

HOWL

Inspiration for Creatives
from *Wolf-Gordon*

Issue 02, 2021 — Quarterly
Curated by Paul Makovsky



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——— Feature

Celia Birtwell

Time, as Mick Jagger sang, has been on *Celia Birtwell's* side. As one of Britain's most enduring and cherished textile designers, she has provided the literal fabric of our lives for nearly 60 years.

by Libby Sellers

Celia Birtwell
“Tulip Reign”

Photo: Courtesy of Celia Birtwell

With designs worn by everyone from Jagger to Talitha Getty and Kate Moss, her printed gossamer chiffons, crepes and cottons—once tailored and cut into romantic dresses and shirts—defined the ethereal look of the late 1960s and 1970s. When her focus turned to interiors in the 1980s, creating prints for walls, windows and upholstery, her distinct motifs were swathed across middle class homes and luxury hotels alike. Her more recent return to fashion, with sell-out collections for high-street retailer Topshop and collaborations with Cacharel and Valentino,



Celia Birtwell
Design, 1967

Photo: Courtesy of Celia Birtwell

kept her patterns on permanent repeat. And while her role at the epicenter of London's creative beau monde has been downplayed, Birtwell is celebrated the world over for her part in David Hockney's 1971 painting "Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy".

On the 50th anniversary of that portrait, one of Tate Britain's most visited works, Birtwell reminisces on her decades-long friendship with Hockney, "I think he was a little intrigued by me and found me amusing (God knows why!). He has been a marvelous friend to me since then." According to Hockney, Birtwell's face is a 'rarity', revealing "her intuitive knowledge and her kindness, which I think is the greatest virtue. To me, she's such a special person." As a testament to their relationship, Hockney has portrayed Birtwell dozens of times across a variety of media. Given this, and the continuing appeal of Birtwell's own work, it seems particularly strange she remains better known as Tate's 'Mrs Clark'—ex-wife and muse to the late fashion designer Ossie. Yet it is to Ossie Clark that Birtwell credits her beginnings.

The eldest daughter of a culture-loving engineer and a seamstress, Celia Birtwell was born near Manchester in the north of England in 1941. She recalls obsessively drawing figures from a very young age and, at 13, was accepted into a technical college in Salford. Finding her artistic voice through pottery, painting and textiles, it was during these formative years she met the precociously talented Ossie at a coffee bar in Manchester. Birtwell says of the occasion, "When I met him, it all just clicked into place, and I haven't looked back since." Following their move to London's then-Bohemian Notting Hill and her series of jobs as a wig maker, costumier and designer of Op Art inspired fabrics for furniture store Heals, it wasn't until 1965, when Ossie was designing fashion collections for the hip London boutique Quorum, that Birtwell joined him in their generation-defining collaboration.

Taking her inspiration from the Ballets Russes, botanical sketches and the entire contents of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Birtwell designed the prints which Clark would magic into beautiful clothing. As she says, "Ossie was the most amazing pattern cutter—he could look at a person, and then cut the fabric freehand to make a perfect garment. I have never seen anything like that before or since. He used his skill to get the best out of my designs." Their joint creations were greater than the individual parts; their glamorous, easy-to-wear dresses anticipated the mood of the hippie years

“Being backstage at one of Clark’s shows was like being at the best party in London with all the most beautiful people.”

Though perhaps this was a harbinger of events to come.

—*Celia Birtwell*

and attracted a jet-set following. One infamous 1970 fashion show had throngs of people banging on the doors, imploring access to the high caliber decadence within. In Jack Hazan’s 1974 documentary “A Bigger Splash,” Hockney notes “Being backstage at one of Clark’s shows was like being at the best party in London with all the most beautiful people.” Though perhaps this was a harbinger of events to come.

