

Pattern and Decoration

Ornament as Promise

February 23 to September 08, 2019



Introduction

Ornament as promise. This could have been a motto for the Pattern and Decoration movement in the USA (1975–1985). This exhibition, with its reference to Adolf Loos's assertion concerning “ornament and crime,” presents Peter and Irene Ludwig's rich collection of works from this movement, in the largest presentation of Pattern and Decoration in German-speaking Europe since the 1980s. With oriental-style mosaics, monumental textile collages, paintings, installations, and performances, artists associated with this movement aimed in the 1970s to bring color, formal diversity, and emotion back into art. Decoration played a key role, as did the techniques of artisanship associated with it. Various ornamental traditions, from the Islamic world to Native American art to Art Deco, were incorporated in their works, opening up a view beyond geographical and historical boundaries. A proximity to folk art and kitsch was welcomed as a deliberate counter to the “purism” of the art of the 1960s.

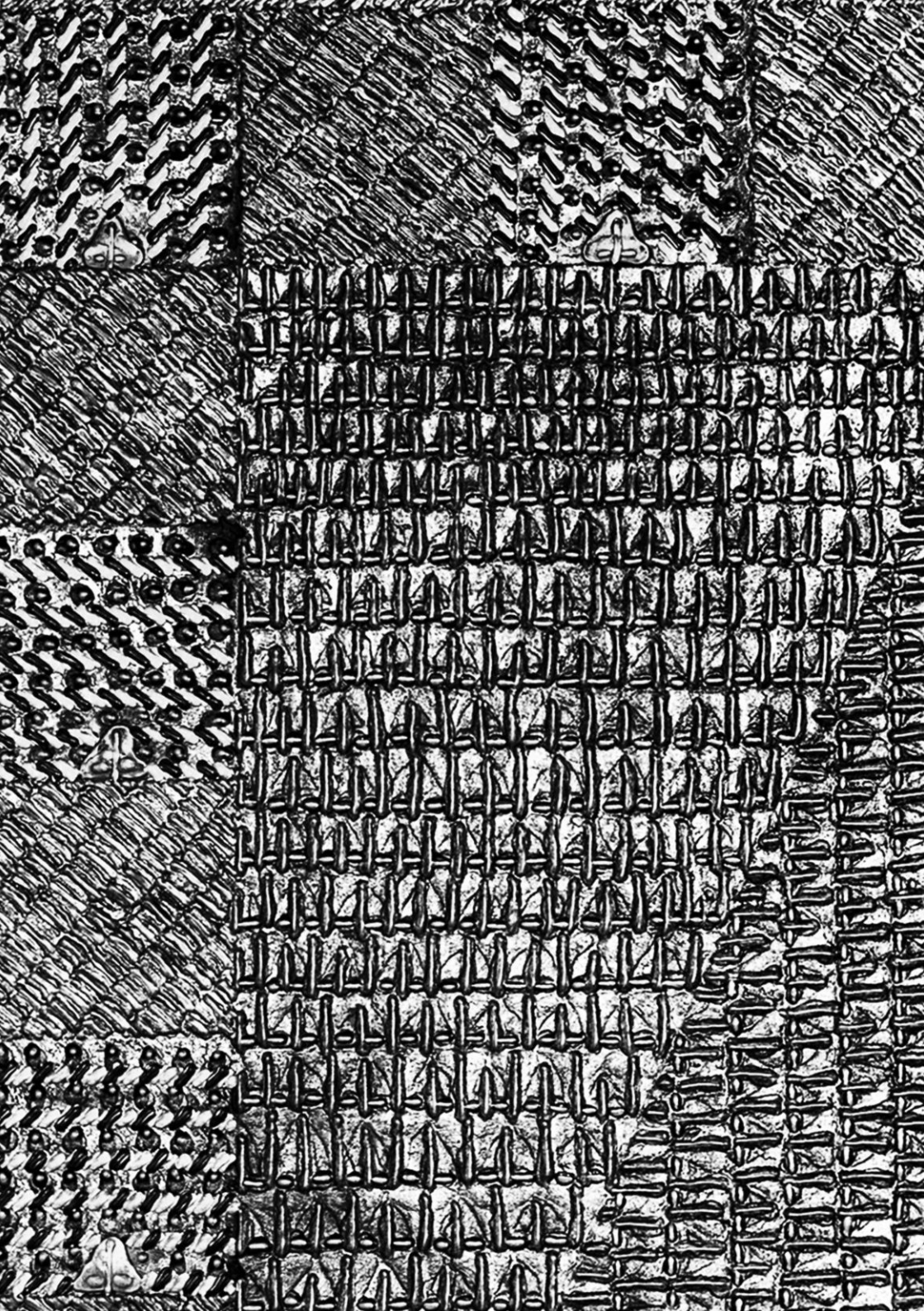
Pattern and Decoration can be seen as a paradigmatic art movement of the 1970s—that hard-to-define decade of social and economic upheaval in which the sociopolitical utopias of the 1960s came up against the first signs of a burgeoning neoliberalism. American art historian Hal Foster criticized the art of the 1970s as “promiscuous.” After the “purist” endeavors of the 1960s, and especially of Minimal Art, he felt that the art of the 1970s lacked both a clear style and critical awareness. But Pattern and Decoration was a very deliberately “promiscuous” movement. The result of debate and discussion between artists who knew each other as friends and acquaintances, and the critic Amy Goldin, it was perhaps the last true art movement of the twentieth century, and the first that engaged with diverse decorative traditions from a truly global perspective. The egalitarian, collective, and very pragmatic dimensions that Goldin saw as the defining features of decorative art are all key to Pattern and Decoration's approach and goal—to celebrate as loudly as possible anything that was conventionally seen as “low” art, including works by women, crafts, and folk art.

