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Limited edition cover by Hella Jongerius



# GOOD YARN

Hella Jongerius' new exhibition adds contemporary twists to the age-old story of weaving

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAN IPP WRITER: ROSA BERTOLI



Sustainable innovation, craft, responsible production, and how we relate to objects and nature are recurring themes in the work of Dutch designer Hella Jongerius. A new series of textile experiments and an exhibition at Berlin's Gropius Bau, 'Woven Cosmos', presents a panoramic take on her thinking.

'I have always worked on the relationship between objects and human beings; objects are silent partners, there is a lot of healing in them,' says Jongerius, whose work over the past three decades has touched upon industrial design, furniture, craft, material explorations and chromatic research.

Her ongoing work with colour has led her to collaborate with textile manufacturers Maharam and Kvadrat; to leave her mark on classic Vitra furniture by Jean Prouvé, and Charles and Ray Eames; and to design the North Delegates' Lounge for the United Nations' New York headquarters. These experiences, alongside more in-depth research, culminated in exhibitions such

Above, *Season Panorama*, made on a digital Jacquard loom in Jongerius' studio  
Left, Jongerius at the Gropius Bau with *Forest*, from the *Woven Systems* series

as 'Colour Machine' at Milan Design Week in 2016 and 'Breathing Colour' at London's Design Museum in 2017.

The newest chapter of her work focuses on weaving, a medium that allows Jongerius to explore some of those recurring themes, particularly sustainability, social responsibility, spirituality and 'the healing function of objects'. The idea for the Gropius Bau exhibition developed after Jongerius spent time working on a digital loom, leaving her keen to investigate more experimental and performative weaving techniques. 'Weaving is such a huge topic,' she notes. 'And I wanted »



Above, this issue's limited-edition cover created by Jongerius features her 2020 *Undertone View*. Woven on a digital loom using mixed materials including cotton and paper, it is part of the *Woven Windows* series. 'During Covid, I had time to weave and I thought we were all inside our houses looking through our windows to the outside world, so I wanted to weave windows,' she says. 'I like the idea that a window is the eye of the house. The window is also a threshold: you can only pass with your eyes, your body can't go out and that's also been the case in the past year.' Limited-edition covers are available to subscribers, see [Wallpaper.com](http://Wallpaper.com)

Left, a model of the Gropius Bau exhibition space and one of the exhibition installations

Opposite, a silk-screen print sketch, part of Jongerius' *Woven Systems* series

to do it in a bigger realm, so I called the show "Woven Cosmos": I wanted to work with metaphors, diving deeper into the future of weaving.'

Presented as a work in progress, 'Woven Cosmos' will include two new installations and more than 50 new objects created by Jongerius and her team between her Berlin studio and the neo-Renaissance halls of the museum, with some pieces developed live on site during the exhibition. Jongerius brought a multilayered and personal approach to the project, including a spiritual séance led by a local shaman in the Gropius Bau's atrium before production started, which highlighted the vitality of the building.

The end result will include three-dimensional textile sculptures created with

yarns spun from recycled materials – old stock from the textile industry, virgin cotton, wool and paper yarns used for weaving – alongside objects in wood, glass and ceramics. Jongerius looked through the museum's archives for materials to repurpose, and found four shades of sand from a recent exhibition by artist Lee Mingwei, three of which have now been used to create glass pieces for 'Woven Cosmos' (a process carried out in Sweden and overseen by Jongerius over Zoom).

There will be three live elements, performed by the designer and her team, Jongeriuslab, with the public invited to join in. The *Cosmic Loom* installation will feature bundles of recycled textile waste, available to the team and visitors to use to spin a yarn to add to the loom. Another project, titled

*Dancing a Yarn*, will invite the public to be part of a choreographed workflow. Twisting and twining dancers will perform alongside a machine, replicating its movements, to create two ropes. The resulting ropes will then be knotted together to form a ladder that will 'grow' out of the building's window and into the public space surrounding the museum.

Finally, *Space Loom #2* (a large-scale, three-dimensional loom Jongerius previewed in a 2019 installation for Lafayette Anticipations in Paris), built by the designer and her collaborators out of four looms, will be activated during the show to produce new 3D-woven objects named *Matrix Modules*.

Outcomes will be unpredictable, but, as the designer points out, 'it's not about the result, it's about the process'. She continues: »





Left, the piece *Cosmos*, from the *Woven Systems* series, at Jongeriuslab's temporary workspace at Gropius Bau

Below, a 3D-woven brick on *Space Loom #2*, part of the *Pliable Architecture* series



**‘We are all yarns  
in the bigger cloth,  
all interwoven’**

‘For me, it’s important that we research, and that what we do is restricted between boundaries, that we have questions. But we are doing the creative work; we are not just producing something that’s ready in our minds. That’s also how it works in design and with other creative processes.’

Building a new body of work on site at Gropius Bau has been a helpful exercise for the team. ‘In the studio, everything looks big, and then we come into the museum and it shrinks,’ says Jongerius. ‘So it is really great that we can see the work at the right scale, under the right lights. I am not there every day, so my team has time to concentrate on a piece of work without being watched the whole time.’ She characterises the more

intimate studio work as the ‘embryo’ stage of her projects, and finds the duality between the two spaces and dimensions refreshing.

Jongerius’ move from industrial design to a more experimental craft-based dimension has felt like a natural progression of her practice. From where she is now, she is able to communicate to a more open, critical audience that wants to explore beyond what’s currently possible. ‘Craft is now more relevant than ever; these ancient techniques not only have cultural and historical value but also offer real solutions,’ she says. ‘A material never travels alone, it has a huge social and geopolitical agenda. To work towards a carbon-neutral footprint, we have to redesign all of our materials, and that has

a lot to do with craft. There is a huge revolution in my profession.’

It’s impossible to create work in 2021 without feeling the impact of the ongoing global pandemic, and for Jongerius, this has meant observing the world both digitally and physically. Its restrictions and new rules, she says, ‘will have an echo in our objects and materials’. This is also where weaving comes into play: ‘It’s almost a cliché, but we are all yarns in the bigger cloth. We are all interwoven, it’s about connection. And that’s why weaving is a very strong metaphor for where we are right now.’★  
‘Hella Jongerius: *Woven Cosmos*’, 29 April–15 August, Gropius Bau, Niederkirchnerstrasse 7, Berlin, [gropiusbau.de](http://gropiusbau.de); [jongeriuslab.com](http://jongeriuslab.com)