With more celebrity followers than fashion buyers, mixed with his increasingly self-destructive, playboy lifestyle, Ossie’s brilliant star was quick to burn out. By 1974, his marriage to Birtwell had burned away with it, leaving her and their two sons to seek retreat in Los Angeles with her friend Hockney. With his support, Birtwell eventually returned to designing and London—opening a small, eponymous shop in 1984 in her old stomping ground, Notting Hill. By then, the once down-at-heel area had begun its march towards gentrification and Birtwell’s home furnishing fabrics were perfectly positioned to cater both to Notting Hill’s influx of affluent home renovators and her own desire for “a gentler, less frantic industry” than fashion.

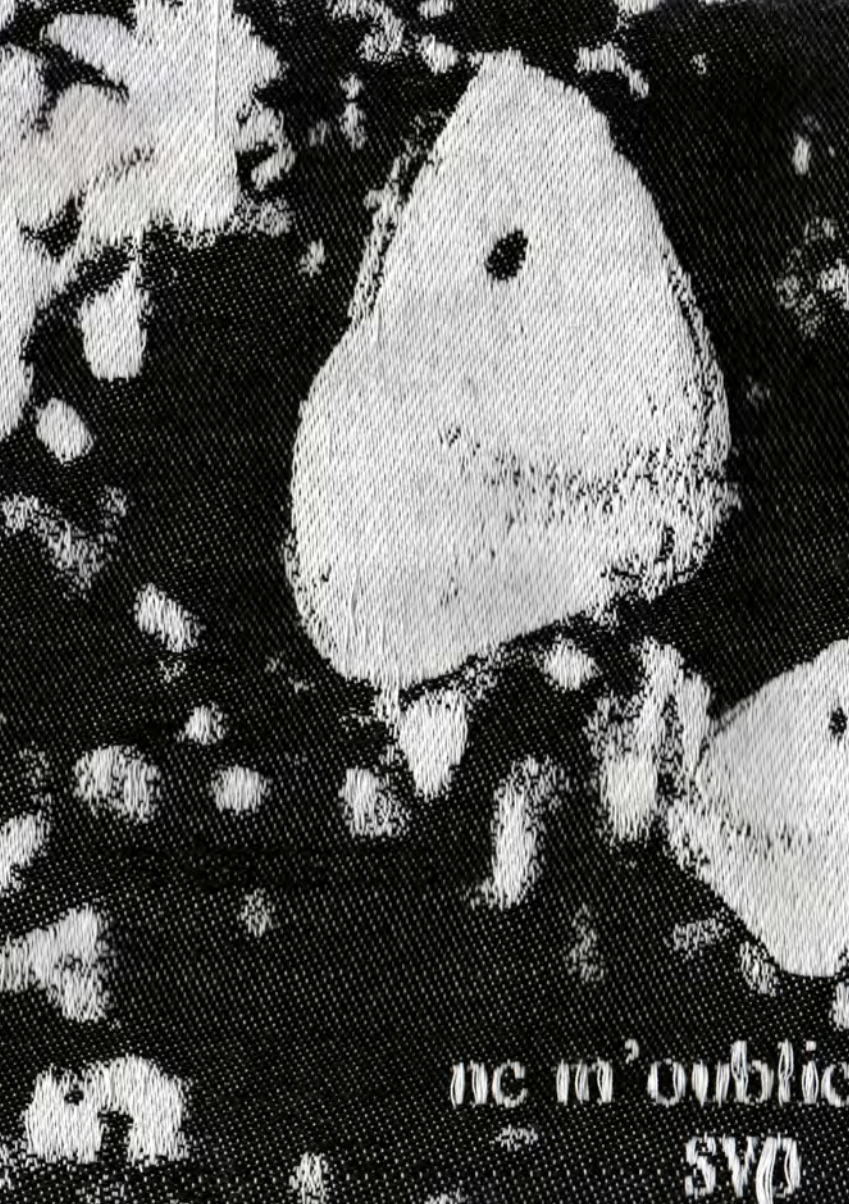
The shop has now morphed into an online venture overseen by her children, though Birtwell’s print collections have continued to extend across a variety of brands from high street to high end. In a way, her career has gone full circle, twice. From furnishing fabrics for Heals, to clothes with Ossie, back to furnishing fabrics (now through Blendworth Interiors) and again to fashion. While the next sweep of the circle is still to be decided, time is likely to continue being kind to Birtwell and her great, creative legacy.

