

MICROSTRUCTURE II

About 20 years ago I began to realize that there is one art in which this fine structure is so pure, so exclusively dealt with, that it has the ability to be a teacher for us. That is the art of carpet making. In a carpet we have something that is concerned almost entirely with pattern, or ornament. There is really nothing else. There is no representation (except in a very limited sense). There is just the geometry and the color of the plane. As I began to enjoy carpets, I realized that the earliest carpets, especially, dealt with this problem with enormous sophistication. And, to a considerable degree, the pattern and ornament are independent of the material. The design of the carpet is essentially made of tiny knots — each knot usually about 1/8 inch by 1/8 inch. Each one is a separate bit of wool, of any color, without reference to the underlying warps and wefts. So it is a pure design made of tiny elements and in which the structure (the design structure, the pure organization of the geometrical arrangement) is the main thing.

I am not the first person to have noticed this. In the 19th century William Morris and his circle were fascinated by carpets and were inspired by them in their craft. In the 20th century a long succession of painters and artists has also struggled with the problem of pure arrangement of color and form.

But none of these artists has really dealt with the microstructure. The connection between small structure and big structure hardly exists in their work. The inspiration for an architect who realizes that the world is made of tiny elements, and that it is the geometry and organization at this tiniest scale that is necessary for the life of buildings, does not yet exist in the work of these artists. Therefore, in trying to find a teacher, I came finally to the very earliest Turkish carpets. It is in these carpets that this problem is most profoundly dealt with.

From A Foreshadowing of 21st Century Art