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Ned Smyth
Robert Zakanitch
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ABOVE RIGHT:
VALERIE JAUDON
Toomsuba, 1973
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While there is general consensus that enough time has passed to allow for a “first draft” assessment of the 1970s, Pattern and Decoration remains stubbornly resistant to rediscovery. The movement emerged at a turbulent time. The ferment in the social and political fabric was amply reflected in the complex array of artistic expressions struggling to find a voice that was more aggressive than the rather formal language of abstraction, which in its various forms had been the dominant style of the post-World War II period. Despite its importance, Pattern and Decoration is often overlooked or dismissed as a less consequential development of the 1970s and 1980s.

Misunderstood then as now, Pattern and Decoration always seems counterintuitive. As the essays that follow demonstrate, the artists we have come to associate with Pattern and Decoration are firmly rooted in the contentiousness of the period in which they were created. But what brings these artists together are the visual choices they make. Again and again, we read of their opting for decorative surfaces, beauty, pattern, and all manner of visual sumptuousness. They were and are marginalized, rather than illuminated, by attempts to understand why they pursue forms that are closely associated with women’s work. What these softly negative inquiries miss is the powerful commitment of the artists to the surface and their virtuosity in dealing with it. Critics also miss the urgent way these artists sought to push the margins of what was acceptable vocabulary for art. And finally, they miss the ways Pattern and Decoration turns our expectations upside down by appropriating some of the formal qualities of abstraction, not to self reflect on the abstract, but to raise issues of identity, gender, power, authority, and authenticity. The comfort and beauty of much of Pattern and Decoration is deceptive. It encourages us to look in the wrong direction.

We are incredibly fortunate to have the contributions of Arthur Danto, Temma Balducci, and John Perrault. Their sharp perspectives will encourage all of us to rethink Pattern and Decoration. There is no one in the contemporary field better able to lead this evaluation than Anne Swartz. Her research into this period has led to a deep and nuanced sense of how Pattern and Decoration fits into the history of contemporary art, and her work has given us both a book and an exhibition that truly “rediscover” the Pattern and Decoration movement. Anne’s work has been effectively supported and enhanced by many members of the museum’s staff: most particularly Jean-Paul Maitinsky, Assistant Director, Exhibitions and Programs; Bartholomew Bland, Curator of Exhibitions; Erica Blumenfeld, Registrar; and James Cullinane, Chief Preparator.
We are especially grateful to Furthermore, a program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, for support of this exhibition and for additional support from Marieluise Hessel, Virginia Galtney and Mary Ross Taylor, and Meredith and David Brown. We have believed strongly in this project, and it is very meaningful to have others recognize and support that commitment. In fact, the Hudson River Museum has a long history of championing artists in the Pattern and Decoration movement. In 1983, the museum hosted the exhibition *Ornamentalism: The New Decorativeness in Architecture and Design*, and with its influential exhibition *A New Beginning 1968–1978*, the museum created one of the earliest institutional attempts to reevaluate the Pattern and Decoration art of a tumultuous decade. More than a venue, the museum has also served as a vehicle for Pattern and Decoration artist Cynthia Carlson. The nineteenth-century decoration of *Glenview* inspired her major installation in the modern wing in 1981. After some twenty-five years it is nice to revisit this important moment in the development of American art and reintroduce it and the artists to the public.

*Installation view of the exhibition Cynthia Carlson: Eastlake Then and Now (1981), showing her paintings based on decorative elements in *Glenview*. Collection of the Hudson River Museum*
The artists helped me understand their work and answered my persistent questions with grace and generosity. I appreciate their impressive and constant help in all ways.

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The emergence of art movements is one of the most distinctive features of modernist art history. Until modernism, art history tended to be marked not so much by movements as by stylistic periods, like the Romanesque, the Gothic, the Renaissance, the baroque, and beyond. Period styles like these pertain not to art and architectures alone, but to the attitudes and values of entire cultures over an extended interval of time. By contrast, art movements are restricted to a more or less small number of artists, who usually know one another, share certain tastes and distastes, and consummate their relationship by exhibiting together as a group. Ideally, they seek a sympathetic critic, often a poet or philosopher, to generate an aura of excitement and even controversy—though often it is a hostile critic who gives the movement its name, as happened with impressionism, cubism, and the fauves. The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood was a typical modernist movement, consisting of several ambitious young artists who managed to enlist the great Victorian thinker, John Ruskin, in supporting their claim that the entire history of art had taken an unfortunate turn with Raphael, away from visual truth, which they embraced as their ideal—getting art back on track, as it were. It is typical of movements to identify their philosophy with the future of culture in this way. To support their art was to invest in the future of society.

There were dozens of such movements in the modernist era, and while no one of them can be said to have defined it in the way the Gothic style did the high Middle Ages, a case can be made that their number and diversity, considered in the aggregate, may itself be one of modernism’s defining marks. It was not a period of consensus, and it is fair to say that when each movement must find reasons to disparage the others, the question of what is and is not art must, more than any answer, be what distinguishes modernism as a period. In light of this, what is striking about the present stage of art is the almost complete disappearance of movements. The emergence of movements has been replaced with the idea of emerging artists. That alone has to mean that modernism as a period has ended. Artists today are very much on their own.

The great movements of the 1960s were for the most part efforts at de-exalting art, bringing art down to earth. Pop certainly attempted to obliterate the distinction between fine and demotic art. Minimalism was an effort to obliterate the distinction between the handmade and the manufactured. Fluxus obliterated the distinction between creativity and play. Conceptual art obliterated the idea that art need even be an object. Pattern and Decoration or “P&D,” as its members and supporters called it, declared itself a movement in the late 1970s,
when the very idea of movements seemed to belong to an earlier era. But its spirit was very much that of the 1960s. It sought to obliterate the distinction between art and decoration, often understood in the most vernacular terms, which, in the case of one of its founding members, the painter Robert Rahway Zakanitch, meant the patterns he remembered from his Central European grandmother’s house in New Jersey—floral prints, painted china, lace curtains, embroidered pillows, wallpaper, rugs—in the warmth of which, as a boy, he felt embraced and secure. “In my grandparents’ house,” he told an interviewer, Charles Sabba, “ornamentation was everywhere. They had embroidered tablecloths and armrests. They used stencils to paint flower patterns on their walls, which gave me an affinity for stencils. My grandparents refused to live in bleak empty rooms and decorated everything.”

The “bleak empty room” is a disparaging reference to the “white cube” that had become the paradigmatic exhibition space of modernism. The artworks shown were not usually intended as decorations, for that space or any other; the blankness and bleakness of the room was calculated to neutralize the ambient space, allowing the work to stand on its own. I remember some photographs, in an exhibition at MoMA of the work of Lee Krasner, that showed some of her paintings in her home, with plants and furniture, rugs and curtains—and I thought how much better her work looked in its domestic setting, where, together with the surrounding furnishings, the urgent florid canvases helped create an atmosphere of life. Until P&D claimed decoration as its artistic criterion, the term had long become one of critical disparagement. Lee Krasner would have been crushed by a review that praised her art for its decorativity.

There is an affecting moment in the movement’s history when Zakanitch told another of its founders, Miriam Schapiro, in her studio in Los Angeles, that he wanted to start a movement—and then asked, “How do you do that?” Schapiro would have been an obvious one to ask, since she had shown considerable organizational skill in the creation, together with Judy Chicago, of feminist art as a political force, and she well understood what she described, in an interview, as “the structure of the women’s movement, the networking and the ways of disseminating information and all of that.” She answered his question with a question: “Well, how did the cubists do it? How did the impressionists?” Both she and Zakanitch knew other artists who had turned their back on the formalist dogmas of the time and sought, to use a slogan of the 1960s, to close, or at least narrow, the gap between art and life. Schapiro herself saw considerable artistic merit in the kinds of decorative touches with which ordinary women, women with no sense of being artists, created work that enhanced life—decorative table linen, aprons, coverlets, samplers, afghans. Far from contrasting these achievements with “real” art, Schapiro celebrated them in her own “femmages”—collages and
assemblages of women’s work. “If there’s a period in history when a number of artists are working in a similar way, what’s interesting is for these artists to talk to each other,” she explained. Zakanitch said, “Okay. I’m making a meeting at my loft, and I want you to come.”

Zakanitch and Schapiro arrived at the aesthetic beliefs and attitudes of P&D from very different directions, and this is also true of the others who became part of the movement in its early stages. Zakanitch had been a formalist and had made a name for himself in the New York gallery scene. But by 1975, when P&D got under way as a movement, he had turned with a certain revulsion away from the critically approved mainstream, which he felt had come to an end. He became, so to speak, a late ’60s artist and thinker, and sought some way to bring into his painting what he described as “the sentimental visuals of my childhood environment.” Feminism, on the other hand, gave Schapiro license to “bring all the parts of my life together” into what her husband, Paul Brach, referred to as “one seamless existence.” She recalls that there were about five women and five men at the meeting in Zakanitch’s loft, and that she and her friend and fellow artist, Joyce Kozloff, found this balance particularly exciting. They had been so immersed in what she terms “the woman’s part of it” that the discovery that the artistic values of decoration and all it stood for had as much meaning for men as for women was a deep validation of its artistic significance. “Here were men who were interested in an analysis of the decorative. Why make the decorative? Where does it happen?”

Though P&D had more women than most art movements, all of them feminists and some very active in feminist causes, it was not a feminist movement. Feminism was but one of its roots. Zakanitch’s roots lay elsewhere. So too did the roots of the California artists Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel, both of whom were inspired by the teaching of the critic and art historian Amy Goldin at the University of California at San Diego, who taught them about Islamic art, which was manifestly decorative. In the spirit of the 1960s, Kushner was eager, as he told his dealer, Holly Solomon, to elevate decoration in much the same way that pop had elevated commercial art. It was clear that decoration fell somewhere between figuration and abstraction and encompassed almost the entire visual culture of many non-Western traditions. Islam was deeply aniconic, but its patterns were not bereft of meaning because of that. Alois Riegel, who had been a curator of textiles in Vienna, attempted in his masterpiece, Problems of Style, to identify certain objective formal structures in the visual culture of a given period, irrespective of any differences between vernacular and fine art, and to explain these structures with reference to the world outlook of those whose art it was. This approach was taken up by Ernst Gombrich in The Sense of Order, in which he felt he had thereby done justice to abstract art, which repelled him.
The P&D artists did not appeal to this scholarly tradition, but it would have lent support to their intuition that from the perspective of meaning, decoration was on a footing with figurative or abstract art, and that the impulse to decorate was the impulse to humanize.

What has to be emphasized is that all the artists in the movement were already using decoration before the movement was created. What P&D’s existence as a movement did was enable its members to recognize what they had in common in making decoration central to their art, and to deal with the kinds of negative attitudes the art they were practicing generated in an art world that could not, for whatever reason, take decoration seriously. But there was a countercurrent in the art world of the 1960s such that by the time the decade was over, it had become the common wisdom that anything could be art, so why not decoration, which in any case had so much to offer so many in terms of pleasure and meaning? If everything was possible as art, who was to say that decoration was beyond the pale? When that was finally understood, sometime in the 1980s, the need for a special movement dedicated to pattern and decoration had disappeared, together with the need for any movements at all.

What the actual Pattern and Decoration movement contributed to cultural understanding was that the decorated surface has its own kind of artistic meaning, alongside the meaning shown in traditional Western art by figures represented as engaged in performing actions, or the kind of meaning with which abstract forms are symbolically vested once abstraction becomes acknowledged. “We are meaning-makers, not just image makers,” as Kirk Varnedoe argues in his posthumous Mellon Lectures. “It is not just that we recognize images . . . it is that we are constructed to make meaning out of things, and that we learn from others how to do it.” It is a genuine insight to recognize, as Joyce Kozloff did, that there is “a third category of art which is neither representational nor abstract”—the art of ornament, pattern, and decoration. The members of the movement to which she belonged were tirelessly inventive in pointing out how much meaning this third category contributes to human life.

Formalism ought easily to apply across the boundaries to all three categories of art, had it not been weighted down with prejudices that had little to do with its essential practice. My own effort as a philosopher of art has been to replace aesthetics of form with aesthetics of meaning, grounded in a definition of an artwork as the embodiment of meaning. It is not difficult to suppose that there are three modes of embodiment, corresponding to Kozloff’s scheme of three categories of art.

However much the P&D artists contributed to the understanding and practice of art, their movement has remained fairly obscure. There are several Web sites on Google given over to directories and timelines of art movements, but I
was unable to find Pattern and Decoration listed anywhere. Since these Web pages must reflect the syllabi and reading lists for Art History 101 as it is taught to undergraduates in institutions of higher learning everywhere in the world, it is reasonable to assume that those whose art education is defined by these know nothing of the wonderful art the men and women of this movement created. It is not just that the issues they raised are deep and important to the understanding of the relationship of art to life—the painting and objects through which their ideas were expressed are well worth knowing directly. P&D was an early step into a globalist aesthetics, and in light of that, this exhibition acquires a fresh dimension.
Pattern and Decoration: An Ideal Vision in American Art

ANNE SWARTZ

IDEAL VISION

Pattern and Decoration, or P&D, was a seductive and alluring movement in 1970s and 1980s American contemporary art. Optimistic and progressive, it was important as a new pathway for artists facing a crisis in painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Artists involved in P&D used decoration, pattern, beauty, and visual pleasure as a response to the restrictive aesthetics of the contemporary art world and its market.1 They wanted to fill the vacuum left by minimalism and sought a way out of the rigidity of formalist and conceptualist impulses of the prior decade. Abstraction had become an extremely limited dialogue, which didn’t make sense outside of a very specific context of Western mid-twentieth century art history. The artists wanted to participate in a much broader dialogue; they saw from the world around them that this art world background could not be the whole story. Robert Kushner said:

I think all of us felt like saying, “It’s a big world, look at your grandmother’s quilt, look at the carpet you’ve been standing on, look at that ornament outside your building, look at what’s happening in other countries. . . . Enjoy it, it’s a huge rich visual feast out there.”2

The P&D artists opened a Pandora’s box with their willingness to expand on the existing ideas about contemporary American art. Once they began moving in this new direction, they could not go back to their previous isolation.

This movement is one of the last of modernism and one of the first of postmodernism. As such, it has been challenging to classify. It was one of several movements in the constellation known as pluralism. P&D offers a lexicon of images through which many past sensibilities have been filtered. Its artists challenged presumptions about the definitions of art versus craft, West versus East, and inclusion versus expansion, especially as some of these issues were addressed by the feminist movement. They made it possible for countless subsequent artists to use pattern, decoration, and ornament,3 and their innovations and concerns continue to resonate in the art world today. These artists’ investigations coincided with a moment of rising interest in exoticism in the American contemporary art scene, partly a result of changing American travel habits.

The title of this exhibition is intended to convey the romantic qualities in the works of this group of eleven artists—Cynthia Carlson, Brad Davis, Valerie Jaudon, Jane Kaufman, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnel, Tony Robbin, Miriam Schapiro, Ned Smyth, and Robert Zakanitch—working on art inspired by imagery from the distant past, faraway places, and the
beautiful, sentimental, or kitschy close at hand. Kim MacConnel remarked on their unity: “Here is this clearly defined group of people creating interesting, strong, visual compelling art, in a rousing, high-energy environment that received tremendous recognition.” Robert Zakanitch noted that it was a disparate group, though: “We all disagreed on almost everything except this attitude that we had about ornamentation and decoration and kind of attacking the sterile approach that art was at that time.” The focus of Pattern and Decoration: An Ideal Vision in American Art, 1975–1985 is on these artists who came together for a brief period for meetings, panels, and exhibitions. P&D as a movement can be understood by surveying its beginnings, considering the main events/exhibitions, and then exploring the recognition that resulted and the backlash that occurred.

THE BEGINNINGS WITH GOLDIN

Art critic Amy Goldin became the primary mentor of this loose group of artists. Working in New York as a critic and historian, Goldin decided to take a break as a visiting critic in California for the 1969-70 academic year.4 Her friends, artist Eleanor Antin and poet David Antin, invited her to the University of California at San Diego, where they were both teaching. There, Goldin met graduate student Kim MacConnel and undergraduate student Robert Kushner through a class she taught called “The Art Box,”5 in which she questioned the rigid definition of Western art. MacConnel and Kushner sought out Goldin’s advice, friendship, and guidance in developing a different approach to their work. MacConnel recalled that Goldin posed the question, “What are the boundaries of art making and how could you transgress them?”6 He and Kushner found her embrace of Islamic art particularly compelling. Initially interested in kilims, MacConnel then began tracing carpet patterns—borders and fields—to unravel the compositional system. It was but one of his sources, but an essential beginning. He decided to make paintings that mimicked a textile he had found comprised of several pieces of ikat weavings sewn together. He found this single piece an extraordinary revelation.

Kushner similarly fell in love with Islamic patterning, art, and ornament through MacConnel’s passion for their compositions and through his nascent efforts as a collector. When Goldin occasionally returned to New York, as she did in the spring of 1970, Kushner would visit with her. They wandered into a carpet store and he purchased one, which became a kind of talisman for him. He would display it wherever he lived or visited and even took commissions to repair small carpets. They returned to California and decided, with MacConnel, to use the carpets they were purchasing as the basis for one of the art department’s “Crit Nights.” Kushner remembers, “Amy had such strong feelings about presenting them.”
Kushner ended up relocating to New York City, where he befriended Brad Davis, with whom he shared a studio. Davis had met Goldin through his work as an assistant to sculptor George Sugarman, a proponent of both public art and lyrical abstraction. Goldin admired Sugarman’s work, often associated with P&D; critic Corinne Robins called him “unofficial adviser and even elder statesman to the movement.”\(^7\) He was held in high regard for his polychromed, curvy, abstract sculptures. His work was called decorative, but he derided such an approach and never considered it so, favoring a less referential description. Goldin wrote some pieces about his work.\(^8\) Davis had started studying Islamic art in graduate school with Ernst Grube, recently departed from his appointment as the curator of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum. Davis described art history as boring, but distinctly remembered Grube’s class as the first presentation of historical visual material that interested him. He was strongly swayed to investigate Islamic art because of Grube’s desire to open his students both intellectually and visually to its qualities and history. Furthermore, Sugarman’s father had sold oriental carpets. The patterns made a strong impression on the elder sculptor, which he then imparted to his assistant.

Kushner and Goldin made a three-month trip to Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan in the spring of 1974.\(^9\) MacConnel had often talked with them about such a journey and Davis had wanted to join in on this one, but couldn’t come up with the necessary funds. Goldin continued on to Lebanon without Kushner, who returned to the States. She had wanted companionship because she was anxious about traveling in the Middle East as a single woman. Iran in particular was very pro-Western, but these countries were still predominantly Muslim. The only hostility the pair encountered was in Iran, from young boys who threw rocks because they did not like the amateur way that Goldin wore the chador, and Kushner tried to sneak into a “Muslim only” site, which ended badly. In general, people were still very kind. Professor Oleg Grabar, the noted Islamicist with whom Goldin had studied, provided her with letters of introduction, which impressed Kushner enormously. Those letters permitted them to travel quite widely, as well as enjoy Professor Grabar’s recommendations of several “off the beaten track” sites. Kushner recalls that his work completely changed as a result of the trip. He had been toying with decoration, and this experience solidified his decision to make overtly decorative work. Davis reports that although he did not go along, the extended discussions he had with Goldin and Kushner gave him fruitful material to send his work on a similar route to decoration.

