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JUNE 2015

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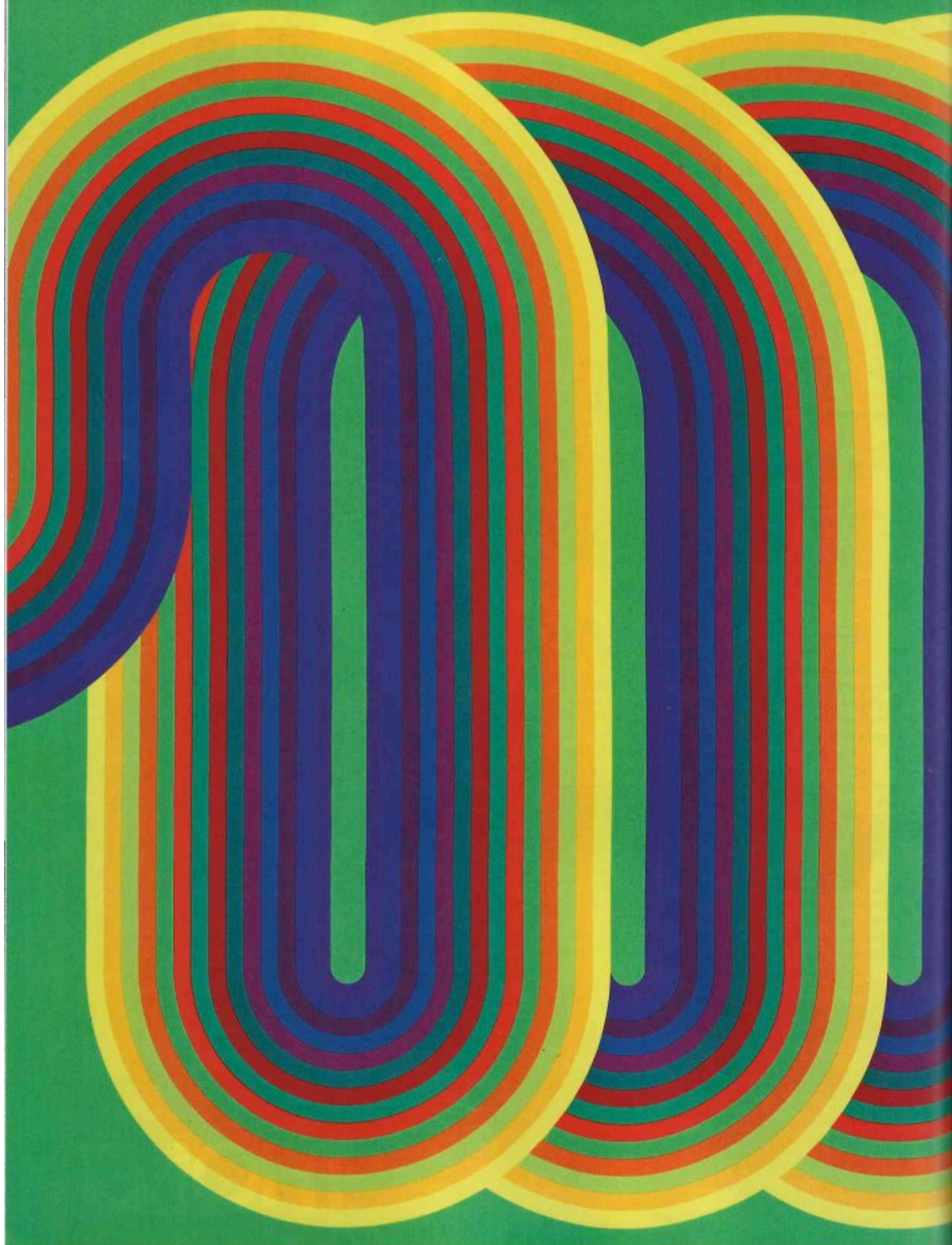


LIMITED EDITION COVER
BY JULIO LE PARC



*Ma longue marche
Julio Le Parc*

Art



Colour by numbers

In the name of the *carré*, French artist Julio Le Parc
and Hermès' expert silk printers have fun with 14 hues

