

Eye Candy: the Manhattan residence of Joseph Holtzman

Lisa Zamberlan : University of New South Wales, Australia

ABSTRACT

Joseph Holtzman is an interior design practitioner and the former editor-in-chief of the interior design journal nest (26 issues printed from Fall 1997-Winter 2003/2004). Holtzman's highly embellished interiors readdress prevailing assumptions regarding authenticity and the socio-cultural pleasure of decorated environments. This paper evaluates the private residence of Joseph Holtzman as an interior liberated from traditional concepts of appropriate discretion. By subsuming the perimeter planes and surfaces with voluble expressions of material excess, Holtzman's residence challenges the understanding of interior design as a mannerly expression of built form. In foregrounding rather than problematising the connotations of artifice and embellishment, Holtzman's work explores qualities of decoration that provoke, subvert, and renegotiate understandings of propriety in contemporary interior design practice.

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Holtzman's dual roles of publishing editor and design practitioner provide a rare example of a practice that operates between the practicalities of built work and reflective, experimental critique. Through the *nest* publication, Holtzman critically explored the social role of decoration in the representation of appearances and contested traditional assumptions concerning material and structural integrity in interior design practice. *Nest* represented Holtzman's erudite editorial stance, which he described as a preoccupation with the presentation of atmosphere and surface.¹ This sentiment belies the rigour with which Holtzman experiments with interior design in ways that can be perceived as oppositional to conventional notions of authenticity in practice. Joseph Holtzman's work is a particularly rich case study as few contemporary practitioners have so explicitly expressed a position that interrogates the role of decoration as a catalyst to contemporary debate on the role and identity of the discipline.

Steven Heller in *Print* magazine describes Holtzman's work as consisting of design and content that are deliberately dissonant, aimed at provoking established and complacent expectations. Heller describes *nest* as both a 'cacophony of visual excess' and an 'off-kilter *National Geographic* of shelter magazines.'² Holtzman's perspective on current practice is described by Heller as a critical assessment of the declining standards of contemporary interior design.³ Rem Koolhaas, architect and Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design at Harvard Graduate School of Design claims '*nest* represents an aggressive, deliberate throw back to content modulated with a perfectly honed contemporary pitch.'⁴ *Blueprint* magazine describes the publication as 'all over the stylistic map'⁵ and restates Holtzman's mandate that 'we're not *Wallpaper** (magazine). It's more subtle – not naked people but sexiness inherent in the very notion of being indoors.'⁶ Edward Mitchell, architectural critic at Yale University, in "Lust for Lifestyle" claims interior design is 'better equipped to actualise the modern as the perpetually new' and credits Holtzman as critically provocative and uncompromising in his reverence for surface in contemporary interior design.⁷ Holtzman's work in

practice was included in the Cooper Hewitt National Design Triennial: *Inside Design Now* in 2003 as a 'current or emerging leader in design practice' within the 'architecture, object and interiors' category. In a review of Holtzman's work, Susan Yelavich, Associate Professor of Art and Design Studies at Parsons The New School for Design describes his work as 'a lavish riposte to the modern dismissal of artifice.'⁸ In the enlivened interiors of his private Manhattan residence, Holtzman elaborates a definition of decoration that challenges marginalised notions of artifice and identity of design practice in a space explicitly subsumed by the pleasure of appearances.



Above left
Figure 1: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Apartment, *nest*, Fall 1998, copyright Estate of Evelyn Hofer.

Above right top
Figure 2: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Apartment, *nest*, Fall 1998, copyright Estate of Evelyn Hofer.

Above right bottom
Figure 3: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Apartment, *nest*, Fall 1998, copyright Estate of Evelyn Hofer.



MANHATTAN APARTMENT, 1998

Joseph Holtzman's *Manhattan Apartment* was first published in the Fall 1998 issue of *nest* in "Yes, I too married a decorator ...," accompanied by text by his partner, writer Carl Skoggard.⁹ In this private residence, Holtzman employs an extravagant emphasis on pattern as a strategy with which to question assumptions about the discretion of interior design's response to its built parameters. In the *Manhattan Apartment*, Holtzman establishes a careful assembly of embellished objects and various surface treatments to effect a sense of abundance and dimensionality. Hand painted circular motifs in numerous, gridded patterns extend across the perimeter planes while an excess of decorative objects dominates the small volume. An exploration of geometric patterning in various scales, and material and colour finishes, governs the selection of objects and surfaces in the rooms and provides a thematic within the space that suggests the designer's preoccupation with graphic explorations of spatial ordering.



