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Highlights from 'With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985'

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Installation view of "Fringe." Photography courtesy of Denny Dimin Gallery.

Writing wall labels for an exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2016 led to curator Anna Katz's discovery of an American art movement from 1970s. "After completing a Ph.D. in contemporary art, I was astonished to have never heard of Pattern and Decoration and some of its key artists, such as Kim MacConnel," she tells *Interior Design*. The first thing Katz embarked on upon becoming the museum's in-house curator the following year was an exhibition that would put the influential but somewhat forgotten movement back on the map.

"With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985" opened at MOCA in October, 2019 with a display of around 50 artists whose work between early 1970s and mid-'80s defied the era's male-dominated minimalism with interpretation of craft and decorative techniques, "while using

abstraction with forceful presence," according to the curator. The show recently traveled to the Hessel Museum of Art at the Bard College campus in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, to emphasize the movement's exchange between East and West Coasts as well as to continue the conversation around Pattern and Decoration (also known as P&D)'s influence on artists who insistently use craft today.

"When I visit young artists' studios, I see how craft has become a tool to talk about marginalization and value," Katz explains. P&D's unsung motto of "more is more" echoes in contemporary artists, who according to the curator, believe "what's considered unnecessary is necessary; over the top, just the right amount;" and "irrelevant, exceptional."

She had initially planned a show that would perhaps be "a sharp edge of a wedge," but her three years of research and visits to many attics and storage facilities led her towards an expansive direction. Besides the movement's critical figures, such as Cynthia Carlson, Joyce Kozloff, Kim MacConnel, and Miriam Schapiro, artists who have not necessarily been considered a part of P&D also made the cut. "I am not claiming Lynda Benglis or Al Loving were a part of the group, but there is a tremendous crossover between the core artists and others' overturning of hierarchies of western art tradition which gerrymandered to exclude anyone except white and male."

Fabrics with bright sequins or gaudy-colored ceramics may now prevail contemporary art galleries, "but that was not the case back then," Katz reminds and adds: "The show helps to understand why the current norm was so radical at time and recover artistic voices that has informed today's artists to speak about political and social movements."

This very connection between the past and present prompted the Denny Dimin Gallery in Manhattan to organize the ongoing group exhibition, "Fringe." "Some of our gallery artists, including Amanda Valdez, Justine Hill, and Future Retrieval, are unabashedly influenced by the 1970s movement," says co-founder Elizabeth Denny. "There are many new conversations to have about the role of the artist in terms of gender and identity that many of the P&D artists were having, which are still so important today." "Fringe" includes 12 contemporary artists who adapt craft techniques, including sewing or floral arrangement, to deliver statements on race, identity, and gender. Artist Justine Hill, who also assisted Denny in organizing the show, sees the show as an opportunity to expand on a major influence on her work, "and bring that interest out of the studio to think about my peers through a P&D lens."