Libby Sellers is a London-based writer and curator of design. Her book, “Women in Design,” was published by Quarto in 2018.



Portrait of *Celia Birtwell*

Photo: Courtesy of Celia Birtwell



——— Feature

Thomas Renwart

Through nature-infused tapestries, *Thomas Renwart* reconciles craft and industry, poetry and visual art, and myth and reality.

by Belinda Lanks

ne m'oubliez pas
svp

Thomas Renwart's artwork takes root in gardens—literally. The flowers (and found insects) he collects become the basis for intricate tapestries that interweave traditional craftsmanship with modern industrial techniques.

*Thomas Renwart aka
Les Monseigneurs
"Ne m'oubliez pas svp"*

Tapestry detail
Photo: Courtesy Thomas Renwart

"The flowers into textiles came somewhere out of a naive childish romantic memory," Renwart says. He recalls sewing bags of dried lavender picked from his parents' garden in Ghent, Belgium, when he was 12. His grandmother taught him how to cross stitch around the same time. His early childhood interests carried into adulthood, leading him to get his master's in textiles at LUCA School of Arts.

Since graduating in 2019, he's secured gallery representation and multiple solo and group shows, tapping into a renaissance in tapestry design. Now 25 years old and working under the alias Les Monseigneurs, he harvests flowers from his own garden and picks wild flowers—especially

Portrait of *Thomas Renwart*

Photo: Dajo Van den Bussche

Courtesy of Bruthausgallery



poisonous ones—from local forests. “I like toxic flowers in a way,” he says, “because beauty is toxic.”

Starting in the medieval era, European tapestries, made from heavy wool, were used to keep drafty castles warm. Handweavers employed silks to create artful effects such as highlights or luminosity, contrasting the darkly colored wool threads. Today, lightweight tapestries have undergone a resurgence as easy-to-install alternatives to framed art. Renwart’s pieces straddle the old and new tapestry forms: in keeping with tradition, he explores a motif across a set of tapestries designed for specific sites. But he’s evolved his approach to include unexpected natural materials, including linen, rubber, and paper, which he combines on jacquard looms before enlisting local textile mills to make the finished pieces.

“It’s always a play with yesterday and today, the past and the present,” Renwart says of his collaboration with textile manufacturers. “I always want to challenge weaving mills, but they’ll also challenge me because they have their machines, and I have to adapt my weaves to their machines—and then the other way around. Everybody learns in a way. That’s what I think is one of the most beautiful things about textiles—it’s an open school. Everybody is always learning and adapting. New materials, new methods, new stories come up, and I think you’re never finished learning.”

By working with local mills, he also hopes to bring attention to a struggling industry. “In Belgium, they have a lot of trouble surviving, and this shows that it’s still possible to do things here and create a unique story without having to go abroad or ignore our tradition.”

Although Renwart’s works always feature natural objects, they start with a sort of poem. “I embroider tiny little words or tiny little things—little secrets,” he says. “I think most of the time people don’t really notice them.” He writes in French, because of the language’s potential for layers and double meaning, and he explores the relationship between similar words such as *songe* (“dream”) and *mensonge* (“lie”). “Only three letters set them apart,” he says. “In French, you feel that the dream is a lie, and a lie can be a dream.” At the time of this interview, he was embroidering a “little secret” about a daffodil garden that you can only visit when you don’t have any voicemails. “It’s a place that you visit when you feel lonely, or when there’s solitude around you,” he says. “I like to play with creating something that exists between myth and reality.”