In the dining room, a hand painted circular pattern in a black and white motif dominates the vertical timber wall panelling (Figure 1). The ceiling treatment is a grid of square patterning in hand finished yellow and black paintwork. Doorframes and architraves are articulated in a bright blue complement to the yellow used in the ceiling. The walls adjacent to the door between the living and dining rooms are flanked with hangings and decorative objects, each bearing a form of geometric patterning in various colour and material expressions (Figure 2). In the living room, the white base walls are striped with wide turquoise beeswax bands, each band outlined by a thin red line (Figure 3). Across the ceiling, a white base is sparsely divided by wide black bands of paintwork, rounded at each end, that finish just before the junction of the wall and ceiling, offering an illusion of depth to the flat plane. On the perimeter walls are artworks by Kandinsky, Dubuffet, and Picasso. Lining one wall, above the picture rail, is a single row of books with spines positioned vertically and facing into the room. The pattern created by the book spines mimics the wider stripes that define

the wall planes (Figure 4). Alongside a large painting by Rothko is a wall hanging comprised of three rows of hand blown multicoloured glass discs overlaid on one of the turquoise bands. This echoes the circular motif elaborated in the dining room. Adjacent to the wall hanging, a venetian blind, decorated with a black square and a series of turquoise dots, covers the window (Figure 4). The referencing of both the linear and the circular motif in various representations and in two and three dimensions builds and layers a language of the interior via the surfaces and decorative objects in the rooms. The surface treatments and objects in the *Manhattan Apartment* extend the exploration of the representative potential of surface by describing alternate representations of thematic patterning. The overall effect of the contrasting examples in various scales, colours and textures in the room arrangement is a densely patterned composition of two-dimensional geometries in three-dimensional relief.

The thematic of spatial geometry 'bounds' the decoration within a language that is reiterated in carefully constructed visual fields across the wall surfaces and encompasses the objects of the living space. The décor in the living room represents a diverse mix of furniture pieces and objects from various eras, cultures and decorative styles. The seating arrangement, described in the article as the 'conversation pit'¹⁰ features a three-seat lounge upholstered in a gridded fabric interspersed with off-white, painted timber-grain-effect panels and midnight blue velvet armrests (Figure 3). Two textured and patterned rust-coloured throws cover the lounge, facing a pair of cobalt blue armchairs and a Mies van der Rohe ottoman, re-covered in red-and-white-check patterned upholstery. The blue, red and white in the seating echo the palette of the wall finish. The occasional furniture and artefacts in the living room space consist of a combination of artworks, antiques, and found objects. A Louis XVI gilt-wood chair upholstered in silk brocade from the 1770s sits adjacent to a 'homemade'¹¹ occasional table designed by Holtzman (Figure 4). On the table sits a bronze Matisse sculpture. A concert grand piano is personalised with a silk taffeta dust ruffle (Figure 5). Framing the piano, a Persian carpet (c. 1600) hung on the wall is 'accessorised'¹² by a bronze Picasso sculpture on an occasional table in front. The editorial caption describing these spaces extends the commentary on orthodoxies of design practice: 'In a well planned room, there is always one feature toward which the eye is unfailingly drawn.'¹³ In addition to the expression of spatial geometry, the extent of the accumulation of elements in each room infers that the traditional assumption of decoration as a well-mannered articulation of built form is no longer relevant.

In the accompanying text, Skoggard comments on the effect of the layered occupation of the space: 'now I'm starting to think that white walls look bleached, naked. They just stand there embarrassed not knowing what to do. I do like our busy, full time walls.'¹⁴ Holtzman's exploration of authenticity through artifice in decoration is pursued in this private residence as he defines decoration as 'supposedly ... deferential, content to serve something more important than itself. A flatterer.'¹⁵ Suggesting the role of decoration is in contestation of traditional perspectives of architectural authority and conceptions of appropriate restraint, Holtzman's decoration is a subversive practice.

Opposite left

Figure 4: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Apartment, nest, Fall 1998, copyright Estate of Evelyn Hofer.

Opposite right

Figure 5: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Apartment, nest, Fall 1998, copyright Estate of Evelyn Hofer.

