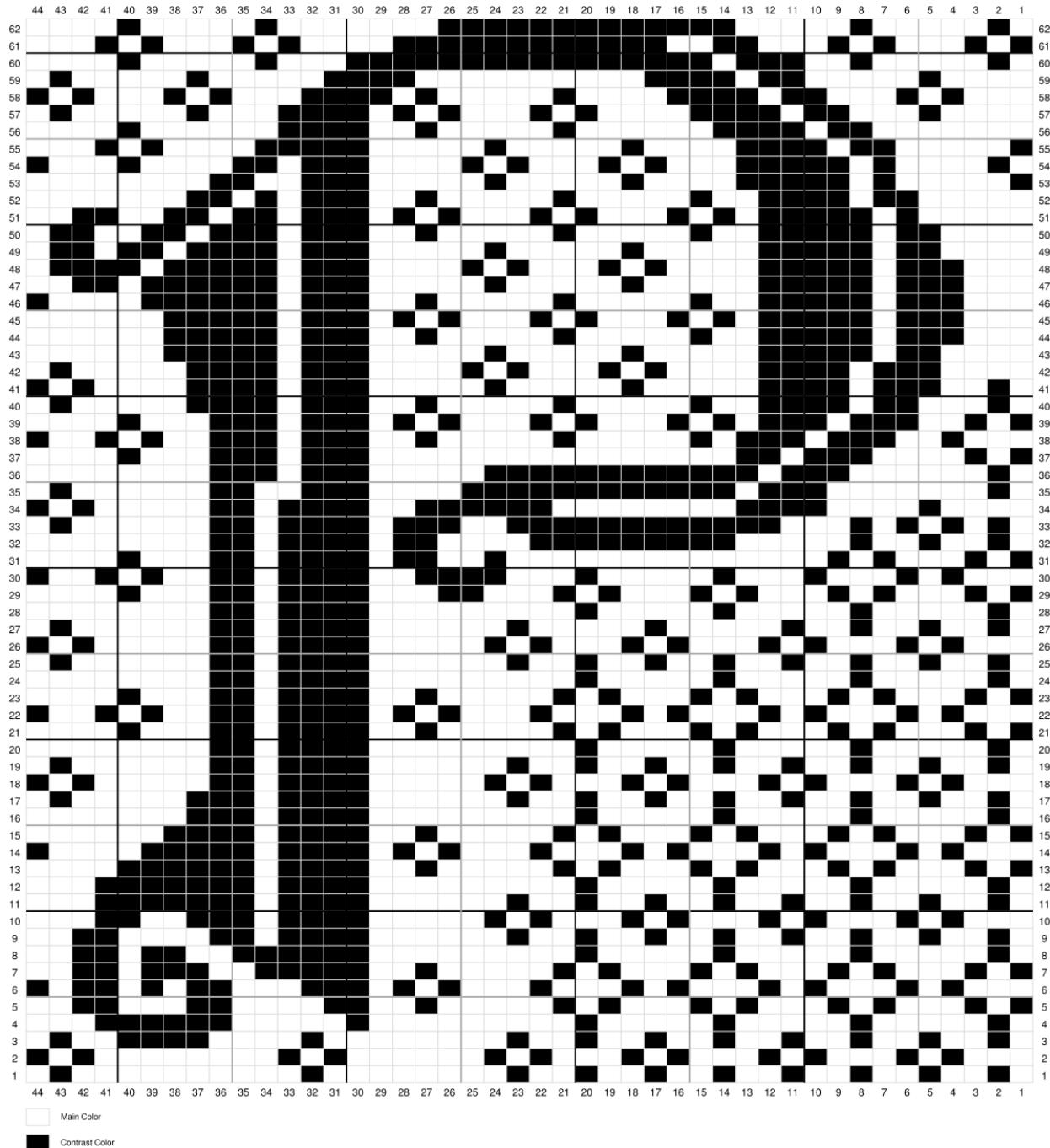
Initial Chart: M