Thomas Renwart aka

Les Monseigneurs

“Les flocons de neige, de poésie,”

2021

Photo: Dajo Van den Bussche

Courtesy of Bruthausgallery

“I try to build a world around
the word or text—it’s a quest
for an atmosphere.”

—*Thomas Renwart*

Once he decides on the text, he settles on the subject matter—whether it be flower, butterfly, or dragonfly. Then he embarks on a long process of designing the weave, developing different ways of creating gradients in the colors and experimenting with material combinations. “I try to build a world around the word or text—it’s a quest for an atmosphere,” he says.

In creating an atmosphere, he also considers the space in which his pieces will be installed. For a show through his gallery, Bruthausgalerie, Renwart took advantage of the natural light from large windows and skylights in an old factory to change the perception of his moth-themed tapestries. Depending on the time of day, the front side or the backside of a tapestry would be visible—again, playing with perception, myth and reality, light and dark.

Renwart hopes that viewers of his work “forget everything” in a moment of silence: “Silence isn’t a negative; it’s also a positive thing. Silence is a harmony. So, I hope that, perhaps, people can just feel at peace, just for a few minutes.”

Belinda Lanks is the former design editor of WIRED and Bloomberg Businessweek. Her writing has also appeared in Fast Company and The Wall Street Journal.



*Thomas Renwart aka
Les Monseigneurs
“Soie à sois, sois encore à moi,”
2021*

Made in collaboration
with TextielLab Tilburg

Photo: Courtesy Thomas Renwart



—— Interview

Monica Kumar

Surviving the Pandemic and Living in Brooklyn

by Anna Zappia

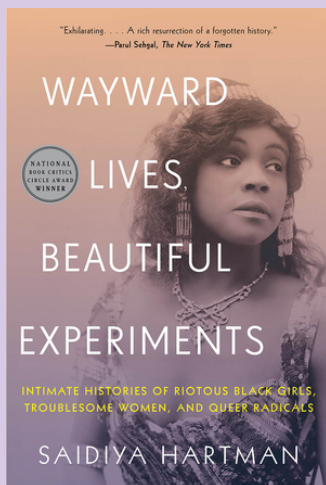
Perkins&Will interior designer Monica Kumar takes the opportunity to discuss design as we emerge from the pandemic, what makes New York City so special, and life in Brooklyn.

Portrait of Monica Kumar

Photo: Courtesy of Monica Kumar

—— How have you managed with the effects of the pandemic in the last year?

As grateful as I am for a 'return to normal' on the horizon, there were a few positives to come out of home office culture. By removing "face to face" meetings from the equation, I've been able to collaborate with people across the country and in diverse market sectors on projects that would otherwise never have existed. I also have more latitude to bring equity issues to the design table. It took a global pandemic and public execution of George Floyd Jr. for the world to see that social justice and environmental justice (and by extension design) are intertwined; what are we going to do about it? That keeps me up at night, and was a driving force in getting me through the pandemic.



Saidiya Hartman
 “Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments”
 Photo: Courtesy Norton

Most people don’t notice buildings, even though we spend our lives in them. Meanwhile, buildings affect us in ways we are only now beginning to understand: health, mood, and even lifespan. Designers know this, but I’d love to bring this knowledge to an even wider audience: everyone should be able to use the power of design to envision and create a more equitable future—one where buildings make us (and the planet) healthier, not sicker. It’s the reason my colleagues at Perkins & Will—Erika Eitland, Lauren Neefe, Anna Wissler, and myself—solicited our firm, where we are working on a podcast (launching this Fall) to examine some of these issues.

I were joking how we are both very slow readers, so we started our own “SSBC: Super Slow Book Club” where the deadlines are very flexible, and hope to finish our first book this year. We started with Saidiya Hartman’s award-winning “Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments”, a book about how black women lived in Philadelphia and New York at the beginning of the twentieth century and how they were perceived and accepted in public space.

——— What makes living in New York City so special?