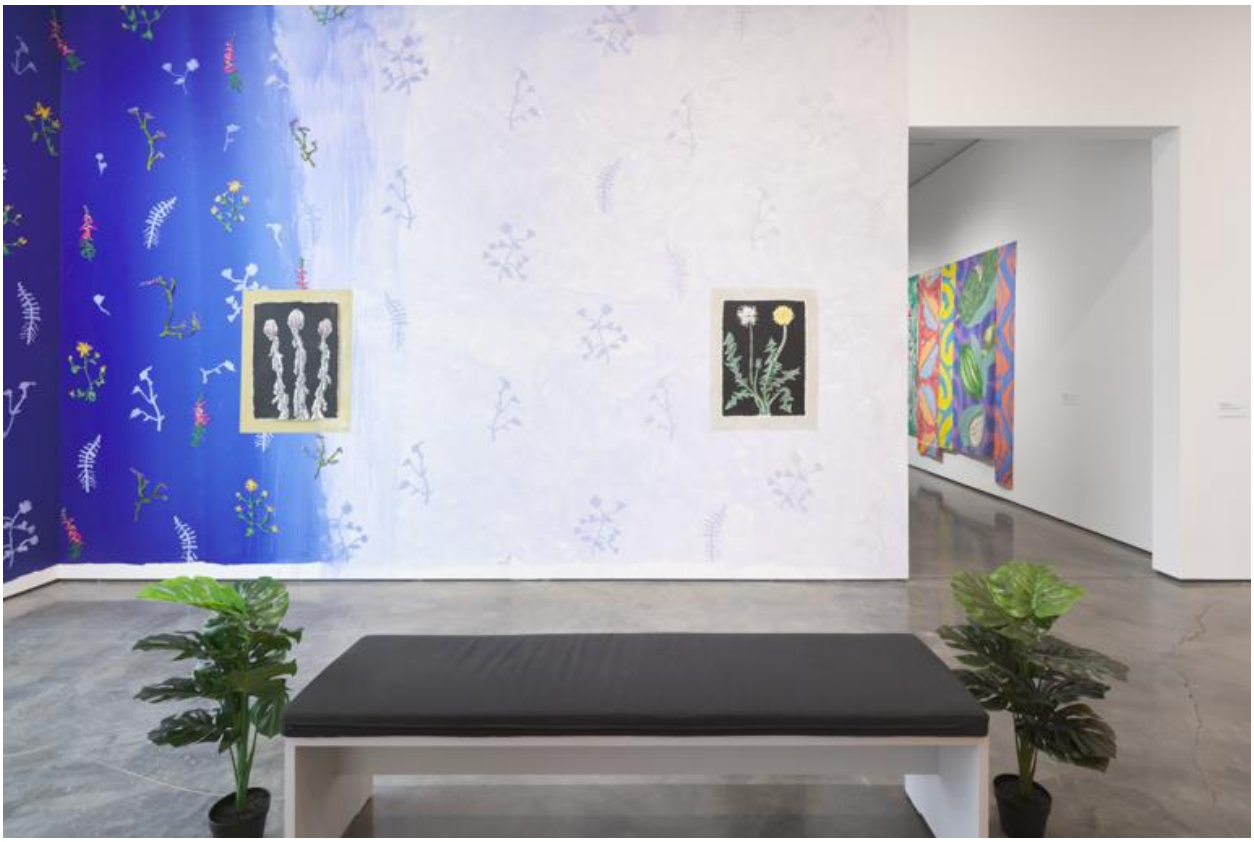
Interior Design has picked highlights from the Hessel Museum of Art's ongoing exhibition at Bard College, "With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985," in addition to a few from "Fringe" in Manhattan.

Jane Kaufman, *Embroidered, Beaded Crazy Quilt*, 1983-85

Embroidered, Beaded Crazy Quilt, 1983-1985. Photography by Joshua Nefsky, courtesy of the artist.

Kaufman, according to Katz, "defied the logic that women historically did not make art." For this nocturnal-hued quilt, the artist used over one hundred historical embroidery stitches dating as far as the 16th century. Kaufman studied them at The Textile Museum in Washington D.C. after she curated the very first P&D exhibition in 1976 at Alessandra Gallery in Manhattan with 10 artists, many of whom are in the current show. "The work of women artists for hundreds of years have been broadly called decoration, and Kaufman's work shows decoration is worthy of admiration," adds Katz. Often times intentional, the materials used by the women artists reflect their limited resources under the shadow of their male peers.

Cynthia Carlson, *Tough Shift for M.I.T.*, 1981-2019



Installation image of Cynthia Carlson, *Tough Shift for M.I.T.,* 1981-2019. Photography by Olympia Shannon, courtesy of the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.

Architecture, especially Bauhaus, was an influence among the artists of this group. “Not its [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe-led later stage, but the early Weimar era,” Katz notes. This connection is most apparent in Carlson’s wallpaper-looking painting of floral patterns. The curator also makes a parallel between the artist’s attempt to make-do with a given platform and inherent nature of decoration. “Unlike a painter working autonomously with an easel, Carlson shows the decoration’s dependence on presumed architecture,” she says. The artist first created the immersive installation, for which she applied paint directly onto the walls, for M.I.T. with cake-frosting tools. Between embracing decoration, domestic tools, and so-called feminine imagery of flowers, Carlson—who has recreated the same installation for the Hessel Museum of Art show—builds an expansive panorama of the movement for today’s viewers.