In 1908 Austrian architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) published his notoriously polemic work *Ornament and Crime*, in which he reacted to Vienna Art Deco by declaring decoration a criminal act. Loos saw the absence of decoration as a sign of a highly evolved culture, while the use of decoration was a “crime against the national economy.” “Ornament as Promise” reverses Loos's polemic in line with the goals of the Pattern and Decoration movement. While Loos's position advocates “high art” in unmistakably misogynist and colonialist tones, Pattern and Decoration represents a search for alternatives to the values of the Western industrial nations—for different gender relations and cultural identities, and not least for a new concept of art.



Brad Davis

A course in Chinese painting that Brad Davis took while studying at Hunter College in New York in the late 1960s left a lasting impression on him. It was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with Asian art—from motifs to compositional principles to the brushstroke—which would also be shared by other artists in the Pattern and Decoration movement. Around 1975—the year Pattern and Decoration first took shape—Davis was inspired by the teachings of the Indian yogi Muktananda to turn to the depiction of plants and landscapes. The installation *The Garden*, which Davis realized at the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1977 in collaboration with the sculptor Ned Smyth, is a prime example, featuring paintings that simulate views of several (Oriental) gardens. Starting in the late 1970s, animal motifs—dogs, birds, monkeys—took on greater importance for Davis, who framed them with strikingly patterned polyester fabrics, sometimes with a double border. A trip to India and an enduring absorption in Persian and Indian miniatures are notable influences. The artist also drew on Indian mythology, in which animals often symbolize human character traits. Davis's stylized portrayal of two dogs in *Shiva's Dogs I* (1979), for example, refers to the Hindu god Shiva and his four-legged companions, which stand among other things for territorial attitudes—undesirable in Hinduism—and for (self-) protection. An occasional splash of red echoing the decorative floral border can be seen in Davis's image, while the dogs are rendered with such elegant lines as to be arabesques themselves, embedded in a pictorial space that is not so much illusionistic as ornamental. Davis's interest in painterly depictions of movement and flow in an emphatically planar pictorial space is particularly apparent in the motif of water found in many of his images, for example in *Night Cry* (1979), where it becomes an iridescent matrix. The “omnidirectional” tondo form, which the artist used especially from the 1980s onwards to depict, for example, the change of seasons or times of day (*All Seasons*, 1980), is also part of this program. Characteristic of all phases of Davis's work, along with his gestural style and dynamic picture surfaces, is a profusion of color that lends an artificial or dream-like quality even to his representations of nature.



