

du

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A Selective Summary of the Contents

Decorative Art Today

At the outset, the concept for this Number was quite simple. A first part would illustrate the work of a number of New York artists against the background of 20th-Century decorative art, while a second would discuss the ideas surrounding them. But as soon as we came to choose a title things began to become complicated. The literal German translations of "pattern" and "Patterning" seemed misleading and too restrictive. So we decided to use the English word "pattern", since it stood for the American movement we are considering. But this in turn brought its own problems, for although the amount of material available suggested that we confine ourselves to America, the subject matter made this inappropriate. In the end, we asked Harald Szeemann to write from the European standpoint and John Perreault to give us the New Yorker's view of the Patterning people. At the same time we were compelled to restrict the European contribution to a kind of decorative art family tree supplemented by a report on its practice in France, the only country in Europe where there is much of a concentration of artists working in the decorative genre.

Among the aspects that feature our experience of the New York pattern artists are the light-heartedness with which they use the decorative art of all kinds of civilizations as pegs on which to hang their work, establishing cross connections and adopting forms and colour combinations in the process and being quite open about it all; and secondly the high proportion of women involved and their commitment to feminism. The essay on "art-hysterical" conceptions, though admittedly polemical, is to my mind among the most stimulating things thrown up by the patterning movement. But there are also a few points about which I have misgivings. There is, for instance, the almost unanimous rejection of what they like to call "tragic artists", an attitude that seems to me to involve a misunderstanding, for the tragic approach of artists like van Gogh, Pollock or Rothko is not a matter of choice but - like their pictures - a direct consequence of the frightful intensity with which they lived. The rejection probably derives from personal or secondhand experience with various drugs around 1970. And another point: Much as I appreciate the aim to produce pictures in a language anyone can understand, I prefer those with iconographic, symbolic connotations of a mainly individual kind.

Dominik Keller

Retrogression and Progression Towards the "Dignity of the Decorative"

"It looked as though everything had been tried out and done to death and that progress had come to a standstill. The avant-garde of modern art, which had tirelessly been producing new trends, styles, 'isms' and fashions since the start of the 20th Century had been marking time for eight long years. But now - and it is written - a revolution is said to be enlivening

the drab scene and opening a new chapter in this century's art' (Willi Bongard) and stimulating discussion and turnover... the movement is called 'Patterning' or 'Decoration Art', and the names reveal the entire programme." With these words, Alfred Nemeczek, writing in "Stern" (No.13, 22.3.1979), introduced the new form of art presented by eight American exponents (four of each sex) in the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts for the first time in Europe.

I have faith in adventure and in the miracle of newly-awakened sensitivity and it was vouchsafed me to experience and express such things more than once. And although I have sought different directions since then - possibly because I was afraid or suspicious that any new event of this kind would be unlikely to have the intensity of something like the 1969 "Attitudes becoming forms, Life created by thought" - I had no hesitation in plunging back into the studio world and seeking out the exponents of "Patterning". The excellent information provided by Johannes Gachnang about new painting to be seen at the Berne Kunsthalle and the frustration produced by documenta 7 and the chances it missed to have a powerful visual section distorted expectations somewhat and diverted my wishful thinking into the usual hackneyed approach. I was expecting pinnacles, and acquired atmosphere and quality of living from the artistic climate which these artists emanate. By contrast to earlier buddings of new styles and trends in New York, this for once is not a group of juveniles leading off against their elders. The Patterning artists belong to various generations. "The youngest of them put most of their energy into filming", said Richard Serra, one of the most powerful artists of the past decade. These people are aged between 33 and 55, and one of the most astonishing and favourable points about them is the high proportion of women among them, for they have contributed extensively to producing a "relaxed" climate, as the men themselves admit. They have been meeting regularly since 1974 and arguing about the relationship between "high" art and its decorative relatives, their common ground consisting in a distaste for the austerity of Conceptual Art and Minimal Art and a love of a genre that provides pleasure to the senses and beauty to the environment, abandoning conceptual riddles and complex iconographical content. Most of them received their stimulus to produce these voluptuous, colourful creations during travels in the Middle East, India, Afghanistan or Mexico, where they assimilated much of the centuries-old tradition of ornamentation. Many of these artists are unwilling to stop short at panels and other individual items and are hoping to obtain commissions to execute ornamentation in connection with construction projects. Where Conceptual Art derives its liberty from non-execution, these artists have discovered a primaevial pleasure in actually doing things.

