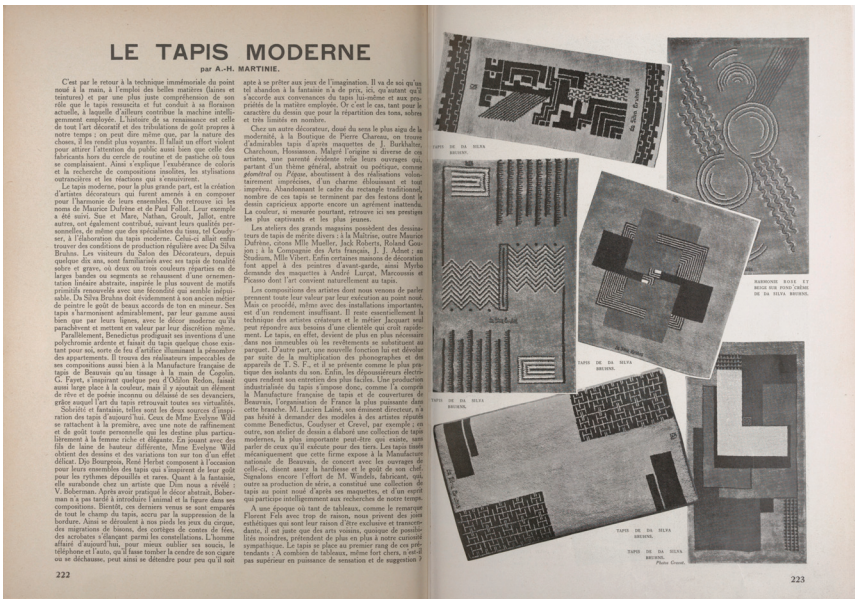
Figure on Ground: Spectatorship and the *Tapis modernes* of Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, 1919–39

Michael Tymkiw
University of Essex, Colchester, UK

During the interwar years, Ivan Da Silva Bruhns became one of France's most celebrated designers of tapis modernes*, or "modern rugs." Despite the limited scholarly attention that Da Silva Bruhns has received, his rugs have long been considered a pinnacle of interwar modernism. However, whereas most writers then and now have largely focused on the modernism of his rugs on a compositional level, this article considers what was quintessentially modern about their mode of addressing spectators. As the essay argues, the modernism of his interwar rugs turned on an evolving relationship between figure and ground—one in which a spectator assumed the role of figure-on-ground who both interrupted and completed the rugs' compositions, as abstract or quasi-abstract pictures underfoot.*

In interwar France, the phrase *tapis moderne* (modern rug) proliferated in periodicals, books, and advertisements, functioning largely as an umbrella term to describe rugs that engaged with the formal vocabularies and ideas of modernism.[1] Like other monikers, the term tapis moderne was highly malleable, used for objects by a diverse array of designers who often did not share the same formal concerns or levels of familiarity with the technical aspects of rug production. Nevertheless, if one had to name a single figure who became the most visible and celebrated maker of tapis modernes, it was unquestionably Ivan Da Silva Bruhns (fig. 1). A Brazilian designer born and raised in France, Da Silva Bruhns created rugs for luxurious homes, major public buildings, and high-profile ocean liners, all of which led him to become the subject of countless articles during the interwar period.[2] Hand-knotted, unusually plush, and typically custom-made, his rugs were cult objects for both wealthy collectors and the prominent interior designers who counted among his earliest champions and clients.



LE TAPIS MODERNE

par A.-H. MARTINIE.

C'est par le retour à la technique immémoriale du point noué à la main, à l'emploi des belles matières (laines et teintures) et par une plus juste compréhension de son rôle que le tapis renaissita et fut conduit à sa floraison actuelle, à laquelle d'ailleurs contribue la machine intelligemment employée. L'histoire de sa renaissance est celle de tout l'art décoratif et des tribulations de goût propres à notre temps : on peut dire même que, par la nature des choses, il les rendit plus voyantes. Il fallait un effort violent pour attirer l'attention du public aussi bien que celle des fabricants hors du cercle de routine et de pastiche où tous se complaisaient. Ainsi s'explique l'exubérance de coloris et la recherche de compositions insolites, les stylisations outrancières et les réactions qui s'ensuivirent.

Le tapis moderne, pour la plus grande part, est la création d'artistes décorateurs qui furent amenés à en composer pour l'harmonie de leurs ensembles. On retrouve ici les noms de Maurice Dufrène et de Paul Follot. Leur exemple a été suivi. Sue et Mare, Nathan, Groult, Jallot, entre autres, ont également contribué, suivant leurs qualités personnelles, de même que des spécialistes du tissu, tel Coudyser, à l'élaboration du tapis moderne. Celui-ci allait enfin trouver des conditions de production régulière avec Da Silva Bruhns. Les visiteurs du Salon des Décorateurs, depuis quelque dix ans, sont familiarisés avec ses tapis de tonalité sobre et grave, où deux ou trois couleurs réparties en de larges bandes ou segments se rehaussent d'une ornementation linéaire abstraite, inspirée le plus souvent de motifs primitifs renouvelés avec une fécondité qui semble inépuisable. Da Silva Bruhns doit évidemment à son ancien métier de peintre le goût de beaux accords de ton en mineur. Ses tapis s'harmonisent admirablement, par leur gamme aussi bien que par leurs lignes, avec le décor moderne qu'ils parachèvent et mettent en valeur par leur discrétion même.

Parallèlement, Benedictus produisait ses inventions d'une polychromie ardente et faisait du tapis quelque chose existant pour soi, sorte de feu d'artifice illuminant la pénombre des appartements. Il trouva des réalisateurs inspecables de ses compositions aussi bien à la Manufacture française de tapis de Beauvais qu'au tissage à la main de Cogolin. G. Fayet, s'inspirant quelque peu d'Odilon Redon, faisait aussi large place à la couleur, mais il y ajoutait un élément de rêve et de poésie inconnu ou délaissé de ses devanciers, grâce auquel l'art du tapis retrouvait toutes ses virtualités.

Solidarité et fantaisie, telles sont les deux sources d'inspiration des tapis d'aujourd'hui. Ceux de Mme Evelyne Wild se rattachent à la première, avec une note de raffinement et de goût toute personnelle qui les destine plus particulièrement à la femme riche et élégante. En jouant avec des fils de laine de hauteur différente, Mme Evelyne Wild obtient des dessins et des variations ton sur ton d'un effet délicat. Dio Bourgeois, René Herbst composent à l'occasion pour leurs ensembles des tapis qui s'inspirent de leur goût pour les rythmes dépouillés et rares. Quant à la fantaisie, elle surabonde chez un artiste que Dieu nous a révélé : V. Bobermann. Après avoir pratiqué le décor abstrait, Bobermann n'a pas tardé à introduire l'animal et la figure dans ses compositions. Bientôt, ces derniers venus se sont emparés de tout le champ du tapis, accru par la suppression de la bordure. Ainsi se déroulent à nos pieds les jeux du cirque, des migrations de bisons, des cortèges de contes de fées, des acrobates s'élançant parmi les constellations. L'homme affairé d'aujourd'hui, pour mieux oublier ses soucis, le téléphone et l'auto, qui font tourner la cendre de son cigare ou se déchausse, peut ainsi se détendre pour peu qu'il soit apte à se prêter aux jeux de l'imagination. Il va de soi qu'un tel abandon à la fantaisie n'a de prix, ici, qu'autant qu'il s'accorde aux convenances du tapis lui-même et aux propriétés de la matière employée. Or c'est le cas, tant pour le caractère du dessin que pour la répartition des tons, sobre et très limités en nombre.

