

Anna Andreeva
Les Fleurs

This exhibition was conceived in collaboration with Robert Müller.

31 March – 20 May 2023

Anna Andreeva (1917-2008) was a leading artist and designer at the prestigious state Red Rose Silk Factory in Moscow, where over the course of her career she designed hundreds of patterns for scarves and textiles that have since become examples of a distinctly Soviet “Op Art”. The balance they find between Western-style modernism and a compatible, contemporary design for the modern Soviet woman is quite extraordinary, and a subversive poetic method of exploring and negotiating aesthetic freedoms within a rigid political system.

As her practice modulated according to the shifting political guidelines and parameters throughout the several decades during which Andreeva was active, a compelling vocabulary began to emerge. For censorship reasons, Andreeva often had to invent narratives for her abstract designs in order to justify them to the strict Soviet authorities. One such design was the overlapping zigzag patterns of the “Electrification” cycle. Initially rejected as “pure abstract propaganda”, the artist made a case that electrification was one of the central pillars of Soviet development and the design eventually went into production and was even used for prestigious projects such as the interior design of the state broadcasting building in Moscow.

Les Fleurs at Layr is the first solo presentation of the artist’s Estate. Conceived in collaboration with Robert Müller (curator, Angewandte Collection and Archive), the exhibition draws on comprehensive material to explore the relationship between ‘representational’ and ‘non-representational’ art in the context of specific social conditions. It also renders the artist’s unique position during the complex, historical challenges, and traces the many variations and stages of the work process through (literal) juxtapositions, superimpositions and repetitions.

The exhibition presents a variety of fabric designs from Andreeva’s series, as well as textiles that were produced, mostly with themes such as electricity, radio waves, research and youth – themes of progress in the Soviet Union’s state socialist narrative. The narratives of technology and the natural sciences freed the geometric designs from being non-representational and legitimized their abstraction in the political context. For cases where this negotiation seemed unfeasible, the artist would employ cutouts of flowers – Les Fleurs – to function as “concealment elements”, in order to smuggle supposedly representational motifs into proposals that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable – she carried some in her handbag at all times.

Patricia Grzonka