Attaching New Value to Female Handicrafts

In the realms of "high" art, "decorative" has always been a kind of insult. It implies superfi-

ciality, winsomeness, the absence of a train of thought and a seeking after effects and has often been associated with terms such as "women's handicrafts" and "commercial art" and something far below the art produced by men - a circumstance illustrated, for instance, by the fact that Switzerland still has two artistic societies, divided by sex. The Women's Movement has now set about attaching new valuations to all kinds of female activity, not merely the everyday ones such as washing, baking, cooking, mending, cleaning and ironing but also the more decorative ones such as sewing, knitting, painting cards or porcelain and quilting, proclaiming the visual elements they utilize for the purpose, such as abstract ornaments and flower patterns, as fully artistic in ranking. Miriam Schapiro, a rabid feminist, describes her present mental attitude as "androgynous", "derived from my male-oriented past and intermingled with my female-oriented present". Speaking of her monumental works, paintings and collages, richly ornamented fans and kimonos, she says, "Since my conversion to feminism in 1970 I have tried to approach women direct by means of my art. I chose the kimono as ceremonial robe for the New Woman. My aim was to clothe her in the power of her new tasks and her inner strength. Both for myself and for the others I wanted to have rich, dignified, uncomplicated clothing with a great deal of gold and silver, and I didn't realize until later that men wear kimonos as well, which meant that my work might also have androgynous qualities. That was O.K. by me. It gave me something."

She has coined the word "femmage" for work typical of women. "We invented this word to cover all activities like collage, assemblage, découpage and photo-montage carried out by women as part of the rôle assigned to them by history." To rank as femmage, a work must fulfil the following criteria:

1. It must be the work of a woman.
2. An important element of the work must consist of collecting and hoarding.
3. Remnants and cuttings are part of the process and are constantly recycled.
4. The subject relates to women's life.
5. The language is that of intimacy.
6. The femmatic content is aimed at an "in" audience.
7. The work commemorates some event, either personal or public.
8. It is handled from the standpoint of autobiography.
9. Both graphical and textual material is embroidered.
10. Silhouette pictures are stuck on different materials.
11. Recognizable images appear in narrative sequences.
12. Abstract forms are arranged into patterns.
13. Photographs and other printed materials are utilized.
14. The work has both functional and aesthetic aspects.

In Opposition to the Traditional Hierarchy of Values

For two of the younger women artists, Valerie Joudon and Joyce Kozloff, upvaluing faceless female handicrafts to the status of art was but a short step to attacking the prevailing masculine artistic ideology. In a feminist magazine called "Heresies. A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics", they have taken a long cold look at a

number of art-historical (which they call art-hysterical) terms related to progress and culture. As feminists and artists working "decoratively", they have made a study of the way that adjective has been utilized pejoratively in art magazines, theories and criticisms and have detected value hierarchies in which high art is ranked above decorative art, western above non-western and male above female. The theoretical art background to this new painting trend was also supplied by a woman, art critic Amy Goldin with an article on fundamentals entitled "Matisse and The Decorative", based on his late work "Gouaches découpées", but also on Islamic ornamentation. She has also written numerous articles on young artists whose message she sees as indicating ways to place joy of living above intellect and ceremony above anxiety.