Chez un autre décorateur, doué du sens le plus aigu de la modernité, à la Boutique de Pierre Chareau, on trouve d'admirables tapis d'après maquettes de J. Barthelmy-Charchoun, Hossainson. Malgré l'origine si diverse de ces artistes, une parenté évidente relie leurs ouvrages qui, partant d'un thème général, abstrait ou poétique, comme *plénitude* ou *Pêche*, aboutissent à des réalisations volontairement imprécises, d'un charme éblouissant et toujours imprévu. Abandonnant le cadre du rectangle traditionnel, nombre de ces tapis se terminent par des festons dont le dessin capricieux apporte encore un agrément inattendu. La couleur, si mesurée pourtant, retrouve ici ses premiers les plus captivants et les plus jeunes.

Les ateliers des grands magasins possèdent des dessinateurs de tapis de mérite divers : à la Maîtrise, outre Maurice Dufrène, cités Mlle Mueller, Jack Roberts, Roland Coueson ; à la Compagnie des Arts français, J. J. Adnet ; au Studium, Mlle Vibert. Enfin certaines maisons de décoration font appel à des peintres d'avant-garde, ainsi Myrbo demande des maquettes à André Lurçat, Marcoussis et Picasso dont l'art convient naturellement au tapis.

Les compositions des artistes dont nous venons de parler prennent toute leur valeur par leur exécution au point noué. Mais ce procédé, même avec des installations importantes, est d'un rendement insuffisant. Il reste essentiellement la technique des artistes créateurs et le métier Jacquart seul peut répondre aux besoins d'une clientèle qui croît rapidement. Le tapis, en effet, devient de plus en plus nécessaire dans nos immenses où les revêtements se substituent au parquet. D'autre part, une nouvelle fonction lui est dévolue par suite de la multiplication des phonographes et des appareils de T. S. F., et il se présente comme le plus parfaite des isolants du son. Enfin, les dépoussiéreurs électriques rendent son entretien des plus faciles. Une production industrialisée du tapis s'impose donc, comme l'a compris la Manufacture française de tapis et de couvertures de Beauvais, l'organisation de France la plus puissante dans cette branche. M. Lucien Lainé, son éminent directeur, n'a pas hésité à demander des modèles à des artistes réputés comme Benedictus, Coudyser et Crevel, par exemple ; en outre, son atelier de dessin a élaboré une collection de tapis modernes, la plus importante peut-être qui existe, sans parler de ceux qu'il exécute pour des tiers. Les tapis tissés mécaniquement que cette firme expose à la Manufacture nationale de Beauvais, de concert avec les ouvrages de celle-ci, disent assez la hardiesse et le goût de son chef. Signalons encore l'effort de M. Windels, fabricant, qui outre sa production de série, a constitué une collection de tapis au point noué d'après ses maquettes, et d'un mérite qui participe intelligemment aux recherches de notre temps.

A une époque où tant de tableaux, comme le remarque Florent Fels avec trop de raison, nous privent des joies esthétiques qui sont leur raison d'être exclusive et transcendante, il est juste que des arts voisins, quoique de possibilités moindres, prétendent de plus en plus à notre curiosité sympathique. Le tapis se place au premier rang de ces prétendants : A combien de tableaux, même fort chers, n'est-il pas supérieur en puissance de sensation et de suggestion ?

222

223

Fig. 1
An article about *tapis modernes*, with a selection of rugs by Ivan Da Silva Bruhns included as illustrations. A.-H. Martinie, "Le Tapis Moderne," *Art Vivant* (1931): 222–23. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

To an extent, the modernism of Da Silva Bruhns's tapis modernes seems clear enough. This is suggested, for example, by the frequently overlapping planes of their compositions, which loosely recall cubist paintings, or by the rugs' large fields of color, which, discretely interrupted by arabesques or other ornamental forms, somewhat conjure the mix of expansive color planes and decorative motifs in paintings by Henri Matisse and some Symbolist artists. Yet, notwithstanding a few relatively brief discussions of his work in periodicals, books, and exhibition catalogues since his death in 1980, Da Silva Bruhns's rugs have not been subject to much sustained analysis in the existing literature, which has led to a less than robust understanding of what makes these objects at once exemplary of and exceptional within interwar France's proliferation of tapis modernes.[3] To fill this lacuna, the present article considers the factors that make Da Silva Bruhns's interwar rugs modern—not simply on a compositional level but also in terms of their mode of spectatorial address. As this article argues, the modernism of Da Silva Bruhns's tapis modernes hinged on their evolving relationship between figure and ground, which, by the late 1920s, implicated the spectator in interrupting, completing, and animating the rug as an abstract or quasi-abstract picture underfoot. While not exactly new, this dialogue between a viewer's body and a rug's imagery exemplified a wider contemporary interest in "living abstraction," which, in Da Silva Bruhns's case, laid bare the economic inequalities and fragility of the interwar period.

Becoming Modern

Da Silva Bruhns emerged as a rug designer somewhat late in his professional life, close to the age of forty. Born in Paris in 1881 to Brazilian parents, Da Silva Bruhns originally studied biology and medicine at the Sorbonne. These

MOBILIER & DÉCORATION 189

Harmonie vert et rouge

LES TAPIS DE DA SILVA BRUHNS

Le tapis est un des compléments les plus répandus, et souvent les plus indispensables d'un ensemble mobilier. Pourtant on peut facilement dénombrer les décorateurs qui, dans la production contemporaine, en ont su créer des modèles réellement en rapport avec la technique et avec les exigences de l'usage. Lorsqu'on a prononcé une demi-douzaine de noms, on a passé en revue tous ceux dont l'effort a pu compter dans une industrie qui semble, au premier abord, peu compliquée, et qui exige, pourtant, beaucoup de savoir allié à une rigoureuse logique.

L'auteur de tapis joue, dans la décoration du home, le rôle de l'accompagnateur dans la musique vocale. Ce dernier, qui doit posséder toute la science d'un bon exécutant, est d'autant meilleur, qu'il sait davantage faire oublier sa présence.

Un bon tapis a, dans un intérieur, la difficile et délicate mission de relier et de mettre en valeur les éléments divers. Dans la plupart des cas, il n'est qu'un fond, mais un fond très important qui concourt, pour une large part, à la création de l'atmosphère d'une pièce, et dont la qualité confère à l'aspect général ou de la solidité et du charme, ou un sentiment de déséquilibre et d'indigence.