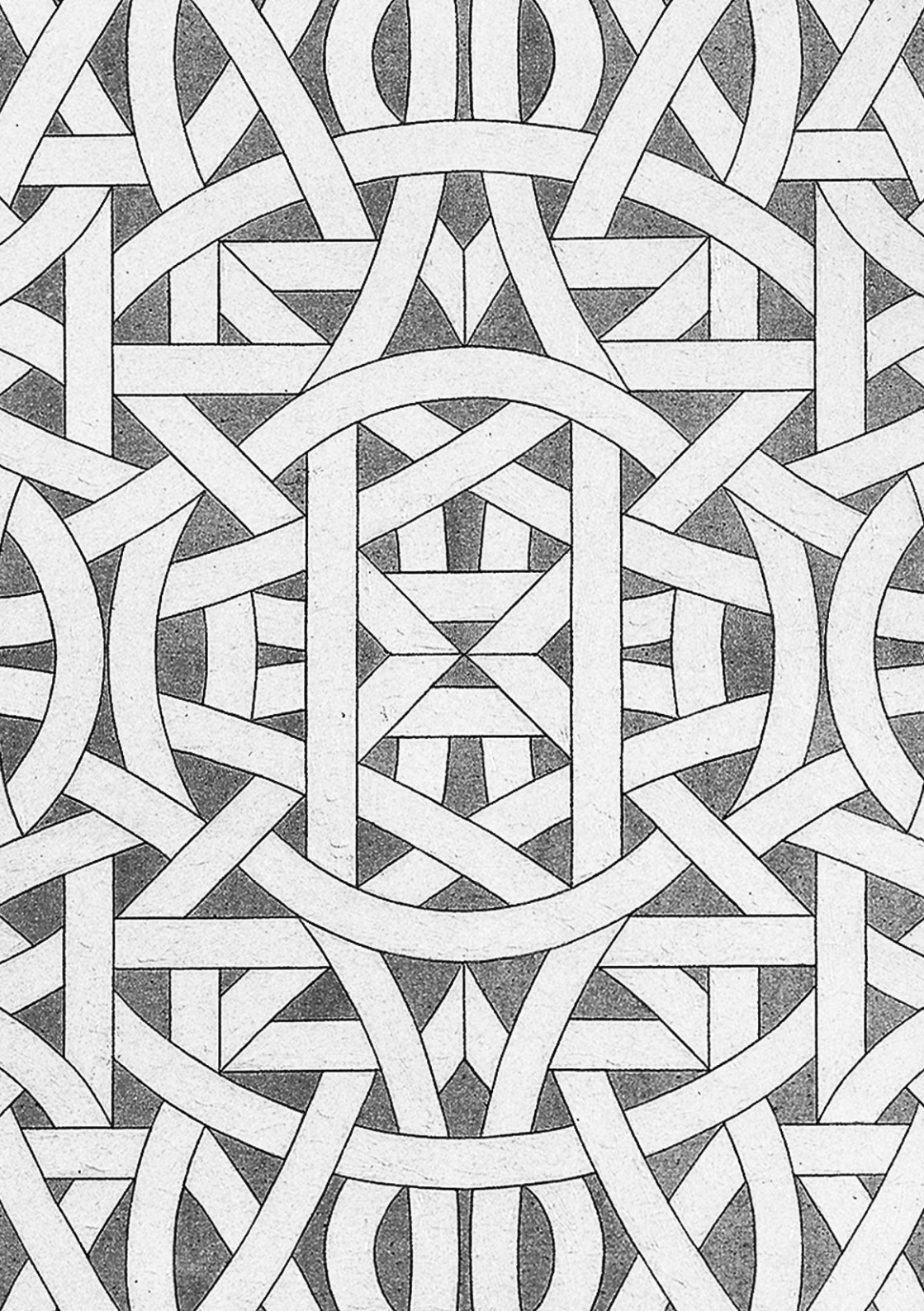
Frank Faulkner

Frank Faulkner's paintings evoke multiple associations, resembling large tapestries or Persian rugs while at the same time reviving the aesthetics of ancient metalwork or wooden screens. Their complex surfaces, built up from many layers of paint, often reflective and metallic, underscore the notion that the history of fine art cannot be separated from craftsmanship. Like most Pattern and Decoration artists, Faulkner was active in New York in the mid-1970s and participated in a number of exhibitions devoted to the movement. He was interested from the outset, however, mostly in what he once called the "gymnastics of seeing." *Untitled* (1976/77) displays a kind of planar brickwork in muted earth tones. Its structure is made up of smaller rhythmically arranged clusters composed of single dots, lines, and dashes painstakingly applied to the paper. Countless markings come together to create a multilayered composition onto which additional small rectangles and dots are mounted at irregular intervals. Amidst this "earthy" profusion of elements are flashes of more saturated colors like pink, orange, and purple. The effect is to create an iridescent all-over pattern that keeps the eye in constant motion. Faulkner pursues the same level of intricacy in *Atlantis II* (1980), a painting that at first suggests a large-scale map. Composed of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dashes, the picture displays a triangular form at its center, framed by smaller squares. The title refers to the long-lost mythical island kingdom of Atlantis described in Plato's *Critias*. Atlantis was thought to be surrounded by rectangular canals, resulting in numerous small islands connecting the mainland to the sea. If we interpret Faulkner's composition as a kind of schematic map of Atlantis, the central triangle would represent the main island and the smaller squares the surrounding inland islands. According to Plato's description, Atlantis was rich in resources like gold, silver, and orichalcum (a metal today understood to be brass). This is reflected in the tactile surface of the work but also in Faulkner's use of thin layers of shimmering paint, including gold and copper tones. But the metal colors are dull here rather than polished, and a greenish shimmer makes the picture look aged, like an ancient artifact whose patina tells of its history.



Tina Girouard

Tina Girouard's interest in patterns and her use of elements of interior decoration has secured her a place in the Pattern and Decoration milieu. In fact, however, her work grew out of New York's experimental art and dance scene in the 1960s and early 1970s. She was a founding member of a series of alternative performance and exhibition spaces, including 112 Green Street and FOOD, and worked with artists including Trisha Brown and Gordon Matta-Clark. Many of her works deal with the activation or reorganization of space: using ordinary materials such as patterned fabrics, wallpaper, or linoleum, Girouard creates stage-like settings with layers that cover, divide, or articulate the architecture. In her performances, repetitive everyday actions overlap and often condense into symbolic images. "My use of pattern comes from a desire to communicate to a mass audience, that is to say that repetition is common in industry and thus in life," says the artist. In line with her intention of "making the ordinary extraordinary and the extraordinary ordinary," she combines in *Wall's Wallpaper III* (1974) four panels of industrially manufactured Biedermeier wallpaper into a basic square form. Pink floral patterns, stripes, and artfully arranged pine branches and cones are thus brought together to form a whole that insists on its heterogeneity and refuses to display the usual immersive quality of wallpaper. Girouard proceeds in a similar way with a collection of eight lengths of vintage silk fabric she received from her mother-in-law and named "Solomon's Lot" after their original owner. A selection of these fabrics is combined for example in *Air Space Stage I, II* (1972/2019) to form two square planes that define an (air)space in the room as a ceiling and a floor. The video performance *Maintenance III* (1973) is dedicated to the everyday care of these same fabrics, while *Pinwheel* (1977) demonstrates their use "on stage." Here, in this one-hour performance video whose ceremonial character is inspired by Mardi Gras and the ritual sand painting of the Hopi, the fabrics mark out a four-part floor surface with a wheel in the center that stands symbolically for the quadrants of the universe. Four performers successively add elements to their respective areas, creating an overlapping series of archetypal world images.



Valerie Jaudon

Of the artists associated with Pattern and Decoration, it is Valerie Jaudon who in her paintings most closely maintains the geometric abstraction of Modernism. Early in her career, Jaudon declared in an interview that “emphasizing the peripheral stabilizes the center.” Conventions and values had to be shifted and rebalanced from the inside out. Accordingly, after periods of study in Mexico and London as well as trips to Morocco and across Europe, the artist found inspiration in the oeuvre of Frank Stella, who had likewise experimented in his early works with symmetrical arrangements of uniformly broad, monochrome stripes. Jaudon shared Stella’s fascination both with the formal idiom of architecture and the intricate patterns of Islamic ornament and Celtic illuminations. Yet from the outset her focus was their sociocultural dimension, their impact on collective experience, which she saw as a vital counterweight to the individualism personified to this day by the (male) Western artist. Jaudon distanced herself from the primacy of the individual through the calculated use of her means of expression: by superimposing multiple grids, she propels the logic of repetition and symmetry towards intricately intertwined decorative motifs and hence closer to activities such as knitting and weaving that are traditionally connoted as “women’s work.” While Jaudon initially used as many as two hundred color shades or more per painting, she drastically reduced this range in 1974, producing white, black, gray, or metallic monochrome paintings whose all-over structures atop an unpainted canvas evince a strongly graphic character (*Leland*, 1978). A further shift occurred around 1979: in paintings such as *Hattiesburg* (1979), the filigree all-over pattern gives way to a markedly vertical orientation; architectonic elements seemingly inspired by Gothic or Roman arches and gables create spatial and perspectival effects which the artist shortly afterwards began to underscore by adding a second and then a third color. As of 1985—the last year in which Jaudon named her paintings after cities in her native state of Mississippi—her work became more emblematic, with the interlocking grids now superseded by increasingly distinct figure/ground structures. A series of public art commissions, including the design of an urban square and garden, allowed Jaudon’s interest in architecture to come to fruition in public space. Playing with expectations has remained a constant: the attempt to pin down the logic of her designs always ends in geometric impossibilities, inescapable labyrinths, and dead ends, and thus reflects the complexity of the world in which we live. As Jaudon once stated: “A painting is a kind of decoding device for the culture from which it comes.”