*"There are no pictures;
there are only decorations"*

All the pictures I was able to see in New York did indeed impart this light-hearted impression: Miriam Schapiro's fans and kimonos, Mary Gregoriadis' large-format dynamic pictures produced from ornaments invented by herself, Joyce Kozloff's printed silk scarfs and ceramic columns with biscuit moulds and more particularly her two books of sample ornaments, "If I were an Astronomer" and "If I were a Botanist"; Robin Lehrer's narrative sequences in patterned quilting, the more fragile and style conscious monochrome geometrical patterns of Valerie Joudon, the geometrical colour grids of Dee Schapiro and Cynthia Carlson's three-dimensional tapestries consisting of clumps of colour distributed about the wall. The older male representatives of Patterning, such as Harry Koursaros and George Woodman, usually stick to a single form which they continually repeat in different colours, which is somewhat reminiscent of Vasarely's "Folklore planétaire" pictures. The most colourful fabrics are combined by Kim McConnell, while a specially complex situation is sought by Tony Robin and Robert Kushner, who alludes to his Performance past with the use of coloured kerchiefs as sole article of clothing and who has already re-integrated figures into his wall hangings. He is the only one to have drawn up a kind of catalogue of requirements for a good Patterning picture – unlimited pictorial space, elimination of complex spatial and iconographical situations, special attention to peripheral activities. These, indeed, are postulates with which groups of painters surrounding Nabis and Bonnard concerned themselves in Paris in around 1890, stimulated by their discovery of the compositional possibilities inherent in Japanese surface woodcuts. The style of Kushner's drawings for his figures is vital and somewhat indicative, reminiscent a little of the allusive line drawings and arabesques of Raoul Dufy. It was the theoretician of the Nabis group, Maurice Denis, who enunciated the formula that still holds good for the style traditions of our artists: "People must be reminded that any picture, before it becomes a war-horse, a nude or an

anecdote is basically a flat surface which is then covered by colours in a predetermined order." And even at that time, in 1890, this proclamation of the primacy of the flat surface was perceived as a negation of both linear and perspective space and a legalisation of surface-wise designs admitting of ornament and pictorial overlapping, patterns and sequences as suggested by Japanese woodcuts. Jan Verkade, the painter-monk, issued the 1890 call to battle: "Down with the easel painting! Down with all that unnecessary furniture! Painting may not assume liberties which segregate it from other forms of art. The painter's work begins where that of the architect leaves off. Give us walls and yet more walls to decorate! Down with perspective! A wall must remain a surface and not be broken up by representations of infinite horizons. There are no such things as pictures, there are only decorations."

The transformation of decorative, lightweight pictorial subjects into large-scale painting has been undertaken by a painter who previously belonged to the abstract school, Robert S. Zakanitch. In 1972 he felt frustrated by the need to exclude excessive visual stimuli from his paintings. After first taking refuge in alcohol, he decided to include some of the things he loved – such as Czech embroidery, Japanese woodcuts, Indian paintings and Persian art – in his pictures by way of references and allusions and thus to avoid being segregated, along with his works, from the rest of the world. "The contemporary trend rejected the subjects I used, like flowers, cherries or radishes, as trivial and purely decorative and ornamental. But I am interested in them for their own sake and my aim is to use these 'pretty little things' as an aid to producing joyful and exotic pictures." The subtlety of Zakanitch's pictures, most of which are triptychs, consists in a very extensive and expressive pictorial representation of his main subject at the centre accompanied by a kind of decentralised background music in the lateral panels. He sometimes leaves the margins of his panels plain white, allowing them to provide a kind of entrance hall to his vivid ornamental paintings. His work produces the most convincing combination of those aspects of monochrome painting that enable viewers to achieve physical perception of dimensions and the use of narrative in a pictorial landscape consisting of patterns whose content is entirely susceptible of traumatic interpretation.

Sympathetic Impulses

At the Brussels exhibition referred to above, eight of the artists discussed were on show, but confrontation with Europeans was avoided. Retrospectively, this seems a pity, since artists like Sigmar Polke, Markus Raetz, Harloff, Michael Buthe, Dan van Golden, or Konrad Fischer-Lueg have been using patterning for years, or did use it years ago – though by contrast to the Americans they did not do so as an end in itself but as part of a conceptual procedure and to enrich mythological representation, to create agitation as a background for additional pictorial statements or to visualize

intellectual images in which the pattern is integrated into an undertone of material. Polke's backgrounds and Markus Raetz' "Flechtwerk" mental games are typical examples of this. However, the opportunity for a confrontation was lost, and with it the chance to transmit some of the pleasant atmosphere that might have benefited the Europeans in their artistic isolation.