PORTRAIT: JEAN-NOËL LEBLANC-BONTEMPS



THIS PAGE, JULIO LE PARC
AT HIS STUDIO NEAR PARIS.
THE ARTIST HAS REWORKED
HIS 1970S *LA LONGUE
MARCHE* SERIES TO CREATE
LIMITED-EDITION SCARVES
FOR HERMÈS ÉDITEUR.
OPPOSITE, HIS 'SERIES 4, THEME 2'
SCARF DESIGN FROM THE
HERMÈS COLLECTION, KNOWN
AS 'VARIATIONS AUTOUR DE
LA LONGUE MARCHE'.



LEFT, LE PARC'S WORK INCLUDES SCREEN PRINTS, SUCH AS THE ONDES SERIES, 1974, AS WELL AS SCULPTURES, SUCH AS THIS ENSEMBLE VOLUME-COULEUR, 1971-1975, DISPLAYED AT THE GALERIE BUGADA & CARNEL IN PARIS IN 2011

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTIN ARCYROGLO
OPPOSITE, 'VARIATIONS AUTOUR DE LA LONGUE MARCHE' SILK SCARF COLLECTION AT HERMÈS' TEXTILE PRINTING WORKSHOP IN LYON
PHOTOGRAPHY: TADZIO

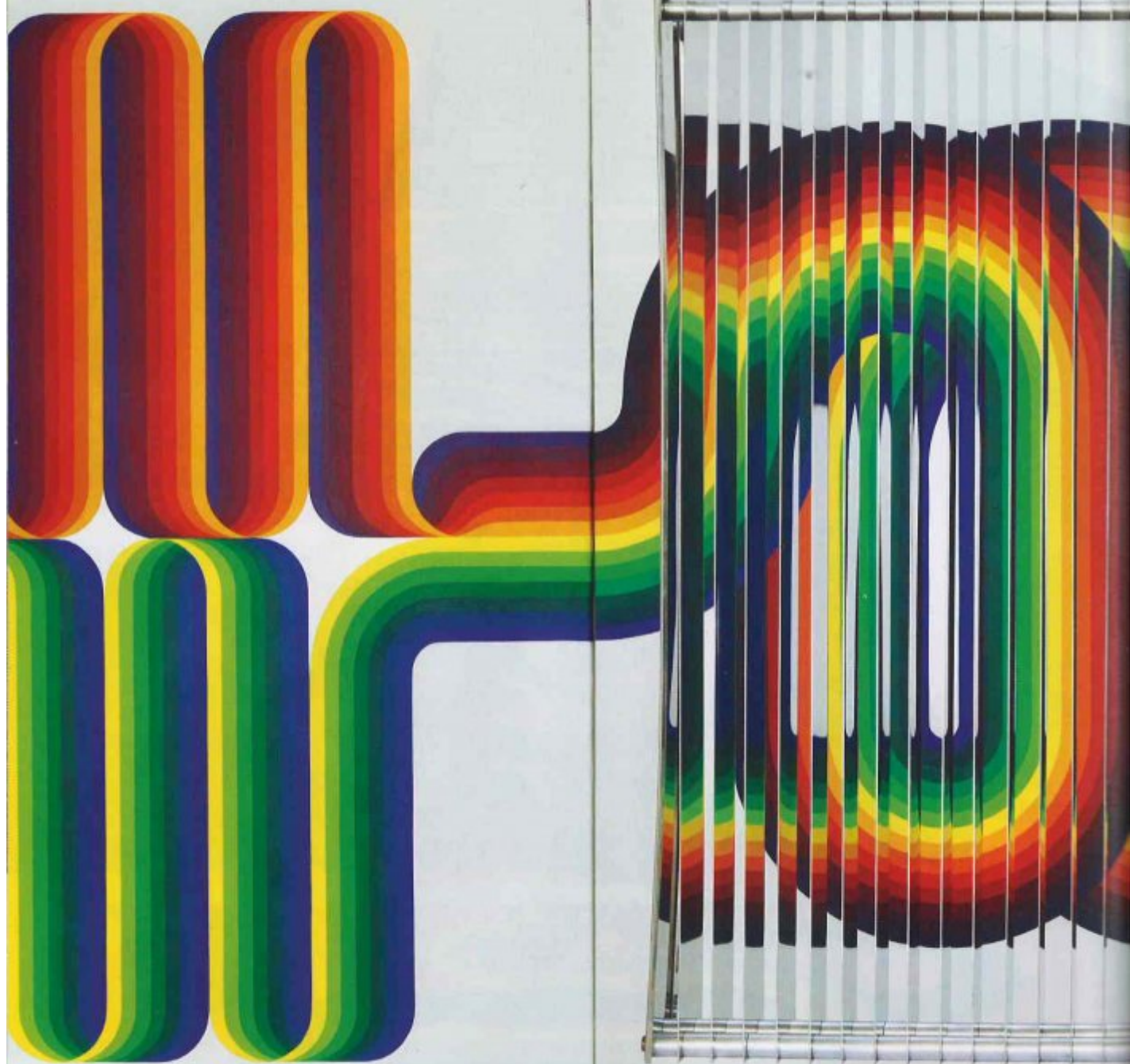
Pierre-Alexis Dumas was trembling with impatience as he and his family walked out of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris after seeing Julio Le Parc's solo exhibition in 2013. 'I was thinking, I have to meet him,' he recalls. Dumas, the artistic director of Hermès (and a member of the founding family) had a specific reason in mind. A few years earlier, in 2008, he had launched a project called Hermès Éditeur, producing rare collections of the house's iconic silk scarves in