After living in Manhattan while I was a graduate student at Parsons, New York City changed me. It becomes the lens through which you see the world. It challenges me to be a more defined version of myself every day, and to constantly seek out new experiences. I chose Park Slope in Brooklyn as an antidote to the perennially cool life of a designer. I love that I can enjoy trendy restaurants and gallery openings through my industry, but I also love a greasy spoon diner, having boxed wine picnics in Prospect Park, and seeing three generations on the street at once. I love coming home late from work to a neighborhood where everything closes at 9 pm. All those things bring me back down to earth, which I find is so necessary when living in this city.

New Yorkers are ridiculously committed to eating out: this shutdown proved that. My partner and I were dedicated to supporting local dining culture and ate out every Friday night of the lockdown, rain or shine. I’ll never forget dining at our favorite Italian restaurant, Pasta Louise in 38 degree-freezing rain, with two layers of thermals, two pairs of pants, and three blankets (and still freezing!)



Harmony Hammond
 “Hug,” 1978
 Acrylic on fabric and wood,
 64 × 30 1/4 × 14 in. in Whitney Museum of
 American Art, New York; gift of Rosemary
 McNamara 2017.208a-b.
 Exhibited in “Making Knowing: Craft in Art,”
 Whitney Museum of American Art
 Photo: © 2019 Harmony Hammond/Artists
 Rights Society (ARS), New York



Liza Lou
"Kitchen", 1991-96

Beads, plaster, wood, and found objects
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Peter Norton 2008.339a-x.
 Exhibited in "Making Knowing: Craft in Art"
 Photo: Photograph by Tom Powel.
 © Liza Lou
 Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art

——— What are some favorite recommendations?

In terms of exhibitions, the Whitney Museum's "Making Knowing: Craft in Art" (until February 2022) is a really provocative look at 'craft' vernacular in the context of 'fine art'. The politics of that blurred line always fascinates me, and this exhibition has stayed with me, even a year after I saw it. Go see it!

I love riding the subway in the 'opposite direction' from Manhattan, and during the pandemic I felt like I travelled to faraway places. One of my favorite weekend trips was to take the Q subway to Brighton Beach, get beers at Oktoberfest, a massage for \$30 at the place next door, and then sit on the beach. For another trip, I finally visited Jackson Heights in Queens to get a dose of South Asia. My three favorites are: Himalayan Yak for traditional Nepali Thalís; Maharaja Sweets (7310 37th Avenue) for their North Indian snacks and sweets (papdi chaat is my all-time favorite Delhi street food); and, Fuskahouse, a street cart outside the Duane Reade at 37th Ave and 73rd St, for classic Bengali street food like Fuchka.

Anna Zappia is digital content strategist at Google and the editor of Officeinsight.



Richard Saja
Bunny Fur, 2021
17 inches round

Photo: Courtesy the artist

——— @richardsaja

Bunny Fur

Based in Catskill, NY, artist Richard Saja focuses on creating “interferences” of the formal patterns of French toiles through embroidery. Saja makes conceptually compelling artworks drawing upon diverse inspiration, from monsters and clowns to ornamental design and bio-hazards.