For we must not conceal the fact that the commercialization of Pattern Painting has begun, with all the paraphernalia of monopoly galleries and the usual pressure on artists to produce. That is one reason why the present essay places more emphasis on background information than on a discussion of the products. Yet it is not only commerce that threatens to destroy the Patterning idea; there are also existing masters who regard patterning and the disco culture as a challenge that has provoked them to seek new heights. In January 1979 the Leo Castelli Gallery showed eight coloured reliefs by Frank Stella entitled "Indian Birds" and incorporating over-life-sized compass-drawn curves mounted on concave metal grids, painted in glaring colours and sprayed with sequins and spangles – a kind of controlled junk and restrained acceptance of the penetration of art by the carnival spirit.

Revolution, adventure, miracles, a new wave of sensitivity. I do not believe that Patterning can achieve these things, which will remain the preserve of artistic loners. Yet the change in mentality is so visible, powerful and attractive that it is bound to bring art to a new public by way of a new generation of artists who regard their works as homage to all the thousands of ornament-creators over the centuries, or alternatively as a contribution to the liberation of women and by consequence a contribution to contemporary life.

Harald Szeemann

In the July "du"

André Heller's Vienna

The July Number considers Vienna as an idea, a creation of the imagination, an inexhaustible source of background and the individual ambience of poet André Heller – a superabundant world of image and language, of constantly changing associations, of shifts between real and imaginary places; a world inhabited by dream figures, tumblers, fire-eaters, queens in constant motion.

From the very first, André Heller has been a personality who invited conflicting assessments, but no-one has ever been able to treat him with indifference. Whether he is writing, singing, staging a circus or crystallizing his world into pictures he is stimulating and challenging and is constantly raising new curtains. The July Number uses pilot pictures to guide onlookers through this world of stories within stories and pictures within pictures and is the product of intensive collaboration between André Heller and "du" editors. The essays are by Hilde Spiel, Hans Jürgen Syberberg and Heller himself.



Architektur • Als sie in Europa zum erstenmal ein Gebäude aus dem 13. Jahrhundert sah, musste sie die Mauern mit ihren Händen anfassen. «Da realisierte ich, was Geschichte, was Tradition ist.» Ursprüngliche Dinge wie ein italienisches Bauernhaus faszinieren sie sehr, die Art, wie das Dach gegen die Regenseite hin weit hinuntergezogen ist oder wie die Dinge des Alltags rund um das Haus angeordnet sind. Von Architektur kann sie vor allem in Europa nicht genug bekommen, «ich kann stundenlang nur schauen». Die

Architekten in Amerika «merken langsam, dass ihren Häusern mit den weissen, sterilen Flächen Formen und Ornamente fehlen».

Kunst am Bau • Ebenso gerne wie Bildermalen würde sie dem Publikum zugängliche Flächen und Räume gestalten. Gelegentlich arbeitet sie mit einem Architekten. Kürzlich malte sie die Decke der Eingangshalle eines Bürogebäudes. «Es war ein schrecklicher Raum, ich verstand, dass die Leute ihn hassten. Als ich dann mit meiner Skizze für die

Decke kam, fanden das die meisten Männer eine Geldverschwendung, nicht aber die Frauen.» Aber um noch mehr öffentliche Plätze zu gestalten – «eine Untergrundbahn-Station wäre wunderbar» –, müsste sie sich mit der Gemeinde, den Stadtbehörden herumschlagen, «da wären neunzig Prozent der Arbeit, sich politisch durchzusetzen». Das liegt ihr nicht.