DECORATION IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Decoration holds a contested position in built environment scholarship. Largely marginalised by Modernist claims of material and structural integrity, decoration is often sidelined as the most temporal and superficial of built environment practices; providing ambience, but superfluous to authentic built practice. An understanding that decoration and interior design merely make built space fashionable underscores their dismissal in scholarship.¹⁶ Holtzman's practice challenges conceptions of decoration in interior design as gratuitous embellishment, and demonstrates how a reconsideration of the term makes new insights available for both contemporary practice and scholarship in interior design.

Ironically, it is from the scholarship of contemporary architecture that the current status of decoration is most clearly articulated. In 2006, *Decoration*, published by 306090 Inc. and supported by Princeton University and the National Endowment for the Arts, reviewed the role of decoration in scholarship and practice.¹⁷ According to the editors, Emily Abruzzo and Jonathan Soloman, decoration is the 'most loaded'¹⁸ term in architectural discourse, equally pivotal in debates of architectural history and contested as auxiliary in terms of its practical objectives. Architects Paul Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki and David Lewis, in the preface to the collection of essays, define decoration as a site in which the exploration of cultural politics occurs, encompassing disputes that resonate across the arenas of the identity of the discipline, society, and culture. For these writers, decoration provokes debates in sexual and gender politics regarding aesthetic and theoretical concerns and represents the contested occupational territories of built environment practices.¹⁹ By addressing the specific irritation that decoration presents to contemporary built environment scholarship, the authors posit that because decoration is considered a borderline practice it is vital to contemporary scholarship: 'Decoration exists in the gaps between things; at contested border lines, of material assemblies as well as disciplines, classes and genders. Inevitably, in a discussion on decoration, one gets caught in protracted border disputes.'²⁰

In recent years, the scholarship of Adjunct Professor Joel Sanders of Yale University and UCLA PhD candidate and practising architect Alexandra Loew has specifically engaged with the marginalised status of decoration. Their contributions to the contested position that decoration poses to design scholarship foregrounds the possibilities of decoration in practice. While Sanders redefines the social role of the decorator, Loew offers a reconsideration of the role of decoration in relation to architecture. In both perspectives, artifice is the concept through which decoration is legitimised as particularly relevant to built environment scholarship. Both arguments are significant in current debates as they initiate discussions that interrogate the most maligned understandings of decoration and thereby reframe its impact for contemporary interior design scholarship and practice.

Decoration is described by Sanders as a form of make believe, a pretence that the spaces we invest in and the image they represent provide a mirror to the authentic self.²¹ He suggests that

the fabrication and disclosure of a desired identity, personal or communal, is represented in a particular image through decoration. Sanders' argument is that the specific purpose of decoration is the application of artifice in order to fashion a personality.²² The role of the decorator, from this perspective, is to facilitate that expression. That is, personality, as an expression of good taste and aesthetic discernment, can be purchased. Further, Sanders argues that decoration requires a form of suspended disbelief, a belief in the pretence that the representation of interior space is an expression of 'personality',²³ and that it is correlated with the personal identity it proposes. The professionally decorated interior, therefore, is doubly fanciful. The illusion of personality is supplied by the decorator as an interpretation of the desired identity of the occupant. Decorative practice, considered as existing beyond a role of surface embellishment to built form, thereby comes to represent the fantastical through devices of artifice and self-conscious display. The social implication of artifice as a form of caprice is related to both gender and discipline territories. Arguing for a correlation between occupational and gender status, Sanders nominates the long-standing association of femininity with notions of artifice in western cultures as critical in these debates. He suggests the prejudices and territorial disputes between the overlapping design professions can be traced through this history.

Historians Carol Morrow and Anne Massey examine the development of interior design through both the emergence of the professional decorator and socio-cultural elitism and gender politics in western culture. According to the analysis of Morrow and Massey, the history of decoration provides unambiguous evidence of the import of decoration in contemporary interior design practice. These arguments discuss the development of decorative practice particularly in association with design roles according to gender. Morrow, in an analysis of women and Modernity in interior design in Australia between 1920 and 1960,²⁴ claims that interior design was initially referred to as interior decoration on the basis of Thomas Hope's description of practice in *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (1807). According to Hope, interior decoration suggested an historical, decorative and fashionable approach to the production of a tasteful interior of a room.²⁵ Historically, the development of decorative consulting work was patronised by a wealthy clientele and Morrow attests that the first professional decorators were well versed in classical architecture, literature and theory. This patronage provided the occupation with a level of social and cultural status that, along with the establishment of academies of art and architecture, offered practitioners an authoritative voice on matters of design, craftsmanship and all matters of taste.²⁶ Historian Anne Massey claims that the occupation developed from the social circles of wealthy amateurs, who had a belief in their ability to sanction and disseminate advice on good taste with regard to the domestic interior. She notes that women served in these advisory positions during the formative years of professional interior decoration as consultant and confidante in charge of the overall appearance of pre-existing rooms.²⁷

