

HOWL

Inspiration for Creatives
from *Wolf-Gordon*

Issue 01, 2021 — Quarterly
Curated by Paul Makovsky

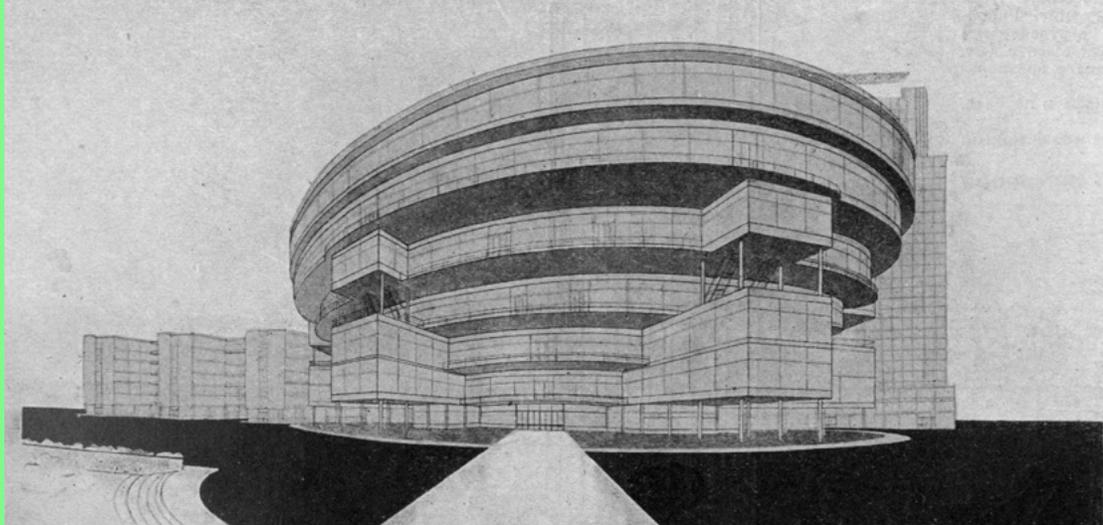


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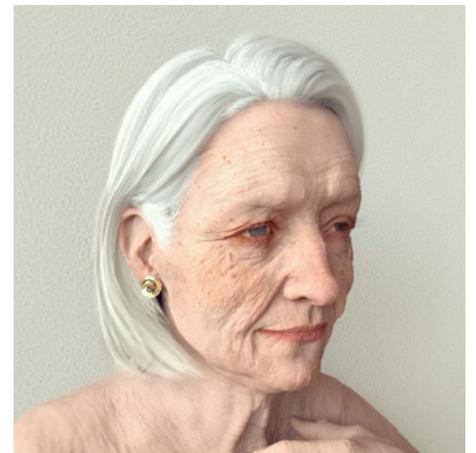


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Feature

Piecing Together a Legacy

On the eve of his second gallery show, *Michael C. Thorpe* reflects on how he's taking quilting—and his identity as an artist—to new levels

By Belinda Lanks

Portrait of *Michael C. Thorpe*
Courtesy LaiSun Keane Gallery

“Basically, it's all about trying to understand and figure out this new life of being a full-time artist,” *Michael C. Thorpe* says of his new solo show, “*Meandering Thoughts*,” at *LaiSun Keane* in *Boston*. At 27, *Thorpe* has already seriously explored other career paths, first as a competitive basketball player, then as a photographer. Now, following a successful inaugural show in 2020, he's a bona fide artist with a *Brooklyn* studio, where he produces painterly quilts of geometric fabric shapes and textures made of stitched lines.

Thorpe grew up in *Boston* with a quilting mother and aunt, but with the exception of a piece he made at 8, quilting took a backseat to sports. “I wanted to be the next Kobe Bryant,” he says. “That's all I cared about—like, 22 hours of the day I spent playing basketball.” Although he played ball at Emerson College, where he also studied photography, he faced fierce competition to become the next Kobe. Later, as a photographer, he again fought to stand out in a crowded field. Quilting, however, gave him entrée into a rarefied world in which he could easily differentiate himself—and afford him the opportunity to redefine the medium.