Arbeitsweise • Für sie zählt nichts anderes als Arbeit und immer wieder Arbeit. Mit grosser Disziplin setzt sie



sich jeden Morgen hin und zeichnet oder malt. «Es gibt Zeiten, da geht nichts, und es gibt andere, da passiert es plötzlich, und man spürt, wie man etwas schafft. Damit ich aber diese Phasen erwische, muss ich da sein. Es gibt keinen andern Weg, es ist hart. Ich beneide die Künstler, die spielerisch und schnell ihr Werk schaffen, ich ringe mit meinen Zeichnungen manchmal sehr lange.» Ihr Leben ist gänzlich von ihrer Arbeit bestimmt. «Ich führe ein sehr langweiliges Leben.» Glück ist für sie, wenn sie die Arbeit eines Tages auch am nächsten Tag noch für gut befindet.

Valerie Jaudon

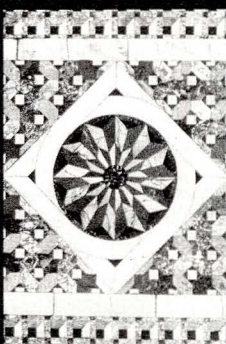
Valerie Jaudon

Pinelstrich • Die Entwürfe werden dann auf die Leinwand übertragen und nachher ausgemalt. Die Farbe könnte ja auch aufgesprüht werden? «Nein, auf seine Art spricht alles eine

Rechte Seite:
Valerie Jaudon: Mound Bayou. 1978. 183 x 183 cm.

Es sind weniger einzelne Beispiele künstlerischen Schaffens, die mich beschäftigen, als vielmehr ganze Richtungen. Obwohl ich vor allem architektonische Einflüsse zeige, sind mir Keramik, Teppiche und Stoffe ebenso wichtig.

1 Die Mosaikböden von San Marco sind vielleicht mein bevorzugtestes Werk europäischer Kunst.



1

2 Ich habe 1966 bis 1967 in Mexiko gelebt und viele indianische Monumente gesehen, vor allem der Mayas. Hier ein Tempel in Uxmal, Halbinsel Yucatán.

3 In England wohnte ich von 1968 bis 1969. Ein Bauwerk, das mich besonders beeindruckte: die Kathedrale von Winchester in Exeter, englische Romanik mit keltischen Einflüssen.



2



3

bestimmte Sprache, auch der Pinselstrich.» Ganz langsam werden ihre Bilder farbiger, «ich glaube, ich versuche, durch die Farben die Bilder noch fester, noch solider wirken zu lassen, im Rosa eines Backsteins oder im Blau von Stahl».

Verantwortung • Die gute Zusammenarbeit mit ihrer Galerie ist für sie Voraussetzung, ihr Werk einem möglichst grossen Publikum zugänglich zu machen. «Wenn eine Ausstellung geplant ist, fühle ich mich der Galerie und den Sammlern verantwort-

lich, auf diesen Zeitpunkt hin muss ich so und so viele gute Bilder gemacht haben. Eine Ausstellung kostet Geld, und Sammler bezahlen für die Bilder, also bin ich verantwortlich, was und wie ich etwas tue.»

New York • Mit neunzehn war sie zum erstenmal in New York, staunte über die Liftanlagen bei Lord & Taylor's, sah hier zum erstenmal Kunst. «In dieser Stadt kann alles geschehen, hier ist beinahe jeder ein Aussen-seiter. Nach der Schule in London, ich war 24, wusste ich, dass ich in

Bowery • Sie und Kalina teilen sich heute in ihr Studio in der Bowery. Wie für solche Ateliers typisch, erreicht man es über eine nicht enden wollende Treppe, die direkt in einen grossen Raum führt, auf dreieinhalb Seiten von vergitterten Fenstern umgeben. Zur Strassenseite hin arbeitet Richard an der linken, Valerie an der rechten Wand. Sie werden, sobald es die Verhältnisse erlauben, jeder ein eigenes Studio haben. «Ich möchte meine Bilder länger an der Wand haben, sie mir immer wieder ansehen können.»

