

Richard Kalina's
Verbanus, 2006.



Andy Warhol's
Cow Wallpaper, 1966.



A.J. Bocchino's *New York Times Headlines (1990-2005)*, 2006.

ART + AUCTION

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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM 1: AARON IGLER, COURTESY THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM, PHILADELPHIA, MATTHEW SUBB, COURTESY KIKI SMITH AND THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM, "THREE IMAGES WALLPAPER LAB," © ALLEN JONES, COURTESY THE COOPER HEWITT DESIGN MUSEUM, THE COOPER HEWITT DESIGN MUSEUM, NEW YORK, AARON IGLER, COURTESY VIRGIL MARTI & THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM, © DAMIEN HIRST, COURTESY OTHERCRITERIA.COM, MUDAM-FONDATION D'ART MODERNE GRAND-DUC JEAN, LUXEMBOURG & GALERIE LAURENT GODIN, PARIS; GALERIE JENNIFER FLAY, PARIS; & GALERIE LAURENT GODIN, PARIS. © 2006 PETER KOGLER, COURTESY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: WALLPAPER LAB. © 2007 ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; WALLPAPER LAB



Hang It All

Contemporary artists of every stripe are transforming one of the decorative arts' most domesticated forms—wallpaper.
By Rebecca Knapp Adams

- 1) *Skin Tight*, 2003. 2) *Weeping Willows Wallpaper*, 2003. 3) *Echo, Wow and Flutter; Sideways, Flopped and Mirrored*, 2006. 4) *anywhere else but here*, 2006. 5) *Two Minutes; Playing Dead*, 2006. 6) *Bachelor's Wall Paper*, 1902. 7) *Right Hand Lady*, 1971–72. 8) *Bullies*, 1992/2006. 9) *Pharmacy Wallpaper*, 1998. 10) *Untitled (Supermarket)*, 1996–1999. 11) *Untitled (Cosmetics)*, 1997. 12) *Untitled*, 2000.

WALLPAPER HAS LONG BEEN THE WALLFLOWER of interior design. While succeeding generations reinvented fashions in the decorative arts, modern tastes left wallpaper—with its aura of stodgy hunting scenes and fussy Laura Ashley blooms—so far behind that extinction seemed imminent. Boomer babies and those that followed scraped away faded remnants and opted in large part to paint their walls. If wallpaper was found in their homes at all, it was likely to be digitized decoration for their computer screens.

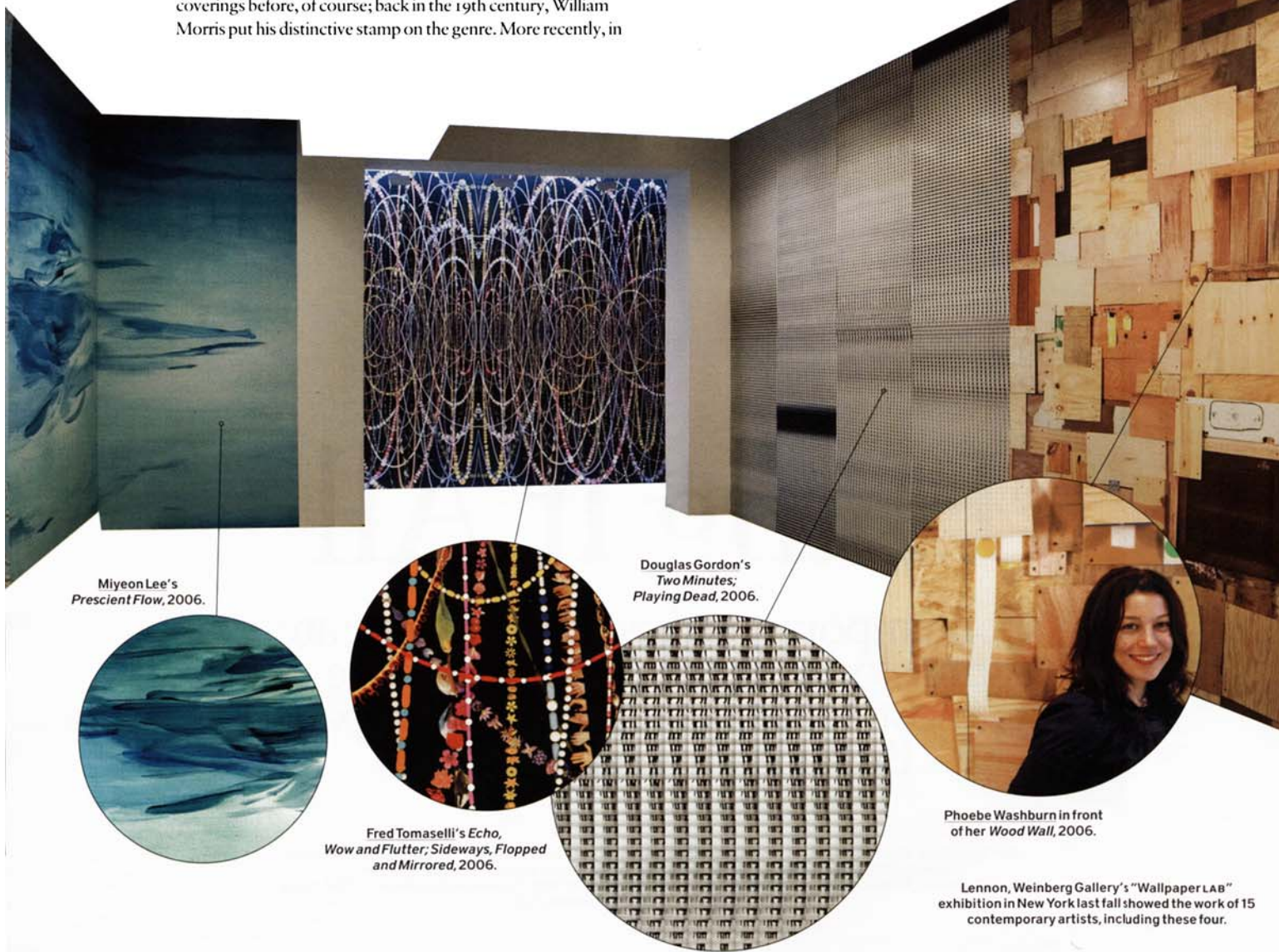
The paperhangers guild should not disband just yet, however. A surprising roster of avant-garde, even radical, artists has entered the field recently. The New York gallery Lennon, Weinberg staged “Wallpaper LAB” in fall 2006, displaying samples by 15 contemporary artists, such as Fred Tomaselli, Douglas Gordon and Phoebe Washburn. Then the city’s Museum of Modern Art hosted “Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples/1960 to Now,” featuring wallpaper by Damien Hirst, Peter Kogler, Sarah Lucas and others. Why wallpaper? What appeal does the outrageous Hirst, perhaps most famous for suspending a shark in a vat of formaldehyde, find in printing a step-and-repeat pattern in two dimensions?