—— @boleroadtextiles

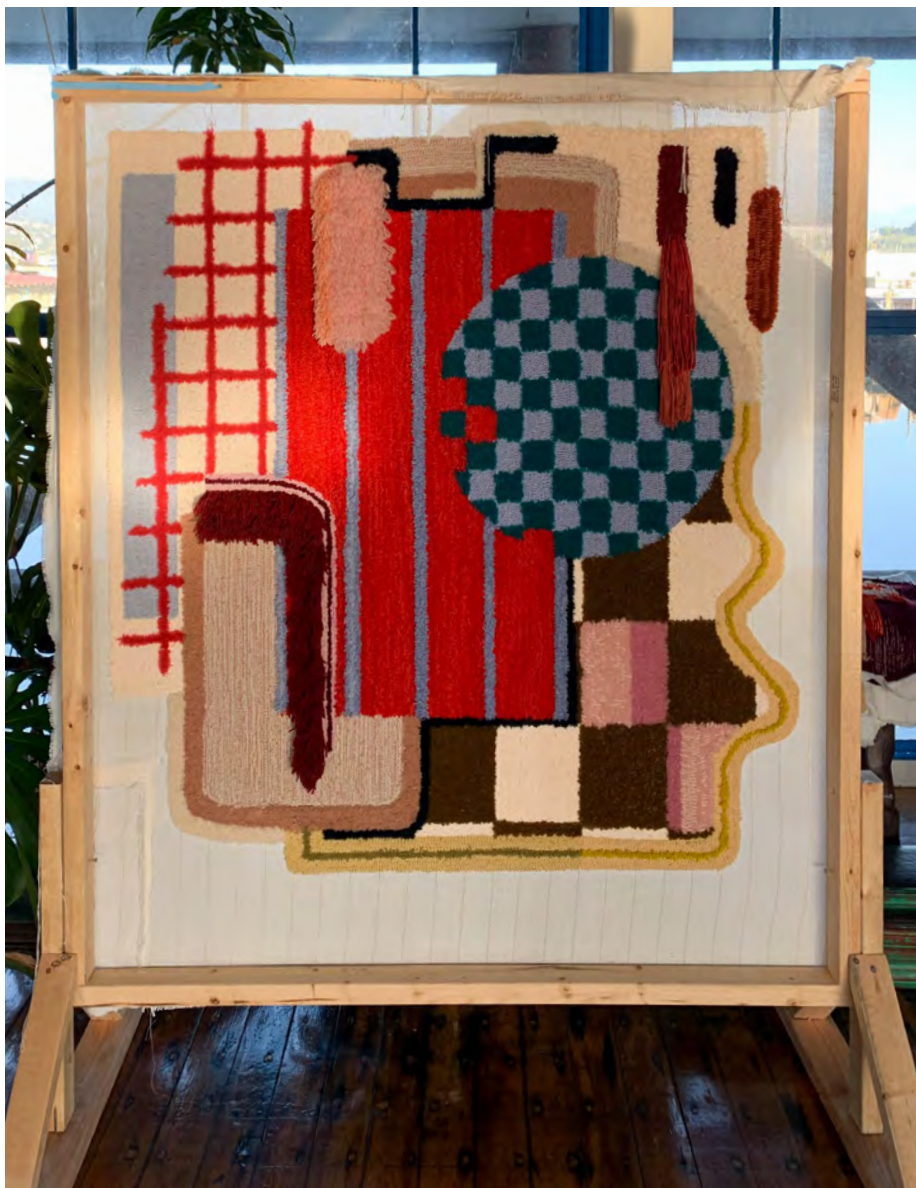
Harar wall hangings

Brooklyn-based designer Hana Getachew founded Bolé Road Textiles (named after a street in her hometown of Addis Ababa) to combine her love of handwoven Ethiopian fabrics with her career in interior design. The brand's online shop contains a dazzling array of vibrant colors and graphic patterns that are designed in New York and ethically handwoven in Ethiopia, like these Harar wall hangings that also double as bed scarves.