Pour avoir compris à merveille la fonction du tapis, M. Da Silva Bruhns est

Fig. 2
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, rug ["Harmonie vert et rouge"], mid-1920s. Yvanhoé Rambosson, "Les Tapis de Da Silva Bruhns," *Mobilier et Décoration* (1925): 99. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

studies not only provided a foundation for his role as a doctor in the French military during World War I but also paradoxically served as an entry point into rug design, as suggested by his 1917 decision to use a scalpel for deconstructing some Oriental rugs during a war-related convalescence.[4] While it is unclear whether Da Silva Bruhns supplemented this intuitive approach to understanding a rug's materiality with some professional training, what remains certain is that he counted among a small handful of rug designers in interwar France who were closely involved in multiple steps of the production process.[5] For instance, although Da Silva Bruhns did not produce his rugs himself—a task left up to a team of weavers who, from 1925 onward, worked in a dedicated manufacturing facility that he established in the Aisne region[6]—he was closely involved not only in the choice of wools and colors but also in the preparation of the *mise en carte*, which involved transferring his final design to a full-scale watercolor on grid paper that weavers used to produce his rugs with hand looms.[7] Through such point-by-point drawings, Da Silva Bruhns combined his nascent interest in rug design with his long-standing interest in painting, an art to which he had dedicated himself before 1918 and one partly informed by classes he had taken at academies led by figures such as Ferdinand Humbert and Paul Ranson, the latter of whom had ties to the Nabis movement.[8]

Da Silva Bruhns began exhibiting his rugs in 1919, when they appeared in a debut solo show at Paris's Galerie Feuillets d'Art, which attracted orders from several high-profile furniture and interior designers.[9] As critic Marcel

Weber remarked in 1924, these early rugs, which primarily featured designs with "flowers and stylized fruits," had a rather "violent color relationship," with "ornaments in very vivid shades, grouped in garlands or bouquets, detaching themselves from backgrounds of black, lapis blue or yellow, [or] the color of pollen."[10] Starting around 1923, however, these vegetal motifs gave way to geometric patterns frequently based on nonfigurative ornamental forms, such as zigzags, lozenges, chevrons, or Greek meanders (fig. 2). Routinely placed on backgrounds of a roughly similar palette, such forms created a stronger figure-ground interplay, consistent with the more general interplay between figure and ground that has long defined rugs with allover decorative patterns (that is, markings repeated across nearly a rug's entire surface).

Da Silva Bruhns's rugs from around 1923 to 1926 instantiated a wider tendency in art deco design, or what was then often called *le style moderne*: the incorporation of geometric motifs drawn from or loosely inspired by non-Western sources, such as pre-Colombian, North American Indian, or Persian cultures, all of which appear in Da Silva Bruhns's rugs from the time.[11] That said, there was nothing especially modern about the mode of spectatorship elicited by these rugs, which, with their well-delineated borders, symmetrical designs, and figure-ground ambivalence, recalled the basic form of address in many non-Western rugs from previous centuries. This mode of address is perhaps best summed up by art historian Oleg Grabar's description of a sixteenth-century rug designed for the Safavid court in present-day Iran—an object that a "viewer-user penetrates . . . , both literally, as rugs are meant to be walked on, and perceptually, as the eye meanders."[12] Here, I take Grabar to mean that a spectator's *physical* penetration of the object is articulated through the sense of order conveyed by the repetition and symmetry of its ornamented design, which establishes boundaries and spatial zones that define where one can(not) walk. Additionally, what Grabar calls a spectator's *perceptual* penetration of a rug, which occurs as the "eye meanders," stems above all from the sense of playful fantasy conveyed through repeating ornamental forms that, through their slight differences in placement and shape, appear to continuously change and move across the planar surface.

Planarity

Around 1927, Da Silva Bruhns's rugs underwent several stylistic changes that heralded the start of what design historian Susan Day calls his modern phase (fig. 3). In her words, "dense motifs, spread across the entire surface, give way to larger motifs that emerge on wide expanses of naked field," and the "designs [become] asymmetrical, devoid of borders, or perhaps include a single decorative band, but on only one side" (see fig. 1). Day further notes that some rugs become "entirely cubist in their conception, with motifs grouped in planes that overlap like a collage" (see figs. 1 and 3).[13]

Taken together, these changes reflect Da Silva Bruhns's heightened interest in the planarity of a rug's pictorial surface—an interest he revealed by leaving "wide expanses" of color "naked" rather than filling them with "dense

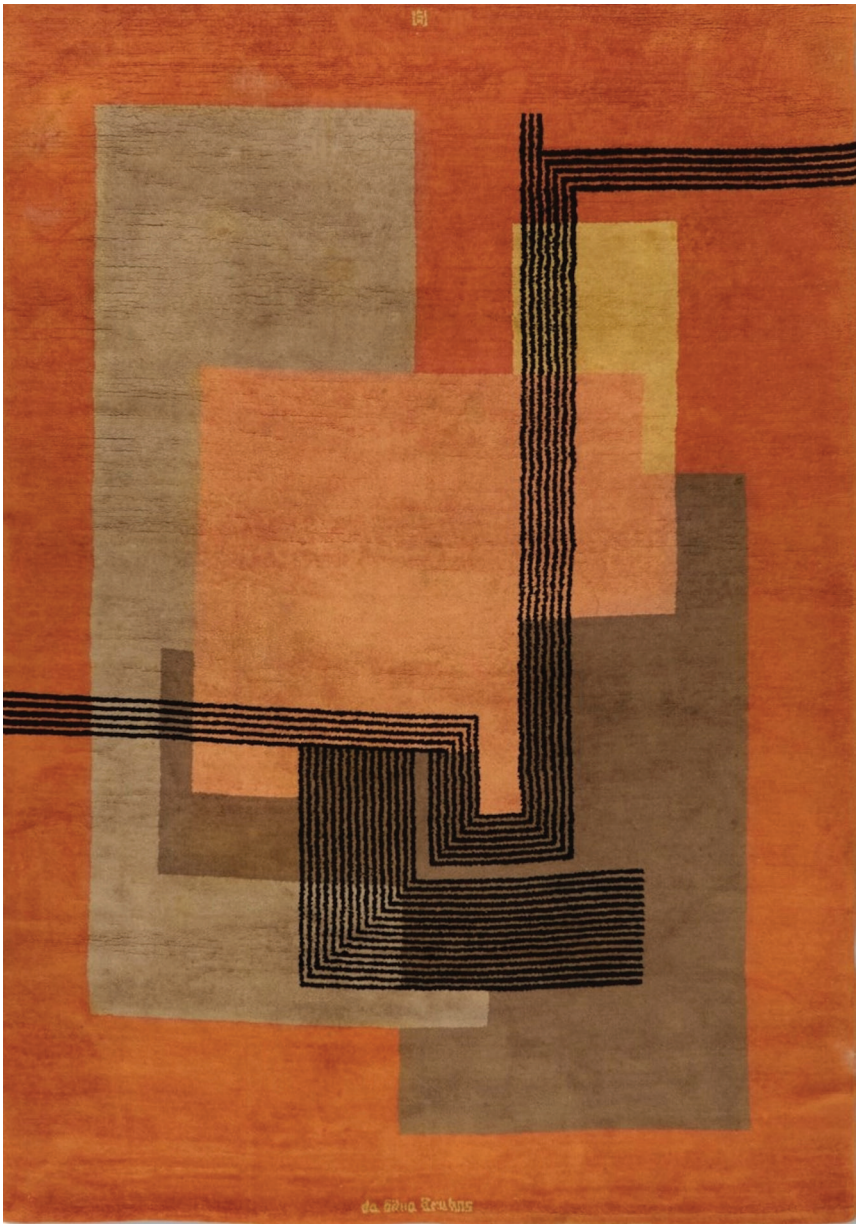


Fig. 3
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, rug for the Maharaja of Indore, ca. 1931. Photo: Christie's Paris. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

motifs"; by eliminating borders along a rug's perimeter, which resulted in a less abrupt distinction between the rug's imagery and the surrounding floor; and by expressly adopting the formal vocabulary of modernism through overlapping or intersecting planes loosely reminiscent of collage. In line with this claim, Da Silva Bruhns stated in 1927, "The rug is only a pavement, more opulent and warmer to the eye and to the foot than paving in marble or mosaic; it must remain, by its *essential planar decor*, by its sobriety and density in color, strictly at its *[own] level in space*."[14]

