

Donald Farnsworth & Era Hamaji Farnsworth: *Mythos*



Mythos III, 2006, Jacquard tapestry, 104 x 75 in, edition of 8

Donald Farnsworth and Era Hamaji Farnsworth's artworks chronicle the artists' fascination with the powerful aesthetic manifestations of mythology. Drawing on sacred works and cultural treasures spanning multiple centuries and belief systems, the artists add and subtract elements from multiple sources, aiming to peel away the anthropocentric concerns that create divisions between belief systems. Their goal is to construct what they call an "aesthetic animism," to find common ground between various traditions in the recognition of a universal spirit or energy pervading all things. Ultimately, beneath the layers of each image lies a subtle appeal to unity, as the underlying sacred nature of the constituent elements emerges, unfettered by dogma.

In each of the Farnsworths' tapestries, pieces of the ancient world are literally interwoven into a new object, possessing its own physical presence and emotional impact. The artists use

digital and traditional painting techniques to select and combine elements from centuries-old paintings, architecture, and other media. These components are edited and transformed, at times mirrored against themselves to produce symmetrical passages, with additional details and passages of color added by the Farnsworths; the resulting combinations appear as scenes from mysterious, timeless spaces. In these newborn locations, individual human figures of divinity, such as Buddha or Christ, are intentionally absent. Whereas such figures once existed as the focus of the original works, imparting a didactic or ideological message, the Farnsworths emphasize the surrounding elements and paint out the figures. An anonymous, all-encompassing divinity emerges in their stead.

To the artists, the relative truths of mythological texts and stories fade away in the face of the unassuming majesty of the horizon, the stately elegance of a Greek column, or the ethereal, curling clouds of a Tibetan *thangka*. By foregrounding such details, the supporting players in the drama of human ideology, the Farnsworths indicate that these material and aesthetic aspects are invested with their own mythological significance. In the absence of borders reinforcing their differences, these elements merge and mirror each other in a harmony that suggests both ancient ritual and undiscovered future possibilities.

Several of the Farnsworths' tapestry editions, such as *Dharmakaya* and *Thangka I*, are based on imagery drawn from the rich artistic tradition of Tibetan culture. The artists will donate 5% of the profits from the sales of these editions to the Tibetan Children's Village, a shelter and school for Tibetan orphans, or the Norbulingka Institute, which aids refugees in Tibet and provides training in traditional Tibetan arts.

As the blessings and horrors of scientific discoveries reshape our daily lives and our understanding of the material world, a corresponding transformation occurs in our mythologies: the means by which we understand the inexplicable and the sacred. From the atomic to the galactic, whether secular or spiritual, the models we use to navigate our course in the universe are in continuous flux.

- Donald Farnsworth and Era Hamaji Farnsworth



Mythos II, 2006, Jacquard tapestry, 109 x 72 in, ed: 8



Dharmakaya, 2005, Jacquard tapestry, 120 x 80 in, ed: 3



Mythos V, 2006, Jacquard tapestry, 104 x 75 in, ed: 8

About the Magnolia Tapestry Project

Rather than weaving solid areas of color, as in traditional hand weaving, the Magnolia Tapestry Project's method makes the most of Jacquard technology's potential to weave a complex, mosaic-like network of color combinations. As Tamarind and Gemini put the commercial lithographic technology of the 19th century into the hands of fine artists in the fifties and sixties, the Magnolia Tapestry Project is putting the electronic Jacquard loom to work in unexpected ways for contemporary artists. The project includes tapestries representative of several generations and numerous art movements: the Abstract Expressionist wizardry of Ed Moses; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; and the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner are re-envisioned in warp and weft. The

Magnolia Tapestry Project has also produced tapestries by Alex Katz, Doug Hall, Lewis deSoto, D.J. Hall, Donald and Era Farnsworth, George Miyasaki, Rupert Garcia, Diane Andrews Hall, Robert Kushner, Nancy Spero, and other artists. ■



Untitled work in progress.