Michael C. Thorpe
Necrows, 2021

Fabric, quilting cotton and threads
31.5 x 39.5 in
Courtesy LaiSun Keane Gallery



Michael C. Thorpe
Dick 4 President, 2021

Fabric, quilting cotton and thread
37 x 25.5 inches
Private Collection
Photo credit: Philipp J Hoffman
Courtesy LaiSun Keane Gallery

"I was the only dude," he says, of the historically women-dominated quilting community. "In the Northeast, because it's very different than in the south, I was the only black person in these quilting spaces." Thorpe is biracial and was raised by his white mother. "It could have been alienating," he continues, "but for my luck and good fortune, it was very embracing. I think of it a lot as a small-town kid who was the basketball star going off to the big university and, like, the whole small town was just rooting for him, and that's how I feel right now with my art. I have this community that's just cheering me on."

For his first show, Thorpe split his focus between figurative and text-based styles—both unusual subjects for quilts. When making portraits of friends, family, and basketball heroes, Thorpe relies on photos as his primary starting point. He'll create a sketch based on an image, then lay blocks of fabric, like pieces of a puzzle, over the sketch before stitching them together on a quilting machine. For the text-based quilts, Thorpe strings together snippets of found poetry into phrases such as "Shes eating watermelon/she must be half black." "Whenever I see something that just clicks with me," he says, "I'll write it down, and I have, like, an ongoing poem. Basically, it'll make itself. And once that is done, it's almost like free jazz—it's, like, trust the concept, not the music."

His new show expands his subject range to include landscapes, still lifes, and even cartoons. "I constantly think about art and how people get put in pigeonholes where they only paint people, or they only paint landscapes," he says. "One of my biggest influences is David Hockney, and David Hockney paints everything." One of his favorite recent pieces is "Necrows" (a play on "negroes"), depicting the controversial black crows from Disney's *Dumbo*. The quilt is an exploration of the artist's love-hate relationship with Disney and its enduring history of racism. In *Dumbo*, the main crow character is named Jim Crow—the Jim Crow laws enforced segregation in the American South—and voiced by a white man "talkin' jive." "It's very fascinating to look at Disney and see how often they don't allow people of color to, like, live in their bodies," Thorpe says. "Even in the new movie *Soul*, it's really wild to me that they literally killed a black man and then had a white woman take over his body."

“Meandering Thoughts” runs through April 15–May 29, *LaiSun Keane*, 460C Harrison Avenue, Boston, MA.

Thorpe cites many artistic influences as he meanders toward defining himself as an artist. He likens his text-based works to the nonsensical poetry of Dadaism, the avant-garde movement that sprung up in Europe as a reaction to the horrors of World War I. His other artistic influences span Jean-Michel Basquiat and contemporary African American painter Henry Taylor to the generations of Black women producing quilts in Gee’s Bend, an isolated town in Alabama.

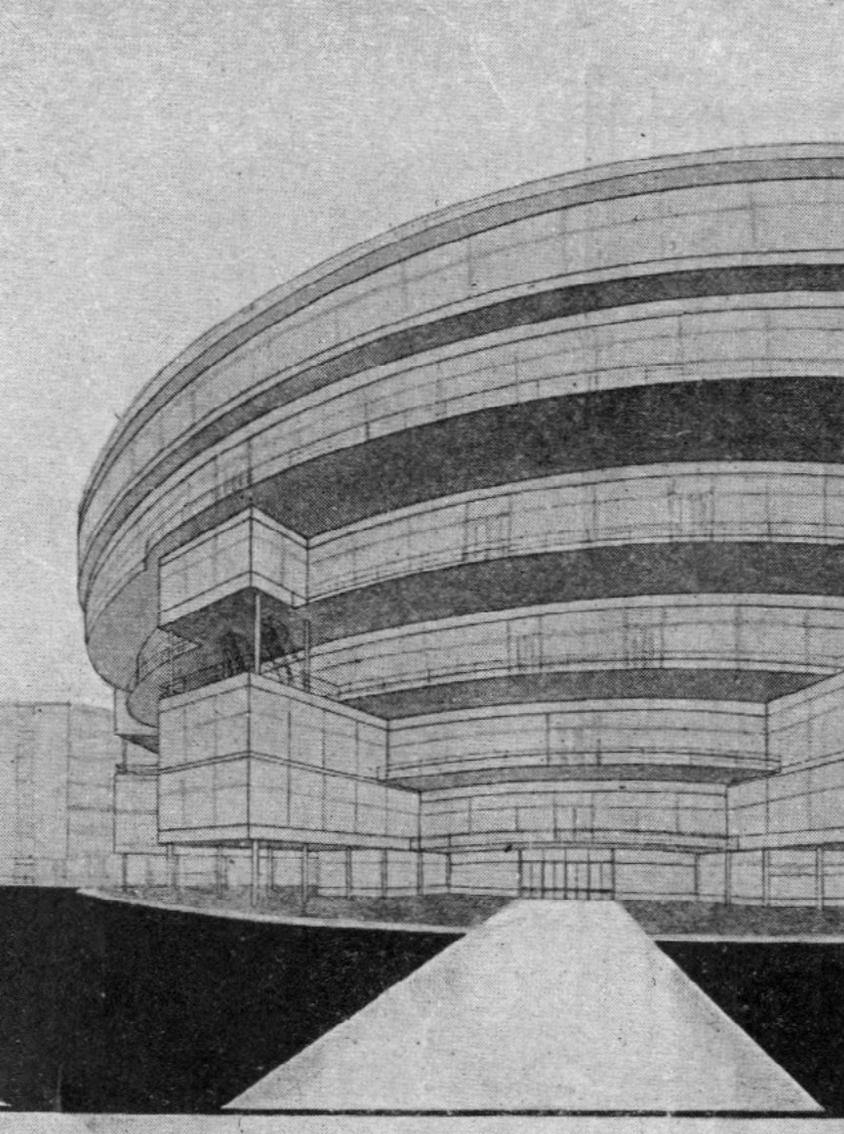
Even as he borrows from the artistic past, his work is meant to spark happiness in the midst of today’s acute social challenges: racial strife, a global pandemic, and political division. Rather than leading viewers into that darkness, he hopes his body of work sparks their joy. “I look at a lot of artists, especially in New York, who are doing gut-wrenching art, and I don’t want to do that, because, for me, it’s 100,000% escapism,” Thorpe says. “I have this outlet with art that just solely makes me happy, and hopefully, it also brings the viewer happiness.”