Joyce Kozloff

Joyce Kozloff, like Miriam Schapiro a founding member of the feminist Heresies Collective, began her career as a painter. During a lengthy sojourn in Mexico in 1973, intense exploration of local ornamental traditions prompted her first to question the conventional hierarchical distinction between “high” and decorative art, and then to interpret details of motifs from woven rugs or ceramic tiles in her paintings on an increasingly large scale. Her ongoing preoccupation with geometric patterns in Islamic art, a trip to Morocco, and, not least, discussions with the artists who in 1975 had joined forces under the banner “Pattern and Decoration” left Kozloff dissatisfied with merely depicting ornamental systems. She decided to quit canvas and soon afterwards realized her first installation, *An Interior Decorated* (1979). Originally conceived for the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York, Kozloff’s interior was subsequently adapted for display in several other American venues. Its centerpiece was always the richly ornamented mosaic floor composed of almost one thousand hexagonal and star-shaped ceramic tiles which the artist had cut out herself using cookie cutters and then painted, glazed, and fired. In this, her “personal anthology of the decorative arts,” Kozloff brought together a great variety of ornamental traditions yet kept the specifics of each of them intact: Native American ceramics, Persian miniatures, Berber carpets, Egyptian murals, Viennese Art Nouveau, and so forth. Wall hangings of silk and cotton surrounding the tile floor were silkscreen printed with patterns of Islamic and Egyptian origin (the latter inspired by the “Tutankhamun” exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York), alternating with tiled pilasters echoing the floor. A further feature was a series of lithographs with the telling title *Is It Still High Art?* This installation, in which painting, sculpture, and architecture are fused and various craft traditions are cited along with countless decorative systems, launched Kozloff on a new phase of creative endeavor. Starting in the 1980s, she executed a series of ambitious public art projects in subway stations, train stations, and airports, allotting an ever greater role to regional visual idioms and figurative motifs.



Robert Kushner

While studying at the University of California in San Diego, Robert Kushner met not only Kim MacConnel—who shared his fascination with Oriental carpets, kitsch, and Chinese clip-art books with motifs to cut out and collage—but also the art historian Amy Goldin, one of the key voices in theoretical discussions of Pattern and Decoration. After moving to New York in 1972, the artist worked primarily on performance pieces, presenting them at art spaces such as 98 Greene Street, an alternative loft space directed by the art collector and later gallery owner Holly Solomon and her husband, Horace. Inspired by fashion shows, pageants, masquerade balls, and cabaret, Kushner's performances featured costumes he made himself from everyday (even edible) materials. In 1974 he embarked with Goldin on a three-month journey to Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, which was to leave a lasting impression. For his first solo show at the Holly Solomon Gallery, in 1976, the artist used the form of the chador, the traditional garment worn by women in Iran, as a support for richly decorated paintings. These pieces also served as costumes in the performance *The Persian Line: Part II* (1976), dedicated to fashion designers Cristóbal Balenciaga and Paul Poiret. The paintings were simply taken down from the walls, donned by otherwise naked models for a runway presentation, and then re-hung afterwards. Following extensive tours throughout Europe, where he showed for example the performance piece *Layers* (1977), in which striptease becomes a metaphor for transformation, Kushner shifted his focus to painting. For the exhibition *Arabesque* at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1978, he created *Cincinnati ABC*, an expansive fabric environment displaying brilliant colors and eccentric forms that demonstrates par excellence the practices and motifs important to him at the time. Besides the chador, it features botanical patterns based on textile designs by the French entomologist Eugène Ségué (1890–1985). In addition, for the first time Kushner made use of a technique he had learned of on a trip to India in 1977: areas of the painted fabrics were cut away and replaced by glittering chiffons added from behind. Increasingly, the human figure also began to play a role, almost as if the bodies were now crossing over from the performances to the canvas. *Rivals* (1978) is one example of a group of fabric paintings in which Kushner took his cue from German Expressionism—notably the portraiture of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Alexej von Jawlensky. At the heart of these works are fashionable female figures and women's faces which repetition, mirroring, and/or color inversions propel into a decorative format. In the late 1980s, Kushner began painting floral compositions, and he has remained true to this quintessential decorative motif ever since.



Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt

Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's art got swept up in the slipstream of Pattern and Decoration through his association with the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York. With his affinity for knick-knack and kitsch and his ability to create highly decorative objects and settings out of cheap materials such as aluminum foil, cellophane, plastic beads, and tinsel, his work suggests straightforward formal analogies and yet also resonates with a deeper, quasi-anthropological dimension. Coming from a Catholic working class background and already openly homosexual before the Stonewall uprising of 1969, in which he was actively involved, Lanigan-Schmidt addresses in his art the complex entanglements between class, religion, and sexuality. He put on his first exhibitions in his own apartment, transforming it for example into a kind of medieval treasury complete with relics, clerical vestments, and chalices (*The Sacristy of the Hamptons*, 1968) or into the royal residence of a fictional czarina (*The Gilded Summer Palace of the Czarina Tatlina*, 1970). Lanigan-Schmidt's references to Christian iconography and his transformation of profane materials into "precious" ones were not however an ironic reaction to the reductionism of 1960s art. Instead, they originated from a lifetime practice that fundamentally challenged the puritan values of bourgeois aestheticism by displaying a fecund inventiveness using limited means and highlighting the emotional potential of archetypal forms. "Good taste is the last refuge of the unimaginative," Lanigan-Schmidt declared much later. *Iconostasis* (1977/'78) reflects his conversion from Roman Catholicism to the Russian Orthodox faith and his consuming interest in Byzantine art and icon painting. The multi-part object is fully functional and corresponds in every last detail to the structure and iconography of an iconostasis, a partition used in Orthodox churches to separate the altar from the nave, and hence the divine from the worldly realm. Here, instead of precious woodcarvings, paint, and gold leaf, the artist used cheap wooden slats, reflective foils, felt pen, and staples; the icons themselves consist of several layers of painted plastic wrap. The group of works titled *Venetian Glass* was inspired by Lanigan-Schmidt's participation in the 1984 Venice Biennale. Traveling to Europe for the first time, he encountered there not only the Catholic Church on its ancestral ground but also the local glass art, ubiquitous tourist kitsch, and plastic garbage floating in the canals.