Brad Davis, along with Kushner and MacConnel, became one of the artists whom Holly Solomon, and her then husband Horace Solomon, actively championed in her eponymous gallery. In addition, she cultivated the artist Ned Smyth,
who collaborated with Davis in several key installations at her gallery, including “The Garden—A Collaboration,” from September 10 to October 8, 1977. Smyth’s upbringing around major Byzantine and Renaissance Italian churches that his father, the art historian Craig Hugh Smyth, studied, prompted him to create minimally decorated architectural elements as a way of structuring space anew. However, he soon turned his attentions to surface decoration and began exploring mosaic and ornament in his work.

The P&D artists gave a form to ideas independent of the established avant-garde dialogue, which required both great innovation and a willingness to be transgressive. Robert Kushner explained: “There was a tremendous amount of excitement and shared mission; we felt like we were bringing something new into the art world.” They used decoration in two ways, either predominantly organic/floral imagery or geometric forms. John Perreault differentiated these aspects into “a formal track and an emotional track.” Their sources allowed them to pursue an investigation of beauty; its presence is both necessary and restorative for our contemporary lives. P&D was centered largely in New York City around the gallery scene. Gallery shows were followed with lengthy reviews by Amy Goldin (who was in many ways an unofficial mentor to the group), John Perreault, Jeff Perrone, Carter Ratcliff, and Carrie Rickey. The movement became prominent after 1977 when the European market got hold of it. Museum exhibitions brought the artists and their approach to decoration to the attention of a broader public, as will be chronicled below. And the collectors came en masse and purchased the work, lots of it.

The artists started by exploring some of the choices available to them in the visual culture beyond the avant-garde. They quickly became passionate about using ornament, women’s work, and non-Western forms, as well as travel, as source and inspiration, even as the art world disparaged these motifs, modes, and methods. Many remarked that they found these alternatives visually and intellectually exciting. But, early on, comments about P&D artists as cultural imperialists prompted them to ensure that their admiration for the sources was uppermost, much as Henri Matisse’s similar respect for non-Western art and decorative arts had permitted him to see more of the world than his contemporaries. They were not decadent, simply looking for imagery to plunder; instead, they sought options they celebrated and acknowledged. Harold Szeemann commented on the import of what these artists were doing: Yet the change in mentality is so visible, so powerful and attractive that it is bound to bring art to a new generation of artists who regard their works as homage to all the thousands of ornament-crafters over
the centuries, or alternatively as a contribution to the liberation of women and by consequence a contribution to contemporary life.  

These are not minor effects or issues. The artists treated their heritage and other cultures with seriousness of purpose, even as they made playful and joyful imagery.

**MEANWHILE, BACK IN NEW YORK . . .**

Kozloff, Jaudon’s friend from feminist consciousness-raising groups, also sought to avoid the modernist dialogue. Jaudon and Kozloff met regularly with Schapiro in 1977 to discuss a contribution to the fourth issue of the Heresies Collective’s quarterly publication, which focused on “women’s traditional arts.” Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics had been founded that year by Schapiro, with Joan Braderman, Mary Beth Edelson, Elizabeth Hess, Joyce Kozloff, Arlene Laddan, Ellen Lanyon, Lucy Lippard, Joan Semmel, Nancy Spero, May Stevens, Michelle Stuart, and Susana Torre. Joyce Kozloff held the first meeting at her place. Eventually the Heresies Collective would include many more women, like Jane Kaufman, who assisted in editing a single volume of the publication. Jaudon and Kozloff both describe how overwhelmed they were by the baggage of history and the rebuke of decoration. Part of the reason for the outcry was the pejorative association with beauty. Jaudon had been collecting quotations, and she and Kozloff noted a perennial misogyny and racism in the ways that decoration was denigrated. They collected these quotations under headings such as “War and Virility,” “Purity,” “Purity in Art as a Holy Cause,” “The Superiority of Western Art,” “Fear of Racial Contamination, Impotence and Decadence,” “Racism and Sexism,” “Hierarchy of High-Low Art,” “That Old Chestnut, ‘Humanism,’” “Decoration and Domesticity,” and “Autocracy.” They contended that only by questioning these comments could they seek to eliminate the negative perceptions that motivated them. This kind of activist stance was typical of feminism in the 1970s in the art world—intelligent and careful in its critique of the patriarchy and its mechanisms.

The period was significant in terms of women gaining more attention in the art world. In addition to increased exhibitions of women artists, as a result of the kind of feminist organizing Schapiro and Kozloff were doing, other artists became involved as well. Jane Kaufman curated a show at Alessandro Gallery on Broome Street in Soho. That exhibition, which opened on September 25, 1976, was “Ten Approaches to the Decorative,” the first show of P&D, and included Valerie Jaudon, Jane Kaufman, Joyce Kozloff, Tony Robbin, Miriam Schapiro, Arlene Slavin, John Torreano, Robert Zakanitch, and Joe Zucker. Kaufman went from spraying paint to spraying
metal flake (reflective material, like used on motorcycles). And then she began showing her beaded pairs, on black velvet canvas, as a way of exploring light reflective material. The pairs of “paintings” functioned for Kaufman as decorative elements, which then prompted her to emancipate the beading into hangings, free from the background into the space of the gallery. Beading was a female adornment used on women’s dresses, on bags—it was using women’s materials—but was mostly about the reflective quality of the bead, which for her was also about the decorative. Kaufman wanted to make a statement about the gorgeousness of the material. She was close friends and allied politically with artist Ree Morton, who died an untimely death in 1977 from a car accident, and was an influence on Cynthia Carlson in her work. Morton worked extensively in installations, which were broadly influential on Carlson, who created several important installations in 1975 and 1976 at Hundred Acres Gallery, where she literally covered the wall with squiggles of paint to suggest embellished reliefs. Carlson came to the use of the squiggles of paint from her pattern paintings of the early 1970s, whose compositions and forms are based on woven textiles. Additionally, articles of the period discuss and define common features and qualities of women’s art, as when Cynthia Carlson, Jane Kaufman, Joyce Kozloff, and Miriam Schapiro are noted for the obsessive repetition that was a recurring feature of women’s work.

THE IMMEDIATE AND DISTANT PAST IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

The artists did not spring forth fully formed, but their work did “have something to do with pleasure,” which was a much-maligned concept for art. “Decorative” was a negative term, despite many minimalist painters creating works that could be called that, such as Frank Stella, who invoked Matisse as the forerunner for his desire to make decoration “truly viable in unequivocal abstract terms.” David Bourdon (or his editor) perhaps crystallized the sentiment most perceptively, when a piece he wrote for The Village Voice was titled “Decorative Is Not a Dirty Word.”

P&D artists have many debts to the art of the preceding generations. Miriam Schapiro, Robert Zakanitch, and Jane Kaufman had all achieved recognition as abstract painters in the late 1960s and early 1970s before turning to

PLEASURE

The notion of irony and anxiety are constants in recent American art, but absent in P&D. P&D artists focused their energies elsewhere—on eroticism, play, and color. The use of pattern and fabric suggests clothing and, by extension, the body. Kim MacConnel perhaps summed up the significance of soft, cheerful imagery and forms in reference to his practice when he commented, “I was actually fighting the good fight.”
craft, ornament, and pattern. The proportions of abstract expressionism are evident in the large scale of the works, as many of the most important paintings are the size of murals. Art historian E. A. Carmean Jr. connects Zakanitch to Schapiro’s friend Jackson Pollock and his art, noting that “the more even distribution [of pattern], the creation of various subunits, and the sense of sweeping irregularity all evoke the large poured compositions of Jackson Pollock.” The interest in the grid comes directly out of American painting of the 1960s, especially minimalism, but it is used as a substructure rather than as an end in itself. Art historian Anna Chave noted direct linkages between Valerie Jaudon’s geometry and that of painter Frank Stella and sculptor Eva Hesse. The new movement’s artists felt there was too much emptiness, tranquility, and stillness in minimalism; each separately shifted toward an art of repetitive patterns, exuberant colors, and vernacular sources. They found their content in marginalized patterns and decorative motifs. Using the repetitious language of systems so prevalent during the 1960s and early 1970s, they began incorporating stylized imagery drawn from architectural ornament; from art and architecture from Italy, Japan, China, Morocco, Mexico, and Turkey; and from vernacular decoration such as quilts, embroidery, and self-taught artists. The working methods Kozloff evolved were analogous to her sources: “Crafts rely on labor-intensive processes, and I’ve made that kind of process part of my work and imposed it on the viewer as well.” Several common exhibitions and lectures captured the artists’ attention, but Matisse was one of the strongest influences for most. Matisse had embraced the idea of an art of ease, comfort, and delight; the P&D artists adopted a similar concept but wanted to make it valid in their age. Kozloff, like several of the others, found the 1977 National Gallery of Art exhibition of Matisse’s cut-outs particularly important. Matisse had visited Morocco twice in 1912 and then began utilizing more severe abstract forms, as in The Piano Lesson of 1916 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY). The all-over composition, as opposed to the centralized composition, was a crucial element that he drew from his experiences in North Africa and developed most significantly in his cut-outs, made decades later. Matisse had been criticized for his reliance on decoration, which enhanced his influence, but it was the brilliant color, the use of pattern, and the combination of a field with a framing border and ornament that so intrigued this younger generation. They also found the work quite lovely—something not discussed or considered relevant in modernism.

A major interest for several of the artists was James McNeill Whistler’s The Peacock Room, housed in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., which opened to the public in May 1923 and has been conserved many times, including a major effort to return the room to its original condition in the 1970s.
The P&D artists would visit Washington, and several recall visiting the room. It originally served as a dining room for Frederick R. Leyland, for the display of a porcelain collection. Interior architect Thomas Jeckyll designed the space, including installing a painting by Whistler, *The Princess from the Land of Porcelain* (1863–64) over the fireplace. The room is vibrant and explosive, a tour de force of Victorian/aesthetician interests in *japonisme* (and Asian and Islamic art in general, if one looks at this illustrated manuscript page with a brilliant and stylized peacock at its center, an image from the Mantiq al-Tayr [The Language of the Birds], the mystical poem by the twelfth-century Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar), the flourish of the peacock feathers giving Whistler the opportunity to gild and color the room in an explosion of decorative motifs, all reflecting prosperity and luxury in the gilded leather, the dark woods, and the combination of painting and decorative arts. The curators at the Smithsonian Institution, of which the Freer Gallery of Art is part, have been endeavoring to build a collection of Chinese porcelains to complete the original look of the space.
That many of these romanticizing tendencies recall a distant land or exotic imagery prompts the suggestion of a relationship between P&D and similar nineteenth-century approaches seen in the Victorian age and in art nouveau. The tastes of the Victorian period, named for the long reign of Queen Victoria in Britain from 1837 to 1901, included orientalism, rural nostalgia, several revival styles, including the Gothic Revival and Pre-Raphaelite phases, and aestheticism (which included an embrace of Asian art and decorative arts). The art produced included abundant surface variation, ornament, and extensive patterning, differing according to the particular qualities, region, or sentiments of the artist.

Design and its history were significant influences on many of the P&D artists, who drew upon the abundant American inflections and approaches to design and decorative arts, especially from the styles of the nineteenth century. Peacock feathers and their colors, beading, the use of velvet, the aforementioned natural forms, and the unapologetic use of decoration are all hallmarks of Victorian art and reappear a century later in P&D. Look at Jane Kaufman’s quilts and her widespread use of beading; note the repeat patterning of Cynthia Carlson’s canvases and the pretty colors of Robert Zakanitch’s paintings. They offer a revival of Victorian features.

There are also strong art nouveau flourishes in P&D art. The period of art nouveau was roughly 1880 to 1914, and it is most notable for the use of organic imagery. Free-flowing, swirling, and rich images activated the surfaces and forms of art and design work.

There are many other Western sources of inspiration. Kushner mentioned this list to me: the atmospheric experiments of J.M.W. Turner; the beauty of the impressionists’ paintings; Charles Demuth, who understood the seductive and mysterious associational qualities of flowers; William Morris’s wallpaper; the gold tesserae of Byzantine and later Renaissance mosaics; the spiritual renewal found in the patterns of nature in Marsden Hartley’s paintings.

Additionally, the tastes in fashion and interiors of the 1970s are co-opted from both Victorian and art nouveau styles, and include strong hints of ethnic and folk styles too. In fashion, ethnic clothing, the peasant look, the maxi skirt, and the neo-Victorian ruffled dress were coupled with synthetic fabrics to create a pastiche of styles. Companies like Marimekko of Finland became famous, espousing bright colors, bold patterning, and organic shapes (as well as girdle-free ones). In interiors, playful color accents alongside earth tones predominated, as well as strong graphics and comfort as a main goal.
SCANNING AS A WAY OF LOOKING

The artists embraced the desire to have their art “scanned.” They wanted viewers to spend a great deal of time and attention on it, not simply to glance at a surface that had limited activity. Goldin wrote about the importance of scanning as a way of looking at art, a “specialized, anxious, kind of looking. We enter a seamless experience of measured space, the experience of visual order itself.”

E. A. Carmean Jr. commented on the way Jaudon’s work prompted scanning: “Jaudon’s smaller and more numerous bands continually seek a point of reference. Ultimately they group with other adjacent elements, creating various focal points. The foci are scattered over the surface, and as one’s eye shifts away, the separate elements dissolve and are assimilated into new groupings.” Jaudon has remarked on how the artists wanted the viewer to focus on the work slowly, moving visually across the surface in a measured approach. Kozloff mentioned in describing her larger horizontal canvases: “I meant the viewer to ‘read’ sequentially. This was my private metaphor for travel, paralleling the experience of walking through a bazaar or the streets of an unfamiliar city, taking in complex and variegated visual stimuli at unexpected intervals and rhythms.” Pattern aims at a different aesthetic experience than high art; it fills the space and permits focus on the structure. Curator Randy Rosen remarked that Tony Robbin’s work “cannot be grasped in a single glance and the viewer must relinquish one-point perspective in favor of multiple viewpoints.” This comment speaks to one of the main concerns the artists shared. Their work is often representational or geometric, has a clear surface orientation, is sometimes literal, is pleasingly clear conceptually, and emphasizing technique and craft.

OPTIMISM

One aspect of the artists’ interest in travel was manifested in study of other artists who had incorporated their travel experiences into their work, such as the Luminist painters, James McNeill Whistler, and Henri Matisse. Robert Kushner specifically mentioned his interest in the Luminist painters to me. This group of artists, including Fitz Hugh Lane and Frederic Edwin Church, were a second generation of the Hudson River school of the mid-nineteenth century who embraced its central features—investigation, exploration, discovery—but painted with a more refined, concealed brushstroke, as seen in Fitz Hugh Lane’s painting The Golden State Entering New York Harbor of 1854. Optimism, especially evident in works by Thomas Cole, the acknowledged founder of the group, is a main quality of their work, but pleasure in the beauty and the sublime power of nature are also evident in works such as View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, After a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow of 1836, with the viewer’s perspective...
focused on the grand expanse of the landscape and the natural elements. The artists saw the untamed beauty of the American landscape as sensual, exotic, and ideal. Many settled in the area north of New York City along the Hudson River, including Church, who built a kind of Persian palace as a home, which he named Olana. Similar impulses and interests in beauty, decoration, and ornament inspired the P&D artists to look to the exotic past of Asia and the Middle East.

**THE BACKDROP OF THE 1970s**

The important cultural backdrop to P&D was the politically and socially revolutionary decade of the 1970s. There was an explosion of interest in religions and seeking direction outside of the established denominations. The sexual revolution, the women’s movement, and the struggle for racial equality, all set in motion in the 1960s, achieved a kind of flashpoint status. The Vietnam War reached its apex at the beginning of the decade, then ended in a complete pull-out in 1975. President Richard Nixon left office in disgrace, a casualty of his hubris in Watergate. The nation had to contend with the powerful antiwar/counterculture of the period from 1968 through 1976. All of these things occurred against a backdrop of oil shortages and simultaneous recession and inflation, plus increasing interest in environmentalism as a result of unchecked pollution. This period is notable for its fracture, progressiveness, and activity.

Visual energy in the form of all the new surface designs in fashion and all the color and activity in the home (everything from decals for refrigerators to appliquéd designs on curtains) was a complement to this varied age. It was a frenetic period in many ways, yet the P&D artists found ways to meet its challenges by looking outward and embracing what had previously been overlooked. Robert Zakanitch commented that it was evolutionary work, not revolutionary.
work, aimed at mending the firmament that is constantly being torn. He continued, “Art can plant seeds of optimism deep into the human psyche.” Just as traveling was becoming more common, so these artists wanted to “embrace the whole world,” a phrase several of them have used in describing their desire to investigate all the possibilities. This very antiminimalist stance was expansive and has often been called “maximalism” for its inclusiveness.37

**CALIFORNIA AND NEW YORK AS SOURCES**

The presence of several of the artists in California and New York City permitted a meaningful dialogue about their emerging interests in pattern, decoration, and ornament: Kushner and MacConnel with Amy Goldin in San Diego; Schapiro, Kozloff, and Zakanitch in Los Angeles, then back in New York; Jaudon and Robbin in New York, where most of the artists and Goldin were based. Some critics and some of the artists have argued that the bright light, the connections to nature, and the more emancipated lifestyle in Los Angeles and San Diego directly influenced the colorful, vivid colors of P&D. Miriam Schapiro noted that “P&D came out of the sense of lushness of the landscape. We’re not talking about living in an asphalt city, we’re talking about being under the sky at the beach and being surrounded by the blueness of blue of the water.”

Some have seen the grid of the patterning in P&D art as an outcome of the urban structure of New York City. Kim MacConnel told me that George Sugarman berated him for using color (despite Sugarman’s active use of bright colors), insisting, “This town is about somberness. It is dark and it is serious. The West Coast palette is something antithetical to the New York eye, so to speak, and you’re never going to make it in this town, kid.” And Robert Kushner described how entranced he was by Brad Davis’s habit of photographing architectural ornament on buildings in New York, identifying a whole encyclopedia of decoration there.

**JOY**

**POSTMODERNISM AND COLLAGE**

Arguably, Pattern and Decoration is the first postmodern art movement, because the artists utilized a broad array of source material and embraced the impermanent, the common, and the excluded in their content and images. “Without P&D,” Robert Zakanitch noted, “there would be no postmodern.” P&D artists employed pastiche, appropriation, and hybridization in substantially new ways, introducing a new kind of collage into contemporary art. Critic Jeff Perrone characterized their practice as either “literal collage,” where the media are layered, or “metaphorical collage,” where elements “have been decontextualized and then layered, not
merely juxtaposed.” He further noted the expansive nature of the references “to other decoration, as a feminist statement, as a diaristic accumulation of experience, as a pun on modernist painting, or even as a diagram of the ‘fourth dimension’.” Kozloff described her art after the early ’70s as collages of imagery from other cultures.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GRID

The grid would form the basis for the use of pattern. Tony Robbin noted that “patterns—which can be complex in themselves—when juxtaposed, superimposed, or interpenetrated, establish spatial complexity, which I think is the most potent metaphor for contemporary experience.” Robert Kushner remarked to me that “if you think about it, the grid is really the ultimate decorative reduction.” Grids were related to the recent past of minimalist obsession with geometry, but also to homes in the case of Miriam Schapiro; quilts for Schapiro and Jane Kaufman; and architectural ornament in Valerie Jaudon’s work. The notion of repeating patterns and tessellations came from rugs and wallpaper for Robert Zakanitch, Cynthia Carlson, and Robert Kushner and from Chinese clip art for Kim MacConnel and also for Robert Kushner, while tiles from Mexico and Morocco were of central importance to Joyce Kozloff. Jane Kaufman looked closely at Moroccan and Tunisian art and considered carefully Eugène Delacroix and Henri Matisse.

Ned Smyth looked to European architectural motifs and decorations, while Brad Davis focused on the details of Islamic art, then Chinese art.