Sylvia Sleigh, *The Turkish Bath*, 1973

A figurative painting of male nudes may come off as an unexpected entry to an exhibition about abstraction and craft. Sleigh’s painting, however, sets the overall show’s tone and injects the viewer into the movement’s place and time. In addition to subverting art history’s fascination for female nudity through unrobing the opposite gender, Sleigh also juxtaposes a who’s who of P&D through placing three key male figures—all nude—in front of a geometric tapestry that salutes the movement’s core aesthetic. John Perrault, who organized P&D’s first museum exhibition at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center (now MoMA PS1) at Long Island City in 1977 takes the painting’s center stage with his gaze locked away from the painter’s. Artist Scott Burton is rendered as perched over his legs on which he rests his hands, while critic Carter Ratcliff who supported the movement with his essays and reviews sits over a chair behind other men.

Tina Girouard, *Maintenance III*, 1973

Tina Girouard, *Maintenance III*, 1973, Video (color, sound) 27 min. Courtesy of the artist's estate.

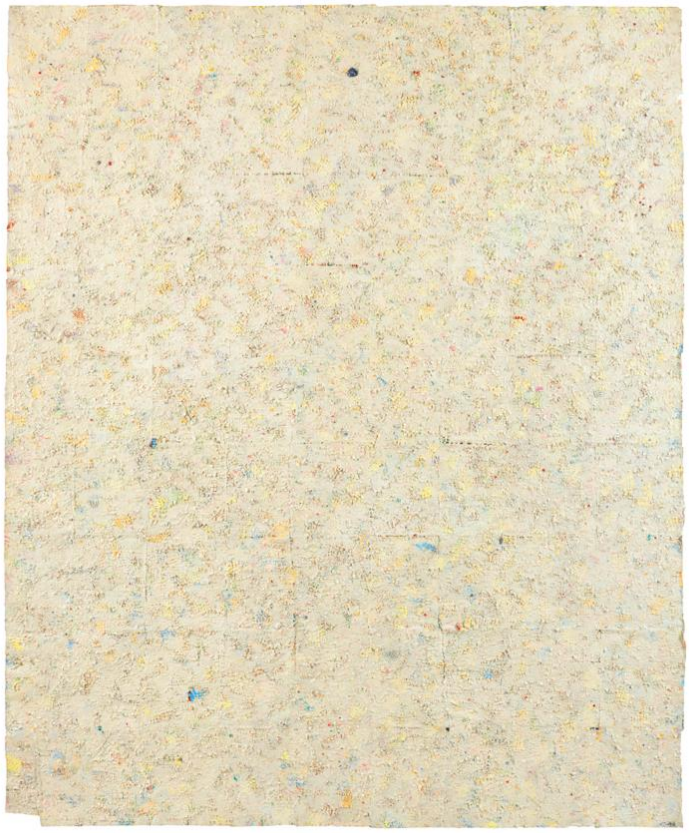
This 27-minute projection zooms onto Girouard's lap while she tends a group of floral fabrics which she inherited from her uncle, Sullivan. Throughout the video, she rinses, sews, and folds the materials while the radio in the background plays content that ranges from the time's popular tunes, advertisement, and political updates. A song from Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of The Moon* album is followed by a car dealership advertisement, and we eventually hear the most recent development in the Watergate hearings. "That big 'a-ha' moment is critical about the movement's queering of not only contemporary art but the broader authority," says Katz. The topics' relevancy to the present, particularly a few years ago during the curator's research for the show, is further striking.

Takako Yamaguchi, *Magnificat #6*, 1984

Takako Yamaguchi, *Magnificat #6*, 1984. Oil, bronze leaf, and glitter on paper. Two parts, overall 74 × 107 1/2 in. (187.96 × 273.05 cm. Deutsche Bank Collection. Photography by Liz Ligon.

Despite its rebellious nature, P&D always struggled with inclusivity and remained a heavily white movement. Moreover, appropriation of Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Indigenous craft was a common practice—although most artists committed to research and travel to understand the geographies they found themselves strongly influenced by. In addition to being the youngest artist in the exhibition's checklist, Yamaguchi is particular for her take on Japanese art tradition. The California-based artist's large-scale bronze leaf and glitter-heavy painting satirizes the West's notions on Japanese Minimalism and the moderate use of expression with a medley of inspirations that range from kimonos to bedroom dividers to architecture. "She was against expectations and responded with Maximalism," says Katz.

