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London Design Festival 22

London designer Suzy Hoodless

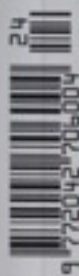
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SVENSKT TENN FABRICS | MAGIC CARPETS BY CAPPELLINI & DIACASAN

BANKING ON

Yooors

During the economic and cultural boom of the 1950s, Belgian artist and writer **Jan Yooors** brought the revered art form of tapestry to America, turning it into 20th century expression. Thom Lepley reports



01 *Roots*, 1958, Jan Yooors

02 *Mexcian Pink Tantra*, 1976, Jan Yooors

03 *Purple Tantra*, 1976, Jan Yooors

04 *Vermillion Tantra* (detail), 1976, Jan Yooors



During the post-war years of the 1950s America was looking towards a brighter future. The nation's vision for modern living led to many parts of the economy to begin to streamline outdated processes and suggest new efficient directions. This change stimulated an air of great creative excitement in the arts and industry. As part of this new thinking, industry sectors from manufacturing to healthcare started to update their work environments, banks and financial institutions were not far behind. Banks at that time needed to demonstrate that their ethos included a desire to stimulate new growth and thus wanted to project a more positive atmosphere in which to do business. Their reserved interiors began to change, with the introduction of colour and Scandinavian furniture.

Original work by current abstract artists was commissioned for the walls. This investment proved worthwhile, as each bank strived for more enviable experiences. Although the Abstract Expressionists established themselves at this time in the sphere of painting, only one person explored the creative possibility of tapestry and designed it into a modern expression for its time. That vision came from Jan Yooors.

Yooors was born in Antwerp, Begium, in 1922 to a cultured, liberal family of artists. He studied sculpture at Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts

and at La Cambre in Brussels before going to London to study at SOAS, where he was introduced to the art of tapestry in a chance visit to an exhibition of medieval tapestries. Yooors had no formal training in the medium but evolved his technique from a life-long study of the world's great weaving traditions.

His arrival in New York in 1950, with wife Annabert and friend Marianne, offered adventurous possibilities and they entered into a bohemian lifestyle creating an artist's studio devoted to tapestry. The weaving techniques were self-taught, guided by a principle of excellence in their execution, and dynamic abstract images with brilliant colour, strong contrast, and organic shapes. These three worked tirelessly to build their studio into a disciplined practice.

In 1968 *Primeval Night*, a twelve-foot long Yooors tapestry was hung in the headquarters of the Bank of America in San Francisco. This created a relaxed and sophisticated experience for banks customers to do business in, reflecting the mood in the city at that time.

Back in New York, the early seventies witnessed steady purchases as Yooors met with more banking figures. The Sears Bank purchased *Joy* in 1976 following a First National Bank of Chicago acquisition. Before long, these tapestries were in banks in Buffalo, New York, Chicago, Nashville and even an installation in Paris.

In observing these tapestries from the late 1950s onwards, it was financial institutions which were willing to invest the resources to allow this type of work to unfold. The accoustic properties aside, tapestries allowed the institutions through their patronage to create a sense of the modern combined with an appreciation of the traditional, a metaphor for the image that the banks wanted to project. These textiles evidenced a cultural renaissance in the American monetary environs; the lobbies, hallways and office spaces graced by these works were transformed into strong statements of modern leadership.

The aesthetic appeal of Yooors' work will be shown at the Paris International Contemporary Art Fair (FIAC) in October by Galerie Chevalier who will present ten of his large tapestries from 21 October – 26 November. The show will focus primarily on brilliant examples from the 1970s.

Also a large retrospective of Jan Yooors tapestry will be part of a collective museum celebration in Brussels and Antwerp in 2012. According to his son Kore, who manages the archive, there is avid interest particularly in Europe for Jan Yooors' vision of life through mid-century modern expression in tapestry. www.janyooors.com