Michael C. Thorpe
Family, 2021

Fabric, quilting cotton and thread
57.5 x 84 inches

Courtesy LaiSun Keane Gallery



— Interview

Learning from the Russian Avant-Garde

Author *Anna Bokov* on rediscovering the Soviet counterpart to the German Bauhaus and what it teaches us

By Paul Makovsky

— How did you get interested in doing your book, “*Avant-Garde as Method: Vkhutemas and the Pedagogy of Space: 1920-1930*”?

I became interested in Vkhutemas [pronounced f-KHOO-the-mahss] as an architecture student, when I first studied the other side of the avant-garde movement in Russia, which had this explosive pedagogical output and facilitated the birth of modern architecture and design. The school remains practically unknown outside of the Russian cultural sphere and, even in Russia, it is not really known or understood. My book is the first comprehensive publication on the school in English.

While I focus on architecture pedagogy, from the core curriculum to diploma projects, I cover the overall history of the school and discuss other disciplines, including textiles, graphic and industrial design, which were all a part of this new synthetic educational model. The mission of my project was to make the school—its legacy and ideas—accessible to the larger global audience.

Lydia Komarova
Communist International
Headquarters (Komintern)

Diploma project for Alexander Vesnin's studio at the Architecture Department at Vkhutemas, Moscow, 1929.

Project drawings (elevation, perspective, plan). Published in *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, no. 4 (1929).

Author's Archive



Lyudmila Mayakovskaya
with students at *Vkhutemas*.
Moscow, 1920s.
Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow.

——— Can you summarize what the *Vkhutemas* was about?

Vkhutemas was not simply an educational institution, in a traditional sense; it was explicitly set up to change the order of things as they were—aesthetically, spatially, physically, and conceptually. Its mission was to create a new lifestyle, to build a new world. It was a laboratory of the avant-garde and an incubator of Modernism.

In a typical educational setting, existing knowledge is being passed on from teacher to student. But in the case of *Vkhutemas* (and the Bauhaus of course) that educational process was bi-directional and ventured beyond the limits of currently defined knowledge. In fact, it was more of an exchange, which served as a means of producing new knowledge. *Vkhutemas* demonstrated that education is about harnessing a collective genius more than anything else. It showed that a fertile educational setting can indeed function as a time machine of sorts, transporting us into the future.



Lyudmila Mayakovskaya
Fabric pattern samples (velvet), using the airbrush technique with a geometric pattern obtained by superimposing triangular stencils. *Trekhgornaya manufaktura* (factory). Moscow, 1920s.
Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow.

——— If you were to compare the German Bauhaus and what happened in the Soviet Union, what differences would you find?

Like the Bauhaus, *Vkhutemas* was an interdisciplinary school. The Soviet school was more than ten times larger in terms of student and faculty population, resulting in a much more complex and pluralist institution with many competing voices. The other significant distinction was a conceptual one. The *Vkhutemas* mandate was to educate not just individuals but the masses, and can be considered the first coherent attempt to develop a mass educational model for modernist architecture and design, which was based on the so-called “objective method” rather than individual mastery. Also, *Vkhutemas* aimed to train “specialists for modern industry,” while the Bauhaus initially was focused on craft and shifted towards industry a few years later.