The correlation of the development of decoration in the nineteenth century with issues of gender is twofold. Both Morrow and Massey claim that the relationship of decoration with gender was

influential in the diminished status of decoration. Morrow notes that women became both the dominant consumers and the professional consultants in charge of defining interior space. While the merchants of domestic decorative products prospered during this time of commercialisation, the rise of the interior decorator as consultant emerged, in effect, due to product saturation and mass consumption.²⁸ In a critical response to the saturated marketplace, and an assumed consumer ignorance relating to furnishing the domestic interior, decorating manuals emerged offering instruction on decoration. Compelling members of the cultural elite was the need to distinguish, among the ill-conceived confusion of historic styles, the proper application of decorative principles in good taste. Publications such as *The Decoration of Houses* (1898) by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman and *The House in Good Taste* by Elsie de Wolfe, first printed in 1913, demarcated the occupation of interior design, along with the consumerist practices surrounding decoration, as the domain of the feminine.²⁹

Both historians nominate gender discrimination against the prevalence of women, such as Wharton and de Wolfe, in interior design and their perceived preference for stylistic approaches to decoration, as the impetus for a diminished credibility of the profession in built environment practice and scholarship. The categorisation of decoration as distinct from architecture in nineteenth century social history, along with its nomination as a particularly feminine pursuit, provides a background for understanding the marginalisation of decoration in contemporary interior design. Extending the arguments of Morrow and Massey, Sanders cites the continuing influence of Modernity on the diminished status of decoration and the correlation of gender issues to ornament and artifice through the Modern aesthetic in the early twentieth century. The International building style, which literally eradicated the distinction between the inside and outside of architecture, through the development of the transparent curtain wall, is credited by Sanders with simultaneously fortifying the territorial prejudices between architecture and decoration through gender politics. 'Draped with finery and fabrics, the decorated room calls to mind the decorated woman whose allure derives from superficial adornment.'³⁰

Valuing material authenticity over artifice and claiming a derogatory correlation between ornamentation, dress and the feminine, architects in the early twentieth century established a disparity between what was considered of value and what was extraneous to the practice of architecture and the articulation of interior space. Decoration, although distinct from any 'true' or 'proper' value, served a particular social agenda and the occupation became complicit in the representation of taste, as the decorated home was considered a form of self expression of the well-fashioned woman. Accordingly, the field's credibility was diminished by the extension of the association between gender and taste to interior decoration as a transient and temporal practice. Sanders argues 'institutional prejudices and interdisciplinary disputes not only perpetuate curtain wars, they are also symptomatic of our deepest and most ingrained anxieties about the nature of masculinity, femininity and homosexuality – mirroring the broad cultural assumptions that shape the impressions of both disciplines as well as our ideas about the identities of the professionals who practice them.'³¹ According to Sanders, the association of women and gay men with the presentation of a constructed and desired self through decoration is no coincidence when one considers the necessity for a social minority to be adept at fashioning a public façade to attain mainstream acceptance. The social and gender implications of the 'closet' in contemporary western culture is a potent illustration of such a façade.³² It is this correlation of decoration with appearances, ascribing to interior decoration a sense of temporality and therefore a lack of professional and academic legitimacy, that Holtzman explicitly interrogates.