Da Silva Bruhns's emphasis on planarity was, of course, not new to rug design. After all, "planar decor" characterizes numerous rugs from earlier epochs. Flatness also had become a core principle of rug design in industrialized Western countries since roughly the nineteenth century—a development particularly apparent in Great Britain. There, as art critic Joseph Masheck observes, a rug's flatness became a mantra among nineteenth-century design reformers to counter what they considered a decline in the quality of applied artworks after industrial production—a decline they associated with a derivative embrace of the illusionism common to the fine art of painting.[15] This interest in a rug's planarity also extended to design reformers and others associated with modern design in countries that industrialized later, such as France, where many rugs were handwoven and positioned squarely within its luxury-goods market (unlike in Germany, another hub of interwar rug design but one where rugs were frequently mass-produced).

Like other luxury goods in France, handwoven rugs had a close if ambivalent relationship to industrial production. For instance, industrialization often prompted makers, sellers, and trade organizations to cast handwoven rugs as high-quality alternatives to those that were mass-produced. Yet, given the widely held aspiration that well-designed products should remain affordable to the working classes, individuals and organizations in France routinely positioned handwoven rugs as *models* for mass production: that is, not necessarily prototypes for industrial manufacturing but, at the very least, models that might inspire good design in an industrial era.

Within such attempts to cast handwoven textiles as models for mass production, the planarity of rugs and other textiles emerged as an important concern. As one example, in 1929, the artist and designer Sonia Delaunay stressed the need for "pictorial research" concerning the "decoration plane" (*décoration plane*) of rugs and fabrics—a plane that would help "form the taste of the general public" even when its most "visionary" experiments remained the "production of [a] minority."[16] Indeed, the stakes of such planarity were not limited to improving the taste of those who could ill afford textiles produced for a well-off minority. As art historian K. L. H. Wells observes, the "experiments with planar decoration" afforded by textiles allowed Delaunay to achieve a more thorough integration between art and architecture. This integration also remained a central concern for Da Silva Bruhns, who, circa 1927, described a "law of subordination [as] essential to the rug, which is almost an element of [a] building['s] interior architecture." As he elaborated, this law of subordination "governs a rug's decoration in the division of nude or decorative surfaces, the general rhythm of lines, the detail of arabesques."[17]

While art's integration with architecture was hardly a concern limited to the industrial era, it did become more palpable and urgent once industrialization took hold. This occurred in part, to borrow Delaunay's words, because "small pictures," such as paintings, did not "fit with" the increasingly "large [and] unified surfaces" of walls—planar surfaces that in modern architecture were routinely stripped of ornament, often in response to the proliferation of ornament that resulted from industrially produced building materials.[18]

Furthermore, Delaunay, Da Silva Bruhns, and others involved in designing and writing about the tapis modernes of interwar France did not simply emphasize planarity as such. They specifically stressed the decorative potential of planarity, undoubtedly to highlight the maker's role in carefully considering *how* to apply decoration to a textile's plane(s) rather than in "mindlessly" replicating decorative forms on these surfaces, which writers in France and other industrialized countries routinely attributed to poorly designed, mass-produced decorative objects such as rugs.[19]

Understood in this light, the interest that Da Silva Bruhns and others expressed in the decorative potential of a textile's planarity not only speaks to the more thorough integration between architecture and art, both fine and applied. It also instantiates a closely related development: what architectural historian Alina Payne calls ornament's shift from architecture to object, which occurred as "ornament [was] cut from its moorings [in modern architecture] and relocated in the objects that populated architecture's spaces."[20]

Rugs, of course, are not the only textiles to have contributed to the shifting relationship between modern architecture and the designed objects within. However, one likely reason for the greater attention paid to rugs within the field of interior design in France and other industrialized countries during the interwar period was the fact that such objects could transform a home's floor into a plane of insulation against the noises of modernity through their thickness. By "noises of modernity," I refer to the horns, engines, and other outside noises emitted by mass-produced automobiles, which proliferated from roughly the 1920s onward.[21] I also refer to the sounds generated inside homes through the "multiplication of phonographs and radios," for which rugs became one of the "most practical forms of insulation" according to a 1931 article about tapis modernes.[22] Paradoxically, though, the more significant role that rugs assumed in reducing noise actually ended up creating *more* noise through the modern pursuit of domestic hygiene, as evidenced by the dramatic expansion of mass-produced vacuum cleaners in the 1920s.[23]

Considered from such vantage points, the modernism of Da Silva Bruhns's tapis modernes did not stem solely from his engagement with the formal vocabulary and principles of modern design, as instantiated by his concern with planarity. Rather, it also developed from how such rugs mediated key forces of modernity. For instance, if his rugs exemplified a wider concern with a textile's planarity as a site of "pictorial research," this concern itself gained traction through the tension between the market for handmade luxury rugs in interwar France and the threat that many saw mass production as posing to this sector. Moreover, because Da Silva Bruhns's rugs and those of other makers helped to transform a home's floor into a plane of sonic insulation, the noises mitigated and provoked by such planes remained inextricably linked to developments within the history of modernity, from cars to vacuums.

Figure on Ground

Assuming Da Silva Bruhns did demonstrate a more pronounced concern with planarity by the late 1920s—above all through increasingly "nude," unbordered planes of color but also through the containment of ornament's repeated motifs to smaller, more discrete areas within such planes—his rugs at this moment reveal a fundamentally different mode of spectatorial address than those he had designed just a few years earlier. In a nutshell, whereas Da Silva Bruhns's rugs from the mid-1920s dissolved or strongly mitigated figure-ground distinctions, his rugs from circa 1927 onward transformed their users into proverbial figures on ground. That is, beholders did not simply view figures within the ground of a rug's composition but themselves became figures-on-ground when stepping onto the rug's images or "pictures" that covered the ground. Consistent with this assertion, Da Silva Bruhns's decision to jettison outer borders in most designs from 1927 onward may be read as an invitation for audiences to wander into and out of a rug's composition, while the increasingly large fields of nude color became a flat surface that spectators could physically and imaginatively occupy.

Da Silva Bruhns's designs are not entirely unique in transforming a spectator into a figure-on-ground. For the same may be said of various other rugs, from monochromatic, industrially produced wall-to-wall carpeting to handmade North African rugs with no borders and only minimal markings on large expanses of color, such as those of the Ouled Besseba, which may have informed Da Silva Bruhns's approach given the increased visibility of North African rugs after France's 1912 colonization of Morocco.[24] Moreover, several features of Da Silva Bruhns's rugs that transformed a beholder into a figure-on-ground closely recall characteristics that contemporary critic Raymond Cogniat associated with a particular strand of tapis modernes in interwar France: namely, the absence of well-defined borders, a rejection of rigid symmetry, and the embrace of large planes of color broadly similar to those found in "African rugs, [such as] brown, beige, black, gray, [and] white."[25] Nevertheless, because Da Silva Bruhns's rugs from around 1927 onward often feature unusually large expanses of what he called nude color, these traits had the effect of making the invitation to become a figure-on-ground especially glaring—a way, we might say, of pushing this strategy to an extreme.

