

Pattern and Decoration Ornament as Promise

February 23 to September 8, 2019

Press conference:
Thursday, February 21, 2019, 10 am

Opening:
Friday, February 22, 2019, 7 pm

Artists' Panel
Saturday, February 23, 2019, 5 pm



Miriam Schapiro
Dormer, 1979
Loan of the Peter and Irene Ludwig
Foundation
Photo: Carl Brunn / Ludwig Forum-
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Ornament as promise. This could have been a motto for the Pattern and Decoration movement, formed in the mid-1970s in the USA. In this exhibition, with its reference to Adolf Loos's assertion concerning "ornament and crime," mumok presents the rich collection of works from this movement of Peter and Irene Ludwig, 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, in the 1970s committed feminist artists like Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon, and Robert Kushner aimed to bring color, formal diversity, and emotion back into art. Decoration played a key role, as did the techniques of artisan-ship associated with it. Various ornamental traditions, from the Islamic world to North American Indians 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" in his 1982 article "The Problem of Pluralism." After the "purist" endeavors of the 1960s, and especially of minimal art, the art of the 1970s lacked both a clear style and critical awareness.

But Pattern and Decoration was a very deliberately "promiscuous" movement. Joyce Kozloff, for example, stated that these artists refused to subject themselves to any hierarchy of artistic forms and genres. "We never prioritized one kind of art over another, and we saw the world's art as a continuum. For us, there was no 'high'/'low'." And Robert Kushner: "We all wanted to extend the range of what was allowed into the formal lexicon of *Art*. Textiles, great. Quilts, yes. Ceramic, sure. Carpets, why not. We looked at all of these objects for their aesthetic merit and rich visuals rewards, and wanted others to see them as art as well." And Robert Zakanitch: "The rigid mainstream parameters of the modernist gave way to a boundless 'beyond' of glorious things to feel and paint, such as delicate patterns, ornamentation, designs from any culture in the world, folk art—things and subjects that were considered too feminine and therefore trivial and referred to as 'low art'."

Pattern and Decoration was the result of debate and discussion between artists who knew each other as friends and acquaintances, and the critic Amy Goldin. Perhaps the last true art movement of the twentieth century, it is also 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*, the subtitle of our exhibition, 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.

Peter and Irene Ludwig were quick to recognize the value of the art of Pattern and Decoration and, through systematic purchases, made it a major focus of their collection. On trips to the USA in the late 1970s they acquired around seventy works, the great majority of which are held today in the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst Aachen, with a considerable collection also held in mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. Jointly organized by both institutions, *Pattern and Decoration. Ornament as Promise* reunites these holdings for the very first time. Important additional loans make our exhibition the largest show of works from the Pattern and Decoration movement to be presented in German-speaking Europe since the 1980s.

Today, in our ever more globalized world with its great asymmetries of power, the questions that these artists posed remain urgent and relevant. As divisions widen and borders are being closed, Pattern and Decoration reminds us what we can gain if we keep channels open.

This project was initiated by the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst Aachen and realized in cooperation with mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. Following the venues in Aachen and Vienna, the exhibition will be on view at the Ludwig Múzeum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest.

Artists: Brad Davis, Frank Faulkner, Tina Girouard, Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Kushner, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Kim MacConnel, Miriam Schapiro, Kendall Shaw, Ned Smyth, Robert R. Zakanitch, and Joe Zucker

Curated by Manuela Ammer

Catalogue: With a selection of historical texts (some published in German for the first time), newly commissioned art-historical essays, an artists' interview, and a comprehensive chronology, this accompanying publication in German and English, published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, represents a thorough assessment of the Pattern and Decoration movement. With contributions by Manuela Ammer, Esther Boehle, Michael Duncan, Amy Goldin, Valerie Jaudon / Joyce Kozloff, Holger Otten, Anne Swartz and Harald Szeemann.

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