HOLTZMAN AND THE INTERROGATION OF ARTIFICE

The emphasis on pattern in the surfaces and décor of the *Manhattan Apartment* exaggerates the artifice of decoration. In so doing, Holtzman refutes the tradition of form over ornament by foregrounding decoration over the volumes and planes of the spaces. Holtzman's emphasis of the cosmetic nature of the affected surface draws on the decorative as a salacious pleasure, able to operate independently of mandates about authenticity

in Modernist architecture. The decorated surface is thereby driven to explore possibilities of playfulness and gratification in artifice. Instead of surface treatment operating as a discrete embellishment, in this instance it becomes a subversive element in the appearance of the interior: Holtzman inverts the relationship of form and ornament and presents an exploitation of artifice as a material and formal graffiti. Liberated from assumptions that interior design is limited to discrete embellishment, Holtzman's design approach to decoration credibly connects the notions of affectation and fabrication to contemporary practice. His reference to the two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional spatial geometries may be motivated by a desire to legitimise the complex possibilities of surface embellishment in decoration and the potential of decoration to participate in debates on the nature of authentic representation in practice.

The living spaces of the apartment suggest an emphasis on conviviality and generosity in an expression of largesse, rather than a wholesale assault on traditional architectural mandates regarding the dialogue between the built volume, surface embellishments, and decorative artefacts. The design implores rather than assaults the architectural parameters of the built form. In a complex and nuanced dialogue with the decorative objects, the walls are no longer distinguished and divided by surface treatment but are instead built up with layers creating an impression of being compelled forward. Holtzman constructs tiered, internal panoramas with the wall surfaces and projects them forward toward the decorative objects in the room, as if to meet somewhere between two and three dimensions. In labouring and layering the perimeter planes, the room and its contents become the focus, rather than the planes that define its boundaries. The role of decoration is extended in the representation and description of the objects arranged throughout the living room as Holtzman exaggerates the décor to affect, accent and embellish interior space. The language of the surfaces and objects describes a defence of decoration via material abundance. The proliferation and variety of objects and surface treatments in the living spaces, however, belie the meticulous fabrication of this interior through the exploitation of largesse. The collection of artefacts and the manner of embellishment infers a generosity through crafted

visual fields that describe alternate expressions of the geometric thematic. Like clustered arguments and points of debate, what appears to be a visual riot in the interior design, is, in fact, an elaborated and spirited discussion from various perspectives and in various forms via the objects of decoration and surface embellishment.

Like Sanders, academic Alexandra Loew suggests that decoration is involved in self-expression through the pleasure of display. Her argument, however, makes claims for decoration as a form of social transaction. In "Décor, not Decoration," Loew distinguishes the socio-cultural significance of interior ornamentation and embellishment from the physical parameters of architecture altogether.³³ Loew credits Mark Wigley's analysis of the Modernist style in *White Walls, Designer Dresses*³⁴ with elevating the status of decoration to that of a 'supplement: that thing which exposes architecture's lack.'³⁵ Wigley illuminates the embellished, albeit white, surface in Modern architecture as critical to maintaining the illusion of abstraction and structural integrity.³⁶ His nomination of decoration as the device through which Modern architecture appears to be without embellishment, and thereby superior, is an astute articulation of the fashionable mechanisms of the aesthetic. Loew argues, however, that in Wigley's analysis, decoration's influence continues to be 'covert'³⁷ in nature, limited to the surface and essentially confined to a role of galvanising the aesthetic imperatives of modern architecture. The strategic role of the decorated surface is advanced in status; however, the very parameters of decorative practice, argues Loew, are not interrogated. Loew suggests that in discussing decoration as mere embellishment of the architectural surface the debate is rendered circular, confining discussions to the bounds of architecture without defining new perspectives of practice.³⁸

Loew shifts the emphasis from the surface of architecture entirely and argues that the most critically provocative site for debate in design discourse and practice lies in the objects and artefacts of the domestic décor. Loew's argument translates what is considered as typically derogatory terminology and reinterprets it to empower the metaphorical connection between overt femininity and décor as fashionable expression. Decorative



photograph Jason Schmidt



Opposite

Figure 6: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Kitchen Wars, nest, Winter 1999/2000, copyright Jason Schmidt.