conjunction with renowned contemporary artists. 'I dreamed of collaborating with artists on limited editions,' he explains. 'I wanted to push printers to their limits and to make a scarf where you could stop and think: wow, this is not an image on silk, where does it come from, how is it printed? I wanted something spectacular, exquisite, challenging, that would awaken curiosity and awareness of the art of printing silk.'

Dumas' grandfather introduced silk scarves at Hermès in 1937, and Pierre-Alexis took over the silk collection in 2002. He says these *carrés* have always been a bit of a family obsession: 'I grew up surrounded by people I loved - my father, my grandfather - talking about whether an image could fit a square, or how to activate movement in a square, or how to manage colour and textile. I liked it as a child.'

Each Hermès Éditeur edition takes two years to realise, and the latest collection numbers 60 unique >>





THE STEEL AND ALUMINIUM CLOISON À LAMES
RÉFLÉCHISSANTES, 1966, DISPLAYED IN FRONT
OF SOME OF THE PANELS OF THE ORIGINAL
LA LONGUE MARCHE WORK, CREATED IN 1974-75
PHOTOGRAPHY:
JEAN-NOËL LEBLANC BONTEMPS





pieces in all. The project's first iteration, in 2008, was based on works by the late Josef Albers. That was followed with editions by living artists, Daniel Buren in 2010 and Hiroshi Sugimoto in 2012. When Dumas entered the Palais de Tokyo show and saw Le Parc's work with colour, he immediately knew that the artist should design the fourth edition. 'He is a great master of abstraction and colour,' Dumas says, 'of using colour to enter the language of our emotions.'

Born in Argentina in 1928, Le Parc studied art at the School of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires, where one of his professors was Lucio Fontana. He moved to Paris in 1958 and was a precursor of movements including light art, kinetic art, and op art, as well as a founding member of the GRAV (Visual Arts Research Group). Le Parc was politically active, too; his involvement in the civil unrest of May 1968 earned him a five-month expulsion from France. Fascinated with colour, in 1959 he chose 14 colours of the prism he felt represented all the possible variations of chromatic mixtures, and has restricted himself to this palette ever since. He applies colour using pre-determined systems, repetition and geometry. Though his rules are strict, they permit him nearly unlimited combinations, and he takes particular delight in creating effects that surprise the eye.

Le Parc himself practically disappeared from the public eye when kinetic art fell out of favour in the 1970s – though he never stopped working. His show at Palais de Tokyo was something of a resurrection. *L'Express* magazine wrote in its review that the octogenarian's creations had 'kept all their freshness, all their poetry.' His work was later shown at the Grand Palais and the Serpentine Gallery in London.