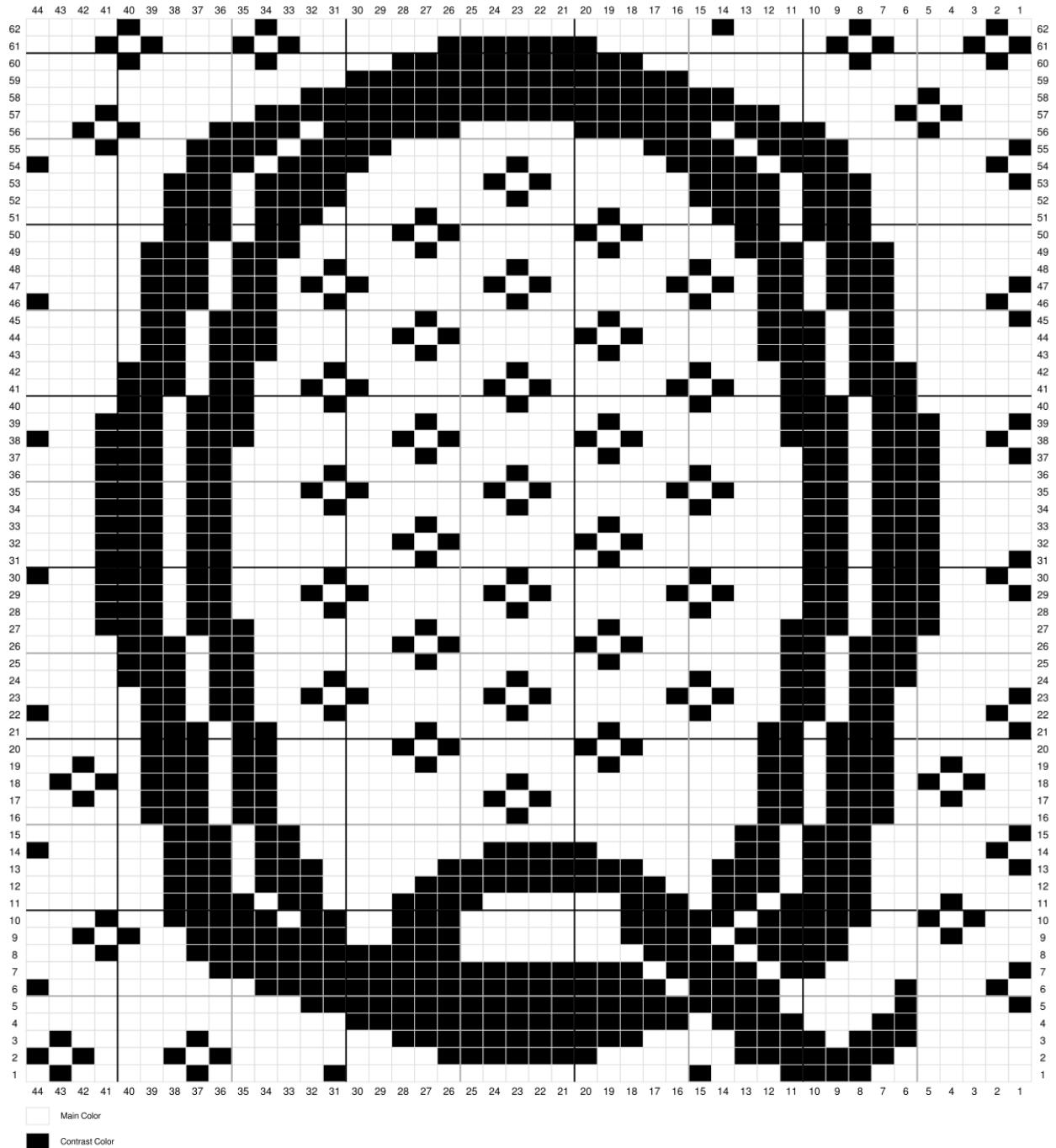
Initial Chart: N



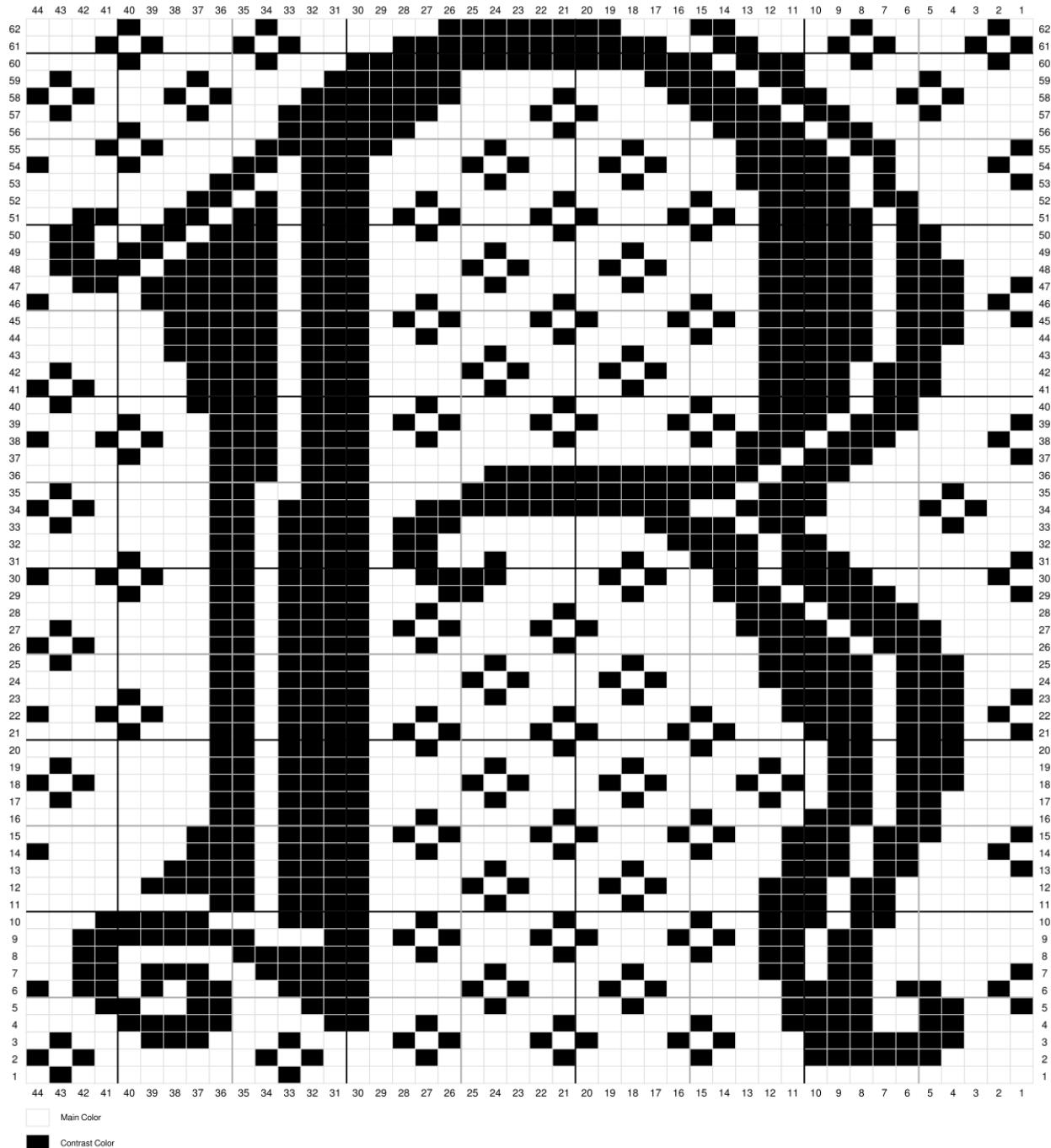