It is necessary to understand the radical nature of what these artists were doing, even as they used the much-celebrated grid. The P&D artists liked the romantic spirit of abstract expressionism, but disliked its machismo and the austerities of minimalism and conceptual art. Individually, they figured out how to use the grid as a way to move from the existing dialogue in a new direction. Critic John Perreault remarked to me that these artists were “filling in the grid with historical references and beautiful colors.” The grid served as an organizing principle for the surface, evident in several of the more geometrical works in this exhibition, such as the art of Kozloff, Jaudon, Robbin, Carlson, and Smyth. In the more organic pieces on view, the grid is utilized in forming the structure of the work itself, as evidenced in the art of Zakanitch, Kushner, MacConnel, Schapiro, and Kaufman, as a way to define themselves in distinction from the then-current emphasis on formalism and the severity of the picture plane.

INCLUSIVITY AND EXPANSIVENESS

The American art world had become increasingly insular by the end of the 1960s. Some artists were searching for other...
directions. Robert Zakanitch summed up his approach in a 1983 statement:

Painting had become too cerebral and I wanted it to become more physical, more touchable (but still intelligent), and I wanted to reach a broader audience and not just the art historian, artist sect. . . . What was becoming evident and wonderfully ironic was that although I was now using referential imagery (which gave me the feeling of freshness, newness, unlimitedness and excitement), it was through the use of abstraction, the emphases on the paint and surface that the dynamics began to happen and what made it art. But what had radically changed was the content and my attitude which was now interested in additive and not reductive ideas. Modern art, as I knew it, would never be the same for me.\(^{47}\)

Zakanitch’s comments echo many similar sentiments from the other P&D artists, who wanted to broaden the formal language of art. Amy Goldin helped many find their way in doing just that by emphasizing the formal language of pattern, of ornament.

**AMY GOLDIN**

Goldin’s role in providing an intellectual framework for pattern, decoration, and ornament largely evolved from her efforts to define the formal aspects of art and ways to communicate them and her study and promotion of Islamic art, non-Western art, and folk art\(^{48}\) through private meetings with the artists, public panels, and a series of important articles in the American art press. Goldin problematized the distinctions between fine art and craft and the relationships between grid and frame.\(^{49}\) She was a formalist, interested in basic concepts of art and how to communicate them, so she began using textiles and rugs to discuss ideas like balance, pattern, and rhythm.\(^{50}\) She also actively embraced Matisse’s late work, even though at that time in the 1970s, it had not been considered an important part of his art. She articulated a concept of decorative art that was profoundly influential to the P&D artists: that decoration could and should be examined with the same intensity as art.\(^{51}\) Goldin defined the three characteristics of decoration, according to Kushner, as: flat, expansive, and with subject matter subordinated to the overall visual experience.\(^{52}\) She exposed the artists to forms, including the expressive possibilities of geometrical complexity, nonmimetic conceptualism, and vegetal, organic imagery. These features were enormously important because P&D artists were interested in abandoning the static, planar approach of American art from the 1960s. P&D represented an energetic alternative to the then-dominant formalism espoused by Clement Greenberg, among others, so Goldin was an important guide.
Goldin’s teachings and writings were key in prompting the artists to find meaning in their work, and particularly to see Islamic art as a differentiated category. She obtained a National Endowment for the Arts Critic’s Grant in 1972 so that she could travel from New York to Cambridge regularly to attend Professor Oleg Grabar’s seminar on Islamic art at Harvard University in 1973. She sought out Grabar because of his interest in decoration and ornament within Islamic art. Professor Sheila Blair, an Islamist, remembers Goldin from that class and commented that she had no background in studying the history of Islamic art (though Goldin had actually been doing substantial reading on the topic), so she applied what she knew about contemporary art to it. One of her seminar papers was an ahistorical examination of composition in Persian painting. Blair recalls that Goldin pointed out how the organization of the writing into columns on the page dictated the composition of the painting, which the other students had not noticed. This experience with Professor Grabar was significant for Goldin, who wanted to promote the understanding of Islamic art and its beauty, alongside its role in religion, for Western audiences. Additionally, she relished the cachet his name provided, specifically citing her work with him in her correspondence, letters of introduction, and curriculum vitae. After completing the course, she wrote to a friend about wanting to write a book on formal analysis for a general audience using a single reproduction of an Islamic ceramic; she completed a prospectus, but the book was never published.

Goldin turned her attention to patterning in contemporary art, with Islamic art as the basis for her discussions. In her 1975 article “Patterns, Grids, and Painting,” she demonstrated that pattern was a direction for contemporary art that would avoid the assumptions of modernism by promoting disregard of egocentrism. She commented, “The enjoyment of patterns and grids, so often linked to religion, magic, and states of being not-quite-here, requires an indifference to self-assertion uncongenial to most Westerners.” Pattern would be the way to avoid hierarchy and prompt scanning of the overall image; though these were vital components of modernist rhetoric, no one else had seen the possibilities of Islamic art for this discourse. Perhaps most importantly, she espoused the idea that “grids are centrifugal.” This expansive description provocatively set the stage for many of the P&D artists to move beyond the dictates of abstract painting. She helped them appreciate the ascribed beauty of world art, rather than deferring to the supposedly intrinsic qualities of Western modernism. Decoration was the significant element, as she described in a lecture on Near Eastern art:

But seeing what Islamic artists have produced, I became convinced that there is, in
what we call decoration, an artistic alternative to art... that latches onto the world in a radically different way. Decoration involves the maker in a relationship to the world around him that is much more intimate and practical than the specialized, alienated world of professional art. Decoration doesn’t lend itself to artistic ego trips or to scientific abstract thought. Instead of seeing yourself as the unacknowledged legislator of the world, you face the requirements of your own environment, the setting of your own life, and the feelings of people around you. Your job is to clarify and heighten the impact of objects and occasions that already exist, that already have meaning. And that function requires quite different kinds of attention and sensitivity than you usually find among artists. 

All of the artists recognized the lavishness of Islamic art and wanted to embrace it in their work. But much of what they were doing was pilloried by the art world as bad art or kitsch, in its most benign insult, or cultural imperialism, meant as a more damning statement. Several of the artists examined Islamic material culture to consider the expressive possibilities of nonrepresentational uses of symmetry, pattern, tessellation, tiling, and broken symmetries, and to scrutinize its dynamic geometry and pulsating illusions. Islamic art and culture provided many generalized formal referents, showed the way to use flamboyant, arabesque imagery, and provided a model to celebrate decoration on the level that Western art history esteemed painting, sculpture, and architecture.

PLAYING WITH THE BOUNDARIES OF ART

A feature of P&D artists’ willingness to expand the vocabulary of contemporary art included formal variation. Frank Stella had been making shaped canvases for more than a decade and conceptualist Scott Burton had been interpreting sculpture as furniture. Brad Davis and Ned Smyth made elaborately decorated metal cut-outs as well as intricate surface encrustations part of their installations. Unstretched canvases became a mainstay in Kushner’s and MacConnel’s work, and MacConnel also worked in painted and manipulated furniture, while Schapiro collaged handkerchiefs and aprons into her art. Cynthia Carlson had been exploring environmental sculpture made by American self-taught artists and decided to produce installation work using cake frosters to apply paint (which other artists did as well). The artists embraced many, many more visual sources, including decoration, than had been acceptable or the norm in contemporary American art.
ROLE OF TRAVEL AND NON-WESTERN ART

Travel and non-Western imagery proved extremely important. Miriam Schapiro commented that theirs was a sensibility of reaching out: “It allowed us to scout geographically and through history.” Some had lived outside America for many years, like Tony Robbin (Asia and the Middle East), Ned Smyth (Italy), and Kim MacConnel (Mexico). Others made important trips abroad, like Joyce Kozloff (Mexico and Morocco), Robert Kushner (Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan), and Jane Kaufman (Morocco). The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s relocation and renovation of its Islamic art galleries in 1975 was a major event, prompting many visits by the artists individually and in groups.60 There, they saw many beautiful ornamented and decorated surfaces, like this Mihrab, such as they had seen on their international travels. Many attended lectures and exhibitions at the Asia Society and at the Japan Society, Robbin recalls. Robert Kushner immersed himself in repairing fragments of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Persian carpets found in flea markets and at secondhand shops, remnants of travelers’ experiences abroad prompted by the increased interest in travel after World War II. Schapiro and Robbin count Japanese kimonos as one of their major influences. Kimonos, such as this example, provided the artists with prototypes for the kind of elaborate surface designs and radiant color schemes they wanted to incorporate.61
P&D is an interesting counterweight to claims of unidirectional cultural influence and arrogance—that America sends out but does not acknowledge the importation of cultural forms and motifs—seen as one reason for resentment of the United States in the rest of the world. What is most significant about these artists and their consideration of non-Western art is that they were not detached, choosing beauty, ornament, and decoration over content. This attitude presumes that such qualities and others, including pattern, do not have social value in contemporary America or within the art world of the 1970s and 1980s. The P&D artists felt that decoration aimed to please and provided sensual delight. Pattern aimed at a different aesthetic experience from art, because it both filled the space and permitted focus on the structure. Through Islamic and Asian art, in particular, the artists found a way out of the confines of avant-garde art of the period, even as their work, despite the critics and backlash, remained both significant to the era and broadly influential on later American artists.

OTHER CULTURES

The charge of cultural imperialism that was and is often leveled at the P&D artists—all white, Western-educated, non-Muslim—does not diminish either the movement’s impact on subsequent artists interested in ornament, pattern, and decoration or the reality of the historical role that P&D artists played in contemporary art. They felt that their self-conscious use of Islamic art and Asian art as a source was a break from the constraints of the modernist discourse, a kind of heteroglossia and move toward multiplicity. One critic commented that with this exploration, the artists were “working in the context of cultural history [that] . . . can do nothing but good for the future of art in America.” They linked their cultural consumption to their artistic production in what can now be understood as an exoticism moment. Based on their engagement with all forms of the Islamic system of visual culture, they recognized the distinction between the “classical” art of architecture and architectural ornament and the active, cultural system of folk art. They used contemporary art as a mode to read the orthodox ornament, decoration, and pattern of Islamic art.

None of the artists became Muslim or studied the Qur’an; they simply wanted to go beyond the discourse of modernism. This approach is the inverse of modern artists’ use of non-Western art as a way toward formalism, like Matisse with Islamic art or Picasso with African art, used to fragment and geometricize forms as the basis for his cubist innovations. The P&D artists were cultural voyeurs who recognized and did learn about the breadth of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples from Muslim societies. They sought out the basic distinguishing features of both religious and secular art, equally interested (if not
always admittedly) in the vegetal arabesque, the geometric patterning, the celebration of calligraphy, the noncentralized use of figuration, and the persistence of forms. What they did, with Goldin as their guide, was to admit that Western art was not closed, that the art world did not command their complete attention. They recognized that they profited from their exposure to Islamic art and had actively appropriated concepts and forms from it. This admission shaped the way their critical champions saw their work. Critic John Perreault, writing about the 1981 group exhibition “Islamic Allusions,” curated by April Kingsley for the New Museum, noted, “It is ironic that just at the time when the public has been conditioned by conscious or unconscious racism to hate everything Islamic, our artists have come up with art that owes a great deal to Near Eastern culture.”

**FEMINISM**

The artists agreed on visual pleasure and beauty through patterning motifs and decoration as a major feature in their art. Because of this, they have frequently been regarded as disengaged. Their point of engagement was with feminism: its inclusive stance, its collaborative network, and its recognition of women’s activities. The male artists in P&D never became actively involved in the feminist cause, but they learned from it. Feminism or the women’s movement, as it was known in the early 1970s, was extremely exciting to many women and men artists and a key part of their all-encompassing intellectual framework. Valerie Jaudon commented on the first meetings as resembling the consciousness-raising sessions in which the women artists had all participated as they became radicalized by the women’s movement. She doesn’t think any of the male artists realized the similarity. It helped the women take an expansive approach in seeking ideas for their art and incorporating many domestic and international visually exotic elements.

P&D artists embraced the joyful, pleasurable, optimistic, and inclusive aspects of feminism, a fascinating kind of dissent in a different kind of package than most other feminist art of the day. This point was starkly brought into focus in a review by critic Nancy Princenthal of “WACK! Art and Feminist Revolution,” curated by Connie Butler, which originated at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in March 2007, where Princenthal uses Kozloff’s “dazzling mosaics” as an example of joy as opposed to rage, the main emotional state dominating the majority of artworks on view by 120 women. Though feminist art celebrated women and the body, not much focused on the notion of the ideal.

That several of the main artists of Pattern and Decoration were women is surprising, even today, as women’s roles in the art world are complicated, without consistent access or opportunity compared to men. The women’s movement
proved emancipating for Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon, Jane Kaufman, and Cynthia Carlson personally and professionally. Its inclusivity enabled each of them to look at women’s work—vernacular forms, such as quilts, embroidery, and beading—and the domestic in ways that been previously verboten in the art world. Critic Carrie Rickey has commented that feminism was central to the move away from minimalism: “minimalism was ready to tumble, and women were there to push.”

Cynthia Carlson, Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnel, and Robert Zakanitch looked closely and carefully at wallpaper design, textile patterning, and rug compositions for imagery, forms, and designs.

SCHAPIRO AND KOZLOFF AND SCHAPIRO AND ZAKANITCH IN CALIFORNIA

Separately, in 1971–72, Miriam Schapiro was involved in the consideration of decoration as a means of breaking free from the rigid proscriptions of contemporary art. As a professor at Cal Arts, she was actively involved in the Feminist Art Program, a landmark course designed to help women students make art from their own content. She made a room for The Dollhouse, a small sculpture consisting of six rooms done in collaboration with student artist Sherry Brody, that was a seraglio, the living quarters for women in a Turkish home. The dollhouse was part of the larger feminist installation known as Womanhouse, a milestone in the history of contemporary art. Schapiro made this lavish, Persian-inspired room as a way to investigate how women’s experience had been structured through the domestic interior. Additionally, the idea of using exotic fabrics was another transgressive act, beyond the conceptual contravention of a dollhouse as an artwork.

Joyce Kozloff’s association with Miriam Schapiro would eventually flower into her involvement in feminism and later P&D-style painting. Kozloff began her career auspiciously with a series of geometric abstractions at her first solo show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1970 at age twenty-eight; these particular works were based on a trip through Sicily the artist took with her husband, the art critic Max Kozloff, in 1968. Kozloff was strongly influenced by the Greek temples there, particularly Agrigento, Selinunte, and Segesta, the visual appearance of the “columns against the sky and spaces between them.” She continues, “I also held in my memory the color and light—springtime, the wildflowers in the fields around the temples, pinkness in the morning light, deep purples as the sun set in the evening.”

Kozloff and Schapiro were introduced in 1967 by Max Kozloff, who was close friends with Schapiro and her husband, Paul Brach. Brach invited Max Kozloff to teach at Cal Arts the first year it opened in 1970–71 and the foursome spent much time together. Kozloff became involved in feminist consciousness-raising groups in the fall of 1970, invited by another faculty wife. She notes, “I was radicalized very fast.” In the winter of that year, at a brunch
Schapiro had invited her to attend at the home of June Wayne, she became directly involved in initiating a feminist project, specifically the first organization for women artists in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists. Kozloff continues,

This group protested the Art in Industry show at the L.A. [Los Angeles] County Museum of Art, a big blockbuster show, all male. We had a press conference and made a lot of demands. One of the most visible outcomes was the show, “Women Artists: 1550–1950,” curated by Ann Sutherland-Harris and Linda Nochlin [which was held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art].

Leaving L.A. in June 1971, Kozloff went to San Francisco for the summer with her family, where she joined another consciousness-raising group. She returned to New York in September, when her husband took a position at Queens College alongside colleagues such as Amy Goldin, newly appointed to teach there as well. Kozloff’s work of 1971-72 contained motifs taken from California and New Mexico.

Robert Zakanitch, invited out to California by Schapiro, gave several lectures to her students on a new direction in his work. Later he wrote about this new approach, “I had to make my own decisions.” A geometric abstract painter, Zakanitch was shifting more and more toward patterns, such as those seen in wallpaper. The work also evolved from his desire to create luxuriant imagery using lush domestic patterns and opulent fabric decoration. He became intently involved in considering the notions of ascribed beauty within Western culture. He was very interested in Islamic art, but subsequently disavowed its influence on him. One of the key issues of his work—the absence of distinction between painting, sculpture, architectural ornament, and all other forms of visual artistic expression—could arguably be seen as stemming from Islamic and Asian art.

Zakanitch was hesitant to speak, but Schapiro encouraged him. He has noted that support as important in his increasing desire to explore decoration. He has told me on several occasions that decoration was a third option after realism and abstraction, which he found provocative. Kushner tells a humorous anecdote about Zakanitch’s bravura in embracing the decorative: when he was asked during a panel discussion how he was saying his art was different from wallpaper, Zakanitch boldly responded, “I’m not!” A shocking statement to the assembled crowd of art world aficionados. Dr. Willy Bongard, author of a newsletter for collectors, reported from Europe about P&D with much interest in the mid- to late 1970s. He remarked on how P&D was sometimes called wallpaper, but he saw it as filtered and revised, remarking on how the artists had transformed the source, much like Roy Lichtenstein had modified his
sources in comics or Andy Warhol had altered Campbell’s Soup cans for his paintings.\textsuperscript{76}

**RESPONSE**

P&D was a loosely connected group of a core set of artists who used the main issues of the movement as ways to expand the dialogue about art. One of the most compelling ways many of the P&D artists successfully eliminated the barriers between fine art and craft, between Western and non-Western art, was to move into the public realm. Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon, Robert Kushner, Miriam Schapiro, Ned Smyth, and Robert Zakanitch have all made large-scale decorative works. The importance of the environment to the P&D artists prompted several of them to work in the community. Dr. Ruth K. Meyer remarked on this transition as hearkening back to “those periods in which ornament and decoration were part of everyday life as well as ceremony and ritual.”\textsuperscript{77} Tony Robbin used his interest in pattern and perceptual notions of space as the basis for an extended examination of fourth-dimensional geometry.\textsuperscript{78}

P&D suffered from its own success. Gallerist Holly Solomon was largely responsible for promoting the group; she was even termed its “midwife.”\textsuperscript{79} Robert Kushner credits Holly with originating the name, primarily as a marketing tool. She took many paintings to the Basel Art Fair in 1977 and sold out her booth, an impressive achievement. Interest in the artists and their work was strong in Europe, with several gallerists actively pursuing them, including James Mayor in London, Bruno Bischofberger and Thomas Ammann in Zurich, and Daniel Templon in Paris. There was a certain cachet to having one’s work collected in Europe, but that meant the work wasn’t widely circulated in America. The prices were high and collectors were seeking bargains, prompting them to look at other art.\textsuperscript{80}

The backlash had a chauvinistic tone against the women and the feminine imagery.\textsuperscript{81} Sometimes this quality was couched in terms of too much joy or not enough intellectual weight. One of the reviewers for a P&D group exhibition in Britain wrote that “there is too much accent on the seeing side of things and too little on the thinking.”\textsuperscript{82} Another critic of that same exhibition commented that the show organizers had taken the stance that “triviality can be given weight by treating it seriously.”\textsuperscript{83} In a 1998 review of an exhibition of Kim MacConnel’s work, critic Ken Johnson described the opinion of P&D: “It is viewed as a fluffy transition between formalist abstraction and more muscular styles of the ’80s like Neo-Expressionism.” Many of the non-Western and craft sources the artists used had domestic connections, links to a female realm, making much of the work seem feminine.\textsuperscript{84} Kim MacConnel noted that his work was largely drawn from other cultures but became seen as
feminine. Also, it was brightly colored, which has further connotations of the feminine. The criticism quickly turned combative because lush, sensual patterns and decorative values were regarded as weak and female, even in the work done by the men. The intense distrust of the decorative and the expansive approach these artists embraced was expressed in derision by an art world unaccustomed and unwilling to canonize women artists alongside men artists, to embrace imagery so imbued with decoration, or to accept art that unabashedly showed its tourism on its sleeve, although generations of artists, from the romantics to Matisse, had done similar work. Some critics called the decorative art “bad painting,” linking it to an actual group of artists under that title, while others used it as a reason to renounce the movement. P&D was also dismissed because it was seen as lighthearted and lightweight. Critics, such as Donald Kuspit, even proposed that the use of the decorative “betrayed” the intentions of feminist art. Feminist art historians took issue when the decorative was discussed in relation to the tradition of a patrilineage.

