

Book Review

Marie Cuttoli: The modern thread from Miró to Man Ray

Edited by Cindy Kang

Contributions by Laura Pirkelbauer, Laura L. F. Sevelis, Virginia Gardner Troy, K. L. H. Wells and Bruno Ythier

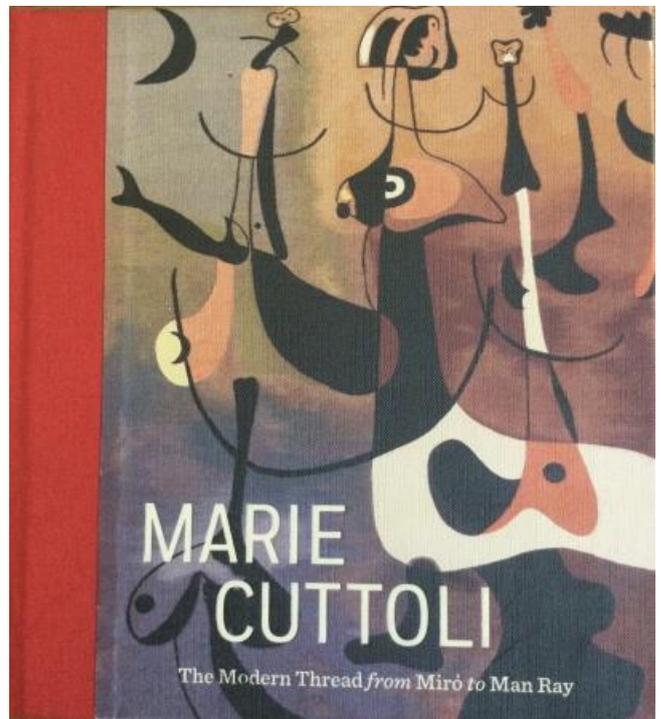
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Review by Sally Reckert, April 2022



'Marie Cuttoli: The Modern Thread from Miró to Man Ray' - Photo Sally Reckert

Marie Cuttoli's (1879-1973) role as a textile entrepreneur bridged the divide between fine and decorative arts in France during the early – mid-twentieth century. Cindy Kang's book was published to coincide with the Barnes Foundation exhibition on Cuttoli's work in 2020. As exhibition curator and writer, Kang traces Cuttoli's career from commissioning textile designs by contemporary artists, through her role in helping to revive the manufacture of French tapestry at Aubusson, to her championing of 'portable murals' in her gallery in Paris as well as to an international audience through exhibitions, particularly in Philadelphia, USA.

The book also contains essays by significant tapestry historians: Virginia Gardner Troy, K.L.H. Wells, Bruno Ythier, Laura L.F. Sevelis and Laura Pirkelbauer. Colour reproductions of textiles and the originating artworks that Cuttoli commissioned from artists such as Léger, Lurçat, Marcoussis and Picasso are set among historic photographs of people and interiors, studios and artists. There is a selected bibliography and a checklist of all exhibitions in the USA organised by Cuttoli.

Kang focuses on Marie Cuttoli's legacy: how she transformed the way we place fine and decorative art in domestic and public spaces. In her Parisian gallery, Myrbor, Marie Cuttoli exhibited textiles together with paintings by artists such as Braque, Max Ernst and Ozenfant and dresses designed by Goncharova and Lipska. With these works she showed how public spaces could be enhanced by contemporary art translated into tapestries for floors and walls. Her book joins Ann Lane Hedlund's work 'Gloria F. Ross and Modern Tapestry' (Yale University Press, 2010) and K.L.H. Wells's book 'Weaving Modernism' (Yale University Press, 2019) in bringing into the light the importance of entrepreneurial women in the fields of contemporary art and tapestry.

Tapestry is time consuming and expensive to produce; revolutions, wars and the Great Depression almost destroyed French tapestry manufacturing so that by the 1920s the weaving industry was moribund and broke. Marie Cuttoli and Jean Lurçat were together responsible for rejuvenating Aubusson and French tapestry as they commissioned the clear lines and bright colours of contemporary artworks to be translated into tapestry, thus revolutionising both the design of tapestry and the process of weaving. Cuttoli took commissioning and selling art and textiles a stage further by showing the public how spaces could be transformed into 'concept' rooms by displaying her rugs and tapestries on the floor and hanging them on the wall as 'textile murals'.

Kang suggests that Cuttoli's name and her innovations in commissioning and displaying contemporary paintings as textiles "had fallen through the cracks easily because of the way we study art history and the way we train to be curators". Cuttoli's name deserves to be as well known as the artists who, benefitting from her patronage, had the confidence to explore the crossover between fine and applied art. In turn the artists who were her contemporaries paved the way for painters such as Vasarely, Frankenthaler, Stella, Rothko, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Kitaj, Hockney, Tracy Emin and Chris Ofili to have their works translated into tapestry. Dealers, collectors and critics could now bring post-war art as 'textile murals' to a much wider public in large open spaces such as libraries, airports, public and government buildings.

Anyone interested in mid-twentieth century art and textiles will be fascinated by Cindy Kang's book.