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COOPER HEWITT EXHIBITION TO FEATURE AMERICAN TEXTILE DESIGNER SUZIE ZUZEK

CELEBRATING THE DESIGNER BEHIND THE ICONIC PRINTS USED BY
LILLY PULITZER, 1962–1985



AUG. 15, 2019

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum will present an exhibition celebrating the prolific textile designer Suzie Zuzek (Agnes Helen Zuzek de Poo, American, 1920–2011) in spring 2020. Her imaginative designs and playful prints played a key role in the success of the Lilly Pulitzer clothing line in the 1960s and 1970s. “Suzie Zuzek for Lilly Pulitzer: The Prints That Made the Fashion Brand” will be the first museum exhibition to reveal the nature and scope of Zuzek’s artistic contribution to the iconic Pulitzer style. On view May 15 through Dec. 7, 2020, the exhibition will feature more than 35 original watercolor and gouache design drawings by Zuzek, alongside finished screen-printed textiles and some of the fashions that made them famous.

Between 1962 and 1985, Zuzek created over 1,500 designs for Key West Hand Print Fabrics in Key West, Florida, which were used by Pulitzer. Pulitzer developed a close partnership with the screen-printing business, eagerly purchasing Zuzek’s fabrics and eventually buying a controlling interest in the company. The vibrant, fanciful prints of Lilly Pulitzer resortwear were instantly recognizable, defining a classic American look favored by fashion leaders such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Audrey Hepburn.

“For nearly a quarter of a century, Zuzek’s limitless creativity powered the ‘Lilly look,’” said Caroline Baumann, director of Cooper Hewitt. “Long overdue for public recognition, this

exhibition will tell the important story of a talented American designer who worked anonymously in support of a larger brand.”

The archive of Key West Hand Print Fabrics, now privately owned, includes watercolor designs and pen-and-ink drawings by Zuzek from her 23 years as a staff designer. Among the works on view will be ten drawings recently acquired for the museum’s collection through a gift from the archive. In their multiplicity, the designs showcase her extraordinarily creative treatment of various subjects, from mythical creatures to cosmology to the flora and fauna of the Florida Keys. Zuzek’s palette was typically naturalistic, employing both the brilliant hues of the tropical flowers that fill many of her designs and the subtle shades of browns, ochres and grays used in her renderings of animals. Invariably the fabrics for the Pulitzer brand were printed in beyond-bright, vivid colors. The exhibition will elucidate the process of translating an artist’s rendering to fabric, and ultimately fashion, through silkscreen printing.

EXHIBITION CREDIT

The exhibition is organized by Susan Brown, associate curator, textiles, Cooper Hewitt.

RELATED CONTENT

In May 2020, Rizzoli Electa will publish *Suzie Zuzek for Lilly Pulitzer: The Artist Behind an Iconic American Fashion Brand, 1962–1985* with essays by Susan Brown and Caroline Rennolds Milbank.

ABOUT COOPER HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM

Cooper Hewitt is America’s design museum. Inclusive, innovative and experimental, the museum’s dynamic exhibitions, education programs, master’s program, publications and online resources inspire, educate and empower people through design. An integral part of the Smithsonian Institution—the world’s largest museum and research complex—Cooper Hewitt is located on New York City’s Museum Mile in the historic, landmark Carnegie Mansion. Steward of one of the world’s most diverse and comprehensive design collections—over 210,000 objects that range from an ancient Egyptian faience cup dating to about 1100 BC to contemporary 3-D-printed objects and digital code—Cooper Hewitt welcomes everyone to discover the importance of design and its power to change the world. Cooper Hewitt knits digital into experiences to enhance ideas, extend reach beyond museum walls and enable greater access, personalization, experimentation and connection. The museum is fully accessible.

For more information, visit www.cooperhewitt.org or follow @cooperhewitt on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

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Drawing, *Wildness*, © September 11, 1972. Designed by Suzie Zuzek (Agnes Helen Zuzek de Poo, American, 1920–2011) for Key West Hand Print Fabrics, Inc. (Key West, Florida). Used by Lilly Pulitzer, Inc., before 1985 (Palm Beach, Florida). Brush and watercolor, pen and black ink, graphite on paper. 38.1 × 56.2 cm (15 × 22 1/8 in.). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Gift of The Original I.P. LLC, 5891.6.2018. Photo: Matt Flynn © Smithsonian Institution.