Initial Chart: O



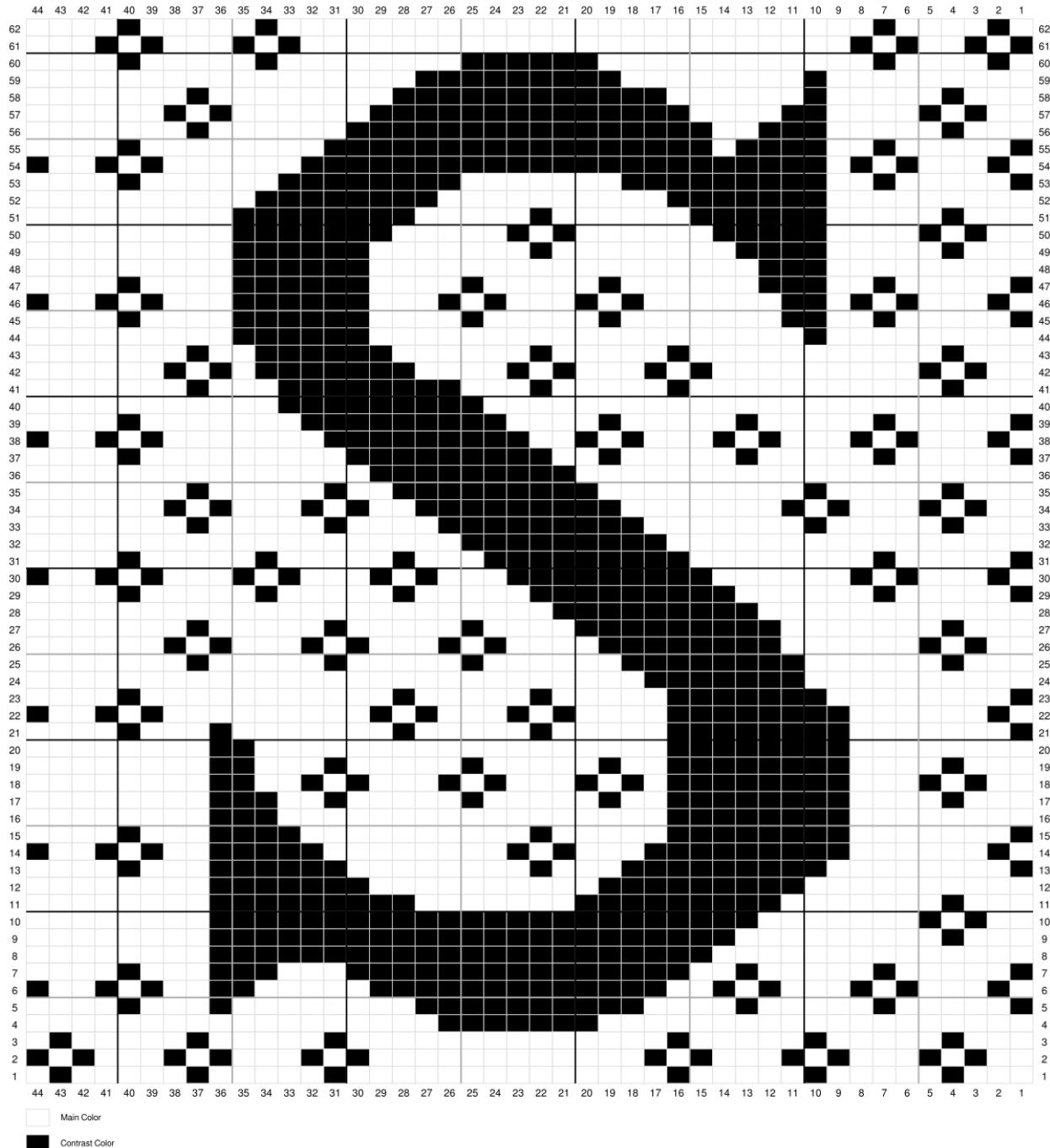