Da Silva Bruhns's emerging interest in transforming a spectator into a figure-on-ground becomes clearer if we compare his rugs to the paintings he created around the same time, many of which do not share the features that made his rugs "modern." For instance, although a few such paintings were nonfigurative and featured interconnected, geometrical shapes devoid of modeling—features that signaled a kinship not only with his rugs but also with the formal vocabulary of modernist abstraction more generally—most of his paintings from the late 1920s and early 1930s remained figurative, usually with heads or entire bodies transformed into stylized, geometricized forms (fig. 4). As Élodie Vaudry insightfully shows, such paintings tend to reveal a shift away from the zoomorphic motifs occasionally found in Da Silva Bruhns's rugs toward more explicitly anthropomorphic elements, exemplifying what the art historian terms an "ornamental algorithm" connecting the two bodies of works.[26] Yet what seems

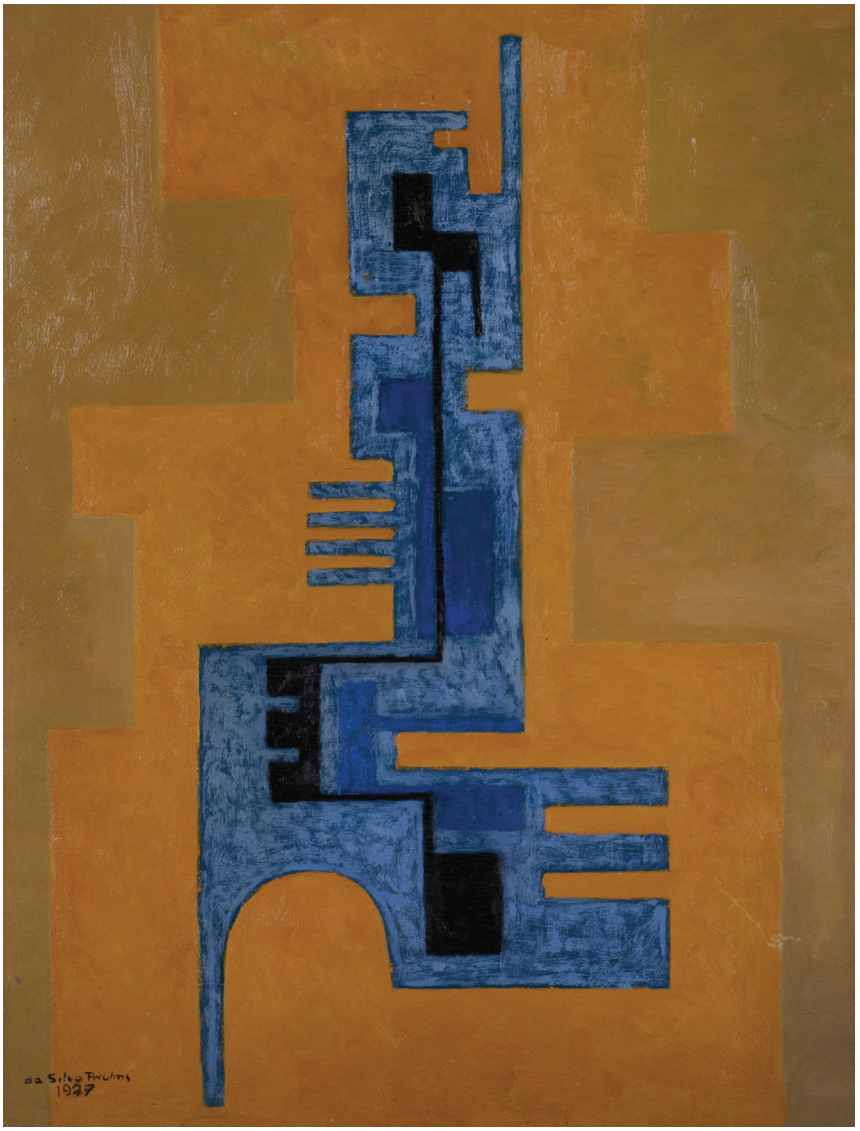


Fig. 4
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, *Le Chevalier Bleu* (*The Blue Knight*), 1927. Oil on panel. Photo: PIASA Paris. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

just as striking to me is the different figure-ground relationship that characterizes such works and the rugs that Da Silva Bruhns made at roughly the same moment. In brief, whereas Da Silva Bruhns's paintings almost without exception demonstrate a strong figure-ground contrast, his rugs from the late 1920s onward generally lack this contrast.

As the most glaring example of this difference, briefly consider *Les Vautours* (*The Vultures*, ca. 1931; fig. 5), a painting by Da Silva Bruhns that appeared in a 1931 group exhibition at a Parisian gallery. While the exhibition presented fine artworks by roughly twenty so-called decorative artists to challenge the hierarchical distinction between the "major" and "minor" arts, Da Silva Bruhns's painting

Fig. 5
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, *Les Vautours* (*The Vultures*), ca. 1931. Fabien Sollar, "Peintures et dessins de décorateurs," *Les Échos des Industries d'Art*, no. 69 (April 1931): 26. Private collection. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

complicated this goal considerably.[27] After all, whereas the flat expanses of color in his rugs become a ground on which spectators moved their own bodies—bodies that project outward from the rugs' picture plane into three-dimensional space—the circa 1931 painting offers a highly illusionistic representation of bodies occupying three-dimensional space. This occurs above all through the richly textured folds of the vultures' feathers, which draw attention to the three-dimensionality of their bodies, set as figures against the seemingly infinite recession of space in the (back)ground.

To a certain extent, the different figure-ground relationships in Da Silva Bruhns's rugs and paintings around 1930 reflect his technical dexterity as a decorative artist, which allowed him to create imagery in a range of styles, from the meticulous naturalism of *The Vultures* to the highly stylized anthropomorphism of *Le chevalier bleu* (*The Blue Knight*, 1927; see fig. 4) to his rugs' large planes of color frequently devoid of figurative motifs. That said, by focusing for a moment on *The Vultures*, we discern a trio of major differences in the modes of spectatorship elicited by his paintings and his rugs around this time—differences that ultimately converged around the distinct figure-ground relationships in these two kinds of work. First, as noted earlier, whereas the paintings offer *representations* of figures on ground, the rugs invite a spectator to become a figure-on-ground. Second, when a spectator accepts this invitation, what results is a highly embodied figure-ground dialogue between a beholder and the picture plane underfoot. Third, tactile contact proves decisive to this embodied figure-ground dialogue. For example, although *The Vultures* has a much stronger tactile quality than his paintings with stylized bodies (through the thick folds of

the birds' feathers and the craggy texture of the rocks below), Da Silva Bruhns deployed such features within a work conceived to be viewed and displayed on a wall, which addressed a spectator's "tactile eye."[28] By contrast, his rugs elicit a far more direct and sustained form of tactile contact between a spectator's feet and a picture plane displayed on the floor. While admittedly a core feature of every rug that audiences may step on, such contact proves decisive to a spectator's role as an embodied figure-on-ground, who at once occupies, interrupts, and animates the exceptionally large expanses of ground that define Da Silva Bruhns's rugs on a compositional level and can be felt underfoot.

