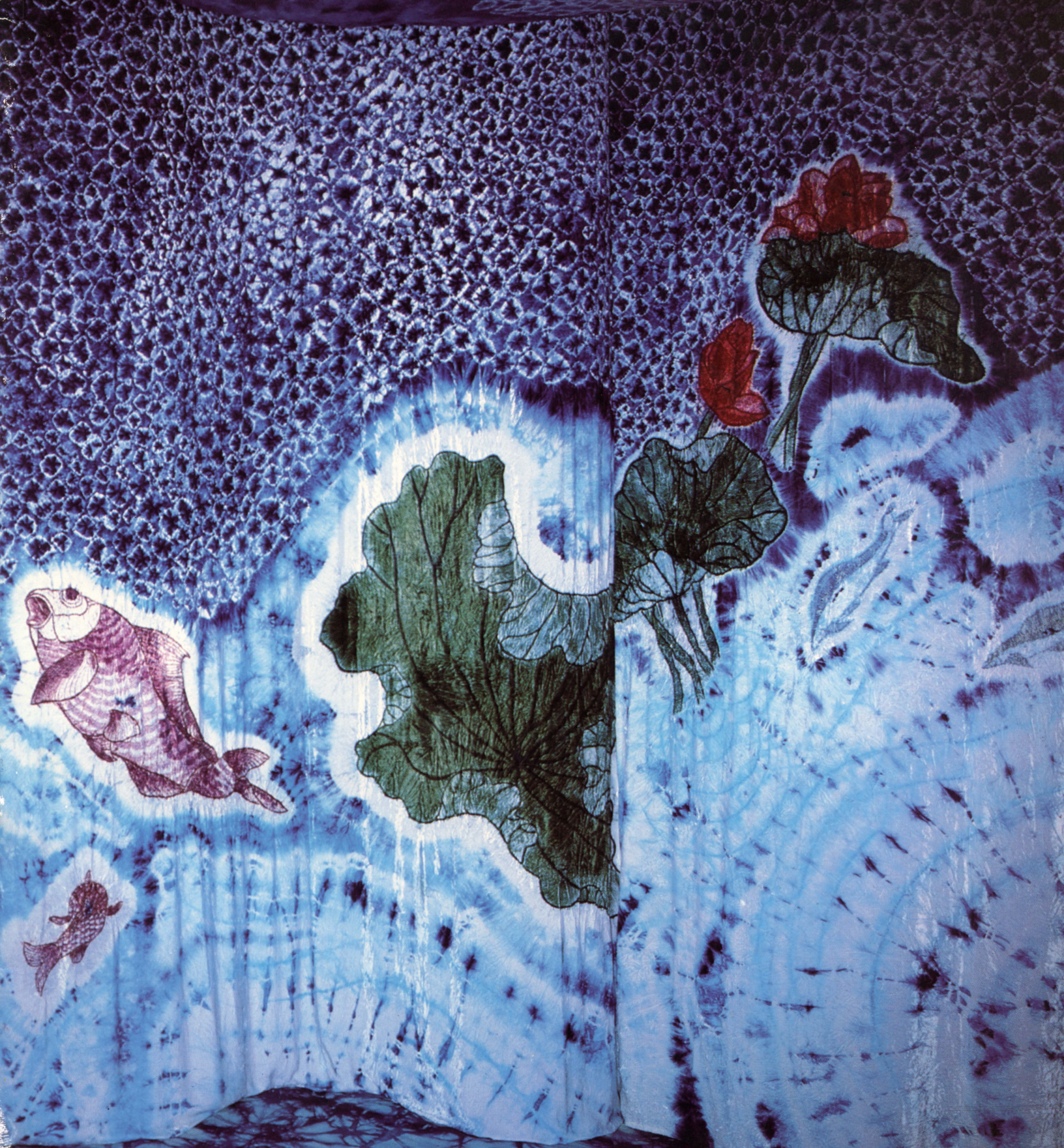


Floating World:
Environmental Textiles



MAYA ROMANOFF

Outside Cover:
Carp and Stars, Interior Park,
velvet, silk and canvas, 1982,
120"h × 120"l × 120"w

Velvet Djinn, Floating column,
dye and knotted velvet, 1982,
120"h × 36"l



Introduction



For two decades, Maya Romanoff of Chicago has been a dominant factor in the world of embellished fabric. In fact, his contributions plus their exhibition and publication have been a force in the sweeping popularization of the resist-dye techniques of surface design – in apparel and art fabrics as well as furnishings.