Above

Figure 7: Joseph Holtzman, Manhattan Kitchen Wars, nest, Winter 1999/2000, copyright permission Wouter Dolk.

practice, according to Loew, operates beyond the control of the authorities and methodologies that dominate architecture. Extending traditional connections of domesticity and decorative practice to the feminine, she alludes to the Modernist refutation of ornament and embellishment as akin to the refutation of feminine sexuality. Loew connects the decorative to the salacious by using metaphors connected to playful and flirtatious engagements: '... décor is more like a whore in its modus operandi: no entanglements only flirtations ... Like the prostitute, décor has transactional mechanisms that allow it to provide satisfaction while remaining independent to the laws of truth and honesty to which architects so dutifully subscribe.'³⁹ Drawing on the works of Benjamin and Baudelaire, Loew's conflation of décor with prostitution challenges prevailing assumptions of the social implications of each. Both practices, suggests Loew, are commodious and transactional in nature and draw on social relations outside accepted norms. Further, both elicit artifice as a method of practice and both practices are driven by gratification and excess.⁴⁰

According to Loew, the purpose of décor is to ensure a sense of stylishness and to guard against boredom; 'it aims to be plausible, not authentic; to delight, not to impress.'⁴¹ I argue it is precisely this understanding of décor that represents the particular strength for interior design that, through the decorative aspects of practice, operates as a specialist discipline distinct from architecture. In the context of built environment discourse, Loew's argument is significant particularly because it dispenses with debates concerning intellectual legitimacy and foregrounds artifice as critically germane in contemporary debates of practice. Relieved of the duty of authenticity that continues to be valued in contemporary debates surrounding some built environment practices, decoration gains credence as an aspect of artifice. From this perspective, the cosmetic nature of decoration reclaims the possibilities inferred in the notions of illusion, pretence and the fantastical. The critical writings of Loew and Sanders are central to the evaluation of contemporary interior design precisely because they give new credence to notions of artifice and the gendered terms in which interior design is understood in built environment scholarship. Interrogated through the living spaces of Holtzman's private residence, these debates create new possibilities for practice and criticism in interior design scholarship arising from the integration of the themes of decoration and artifice as being pertinent, rather than pejorative.

Commenting on Holtzman's decorative strategy, Carl Skoggard claims, 'that restless talent on easy terms with connoisseurship, the tactful subversion of convention, innocent love of visual violence, delight in odd placement and delayed discovery – all this is familiar and will continue to play itself out before the two of us, a shared entertainment (for good decorators end up surprising themselves as well as others).'⁴² Skoggard describes the aim of Holtzman's design to 'occupy' interiors with decoration. The decorative strategy has artefacts that appear to edge from the centre to meet the coated walls, and inhabit the volume in an elaborate language, suggesting the spatial and contextual possibilities of surface embellishment and the critical potential via immoderation in decoration. Holtzman's emphasis on excessive and luxurious fittings in the apartment challenges conventions that luxury must be restrained. The elaborated living room represents an extension of fashion

theorist Gilles Lipovetsky's description of conspicuous luxury as an immoderate and transparent indulgence⁴³ in order to assert the role of decoration in the social pleasure of appearances. By implication, Holtzman's *Manhattan Apartment* offers a description of interior design practice liberated from concepts of discretion and propriety in relation to architecture and instead proposes that decoration is informed by social-cultural influences on the articulation of the interior. The point Holtzman seems to attest is that decoration that emphasises luxury refutes definitions of interior design that prescribe a demure restraint. Instead, Holtzman offers a lively display that caricatures the association of decoration with status. Moreover, the design challenges expectations that the social role of the decorator is to know their place.

MANHATTAN KITCHEN WARS 1999/2000

A year after *nest* published *Manhattan Apartment*,⁴⁴ Holtzman provided a publication of the apartment's kitchen in *Manhattan Kitchen Wars*. The decorated kitchen space of the apartment represents an even more insistent strategy of gratuitous display. In this account of an interior, Holtzman emphasises his negotiation of alternative viewpoints on the nature of interior design practice, and the reaction it prompts in others; in this case the reaction of his neighbour across the light well. This exchange between the neighbours, represented in text and image, emphasises Holtzman's view of the role of decoration as an expression of luxury that challenges the assumption that utility takes precedence over embellishment.

