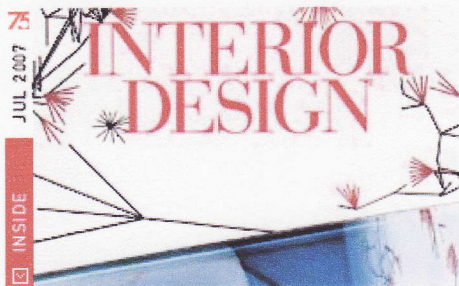




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Spotlight: Fabric Workshop and Museum

Fabric Workshop and Museum Takes Textiles to New Artistic Limits

LAURA B. WEISS

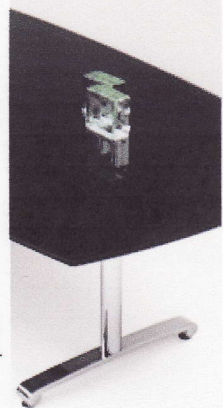
INTERIOR DESIGN · JULY 9, 2007

If you feel inspired when you step into the Philadelphia home of the **Fabric Workshop** and Museum, you're in good company. Since 1977, artists, designers and architects—from painter Sam Gilliam to sculptor Louise Bourgeois—have devised fantastic creations in the museum's print and construction workshop. There, they transform toile, stainless steel and horsehair into inventive coverings, carpets, sculptures and art installations.

It's hardly a secluded setting. Each year, roughly 10,000 visitors throng the museum to view its exhibits and observe aspiring and established artists—who are invited to work on site with printers and other staff in the facility's studio—silk screen fabrics and create inventive applications. A particular favorite is the men's room. Artist and designer Virgil Marti has fashioned a bold floral wall covering peppered with images of his high school classmates. Dubbed "Bullies," the playful design has transformed the space into "a destination," boasts Lonnie Graham, the museum's artistic associate director.

But now the expansion of the nearby Pennsylvania Convention Center is forcing the museum to move from its two-floor 33,000-square foot Cherry Street location to six floors encompassing 36,000 square feet of space in a former flag factory at 1214 Arch Street. At the new site, the studio will be able to accommodate large-scale fabrications and samples of textiles and other materials will be on view. And while Marti's popular bathroom wallpaper almost certainly won't make the trip to the new locale, the staff hopes the artist will imagine a new lavatory wall design for Arch Street.

While the museum now encourages visiting artists to explore a variety of materials, that wasn't always the case. During the museum's early days, founding and artistic director Marion Boulton Stroud emphasized working with fabrics. But "nowadays, the definition of fabric has expanded to include almost any material that's as plastic or flexible as fabric can be," explains Graham. Adds project coordinator and master printer Mary Anne Friel: "The materials in general are only conceptually related to textiles" and anything goes—as long as the staff can construct the piece.



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The museum's collection of 5,500 art and design objects—from Renée Green's provocative toile which intersperses traditional bucolic scenes with images of American ante-bellum slave life, to Mona Hatoum's carpet composed of stainless steel straight pins and silicone rubber—reveals the limits of what's possible.

Another example of boundary pushing: artist Jana Sterbak's stainless steel, wool and nylon tent, a configuration that's modeled on the Faraday Cage, a 19th century sealed metal structure used to block electromagnetic waves. Then there's the imaginative way the museum incorporates artists' creations into the design of its own interior space. For example, artist Jorge Pardo outfitted a lounge for the museum with hand-crafted silk-screened cotton curtains, upholstered chairs, ottomans, countertops, and other furnishings.

While awaiting completion of its permanent home sometime this fall, the museum will inhabit temporary space at nearby 1222 Arch Street. Objects from the permanent collection, including Claes Oldenburg's *Calico Bunny*, composed of red, yellow and blue soft bunnies, will be exhibited, and large storefront windows (also a feature of the permanent 1214 Arch Street space) will display work that includes Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates' stylized flower cutouts. Down the street, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts is hosting artist Senga Nengudi's sound and video installation which projects images—drawn from textile mills—through hundreds of Jacquard punch cards.

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