Maya's world is a broad and dynamic one, extending from the scintillating psychedelia of environments by the multifarious Maya of the sixties to his broad experiments in fold dyeing on media as varied as cowhide, silks, heavy canvas and paper.

From the 1970s we see him settling in to quality control for furnishings projects, in upholstery, curtaining, wall fabrics and more recently, handcrafted wallpapers. The theatrical scale of his murals and banners, floor cloths and "outdoor pieces" confirm the continuing place for ceremonial cloths in an increasingly hard-edged culture.

His concern with the relationship of these fabrics to architecture and occasionally to a total environment is another separation of Romanoff from other artists working in this medium.

In these respects, this exhibition is a milestone in Art Fabric History. The scale is spectacular and the vision courageous.

Jack Lenor Larsen

Foreword

Whatever else art may be – and certainly there are almost as many exclusionary definitions as there are works of art – it is also this: Joy out of context. In the case of textile artist Maya Romanoff, not only the emotional response to it, but the art itself is refreshingly out of context. Unencumbered by the constraints of the gallery and the museum, the gilt frame and the marble pedestal, Maya Romanoff's art is liberated and, not infrequently, larger than life.

Cascading down the facade of an historic building, enveloping an entire room, sculpted and knotted into architectural elements or encasing a piece of furniture, Maya Romanoff's dyed, painted and quilted textiles expand the definition of art, both in their execution and their application.

With his monumental architectural drapings, he has literally turned the definition of art inside out, adding a new exuberance and a billowing beauty to the concrete canyons of the cityscape. By their great scale, by their undulating partnership with nature's forces, and by their rich and brilliant design and color, these textile tresses can metamorphose the intransigence of stone and steel. Together, building and banner form a new whole, a new entity, simultaneously linear and organic, massively stationary and enormously moving.

Says the artist, "I cover a building for several weeks so that the structure continues to live during the life of the piece. Its occupants come and go, doing their work and living their lives – but in a context that has changed, that keeps changing from moment to moment with the slightest breeze, even as people go about their business."

His first major outdoor canvas draping in 1979 involved the New York City Arsenal. Entitled *Kimono*, it required 400 yards of fabric in eight panels, each 80 feet long and six feet wide. It was in place for two months and survived several major thunderstorms and winds of 40 miles per hour. Said Gordon J. Davis, former Commissioner of Parks of New York City: "Maya Romanoff's *Kimono* was the first wrapping of an historic landmark in the New York park system. The eight huge lengths of multi-colored fabric seemed to lift the 120-year-old landmark . . . out of time and space . . . ; a 19th century rough brick fortress appeared to float barely on 20th century wings."

Kimono was followed in 1980 by *Sleeves of Spring* draping New York's Belvedere Castle in Central Park, and in 1982, by *God's Eye* which draped the facade of the Chicago Cultural Center.

Floating World, executed for the Fashion Institute of Technology and the present exhibition is the largest of Maya Romanoff's outdoor pieces to date. More than 12,000 square feet of fabric has been used to cover two sides of the building and to come together on the ceiling of a bridge running over 27th Street.

"This is an opportunity to envelop people in color and movement," says Romanoff. "They will be able to see the draping from great distances and from very intimate proximity under the bridge."

Similarly, Maya Romanoff's "Interior Parks" and draped rooms are textile environments with walls of dyed velvet, ceilings of diaphanous silk and floors of canvas – again, new contexts. These soothing, sound-absorbing fabric cocoons are at once works of art to look at and to live in, making art that is not so much objectified as occupied.

"Because I live in Chicago, a northern industrial city, and partly because of memories of my travels in Africa and Japan, I tried to make these special rooms little worlds of their own. Their function is to make a retreat, a new place where the shapes of the walls – of the room itself – change with the air currents, where it is quieter than any place else, and where the colors are soft, brilliant, deep and changing."

Applied to furniture, Maya Romanoff's textiles yield chairs and sofas that are as aesthetically comforting as they are physically comfortable. Swathed in his embellished fabrics, a utilitarian object becomes functional, touchable, useable art, integrated in a living environment, not set apart from it.

The individual pieces – the furniture, the hanging velvet columns and the leather sculptures – share with the environments and the exterior pieces a relationship of dimensional form to surface design. Each creates its own unique context. Each evokes an emotional response derived from the discovery of art in a new application.

“Anywhere a piece of fabric can go – whether or not it has ever been there before – is where I put my textiles,” says Romanoff. “There is no creative distinction in my mind between what can be used and what cannot. There is a continuum between these pieces that are so obviously singular works of art – the *God’s Eye* or *Floating World* – and the leather which I dye for chairs or the paper I create for a wall.” In other words, the application and the context of Maya Romanoff’s textile art may vary, but the inspiration for each is the same.