Living Abstraction

Da Silva Bruhns's transformation of a spectator into an embodied figure-on-ground chimes with efforts by other artists and designers to create forms of "living abstraction," a term used by art historian Nell Andrew and others to encapsulate the wider impulse during the first decades of the twentieth century to produce forms of visual culture that provoked a dialogue with the moving bodies of performers, spectators, or users.[29] At stake in such a dialogue was partly an attempt to upend the mechanical, objective, or otherwise rational qualities often associated with abstraction at the time and partly an effort to interrogate abstraction's more general relation "to the body, to the applied arts, to architectural space, and to the political, social, and cultural situation in which it was made," as curators Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp write.[30]

At first glance, it might seem odd even to situate Da Silva Bruhns's rugs within this larger interest in living abstraction. In the designer's comments about the "essential planar décor" of his rugs, for example, he clearly positioned such planarity as a form of decoration. That said, Da Silva Bruhns's rug designs do engage with the formal vocabulary of modernist abstraction: particularly with the overlapping or intersecting planes of Cubist painting and collage (undoubtedly why critics regularly made links between his rugs and Cubism)[31] but also with the large color planes exemplified by De Stijl artworks and environments, which were well known in interwar France through exhibitions and articles.[32] However, assuming Da Silva Bruhns did bring modernist abstraction to bear on his rug designs from the late 1920s onward, the act of stepping on such rugs effectively places a spectator within abstract pictorial compositions as a figure-on-ground. In this respect, Da Silva Bruhns's designs share a qualified overlap with the interwar rugs of other modernist artists and designers, such as Jean Lurçat or Bart van der Leck. At the same time, given Da Silva Bruhns's stated interest in the decorative potential of a rug's planarity described earlier, it seems perhaps most accurate to say that his rugs place a spectator within compositions that, although strikingly abstract in their formal syntax, hover between abstraction and ornament.

By noting this interplay between ornament and abstraction, I do not wish to suggest that such a dialogue was unprecedented; to the contrary, it remained pervasive within various forms of decorative art, both before and during the interwar period.[33] Nevertheless, acknowledging this interplay seems useful for

our purposes, since it helps us better understand *how* Da Silva Bruhns made abstraction living. Namely, he made abstraction living by having spectators "feel into" his rugs with their feet, thereby opening the potential to mitigate the alienation that art historian Wilhelm Worringer influentially associated with abstract ornament and abstraction more generally in his 1908 text, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and empathy).[34] To be sure, nearly all rugs invite a spectator to feel into them by evoking a sense of "pedestrian touch," to borrow a term from social anthropologist Tim Ingold.[35] With Da Silva Bruhns's rugs, however, the process of feeling into them becomes especially pronounced through their unusual thickness. Resulting both from the large number of yarns per knot and from the substantial height of the pile, which was roughly double that of most rugs at the time, such thickness regularly prompted critics to liken the act of walking on his rugs to stepping on grass, foam, or fur—materials that are not simply soft but also somewhat malleable and thus responsive to the footstep.[36] Through such malleability, the rugs dramatize not just the sensual qualities of stepping on rugs but, more specifically, the sensual connection between a spectator's moving body and an (ornamentally) "abstract picture" underfoot.[37]

Individualism, Collectivity, and Wealth Inequality

By inviting spectators to "feel into" abstract pictures under their feet, Da Silva Bruhns's rugs offer one manifestation of touch's long-standing associations with the bourgeois interior. Such associations are best summed up by Walter Benjamin, who, in the late 1930s, described this space as "not just the universe of the private individual [but] also his *étui* [case]," a "sort of cockpit" that allows a person to leave an "imprint of all contact" into soft, textured surfaces.[38] Indeed, Benjamin may have considered the interior qua *étui* a defining feature of the private individual's bourgeois home since roughly the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Da Silva Bruhns's rugs—as objects that were at once extremely plush underfoot, costly to acquire, and patently modernist in their formal vocabulary—epitomized the degree to which the tendency described by Benjamin became more pronounced through art deco, a style with which the Brazilian designer was closely associated.[39] As art historians Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton write, art deco centers on addressing "the 'individualism' of desire," which in large measure reflected the fact the style was a "pragmatic . . . rather than a utopian one," responding to the desires of individuals with considerable wealth and thus departing from the utopian aspirations that had underpinned projects by many design reformers and members of the historical avant-garde.[40]

Roughly consistent with Benton and Benton's observation, Da Silva Bruhns's rugs diverged from the utopian ideal of collectivity that, as but one example, informed the abstract environments of the De Stijl movement during its later years—environments that sometimes extended planes of color to the floors.[41] Da Silva Bruhns's full-throttled embrace of luxury also remained unshaken even after groups in interwar France, such as the Union des Artistes Modernes, called for an end to expensive objects that remained out of reach to most consumers despite their deceptively simple forms.[42] That said, whereas Benton and

Fig. 6
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, rugs in the entrance hall of Manik Bagh, ca. 1931. Photo: Collection Vera Muthesius/ADAGP. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

Benton suggest that art deco's attempt to address the "'individualism' of desire" may be read as an affirmation of "democratic values" that contrasted the eradication of such values under the "totalitarian regimes" of the interwar period, I propose that Da Silva Bruhns's rugs did something different and, in some ways, more complex.[43] On the one hand, these objects highlight the important role that textiles assumed in advancing a kinesthetic conception of abstraction, particularly in dialogue with modern interior architecture. On the other hand, the act of "touching" the rugs' abstract pictures with one's feet constitutes a gesture that both depended on and reinforced the wealth inequalities endemic to global capitalism. To clarify this claim, I would now like to narrow my focus to some rugs that Da Silva Bruhns realized in the early 1930s for Yeshwant Rao Holkar II, the maharaja of Indore (see fig. 3). These rugs not only constitute the single most significant commission of the designer's career but also count among his most purely abstract designs, in that Da Silva Bruhns often eliminated the repeated markings of ornament, such as chevrons, and instead created compositions dominated by interlocking, rectilinear planes of color that recalled the formal vocabulary of cubism and De Stijl.

Da Silva Bruhns designed numerous rugs for the monumental modernist palace Manik Bagh that the German architect Eckhart Muthesius built for the maharaja in the 1930s, including several for the entrance hall (fig. 6). On the most basic level, these rugs demonstrate how floors increasingly became an important plane for displaying abstract pictures during the interwar period,

sometimes even usurping the role previously assumed by walls. In the entrance hall, for instance, the surrounding walls were largely devoid of pictures; the only two paintings displayed were a pair of resolutely figurative portraits of the maharaja and maharani by the French Art Deco artist Bernard Boutet de Monvel. Yet however much the rugs reveal that floors could overtake walls as the primary plane for displaying abstract imagery, Da Silva Bruhns's tapis modernes also entered into close dialogue with several elements of the entrance's interior architecture and decor, which had the effect of pushing abstraction beyond the two-dimensional plane of any single surface—wall, floor, painting, rug—and into the three-dimensional space of the environment itself.

