

## How Ornamental Is Art?

Entering an installation by **Vreni Spieser** is a bedazzling experience. Stunning color patterns and images cover the floors and sometimes even objects or walls. The striking ornamentation creates an impressive and utterly transformed atmosphere within a space.

Wallpaper patterns with hunting motifs, animals or psychedelic patterns are a familiar sight, but today one hardly encounters this density of ornamentation. The tightrope walk between art and kitsch is refreshing. Almost immediately one starts to think: Maybe I should redecorate my apartment ... But this time not with that understated look but with the courage to do what I really want!

This is naturally not the reaction that Vreni Spieser intends. She simply reflects on the history and use of ornamentation and develops her own patterns in response to each specific space. INMYX spoke with her about her work.



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**INMYX:** Your installations in different spaces amaze people. With your new project you will design the walls in the stairwell of a printing company. How do you approach a project?

Vreni Spieser: Well, the next project is something special. It is a commission for Thomi Wolfensberger, a printer with whom I have worked together a lot. For the stairwell, he would actually like to have one of my existing works, *Wilde Tiere 2 (Wild Animals 2)*. It is an installation that I did last year for the Museum of Design and Applied Arts in Winterthur.



**INMYX:** You prefer “not-so-pretty spaces” — run down spaces that show traces of the past. How do you develop the patterns? Spieser: I am inspired by traces of sedimentation and use — spaces that have stories to tell about the people who inhabited them or that stood empty for years. To some extent, I respond to formal aspects of the site, which I then incorporate into my ideas and develop further. Or I enter a space, which creates certain images and stories in my mind. Sometimes the idea is already there, and I just have to find the place.



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**INMYX:** You do not just work with floors, but you also do performances, and make drawings and objects. Sometimes your installations leave the floor and come up the wall and even the ceiling. But you once said that discovering the floor was extremely radical and important for you. What is all the ornamentation about?



Floor design of a 1960s house, Thalwil/Switzerland 2007 © Vreni Spieser

Spieser: Hmm. I am interested in the importance that decoration assumes in art, or one could even say the “unimportance” of decoration and how it is used without much conscious deliberation. Decoration is generally condemned in art, and there is often an unspoken agreement about what is decorative and what isn’t. Opinions are simply assumed without any critical reflection, and the result is conceit and ignorance. This is starting to change in



Exhibition Installation: *Wilde Tiere 2 (Wild Animals 2)*, Museum of Applied Arts and Design, Winterthur/Switzerland © Vreni Spieser



Visitors can color in the wallpaper with markers, Museum of Applied Arts and Design, Winterthur/Switzerland © Vreni Spieser



Museum of Applied Arts and Design, Winterthur/Switzerland © Vreni Spieser

In the meantime, we have been thinking about a different work. It is a design for a tablecloth for a garden restaurant. The design is ten years old, but we are thinking about a new edition. I think it would be exciting to develop this work more and adapt it for the stairwell, so that it also works in that space.

**INMYX: Different spaces influence your installations. How do you select them?**

Spieser: The choice of space generally depends on the exhibitions I am invited to take part in and commission requests. For me, it is always a very emotional and atmospheric thing.

architecture, but not yet in art.

Most of all, I am interested in the slightly subversive notion that what is so-called "pretty" is not really taken seriously, and I can smuggle it in unnoticed. Naturally there is the danger that this backfires, and people don't take my work seriously, because it's decorative. It's always a balancing act ...



Küsnacht/Switzerland 2006 © Vreni Spieser



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