Bolé Road Textiles
Harar wall hangings

Photo: Courtesy Bolé Road Textiles



Caroline Kaufman
Tufted No. 7 tapestry
Photo: Courtesy the artist

—— @carolinekaufman

Tufted No. 7 tapestry

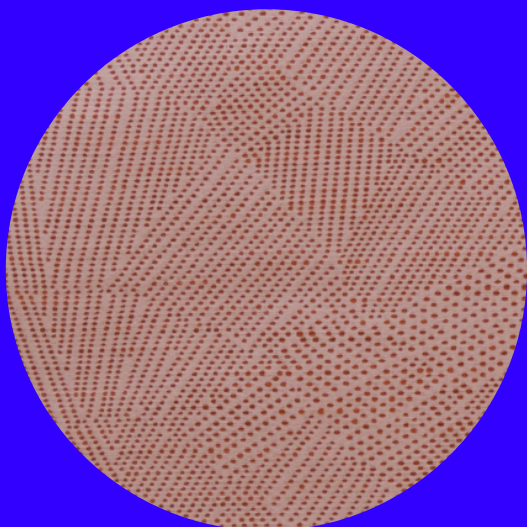
Caroline Kaufman is a textile artist who translates her paintings, drawings and notebook ideas into story-based, exuberant, tufted tapestries. Kaufman's work tends toward free-form shapes with vibrant geometries like checkerboard patterns, and draws upon influences from modernist greats like Stuart Davies and David Hockney.



— Digital Wallcovering

Blooma by Ghislaine Viñas

Inspired by Swedish patterning, Ghislaine *Viñas*' Blooma is a happy and confident floral celebrating nature whimsically. Viñas leads her internationally renowned design studio with a visionary approach, collecting inspiration from the everyday and everywhere.



— Upholstery

Nakata

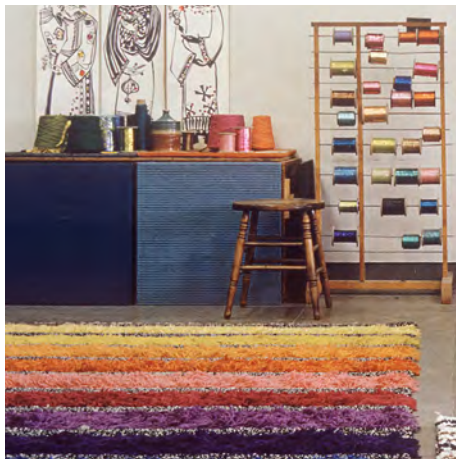
An aerial view of vineyards catalyzed the design of Nakata, an appreciative hybrid of organic form and geometry. Two-toned stitches gracefully interpret linework in a movement that can be seen and felt. Nakata is available in thirteen contemporary colorways.



— Wallcovering

CLAIR® Taiga PVC-Free Type II

Wood looks are much desired across all categories of interior finishes, and Taiga interprets woodgrain in a high performing, PVC-free, and bleach cleanable construction. Check out our thirteen exquisite colorways of natural, pickled, weathered and stained inspiration.



— Exhibition

With Eyes Opened. Cranbrook Academy of Art Since 1932

Cranbrook Art Museum
Cranbrook, MI
until September 19, 2021

Widely considered the cradle of mid-century Modernism in America (with alumni such as Ray Eames and Florence Knoll), the Cranbrook Academy of Art did not only pioneer a more organic and human-centric approach to design starting in the 1930s. Cranbrook also helped shape the Studio Craft movement in the postwar period, and it radicalized the fields of architecture and design in the 1980s during the advent of Postmodernism. This exhibition surveys over 250 works by some of the leading artistic and design talents from the last century.

Marianne Strengell's
Weaving studio with the Forecast Rug (left)
Cranbrook Academy of Art, c.1957.

Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research,
Marianne Strengell Papers (1991-07)
Photo: Courtesy Cranbrook Archives



— Conversation

Sheila Hicks: Thread, Trees, River MAK Dialogues

Artist Sheila Hicks and The MAK (Museum of Applied Arts) curator Bärbel Vischer discuss the process of designing works for exhibition installation, in this case, Hicks's experimental weavings and sculptural textile arts at The MAK in Vienna in 2020. The artist talks about her major influences (Josef Albers and Luis Barragan), how architecture impacts her work, and how unknown factors, new ways of doing things, and continually improvising from one idea, one space and one opportunity to the next, all play a role in her process.