For instance, although the hall's largely bare and seemingly unornamented walls might appear smooth and neutrally colored based on contemporary black-and-white photographs, they were actually light yellow and silver, with a slightly coarse texture called *granité*.[44] As such, their planar surfaces complemented those of the rugs, which featured nude expanses of colors in a roughly overlapping palette and also had a discernable texture. Crucially, though, spectators perceived the rugs' texture not just through their eyes but through their feet as well—a way, as it were, of ensuring that the maharaja and those within his circle could leave a more direct imprint on this interior-as-*étui*. Additionally, if the repeated lines of the entranceway's columns and staircase railing echoed the parallel lines that gave a sense of dynamism and structure to the overlapping color planes in certain rugs covering the floor (see fig. 3), the nearby expanse of orange curtains, with their pattern of repeating, narrow rectangles, further complemented the shapes and palette of such rugs.[45] Only whereas the rugs featured flat color planes flush with the floor, the curtains could be both extended and retracted, which is why gathers often appear in contemporary photographs of the hall. The upshot: if the rugs epitomized Da Silva Bruhns's notion that a rug's "essential planar décor" results from remaining "strictly at its [own] level in space," the curtains drew attention to what Anni Albers would later call the "pliable plane" of textiles, which the German American artist and designer considered an "integral architectural element" that offered a "counterpart to solid [and generally flat] walls."[46]

By describing how Da Silva Bruhns's rugs entered into dialogue with other elements of the entrance hall, I do not wish to suggest that he himself was responsible for such an interplay, which reflected Muthesius's conception of the palace's interior. I also do not wish to imply that the interaction between formal elements was especially unusual, since it has long been a goal of interior design. Nevertheless, the interactions described do reveal the decisive role that rugs assumed not just in pulling abstraction down to the floor's planar surface but also in extending abstraction into the three-dimensional space of a domestic environment. Just as importantly, because the rugs were abstract pictures that spectators walked *on*—and because individuals did so within an abstract environment that they also walked *through*—the rugs exemplify the crucial role that kinaesthesis assumed in abstraction's development, as Andrew and others have shown.[47] At the same time, when we ask ourselves *which* bodies walked on Da Silva Bruhns's rugs in Manik Bagh's entranceway, we find little evidence that these objects advanced "democratic ideals" by addressing the "'individualism'

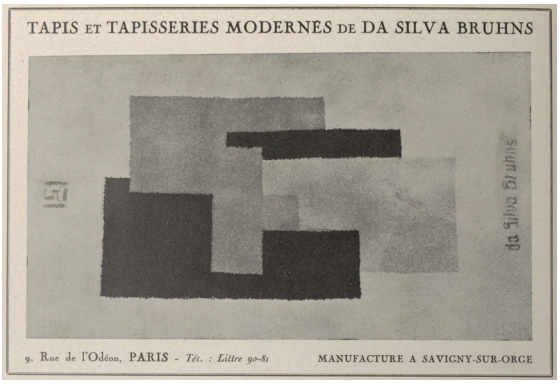
of desire," to cite Benton and Benton once more. To the contrary, these rugs were stepped on by one of the world's richest individuals, the maharaja, along with his wife and their circle of friends, elite acquaintances, and staff, thereby highlighting the fact that their mode of living abstraction remained closely defined by extreme wealth and, indirectly, by wealth disparities.

Closely related, when we situate these rugs within what Wells calls "marketplace modernism"—a "wider definition of modernism" that attends to how market forces have shaped modernism's development—the objects instantiate how the luxury market in France and other Western countries came to depend less on the bourgeoisie and more on Indian princes, who, "during the Great Depression, were [often] the mainstay of business," as curator Amin Jaffer notes.[48] Indeed, whereas some of Paris's most prominent galleries and showrooms that sold tapis modernes were forced to close their doors shortly after the stock market crash of 1929, which almost immediately caused the fortunes of the wealthiest French families to plummet, Da Silva Bruhns not only weathered the storm but also seemed to prosper during it, as suggested by the fact that he moved his showroom in 1930 from the already tony rue de l'Odéon to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, among the city's most prestigious shopping destinations for luxury art and design.[49] This address change was almost certainly made possible by the substantial revenues and publicity that Da Silva Bruhns generated through the rugs created for the maharaja, who, in today's dollars, had a fortune of roughly $1.5 billion and an interior-design budget of $70 million for his palace alone.[50]

Tactility and Market Vulnerability

Following his commission from the maharaja, Da Silva Bruhns realized numerous rugs during the 1930s that maintained core features of his earlier designs, particularly those from the late 1920s. For instance, although the rugs produced after the maharaja's commission admittedly incorporated more ornamental forms within compositions based on overlapping or interlocking planes, giving rise to what we might call a form of ornament-as-abstraction, these rugs continue to feature large and frequently overlapping planes of color without outer borders, which means that the objects still invited a spectator to assume the role of figure-on-ground. That said, we discern a subtle but significant change in Da Silva Bruhns's rugs from roughly 1931 onward: their more concerted attempt to appeal to a beholder's sense of touch, which ultimately transformed how such objects address spectators.

Da Silva Bruhns's growing emphasis on tactility becomes evident when we consider the advertisements he placed in contemporary art and design journals to promote his showroom (fig. 7). From roughly the mid- to late 1920s, the photographs in such advertisements did not particularly stress the tactile qualities of his rugs. To the contrary, the ads generally showed the rugs flat and offered minimal indication of their surface texture, as if to insist that they were planar enough to function as paintings on a wall—a strategy with corollaries in other photographs of tapis modernes during the same period.[51] By the early to



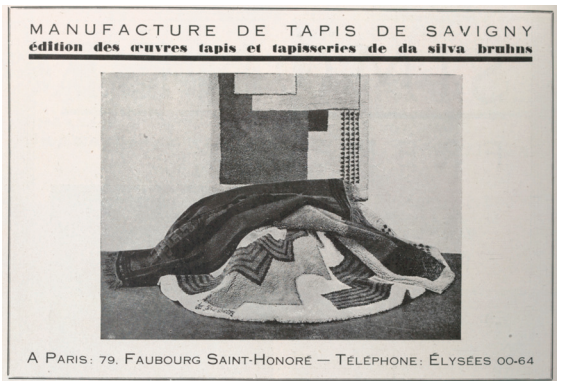


Fig. 7 (above, left and right) Advertisements for Ivan Da Silva Bruhns's showroom. *Mobilier et Décoration*, 1929 (left) and 1932 (right). Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

Fig. 8 (below) Draped display of Ivan Da Silva Bruhns's rugs. René Chavance, "Les Arts Appliqués au Salon d'Automne," *Mobilier et Décoration* (1932): 505. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

mid-1930s, however, Da Silva Bruhns's advertisements more frequently featured draped displays, a mode of presentation that also became more prevalent in public exhibitions of his rugs around the same time (fig. 8). While such draped displays were hardly new and, in fact, proliferated during the interwar period, they did have the effect of drawing attention to one of the most distinctive features of Da Silva Bruhns's rugs, namely, what Day calls the "velvety depth of [their] pile."[52]

Fig. 9
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, small rug (bottom right) in a model living room by Jules Leleu. Bernard Champigneulle, "Le Vingt-Quatrième Salon des Artistes Décorateurs," *Mobilier et Décoration* (1934): 203. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

As a result, both the advertisements and the displays inflected how a spectator could "feel into" the velvety pile of Da Silva Bruhns's rugs, which now occurred not just by inviting a beholder to walk on such objects but also by beckoning a spectator's tactile eye when *not* walking on them, be it through the otherwise flat photographs used to publicize his showroom or through the public exhibits of his rugs lushly spilling from a vertical to horizontal plane (see fig. 8).