Valerie Jaudon pointed out to me that one of the main problems with P&D was that it wasn’t self-referential. The artists responded to and reacted against modernism’s grid, flatness, and self-referentiality. Even as their work fits within the nomenclature of modernism—it is typically two-dimensional, with an all-over treatment of the surface, employing nonhierarchical compositions—it was disparaged. Jaudon, for example, decided to utilize the grid, which is the scaffolding for most decoration and significant to the minimalists, to undermine the isolated structure and subject matter associated with the formalist use. The artists’ common interest in decoration and ornament challenged received definitions of aesthetic significance and the traditional hierarchical distinction between the superior fine arts and the inferior decorative arts or crafts. Kim MacConnel remarked to me:

[P&D] is nonhierarchical in the sense that it is not refining itself to an end point and time . . . . It is much more chaotic. It is open to different voices, it accepts different voices, it’s making different voices.

By embracing such devalued materials and techniques as mosaics, weaving, fabric, needlework, and wallpaper, this group encouraged a wide variety of 1970s artists. P&D was part of a cultural shift toward plurality within the art world and within society. It is a reminder of the questions raised and the battles fought during this period both in the art world and in the wider cultural discourse. It was particularly important for artists seeking decoration, pattern, and non-Western sources, ideas, and images, as well as artists seeking to break with the modernist categorical imperatives.
The opulence, ornamentation, and elegance of P&D works permitted the art world for a brief time to abandon its embarrassment about the secular use of the beautiful and the pursuit of ornament. The P&D movement produced art that challenged the minimalist status quo and valued craft, women's work, and bold and exotic design. Reacting against the reductive proposition of Greenbergian flatness and then opposing the continued minimalist aesthetics of exclusion, these artists created either exuberant paintings in traditional easel or wall-related formats or expansive environments that permitted more complex spatial considerations. By willingly and willfully focusing on the degraded notion of the decorative, they debunked many long-standing tenets of modernism even as they used its language, as in the reliance on repetitive design motifs.

The legacy of P&D has been considerable, and some of the more interesting work appearing in the last twenty-five years has been shaped by it. This influence stems partly from many of the artists’ roles as teachers. The role of beauty, decoration, and ornament has become prevalent in many recent exhibitions, especially in the work of artists such as Polly Apfelbaum. P&D largely disappeared from the scene because of the shift in sensibility and the art world surge of interest in the bombastic approach of the neo-expressionists. However, all of the P&D artists have remained active, continuing to explore the potentials of a broader, expansive worldview in their art.

**NOTES**


2. All the quotations or comments by the artists come from the interviews made as part of the video documentary I wrote and directed, *Pattern and Decoration: The Great Untold Story*, produced by Department 61, or from my many conversations with the artists in their homes, in their studios, at restaurants, visiting collectors or galleries, at conferences, or on the telephone. If specifically quoting an artist from a piece of correspondence, the reference has been provided.


5. Goldin was highly experimental as a critic and as a teacher. She detailed her experiences of teaching at UCSD in an article where she described her desire to help students grasp that art objects had a greater role in culture than simply functioning as “consumer objects for a spiritual elite” and outlined her responsibility in teaching her students to understand art in broader terms. Even now, almost forty years after that course, her engaged approach has tinges of Marxism, but also speaks to an expansive approach that characterized her art criticism of the 1970s. (See Amy Goldin, “A Non-Survey Art Course,” *Art Journal* 31, no. 2 [Winter 1971]:175–177.)


10. John Perreault, interview with author at Urban Glass, Brooklyn, 1998. The quotation by Kushner is from a conversation with the author, so is not referenced in this citation. (See note 2 for explanation.)


13. Critic Jeff Perrone astutely noted that the artists showed their sources as a way to admit and recognize them: “These artists do not merely play a game of free association—the visual evidence is there” (“Approaching the Decorative,” *Artforum* 15, no. 4 [December 1976]: 28.)


22. Valerie Jaudon and I had a discussion about her interest in Lawrence Alloway’s article on Systems Art. See Lawrence Alloway, “Background to Systemic,” Art News (October 1966):30-33.


26. In my 1998 interview with Kim MacConnel, he pointedly remarked that Matisse’s art didn’t interest him, but the sources from which Matisse drew did. However, many artists change their approaches/sources/referents over time, so there are ways that MacConnel either directly or indirectly linked his work to Matisse. I see crosscultural issues as the main theme in MacConnel’s work; they were also evident in a different way in Matisse’s art. In MacConnel’s Grandee of 1977, two of the nine strips are drawn in a style reminiscent of Matisse, and the artist has actually mimicked Matisse’s signature in both strips several times. Given the visual resemblances and MacConnel’s use of unmodulated, bright colors, it is difficult to accept completely that he didn’t absorb some lessons from Matisse, given that Goldin deeply admired Matisse and they maintained a strong dialogue both when she was in California and after. Critic Calvin Tomkins contended that MacConnel “has obviously looked long and hard at Matisse, and not only at Fauve-period Matisse” (“Matisse’s Armchair,” The New Yorker [February 25, 1980]: 112).

27. Matisse’s exact quotation was “What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or disturbing subject-matter . . . like a comforting influence, a mental balm—something like a good armchair in which one rests from physical fatigue.” Sally Webster, “Spacial Geometry: Art in Architecture,” Arts Exchange (November/December 1977):14.

28. “Matisse: The Cut-Outs,” was a traveling exhibition, held at the National Gallery of Art from September to October 1977, co-curated by Jack Cowart of the St. Louis Art Museum and John Hallmark Neff of the
Detroit Institute of Arts. (See also John Hallmark Neff’s earlier articles—“Matisse and Decoration: An Introduction,” *Arts Magazine* [May 1975]: 59–61; “Matisse and Decoration,” *Arts Magazine* [June 1975]: 85; and “Matisse and Decoration: The Schuchkin Panels,” *Art in America* [July–August 1975]: 39–45.) This was the first major exhibition of Matisse’s late cut-outs. In 1975, Goldin had written an article on this body of work, which the artists actively discussed because of her particularly perceptive account of decoration. (See Amy Goldin, “Matisse and Decoration: The Late Cut-Outs,” *Art in America* [July–August 1975]: 49–59.) Kenneth Baker wrote a startlingly fresh take on the animation of Matisse’s work (“Performing Forms: notes on Matisse’s Cutouts,” *Artforum* 16, no. 5 [January 1978]: 60–63; see in particular discussion on page 63 about the swimmers in *The Swimming Pool*).


30. Glenview, part of the Hudson River Museum, is crafted in the Eastlake style, with many typical details and features, including copious natural motifs. This style is named after Charles L. Eastlake (1833–1906), an English architect who wrote “Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details,” published in 1868, which was extremely popular in the United States and prompted widespread use of the style with elaborate woodwork both inside and out, as well as multicolored interior decoration with every surface plentifully decorated and ornamented.


36. Robert Zakanitch made this point to me in discussing how the domestic environment became increasingly decorative.


40. Repeated elements do not make a pattern distribution of similar elements over a field a pattern. Robert Kushner recently clarified this point, which Amy Goldin discussed in her article on patterns, for me, and mentioned the importance of interval as a defining feature. (See Amy Goldin, “Patterns, Grids, and Painting,” *Artforum* [September 1975]:50–54.) See also the discussion about Goldin in “Pattern and Decoration: A Discussion Between Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff, and Robert Kushner April/May 2001,” in *Patterns: Between Objects and Arabesque*, organized by Karsten Ohrt and Lene Burkard (Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, Odense, Denmark, 2001),57–89.


44. Perhaps best summed up by John Perreault when he wrote, “Do we really need one more monochromatic, non-inflected surface?” (“Persistent Patterns,” Persistent Patterns [exhibition brochure] [New York: Andre Zarre Gallery, 1979]).


49. These sentiments occur persistently in her writing and occurred, defined as such, in a letter Professor Oleg Grabar sent to Goldin in response to her request that he comment on a paper she had written. Amy Goldin Archive, Oleg Grabar Letter, dated April 2, 1975, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

50. Kim MacConnel made the point to me that he and Robert Kushner suggested this approach to Amy, based on all of the discussion they had been having with her about the value and beauty of Asian textiles and rugs.


52. These points are clearly important to Kushner’s way of thinking; he has mentioned them on several occasions. See Anna Richardson/Ana Kolkowska, “Kushner,” Juliet (February/March 1992):35. He mentioned these again in 1996 (see Robert Kushner, “Defiant Decoration: A Short History of Decoration,” The Studio Potter 24, no. 2 [June 1996]: 33–34). He elaborated on the matter of the decorative and these three points in 2001. See Kushner’s comments in “Pattern and Decoration: A Discussion Between Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff, and Robert Kushner, April/May 2001,” in Patterns: Between Object and Arabesque, organized by Karsten Ohrt and Lene Burkard (Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik, DK, 2001), 84–85.


54. There are numerous examples of her references to Grabar’s role in her study of Islamic art in her personal correspondence in her archive. Additionally, all the P&D artists have spoken with me about the significance his breadth of knowledge about Western art history and Islamic art and several have mentioned his understanding of the role of ornament and the impression that made on her thinking.

56. All the preceding quotations are taken from Amy Goldin, “Patterns, Grids, and Painting,” *Artforum* (September 1975):54.


59. Critic Peter Frank remarked, “At the core of pattern painting is the acceptance of ‘decorativeness’ as a constructive quality rather than a shortcoming, an idea that had been heretical” (“Pattern Painting P.S. 1,” *Art News* [February 1978]:146).


62. Kim MacConnel remarked that the “history of carpet in Europe refutes the assumption of one-directional influence” (unpublished manuscript page for *Art in America* article, given to Joyce Kozloff; the page from which I quote is in Valerie Jaudon’s archive).

63. The context for this remark comes from Allen Schwartzman, a curator at the New Museum, who was intending to defend Pattern and Decoration by defining the artistic efforts as complex, rather than intellectual. He stated, “Decorative or Pattern Art is basically non-intellectual. But that doesn’t make it dumb. There is a great deal of consideration in these works, but we tend to discuss anything ‘pretty’ as simple. That’s not the case here.” In the article, he is noted as an early exponent of pattern painting. (See Michael Haley, “Pattern Painting: New Art for a New Decade,” *SKY* [July 1980]:26).


70. Joseph Mascheck wrote an excellent article on the role of carpets and textiles in Western art history; in a way, he justified the use of decoration as a corollary to Greenbergian flatness. He remarks on a 1934 comment by Alfred Barr on the importance of Near Eastern textiles to artists as diverse as Matisse, Klee, Dufy, Weber, Prendergast, and Davies (102). He does make a one-sentence mention of Kozloff’s work, describing her art as “conventional canvases covered with ornamental patterns that are openly Islamic in investigation” (103). He also provides extensive references for the discussion of decoration and non-Western sources in modernism (“The Carpet

71. The art market of the late 1960s and 1970s was wholly different than it is now, where artists are selected by gallerists in graduate school or have their entire thesis exhibitions purchased by collectors.


73. This account of Joyce Kozloff’s early encounters with Miriam Schapiro and her evolving feminism is from e-mail to author, April 6, 2007.


75. In fact, though, Zakanich has told me he was more influenced by linoleum, which he calls “machine-made Aubussons for the masses . . . to enrich their houses and their lives but was easy to clean.” Kushner described this anecdote slightly differently to Anthony Hayden-Guest (see *True Colors: The Real Life of the Art World* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998], 73ff.). Willy Bongard noted the dearth of a supply of P&D work by 1978 (he made a short catalogue of all the recent P&D gallery shows that had sold out or how the prices had doubled and tripled) and 1979 (*art aktuell* [mid-October]:766 and *art aktuell* [January 1979]:795).


80. Kim MacConnel made this comment to Rob Blackson, who co-curated a P&D exhibition, “Too Much Joy: Re-Visiting the Pattern and Decoration Movement,” at the Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 2002. His co-curators were Amaya de Miguel, Kelly Taxter, and Jimena Acosta (Kim MacConnel, e-mail to Rob Blackson, November 28, 2001). I am grateful to Rob Blackson for his willingness to discuss his ideas and for sharing his research with me. See also Robert Kushner’s discussion of the end of P&D as related to collectors and dealers seeking the “next thing” (Anthony Hayden-Guest, *True Colors: The Real Life of the Art World* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998], 73ff.).

81. Larson, “For the First Time Women Are Leading Not Following,” 64.


Shari Urquart, and William Wegman. One of the main linkages was the use of kitsch.


88. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews noted the problematics of critic Donald Kuspit’s view of P&D: “Donald Kuspit proclaimed that art based on decoration betrayed the critical potential and intention of feminist art. He considered decorative art to belong to that now authoritarian Modernist mainstream, and criticized it on that basis.” They refer to his article “Betraying the Feminist Intention: The Case Against Feminist Decorative Art,” *Arts Magazine* (November 1979):124–126. (Cf. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 [September 1987]: 333.) Kuspit acknowledged soon after that the pleasure of P&D art (he was specifically speaking about Kushner’s work) was overwhelming. He felt he needed to “rationalize my enjoyment of Robert Kushner’s art—in feeling compelled to apologize intellectually for the deep pleasure I take in it, a pleasure that is more of a challenge to my being than transient sexual pleasures” (“Robert Kushner’s Happy Consciousness,” in *Robert Kushner* [Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1987], 21). I suspect that until recently, a certain Puritanism surrounded the view of feminist art that prevented it from being seen as acceptable when it was sexually exciting and provocative. So when P&D art utilized some of the mechanisms of feminist art (provocation, pleasure, softness, etc.), it challenged the intellectual systems that were supposed to be uppermost in the viewer’s mind, prompting a critic like Kuspit to repudiate the intentions of P&D as not supporting the utopian notion of feminist art as a sterile ideology, so he had to return it to the mainstream. His subsequent comment seems to speak of a reality that he, like many others, really enjoyed looking at P&D art; thus, he had to offer some kind of framework for his sentiments.

89. As an example, Norma Broude’s discussion of Wassily Kandinsky and Henri Matisse as sources for Schapiro, despite the reality that the artists had utilized craft, like quilts, and non-Western art alongside work produced by artists such as Matisse; the impulse the feminist art historians, such as Tamar Garb, proposed—that decoration does not need a connection to the canon for justification—was a notion supported by P&D artists, even as they utilized sources from Western art history. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews examine Tamar Garb’s critique of Norma Broude’s discussion of Miriam Schapiro in “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 [September 1987]: 333–334.


91. Carrie Rickey, “What’s New About the New Decoration,” *New Decorative Words from the Collection of Norma and William Roth* (Orlando, FL: Loch Haven Art Center, 1983), 15. See also Willy Bongard’s listing of all the ways P&D artists created a “reaction to reduction” (*art aktuell* [end-December 1978]:788).

92. Michael Duncan curated two large group shows in 2003 (organized according to location as “NYPD” and “LAPD”) working in a vein resembling aspects of P&D art. “The LAPD Project: The Legacy of Pattern and Decoration,” curated by Michael Duncan, Shoshana Wayne Gallery and Rosamund Felsen Gallery, both in Santa Monica, California.
The Elephant in the Room: Pattern and Decoration, Feminism, Aesthetics, and Politics

TEemma bALDUCci

There has been a spate of essays over the past few years that highlight the hesitancy (at best) that some younger women artists have about identifying themselves as feminist, even when their works deal with obviously feminist issues and themes. Mira Schor and Coco Fusco, in particular, have written with barely controlled frustration and even contempt about these women’s refusal to do so. Schor implies numerous times in her paired essays, “She-Demon Spawn from Hell” and “The Ism That Dare Not Speak Its Name,” that this refusal is based in ignorance—ignorance about the feminist movement, its history, its accomplishments, its relevance. Schor is nevertheless complicit to some degree when she says that “there was no point in insisting that they must be feminists just because they used feminist-inspired forms and tropes. If they say they’re not, they’re not.” It might be useful to ask: if these young women are (often admittedly) ignorant about the feminist movement and the art produced by its practitioners, how can they possibly “know” whether or not they are artists working within that tradition? Their insistence that their work is not ideological underscores their ignorance and thus their inability to critique or label their own work, to see the patterns, to make the connections with art of any period or style.

This reluctance to embrace feminism is not limited to young, contemporary female artists, but is magnified almost to the point of farce in scholarship on the Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s and 1980s (henceforward referred to as P&D). Of all the artistic movements in the late twentieth century, it seems to be one of the most underappreciated and the most misunderstood. Neither its historians nor its practitioners can decide if it is or is not feminist. Some scholars and/or reviewers, in an attempt at either compromise or outright denial of its feminist roots, have referred to P&D as one of the first postmodern movements or as anti-art. Others have gone so far as to deny altogether its cohesion as a movement. Writings on P&D are often tortured in their efforts to juggle what seem to be two opposing issues. On the one hand, the stated purposes and motivations for the art are clearly feminist: the works produced demonstrate a concern for reviving previously denigrated techniques and motifs associated with women, domesticity, and/or non-European cultures as well as a desire to challenge conventional societal constructions of gender. On the other hand, there were male artists who played a defining role in the movement from its outset. Further complicating matters is that these male artists, particularly Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel, at times distance
themselves from the feminist label and at times embrace it. So, even though the works of the various P&D artists, including Joyce Kozloff’s *Hidden Chambers* (1975–76; Plate 14), Cynthia Carlson’s *Pfui Teuffle* (1975; Plate 2), Valerie Jaudon’s *Tatum Lake* (1977), MacConnel’s *Good Work* (1979; Plate 21), and Robert Zakanitch’s *Day Trellis* (1979; Plate 33), are for all practical purposes similar in outlook and style, many who have written about the movement have fashioned what amount to separate accounts: one for the women and one for the men.

P&D artists as a group have received perhaps their fullest treatment from Norma Broude. In her attempts to define the movement, Broude refers to the now-famous essay by Kozloff and Jaudon in which the two artists make a list of twentieth-century statements that disparage ornament and/or decorative art:

> The article made explicit and unforgettable the extent to which decoration and ornament are consistently gendered as female in the Western tradition, and it also exposed the power relationships embedded in this discourse, designed to cast decoration as abstraction’s despised and inferior “other.”

This accounting of what brought the artists, both male and female, together seems as accurate as any in defining what was unique and innovative about P&D. Not only did they utilize floral and other decorative motifs associated with femininity and domesticity, but they radically questioned how art was defined by producing their works at a time when the art scene was dominated by male artists focused on abstraction and minimalism.