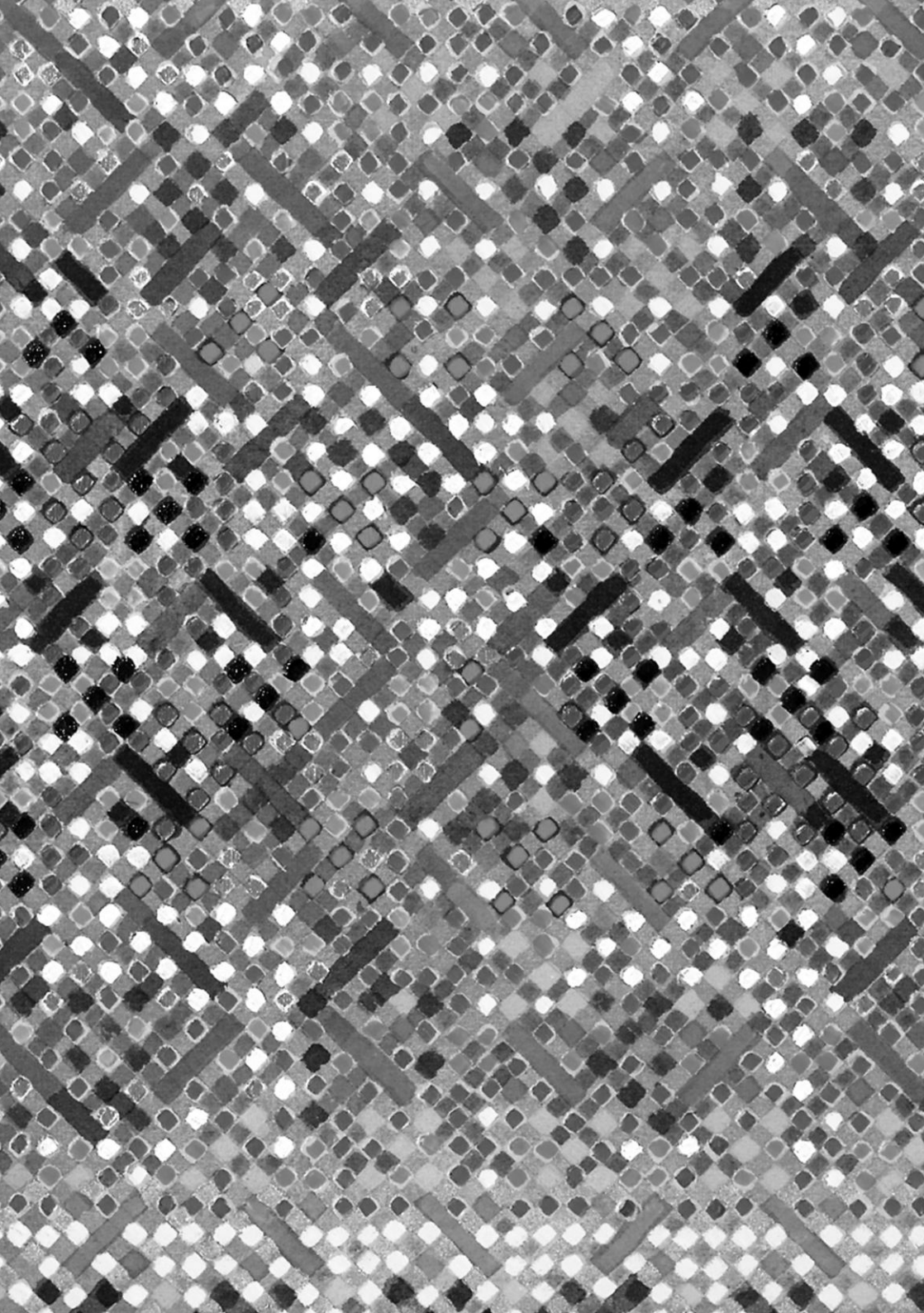
Kim MacConnel

When Kim MacConnel was studying at the University of San Diego in California in the late 1960s with Robert Kushner, he met the art critic Amy Goldin, who would become a mentor to both artists. Goldin's enthusiasm for Islamic art animated MacConnel to research Oriental kilims—woven nomadic rugs—and the ikat weaving technique, in which the yarn is dyed in sections before being woven. He then began in 1975 to produce textile collages made up of vertical lengths of fabric, inspired by the wall hangings in nomads' tents, which often made use of remnants from weavings and rug scraps. Loosely pinned to the wall, works such as *House of Chan* (1975), *Edible*, and *Miracle* (both 1979) combine a wide assortment of patterns and designs, demonstrating MacConnel's interest in the "exotic" as well as his engagement with Western consumer society and the domestic realm. The latter interest is also evident in the second-hand furniture MacConnel started "decorating" in the early 1970s, thereby extending his painting into space, as well as in wall ornaments made of painted cardboard such as *Squid Decoration* and *Trout Decoration* (both 1979), which could have come straight from a shop display. MacConnel found many of his motifs in Chinese clipart books—sample books used in advertising filled with illustrations of all kinds of Western objects and scenes. The arbitrary juxtaposition of images in the graphics series *Ten Items or Less* (1979/80) was directly inspired by these motif collections. For MacConnel, the generic style of the illustrations, which appear neither typically Western nor typically Asian, represents a contemporary form of Chinoiserie, the 18th-century decorative style that catered to European fascination for everything "foreign" with "exotica" produced specifically for the local market. MacConnel's stylistic *mélanges* always emerge from an awareness of the inherently corrupt history of the decorative arts in the course of cultural exchange, global trade, and colonial appropriation, and even celebrate their misunderstandings. His installation *Pagode* (1974) can be read as a kind of shrine to errors in translation. The work was built to house musicians performing an experimental composition for toy organs and pianos. The piece, by the composer Warren Burt, played here over loudspeakers, is a reworking of a reworking of music by the English Renaissance composer John Dunstable, which Burt himself had heard in a performance years