“Wallpaper design isn’t domesticating the artist,” says art publisher and curator Ron Keyson. “It’s radicalizing wallpaper.” Artists have turned their hands to the decorative arts and wall coverings before, of course; back in the 19th century, William Morris put his distinctive stamp on the genre. More recently, in

2004, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, in New York, presented an exhibition of artist-designed wallpapers from its own collection of 20th-century examples; Calder, Matisse, Matta, Miró and Warhol were among those represented. The phenomenon in 2007 is not that artists are making these products but that our regard for design has changed so completely.

Keyson founded the company Wallpaper LAB more than a year ago to collaborate with artists on limited-edition digitally produced papers. The Lennon, Weinberg exhibition marked the launch of the firm’s first line. Keyson had been wary of approaching some of the artists, worried they might have concerns about crossing over into a decorative art. But his fears were unfounded. “I was asking these hard-edged conceptual artists to participate, and they all accepted,” he says.

Phoebe Washburn created *Wood Wall* for the Lennon, Weinberg exhibition. “I was really at a loss when Ron asked me to do this wallpaper show,” she says. “I normally do installations and large environmental pieces, so I don’t think in two dimensions. At first I overthought the project: Could I isolate a pattern or extreme detail and repeat it? I was creating too many steps. It made more sense for me to take a direct approach.”



Miyeon Lee's
Prescient Flow, 2006.

Fred Tomaselli's *Echo, Wow and Flutter; Sideways, Flopped and Mirrored*, 2006.

Douglas Gordon's
Two Minutes; Playing Dead, 2006.

Phoebe Washburn in front
of her *Wood Wall*, 2006.

Lennon, Weinberg Gallery's "Wallpaper LAB" exhibition in New York last fall showed the work of 15 contemporary artists, including these four.

MoMA's 2006 exhibition "Eye on Europe: Prints, Books and Multiples/1960 to Now" featured these four designs, proving that the wallpaper trend continues.



Paul Noble's *nobnest zed*, 2002.

Damien Hirst originally did *Pharmacy Wallpaper*, 1998, for his London restaurant, Pharmacy.

Simon Patterson's *Cosmic Wallpaper*, 2002.

Sarah Lucas's *Tits in Space*, 2000.

Wallpaper can be both status-conscious and democratic.

Washburn turned to the patched-scrap process she uses for her large installations and built a shingled-plywood wall that was photographed with a large-format camera. The image was blown up without significantly compromising the resolution or detail and then scanned into a digitized format and printed on fine art paper.

The "Wallpaper LAB" exhibition garnered ample attention and largely favorable reviews, perhaps because the sheer scope of the works could not be ignored. Nothing dominates a gallery space as entirely as wallpaper, a prospect that no doubt thrills artists used to working in smaller media. Gregory Herringshaw, the assistant curator of wall coverings at the Cooper-Hewitt, comments that, like the 20th-century examples from his museum's 2004 show, many of the "Wallpaper LAB" pieces were essentially existing works by the same artists converted into a larger digital format—literally expanding on their themes. Indeed, Ron Keyson got the idea for his company from his experience translating artists' paintings on canvas into murals for gallery shows.