Holtzman's kitchen is dominated by the voluble and repetitive patterning of the painted circular motif extended throughout the apartment. By exaggerating the cosmetic nature of decoration as applied surface Holtzman offers a strategic deployment of artifice by the layering and exaggeration of pattern to emphasise the possibilities of the surface plane. In the kitchen space, the circular motif is small and regular in size with at least four variations in colour and background (Figure 6). Beyond the cobalt blue architrave that frames the doorway to the kitchen, the painted motif is divided into three horizontal stripes that bound the perimeter of the kitchen space. The layered and

complex colour patterning that is repeated across the surfaces does not accord with the junctions of the joinery. Intermittently, a circle is omitted allowing the background colour to show through and outline the shape of the negative space between. The window glazing is painted over in the same circular motif. Care has been taken when the ornamentation overlaps the frame to stop the hand painted circle on the background layer. This allows light to penetrate and complete the shape. A shelf, painted in accordance with the second colour layer of the space, is suspended above the window holding five plastic decorated cakes, each dotted with artificial berries. The floor is also covered with the circular motif. In contrast to the circular pattern, a loose rug with a rectilinear geometric pattern sits on the floor. The



Above
Figure 8: Joseph Holtzman, *Manhattan Kitchen Wars*, *nest*, Winter 1999/2000, copyright Jason Schmidt.

only surfaces in the room that are not covered in the elaborated pattern are the kitchen appliances and bench tops.

In Holtzman's kitchen, the deocarted surface is foregrounded through excess and repetition; representative of Lipovetsky's conception of luxury as immoderate display, indifferent to utility.⁴⁵ The design offers a deliberate disregard over the expectation that a kitchen is primarily focused on function. Instead, through elaborated visual excess, Holtzman questions assumptions about the value of the appearance of function. An understanding of luxury as representing the antithesis of utility has critical implications for interior design in terms of re-evaluating the capacity and limitations of the discipline. The potential for decoration, therefore, is not only in the representation of the cultural value of appearances but more specifically to reconceive notions of the value of display and alternate conceptions of excess as a measure of fiscal and social freedom.

According to the article, *Kitchen Wars* is titled to represent Holtzman's retort to a sign inscribed with the word 'ugly' appearing in his neighbour's window that faces the kitchen (Figure 7). In retaliation to the sign, Holtzman publishes photographs of both his kitchen and the kitchen across the light well. The image of the view through Holtzman's own decorated window to the neighbouring kitchen is framed in the larger context of the blonde brick wall of the exterior of the building. This image shows Holtzman's painted glazing casting a magnified shadow of the circular pattern onto the wall opposite (Figure 8). The impact of the small hand-painted motif extends across the air space to shroud the façade of the neighbouring building. Decoration as an expression of delight in visual display represented by Lipovetsky's description of largesse takes on new proportions as modest embellishment literally dominates the architectural mass, expressing the critical agency of surface in debates on discipline hierarchy. Crediting Weber, Lipovetsky describes largesse with particular reference to the physical representation of luxury as self-conscious and ostentatious display represented in details of surface innovation.⁴⁶ The 'occupation' of the patterning on the neighbouring wall literally inverts assumptions of volume over surface and architecture over decoration. In the context of interior design practice, this inversion

represents a challenge to the marginalisation of decoration as a subsidiary practice and suggests the possibilities for contemporary interior design if notions of largesse are considered as viable topics in current debates.

The published photographs are accompanied with an editorial plea that nest's readership consider the assumptions underpinning socio-cultural conceptions of taste. Holtzman's editorial comment summarises his reaction to the note in the neighbour's window, 'I was hurt, but then I got a little ugly myself ... can you get over the occupants of a floor to ceiling mahogany veneered kitchen with lacquered brass fittings ... telling me about ugly.'⁴⁷ According to the account and adding insult to injury, the dispute occurred when the decoration of Holtzman's kitchen was only partially completed. The editorial commentary extends the argument beyond the expression of artifice in both kitchen spaces to the more contentious issue regarding the extent to which decoration can be regarded as tasteful. Holtzman's visually cacophonous kitchen is a deliberate dismissal of the appearance of utility, and a critical questioning of the role of decoration in contemporary conceptions of taste and the social boundaries of appropriate display.

The highly elaborated spaces of Holtzman's Manhattan residence challenge the role of decoration as a representation of social propriety. The *Manhattan Apartment* communicates a strategic provocation to traditional hierarchies in built environment practice where decoration is limited to merely well-mannered and discrete expressions of the built shell. To counter this Modernist architectural convention, Holtzman represents decoration as a vehicle of abundance. The articulated living space represents pleasure in the creation of spaces of social conviviality. The exaggerated embellishment raises questions about propriety in decoration and the role of décor in the expression of social status. *Kitchen Wars*, in particular, extends Lipovetsky's description of largesse in terms of immoderation inverting the role of the fabricated surface in the consideration of authentic practice. Holtzman's private residence operates as both a measure of personal and social expression and a theoretical interrogation of the role of appearances in the disciplinary discussions of interior