—— What role do textiles play in your research?

Textiles were among the most fascinating visual materials that I discovered. One of the biggest revelations was the work of Lydia Mayakovskaya (poet Mayakovsky's sister) who was the first woman to hold an executive position at a major textile factory in Moscow. She developed her own technique of aerography, where there is a special way of applying color to fabric with a spraying gun and stencil patterns. The final effect is both structured and organic, and the colors flow and blend in unique ways, recalling patterns found in nature without copying it.

Textiles at Vkhutemas differed from the Bauhaus in that the students worked on designs that could be mass produced and focused on learning the industry at local factories rather than focusing on weaving individual tapestries.

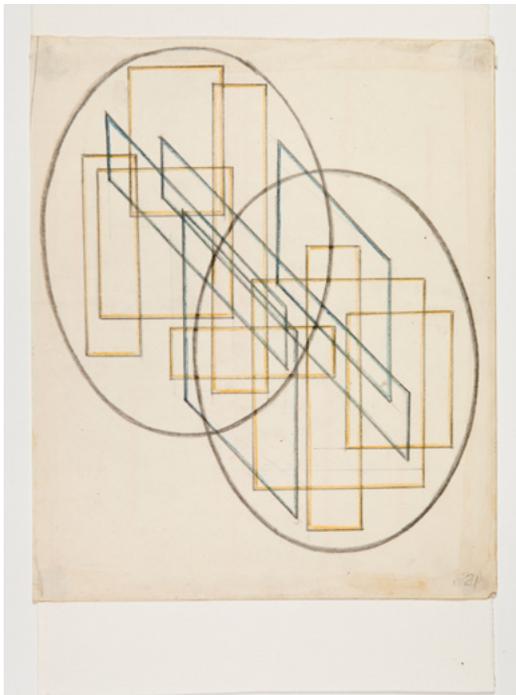
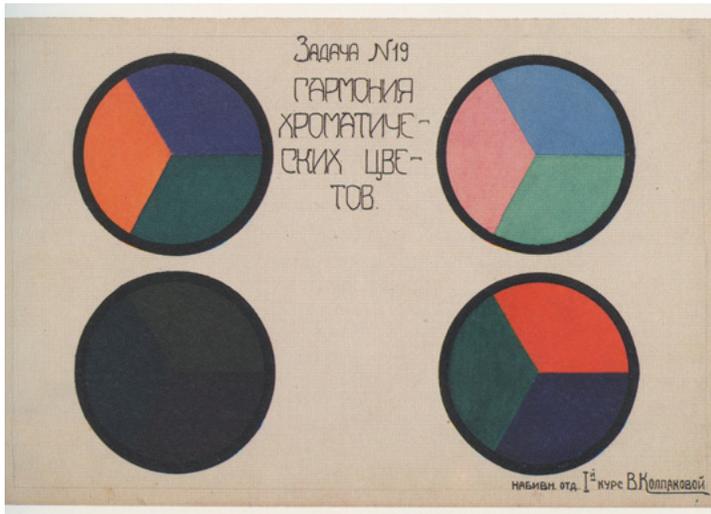
—— Were you able to interview any of the students who attended the school? Did any of them become well known or were they forgotten?

Most Vkhutemas students and teachers belonged to a generation that disappeared before me. Many died during Stalin's time in the 1940s and 50s, some made it to the 1970s, and very few survived to see the 1990s. One of the longest living students, Lydia Komarova lived for 100 years (1902-2002)—she is a legend. However, growing up in a family of architects (my grandmother and my father) I met some of the former students as a child—for example, Leonid Pavlov, student of Ivan Leonidov at Vkhutemas, who was one of the most important architects of Soviet Modernism (he designed Lenin's Museum in Gorki) and remember his enlightened optimism.

Vera Kolpakova

Student exercise on Harmonic Triades of Chromatic Colors (Assignment no. 19) for the first-year core Color course taught by Gustav Klutsis at Vkhutemas, Moscow, 1926–27.

MARKhi Museum, Moscow.



Anastasiya Akhtyrko

Exercise for a version of Initiative assignment (using oval "canvases"). Graphic Construction (Graphics) course taught by Alexander Rodchenko at Vkhutemas, Moscow, 1920–21.

Rodchenko-Stepanova Archive, Moscow.