Initial Chart: P



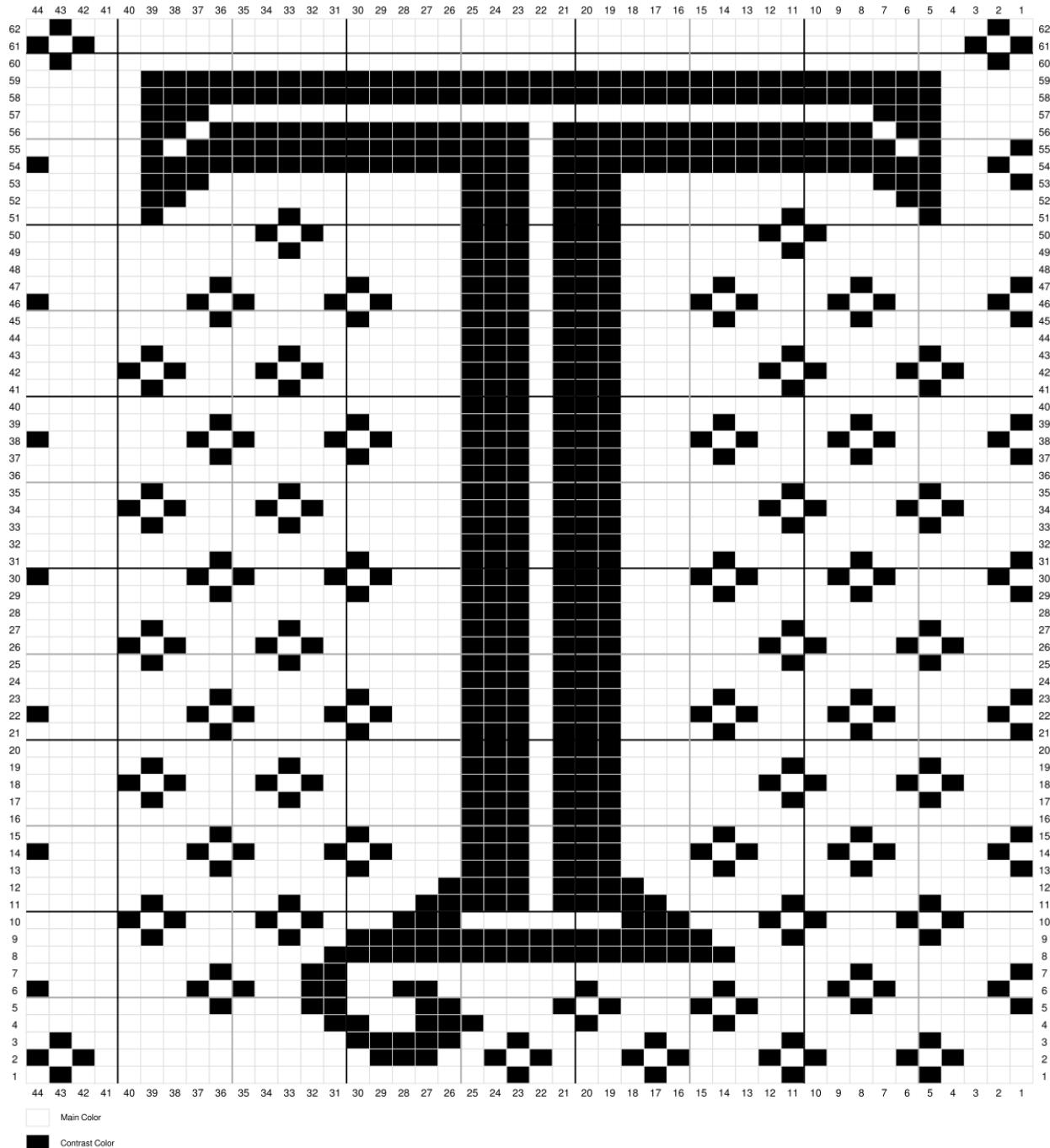
Initial Chart: Q



