

Hella Jongerius transforms a Parisian building into a working tool for making

## Flying colours

**Hella Jongerius: Entrelacs (Interlace)**

*Lafayette Anticipations, Galeries Lafayette, Paris*

*Lafayette, Paris*

*7 June – 8 September 2019*

*Reviewed by Cynthia Rose*

Hella Jongerius wants designers to think like painters. She feels they need to consider how light affects colour and what each kind of surface really signifies. A tireless activist for sustainable products, Jongerius has long lobbied for crafts to respect their origins. But the designer's greatest quality could be her audacity. Her project *Interlace*, which runs for a few more weeks in Paris, takes a close look at what the craft of weaving means. Its success comes from exploring the inner workings of the craft.

*Interlace* spans four floors of Lafayette Anticipations, the art centre inside the corporate foundation of department store Galeries Lafayette. (This venue's title is as enigmatic as it seems but, in French, *d'anticipation* means 'futuristic'.) To create the foundation's complex, architect Rem Koolhaas gave a 19th-century building a slick redesign, erecting a tower of steel and glass in its centre, then adding moving floors that allow for multiple layouts. But, in the year after Lafayette Anticipations opened in March 2018, the art centre started to languish. Not only did Parisians balk at paying to see its shows, the impressive



**‘The exhibition questions what knowing an artist’s name truly contributes to how we experience art’**

DANIKA PARIKH, p.74

**‘The muck and mess of making pots, making love and making a difference are firmly wedged together’**

ISABELLA SMITH, p.79

space also seemed to dwarf what was on offer. Until *Interlace* (a free admission show), the only popular part of the complex was its café.

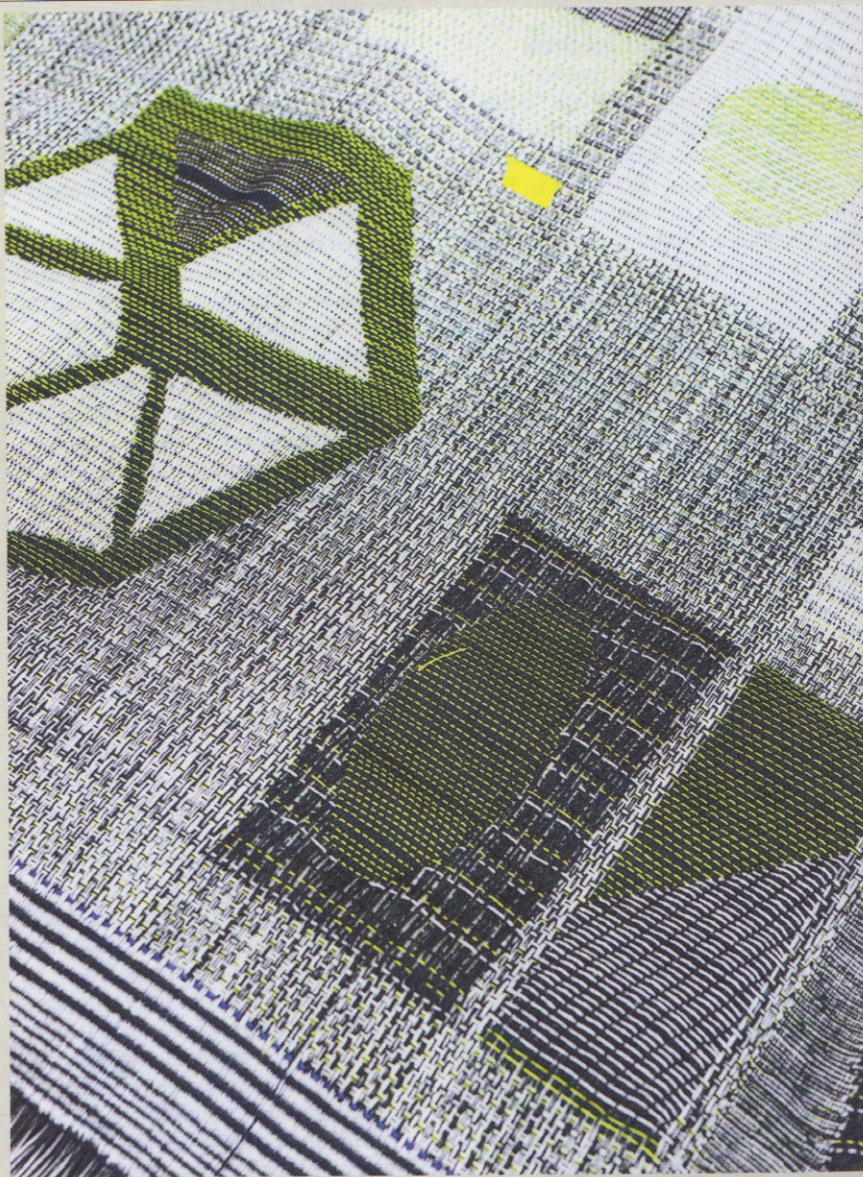
Jongerijs, who works from Berlin, has now run her own studio for 26 years. The Dutch designer’s clients include Vitra, where she is an art director, as well as Ikea, KLM and the textile giant Maharam. Although she is commonly called a product designer, no title could really convey Jongerijs’ clout. In the domain of colour especially, she has international authority. With *Interlace*, she showcases why.