Anna Bokov is an architect, historian, and educator with a PhD from *Yale University*, and degrees from *Harvard Graduate School of Design* and *Syracuse University*. She is a resident member of the *School of Historical Studies* at the *Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton*. Her book *Avant-Garde as Method: Vkhutemas and the Pedagogy of Space, 1920–1930* is published by *Park Books*.

——— The *German Bauhaus* had a huge influence in the USA after World War Two. What happened to the influence of the Soviet school?

Similar to the Bauhaus, whose faculty and students were suddenly pressured into hiding their artistic as well as political views with the arrival of the Hitler regime, Vkhutemas affiliates had to embrace the new vision of totalitarian socialism under Stalin and the resultant “realist” paradigm. However, while most of the Bauhäuslers were allowed to emigrate, thus giving them and their ideas a second life abroad (especially in the United States), their Vkhutemas colleagues were completely cut off from the rest of the world and forced into silence for decades. Many of the students and younger faculty were drafted to the front during World War II and did not make it back. Those who managed to survive the Stalinist repressions and war were too intimidated to disclose any information about their “formalist” period, until well into the 1960s. Vkhutemas’ afterlife was very different from that of the Bauhaus—resulting in nearly complete oblivion for several decades.

The school’s legacy continues in various ways. To start with, its pedagogical innovations enjoyed an afterlife starting in the late 1960s. Portions of the core curriculum were revived at the Moscow Architectural Institute and at the Stroganov Academy of Design and Applied Arts. The “Pedagogy of Space” course was captured in the textbook *Elements of Architectural Spatial Composition*, initially published in 1934, and regularly reprinted decades later. But most importantly, Vkhutemas ideas were so powerful during the 1920s—when its student and faculty work was published, exhibited, copied, and discussed in the progressive media in Russia and abroad—that its real influence is much larger than we can possibly imagine.