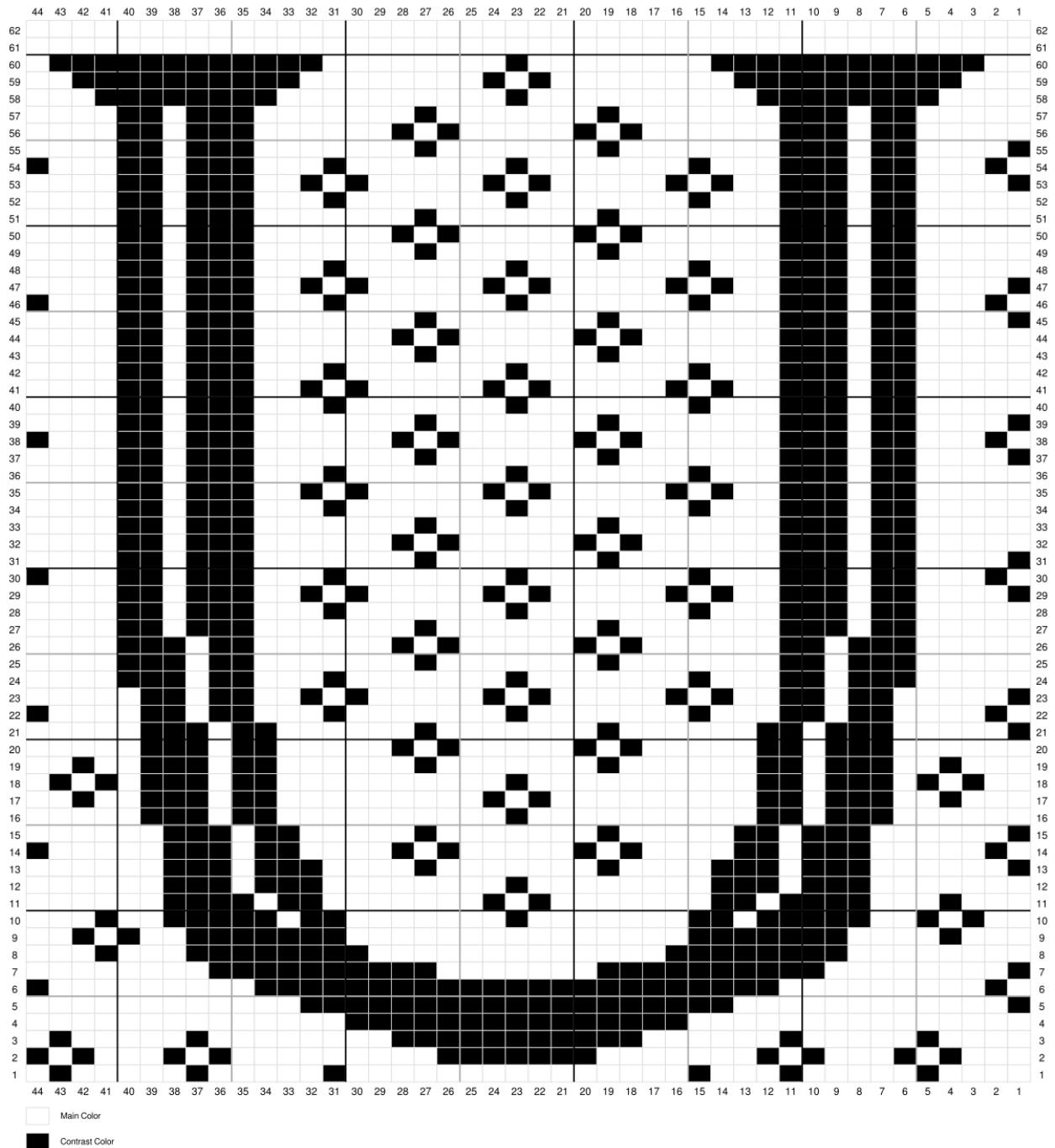
Initial Chart: R



