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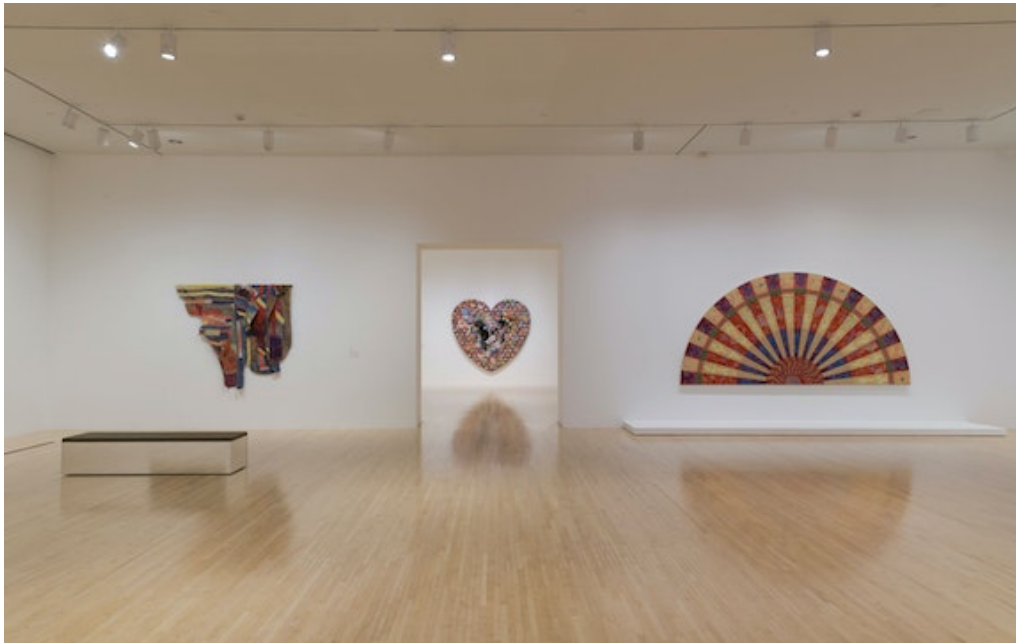
With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972–1985

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Over the last few years, certain craft-based practices have re-emerged in fine art: the woven works of artists such as Diedrick Brackens or ceramics like those of Anna Sew Hoy. A certain nostalgia is exuded in the renaissance of craft aesthetics—the vibe of the 70s ripples throughout art, design, and fashion as exemplified by the resurgent interest in macramé, needlepoint, and clay. Until recently, the recuperation of craft aesthetics in fine art has gone largely unnoticed by critical histories. *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972–1985* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles presents an affirmative and celebratory survey of a less-studied yet deeply influential movement that presents a historical background for some of the trends we see in contemporary art today.

Organized by Anna Katz with Rebecca Lowery, the exhibition features nearly 100 works of art by almost 50 artists from across the country, taking an expansive view on the Pattern and Decoration movement (P&D) and its broad reach. Katz's approach to revisiting the history and dynamics of P&D takes a three-pronged approach in terms of artists included: core members of the official P&D movement, artists who are not usually recognized as P&D artists but were very influenced by the movement or were interlocutors, and artists who are not normally considered P&D artists at all but who were using similar aesthetic and conceptual approaches. What results is a winding arabesque of maximalism and materiality, brimming in color and exuberantly embracing a sincere interest in the aesthetics of what could be considered domestic or traditional crafts: quilting, wallpaper, florals, weaving, pottery, and architectural or design motifs.



Installation view: *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1985*, MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, 2020. Courtesy The Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo: Jeff McLane.

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Perhaps the most compelling argument the exhibition makes about the importance of P&D and its core tenets is pattern-and-decoration's use as an aesthetic tool against hegemonic ideas of what serious fine art must look like. Working against the Abstract Expressionism of the past and the Minimalist art en vogue at the time, artists working in and around the aesthetics of P&D rejected the cool and removed aesthetics of idealized abstraction, instead declaring that taste is subjective and art must be accepted in all forms, not only those that tended to be defined by largely white and largely male audiences.

For the most part, the works in the exhibition speak for themselves: densely patterned surfaces, fecund florals, and swirling arabesques abound. Unconventional materials permeate throughout—glitter, wallpaper, beads, silk, flocking, celastic, ribbons, feathers, sequins—materials normally associated with craft or domestic arts. What transpires is the visual antithesis to dominant art world trends of the time, aesthetics which negate the tenets of a modernism that favored clean lines, an invisible hand, monochrome industrial colors. Joyce Kozloff, who was a key member of P&D, wrote a polemic in the form of a pamphlet in 1976 called “An Answer to Ad Reinhardt's ‘On Negation’ - Negating the Negative” which accompanied a group exhibition at Tony Alessandra Gallery (and is reprinted as a wall vinyl in the exhibition); in it she denounced values associated with modernism and patriarchal culture: “anti-pure... anti-formalist... anti-imperialist... anti-universal... anti-rational... anti-dogmatic... anti-pleasureless... anti-heroic... anti-master.” Instead, she affirms “additive, subjective, romantic, imaginative, personal, autobiographical, whimsical.” What Kozloff argues for is a value shift, one clearly in the feminist spirit (“the personal is political”), that she and other artists found P&D's freedom of expression, liberation from controlling narratives of the art world, and the genuine pleasure found in indulging in sumptuously ornamental, material, and colorful aesthetics. This, as Katz makes clear in her contextualization of P&D, was not celebrating kitsch or bad taste in an ironic way but was a deeply genuine exaltation of the decorative.



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The galleries are organized thematically so as to narrate different approaches to P&D: its intrinsic relationship to the feminist art movement; the intersectionality of an interest in quilt aesthetics among both women and African American artists; a renewed interest in the art of non-Western cultures that did not adhere to aesthetic hierarchies (catalyzed by more accessible international travel); and an inventive, experimental spirit that embraced video art, performance, and installation. As the exhibition elucidates, P&D was an emergent and divergent movement that was at its core a radical approach that sought to question authority and the values it upheld.

Toward the end of the show is **Tina Girouard's** meditative video *Maintenance III* (1973). Unassuming at first glance, the video shows Girouard caring for fabrics she inherited—washing, wringing, sewing, and folding them while a popular radio station plays in the background. Girouard highlights this mundane activity, focusing the camera on the fabrics as the patterns dance across the screen. Made in the year between Nixon's impeachment, reelection, and eventual resignation, and approaching the end of the Vietnam war, Girouard's video is a subtle rumination on the cultivation of taste in culture (music) and a deep questioning of authority at the intersection of American culture and politics. *Maintenance III* meditates on a seemingly neutral act: as the artist listens to upbeat tunes on the radio, there is a subtle critical undertone pointing out that the radio, a symbol of mass media, is itself not neutral. The same messenger of popular music also influences our political environment.

Revisiting the exhibition while in quarantine reminds us of the myriad ways in which art can help us to envision new methods and strategies for challenging the powers that be and reimagining a world that is inclusive, diverse, loving, and celebratory of all forms of expression. It is no surprise that the similar ethics of the P&D movement have percolated in recent years. As Joyce Kozloff and Valerie Jaudon wrote in their 1978 *Heresies* article, "We, as artists, cannot solve these problems, but by speaking plainly we hope to reveal the inconsistencies in assumptions that too often have been accepted as 'truth.'" Let us continue to question these truths.



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