

ART



"Written in Fire," a vast tapestry by Jan Yoors, virtually blazes across a wall at the Cleveland State University Art Gallery

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON ENBERG

All Yoors to be enjoyed

Excellent exhibit displays artist's tapestries, photos

By STEVEN LITT
 PLAIN DEALER ART CRITIC

Wait long enough and every style from the past eventually comes back. Cleveland State University's smashing good exhibition on the late tapestries of Jan Yoors is a case in point.

REVIEW
Cleveland State University Art Gallery

What: Yoors' tapestries, a show on the work of an internationally renowned tapestry designer.
Where: 2307 Chester Ave., Cleveland.
When: Through June 9. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday.
Admission: Free. Call 216-687-2130 or go online to www.csuohio.edu/art/gallery

The tapestries resemble nothing so much as large-scale, color field paintings of the kind that were highly fashionable in the mid-1970s, but were soon to be shoved aside by conceptual art, minimalism, neo-expressionism and a dozen other movements. Yoors, a native of Belgium who lived and worked in New York after World War II, died in 1977 at age 55.



In "Orange Diamond" by Jan Yoors, shapes that look like giant black brushstrokes seem to float on an orange field. "Multiform," at left, focuses on black shapes that look like a collage made with giant pieces of torn paper.

He never lived into the era that dismissed artistic beauty of the kind he created as merely "retinal."

The CSU show, which focuses on a dozen enormous tapestries loaned by members of the Yoors family, examines the very end of the artist's career, when, apparently, he had become very much a New Yorker.

In those years, he worked with family members Annebert and Marianne Yoors in their Manhattan studio to create abstract images that

bring to mind the brooding Spanish Elegy paintings of Robert Motherwell, the paper cutouts of Henri Matisse, the dramatic floral abstractions of Jack Youngerman, the poured-paint abstractions of Helen Frankenthaler and the vast, abstract landscapes of Clyfford Still.

These comparisons are not intended to suggest there is anything the least bit derivative about Yoors' work. The tapestries on view at CSU are very clearly the product of a

strong, highly individual sensibility. But Yoors was very much an artist of his time and his work would look right at home in a museum gallery next to work by his contemporaries.

The tapestries in the show evoke dramatic images of blue mountains rising next to a black sea or a volcano spilling rivulets of lava across a charred slope. "Written in Fire," which measures nearly 24 feet across, brings to mind dancing flames, as well as the curlicue rhythms of Arabic calligraphy.

Other tapestries suggest images of flower petals, leaves or seed pods. "Jungle," a tapestry that looks strongly Matissean, seems to envelope you in a pattern of shadowy black leaves that hangs across a midnight blue background.

It's hard to say which is more beautiful in the tapestries, the colors or the shapes. Yoors created forms that look soft, fleshy and feminine, or hard, crisp and angular. He communicates a lot with edges and with transitions from one zone of color to another. He repeatedly uses black as a foil for bright areas of color, a favorite device of Matisse and Motherwell. And he plays delightful games with the eye, leaving it uncertain whether the colors are meant to float visually in front of the black areas, or whether the blacks are silhouetted shapes in front of the colors. This work is the product of an incredibly refined eye.

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