

“As a general rule then the Wall-covering which has the effect of making the wall disappear from our minds and which does not assert itself too insistently, is best serving its basic purpose.”

WALTER READE BRIGHTLING, WALL PAPER
INFLUENCE UPON THE HOME (MONTREAL
THE WATSON FOSTER COMPANY LIMITED, 1908)

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES EXHIBITION

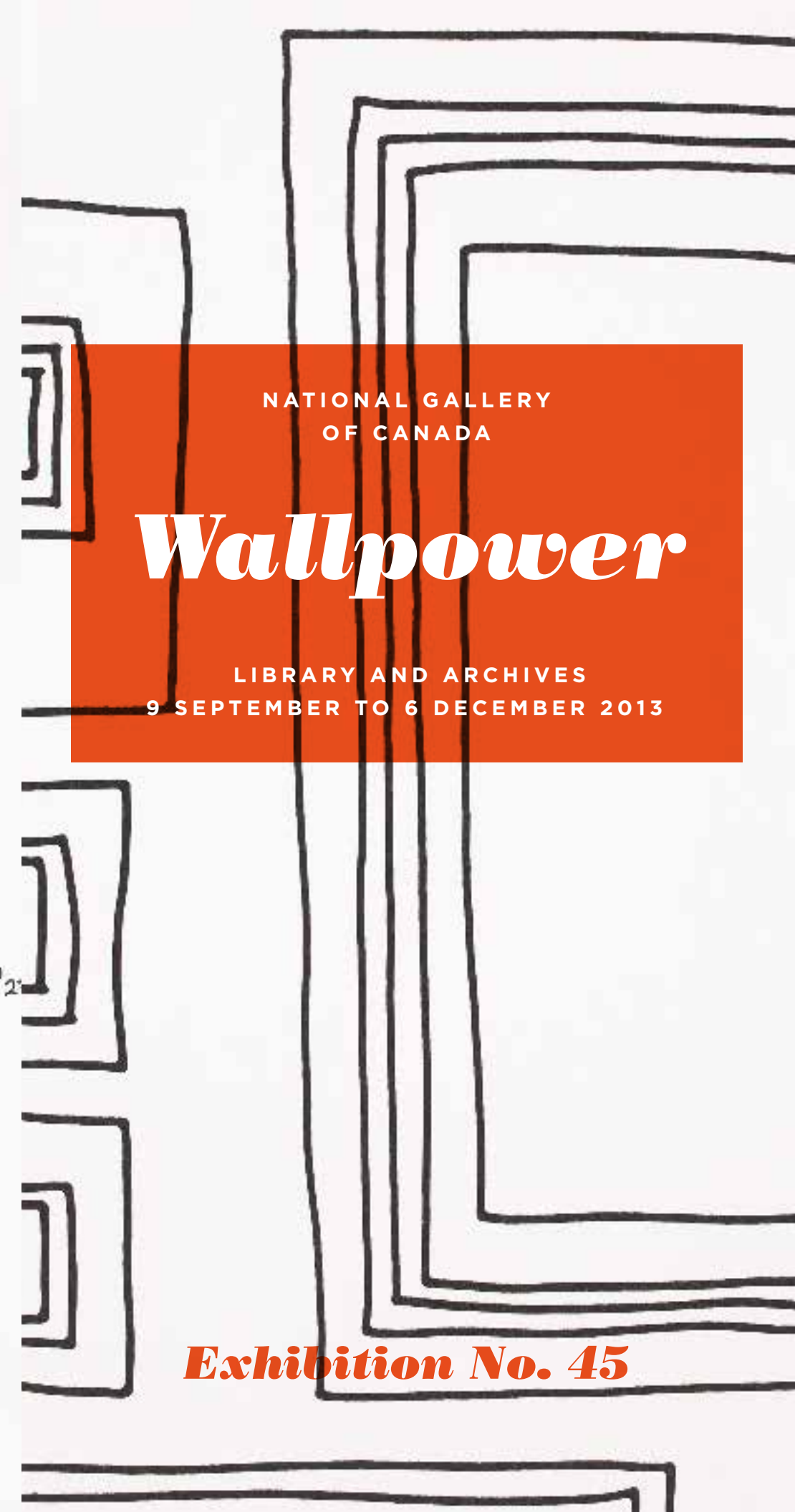
NO. 45

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Cover: Chris Taylor and Craig Wood, *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Frames* (detail), 2002 [5].
Back cover: Chris Taylor and Craig Wood, *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Dot to Dot* (detail), 2002 [7].
Short panel: Vera Greenwood, *Wallpaper Book* (detail), 1999 [9]



NATIONAL GALLERY
OF CANADA

Wallpaper

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
9 SEPTEMBER TO 6 DECEMBER 2013

Exhibition No. 45

This exhibition features a selection of wallpapers designed by artists and chosen from the Library's collection. Rather than disappearing into the background, as Walter Reade Brightling recommended for wall-coverings in 1908, these papers are very much in the foreground, interacting with the space or surface they occupy. They function simultaneously as works of art and decor.

French artist Daniel Buren places a great deal of importance on the physical positioning of his work, be it outdoors, in a domestic setting, or reproduced on the page of a publication **[1]**. In 1981 he papered a Toronto apartment with vertical stripes of white and yellow in equal width, optically transforming the site. Sponsored by the Toronto artist-run centre A Space, the project was one in a series by various artists entitled *Apartment Number*, held offsite over a six-month period in a 1960s highrise apartment building. The visual effect of the striped wallpaper called attention to the size and physical textures of the otherwise bland rooms of the apartment. The paper's repeated pattern destabilized the neutrality of the interior and invigorated the walls, creating restless, disquieting ambiguity.