Sheila Hicks
"Sheila Hicks MAK—Yarn, Trees, River" exhibition,
2020

MAK— Monumental Exhibition Hall, 2018–2020
Photo © Bildrecht, Vienna 2020
Photo: Courtesy MAK/Georg Mayer



— Exhibition

Ann Morton: The Violet Protest

Phoenix Art Museum
Phoenix, AZ
until September 21, 2021

The Violet Protest is a large-scale installation by Ann Morton that seeks to unite makers of varying political ideologies and encourage bipartisan collaboration. The work presents both Morton's handwork and that of 1,500 other makers from across the country, to make square textile units that use equal parts of red and blue materials, symbolizing the union of opposing political ideologies in the United States.

Installation view of
"Ann Morton: The Violet Protest," 2021

Multimedia. Courtesy of the artist.
Installation view of Ann Morton: The Violet Protest, 2021
Phoenix Art Museum.

Photo: Courtesy Airi Katsuta



— Podcast

Fashion Revolution: A Conversation about Trees with Canopy's Nicole Rycroft

The Wardrobe Crisis

This engaging episode interviews Nicole Rycroft of Canopy Planet, which is dedicated to protecting the Earth's precious forests. Hosted by Clare Press, who interviews designers, change-makers, academics, creatives and fashion insiders about fashion, ethics, social justice and environmental responsibility, this sustainable fashion podcast is in its fifth season.

Photo: Courtesy United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service



— Exhibition

Designing the New Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Glasgow Style

Frist Art Museum, Nashville, TN
Until September 12, 2021

This exhibition of 165 works showcases Charles Rennie Mackintosh—the greatest exponent of the Glasgow Style—as an architect, designer, and artist, and contextualizes his production within a larger circle of designers (including his wife, Margaret Macdonald, and her sister, Frances Macdonald) and craftspeople from Glasgow at the end of the 19th century. Combining influences from the Arts and Crafts movement, Celtic Revival, and Japonisme, these artists created their own modern design aesthetic, synonymous with sleek lines and emphatic geometries expressed in a wide range of materials.

Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh
The May Queen (detail), 1900.
Made for the Ladies' Luncheon Room,
Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tearooms,
Glasgow

Gesso on burlap over a wood frame, scrim,
twine, glass beads, thread, and tin leaf

Glasgow Museums: Acquired by Glasgow Corporation
as part of the Ingram Street Tearooms, 1950.
© CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection.

Photo: Courtesy American Federation of Arts



— Conference Highlights

World Hope Forum: Design Tales from Iceland

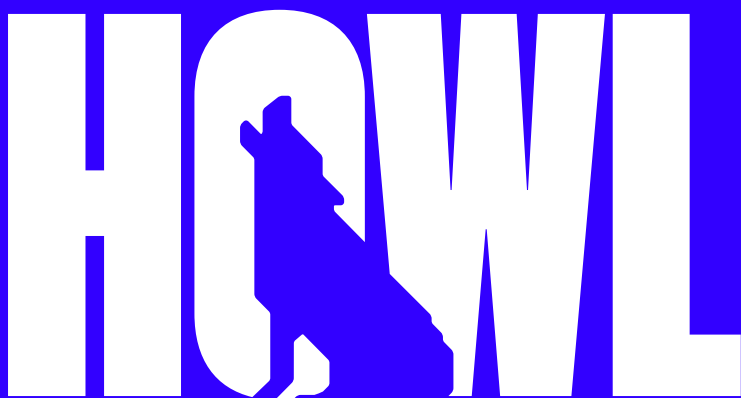
Reykjavik, Iceland

The World Hope Forum is a new initiative, created by trend forecasters Li Edelkoort and Philip Fimmano, that brings together speakers, case studies and innovative ideas in engaging conversations about climate change. The latest conference took place in May in Iceland and included talks by Unnur Kristjansdottir on healing with water and Búi Bjarmar Aðalsteinsson who works with male prisoners and plant materials.

Helga Mogensen
"The Shores of Japan"
neckpiece, 2019

Japanese driftwood, silk

Photo: Courtesy Edelkoort Inc.



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from *Wolf-Gordon*

Next Issue: Fall 2021.
See you then!

Feedback and suggestions for
future content should be addressed
to howl@wolfgordon.com.



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