



This page: Blithfield & Co sells office storage covered in Peggy Angus designs. Shown here are magazine files (£24.68), box files (£29.38) and concertina files (£32.90) in various colourways of 'Small Damask', 'Oakleaves' and 'Small Diamonds'. Opposite: also from Blithfield & Co, the Peggy Angus wallpapers featured (clockwise from top left) are: aqua 'Beasties', £37.60; blue 'Persian Leaf', £37.60; grey 'Damask', £37.60; pink 'Small Damask', £47 per 10m roll; and lime 'Small Damask', £47 per 10m roll. The oil painting shown is of Angus's cottage Furlongs, looking towards Lewes. The collaged black-and-white snaps are from the designer's photograph album, showing happy limes among friends, including Bert Kelly, Jim Richards, Eric Ravilious and, climbing a chalk cliff, the architect Serge Chermayeff. Wallpaper prices are per m, unless otherwise stated; all prices include VAT



PEGGY ANGUS'S wallpapers belong with a robust 20th-century decorative tradition. They are zoomorphic, foliate or abstract, and their dense patterns and motifs conjure up folk design. 'Art for all' was her watchword and fervent endeavour, but she died in semi-obscurity in Camden in 1993. Her pioneering tile designs, manufactured by Carter & Co of Poole in the 1950s, had ceased production, and ten years later her London house, plastered with an archive of unique papers and tiles, was demolished by the local council.

One of her admirers, Graham Moss of the Incline Press, has done more than most to secure her reputation, publishing *Art for Life: The Story of Peggy Angus*, a handmade and hand-

printed folio-sized monograph bound in one of her archive papers, with a deck of facsimiles and linocut prints illustrating her very individual practice. The account of her life which it contains evokes a rather remorseless character, for she was naive, loud and unsubtle, rising at worst to bullying, bossy and exhibitionistic. But these proved to be the very traits that powered her radical contribution to British design.

After a childhood spent in Chile, where her father was a railway engineer, the family returned to England and slid slowly into poverty. At 17, immature and badly dressed, Peggy won a coveted scholarship to the RCA, where Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, Eric Ravilious (*WoI* Nov 2002), Enid ▷

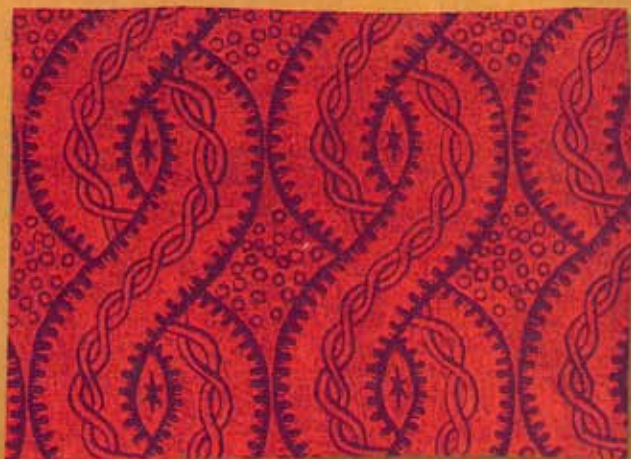
Peggy Angus's linocut designs are also available screen-printed onto linen (£68.15) from Blithfield & Co, including (from top): blue 'Beasties', grey 'Damask', pink 'Beasties', grey 'Persian Leaf' and coral 'Willow'. Price is per m and includes VAT



PAPER TIGER

Peggy Angus, who died 13 years ago in semi-obscure, was a linocut designer of distinction, her wallpapers and tiles displaying a rarely matched ebullience and figurative control. Now, as Angus's work becomes commercially available again, Ruth Guilding reassesses the forceful personality and politically engaged life that drove her radical contribution to British design. Photography: Antony Crolla >

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Marx, Edward Bawden (*Wol* May 2003) and Barnett Freedman were among the intake. Here she met her first obstacle, for female students were not allowed to draw nude male models from life. Assigned to the Design School even though she wanted to paint, she was condemned to a career as a commercial artist or a teacher, but this proved a spur to her future vocation.

She went on filling canvases and sketchbooks with her vigorous, rather folksy pictures, refusing to see a distinction between art and craft, while channelling her mania to create into teaching. Her Labour politics developed a pinkish tinge, and in Russia in 1932 she discovered Constructivist art, whose geometry would later feed into her designs. A short, unhappy marriage to Jim Richards, a fastidious young architect and writer, was emotionally devastating, but the understanding of architecture that she gained from him would also come in useful.

Instead, she took her stability from Furlongs, the unimproved shepherd's cottage that she rented on the Sussex Downs near Lewes. Its primitive sanitation and discomforts were the proper tests of friendship for her guests, she averred. John and Myfanwy Piper, Eric and Tirzah Ravilious, EQ Nicholson (*Wol* May 2000), Olive Cook, Edwin Smith (*Wol* Sept 2005) and Barnett Freedman came again and again, working and sketching and being fed on her gleanings from the land. Once a dead sheep was found and eaten; later she half poisoned Ernö Goldfinger with a stew of deadly mushrooms.

As head of art at North London Collegiate School for Girls Peggy had galvanised the girls to improve their environment, decorating the walls of their school in brightly coloured repeat patterns using lino and potato-print blocks. The architect FRS Yorke saw their potential as tiles to clad the spaces of

modern architecture, and when Carter & Co began producing her designs commercially, she had her first taste of fashionable success. She had printed her tile patterns onto demonstration lengths of lining paper, and now these metamorphosed into wallpapers. The linocut flyer launching her collection in 1960 announced robustly: 'No two prints, even from the same block, are exactly the same.' Her technique was so simple that the colours and even the motifs of the papers, laboriously printed in vinyl emulsion on 22ft rolls, could be tailored to her clients' preferences. The artist Kenneth Rowntree was her first customer for a bespoke paper coloured red and orange, the V&A acquired samples and the Design Centre promoted her papers in London and Glasgow.

Angus's papers are masterpieces of exuberance and figurative control, their dense repeats making a perfect field on which to hang pictures. Anne Dubbs of Blithfield & Co spotted her designs in *Wol* (Sept 2002) and was transfixed. She met Peggy's granddaughter, who had been printing these papers by hand from her Shetlands home, and her feelings were confirmed on first seeing them in a sample book. In 2005 Blithfield & Co began screen-printing some of the cuts from the archive of old lino blocks and papers as wallpapers and linens. Its range now also includes paper-covered boxes and albums, inspired by Peggy's habit of pasting her wallpapers onto any utilitarian or unadorned surface. Or, since some of these papers come by the metre, you could simply do as she would have done: take an old cereal box and make your own ■ *'Art for Life: The Story of Peggy Angus'* (£300) by Carolyn Trant is available in a limited edition of 350 from Incline Press (0161 627 1966). Blithfield & Co can be contacted on 020 7460 6454

'Twist' wallpaper – the colourways shown are pink and red – is available priced £47 from Blithfield & Co. Also shown is a photograph of Peggy Angus eating lunch outside the front door of Furlongs in summer 1984. The price is per m and includes VAT