John Baldessari's *I will not make any more boring art* **[2]** first appeared in 1971 as a wall work at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design's (NSCAD) Mezzanine Gallery. An American artist based in California, Baldessari could not be at the Halifax gallery himself and therefore asked students to write repeatedly, as if in "collective penance," the statement that eventually covered the gallery's walls. The artist's handwritten sample was subsequently used in the gallery's exhibition announcement and was later published by the College as a lithograph. To Garry Neill Kennedy, the former president of NSCAD, those words became "emblematic of the College's mission." Kennedy reiterated his endorsement in his book *The Last Art College* by adapting the work on the publication's endpapers. In 2000 the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia commissioned Baldessari's piece as one of twelve rolls of wallpaper by faculty members, alumni and guest artists from the College, marking the establishment of the NSCAD Archive.

Kennedy's wallpaper design, *GNK CV* **[3]**, for the NSCAD Archive project consists of a nine-page grid featuring his curriculum vitae silkscreened in yellow on white – one of the artist's favourite colour combinations. By removing his CV from its original context and using it to create wallpaper for an executive's office – thereby highlighting his own professional accomplishments in someone else's space – Kennedy transformed an ordinary piece of biographical information into an ironic statement.

A former NSCAD student, Lucy Pullen also designed wallpaper for the Archive project. Her paper is made up of blue ballpoint-like lines that are at once persistent and meandering **[4]**. Although wallpaper usually tends to accentuate the flatness of the surface it covers, Pullen's imperfect lines create the illusion of undulating,

irregular surfaces, drawing us in and compelling us to interact with her work; the more we stare at the lines, probing for meaning, the more we are mesmerized by them.

British artists Chris Taylor and Craig Wood have used wallpaper to blur the boundary between fine art and commercial product. Their series *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete* consists of rolls of printed wallpaper published and distributed by the UK manufacturers Graham & Brown. Handsomely printed in "unlimited" quantities, using techniques associated with industrial production and distribution, their wallpapers mimic the look of an ordinary mass-produced object, but with a twist that alerts you to the difference.