The designer has turned Koolhaas’ atrium into a loom: a four storey-tall machine worked – all day, every day – by a dedicated team. The moment a visitor crosses the building’s threshold, their eyes are mesmerised by a 50-foot cascade of colour. Behind its forest of filaments are youthful weavers using Koolhaas’ moving floors for access. Yet in manipulating each of the giant strands, these artisans reverse weaving’s conventional practice. Instead of using the horizontal weft to engineer patterns, Jongerijs’ troupe are altering the vertical warp. Each of the colossal strands they attack are unique, an individual piece created by Jongerijslab. As the workers augment them with more volume and colour, three-dimensional sculptures appear in the air.

Lafayette Anticipations’ separate floors, which encircle the outsized tapestry, have been configured to house a set of studios. One displays samples of both the massive warp and all the elements used in the weft. As well as linen, cotton and wool, they include raffia, paper, rope and eco-synthetics. The project’s colours demonstrate all Jongerijs’ skill – brilliant oranges blaze next to jazzy blues and rich earth tones are flattered by bright fluorescents. Many of the more delicate tints are made with natural dyes and there is a whole range of blacks worthy of Velázquez.

The hanging’s giant warp strands are made out of linen thread. It was sourced all over Europe, from J. Toulemonde in France; Saflin and Przędzalnia Lambrecht in Poland; and Linificio e Canapificio Nazionale in Italy. Bespoke colours were applied at a historic dye

**Left: an ongoing 50-foot weaving by Hella Jongerijs’ team in the atrium of Lafayette Anticipations in Paris, and right: a textile produced in the surrounding studios**



**In the domain of colour Jongerijs has international authority, and *Interlace* showcases why**

works, Decoster Caulliez, in northern France. The threads were then fashioned into colossal ropes using a customised industrial braiding machine.

This souped-up beast is proudly on display next to something the maker calls her ‘Seamless Loom’. Essentially low-tech, it consists of four ‘networked’ wooden looms able to function as one. It creates three-dimensional pieces and, as visitors watch, craftspeople turn out large, six-sided ‘bricks’ on it. (Jongerijs has much bigger plans for this invention: she hopes it can produce

vessels to reduce the use of plastics.)

Anticipations’ top floor houses a ‘Weavers Werkstatt’ – nine young makers engaging in personal projects. All their creations are made with a digital Jacquard loom, hand-operated but actually computer-controlled. This is the TC2, or Thread Controller 2, invented in Norway by weaver Vibeke Vestby and Tronrud Engineering. The TC2 interprets each intersection of warp and weft as a pixel, which means it can use ordinary software such as Photoshop. A weaver working on it can make instant changes

to pattern, colour or materials.

On floor two, viewers are brought inches away from the central project. Seen from this perspective, it is a jungle of contrasting shapes and volumes, competing styles rendered with individual palettes. While some of its weaving is orthodox and systematic, other zones burst into a joyful anarchy. Only when viewed from afar does the gigantic piece cohere.

Back in the 18th century, Denis Diderot – one of art’s first critics – described his favourite still life. ‘It has something in common,’ he wrote, ‘with the very rudest art. Because, from close at hand, one cannot tell what it is. Yet one moves away and something else is then created, something which contains the very essence of nature.’

This is exactly how Jongerius’ *Interlace* functions. Convening so many views of a single craft should have meant chaos or, at best, a random sampler of styles. But this deftly organised piece far transcends that. It becomes a single – and stirringly human – presence.

● A catalogue of the project, designed by Irma Boom, features contributions from Jongerius, Hans Den Hartog Jager, Alice Rawsthorn, Anne Röhl and Christel Vesters. It is conceived as individual notebooks, which can be purchased individually or assembled into one book. Included is a special glossary of terms for weaving and textiles developed during the project by Jongeriuslab.

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Above: overview of the Jongerius exhibition at Lafayette Anticipations

## Identity politics

**Artist: Unknown**

*Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge CB3 0AQ*

9 July – 22 September 2019

*Reviewed by Danika Parikh*

‘What’s in a name?’ asks *Artist: Unknown*, the new exhibition at Kettle’s Yard: a question originally posed by a man whose own name and identity are now the subject of conspiracy theories. Names are compelling, and particularly so in art. We search for names we’ve attached to genius, we search for names when they’re unknown, and we question the names we do know. Drawing together objects from five continents and 13 University of Cambridge museums and collections, curators Eliza Spindel and Andrew Nairne examine this fixation and suggest that anonymity can be equally compelling. Every object included here, from ceramics and textiles to portraits and taxidermy, was catalogued as ‘artist unknown’. Ambitious in scope yet intimate in feel, the exhibition questions what knowing an artist’s name truly contributes to how we experience a work of art.

The diversity of the collections displayed here allow the curators to challenge the barriers between art and craft, artist and scientist, and original and reproduction. In the process they also examine the social hierarchies that have historically coloured how these barriers have been applied and upheld. On entering, the first objects one sees are two striking carved wooden sculptures from Nigeria. The larger piece is a tour-de-force of graceful lines, at once both a tall sculpture of alternating human faces and antlered animal heads, with a leopard balanced on the antlers and a musical instrument.

These are the first of several ethnographic objects on display, placing front and centre the uneasiness of the border between art and craft, particularly the crafts of Indigenous people. These objects have long been thought of as representative of traditional practices, rather than the work of individuals creating expressions of art. This theme continues with an early 20th-century Fijian *tapa* – a cloth made by soaking the inner bark of trees – its black-and-white composition a lovely work of geometric abstraction. Both of these pieces express singular artistic vision, and the Nigerian sculpture is now thought to be a one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