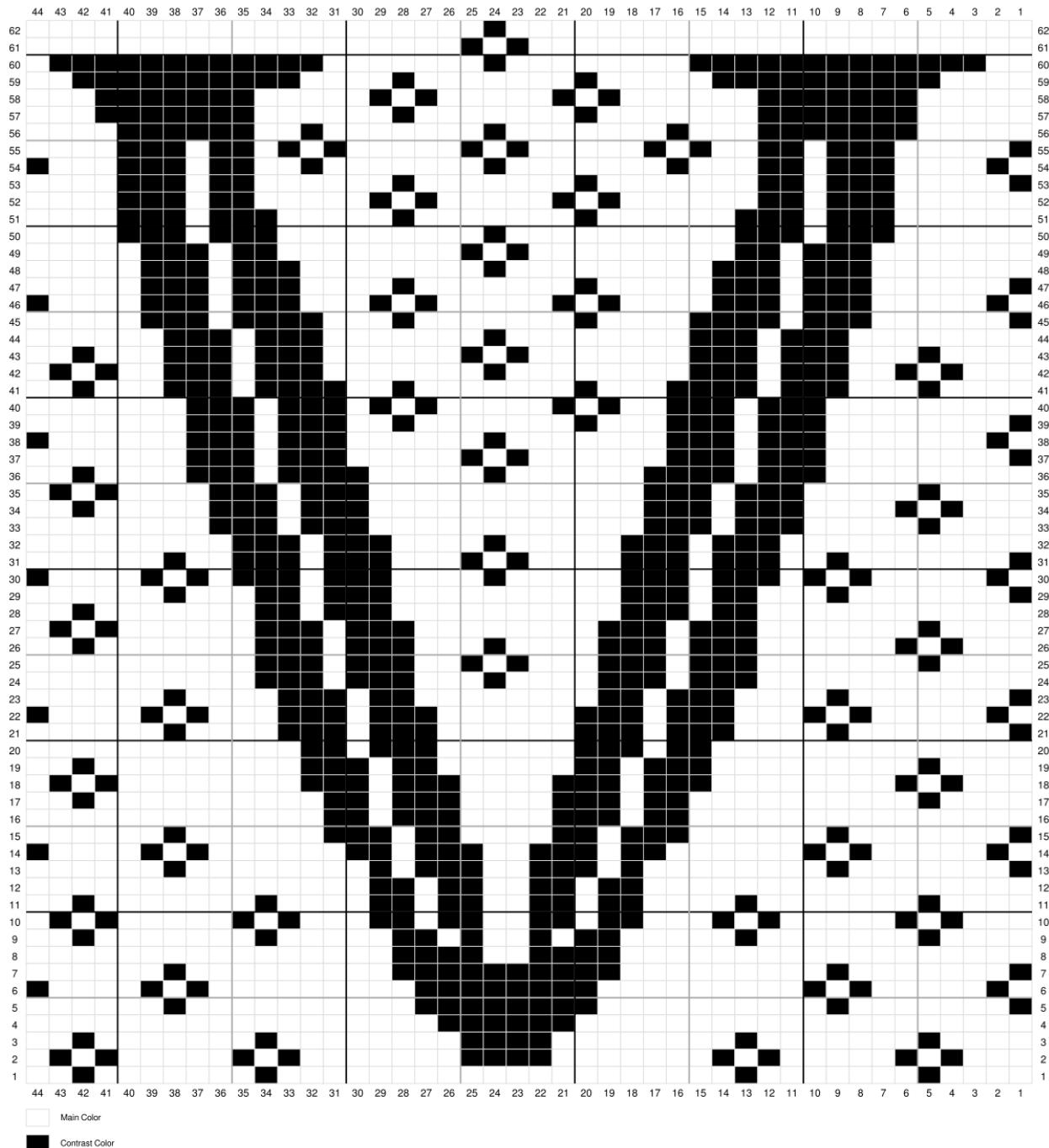
Initial Chart: S

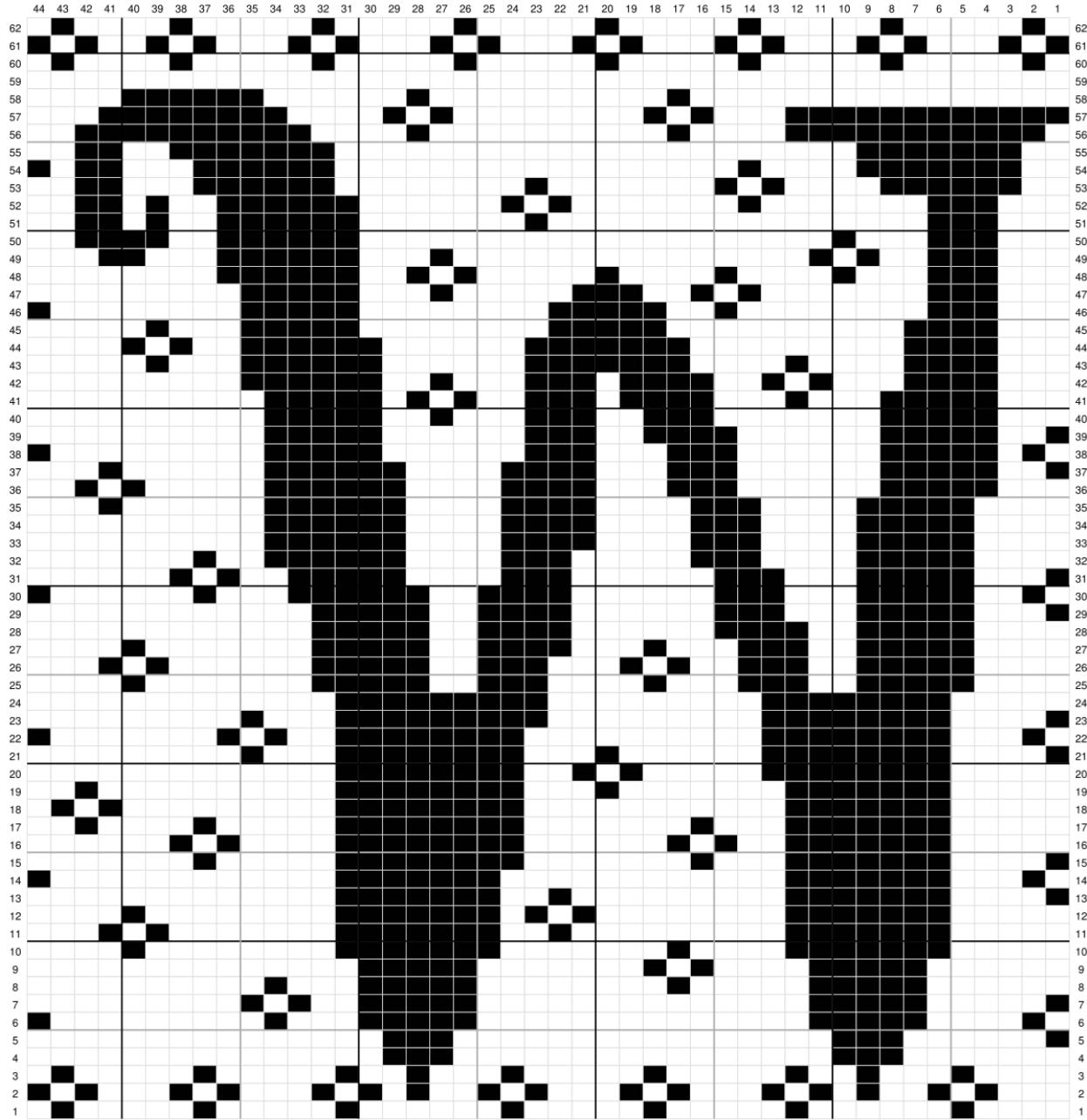