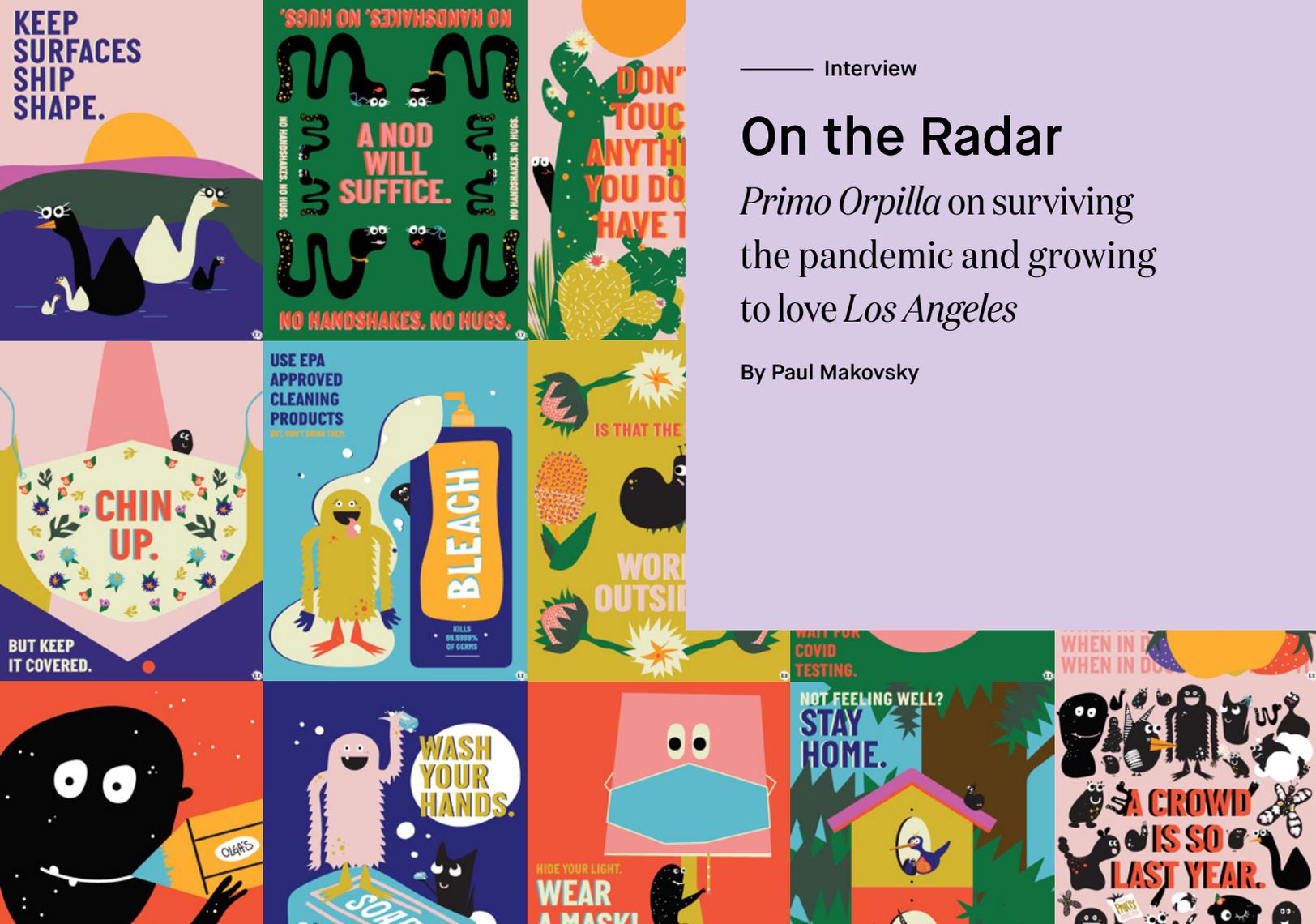


Lydia Komarova
Communist International
Headquarters (Komintern)

Diploma project for Alexander Vesnin’s studio at the Architecture Department at Vkhutemas. Moscow, 1929.

Project drawings (elevation, perspective, plan). Published in *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, no. 4 (1929).

Author’s Archive



— Interview

On the Radar

Primo Orpilla on surviving the pandemic and growing to love *Los Angeles*

By Paul Makovsky

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

It was a year of researching and, then, thinking of what the pandemic does to people's daily lives. How can we make sure we create new habits and designs that will help bring people back to the office and to make sure that all the good things about the workplace are not lost as we return to our life before the pandemic? This led us to develop O+A's guide to the workplace in the COVID era, a toolkit that delves into a host of spaces and elements for the office. From the start, we knew we needed to learn everything we could about the virus and how it was going to impact the workplace. You can't come in trying to consult on this subject with only a topical understanding of the issues around COVID design. You've got to run your knowledge through a filter. That was the toolkit project's aim—to run what we were thinking through a filter of experts and then digest and synthesize it into our point of view.



Photo credit: Oh Happy Dawn Photography



We wanted to take the idea of joy back into our workspaces, so we focused on the behavioral changes that we need to institute. Our free toolkit shows that you should make changes that make the space better, and that it takes baby steps to make people comfortable.

—— You grew up on the *West Coast*, and established your *Studio O+A* in *San Francisco*, and now you are spending more and more time in *Los Angeles*. What is it about *LA* that you find so attractive?

I love that Southern California is so diverse, not only in the people that live and work there, but in the different industries that you find there. It's refreshing to feel like peoples' dreams don't just revolve around the tech sector. In LA, there are huge sectors in the arts, entertainment and education compared to the tech-centric world of the Bay Area or the banking and financial industries of the East Coast.

I know this is a generalization, and Southern California also has tech and financial industries, but the area feels more vast and less concentrated and perhaps, because of that spacing, it feels less overwhelming.

Environmental Signage

Appendix

Signage Collection

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Studio O+A's Toolkit for the Times can be [downloaded here](#).



——— What are some stores, restaurants, or landmarks in *LA* that appeal to you?

I love Downtown LA, especially the areas around Grand Central Market where so many different cultures and businesses thrive alongside nearby art galleries like Hauser & Wirth. Also, art, architecture and design stores are more apparent and you feel and see it all there: Hennessey + Ingalls books, Please Do Not Enter design store, and the Japanese hardware store Anzen Hardware are just a few of my favorites. In terms of food, you can't beat Park's BBQ in Koreatown and the Hollywood classic Musso & Frank Grill. All in all, it's a little less stressful than San Francisco, and people actually like outdoor activities!

——— What's on your bucket list of things to do, that you haven't yet done in *LA*?

In this order: Joshua Tree, The Griffith Observatory, and I hope to one day soon visit Mammoth Mountain.

Once everyone gets the vaccine, and things return to "normal", what are some of your favorite things that you're looking forward to doing in *LA*?

I really miss the opportunities when people come together, like art openings or simple things like casually meeting with friends for coffee, lunch or dinner.