It is at that point, however, that the movement, as described in Broude’s account, loses its coherence. She goes on to divide the artists roughly by gender into those who, she claims, were interested in addressing a gender bias in the art world (the women) and those who were more concerned with a Western European bias (the men). Broude also singles out Schapiro, as does Christopher Miles in a review of a P&D show a decade later:

> Schapiro arrived at a new painting vocabulary that boldly fused the forms, materials and processes of the “feminine” and “women’s work” with modernist principles. Works by Jaudon, Kozloff, Kushner and MacConnel evidenced the group’s enthusiasm for lines and motifs from non-Western and ethnic architecture, décor, fabric and clothing, while Cynthia Carlson’s ornamented gestural brushwork and Zakanitch’s grid-based floral pattern painting revealed the movement’s propensity to play off and embellish upon the codes and underpinnings of high modernism.
Schapiro, known for her participation in the groundbreaking performance/installation work *Womanhouse* (1971–72), for which she helped produce *The Dining Room*, is the only artist of the group consistently and specifically referred to as a feminist. The work of the other artists, particularly the men, is framed in such a way as to refuse acknowledgment of its feminist motivations. Another all too common way of segregating the artists is to divide them between those who had a “political” agenda and those who were more interested in “aesthetics,” again, more often than not, pitting the women/feminists against the men. This is a meaningless, if not ridiculous, distinction, for while politics rarely have any aesthetic value, the aesthetic is always inherently political whether the artist makes use of soup cans, urinals, nude bodies, red rectangles, or grids.

Part of the problem in these often convoluted writings is that there is no working definition of exactly what feminist art IS. It should be obvious (but often is not), particularly in the postgender, postsex twenty-first century, that a feminist outlook has nothing to do with either gender or sex. Even though essentialist notions continue to be important for some artists, feminist art encompasses more than just art made by women with their own menstrual blood or performances in which women pull scrolls from their vaginas. Feminist art is any art that in some way questions dominant, typically patriarchal paradigms—be they art historical, political, social, or aesthetic. This definition is broad, but certainly fits with how the movement has been heralded as a source of the postmodern crisis of authority due to its critique of modernism and its attendant metanarratives, especially those involving conventional constructions of gender. Works by P&D artists, without exception, challenge hegemonic definitions, rooted in long-standing gender and race bias, of what counts as art through their use of materials, size, or technique, not only giving the movement cohesion but also making it irreducibly feminist.

SEWING CELERY, WEAVING LICORICE

Schapiro’s work has always been seen as the most obviously feminist of the P&D movement, if only because she has not been timid about declaring her own affiliation with feminism. In a work such as *Barcelona Fan* (1979), she combines paint and fabric in one of her signature *femmage* pieces (feminist + collage). Its large format is meant to question hierarchies of size as well as the socially constructed divide between “women's work” and “high art.” But what about the other artists? Two hundred years from now, if Schapiro’s *Barcelona Fan* were discovered along with Kushner’s *Aurora’s Chador* (1976; Plate 17), art historians of the future would find it difficult to understand why one might have been considered feminist and the other not. Their use of materials, their size, the ways they draw attention to methods of
production associated with the domestic are strikingly similar. It should go without saying that there is no feminist aesthetic that inheres in the work of Schapiro based on her gender or sex, no aesthetic accessible to only one half of the human race, and Kushner is not off the hook because he has a penis.

Kushner’s art cannot be discussed productively without reference to feminism. In the humorous, near-heroic efforts that have gone into avoiding referring to him as a feminist, he is often instead called “anti-art” for his use of nontraditional, decorative materials. The best example of this is when Kushner himself refers to his use of “nonart materials” in his description of how he “elaborately embroidered a giant philodendron leaf that synthesized my nascent admiration for Matisse with my Grandma’s only form of expression, her handwork.”9 It is hard to think of a more blatant celebration of domestic materials and what has been traditionally considered “women’s work.” Admittedly, most scholars who write about his oeuvre do address his interest in gender issues, but no one has been bold enough to call his art feminist. Janet Kardon is a good example of this diffidence:

By allowing fabric, traditionally assigned as woman’s domain, to be his medium and his message, subliminal gender signals flicker into his Arcadian scenarios. A sewing machine is more prominent in his studio than a paintbrush; Kushner adapts women’s techniques in a direct attempt to reverse gender roles. . . . His blurring of male and female activity, intended to erode current sexual differentiations and boundaries, is the manifesto of his sexual politics. Carefully, he directs the transactions between his male and female figures, constantly striving to “subvert the stereotype,” as he would describe it.10

The above statement could have easily been written about Schapiro or Jane Kaufman, or any of the other numerous artists in the show. But because it describes the work of a male artist, the term “feminism” is deftly avoided. This situation exists despite the fact that Kushner has himself openly acknowledged his influences from his mother, his grandmother, and a housekeeper—how he learned to sew, knit, and weave from them.11 He has further elaborated that he was appalled when he realized that such work did not receive respect. Almost his entire artistic output in the ’70s, including Visions Beyond the Pearly Curtain (1975; Plate 19) and Slavic Dances (1978; Plate 18), dealt with fabrics and other decorative coverings for the body—not just their patterns and textures but their production as well. He would then perform dances while wearing these fabrics, underneath which he was nude. It takes a conscious effort not to associate such performances with the biblical Salomé, and Kushner has stated that
one of the things he was addressing in making these nongender-specific costumes was the breaking down of gender stereotypes. Not included in the exhibit but related to such works, Kushner also made “clothes” of fruits and vegetables—ephemeral and domestic items that he lovingly sewed together—even crocheting net undergarments with his mother to “hold the more fragile vegetables.” He and his friends then performed in these costumes in the tongue-in-cheek context of a fashion runway (above). These are powerful feminist statements that question what we as a society value as art, how we construct gender and sex, issues of the body and self-display. Robert Kushner is a feminist. Pattern and Decoration is a feminist movement. Why must we keep tiptoeing around this?

ABOVE LEFT:
“Gold”
Layers
Internationales Performance Festival
Österreichischer Kunstverein, Vienna, 1978
Photograph by Robert Fleck

ABOVE MIDDLE:
“Velveeta Epaulettes” and “Eggplant Codpiece and Scallion Skirt”
Robert Kushner and Friends Eat Their Clothes
Acme Productions
New York, 1972

ABOVE RIGHT:
“The Rose”
Layers
Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1978
Photograph by Drew Howard
NOTES

1. “The Ism That Dare Not Speak Its Name” was originally published in Documents 15 (Spring/Summer 1999). “She-Demon Spawn from Hell” was published as an introduction to the republication of a revised “The Ism That Dare Not Speak Its Name” in the online journal M/E/A/N/I/N/G in 2006. Other recent publications also deal with this issue. See, for example, Jori Finkel, “Saying the F-Word,” Artnews 106, no. 2 (February 2007): 118–119.

2. Alexandra Anderson-Spivy says that “Kushner was one of the first postmodern artists—before the term postmodernism was coined.” Anderson-Spivy, Gardens of Earthly Delight (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1997), 15. See also Doug Harvey’s review of a P&D show at Rosamund Felsen Gallery, “Pattern and Decoration: Say It with Flowers,” LA Weekly (September 12–13, 2003): 43–44.


6. Artists who paint using their menstrual blood include Vanessa Tiegs, Petra Paul, and Tamara Wyndham. Carolee Schneeman’s famous Interior Scroll was first performed in 1975.


REWRITING THE SEVENTIES

We are entering a period of reevaluation. Carelessly accepted first drafts of the history of art since 1970 need to be rewritten. There are several reasons for this, some quite visible and some that require more thought.

The academic, museum, and market systems are largely unconscious, automatic engines of change. Graduate students are pressed more than ever to discover new topics. In that way the blanks—whether once intentionally created or not—are slowly filled in.

To ensure return visitors and attract new ones, art museums—the second system—must constantly come up with new exhibition ideas. Institutions that have permanent collections, even significant ones, cannot rely on boring lineups as bait for the gate. Exhibitions culled from collections also need new themes. This situation, according to some, is entertainment-driven programming, but so be it. In the long run, by happenstance, this demand for novelty guarantees a kind of historical fairness. The voids in schedules must be filled.

The third system is the art market. Cultural commerce always needs products that can be bought cheaply and resold at a profit, even if these new products—since the recently vaunted art school supply is in fact finite and somewhat raw—are pre-tested and then dressed up in new clothes. This reality is particularly true during a period of an unbelievably expanded buyer’s market.

All three instigators are really one mechanism. But what about the worker bees? Artists and critics cannot be left out entirely. In order to court originality, artists paradoxically always want new resources or inspirations from the past and the validation conferred by honored precedents; critics need new subjects and old evils to redress.

But on a deeper level, this long-awaited reevaluation of the ’70s is also a symptom of a much-needed reform of art historical models. For decades there has been a growing disparity between the entrenched single-line mode of discourse and a more complicated, richer art production that demands a full and accurate accounting of the past and the present. The Hegelian evolutionary model is applied to postminimalism as postmodernism, often favoring photo conceptualism to the exclusion of painting and other formats.
Certainly photo conceptualism and conceptualism are valid art forms, continuing to make valuable contributions to the art discourse—particularly when there is political and/or liberationist content. But I myself could propose an alternative narrative, calling it, somewhat ambiguously, the mistress narrative. “Mistress” because so many of the Pattern and Decoration (P&D) artists are women—and often building on women’s decorative art traditions—and because decoration is the art lover’s secret (apparently shameful, and therefore most cherished) love. One can propose that art has moved from Mondrian to minimalism to grid painting, and from grid painting to pattern painting; pattern painting is enlarged to become Pattern and Decoration. Single-line histories are invented to prove the endpoint inevitable, and because they are a comfort to the simple-minded. Art, however, will not be narrowed down, by me or by anyone else.

We must go beyond the linear, evolutionist model and even, although it is an improvement, the dialectical trope. We can learn a great deal by positing a kind of dialogue between the conceptual and the perceptual, the representational and the abstract, the personal and the social, the geometrical and the organic. But unless we see these constructs as heuristic, we will always come up against the impasse of a structural imposition that trivializes the art in question. The binary cannot encompass more than one back-and-forth at a time.

Because art pluralism is a fact, there need to be better ways of picturing and thinking about art. I favor the braid as a model, for it can encompass many strands and yet suggest complicated interrelationships. Let us picture three strands, five strands, or more in a spiral that loops back on itself. And the spiral is moving through time.

**EVEN SLOGANS ARE DECORATIVE**

We can also turn things around. Above I stated that artists “always want new resources or inspirations from the past and the validation conferred by honored precedents.” The reverse is also true: art movements are validated by successors. This phenomenon, I feel, is particularly applicable to P&D, even if certain successors need to plead ignorance in order to claim originality. The legacies of P&D are also its validation.

Why has P&D been repressed? The first surveys of the ’70s—e.g., Corrine Robbins’s *The Pluralist Era*—cited P&D. But then as time passed, the movement disappeared from the textbooks. P&D let the decorative cat out of the bag. By confronting the decorative and acknowledging it, we are forced to see the decorative function of art in Picasso as well as in Matisse, in conceptual art as well as in Frank Stella. Anything you put over your sofa—whether it is a single word, a dictionary definition, or a gel painting—is decorative. Face up to it. Embrace it. Or—and this is a P&D legacy too—really make
works that can’t fit over a sofa, really subvert
the over-the-sofa or the over-the-reception-desk
function of art. Make performance art without
a trail of saleable documents. Make public art.
Beginning around 1979, for instance, Joyce
Kozloff concentrated on public ceramic tile
commissions for those “bleak, boring ‘minimal’
buildings that we all pass through daily. . . .
What I learned from the anonymous artist of the
past was that decoration at its most glorious
can create and articulate centers of sociality for
whole communities.”¹

How liberating it was to acknowledge
decoration. Years later, painter Robert Zakanitch
wrote: “It became evident that the dynamics
and power of art come through its limitations,
but at this point, at the beginning of the ’70s,
the limitations were too limiting. I felt trapped,
lost, crazy, depressed.”⁵

Before P&D, artists lived in fear of having their
works called decorative. This was particularly
ture of those working in nonillusionist abstract
styles. When Jackson Pollock’s paintings were
called “apocalyptic wallpaper,” this was not
meant as a compliment. If one thinks that
the highest value of art is the spiritual—as
Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, Pollock, Barnett
Newman, and even Ad Reinhardt believed—then
it is curious indeed—and Eurocentric—that no
one seemed to catch on to the spirituality in
Islamic patterning. But, if nothing else, P&D is
less Eurocentric than most other art styles. P&D
will quote visuals from any culture, worldwide,
cross-class, and time-deep.

A LEGACY IS A LEG TO STAND ON

In truth, the legacy of P&D is still in the making
or is sub rosa, submerged, in the form of “the
other”—the other art history, the other art
criticism, the other path. Or, if not still in the
making, that legacy is at least only recently
becoming visible and openly acknowledged.

Patterning is the most social and the most
global of art forms and, in many instances,
humble indeed, or, as in some Islamic
patterning, sublime. As expressed, appropriated,
or reexpressed in P&D, patterning is not
interested in the conventions of Renaissance
space, or in portraiture or literature. Therefore it
is similar to modernist, formalist painting.

Yet strictly speaking, historical patterning
accomplished anticomposition thousands
of years before minimalism by neglecting
to make one segment more important than
another. Patterning was all-over before there
was any other alternative to the centered
and the singular or, on the other hand, dumb
repetition. Historical patterning presents a
unity of form and content through repetitions
and complexities that have relationships to
celestial, sidereal, biological, and other systems
of recurrence. However, since it usually takes
the form of quotation, patterning in P&D has
an added layer of geopolitical, gender, and historical reference, within which there is even room for irony and glamour. P&D, although it has similarities to formalist paintings, is a critique of formalism.

“Our revulsion for the official style united us,” reminisced painter Tony Robbin.

“Art magazines published articles with titles like On Frontality, . . . Such articles were just pompous justifications of Minimalism, an art style invented twenty years earlier. Minimalism was not at all like the experiences we were having in life: the tremendous implosion of alternate view from Western and non-Western history and the pervasive awareness of culture from all over the globe.”

Coming out of minimalist grid painting and/or Matisse, P&D embraces the political, through its association with 1970s feminism, non-Western tessellation, so-called women’s work, and even mass-produced fabric, linoleum, and wallpaper designs. Feminist artist Miriam Schapiro asserts that the women in the P&D movement “needed to affirm the strength of decorativeness in history—since its history was one of work by women almost exclusively. ‘Decorative is not a dirty word’ became a phrase almost as important as ‘The personal is the political.’”

That all these factors and vectors came into play in P&D can only partly be explained by the diverse backgrounds and interests of the artists involved, under cover as it were of patterning, and then, gaining in strength, of the larger affront of the decorative. To generalize, the New Yorkers, such as painters Cynthia Carlson, Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff, Mario Yrissary, and Robert Zakanitch, were filling in those bland minimalist grids in more colorful ways. Schapiro, a New Yorker who had relocated to Los Angeles, began femmaging—juxtaposing found fabrics in honor of anonymous women fabric designers and homebound needleworkers. Farther south at the University of Southern California at San Diego, Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel came under the influence of visiting art historian Amy Goldin. Kushner sewed together flashy printed fabrics to create performance costumes and wall hangings. MacConnel appropriated 1950s design motifs from drapes and other low sources for his unstretched paintings. Back in New York, Tony Robbin, who had grown up in
Japan, Okinawa, and Iran, pursued the fourth and fifth dimensions through complicated geometric patterns. Kushner and Shapiro moved to New York.

They did, however, all connect and hold loft meetings, at which there were more artists involved than are in this particular exhibition. Back in 1977, upon the occasion of my exhibition “Pattern Painting” at P.S. 1, I embraced twenty-two artists, and in retrospect many more could have been included. I left out, for instance, all the criss-cross patternists in Boulder, Colorado, because the work seemed too distant, too cool, and not decorative enough.

**PATTERN PAINTING BECAME P&D AND THEN DISAPPEARED**

Some of the artists then insisted that Pattern and Decoration—not pattern painting—was the correct label for their efforts, and this made some sense. Kushner and Schapiro had not actually been painting *per se* but collaging printed fabrics. Kozloff began devoting herself to ceramic tiles. Others, such as Jane Kaufman, Ned Smyth, and Patsy Norvell, were working in three dimensions. Painting, as a term, was not inclusive enough. Patterning alone did not cover the territory, because some in the group, such as Brad Davis, did not use pattern. But all the work was extremely decorative—colorful, flat designs, covering surfaces of all kinds. So Pattern and Decoration became the preferred term. It was the dreaded word “decoration” that was the common denominator. I went along with the new nomenclature, seeing it as a more accurate and more radical construct.

And then the lights were turned off. The artists kept working, but the collector-fueled, dealer-driven spotlight moved on to another, I thought less interesting, area of the stage. Neo-expressionism took over. On another front, pluralism was reduced to postminimalist conceptualism, and then was erased as a concept. Was this because the term was once used by Marxist-Leninists to indicate counterproductive revolutionary divisiveness? A simpler explanation is that the notion was then too difficult for the art market to handle, since sales are often predicated upon fantasies of outguessing history and scooping up the “one best thing,” the self-fulfilling prophecy, the predicted inevitable, the high art consensus.

**THE BEAUTY OF IT ALL**

What has not yet been explained is how or why P&D, although currently omitted from most art history summaries, remains a viable influence. That it is a continuing inspiration is evidenced by the 2004 exhibitions created by curator and critic Michael Duncan, all at L.A.’s Bergamot Station art space cluster: “Parrot Talk: A Retrospective of Works by Kim MacConnel” at the Santa Monica Museum of Art; “NYPD” at the Shoshana Wayne Gallery; and “LAPD” at
the Rosamund Felson Gallery. Although many of the P&D usual suspects were included in the two gallery surveys, “NYPD” also included Carl Fudge, Polly Apfelbaum, Virgil Marti, and Rob Wynne; “LAPD” had Jean Lowe, Carole Caroopas, Merion Estes, and others.

Are rumors of beauty somehow enough? Or is it that beauty, because it is so difficult to define, can still be subversive? Beauty, according to superficial modernism and even more superficial postmodernism, is anathema. It is therefore still available to the perverse contrarian, because the illusively nonverbal is “evil” too seductive.

P&D has had a lasting influence because it reintroduced beauty, particularly historical, non-Western, and populist beauty, into art. With its valorization of the floral, the lush, the colorful, and the complicated, the movement was in part a response to the cool Puritanism of minimalism in painting and sculpture and thus, to its credit, an affront to Puritanism in general.

Pattern painting was an attempt to fill in the minimalist grid with life-affirming color, with playful or more complicated geometries, even representational images. The renaming of pattern painting as Pattern and Decoration made marketing a little more difficult, but it reopened art to beauty and excess.

Much has been written about beauty, but little has been learned. If it is only in the eye of the beholder, then its reality is questionable. If it is social, then we limit experience. For although beauty changes according to collective agreement, there still seem to be individual perceptions. Right proportions are not the answer, since the correct always needs a corrective, usually in the form of variety. Order may be the underpinning, but it is not the essence. There are ugly people, ugly paintings, but are there ugly flowers? Perhaps beauty can only be defined by beauty, i.e., poetry.

**APPROPRIATING CRAFTS**

Since P&D often appropriates methods and images from the decorative arts and the crafts, it allows us to see these sources in a new light—as art, not pure and simple, but certainly as valid in its own way, like most paint-on-canvas art. If geometrical Amish quilts are art of some sort, then so are crazy quilts, as seen here in Kaufman’s embroidered and beaded quilt. Kozloff’s collaborations with potter Betty Woodman led some to believe that it was time to look at ceramics again.

P&D allowed some of us—I wish I could say all of us—to see the crafts as art. For me, an exhibition at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1981 initiated one of those revelatory moments. It was of works by Kozloff and potter Betty Woodman; Woodman made the pots and Kozloff applied the glazes. I selected several of their collaborations for my exhibition “Usable Art” (Myer Fine Arts Gallery,
State University College, Plattsburgh, New York and the Queens Museum of Art, New York City, 1981). Although including one of Woodman’s solo pieces was barely noticeable to others, to me it emblemized my crafts conversion. P&D—and not only Judy Chicago in *The Dinner Party*—was quoting or appropriating “craft” traditions, so why not go to the sources?