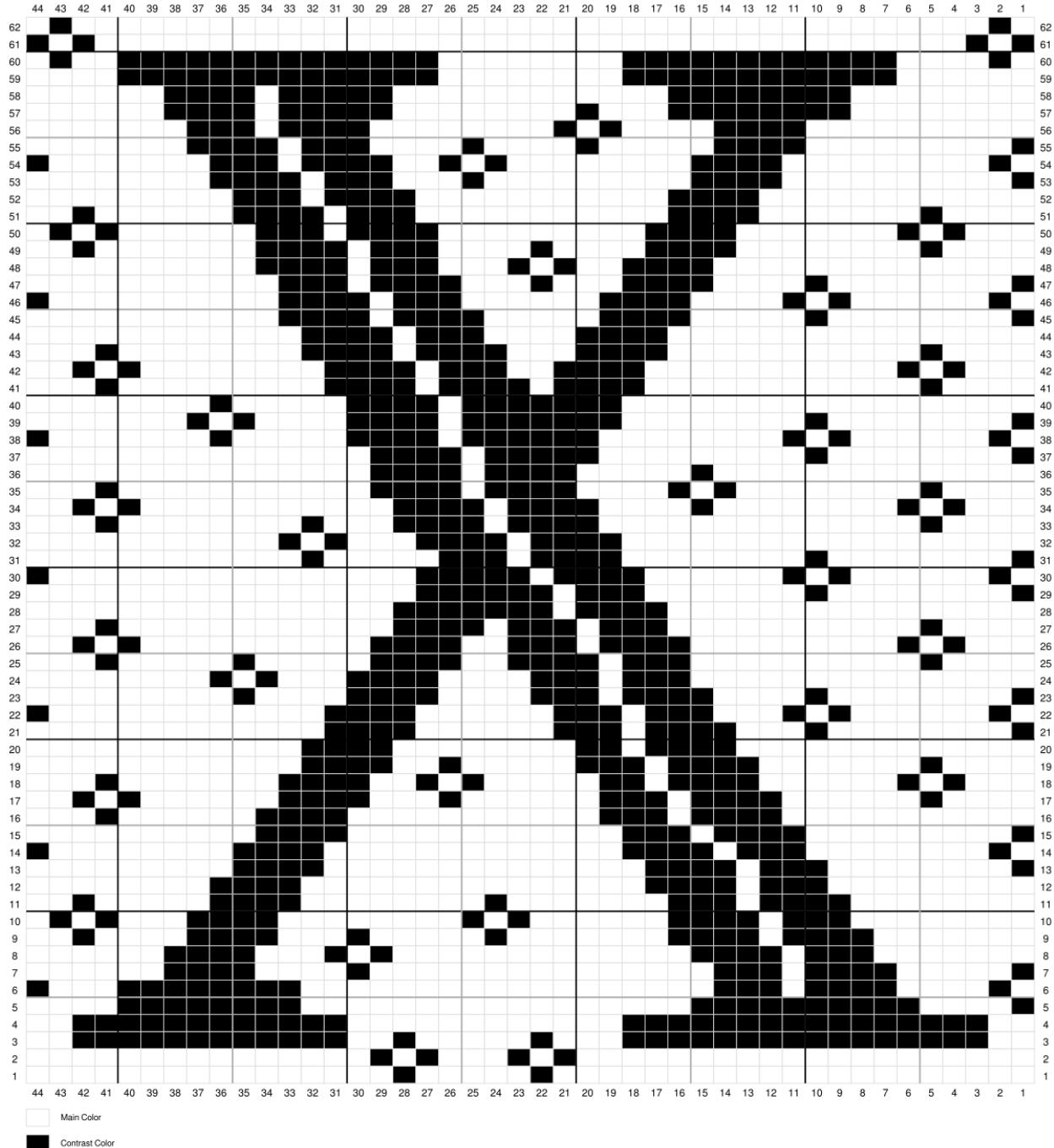
Initial Chart: T