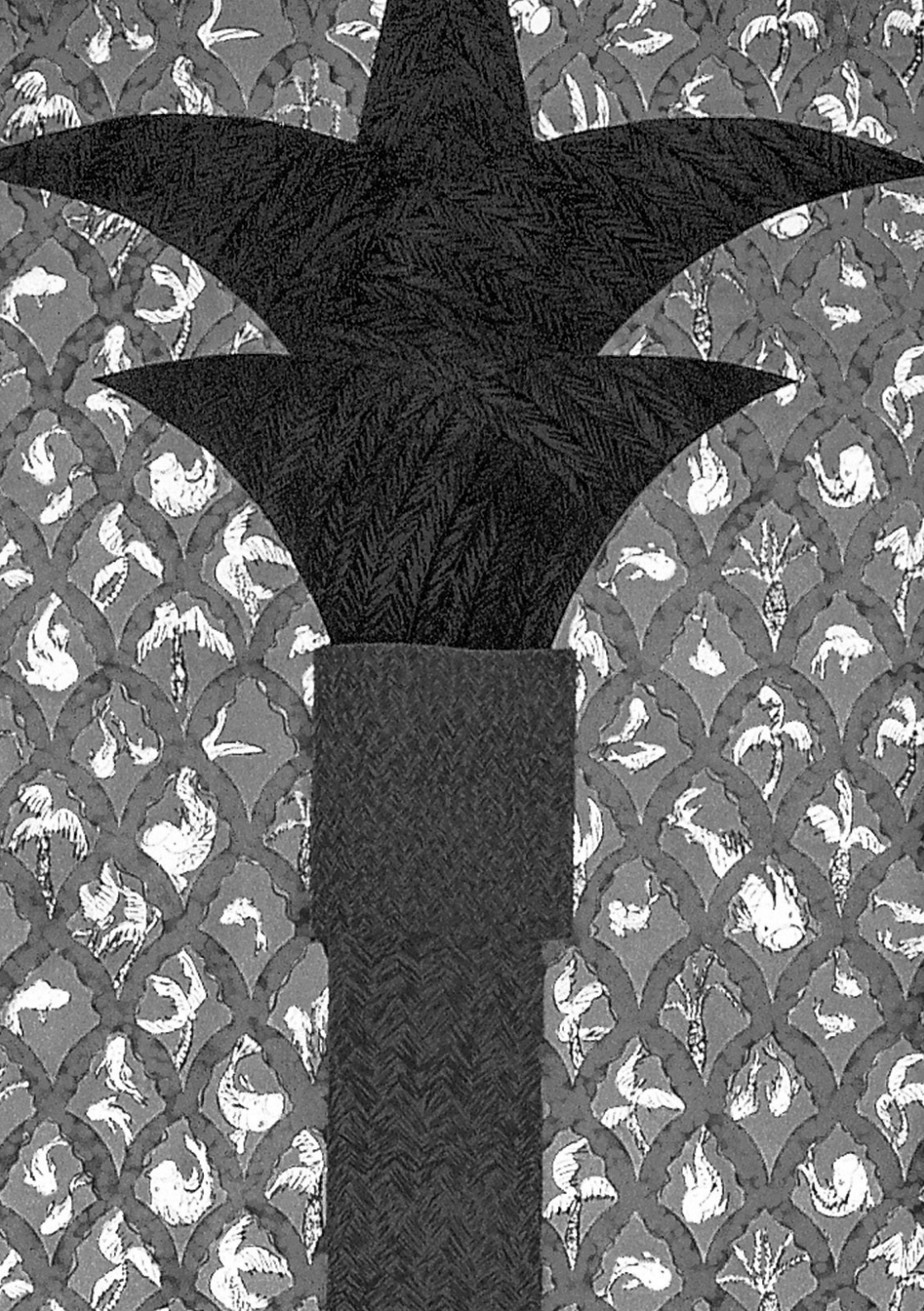
Miriam Schapiro

When Miriam Schapiro helped launch the Pattern and Decoration movement, she was already in her early fifties and thus almost a generation older than most of her colleagues. Shaped by her experiences as a woman painter in the sexist environment of the New York Abstract Expressionists, she had founded the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles with the artist Judy Chicago in 1971—one of the key institutions for the advancement of feminist art in the USA. The program’s goal was to encourage female artists to relate their lives, experiences, and fantasies to their work. Schapiro was also a founding member of the Heresies Collective, a women’s group that published the periodical *Heresies. A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* (1977–93). Pattern and Decoration offered Schapiro a context in which she could visually articulate her feminist agenda. In decorative work, which had historically been associated primarily with women, she identified a marginalized and yet collective vocabulary that in her view was “not elitist, not sexist, not racist.” With the intention of closing the gap between art and women’s everyday experience, Schapiro began to use fabric scraps of clothing, tablecloths, aprons, and bedspreads to piece together works in the tradition of American quilts. In the process, she developed a repertoire of shapes imbued with notions of domesticity, femininity, or sentimentality, using them throughout her career as image supports. *Geometry in Flowers* (1978) and *Pink Light Fan* (1979), for example, belong to a group of works in which interlocking stripes and circles made from pieces of painted paper and fabric are assembled into fan shapes that also evoke a romantic sunrise. The fan as a feminine accessory that is both functional and flirty takes on almost architectural dimensions here, becoming a minimalist shaped canvas as a kind of monument to the decorative. For Schapiro, the interplay of order and chaos was an important concept, as is particularly evident in the house-shaped *Dormer* (1979), in which tectonic elements and grids of colorful paper and fabric pieces are repeatedly disrupted by organic forms reminiscent of billows of smoke, bringing movement to the rigid composition. Schapiro herself called her feminist collages *femimages*, a neologism in which the word “homage” also resonates, in allusion to all those anonymous (handicrafts) workers and designers who through their sewing, embroidering, and loving care structure the multi-layered chaos of domestic life.



Kendall Shaw

Kendall Shaw was born in 1924 in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he was exposed to jazz and ragtime at an early age through his father, a pianist, and later studied both chemistry and painting. A generation older than most of his Pattern and Decoration peers, he first fell under the sway of Abstract Expressionism before turning in 1966 to abstract rhythmical paintings based on enlarged photographs of his wife Frances's patterned and striped dresses. In the early 1970s, Shaw then began to paint his own patterns and found in Pattern and Decoration a congenial context for his interest in visual rhythm and the play of color and energy across a surface. His paintings from those years, built up layer by layer over extended periods of time, display fine color grids that often look more woven than painted, with complex surfaces that seem to pulsate. Shaw was evidently inspired here by his scientific background, his interest in jazz and minimal music, and also his studies of Pre-Columbian textiles such as those found in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum in New York. "I play with the crazy illusion of matter which may appear to be solid but is only a hum of patterned electrical charges," says the artist. *Bethune* (1978), named after Bethune Street in New York's West Village, combines countless tiny squares in warm earthy tones to generate an all-over vibrating surface from which it appears that a pattern is just beginning to emerge. Individual sections seem to repeat yet are never fully identical, and the alternating matte and glossy, glazed and impasto surface produces an extremely tactile effect. The following year, Shaw experimented with the possibility of "charging" abstract painting with autobiographical overtones. The result was a group of gridded images dedicated to his grandmother Emma Lottie, a New Orleans suffragette in the late 19th century who fought for women's rights, the end of child labor, and better educational and health facilities. In *Emma Lottie Marches for the Right to Vote* (1979), Shaw integrated buttons, gemstones, and small mirrors into a picture dominated by shades of red and pink—things that reminded him of his grandmother and are associated with handicrafts, decorating, or femininity in general. Silver fringes adorn the edges of the canvas. Thus imbued with a narrative, the abstract grid becomes specific and personal, an expression of the artist's explicit desire "to place life upon the wall."



Ned Smyth

Ned Smyth embarked on his artistic career in New York in the early 1970s, crafting architectural tableaux out of basic structural forms in cast concrete—cylinders, steles, arches—that borrowed from both Minimalism and classical monuments. As the son of Renaissance art historian Craig Hugh Smyth, the artist spent time in Italy as a child and the European art he saw there would leave a lasting impression. Smyth met the painter Brad Davis through the Holly Solomon Gallery, and the two realized the joint installation *The Garden* there in 1977, which combined painting and sculpture resonating with both Western and Eastern references into an all-encompassing decorative ensemble. His collaboration with Davis was an important milestone in Smyth's work: in *The Garden* he used for the first time the “palm column” that would become a recurring motif in his work, both as a single element and as a colonnade. He was also inspired by Davis's flora and fauna paintings and his use of color and gesture to search for ways to make his sculptural forms more expressive. Smyth found his answer to the limitations of Minimalism in nature motifs and a decorative approach. He gradually expanded his artistic vocabulary to include various handicraft techniques and began to work with fabric, ceramics, and mosaic. The “palm columns” in his first public sculpture—a fountain he designed in 1978—are already decorated with colorful mosaics. In his monumental silkscreen *Philadelphia Colonnade* (1979), Smyth used fabric for the first time. Here he once again combines the element of the column with the motif of the palm tree, thereby alluding to early advanced civilizations—such as Egypt—as well as to the origins of architectural forms in observations of nature. Backed by motifs from the plant and animal kingdoms organized in a grid, the stylized palm trees themselves become a pattern here and initiate an illusionistic play with surface and space. This tension between two and three dimensions would become more and more central for Smyth. Starting in the early 1980s, he began making figurative mosaics and his work became distinctly more narrative. Embedded in decorative structures, the human figure with its gestures and facial play became a significant vehicle for expression.



