

# Maharam Introduces Amulet, Monsoon, Mela, Mandala, and Zenith by Sonnhild Kestler

This spring, Maharam is proud to introduce a suite of three textiles and two rugs designed by Sonnhild Kestler in collaboration with the Maharam Design Studio.

Sonnhild Kestler is a Zürich-based textile designer known for her ability to synthesize a range of folkloric and traditional motifs into a distinct pattern language emphasizing dynamic compositions, vibrant color, and ornate graphics. Under her own label, S.K. Hand-Druck, Kestler has been designing a range of hand-screen printed textiles for interiors as well as home and fashion accessories since 1996.

Influenced by her extensive travels and collection of everyday cultural artifacts, Kestler's work references a range of traditional arts throughout Eastern Europe, Southeast and Central Asia, North Africa, South America, and the Middle East including folklore, religious cult imagery, children's books, and vintage textiles which Kestler exalts for their everyday production and use. Kestler says: "The simple fact that people aren't schooled in these traditional crafts I have found very exciting because there is so much more human soul or feeling to them that way. Rather than being overly designed, the objects are somehow charged with meaning that people respond to." For Kestler, textiles are particularly well-suited to this form of expression: "A printed fabric doesn't have the gravitas of an artwork, it thrives on a certain lightness. Art, on the contrary, forces you to say what you think in a serious way that I find to be too much. I like cloth to fall to pieces—for it to be used and to be lived with. I like that textiles have a limited shelf life."

Employing a unique atelier way of working, each pattern begins with paper cutouts that are handpainted in a distinctive palette of mixed gouache and placed in layered arrangement before being translated to silkscreen. Working without a computer, Kestler often uses mirrors to experiment with repetition and composition by hand. According to Kestler, this ritualized and hands-on approach affords dexterous expression while capturing the unique, improvisational atmosphere in which each design was created. She says: "If I were to bring an old design into a new collection everyone would notice right away that it's from a different time and doesn't stand for the present. The present always stands for what I have to say and what drives me right now—which is something I have to discover for myself first." Through this process, references culled from diverse sources pass through a singular filter of color, scale, and simplicity as they are concentrated into the boldly stylized iconography that Kestler refers to as her "handwriting." As described by Mary Murphy, Maharam's Senior Vice President of Design: "Sonnhild is so authentic in her design approach and you can see her hand in everything she does."

Kestler's pattern language is seen in three new upholstery textiles, Amulet, Monsoon, and Mela, which are densely constructed of fine cotton yarn for incomparable color saturation and graphic clarity. Offering two variations of a stripe, Amulet's design began with a study of military epaulet tapestries from 19th century Germany and resulted in an Alpine twist on traditional teardrop motifs modernized through matte simplicity and bold scale. Monsoon's granular vertical stripes are spliced and blended in nuanced gradation to reference a vintage photograph of the sky. Both based on original designs for S.K. Hand-Druck, Amulet's pattern was meticulously translated from a hand-printed silk scarf. In complementary palettes emphasizing Kestler's signature twists on primaries, both textiles incorporate shades of tomato, azure, jade, buttercream, daffodil, and bronze found in the original silkscreens. Mela, the pinnacle of Kestler's distinctive symbolism, incorporates references ranging from botanical, geometric, figurative, architectural, and spiritual across a large, twenty-eight-inch repeat comprising six weft colors. Through its intricately blended palette, reduced forms, and large areas of open ground, Mela modernizes these ornamental references while retaining Kestler's signature patterning: "It is really important for me that I am not just copying these cultures but rather distilling them into my own language—that my work continues to revolve around what are, for me, universal questions that I've been rethinking for years."

Although the Swiss Federal Office of Culture recognized her work with a 2010 Grand Prix Design Award for lifetime achievement, Sonnhild Kestler is virtually unknown in North America. Her first collection with Maharam launched in 2008 with Folklore (2008), followed by Alpine Stripe (2009) and Painted Stripe (2009), which are now held in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. The Maharam Design Studio's collaboration with Kestler arose organically from a shared interest in unique pattern languages and international textile traditions. According to Mary Murphy, the impetus for expanding the collaboration was a recent visit to Kestler's

studio in Zürich: “I visited Sonnhild a few years ago and was reminded of her rich visual language. Her studio was full of textiles and objects she had collected during a recent trip to India. Seeing the proliferation of her own wonderful print patterns and a new interest in rug design, I felt it was the right time to reintroduce her to our audience. The industry was in the midst of a love affair with plain fabrics, and I thought her design sense would provide some much-needed variety.”

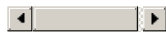
In addition to an expanded offering of textiles, this spring marks Kestler’s foray into designing rugs at a commercial scale. After creating several one-off dhurrie constructions for the Zürich-based boutique Thema Selection, it became apparent that this medium offered a new range to Kestler’s highly consistent pattern language. Taking advantage of their larger scale, the designs for Mandala and Zenith concentrate on architectural and decorative references in bold, symmetrical arrangement. Mandala’s design is based on the street temples Kestler encountered during her travels throughout India, while Zenith conveys a mirrored trio of tower and celestial motifs through reduced geometry. A finely handwoven cotton dhurrie construction was chosen to translate the intricate curves of Kestler’s layered compositions, while enabling its abundant palette through a complex interlocking of yarns. In addition to balancing its ornamental references, Zenith’s matte, graphic construction and subtly offset motifs relate closely to the pattern’s development in both silkscreen and applied paper collage. Kestler’s chromatic signature appears in custom-dyed shades of jade, cornflower, petal, ink, onyx, iris, and buttercream. Offered in one set size—roughly 8' x 10', the rugs are handwoven by a socially and environmentally responsible resource based in India.

### **About Sonnhild Kestler**

Sonnhild Kestler (b. 1963, Germany) is a textile designer and hand-screen printer who graduated from Zürich University of the Arts and now lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland. Her work emphasizes dynamic pattern compositions, vibrant color, and ornate graphics. Along with textiles for interiors, Kestler creates home and fashion accessories under her own label, S.K. Hand-Druck, which is carried by her shop within the Swiss boutique Thema Selection. In 2010 she was awarded the Grand Prix Design Award for lifetime achievement by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture. A Maharam collaborator since 2006, her textiles Folklore, Alpine Stripe, and Painted Stripe are currently held in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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