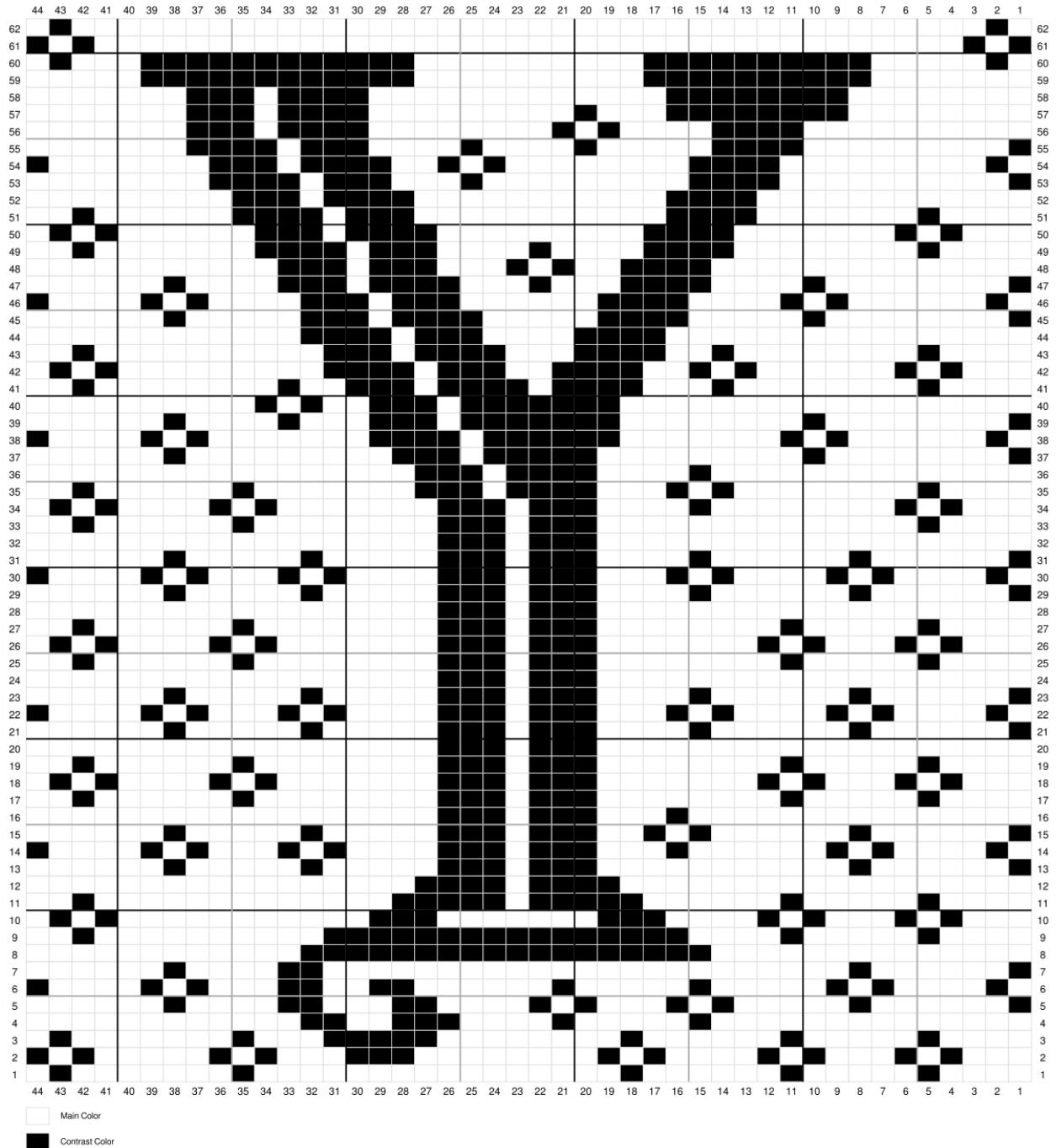


Initial Chart: U









Initial Chart: Y