The titles of Taylor and Wood's individual papers – *Frames* **[5]**, *Blank Cheque* **[6]**, *Dot to Dot* **[7]** and *Notes* **[8]** – are code for the interactive nature of their wallpapers. Unlike most wallpaper, which is pasted on walls as a passive backdrop, their open-ended and humorous patterns encourage residents to vivify their living spaces by defying the prohibition against marking up a wall. For Taylor and Wood, wallpapers are, indeed, surfaces intended to be marked up. The papered rooms are sites for action.

In 1999 Vera Greenwood silkscreened a leaf motif on a hundred sheets of printed newspaper and bound them to produce a wallpaper sample book that she titled *Wallpaper Book* **[9]**. The motif was drawn from her 1993–96 installation *Home*, for which Greenwood silkscreened negative leaf silhouettes onto double-width sheets of newspaper, which were stapled onto gallery walls. The artist remarked that the paper changed the feel of each gallery; its dark colour and densely packed pattern reduced the large public spaces to intimate, domestic settings, while eliciting feelings of ambivalence.

Greenwood writes of using wallpaper to explore concepts of voyeurism, camouflage and invisibility, recalling a "child's magical refuge high inside a tree." Her wallpaper thus has a psychological dimension, hinting at dark spaces, unacknowledged fears and scary monsters hiding within an innocent pattern of leaves. It also recalls Édouard Vuillard's small-scale paintings depicting family life in the home, where the subjects are engulfed by the overactive patterns and textures of fabrics, wallpapers and carpets. As we browse through Greenwood's full-sized pattern book, we can imagine walking into one of her leafy rooms and being enveloped by it.

Peter Trepanier
Head, Reader Services

Checklist

1. Daniel Buren. *Limited Time Only!* Toronto: A Space, 1981 (photocopy on orange-coloured paper); *Daniel Buren / Apartment Number / March 28–April 18, 1981 / A Project Sponsored by A SPACE, 299 Queen St. West, Ste 507, Toronto, Canada (416) 595-0790* (announcement card); Daniel Buren. "Photo-souvenir: Limited Time Only" in *Apartment Number . . .* Toronto: A Space, 1982, 32–33.

2. John Baldessari. *I will not make any more boring art*. Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2000 (roll of wallpaper, 65 × 465 cm); *Nova Scotia College of Art and Design / 6152 Coburg Road / Halifax / Nova Scotia / Canada / John Baldessari / April 1–10 1971 / I will not make any more boring art*. (announcement card); John Baldessari. *Wallet*. New York: Sonnabend Sundell Editions, 1999 (leather wallet with gold-embossed text reading "I will not buy any more boring art"); Garry Neill Kennedy. *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968–1978*. Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia; Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012, front endpapers.

3. Garry Neill Kennedy. *GNK CV*. Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2000 (roll of wallpaper, 65 × 465 cm).

4. Lucy Pullen. *Untitled*. Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 2000 (roll of wallpaper, 65 × 465 cm).

5. Chris Taylor and Craig Wood. *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Frames*. Blackburn, Lancashire, UK: Graham & Brown, 2002 (roll of wallpaper, 0.52 × 10 m).

6. Chris Taylor and Craig Wood. *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Blank Cheque – Grey / Cream*. Blackburn, Lancashire, UK: Graham & Brown, 2010 (roll of wallpaper, 0.52 × 10 m) (commissioned by the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK, for the exhibition *Walls Are Talking*).

7. Chris Taylor and Craig Wood. *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Dot to Dot*. Blackburn, Lancashire, UK: Graham & Brown, 2002 (roll of wallpaper, 0.52 × 10 m).

8. Chris Taylor and Craig Wood. *Down on Paper: Wallpaper to Complete: Notes*. Blackburn, Lancashire, UK: Graham & Brown, 2002 (roll of wallpaper, 0.52 × 10 m).

9. Vera Greenwood. *Wallpaper Book*. Ottawa: Self-published, 1999; Vera Greenwood. *Wallpaper*, 1999 (serigraph on printed newspaper); Vera Greenwood. *Camouflage*, 1994 (digital print) (photo: Alan Inglis).