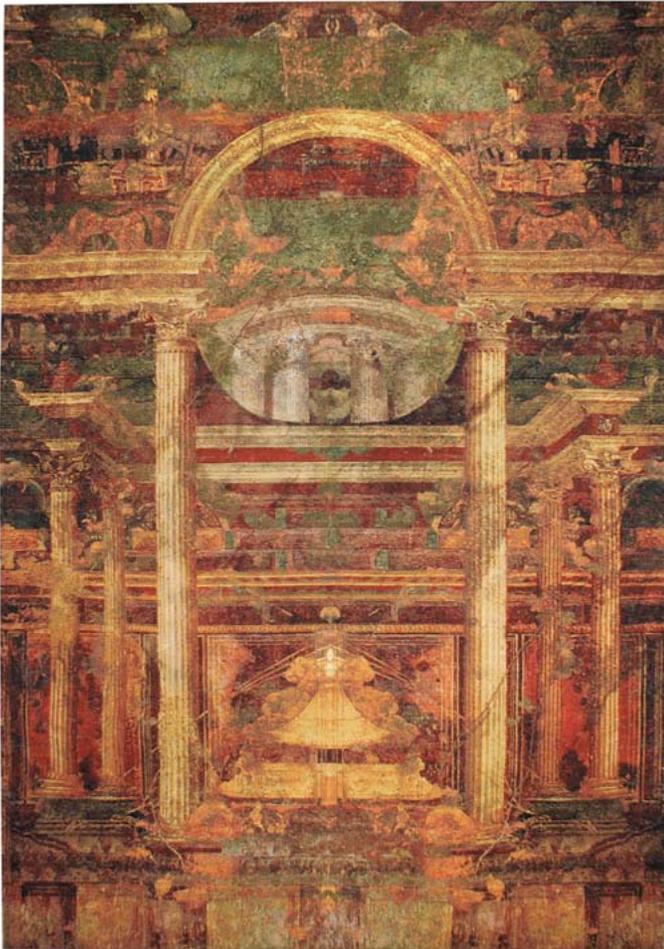


Donald Farnsworth & Era Hamaji Farnsworth: *Mythos*



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.

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

The Magnolia Tapestry Project

The Magnolia Tapestry Project originated in artist John Nava's commission to decorate the vast interior walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, which required a consideration of the acoustical demands of the



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

space: the decorative element was to function practically by reducing unwanted reverberation, prompting an inquiry into the use of textiles. Nava subsequently collaborated with Magnolia Editions co-director Donald Farnsworth on a series of woven experiments which grew into an unorthodox approach to Jacquard weaving. Their innovations have made it possible for contemporary artists to create editions in fiber which are faithful to the artist's vision. An artist works with either Nava or Farnsworth to prepare his or her composition for translation using custom calibrated color palettes developed at Magnolia Editions. Each completed weave file is then woven in Belgium on a double-headed Jacquard loom, where 17,800 available warp threads generate colors of unprecedented variety and density. With an eye toward creating unique compositions rather than reproductions, the Magnolia Tapestry Project has created woven editions based on media ranging from pencil drawings and watercolors to daguerreotypes and digital collage.

Just 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 today's artists. The Project includes tapestries representative of several generations and numerous art movements: the abstract wizardry of Ed Moses; the formally rigorous portraits of Chuck Close; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; the hyper-realism of Alan Magee and Guy Diehl; the playful poetics of Squeak Carnwath; the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner, and the Abstract Expressionist topographies of George Miyasaki are all re-envisioned in striking new editions. The Project has also produced tapestries by Hung Liu, Mel Ramos, Rupert Garcia, Lewis deSoto, Lia Cooke, Diane Andrews Hall, Gus Heinze, Robert Kushner, John Nava, Nancy Spero, Katherine Westerhout and others. ■



Untitled work in progress.