Of course, the more I read and the more I saw, the more obvious it quickly became that my “revelation” was old hat: William Morris, influenced by John Ruskin, firmly grasped that craft was art, and thus there was something called the arts and crafts movement. This reference by a circuitous route led to both the early valorization of craft at the Bauhaus and the post–World War II American craft movement.

The ceramics, performance costumes, and screens of P&D also opened the way to what I called usable art. Scott Burton, coming out of theater, art criticism, and street works, proposed tables and chairs as sculptures. He was influenced not only by Constantin Brancusi but also by Kozloff, Kaufman, and Woodman (with whom he eventually shared an art dealer). Furthermore, would there be an Andrea Zittel or a Jorge Pardo without a Burton? I doubt it.

Kozloff’s appropriation of Hispanic and Islamic tilework and Jaudon’s bow to Islamic/Celtic interlacing relocated grid painting within world culture. And then there is the whole idea of pattern as content as well as form. Mass-produced linoleum patterns (in Zakanitch) and wallpaper (in both Zakanitch and Cynthia Carlson) or mass-produced dress, curtain, and upholstery fabrics (MacConnel, Kushner) and, also, needlework of all kinds (in Schapiro) evoke the past, class, domesticity, and the need for decoration in a drab world of family rooms, clinics, waiting rooms, and factories.

In 1977 in my essay for *Artforum*, I suggested something one might call pattern consciousness:

> That most patterning has always been abstract, examples of representational patterning notwithstanding, also means that once we get rid of our cultural bias against Third World art, “decorative” art, and traditional women’s art, we may be able to break down the superficial elitism of Western abstract art. Patterning could be more of an art of the people than most forms of social realism. One characteristic of significant new art is that it calls attention to aspects of the world previously invisible to, or not attended to by consciousness. Pattern painting does that. One becomes pattern conscious.¹⁰

P&D, I would now add, also makes us aware and appreciative of the decorative, or as I also wrote:
“DECORATIVE ART is the oldest new art there is!”

P&D proved that an art movement no longer had to be initiated by mostly male artists. Women artists participated as equals in the creation of a new style. And, perhaps most importantly, artists now have another precedent for taking art issues into their own hands.

NOTES


8. Certainly Elaine Sturvesant’s full-fledged appropriations of other artists’ work, as early as 1966, preceded P&D; but appropriated art by Sherrie Levine and Mike Bidlo did not. One could say that because of pop art (once referred to as neo-Dada), appropriation was definitely in the air, and P&D participated in this strategy by shamelessly borrowing patterning from here, there, and everywhere.

9. Of course, adjusted by time, minimalism now looks beautiful too, if only in a Neoplatonic way.


Artists and Plates
Cynthia Carlson

Cynthia Carlson’s approach could be described as one of enticing the viewer, urged on by her increasing awareness of feminism and her interest in making paint more tactile and dense. Carlson’s brushwork has an ornamental quality that draws you in to look closer. Her treatment of the brushstroke as an independent entity influenced several of the other P&D artists, as did her ability to create decorative motifs that were monumental and grand and could capture the viewer’s attention.

Carlson also treated “wallpaper” as a kind of painting, but her loose application of paint makes the surfaces seem almost sculptural, as in Mental Report of 1974. The surface of this painting is divided into three bands, with paint applied so thickly it seems to pulse off the surface in its dense impasto. While other artists made renderings of lattice structures (like Jaudon, Schapiro, and Zakanitch), Carlson created a diagonally gridded surface. She was actively involved in decoration as a way to activate space, in both her painted surfaces and her incredibly vibrant installations, outgrowths of her study of vernacular art, particularly installations by self-taught artists.

Pfui Teuffle of 1975 is related to Carlson’s antiformalist environmental works from the P&D period, with the wallpaperlike surface, the decorative elements, and the use of texture, which critic Carrie Rickey has termed a “chewy delectability.” This kind of painting is a complete rebuke of minimalist tendencies, and its title incorporates the response such paintings received, as it translates from the German as “Ugh! Disgusting!” Critic Carter Ratcliff notes that the heavily impastoed surfaces of Carlson’s paintings actually seem compact because of the density of the paint.

Carlson’s works in this exhibition reside more in the vein of geometric abstraction, but she is interested in surface animation so the viewer’s experience of looking is complemented by the sensual appeal of her paintings. It is difficult not to want to touch. Had these works been made with oil paint instead of acrylic, they might have taken years to dry completely.
CYNNIA CARLSON
*Mental Block,* 1974
Oil on canvas, 86 x 114 inches
Polk Museum of Art
Permanent Collection 2005.13
Gift of Cynthia Carlson
and Robert Bertolletti
CYNTHIA CARLSON
Pfui Teuffie, 1975
Oil and vermiculite on canvas, 66 x 96 inches
Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art,
Gift of Robert Bertoletti and the artist
Brad Davis

Brad Davis longed to travel, but financial limitations forced him to miss out on the trip Kushner and Goldin took to the Middle East in 1974. Davis highlights his use of non-Western source material in compositional devices, patterning, ornament, and brushwork. From Islamic art, he began looking at all kinds of Asian art. *Shiva’s Dog* of 1979 is an image of the Hindu story of one of Shiva’s vehicles or aspects; the dog and the bull were ways the deity moved. Underscoring this Indian content is Davis’s engagement with pictorialism and ornamentalism. His interest in Chinese painting and decorative arts was particularly influential on several of the other artists associated with P&D, such as Kushner, MacConnel, Smyth (with whom he collaborated), and Zakanitch. However, his desire to look at non-Western art led him to study first Japanese art, then Chinese art, especially of the Northern Song dynasty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the work of the “literati” (scholar-artists) painters, such as this eleventh-century handscroll painting, *Summer Mountains*, attributed to Qu Ding. In paintings such as this one, the emphasis is on the lush beauty of the landscape. *Fishwatching Triptych* of 1981 also returns to the Islamic use of the pictorial with an ornamented border. Davis examined sixteenth-century Persian carpets, many of which belonged to Shah Tahmasp, who owned the miniatures in the exhibit “A King’s Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972, inspiring to several of the artists for the flattened, almost abstracted treatment of space, the beauty of the surface decoration, and the incorporation of decoration, as seen in this illustrated manuscript example from the *Shahnama* (*The Book of Kings*). This painting also shows an inspirational use of space and a balance between realism and abstraction, recalling Chinese painting, similar to the kinds of works Davis considered. He used the rectangular format and the detailed image of the landscape such as that in *Summer Mountains*.

Davis described “Desert Fox,” also of 1980, to me as a good example of a single animal portrait in the landscape. Two studies, *Study Bird and Butterfly* and *Study Bird Flying*, both from 1979, showcase some features of Davis’s process. They were for a large painting exhibited in a London show, and a subsequent print. Davis described the importance of exhibiting these works together:

This group [represents] a period in my work where the use of strong-colored fabric borders and animals were the main theme. This was influenced by a trip to India and seeing a lot of strong-colored folk art, plus a continuing interest in Persian and Indian miniature painting and textiles. The themes develop from Sufi and Indian myths and stories that often use animals as stand-ins for human traits. I wanted to create narratives that emphasize humor, empathy, and satire of the human condition. It was a way of extending Decoration beyond the standard floral imagery, which is celebratory but impersonal. The strong fabrics and salon hanging contributed to a feeling of intensity, joy, and fullness in the visual field. More is definitely better!

Davis’s reliance on the framing elements, the space, the formats, the motifs, and the imagery of non-Western painting are satisfying figurative meditations within P&D.
BRAD DAVIS

*Desert Fox*, 1980
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 50 x 50 inches
Courtesy of the artist
BRAD DAVIS
Fishwatching Triptych, 1981
Acrylic and polyester on canvas
60 1/2 x 140 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 4
BRAD DAVIS
Shiva’s Dog I, 1979
Acrylic and polyester/canvas, 50 x 68 inches
Marieluise Hessel Collection,
Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies,
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
BRAD DAVIS
Study Bird & Butterfly, 1979
Acrylic and polyester on canvas
27 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

BRAD DAVIS
Study Bird Flying, 1979
Acrylic and polyester on canvas
27 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist
BRAD DAVIS
Top of the Peak, 1980
Acrylic and polyester on canvas
48 inch diameter
Courtesy of the artist
Valerie Jaudon connects her interest in architectural ornament with the gridded and spiraling forms in her work, especially the Beaux Arts–influenced architectural ornament work of Louis Sullivan and postmodern architecture. But she disavows a direct influence from Islamic art, remarking that her work is about the shifting relationships between grids. However, her intentionality is suspect since she regards a visit to the Alhambra, during her year of study at St. Martin’s School of Art in London in 1968–69, as one of the compelling experiences in her artistic development. Jaudon remarked, “Traveling in Europe, seeing places like the Alhambra, and having some distance from [the] New York [art world], I formed myself.” She moved to New York City following her time in London and began making her signature style paintings of interpenetrating grids. Her intent was to figure out how to elaborate on the grid, a significant feature of modernism. Modernist critic Rosalind Krauss regarded grids as non-narrative, non-natural ordering principles of modernism, but also saw them as mystical. This perception celebrates the grid as separate from life and experience, while P&D artists, including Jaudon, did not see it as a pragmatic ideal. Jaudon explained that she turned the grid, then continued rotating it, which recalls natural forms and therefore is engaged with life and experience. Her claim that she did not use Islamic art also rings hollow in light of the attention the Western popular media of the early 1970s gave to the technical innovation of Islamic grid interpenetration as a new form of symmetry, in Jacob Bronowski’s BBC series *The Ascent of Man*, where he compared the spiraling development of crystals to the tiles in a Moorish courtyard. Jaudon worked in two architectural firms, honing her understanding of the shape, composition, and issues surrounding architectural ornament.

One of Jaudon’s first important paintings is *Toomsuba* of 1973. Like all of her works from 1973 to 1985, it gets its title from a community in her native Mississippi. The painting is brilliant, with an array of slightly shaded but unmodulated colors interlocking on a beige/peach/orange field. The scaffolding in this work seems to hold the gridded planes of space, which also seem to shift, just as a kaleidoscope...
moves forms in and out of view. The immediate reference for the dazzling complexity of the composition is to Islamic tile decoration, as is the contemplative quality. Next, I am reminded of Jackson Pollock’s painting *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, where the eight pole forms both emerge and recede in the intricate web of lines on the surface. This painting has a similar surface tension through the same color dynamics of progression and recession. Jaudon’s work also recalls the lines of force activating the surfaces of many Italian futurist paintings, such as Giacomo Balla’s *Dynamism of Dog on a Leash* of 1912. This painting is Jaudon’s meditation on a simple concept of reorienting the grid in various formats, through which she created a broad array of images. She literally contradicted modernist painting.

Jaudon’s painting *Jackson*, of 1976, shows her transition to monochromatic surfaces while retaining the interwoven surface design of the earlier painting. Here, as in *Pantherburn* of 1979, the artist has employed a metallic pigment to create a slight glistening effect on the surface. The format and surface design of *Jackson* closely resemble *Pantherburn*, but that work is more vertically oriented, with the forms more elongated. The decorative element is strongly evident, for the relationship of the motifs and the intervals is regularized, much as in Islamic tile decoration in the Hall of Barca at the Alhambra, where the carved design is seen along with the elaborate tiles. In these two later works, the precision of the linear forms has a soothing quality, reflecting the artist’s precision and suggestive of an ideal domain.
VALERIE JAUDON

Jackson, 1976
Metallic pigment in polymer emulsion and pencil on canvas, 72 1/8 x 72 1/8 inches
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1977
Art © Valerie Jaudon/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
LEFT:
VALERIE JAUDON
Pantherburn, 1979
Oil and metallic pigment on canvas, 96 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Art © Valerie Jaudon/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Photograph by Gary Mamay

ABOVE:
VALERIE JAUDON
Toomsuba, 1973
Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Art © Valerie Jaudon/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Jane Kaufman was expressly concerned with the glistening sheen of light on dark surfaces. Her role in the movement was central to highlighting disparaged creative methods such as those used by women. Her works are homages to the processes and products of women’s labors, while also engaging the dialogue of art. Using quilts, beading, and decoration as her primary formula, Kaufman has produced an elaborate body of work, including the massive quilt, *Embroidered, Beaded Crazy Quilt* of 1983–85. The crazy quilt was a widely popular form of quilting in the Victorian age because of its variety in shape; the surface was often consistently dark to keep it unified, as in this work, relieved only by the bits of embroidery and beading. She told me she worked on the squares for this quilt everywhere—at the movies, at friends’ homes. They are various images of flowers, some with more beading than others. The beads seem jewel-like on the surface, even more luxurious in contrast to the dark rich purple-blue of the background surface. She was obsessed with creating a complete catalogue of embroidery with it.

The *4-Panel Screen* of 1984 is constructed with a surface of feathers and beads. It actively recalls the interest in flora and fauna so typical of the Victorian period. Yet, in light of American painting in the 1970s and 1980s, it breaks every rule—as an object, as a surface, and as an abstraction. Perhaps the reality of the feathers makes the surface even more transgressive, since Kaufman does not hide the feathers and instead exploits their softness and tactility. Glistening, rich, and varied, it is a wild kind of decoration. The work is completely activated by the objects, their textures, their varied look, so it becomes a playful and expansive ornamented surface that is totally original, yet strongly indebted to Victorian interior decoration, art nouveau ornament, and Islamic pattern. The play of sensuality and decoration are perhaps most provocative in Kaufman’s work, compared to that of the other P&D artists. She manipulates the materials in order to use lights and darks to highlight the glamour and sumptuousness of her surfaces.
JANE KAUFMAN
4-Panel Screen, 1984
Coquille feathers and glass beads
79 x 31 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Joyce Kozloff

Joyce Kozloff’s utilization of non-Western imagery as a source provided her with a way out of the then-dominant minimalist and conceptualist bent of the 1970s art world and eventually led her back to American referents. Her desire to make environments led her from painting to decorating interiors to large-scale public artworks. Kozloff acknowledges the enormous impact of Mexican and Islamic art on her work. She first became interested in Mexican patterns when she was studying geometrical pattern as a system for her art, starting in 1973. Soon she began searching for a more complex pattern than the horizontal and vertical and found the overlapping diagonal grids of Islamic art that moved back and forth. In 1974, she started looking at books of geometrical pattern and then appropriated the forms and drew them herself, eventually using them as the basis for paintings. The surge of illustrated scholarly publications in the 1960s and 1970s served as catalysts. In light of her new interests, Islamic pattern held great interest for Kozloff in a way it had not earlier (as in 1967 when she visited the Alhambra). In February 1975, she traveled to Morocco with the express purpose of looking at Islamic pattern. As Henri Matisse’s visit there had done for his art, this trip proved important in her next body of work, which was largely based on the image of the star pattern she had seen in North Africa. In Kozloff’s painting *Hidden Chambers* of 1975–76, the rectangular area of decoration is contrasted with and linked to the vertical bands through the recurrent use of patterns, even when it is varied. It is important to remember that Kozloff was strongly influenced by quilts and their diverse but geometric patterns, which are similarly arranged in a grid formation. She incorporates star patterns, inspired by the Moroccan mosque she visited, as well as several other kinds of ornament. Kozloff particularly remembers the importance of Gombrich’s *The Sense of Order* in 1979 as a way for the P&D artists to see the inherent, essential qualities of decoration, without regard for time and place, reside in its fabricated order. During 1978–79, Kozloff completed her massive *An Interior Decoration*, which was shown in four different installations and was a catalogue of her decorative lexicon. The work consists of seventeen long and short silkscreened wall hangings, twenty-one vertical
tile pilasters (which lean against the walls), many lithographs on silk mounted on rice paper, and a large tile floor. The effect is environmental, which forms a nice pendant to the work of other feminist artists exploring the division between art and craft in the same years, such as Judy Chicago in *The Dinner Party* of 1979.

Conceived around the same time, *Tile Wainscot* of 1979–81 is comprised of hand-painted and glazed ceramic tiles in twenty panels. Wainscoting is a kind of paneling used to provide insulation but usually serves the more obvious form of decorating the lower surface of the wall, beneath the chair rail and above the baseboard, since it typically only stands about three feet in height. In *Glenview* there are several examples of traditional wainscoting, tongue-and-groove boards, that form a visual relief to the vertical expanse of the wall surface or add color or texture. She made a wainscot piece for the “Arabesque” exhibition, curated by Dr. Ruth Meyer, that actually was incorporated into the floor piece for *An Interior Decorated*, discussed below. This second wainscot piece was designed to be adaptable: the panels can be arranged in different groupings with or without space between them. She plays with art deco motifs, considering an array of possibilities for geometric patterns. This work has not been shown often, so this exhibition is a wonderful opportunity to see it. Additionally, the artist specifically requested that her painting hang over the wainscot to animate the wall surface completely.
As a way of creating larger and larger pieces, Kozloff worked on public art projects, but she began by looking closely at the sites and regional ornament for inspiration, even as she continued to imbue her surface designs with the kind of elaborate decorative complexity seen in Islamic architecture. Kozloff’s second public art project was installed in one of Victorian architect Frank Furness’s structures, the Pennsylvania Railroad French Street Station in Wilmington, Delaware, built in 1908. Furness’s work had long interested Kozloff, who traveled to Philadelphia, where the majority of his projects are located. She submitted the proposal in 1980 after making many sketches of Furness’s architecture and ornament, which showed his extensive influence from Beaux Arts design and the arts and crafts movement. The work was installed in 1984 and consists of colorful bands of geometric forms, including a register of chevrons that indicate the direction of traffic flow. The space is a vestibule and moves the traveler from a side street up a flight of steps to the waiting area inside the station. The six-inch stair height served as the module around which the whole design revolves. On the walls, four horizontal registers are separated by three bands. The decoration includes twelve pictorial inserts, referencing Furness’s designs for etched glass, wrought ironwork, tiles, and ornamental brickwork. Kozloff played with the surfaces and came up with many variations on the rectangular and square format of the tiles. She even included near the entrance some floral tiles, based on images taken from Furness’s sketchbooks, against a ground of pink, green, blue, and gold. The effect looks like a quilt and brings the feminine into the otherwise masculine space of architecture. The overall effect is a wealth of color and ornament that transforms and completely dominates an otherwise dull environment.

JOYCE KOZLOFF

*Tile Wainscot, 1979–81*

Hand-painted, glazed ceramic tiles grouted on plywood
20 panels, 48 x 256 inches
Collection of the artist
JOYCE KOZLOFF
Hidden Chambers, 1975–76
Acrylic on canvas
78 x 120 inches
Collection of Françoise and Harvey Rambach
JOYCE KOZLOFF

Wilmington Delaware Amtrak Station (Homage to Frank Furness), proposed 1980, installed 1984
Photograph by Eugene Mopsik, Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York
Robert Kushner

Robert Kushner made a trip to the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey) in 1974 with critic Amy Goldin that proved to be of singular importance in his development. He used source material carefully and occasionally brought different kinds of sources together, as in Persian Line, a performance work presented at the Kitchen in 1975 and then in a second form at Holly Solomon Gallery in 1976. It included sources as varied as a motif adapted from a book of Chinese illustrations and fabric cut into a chador cape.