Freunde, Kontakte • Sie ist auf den Kontakt mit anderen Menschen, mit denen sie über ihre Arbeit sprechen kann, angewiesen, die meisten ihrer Freunde sind Künstler. «Ich brauche andere Künstler, es ist mir sehr wichtig zu wissen, dass sie da sind, und auch, was sie denken. Dritte merken sofort, wenn etwas mit dem eigenen Werk nicht in Ordnung ist, sie haben ein Gefühl für Intensität und Qualität.»

Mississippi • Im tiefen Süden, in Mississippi, wurde sie geboren. Sehr jung empfand sie bereits die Einschränkungen in dieser «hinterwälderischen Provinz», und sie versuchte, nur die Kunst-Technik, nicht aber die -Philosophie zu lernen. Sie hörte Dinge wie «Picasso ist ein Kommunist, darum ein schlechter Künstler». Sie wuchs mit dem Gefühl auf, dass vieles nicht recht, noch mehr aber grundfalsch war. Die Art etwa, wie die Weissen die Schwarzen behandelten – noch heute liebt sie das schwarze Dienstmädchen im Haus ihrer Eltern mehr als ihre Mutter. «Es ist eine bigotte, sehr patriarchalische Gesellschaft.» Manche Fragen aus dieser Zeit beschäftigen sie auch heute noch, «wie sehr doch Geld, Macht und Wirtschaft einen grossen Teil unseres Lebens bestimmen».



New York leben musste, hier geschah alles.» Sie brauchte zwei Jahre, bis sie ihre Eindrücke verkraftet hatte. «In diesen zwei Jahren konnte ich nicht malen, ich musste zuerst sehen.»

Richard Kalina • Einen Monat, nachdem sie nach New York gekommen war, zog sie zu Richard Kalina, der seine Werke bereits ausstellte. Als Nicht-mehr-Studentin, aber Noch-nicht-Künstlerin konnte sie viel von ihm lernen, «ich begriff, was man als Künstler tun muss, nämlich jeden Tag arbeiten und dabei bleiben». Richard ist ihr wichtigster Gesprächspartner. «Wir sind gegenseitig sehr kritisch, wir spornen uns zur Arbeit an. In der heutigen Gesellschaft sind zwar die Männer der wichtigere Teil, nicht so in unserem Privatleben, wir sind absolut gleichberechtigt, wahrscheinlich, weil wir auch so fühlen. Doch der Erfolg wird auch in Zukunft nicht gleichmässig aufgeteilt sein. Es ist eine Frage des Selbstbewusstseins, wie wir damit fertig werden.»



Linke Seite:
Valerie Jaudon: Carrière. 1979. 91,5 x 91,5 cm.

4 Die Wiederkehr Christi. Aus einer spanischen Handschrift des frühen 12. Jahrhunderts. Mittelalterliche Kunst hat mich am stärksten beeinflusst. Ich komme immer wieder auf sie zurück. Ich mag ihre eindringliche und direkte Kommunikation. Es scheint mir, dass mittelalterliche Künstler die Künstlichkeit der Kunst akzeptierten und entsprechend versuchten, soviel wie möglich, so klar wie möglich innerhalb eines

begrenzten Raumes zu sagen. Sie versuchten nicht, mit wissenschaftlicher Akribie Dinge realistisch darzustellen, sondern sie zu zeigen, wie sie waren.

5 Ich habe die Moschee von Córdoba gewählt, weil sie etwas zeigt, das mich fasziniert: die Rippen scheinen für uns heute tragende Funktionen zu haben, aber sie sind rein dekorativ und wurden lediglich gebaut, um ein Bild darzustellen.



6 In der islamischen Kunst gefällt mir vor allem das Backsteinwerk. Was mit einfachen Steinen vollbracht werden konnte, ist überraschend. Was mich allerdings an der islamischen Kunst am meisten anzieht, ist die Tatsache, dass die ineinandergreifenden Formen und Farben eine ganze Kultur betrafen und einten und dass dieses visuelle Vokabular jedermann zugänglich war, für Flechtwerk, Stoffe, Metalle, Ziegel, Glas.