Several weeks after going to the Palais de Tokyo exhibition, Dumas visited the artist at his family home and studio in the Paris suburb of Cachan, a vast, light-filled, industrial space around a leafy courtyard. There was a chance that Le Parc might say no to collaborating

with Hermès. In 1972, he refused an invitation to show a retrospective of his work at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, after flipping a coin. But the two hit it off right away. Le Parc, who at age 86 still has great panache and a sense of mischief (it's easy to imagine him as a provocateur in earlier years), says it was a 'coup de foudre', or love at first sight.

The two men spent hours looking through the artist's paintings and archives, searching for the best work to adapt to silk. In fact, Dumas already knew what work he wanted for Hermès Éditeur. 'I was thinking of *La Longue Marche* but didn't dare ask,' he admits. Fortunately, when it came up, Le Parc agreed.

The artist created *La Longue Marche*, a monumental, horizontal work of ten, two sq m panels, in 1974-75. His standard 14 colours, lined up in parallel bands on a white background, enter each frame from the right or the left and exit again on the other side, meandering onto the adjacent canvas, weaving and twisting into diverse shapes, forming a whole new composition in each square. Le Parc created ten different panels, but he could have gone on to infinity. 'The title worked well,' he says. 'It's a long, open-ended progression with stages.'

For Hermès Éditeur, he opted to research new variations rather than simply copying the original work. He once estimated it would take him 150 years to paint all the variations of his 14 colours in gouache, but the frame-printing process gave him a much bigger sandbox to play in. Dumas already knew what potential his atelier could offer. 'The strength of silk printing is in the permutation of colours,' he says. 'Once we chose *La Longue Marche*, I knew we would really have fun.'

Le Parc riffed off six of the square paintings in *La Longue Marche*, plus three 'non-colours', black, white and grey, ultimately coming up with ten series of six motifs. The first series is true to the original work. Another is similar, but with backgrounds that vary from light to dark grey. In other series, the parallel strips of colour change position, or become black and white bands on solid coloured backgrounds. The ninth series is all black and white, as is the tenth, but with the lines drawn very fine.

There was a particular challenge to Le Parc's designs, a similar one that Hermès had come across with Josef Albers. Le Parc's separate colours butt up against each other, without lines of separation. This effect is difficult to achieve on silk, since the ink tends to bleed. Rather than using the traditional 'seri' method, creating an outline first as a natural barrier, these scarves would require a technique called 'edge to edge' printing. Applied directly, at a bit of a distance, the colours spread and just touch each other without fusing. Mass production would be impossible, since each scarf requires enormous time and attention. 'It's diabolical,' Dumas says. 'But I mean that in a good way.'

Dumas says he has no idea who the next artist for Hermès Éditeur will be. He claims he has no wish list, but knows instinctively when he comes across the right person. 'I hope in 20 years we'll look at all the different editions and say it's like a literary collection, novels with their individual expressions that can stand next to each other,' he says. And he adds with a smile, 'This is my own personal *longue marche*.' ★

The entire edition of 60 scarves debuts at the Museum der Kulturen in Basel during Art Basel (15-28 June), and will be available to buy at Hermès' online gallery from 10 June.

The French house has also co-published a book on the work. editeur-en.hermes.com; julioleparc.org



TOP: 'THEME 4, SERIES 4' SILK SCARF, €7,000, BY JULIO LE PARC, FOR HERMÈS ÉDITEUR ABOVE: OUR LIMITED-EDITION COVER (FOR SUBSCRIBERS, SEE WALLPAPER.COM) AND NEWSSTAND COVER FEATURE, RESPECTIVELY. A REPRODUCTION OF LE PARC'S 'SERIES 4, THEME 3' SCARF DESIGN AND ELEMENTS FROM ONE OF HIS SCULPTURES, AS SEEN PAGE 096



COLOUR VARIATIONS IN THE
'VARIATIONS AUTOUR DE
LA LONGUE MARCHE' SERIES
PHOTOGRAPHY:
JEAN-NOËL LEBLANC-BORTEMPS