Kushner’s marriage of painting and performance conveys some of the energy generated by P&D. After appearing in the costumes he’d made, the performers would hang them on the wall as paintings. Robert Kushner’s embrace of fluidity in painting is manifest in the repetition of the motif and the reliance on acrylic to move swiftly across the canvas. Visions Beyond the Pearly Curtain of 1975 is a design he evolved over a period of time. He told me recently he used a pomegranate, sword-shaped leaves, dots, and a checkerboard and recombined them into different contexts. He developed this approach by studying “bizarre silks,” eighteenth-century textiles that mostly came from France and later from Italy and Spain, noted for their juxtaposition of geometric, fantastical, and organic patterns, as seen in this Italian example, Woven Textile (silk with bizarre design), circa 1700–1705, which is similar to the kind of textiles Kushner utilized.

He said he reduced some of the vegetal forms to their simplest manifestations and added geometric elements (the checkerboards). He also was referring to Central Asian Uzbek
ikat silks, where the bold designs become even stronger when the highly charged edge elements meet and combine to create new shapes.

This ikat example from Yemen has a dramatic surface treatment with jagged lines, which is a common feature of such textiles, made more dramatic by the application of gold on its surface for the inscription band. Kushner took the linear patterns directly from an eighteenth-century French dress silk and combined them with realistic roses to create a surprising contrast. *Slavic Dances* of 1978 looks like a Busby Berkeley-style dance revue with its cascading figures. It showcases the grand scale of P&D art. This image came directly from a book of Chinese clip art combined with a gridded background. Kushner mentioned to me that he wanted to evoke Matisse’s figure drawing directly, but make it even more vigorous and animated. His use of historical textiles resembles Matisse’s approach as well; Matisse kept textiles and returned to them as needed for visual reference and imagery. Kushner’s references were even broader, but both used the surface designs in a similar manner.

As Temma Balducci remarks elsewhere in this catalogue, Kushner held costume and fashion shows, openly influenced by the easing of sexual mores of the 1960s and 1970s. The last was in 1982. His influences were notably broad: Asian calligraphy, Matisse’s drawing, Tiepolo, Watteau, as well as Japanese and Chinese poet painters, who intentionally adopted a consciously naïve sense of drawing because it conveyed a depth of feeling and a conscious rejection of expertise. They didn’t want it to be confused with court painters, who painted everything perfectly; they wanted to have roughness and aliveness. That’s what I am trying for in my mind.

His work shows this kind of vivacity in its swirling expanses of full color and line. Kushner’s real contribution to painting of the period was his willingness to incorporate any source into his canvases to enliven them.
ROBERT KUSHNER
Aurora's Chador, 1976
Acrylic, lace, tassel fringe, and acrylic on fabric, 71 x 93 inches
The Estate of Horace H. Solomon
ROBERT KUSHNER

Slavic Dancers, 1978
Acrylic on canvas, 190 x 240 inches
Marieluise Hessel Collection,
Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies,
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
ROBERT KUSHNER
Visions Beyond the Pearly Curtain, 1975
Acrylic on fabric, 120 x 202 inches
The Estate of Horace H. Solomon
Kim MacConnel's use of non-Western imagery has been broad and diverse. He has borrowed widely from the lexicon of symbols and forms throughout history and the world. His practice has been influential on other artists within Pattern and Decoration, as well as on subsequent artists. He found particular inspiration in Chinese advertising books that Brad Davis showed him and Robert Kushner. These books, coupled with his interest in Mexican tiles and Islamic rugs, prompted him to explore the roles of ornament and pattern in his work.

MacConnel was most interested in cross-cultural misunderstandings, along with globalism. He used the playful misunderstandings of linguistic translations, evident in titles like *Flourishing Sideline Occupations* of 1978, as a way to showcase the cultural distinctions he noted. In this work, MacConnel glued found fabrics into a compositional pattern resembling a crazy quilt, such as this example from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The piece has a kind of roughness or lack of finish, which for him was a way to leave it more open-ended. MacConnel was strongly influenced by the vernacular uses of fabric in the Near East and Southeast Asia, such as in wall coverings and tent hangings. *Mirro Lure* of 1979 was done with acrylic and metallic paint on cut found fabric. The negative space of the image is actually cut out so that the wall on which it hangs shows through the painting. This has the effect of accentuating the decorative surface.
of the piece. It reads like a painting, but acts like a trellis lattice or a lace piece. MacConnel’s inventiveness here is to abolish the unity of the surface, engaging the wall as part of the painting in a way no devotee of Greenberg would have ever permitted. MacConnel effectively blew all minimalist conventions away when he began superimposing drawing onto patterned fabrics to create visual juxtapositions that were humorous, playful, and, on some level, decadent. Paintings like *Good Work* of 1979 allow the viewer to see the patterns of the fabric through the drawings. The sewn-together strips of found fabric create a pastiched whole with distinctions in each panel provided by the different textile designs. MacConnel complicates the surface so that the work’s unity is intricate, like the worn layers of old billboards revealed in a kind of singular statement. It is in his work that the connections of P&D to pop art are most evident. His mixing of imagery recalls the irreverent juxtapositions of panels and images in paintings like James Rosenquist’s disparate combination of food, cinema, cars, and passion, *I Love You with My Ford* of 1961.
KIM MACCONNEL

Flourishing Side Line Occupations, 1978
Glued found fabric, 121 x 142 inches
Courtesy of the artist
KIM MACCONNEL

*Good Work*, 1979
Acrylic on mixed fabric, 50 1/2 x 114 inches
Marieluise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
KIM MACCONNEL

*Mirro Lure*, 1979
Acrylic and metallic paint on cut found fabric
107 x 44 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 22
Tony Robbin

Like Kozloff, Tony Robbin found the publications of Islamic pattern extremely useful. He had lived in Iran from 1953 to 1957, the child of a military intelligence officer, and his family collected carpets, marquetry, and metalwork. But it was in New York, maturing as a painter, that he found Islamic art, at the Asia Society and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, so exciting. Robbin was more concerned with the mathematical possibilities and did extensive analysis of the patterns. He found himself drawn to the ways that pattern related to architecture and to the process of producing elaborate patterns. That they all originated from basic tools like a compass and straightedge was important, as he was looking for ways to manipulate simple forms in complex arrangements. One important element for him was the mysticism of the magic square, which he applied to his work as an organizing principle. Another was the multiplicity of Islamic pattern. Robbin wrote in his notes, “Each pattern is a number of different things at the same time, it is a bunch of pinwheels shapes, then it a bunch of stars in the negative space, collection of pinwheels it is a six fold symmetry in hexagons, number of gestalts in each pattern, many of them had a spatial reading, kind of popped open in space, relate to one another because based on the grid, then could be markers for space, use overlap, interpenetrate them or put them at angles to one another to relate them.” In Islamic art he found the collapse of distinction between analytical/mathematical/geometric and colorful/luxurious/decorative, the lyrical fundamentals for his work.

Robbin stuck to pattern painting from the early to mid-1970s, but slowly revealed his increasing interest in decoration by the end of the decade, as he saw what the other P&D artists did. His Untitled of 1976 is an explicit revelation of his reliance on Persian pattern. Here, using stencil forms, he moves back and forth between a filled-in pattern and an open-lace pattern to construct basic patterns in three sections of different sizes. Untitled #19 of 1978 was a direct result of Robbin's study of kimonos, which are displayed and create one kind of space, and have a pictorial image (usually in the center of the back) and an all-over pattern as well. He reflected the three different patterns by
spraying paint through stencils, then moving the stencils and spraying again to build up a pattern by multiple patterns (hexagons over hexagons). Untitled #20 of 1978 was Robbin’s response to the challenge he felt from the flat-out decorative work that Zakanitch, Kushner, and MacConnel were all showing by that point. He described them as setting a new standard of luxury. Robbin felt compelled to make his pattern paintings but also add lusciousness, which he did by incorporating pink into the repeat of the surface design. 79-8 of 1979 moves back to his larger-format paintings of the first years of the decade. Here he uses a more luxuriant palette of greens and rich browns with exuberant patterns and begins to investigate space and expand from two to three to four dimensions. Robbin took apart rigid minimalist, formalist, and conceptualist boundaries in these paintings.
TONY ROBBIN

*Untitled, 1976*

Acrylic on canvas, 54 1/2 x 140 inches

Gift of William D. and Norma Canelas Roth,
Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art
LEFT:
TONY ROBBIN
*Untitled #19*, 1978
Acrylic on canvas
56 x 70 inches
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Zipser

ABOVE:
TONY ROBBIN
*Untitled #20*, 1978
Acrylic on canvas
56 x 70 inches
Private collection
Miriam Schapiro moved back to New York in the fall of 1972 and rapidly became immersed in investigating the decorative. She remembers distinctly the strong impression made by the exhibition “A King’s Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972, which revealed the beauty of Persian miniatures. She bought the exhibition catalogue and began studying it intently. This exhibition also proved important for Tony Robbin and Robert Zakanitch.

Schapiro would later define her willingness to pastiche materials on canvas, drawing from personal sources and autobiography, as femmage, which can be roughly defined as feminist-inspired collage. Working with artist Melissa Meyer, Schapiro described it this way:

1. It is a work by a woman. 2. The activities of saving and collecting are important ingredients. 3. Scraps are essential to the process and are recycled in the work. 4. The theme has a woman-life context. 5. The work has elements of covert imagery. 6. The theme of the work addresses itself to an audience of intimates. 7. It celebrates a private or public event. 8. A diarist’s point of view is reflected in the work. 9. There is drawing and/or handwriting sewn in the work. 10. It contains silhouetted images which are fixed on material. 11. Recognizable images appear in narrative sequence. 12. Abstract forms create a pattern. 13. The work contains photographs or other printed matter. 14. The work has a functional as well as an aesthetic life.

Seeking an alternative to the harsh limitations of modernism, Schapiro moved rapidly into expanding this transgression and began using fabric on canvas in 1972. She was keenly aware of the challenges she faced in supporting such an approach and of its broader limitations, noting that:

The politics of the high/low art split so supported by mainstream artists was confronted with passion by all of us feminists. We needed to affirm the strengths of decorativeness in history since its history was one of work by women exclusively. “Decorative is not a
“dirty word” became a phrase almost as important as “The personal is political.” For the first time in the history of art we women were able to influence the culture of our time.

Her role in agitating and organizing was significant and widely influential.

Schapiro’s works in this exhibition show her use of *femmage* as well as other kinds of layering in her art. In this exhibition, we include *Little Fan* of 1975, an early example of *femmage* and one of the artist’s first forays into using the fan motif. While most of Schapiro’s larger fan works mimic the semicircular fan, a widely used type, this image shows a less commonly known fan shape (either folding or static), where the framing hinges, if it were a folding fan, are elongated so that they form a handle, around which the holder could easily grasp the fan. The rounded shape of the fan is evident, defined by a checkerboard pattern of green and black, then enlivened by strips of fabric in a variety of blues, red, blacks, grays, whites, and tans. Most of the fabrics the artist has incorporated into the work are solid colors with only a few strips having a geometric or floral pattern. The fabric strips read as fringe or quilt sections in a quilt not yet completely pieced together. The background is static and undefined, a bland surface for the texture and patterning of the “fan” image at the center. Fans have been used by women for centuries to cool themselves, both indoors and out, in a demure manner, since the fan cannot be moved very broadly or the user will rapidly exhaust herself. Though fans have been used by men, they are primarily associated with women, which Schapiro wanted to recognize and acknowledge with works such as this one.

As a way to locate herself in the lineage of women artists, Schapiro made a series of “collaborations” in 1976 (and later) in which she responded to a reproduction of a work by a renowned woman artist, framing it with collage and painting. In *Collaboration Series: Mary Cassatt and Me* of 1976, she created a visual embrace for a small image of Cassatt’s painting *The Bath*. This painting celebrates the artist, the domestic subject matter, and Cassatt’s inventive work as a face, around which Schapiro has fashioned a patterned surface and outlined it with hair. The spray-painted area acts as a ground and the alternating areas of collage at the frame resemble a quilt pattern.

*Gates of Paradise* of 1980 consists of a single, rectangular-format canvas, where the artist has framed the border in bric-a-brac, the flat fabric cord used as a decorative element in clothing and craftwork. She then has layered ricrac trim, lace, appliqués, ribbons, digital images, and geometric shapes into a *femmage*. At the center of the descending rectangles is a white diamond. The garden is referenced here through the incorporation of floral imagery, in all different textures and scales, from the bold, large flowers
to the delicate motifs incorporated into the ribbon. The whole colorful cascade of flowers is set off against a black background, which recalls the textile design of Russian textiles, so important to Schapiro in recalling her Russian Jewish ancestors. The white diamond has the impact of a single unit of lattice, which would hold flowers or vines in place in a garden. The overflowing and cascading arrangement of forms suggests a walled garden of cascading flowers, a medieval reference for the most potent form of female power. The title recalls Lorenzo Ghiberti’s gilded bronze Baptistery doors in Florence, which Michaelangelo called the “gates of paradise” upon seeing them. The suggestion of a central core form here, coupled with the floral imagery and soft fabric, also suggests a double entendre, a reference to female genitalia as the space of rapture and pleasure. The diffuse arrangement of the fabric trims and of the flowers in the composition, offset by the geometry of the diamond, recalls the visual appearance of a single panel of a quilt, here enlarged significantly, so as to call attention to the lush beauty of the imagery.

The idea and look of quilting are central to the large, robust Heartland of 1985. Using the heart shape, Schapiro plays with the surface of the heart as a metaphor for the riches of one’s life. The isometric perspective of the cubes creates an overall ground of visual activity, enlivened with squiggle shapes and floral forms flowing over it. At the center is a dark spot that Schapiro has successfully framed so that it has a romantic, abundant feel of possibility, as opposed to an empty abyss. The gridded format is disturbed by the “pretty” color objects flowing over it.
MIRIAM SCHAPIRO

*Gates of Paradise*, 1980

Acrylic, digital images, and mixed media on canvas

50 x 60 inches

Courtesy of The Flomenhaft Gallery
MIRIAM SCHAPIRO
Heartland, 1985
Acrylic and fabric on canvas, 85 x 94 inches
Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art,
Gift of Women for Special Acquisition and
Council of 101
MIRIAM SCHAPIRO

Little Fan, 1975
Fabric and wood, 17 x 15 inches
Courtesy of Danielle Dutry
Ned Smyth

As P&D developed, Brad Davis befriended the younger artist Ned Smyth, the son of the Renaissance art historian Craig Hugh Smyth, who was investigating Byzantine and Renaissance architectural ornament as a source for his art. Together they produced several collaborations. At that time, Smyth’s work was more focused on form than on surface. Subsequently, he moved more into decorating the surface, using mosaic as a way to animate his sculpture. In the two columns exhibited in this show, known as either Trees or Light Column and Dark Column, according to the palette, he uses colors and gold to enliven and ornament the surfaces. The stylized motifs on all of Smyth’s column elements are derived from the many variations in architectural ornament, beginning with the lotus and the papyrus styles, that became much more elaborated in later uses from Greece and Rome through the Christian and Islamic variations of the medieval period to Renaissance examples. In addition to these columns, Smyth is represented in this exhibition by Leap of Faith, a flat panel mosaic with a pictorial image rendered in the kind of ornamental surface Brad Davis used in much of his painting from the P&D years. The images on this panel are highly stylized, so the emphasis is on giving the viewer a general impression of the form. The surface is quite active, because of both the dense imagery and the use of the glass mosaic. Mosaics seem to glimmer because their glass and stone surfaces catch the light. Medieval and Renaissance builders knew this and used them actively to decorate their buildings because candlelight would flicker and illuminate the surfaces. In addition, as did the builders of the past, Smyth has used gold to add to the radiance of the surface, outlining much of the flora to accentuate its robust curves.
NED SMYTH
Black & White Columns, 1985
Wood, stone, glass mosaic
Each 24 x 11 x 108 inches
Courtesy of the artist
NED SMYTH
Leap of Faith, 1985
Stone and glass mosaic on wood, 60 x 48 inches
Collection of Janet and David Brinton
Robert Zakanitch

Robert Zakanitch’s main concern with the basic issues of line, form, color, and scale prompted him to find new outlets for painting. In the 1970s, he wanted to create sumptuous surfaces, engaging and lavish, even as his peers disdained him for making art embodying this kind of visual pleasure. Zakanitch wanted to make generous, abundant images unlike any the world had ever seen before, and felt pattern was a third alternative painting style, after realism and abstraction. His paintings have graceful surface designs that recall garden structures, feathered cloth, and elaborate textiles, and also have luxurious color. His use of repeat motifs enables him to locate this typically marginalized kind of imagery in the center of his canvas. In each of the three paintings in this exhibition, *Green Goose Waltz* of 1977, *Day Trellis* of 1979, and *Wasp (Gentry Series)* of 1983, the artist has explored romantic beauty in several forms.

*Green Goose Waltz*, Zakanitch remarked to me recently, was personal to him. He was impressed by the Europeans, who were so interested in P&D painting, following the Basel Art Fair when Holly Solomon sold so many paintings in 1977. The American art world had largely rejected P&D, so Zakanitch wanted to embrace it in paintings like this one. Also, he wanted to play on imagery related to his Czech, Ukrainian, and Hungarian ancestry and all the handiwork and crafts his aunt and grandmother did that were displayed in the home, as well as flowered drapes and slipcovers. The ornamented surfaces of 1940s linoleum tile, which he recalled from his childhood, were also extremely influential on the feathery forms in this painting. Brad Davis had a book of linoleum tile patterns that Zakanitch loved to examine. He felt nothing could be more vulgar than using the reference to linoleum tiles in contemporary painting. Above all, he wanted to breach the walls of formalism to make a new kind of modernism, as an affront to what he calls “honcho” art, which he confronted by taking things a step further and using iridescent pink and silver paint.

*Day Trellis*, based on a trellis in his garden on Long Island, was quite confrontational because it was a fresh assault on minimalist thinking—flowers on a trellis, quite taboo as a subject. Zakanitch wanted to abandon the intellectual
rules of art to make beautiful paintings. Patsy Norvell, his wife at that time, was making a site-specific work using a trellis (much less ornate than this painting), so he decided to investigate the form and shape as well, as the central image.

*Wasp (Gentry Series)* was created soon after he and Norvell visited Florence. He saw many Giotto paintings in person for the first time and was incredibly moved by the way the artist handled fabric and cloth. Giotto’s fluid treatment of fabric is evident in almost all his paintings and frescos, as in *The Epiphany*, circa 1320, in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; it reveals Giotto’s use of subtle modulation, extremely difficult in the media of tempera and fresco in which he worked, as a way to render textiles. The Gentry series ended up looking like some kind of couture study, as several of the paintings looked like fabric studies. Arguably, the linear structure underlying Zakanitch’s composition in this painting hearkens back to Giotto’s earlier schematization of textiles. Zakanitch wanted to combine the old with the new in a joyful expression of the beauty of painting and its possibilities.
ROBERT ZAKANITCH

Day Trellis, 1979
Oil on canvas, 88 x 132 inches
Courtes of the artist
ABOVE:
ROBERT ZAKANITCH
Green Goose Waltz, 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 180 inches
Artist’s Studio, Brooklyn, New York
Courtesy of the artist

RIGHT:
ROBERT ZAKANITCH
Untitled, 1977
Silkscreen, 64 x 40 inches
Collection of the Hudson River Museum
Anonymous gift 91.8.3
ROBERT ZAKANITCH

Untitled, 1983
Silkscreen, 50 x 38 inches
Collection of the Hudson River Museum
Anonymous gift 91.8.2

ROBERT ZAKANITCH

Wasp (Gentry Series), 1983
Acrylic on canvas, 85 5/8 x 67 3/4 inches
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Museum Purchase, 1983
The P&D artists were part of a conscious movement: they knew each other, held several meetings to exchange ideas, and exhibited their work together. Their efforts developed and coalesced several prevailing interests in the art world, in pattern painting, in women’s work, and in decoration.