Kathryn Heisinger
Curator of European
Decorative Arts
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Michael Walsh
Design Editor
Chicago Sun-Times

Swan River, Interior Park,
velvet, silk and canvas, 1972,
120”h × 108”l × 108”w, with
Rebecca Romanoff

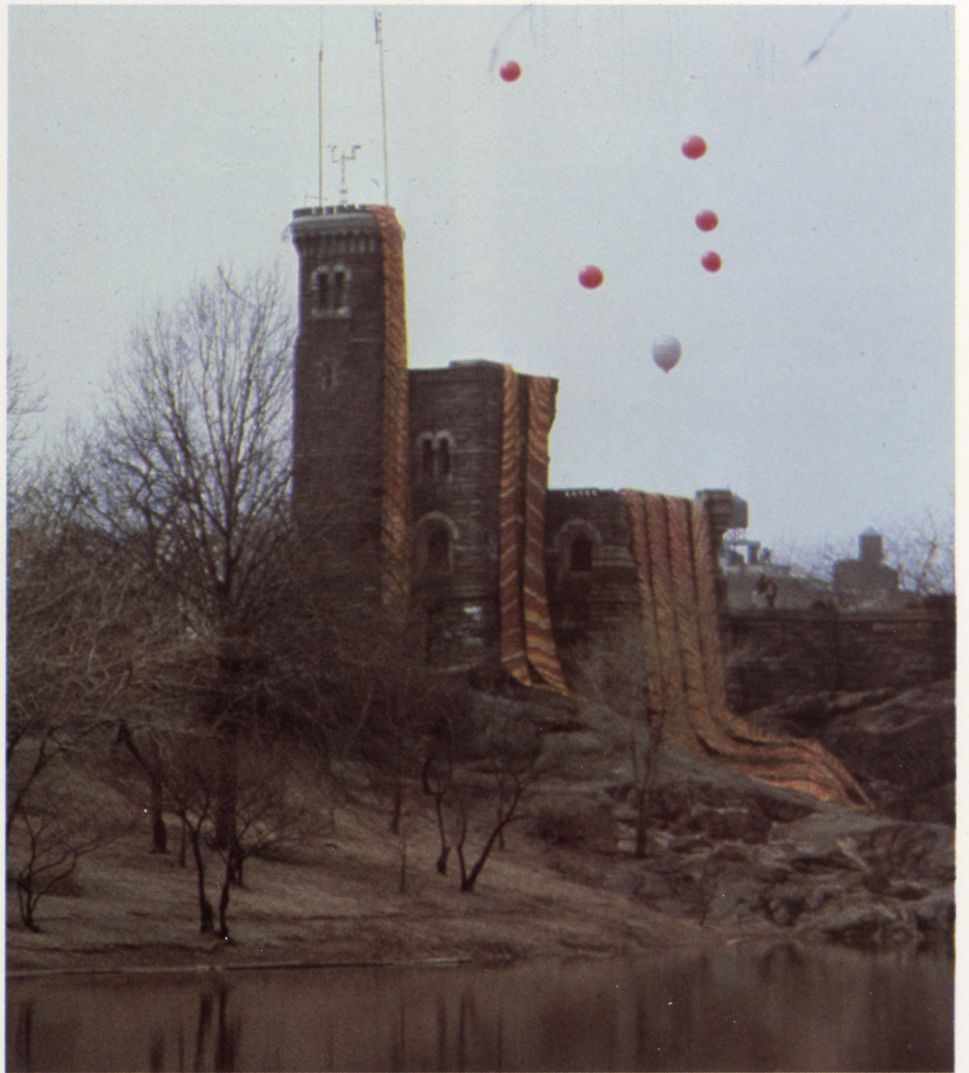
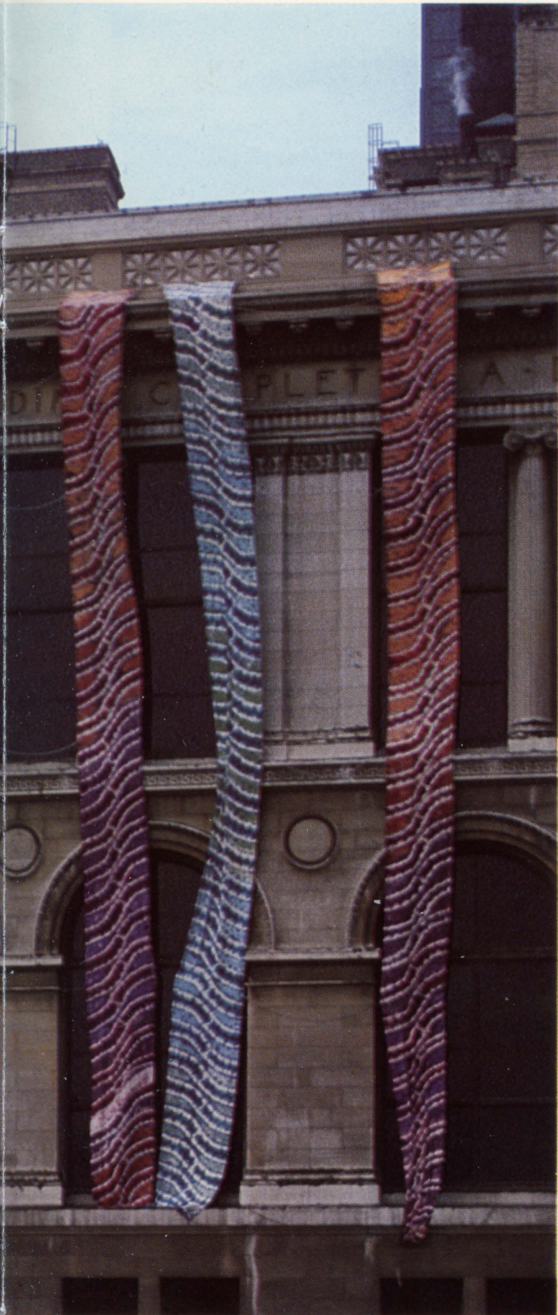
Reverse Rain, detail, resist
dyed wall paper