Robert Zakanitch

When Robert Zakanitch organized the first informal meetings on the topics of “pattern” and “decoration” at his New York loft in 1975, with the help of Miriam Schapiro, he had already made a name for himself with his spare color field paintings. After working in an Abstract Expressionist and Surrealist manner, he had arrived at an individual formal idiom featuring the subtlest of color gradients arranged in grids on large canvases. Like Schapiro, Zakanitch was however seeking to exceed the boundaries of formalist painting, and so he began experimenting with different forms of mark-making, leading in 1975 to his first picture with an unmistakably floral motif, the tellingly titled *Late Bloomer*. Rather than taking his cue from nature, Zakanitch drew on diverse decorative sources, for example mass-produced patterned linoleum floor tiles, painted china, rugs, lace curtains, and stenciled wallpapers. His memories of the Czechoslovakian embroidery and crocheted pieces he saw at his grandparents’ house in New Jersey are a further source of inspiration. In 1976 Zakanitch worked for the first time in the triptych format, connoting the potential of infinite extension to either side. *Flash, Blue Hound* (both 1978), and *Tea Party* (1979) demonstrate how the artist typically set an opulent floral pattern in the center and flanked it with more subtle side panels. The painterly quality of these works is striking—due to their sheer size, the motifs dissolve when viewed close up into abstract brushstrokes that belie the uniformity of the pattern. And yet Zakanitch did not relinquish the grid, which—entwined with blooms and interlaced with arabesques—still forms the underlying structure of his images. Finally, by emphasizing the outer edges of the canvas the artist brings a further formalist theme into his decorative universe: like rugs or tablecloths, his pictures often have white borders that create a fluid transition between canvas and wall. Zakanitch regards his engagement with the decorative as a way to come to terms with gender stereotypes; very deliberately and emphatically he deals in imagery that is pleasing, sentimental, and beautiful to look at. “Pattern, decoration, craft (...) are just acts of pleasure and creation which may be sexual, but not in terms of masculine and feminine,” Zakanitch noted in the late 1970s. “It just may be the first truly androgynous art form.”



Joe Zucker

Through his connection with the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York, which played a crucial role in the success of Pattern and Decoration, Joe Zucker's work likewise became associated with the movement. Common ground can be found in Zucker's ongoing engagement with the grid as well as his interest in painting as a craft and in tactile surfaces. After years of preoccupation with the grid-like woven structure of the canvas, Zucker developed a technique in 1969 that enabled him to approach the elementary conditions of painting from a different angle: he began to construct paintings out of cotton balls soaked in acrylic paint, applying them to the canvas like mosaic pieces. The support material (cotton) and the artistic medium (paint) thus become one—the cotton ball is used as container for the paint. In 1973 Zucker expanded his technique by adding the colorless binder Rhoplex, which makes the cotton wool malleable and shapeable, allowing him to “sculpt” brushstrokes. The artist's images became more complex and narrative, but without relinquishing the link between content, material, and technique. The series *Reconstruction* (1975), for example, engages with the history of cotton production in the American South. In the late 1970s, Zucker produced several groups of works dealing with what he calls “dubious characters.” In the figure of Merlin the magician, an alchemist who can turn lead into gold and travel through time, as well as in the pirate—“someone who was sort of drifting around, looking for a piece of history to rip off”—Zucker saw models for his own artistic practice. In a series of pictures with medieval motifs, including *Sir Splinter de Horsed* (1979), he once again sought a new technique that would enable him to escape a signature style that had become too self-assured. Inspired by Gothic stained glass windows, he drew a grid with cotton strands whose fields he filled with the translucent Rhoplex, rendering the figure of the rider almost illegible here. The hand as the primary artistic tool also plays a role in his 1981 paintings of octopods and portholes, which with their jewel-like surfaces are among Zucker's most “decorative” works. In three series that each document an evolution from fluid and organic to controlled geometric forms, the octopus, as a being consisting only of head and hands, represents not only an ironic reference to the classical portrait, where those parts of the body are of particular importance. It also alludes once again to the artist, to his intellect and handiwork, as well as to his eccentric way of constructing images.

Imprint

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Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien

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Museumsplatz 1
A-1070 Wien
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Exhibition

Pattern and Decoration
Ornament as Promise

February 23–September 08, 2019

Curator: Manuela Ammer
Exhibition Management:
Konstanze Horak
Conservation: Kathrine Ruppen
Exhibition design: Manuela Ammer,
assisted by Klemen Breiffuss
Exhibition Installation: Tina Fabijanic,
Severin Gombocz, Max Hochstätter,
Wolfgang Moser, Gregor Neuwirth,
Andreas Petz, museum standards
Press: Marie-Claire Gagnon, Katja
Kulidzhanova, Katharina Murschetz,
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The project was initiated by the Ludwig
Forum für Internationale Kunst Aachen
and realized in cooperation with the
mumok – Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien. Following the
venues in Aachen and Vienna, the
exhibition will be on view at the Ludwig
Museum – Museum of Contemporary
Art, Budapest.

Exhibition Booklet

Texts: Manuela Ammer, Jörg Wolfert
(using texts by Manuela Ammer,
Esther Boehle, and Denise Petzold
from: *Pattern and Decoration*.
Ornament als Versprechen, edited by
Esther Boehle and Manuela Ammer,
exhibition catalogue, Ludwig Forum
für internationale Kunst Aachen and
mumok – Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Verlag der
Buchhandlung Walther König,
Cologne, 2018)

Translations: Jennifer Taylor
Grafic Design: Olaf Osten
Cover: Miriam Schapiro, *Pink Light Fan*,
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