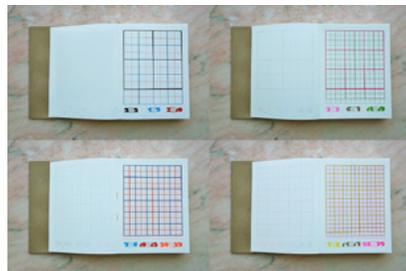
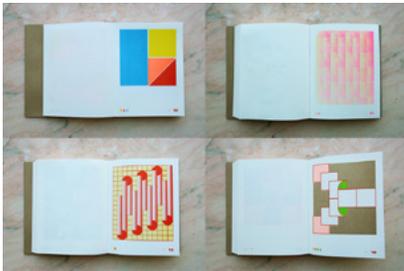
— Space/Pattern/Texture



— Sigrid Calon

SC_{1/1}_{1/2}_{1/4}_{1/8}

This limited-edition book arose out of the visual artist Sigrid Calon's (@sigridcalon) curiosity to discover new forms and color combinations. It is an homage to the endless potential of the Square, the Circle and the Grid, and contains subtle references to sources of inspiration from the past and present.



Photos: Courtesy the artist



— Ana María Gómez

“Knotting Knitting”

In her work, Gomez, of the amgs studio (@anamgomezsuarez) constructs knitted filled bands, and forms a rhythmic combination of colors and uneven lines. The construction can be reshaped to sit, sleep, read, cover up, or lie down, and adapts actively to one’s body. Produced in a small atelier in Antwerp, Belgium, the creation is a combination of handcraft and small industrial techniques.



Ana María Gómez
“Knotting Knitting” project

Photos: © Alexandra Colmenares Cossio

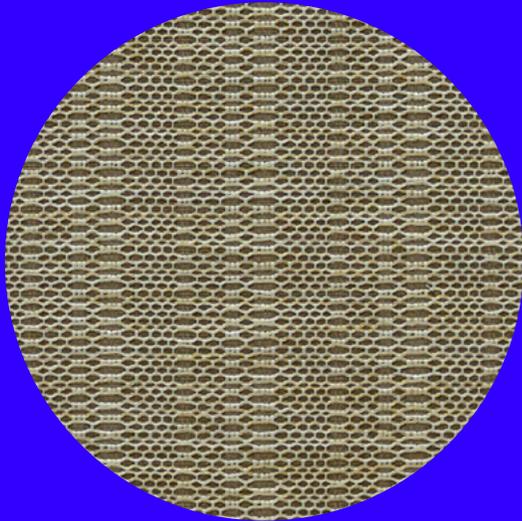


Garance Vallée
Une place à table, 2020.
Image courtesy of Carvalho Park,
New York.
Photo: Courtesy Carvalho Park,
Brooklyn

Garance Vallée

Une Place à Table

This is a painting by the Paris-based artist, designer and architect, Garance Vallée (@royalgarance), who recently had her debut US solo exhibition, "Portrait de Famille," at the Carvalho Park Gallery in Brooklyn (@carvalhoparknewyork). The exhibition featured a suite of paintings, drawings and sculptures in Vallée's distinct and indelible language. Inspired by Surrealism, and with overtones of Brancusi and Leger, her painted interior spaces are suspended between representation and abstraction, volume and silhouette, tangibility and fiction, inquiry and play.



Upholstery

Stroma

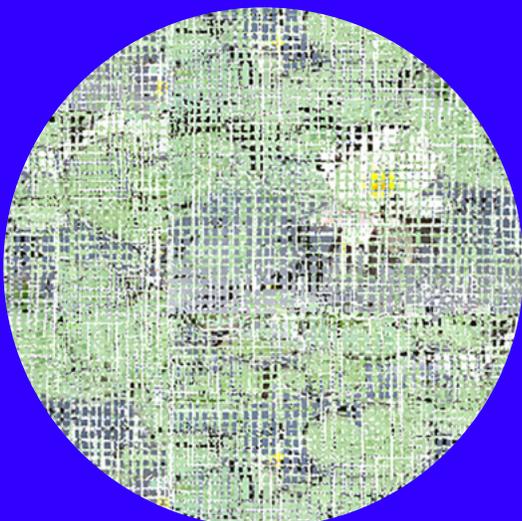
This highly textured weave by Kathrin Hagge is an exquisite translation of natural structure. A microscopic view of the cellular components of wood were the inspiration. Stroma is available in seven colorways and is cleanable with a diluted bleach solution.



Wallcovering

CLAIR® Pando PVC-Free Type II

Designed by Michael Loughlin, Pando is a standout in our new CLAIR collection of PVC-Free Type II wallcoverings. Loughlin based his design on the deeply-ridged bark of an oak tree. Ideal for interiors that incorporate biophilic elements, Pando's organic effects are produced in ten colorways.