Two views of
God's Eye, Chicago
Cultural Center, 600 yards of
dyed canvas, 1982, 14 panels,
each panel 125'1 × 6'w





Sleeves of Spring, Belvedere Castle,
Central Park, New York, 150 yards
of dyed canvas, 1980



Celadon Crystal, dyed leather chair

New Stripe; silk, Maya chaise, designed by Sally Serkin Lewis

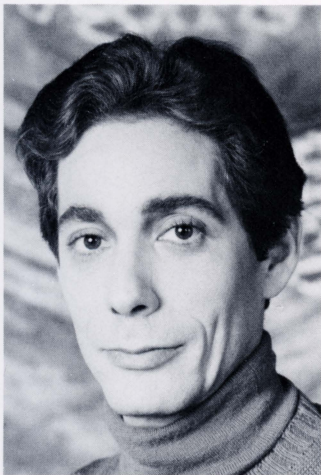


Colored Flow, solidified leather, dyed and modeled, 24" h × 36" l × 20" d

Colored Flow, detail, solidified leather, dyed and modeled, 24" h × 36" l × 20" d

Career Summary

In the rising thrust of a distinguished career, a "summary" could be considered premature, to say the least. In the case of Maya Romanoff, however, so much high ground has already been covered (literally and figuratively) that a brief pause to note some well placed milestones should help keep it all in perspective.



1960-65 My student days were also student nights: days doing Anthropology and Classical Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley; nights sketching and painting. Subsequent graduate studies at the London School of Economics were accompanied by a continued involvement with drawing and painting.

1966 Post-University travel in North Africa produced exposure to great varieties of usable art, especially textiles.

1967 In Paris, my growing orientation to textiles and functional art was confirmed via practical work experience with couturier fashion houses.

1969 A pivotal year in which I began experimentation with resist-dye techniques, and created couture clothing for private clients in Chicago and New York.

1970 I started work on the concept of "Interior Parks": entire textile environments. The coordination of fabrics for ceilings, walls, floors and furniture was considered very radical – even offensive to some.

Produced the first resist-dyed leathers.

1971 Collections of Maya Romanoff Wearable Art were retailed in such stores as I. Magnin and Henri Bendel.

House and Garden Magazine commissioned the first entirely fabric environment: *Garden Room* (300 yards of hand decorated silk and velvet; and the first contemporary decorated canvas floor covering).

1972 *Fabric Vibrations* at New York's Museum of Contemporary Crafts was the first exhibition of the contemporary American art of resist-dyeing. After a stop at the Smithsonian, the show traveled through Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

My primary concern at this point was to create production techniques to utilize rapidly expanding conceptual and technological advances.