Howardena Pindell, *Untitled #19*, 1977



Howardena Pindell, *Untitled #19*, 1977. Mixed media on canvas 94 3/4 x 74 1/2 inches. Photography courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

Similar to the show's other Black artists, such as Sam Gilliam or Faith Ringgold, Pindell was not directly involved with P&D; however, her utilization of the time's unconventional materials is strikingly similar to many members'. During her role at the feminist A.I.R. Gallery in the late '70s, Pindell worked with un-stretched canvases and sewed bits of shredded fabrics into paintings. Although this painting does not include her other signature materials, such as animal hair, perfume or glitter, the heavily manual technique and its quilt-like aesthetic is a strong example of Pindell's inspiration from her travels to West and East Africa as well as challenging of feminism's favoring of whiteness through her democratic technique.

Miriam Schapiro, *Heartland*, 1985

Heartland, 1985. Photography by Zach Stovall/ © 2021 Estate of Miriam Schapiro / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Older and more established than her peers, Schapiro was considered an authority in strategies around collage, decoration and feminism that set the movement's foundation. Schapiro's coining of the term *femmage* to define female collage perhaps cast the biggest impact on P&D artists who elaborated on unapologetic femininity and implementation of found everyday materials. In the shape of a heart, similar to Schapiro's numerous other works, this assembly of stuff includes found fabric cut-outs sewn together with a commitment to traditional quilter patterns. The work is a mosaic of generations-long female labor and assumption of a supposedly domestic aesthetic with an unabashedly kitsch silhouette of a heart.

Justine Hill, *The Arch*, 2021

Justine Hill, *The Arch*, 2021. Photography courtesy of the artist and Denny Dimin Gallery.

Known for her bright-colored whimsical cut-out paintings, Hill cites Cynthia Carlson, who is also a part of "Fringe," as a strong influence, and this acrylic and paper arch-like painting is a stark proof. Similar to Carlson's use interiority and painting through form, Hill creates portals for the subliminal with zigzagged gestures and immediate forms which absorb the viewer through their playfulness. The similarity between two artist's contribution to the Denny Dimin show also lies in their use of multiple panels to play with painting's notion of flatness and unity.

Josie Love Roebuck, *Farm Boy*, 2020

Josie Love Roebuck, *Farm Boy*, 2020. Photography courtesy of the artist.

Figuration rarely made its way into P&D artists' fabrics and yarns, but numerous threads of techniques in Roebuck's portrait of a Black boy tie her work with the movement. Sewn and printed onto un-stretched canvas, the square-formed "painting" holds buttons, fabric and yarn that yield the boy's piercing expression and ruby-colored shirt with geometric patterns. He blends into the background of patched light-hued fabrics. "The inclusion of artists of color and a non-binary into a conversation

around who is allowed to claim the domestic space felt like a natural expansion of P&D ideas," says Hill. "If the movement was aimed at inclusion and a non-hierarchical appreciation of art, then these voices are necessary to talk about its legacy today."

Max Colby, *They Consume Each Other #1*, 2019-21

Max Colby, *They Consume Each Other (#1)*, 2019-21. Photography courtesy of the artist.

Similar to artists of color, queer artists were invisible throughout P&D's roster. Colby's elaborate installation of beads, faux flowers, sequins, ribbons, fabric and jewelry is a flamboyant celebration of self-expression through the artist's meticulous process of utopian construction of a universe. "Max may not list P&D as a direct influence but the work uses forms and materials more associated with ritual or craft than art, and the topics discussed such as gender, power and beauty—all feel like topics the P&D artists would rally behind," says Hill. Connected to the movement through her commitment to handwork, labor, and color, Colby builds a set-like small scale glass towers crowned with lush arrangements that burst with color and materials. The viewer is invited for a full tour around an impossibly colorful and joyfully queer banquet of shiny glass beads and lush surfaces.