Digital Wallcovering

Waterlilies by Carla Weisberg

This lovely floral artwork, ready to be digitally printed from Wolf-Gordon's Curated Collection, is customizable as wallcovering, upholstery, acrylic panels and window film, and can be adjusted for color and scale to suit the purpose. Weisberg is a New York-based pattern designer who focuses on handmade interpretations within a Modernist design vocabulary.

— Take a Look



— Exhibition

Modern Look: Photography and the American Magazine

The Jewish Museum
NYC, April 3 - July 11, 2021

This exhibition explores how photography, graphic design, and popular magazines converged to transform American visual culture from 1930 to 1960. The exhibition highlights a period when avant-garde techniques in photography and design reached the United States via European émigrés, including Bauhaus artists forced out of Nazi Germany. The unmistakable aesthetic made popular by such magazines as Harper's Bazaar and Vogue—whose art directors, Alexey Brodovitch and Alexander Liberman, were immigrants and accomplished photographers—emerged from a distinctly American combination of innovation, inclusiveness, and pragmatism.

Lillian Bassman
Blowing Kiss, 1958

Gelatin silver print
Collection of Eric and Lizzie Himmel, New York
© Estate of Lillian Bassman



— Discussion

Guillermo Bert Textile Society of America Contemporary Voices Series

In this online talk, sponsored by the Textile Society of America, Los Angeles-based multimedia artist Guillermo Bert will focus on recent artistic projects, including his Encoded Textiles series. Working with traditional weavers, he creates QR codes woven into textile designs. These “high tech” codes, when scanned with a smartphone, take the viewer into a filmic world of story, myth and reflection by indigenous elders, activists and poets. Collaborating with Mapuche, Navajo, Maya, Mixtec and Zapotec weavers, he has done more than 40 embedded documentary films that “de-code” cultural messaging and create a bond between the distant viewer and the intimacy of the community of indigenous artists and storytellers.

Guillermo Bert
“Mapuche Portal #1” (detail), 2015

Photo by Ronald Dunlap.
Courtesy Textile Society of America



— Podcast

The Art of Ziv Schneider State of the Art Podcast

This engaging podcast, hosted by Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, features new artists, curators, technologists, collectors, and innovators, on the ever-changing relationship between art and technology. Don't miss the episode on Ziv Schneider, a creative technologist, artist and designer working with new and emerging technologies. Her recent project, *Sylvia*, is a storytelling experiment that disrupted the virtual influencer landscape for a short period of time where her *Sylvia* aged five decades, from 30 to 80 years old, in five months on Instagram.

[@myfriendsylvia](#)

Project: Created by: Ziv Schneider; Styling and Art Direction: Odie Senesh; Character Artist: Halime Maloof; Celebration Director: Bethany Tabor; Natural Language Processing: Alex Calderwood; Digital Installation Design & Development: Tong Wu; Music: Philippe Lambert; Aging Researcher: Alexa Fleet
Courtesy Ziv Schneider

— Take a Look



— Exhibition

A Common Thread

The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art
Las Vegas, NV
April 2 – July 2, 2021.

This group exhibition features textile art by nine womxn artists of color from Las Vegas and other communities across the United States. Drawing on traditions and perspectives from a variety of backgrounds, these artists are ensuring that the expanding field of textile arts includes progressive forms of personal expression, cultural critique, and community resilience. The artworks range from Ailene Pasco's compact sculptural vessels to Yacine Tilala Fall's performance props and the expansive works of Desire Moheb-Zandi, whose day-glo "glitch" tapestries—inspired by the loom weaving of her grandmother in Turkey—embrace plastics, wire, tubing, paint, and rubber.

Desire Moheb-Zandi
Not afraid of love, 2021

Cotton thread, paper, plastic, and velvet yarn.
Courtesy The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art



— Resource

Noguchi as a Collector

Online at The Noguchi Museum
Queens, NYC

In this online essay, Kate Wiener, assistant curator at The Noguchi Museum, explores the relationship between artist and designer Isamu Noguchi, and his collection of more than 400 objects housed in The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum's Study Collection. Taken together, they offer a unique and intimate portrait of the artist, tracing his travels around the world and the phenomenal scope of his interests. This essay highlights select objects in the collection—from an ancient Chinese three-legged vessel to a Native American hide drum—treating them as entry points into Noguchi's complex and multi-faceted practice.

Isamu Noguchi
at his Long Island City studio, c. 1960s.

The Noguchi Museum Archives, 06307.
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NY / Artists Rights Society (ARS)

HOWL

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Next Issue: Summer 2021.
See you then!

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



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