1973 Trials were started on modern large-scale, hand-dyeing production. I was commissioned by Baker, Knapp & Tubbs, Inc. to create *Swan River*, the first free-standing textile environment (200 yards of silk, velvet and canvas). First sponsored by the National Endowment of the Arts, *Swan River* was exhibited internationally; blazing a path for public, municipal art in the form of "Interior Parks."

1974/75 In the wake of the first large-scale, hand-dyed draping of a public building (Design Pavilion, Chicago), the demand for public exhibitions increased steadily.

My continued refinement of multiple production technologies proceeded in association with such designers and architects as Jack Lenor Larsen and Mario Bellini.

1976 This was also the year of my market introduction of the first widely available handmade resist-dyed fabric and floor covering to the Home Furnishing Industry.

1977-1982 As public acceptance of the textile medium has grown, so has my involvement in creating opportunities for bringing contemporary textile artists in contact with designers, architects and the general public.

Career Summary

My first trip to Japan in 1978 was followed by return visits in 1979 and 1982; highlighted by invitations to visit important ateliers, including those of *Living National Treasures* Moriguchi Kako (kimono dyer to the Empress) and Serizawa Sensei.

Present My refining of dyeing techniques continues, along with simplifying production technology to increase creative input, productivity and quality control. In the process, Maya Romanoff production fabrics have become more spontaneous, while improving in consistency and affordability. And in the framework of consistency through endless runs, exciting creative "accidents" are encouraged.

The first stage of my career evolved from my wandering, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, across Africa, Europe and India. This visual catalog generated an initial period of creativity which built the bridge from watercolor and other conventional two-dimensional arts to my complete transformation to textiles.

Subsequently, my interest in the technological refinements of textile art stimulated new visual approaches, leading to different images as well as to different ways of expressing my artistic experience.

Now, there are opportunities for me to work in, and communicate through, a variety of media, thereby engaging every kind of sense response. When I build an environment, for example, I work on sight, touch, smell and hearing. When I design an upholstered fabric, I design work to be felt with the body as well as the spirit. I make things whose beauty will move people over and over.



Maya Romanoff

Selected Exhibitions, Collections and Awards

Exhibitions

- * **The Galleries of F.I.T.**, New York City
- Rhode Island School of Design**
- The Philadelphia Museum of Art**
- The Smithsonian Institution**, Washington, D.C.
- The National Collection of Fine Arts**
- Chateaux de la Drôme**, France
- Mitsukoshi**, Tokyo
- The American Craft Museum**, New York
- Milan Triennali**
- * **The Arsenal**, New York City
- * **The Chicago Cultural Center**
- * **The Pacific Design Center**, Los Angeles
- Fairtree Gallery**, New York
- Northwestern University**, Chicago
- * **Oak Lawn Design Center**, Dallas
- Chicago Historical Society**
- National Gallery**, Australia
- City Gallery**, Hong Kong
- * **Richard Himmel Design Pavilion**, Chicago
- * **Lawrence Art Center**, University of Kansas
- * **Cliff Dwellers**, Chicago
- The National Museum**, Malaysia
- The National Museum**, Manila
- The Dyers' Art II*,
The Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles
Co-Curator with Jack Lenor Larsen
- * One person exhibitions

Collections

Jack Lenor Larsen
Muriel Newman
Dustin Hoffman
Julie Christie
John Denver
Cheryl Tiegs
Claire Zeisler
Paul Sand
Nicol Williamson
Ruth Horwich

Baker, Knapp & Tubbs
Atelier International
Dunbar, Inc.
Knoll International
John's Island Beach Club
Mrs. Laughlin Phillips
Richard Himmel
Sharon Harris Hart
The Royal Palace, Zaire
New York Parks Commission
The Muppets
Mr. & Mrs. John Mecom, Jr.
Mecom Oil Company
New Orleans Saints
Four Seasons Hotel
Elita Mallers Murphy
Claremont Hotel, Oakland
Robert Stack
John Connally
Dos Playas, Cancun, Mexico
Neiman-Marcus
Sheraton Hotel Corp.
Hilton Corp.
The Fontainebleau, Miami
Albert Hadley
Chicago Historical Society
Crane Communications, Inc.
Quaker Oats Corp.
DoubleTree Inn/Scottsdale

First Place Awards

Best Technological Innovation in the Home Furnishings Industry – 1976-77

Best Technological Innovation in the Home Furnishings Industry – 1977-78

Best Contemporary Fabric Design – 1978-79

Best Contemporary Floor Covering Design – 1978-79

Best Contemporary Wallcovering Design – 1979-80

Best Wallcovering, 1982, A.S.I.D. Product Design Award



Dancing Carp, dyed canvas, 1983,
60"l × 60"w



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