1974–1975
In November 1974, pattern painter Mario Yrissary held a meeting, attended by Valerie Jaudon and Tony Robbin, in preparation for a panel on “The Pattern in Painting,” scheduled for February 1975 as one of the “Artists Talk on Art” series at Artist’s Space, coordinated by art historian Irving Sandler. The panel was organized by Yrissary and moderated by Peter Frank; speakers included Martin Bressler, Rosalind Hodgkins, Jaudon, Robbin, and Sanford Wurmfeld. Perhaps the first major event where P&D began to be fleshed out was when Robert Zakanitch held a general “Pattern” meeting at his loft on Warren Street. The attendees included Amy Goldin, Leonore Goldberg, Rosalind Hodgkins, Jaudon, Kozloff, Kushner, Robbin, Schapiro, Kendall Shaw, Nina Yankowitz, and Zakanitch. Several of the artists had solo exhibitions in 1974 and 1975 where they began to show P&D work, including Kozloff’s 1974 exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Robbin’s 1974 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Zakanitch’s 1974 show at Cunningham Ward Gallery, and a series of shows at Holly Solomon Gallery, which officially opened in September 1975. Solomon represented only one of the women associated with P&D and never really took to the feminist politics underscoring it. She briefly represented Jaudon, who then moved on to Sidney Janis Gallery. Her opening exhibition was a group show that included nineteen artists, most significantly Kushner, MacConnel, and Smyth. Davis had a solo show at Holly Solomon Gallery, immediately following the opening group show. And MacConnel had a show there from late November through early December 1975, followed by a very decorative show of Lanigan-Schmidt, also in December. Also of particular note was the number of works by Kushner and MacConnel related to P&D that were selected by curator Marcia Tucker for the Whitney Biennial. Goldin commented on this in an article for Art in America.

1976–1977
The P&D artists were impressed and astonished by the surge of interest in their work. They had a rapid succession of shows, by 1970s standards, in the United States and then in Europe. They spoke on panels together; they got reviewed by major critics; they sold entire exhibitions to prominent collectors. It was a heady period of interest that developed very rapidly. “Ten Approaches to the Decorative,” the first show

Chronology of Shows and Writings
ANNE SWARTZ

The P&D artists were part of a conscious movement: they knew each other, held several meetings to exchange ideas, and exhibited their work together. Their efforts developed and coalesced several prevailing interests in the art world, in pattern painting, in women’s work, and in decoration.

1974–1975
In November 1974, pattern painter Mario Yrissary held a meeting, attended by Valerie Jaudon and Tony Robbin, in preparation for a panel on “The Pattern in Painting,” scheduled for February 1975 as one of the “Artists Talk on Art” series at Artist’s Space, coordinated by art historian Irving Sandler. The panel was organized by Yrissary and moderated by Peter Frank; speakers included Martin Bressler, Rosalind Hodgkins, Jaudon, Robbin, and Sanford Wurmfeld. Perhaps the first major event where P&D began to be fleshed out was when Robert Zakanitch held a general “Pattern” meeting at his loft on Warren Street. The attendees included Amy Goldin, Leonore Goldberg, Rosalind Hodgkins, Jaudon, Kozloff, Kushner, Robbin, Schapiro, Kendall Shaw, Nina Yankowitz, and Zakanitch. Several of the artists had solo exhibitions in 1974 and 1975 where they began to show P&D work, including Kozloff’s 1974 exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Robbin’s 1974 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Zakanitch’s 1974 show at Cunningham Ward Gallery, and a series of shows at Holly Solomon Gallery, which officially opened in September 1975. Solomon represented only one of the women associated with P&D and never really took to the feminist politics underscoring it. She briefly represented Jaudon, who then moved on to Sidney Janis Gallery. Her opening exhibition was a group show that included nineteen artists, most significantly Kushner, MacConnel, and Smyth. Davis had a solo show at Holly Solomon Gallery, immediately following the opening group show. And MacConnel had a show there from late November through early December 1975, followed by a very decorative show of Lanigan-Schmidt, also in December. Also of particular note was the number of works by Kushner and MacConnel related to P&D that were selected by curator Marcia Tucker for the Whitney Biennial. Goldin commented on this in an article for Art in America.

1976–1977
The P&D artists were impressed and astonished by the surge of interest in their work. They had a rapid succession of shows, by 1970s standards, in the United States and then in Europe. They spoke on panels together; they got reviewed by major critics; they sold entire exhibitions to prominent collectors. It was a heady period of interest that developed very rapidly. “Ten Approaches to the Decorative,” the first show
of P&D, opened on September 25, 1976 at Alessandra Gallery on Broome Street in Soho. The artists included Jaudon, Kaufman, Kozloff, Robbin, Schapiro, Arlene Slavin, John Torreano, Zakanitch, and Joe Zucker. The show was organized by Schapiro and curated by Kaufman. Schapiro noted in her statement that the artists sought to have their “art speak as a woman speaks.” Kozloff’s statement is even more definitive. She listed 112 antimodernist words under the title “Negating the Negative (An Answer to Ad Reinhardt’s ‘On Negation’)”:


In their place, she promoted (in “On Affirmation”):

- additive, subjective, romantic, imaginative, personal, autobiographical, whimsical, narrative, decorative, lyrical, architectural, sculptural, primitive, eccentric, local, specific, spontaneous,
irrational, private, impulsive, gestural, handwritten, handmade, colorful, joyful, obsessive, fussy, funny, funky, vulgar, perverse, mannerist, tribal, rococo, tactile, self-referring, sumptuous, salacious, eclectic, exotic, messy, monstrous, complex, ornamented, embroidered, articulated, spatial, light-filled, delicate, warm, open, questioning, sharing.

This listing reads as a compendium of descriptions for P&D art, but also speaks to the movement’s shocking place amid the austere art heralded in this period.

Another meeting was held in April 1976 at Schapiro’s loft, perhaps in preparation for another “Artists Talk on Art” panel on September 30 of that year. That panel, “Decorative Painting,” included Goldin, Kozloff, Kushner, and Schapiro. On October 2, 1976, another meeting was held at Schapiro’s loft, followed by a meeting at Kozloff’s loft on December 12, 1976, in preparation for a panel scheduled for the College Art Association’s (CAA) annual conference in February. Jaudon noted, “This is the last informal meeting of the larger group organized by the artists. The artists meet after this only for panels, openings, or in small groups.” Holly Solomon showed Kushner, Smyth, and Girouard that year; Rodney Ripps had a decorative show at Brooke Alexander Gallery; Andre Emmerich showed Schapiro; and Cynthia Carlson had an important installation at Hundred Acres, complete with wallpaper she painted.

The CAA panel, also called “Decorative Painting,” was an extended meditation on decoration and its many forms. Kozloff sent everyone on the panel a list of issues to be discussed; Goldin would moderate. The central themes revolved around defining the decorative, the intention for using the decorative, the pejorative attitudes with roots in romanticism, the embrace of technology, content and emotion of decoration, taste and sentimentality, and the possibilities for duration, scale, and intricacy, as well as the relation of decoration to “real space.” Each of the panel participants was to focus on some particular aspect. Goldin spoke on the dominant characteristics of decorative art, field and frame, and the dissimilarity of sources and styles versus similarity of attitudes. Jaudon spoke on the transgressive qualities of crossing boundaries between art and decoration. Kendell Shaw highlighted the additive versus the reductive (a historical response to formalism and minimalism) and universal structures of weaving and music. Kushner considered the relationship between prejudices and decoration and highlighted the importance of visual pleasure and joy. Schapiro discussed the importance of acknowledging sources in one’s content, the use of personal history to develop attitudes, and the embellishment of architecture. Kozloff
considered pattern, the sequential reading of imagery, intricacy and irrationality, and color and/as light in the decorative ensemble. Zakanitch’s part is blank on the list. I asked Jaudon, who gave me a copy, why, and she remarked that he wanted the freedom to speak about the personal qualities of decoration and its importance to him.

The major group shows of 1977 were held in both America and Europe. Holly Solomon took P&D art to the Basel Art Fair, and suddenly European interest in the movement became quite intense. Art critic John Perreault curated a fall show, “Pattern Painting at P.S. 1,” at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. Christopher Miles noted recently that though he had included several artists, Perreault was actually quite restrained in his selection, “for good reason: to define a movement that was new, distinct, nonsexist and nonhierarchical, and to avoid co-option by association.” Perreault wasn’t paid for the exhibition and wrote an essay about it in *Artforum*, since money wasn’t available for a catalogue. In the essay, he noted that pattern painting “allows a greater complexity of visual experience than most non-realist advanced painting of the recent past.” The exhibition was widely reviewed in the major New York art publications and generated much interest in the artists, continuing opportunities to exhibit, and more collectors seeking their work.

The Museum of the American Foundation for the Arts held the exhibition “Patterning & Decoration,” organized by Holly Solomon, in Miami, Florida in 1977. Amy Goldin wrote the catalogue’s introductory essay, which in one page sums up the essence of P&D: “This exhibition is not offered in the spirit of a lecture but as an invitation to a worldly or a cosmic dance. The artists wish to remind you of the possibility of joy beyond reason, of solemnity beyond fear.” Goldin’s meditations in this nine-paragraph essay give the full range of P&D artists’ concerns: art is formally or informally decorative; the repudiation of decoration is based in Western notions of superiority; decoration relates to both the great and small occasions of daily living; using decoration is a humanistic approach to art; the structure of decoration is more important than its associations in this work; these artists invigorate the grid; regular patterned fields establish the P&D surfaces as infinitely extendable; the field/frame relationship is key to understanding P&D; and light is just as important as motifs and structure. The artists in this exhibition were Robert Benson, Scott Burton, Brad Davis, Tina Girouard, Mary Heilmann, Valerie Jaudon, Richard Kalina, Christopher Knowles, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Kushner, Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, Alan Shields, Ed Shostak, Frank Stella, George Sugarman, George Woodman, Peter Young, Robert Zakanitch, Barbara Zucker, and Joe Zucker. The show traveled to the Galerie Alexandra Monett in Brussels.
Also in 1977, Holly Solomon assisted on another show, curated by Mary Delahoyd for Sarah Lawrence College, titled “Painting 75-76-77.” The exhibition was shown in two parts there, then in two parts at The Museum of the American Foundation for the Arts. The parts were brought together in one exhibition at The Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The catalogue had several essays, including one by Weba Garretson titled “Painting Decoration” and one by Eva Skrande on “Redefining the Grid.” Garretson freely associated from Robert Zakanitch’s maxim about decoration offering to painters, after realism and abstraction, an alternative way to investigate the physical properties of paint and to intensify the image rather than “amplifying its reference.” She further noted that P&D art offered a “new viability for painting in the 1970s, but [it] also encourage[d] a diversity of approach.” The exhaustion of painting was a much-discussed topic from the mid-1960s on and even appears perennially now. Pop art had drawn from contemporary culture to such an extent that it seemed to threaten the originality of art. Then the minimalists engaged in a strong rebuke of the art object, often regarding it as exhausted. A different direction was needed, which Garretson aptly noted in the work of the P&D artists. Skrande discussed how innovatively they used the grid, not as an end in itself but rather as a “point of departure for variations on a theme.” She also noted its ubiquity in the urbanized landscape, prompting its perennial recurrence in twentieth-century art.

1978–1979

Group exhibitions of 1978 included “Arabesque” at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, curated by Ruth K. Meyer, which traveled to La Jolla, California and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Interest in P&D became more evident beyond New York City after 1978, and in 1979, many exhibitions began to be held in Europe—in Brussels, London, Paris, Cologne, Innsbruck, Vienna. There were also several exhibitions in the United States, including in Dayton, New York, Buffalo, and Philadelphia. Kozloff’s work was featured by curator Tom Armstrong at the 1979 Whitney Biennial.


In 1980, there were several exhibitions of import and the last public forum during the active days of the movement. The roundtable discussion “Pattern and Decoration,” organized by the Morton Neumann Family for their archives (they had collected several works by that time), was held at the loft of Valerie Jaudon and Richard Kalina. This panel was related to the 1980–81 exhibition “The Morton G. Neumann Collection,” held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., which showcased works from the collection, from cubism to P&D. “Decorative Fabricators,” held at the Institute of Contemporary Art of the Virginia Museum, framed the work of ten artists from New York examining decoration and ornamentation. Also, several P&D works were included in the Venice Biennale’s U.S. Pavilion; John Perreault’s essay
published in the exhibition catalogue has been described as the “public manifesto” of P&D.

One of the main exhibitions of note was the “Dekor” show, which traveled from Mannheimer Kunstverein, Germany to Amerika Haus, Berlin to the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, England. The artists were Brad Davis, Tina Girouard, Valerie Jaudon, Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnel, Ned Smyth, Robert Zakanitch, and Joe Zucker. The show, which had been organized by Holly Solomon only for the European tour, was then brought to Greenberg Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri, where that gallery participated in curating. Then the show went to the San Francisco Art Institute in California, where it was titled “decoration.” This particular exhibition was widely discussed.

Another major show, “Les Nouveaux Fauves/ Die Neuen Wilden,” held at Neue Galerie, Sammlung-Ludwig, Aachen, Germany, was organized by Holly Solomon and the Ludwig. The title “The New Fauves” immediately emphasized the connection to Henri Matisse, whose art had been much discussed during the preceding decade, beginning in 1970 with a major exhibition in Paris curated by Pierre Schneider and several subsequent exhibitions in Europe. The Aachen exhibition had a broad roster including artists connected to German neo-expressionism and the French artists called Nouvelle Peinture, or Supports-Surface, loosely associated since the mid-1960s and formally established as a group for a brief period in 1970.

The Alternative Museum showed “Islamic Allusions,” curated by April Kingsley, which resulted in some useful discussion about the expansive possibilities of decoration as it appeared in the work of the P&D artists. Kingsley’s essay points to the postmodern element of hybridization, borrowing some referents and mixing them with others, which she likens to Matisse’s approach. She also remarks on the ways that the all-over approach of artists like Pollock prompted later artists to look at Islamic art with some similar nonhierarchical structure.

In 1981, there were several group exhibitions, including “Usable Art,” curated by John Perreault. It included collaborative works by Joyce Kozloff and Betty Woodman about which Perreault noted, “Are the Kozloff-Woodman ceramic pieces art or craft?” He continued, “By causing us to doubt the art status of their work, they reinforce it. The artists push us beyond either/or situations.” Above all, he emphasized that the artists took the usable into the realm of art. Another group show of that year, “Five on Fabric,” included Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnel, Howardena Pindell, Lucas Samaras, and Miriam Schapiro, and was curated by Annette DiMeo Carlozzi. Also, as a kind of summation of the 1970s, the Whitney Biennial “featured” P&D, including work by Kushner, MacConnel, Schapiro, and Zakanitch. At the Hudson River Museum, Cynthia Carlson executed a large installation, alongside
paintings, all inspired by Glenview, in her exhibition “Cynthia Carlson: Eastlake Then and Now.”

1982–1985
From 1982 through 1984, there were several group exhibitions on different aspects of pattern, decoration, or ornament. These included “The Spirit of Orientalism” at Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase, curated by Linda Nochlin, which accompanied a nineteenth-century exhibition. The 1983 show “New Image/Pattern and Decoration (from the Morton G. Neumann Family Collection)” was originated by Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Michigan. The Hudson River Museum was the site of “Ornamentalism,” curated by Robert Jensen, in 1983, with an accompanying book that featured the P&D artists prominently. Cynthia Carlson produced a site-specific installation for the show. The Loch Haven Art Center in Orlando, Florida was the originating venue in 1983 for “New Decorative Works from the collection of Norma and William Roth.” “New Decorative Art,” originated by The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was curated by Debra Bricker Balken. In 1984, Pam Adler Gallery was the site of “The Decorative Continues,” curated by Susan Putterman. And the last group show of 1984 was Bette Stoller Gallery’s “Arabesque: Grand Gestures in Painting, Sculpture, and Decorative Arts.” By 1985, serious assessment of the art produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s was just getting under way. “A New Beginning 1968–1978” was an exhibition that started the dialogue about art of that period and included some of the P&D artists, as well as conceptual and performance artists. That exhibition was held at the Hudson River Museum, the site of the current P&D show. As well, many of the P&D artists were gaining recognition and continued having their work actively sought by curators and collectors alike, including shows like the Whitney Biennial.
Exhibition Checklist

PLATE 1
CYNTHIAS CARLSON
*Mental Block*, 1974
Oil on canvas, 86 x 114 inches
Polk Museum of Art Permanent Collection
2005.13
Gift of Cynthia Carlson and Robert Bertolletti

PLATE 2
CYNTHIAS CARLSON
*Pfui Teuffle*, 1975
Oil and vermiculite on canvas, 66 x 96 inches
Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art,
Gift of Robert Bertolletti and the artist

PLATE 3
BRAD DAVIS
*Desert Fox*, 1980
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 50 x 50 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 4
BRAD DAVIS
*Fishwatching Triptych*, 1981
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 60 1/2 x 140 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 5
BRAD DAVIS
*Shiva’s Dog I*, 1979
Acrylic and polyester/canvas, 50 x 68 inches
Marie Louise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

PLATE 6
BRAD DAVIS
*Study Bird & Butterfly*, 1979
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 27 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 7
BRAD DAVIS
*Study Bird Flying*, 1979
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 27 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 8
BRAD DAVIS
*Top of the Peak*, 1980
Acrylic and polyester on canvas, 48 inch diameter
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 9
VALERIE JAUDON
*Jackson*, 1976
Metallic pigment in polymer emulsion and pencil on canvas, 72 1/8 x 72 1/8 inches
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1977
Art © Valerie Jaudon/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

PLATE 10
VALERIE JAUDON
*Pantherburn*, 1979
Oil and metallic pigment on canvas, 96 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Art © Valerie Jaudon/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Photograph by Gary Mamay

PLATE 11
VALERIE JAUDON
*Toomsuba*, 1973
Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist
Art © Valerie Jaudon/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

PLATE 12
JANE KAUFMAN
*Embroidered, Beaded Crazy Quilt*, 1983–85
Embroidered and beaded quilt, 94 x 82 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 13
JANE KAUFMAN
*4-Panel Screen*, 1984
Coquille feathers and glass beads, 79 x 31 inches
Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 14
JOYCE KOZLOFF
*Tile Wainscot*, 1979–81
Hand-painted, glazed ceramic tiles grouted on plywood
20 panels, 48 x 256 inches
Collection of the artist

PLATE 15
JOYCE KOZLOFF
*Hidden Chambers*, 1975–76
Acrylic on canvas, 78 x 120 inches
Collection of Françoise and Harvey Rambach

PLATE 16
JOYCE KOZLOFF
*Wilmington Delaware Amtrak Station (Homage to Frank Furness)*, proposed 1980, installed 1984
Eight Furness pencil drawings, 1982, in one frame (four 7 1/2 x 11 inches and four 6 x 8 inches), 1982; two first-stage drawings, pencil on graph paper, 1980, each 20 1/4 x 31 1/2 inches; two color photographs, framed, 1984, each 11 x 14 inches; tile sample, 1984, 24 x 24 inches; tiles grouted on plywood; model, 1980, 20 x 16 x 12 inches
Collection of the artist
Photograph by Eugene Mopsik,
Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York

PLATE 17
ROBERT KUSHNER
*Aurora’s Chador*, 1976
Acrylic, lace, tassel fringe, and acrylic on fabric, 71 x 93 inches
The Estate of Horace H. Solomon

PLATE 18
ROBERT KUSHNER
*Slavic Dancers*, 1978
Acrylic on canvas, 190 x 240 inches
Marie Louise Hessel Collection, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York