

Donald & Era Farnsworth: *Mandala Analecta*

Many Tibetan mandalas incorporate a similar organizing principle, in which concentric geometric shapes, each possessing a specific symbolic meaning, radiate from a central roundel or deity. In *Mandala Analecta*, the Farnsworths have used the mandala as a starting point from which to construct a hypnotic garden of color. Using layer upon layer of colored washes and interlacing vines, tendrils and floral ornamentation, the artists create ethereal passages which continually shift between pattern and abstraction, unity and multiplicity. As in the artists' *Mythos* series, the power of the combined elements in the work is greater than that of any single aspect, and the human figure is almost entirely absent: the deities occupying the central roundel are indistinct and barely defined.

The arabesque nature of this work is consistent with the Farnsworths' continued interest in the intersection of art, science and faith: arabesque art typically involves a multilayered symbolism which uses proportion and form to evoke the underlying unity of the world. At the same time, the lush, foliate repetition of the work has as much in common with the mille-fleur backgrounds of medieval European tapestries as it does with the elaborate, vegetal motifs of traditional Arabic calligraphy. In addition to the Tibetan mandala structure, the tapestry also combines elements drawn from a Persian Islamic prayer book and painted scrolls from Japan. The aesthetic accomplishments of these sources are set free from their dogmatic function and unified such that their similarities outweigh the divergent ideologies with which they are associated. The artists' drive to locate a timeless beauty in the synthesis of myriad traditions suggests that generations of experience can be successfully distilled to inspire a more adaptive and harmonious existence.



Mandala Analecta, 2008
Jacquard tapestry, 96 x 75 in., Ed. of 12

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. In the same way that 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; Chuck Close's rigorous, process-based portraiture; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; the playful poetics of William Wiley and the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner are re-envisioned in warp and weft. ■