"Many artists want to control their universe. It's like a sculptor's desire to control his space," says James Cohan, a dealer in New York City. In 2003 Cohan's gallery exhibited a Trenton Doyle Hancock installation that featured *Flower Bed*, a mixed-media work in which the artist hung his painting *Choir* on wallpaper. Hancock's paintings, collages and works on paper veer from abstract to cartoonish, but they're always inventive, and the idea of wallpaper as a medium spurred his creativity. "Before Trenton considered wallpaper," notes Cohan, "he thought about making drawings and hanging other drawings on top," essentially making his own pictures into wallpaper.

Certainly the progressive blurring of the line between art and design lies at the root of this trend. MoMA's Wendy Weitman, co-curator of the "Eye on Europe" exhibition, notes that as artists "look into installation art, you see them wanting to activate the entire space their work is being shown in." This pursuit often generates both wall decor and playful thinking, as in the case of Damien Hirst's *Pharmacy Wallpaper*, from the MoMA show. Hirst designed the piece for his now defunct London restaurant, Pharmacy, in 1998. From a distance it looks like a Ravenna mosaic, but when the viewer draws near, it resolves into a pattern of pills and pill bottles. Just like that, masterpiece becomes mundane.

Wallpaper can be both status-conscious and democratic. As a decorative art, it helped announce a homeowner's class—or the class to which a homeowner aspired. It started out in about the 16th century as a less expensive alternative to the tapestry, fancy fabrics, embossed leather and paneling with which the wealthy, especially in cool and damp Western Europe, covered their walls. The craftsmen of the time heard the call of the less affluent for a more affordable way to adorn their own walls and soon turned to printed papers. In the 1600s, the trend spread throughout Europe and into China, and from modest homes to extravagant manors.

As an art form, wallpaper has an immediacy and directness (no frame, no pedestal) that feels almost populist. "I love that wallpaper is something people can readily have in their homes," says Weitman. "It represents an antielitist approach to art making that I think some artists find very motivating."

On European shores, French new-media artist Claude Closky, 2005 winner of the Prix Marcel Duchamp, designed



Virgil Marti, far left, and his wallpaper *Bullies*, 1992/2006, installed behind urinals.

wallpaper for the Centre Pompidou's administrative offices and also has a series available at the Paris shop Ugly Home, where a 10-foot roll costs about \$106. (The Pompidou paper is available in the museum shop for roughly the same price.) Designing wallpaper makes sense for Closky, whose art betrays an obsessive-compulsive streak. The patterning and tiny detail associated with traditional wallpaper are everywhere in his works. His sepia-toned *Untitled (Supermarket)* paper, for example, is cluttered with the profusion of goods available at most superstores: bottles of Perrier, double-A batteries, hot dogs and sausages, a small charcoal grill, leeks, in-line skates and lacy women's undergarments, with each item's price appearing next to it. This is both art and wallpaper, yet it resembles nothing so much as a newsprint circular from a supermarket.

Artists' motives for entering the field are clearly not commercial at this point. The market for wallpaper is still "all over the map," according to Weitman. Phoebe Washburn's *Wood Wall*, for

example, costs \$7,000 for each 150-square-foot sheet in the limited edition of 20. A larger Wallpaper LAB work, by Douglas Gordon, is priced at \$75,000 for a 1,200-square-foot sheet from an edition of seven. None of the Wallpaper LAB papers has been sold, but Keyson says there has been a lot of interest.

Wallpaper can be brilliantly engaging, but it's difficult to collect. Anthony Baratta, an interior designer in New York, bought Virgil Marti's 1992 *Bully* a few years ago and used it to paper a room in a Florida apartment he owned. Its pattern is composed of rows of tiny pictures out of Marti's junior high school yearbook, rendered in fluorescent ink and rayon flock on Tyvek. When Baratta sold the apartment, he left the wallpaper behind. "I'm sad I lost that artwork," he admits. "People say you can remove paper and take it with you, but it's really hard." (Potential collectors might consider mounting wallpaper on screens or large panels that can be packed up when moving day arrives.)

Despite regrets over the Marti, Baratta claims he's willing to buy again, but "I haven't seen a piece that grabbed me like Virgil's." The decorator would also like to use art wallpaper in some of his clients' interiors but says it's a tough sell because of the nature and scale of the work. "It's certainly not easy to live with," he concedes. "I used *Bully* in my guest room, where people wouldn't spend too much time with all that neon."

Baratta, like many other wallpaper fans, was turned on to the genre by Andy Warhol's 1966 *Cow Wallpaper*, a paragon of artist-designed papers. Its repeating cow's-head motif was first shown at the Leo Castelli Gallery, in New York, in an exhibition some thought was intended as Warhol's farewell to painting and the rarefied world of fine arts. Thirty years later, artists who make wallpaper—no matter how unconventional—are sending an altogether different message. †

Artist Trenton Doyle Hancock, far right, and an installation view and detail of his *Flower Bed*, 2003-04.