design. While each space emphasises elements of decoration as an expression of the pleasure of display in the social context of hospitality, Holtzman's strategy can be described as a voluble domination of embellishment to exaggerate the import of decoration in the contemporary debates of practice. Considered in terms of the critique of appearances, Holtzman offers a unique perspective on the contemporary cultural concerns relevant to display and social distinction. Considering the purpose of contemporary interior design practice, Holtzman claims: 'I really think we need to learn to design again, not just assemble objects that look back or are revivals ... I'd like to walk into a room that hits you in the chest.'⁴⁸ The aesthetically rigorous interiors of the *Manhattan Apartment* extend the role of the decoration as possessing a critical agency in the examination of culturally entrenched expressions of identity and in challenging notions of propriety in social expression.

NOTES

1. Julie Iovine, "Rooms with a Caligula-Slept-Here-Look," *The New York Times*, October 7 (1999), http://global.factiva.com/en/arch/print_results.asp (accessed October 6, 2004).
2. Steven Heller, "Shelter Skelter," *Print* 54, no.4, July/August (2000): 63.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Joseph Holtzman, ed. *Every Room Tells a Story: Tales from the Pages of nest Magazine* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), back cover review.
5. Fred Bernstein, "Joseph Holtzman," *Blueprint* 152, July/August (1998): 11.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Edward Mitchell, "Lust for Lifestyle," *Assemblage* 40, December (1999): 83.
8. Susan Yelavich, "Nest Room in Recontres D'Arles," accessed 28 September 2004, http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://www.recontres-arles.com/pages/04festival/04expo_i_roomtx.html&prev=/search%3Fq%3Drencontres%2527arles%2Bnest%2Broom%2Bjoseph%2Bholtzman%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DX (accessed September 28, 2004).
9. Carl Skoggard, "Yes, I too married a decorator..." *nest* 2 (Fall 1998), 106-115.
10. *Ibid.*, 106.
11. *Ibid.*, 108.
12. *Ibid.*, 109.
13. *Ibid.*, 110.
14. *Ibid.*, 114.
15. Holtzman, ed., *Every Room Tells a Story*, 106.
16. Lisa Zamberlan, "Playing Up: The Role of Decoration in the Re-conceptualisation of Interior Design," *Design Principles and Practices: An*

International Journal vol 3, no.3 (2009): 1.

17. Emily Abruzzo and Jonathan Solomon, eds. *Decoration* 10 (New York: 306090 Inc, 2006).
18. *Ibid.*, 18.
19. David Lewis, Paul Lewis and Marc Tsurumaki, "Forward: Decorative Dilemmas," in *Decoration* 10, eds. Emily Abruzzo, and Jonathan Solomon (New York: 306090 Inc, 2006) 20.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Joel Sanders, "Curtain Wars," *Harvard Design Magazine* 16 (Winter/Spring 2002), accessed August 31, 2007, <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/research/publications/hdm//back/16sanders.html>
22. *Ibid.*, np.
23. *Ibid.*, np.
24. Carol Morrow, "Women and Modernity in Interior Design: A legacy of design in Sydney, Australia 1920s-1960s," (PhD Thesis, Faculty of the Built Environment, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2005).
25. *Ibid.*, 83.
26. *Ibid.*, 84.
27. Anne Massey, *Interior Design of the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 123.
28. Morrow, "Women and Modernity in Interior Design," 88.
29. Massey, *Interior Design of the Twentieth Century*, 125.
30. Sanders, "Curtain Wars," np.
31. *Ibid.*, np.
32. *Ibid.*, np.
33. Alexandra Loew, "Décor, not Decoration," in *Decoration* 10, eds. Emily Abruzzo and Jonathan Solomon (New York: 306090 Inc, 2006), 77-79.
34. Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).
35. Loew, "Décor, not Decoration," 77.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, 78.
42. Skoggard, "Yes, I too married a decorator..." 114.
43. Gilles Lipovetski, *The Empire of Fashion* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1994), 45.
44. Holtzman, ed., *Every Room Tells a Story*, 86.
45. Lipovetski, *The Empire of Fashion*, 45.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Holtzman, ed., *Every Room Tells a Story*, 87.
48. Heller, "Shelter Skelter," 62.