While the prevalence of draped displays in both his advertisements and public exhibitions dramatized the tactility of Da Silva Bruhns's rugs, his emphasis on touch is particularly evident in one of his rugs shown in a model bedroom by Jules Leleu, a designer with whom Da Silva Bruhns often collaborated for nearly two decades (fig. 9). In this bedroom, which appeared in the 1934 *Salon des Artistes Décorateurs*, visitors did not encounter a tapis that became "one" with the floor, to borrow a phrase used by critic René Chavance the year before to describe Da Silva Bruhns's rugs.[53] Instead, spectators encountered a rug that rose substantially from the floor, with a long and unruly pile that diverged from the thick but smooth pile of nearly all Da Silva Bruhns's previous rugs. Indeed, although this rug's composition, with its repeated lines and considerable amount of nude space, certainly recalls his earlier designs, each distinct strand of yarn within the long and uneven pile effectively functioned as its own "line."[54] These "lines" had the end effect of making the lines within Da Silva Bruhns's composition far less legible, thereby highlighting the tactility of the rug's surface even when a spectator did not walk directly on the rug to become a figure-on-ground.

Assuming Da Silva Bruhns's rugs did reveal a stronger emphasis on tactility during the 1930s—as suggested by his advertisements, draped displays, and the rug for Leleu's model bedroom—then one implication of this shift is a

more nuanced understanding of the forces that shaped the "marketplace modernism" of interwar France's tapis modernes. Broadly speaking, Da Silva Bruhns's greater emphasis on tactility belonged to a wider "tactile turn" that was transforming French art and culture at this time. Crucially, however, his rugs did not advance the utopian ideals that, as art historian Adam Jolles shows, fueled the interest in tactility among the "most ardently leftist members" of the French avant-garde.[55] Nor did Da Silva Bruhns's stronger emphasis on tactility manifest a desired return to the rural and organic, which, as art historian Romy Golan explains, implicitly advanced the ideals of France's political (far) right in the 1930s.[56] Instead, Da Silva Bruhns's greater attention to tactility arguably reflected the increasingly precarious market position that his rugs occupied within the interwar field of tapis modernes. On the one hand, his stronger emphasis on tactility marked an attempt to play up one of his rugs' most distinctive (selling) features: their "lush" and "velvety pile."[57] And in so doing, he offered what may be considered a competitive response to the economic crisis following the 1929 stock market crash, which prompted some of the most important galleries that sold richly textured tapis modernes either to close entirely (such as Eileen Gray's Jean Désert) or to place far more emphasis on higher-ticket tapestries (such as the Maison Myrbor).[58] On the other hand, as suggested by his one-off attempt to create a long-pile rug for Leleu's model bedroom, Da Silva Bruhns was not entirely certain *how* to ensure that his rugs would attract interest and command a market premium through their tactility. This uncertainty stemmed in large part from the fact that texture had become increasingly pervasive across the full spectrum of tapis modernes during the 1930s, from upmarket rugs that featured real fur to more affordable options that used mass production to create scalloping, tufting, and other textural effects.

Considered in this light, Da Silva Bruhns's stronger emphasis on tactility during the 1930s likely reflected an attempt to appeal to his core base of well-heeled customers amid greater economic uncertainty and increased competition. By extension, this greater emphasis on tactility can be understood as one response to the "ethically defective social hierarchy" that, as art historian Margaret Iversen notes, Alois Riegl had associated with the haptic—a hierarchy to which Da Silva Bruhns's rugs were inextricably bound through the extreme wealth disparities on which such objects depended for their realization.[59]

Coda: Postwar Figure-Ground Ambivalence

Da Silva Bruhns closed his manufacturing facility with the onset of World War II and did not reopen it following the armistice, undoubtedly because he was nearly sixty-five and approaching retirement. However, after relocating in 1950 to the Côte d'Azur, where he focused mainly on painting, Da Silva Bruhns sporadically designed rugs for the Savonnerie and other prestigious workshops—rugs that, as Day observes, marked a return to figuration and thus remained roughly consistent with the wider embrace of Neoclassicism evident since the 1930s among fellow designers from the Société des Artistes Décorateurs.[60] That said, Da Silva Bruhns's postwar rugs remain notable not only for their return to figuration but also for their fundamentally different mode of spectatorial address compared

Fig. 10
Ivan Da Silva Bruhns, color sketch for rug, ca. 1950s. Watercolor. Photo: Drouot Paris. © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2025.

to that of his interwar rugs. Gone, for example, were the borderless perimeters and large expanses of nude color, which both functioned to place a beholder in the position of occupying a rug's picture plane to become a figure-on-ground. Closely related, unlike his earlier emphasis on inviting a spectator *into* the ground of a rug that remained "strictly at its [own] level in space," his rugs from the 1950s posited a far more ambivalent relationship between figure and ground.

The most dramatic example of such ambivalence is a rug design from the 1950s, which, although unrealized, shows a hunter with animals amid highly stylized trees (fig. 10). In this design, the trees draw attention to a 90-degree tilt of the rug's picture plane, since they do not rise from the plane of the actual ground but appear flush with this surface. As such, the trees highlight a disconnect between the bodily position of an ambulatory spectator—perpendicular to the ground of both actual space and the rug as a picture placed in this space—and the bodily position of the ambulatory hunter—parallel to the ground of real space while simultaneously perpendicular to the illusionary space.

On its own, this disconnect was hardly unprecedented in rug design, since it extends to countless rugs that have invited spectators to walk on figurative

images. Nevertheless, the disconnect does underscore the extent to which Da Silva Bruhns purged abstraction from his postwar rugs, even if this stylized design clearly departed from meticulous naturalism. The disconnect described above also encapsulates the disappearance of a spectator's role in making abstraction living, which had heretofore hinged on a beholder entering and occupying the rug as a picture. Indeed, compared to his paintings from the 1950s, which in several cases revealed an impulse toward abstracted forms and a tilting of the picture plane to let a spectator *into* the image's illusionary world, this maquette reveals Da Silva Bruhns's urge to transform his postwar rugs into self-contained pictures rather than leaving them as a ground for a spectator qua figure to occupy.[61] In so doing, Da Silva Bruhns jettisoned any bridge between illusion and reality that had existed through a beholder's body—a retreat both from the conspicuous celebration of the collector, as a privileged figure-on-ground, and from a rug's implicit entwinement with wider sociopolitical instabilities.

■

Michael Tymkiw

Michael Tymkiw is reader in art history at the School of Philosophical, Historical, and Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. Previously, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut. Tymkiw specializes in modern and contemporary visual culture, with a particular interest in issues of spectatorship.

1 Throughout this text, I translate *tapis* as "rug" instead of "carpet." While the two English words are often used interchangeably, the first tends to describe a smaller floor covering, whereas the second also encompasses larger textiles that cover the entire floor, such as wall-to-wall carpeting (*moquette* in French).
2 While Da Silva Bruhns painted before, during, and after his main period of rug production during the interwar years, I will henceforth refer to him as a designer both because this article focuses on rugs and because rugs constituted the largest, most publicly exhibited portion of his professional output.
3 To date, the most complete overview remains Susan Day, "Un maître du tapis art déco: Ivan da Silva Bruhns," *L'objet d'art* 69 (2002): 3–10. For an illuminating and more recent discussion of Da Silva Bruhns's rugs, which primarily concerns his use of pre-Columbian motifs, see Élodie Vaudry, *Les arts précolombiens: Transferts et métamorphoses de l'Amérique latine à la France, 1875–1945* (Universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 350–88.
4 See, for example, Susan Day, "Art Deco Masterworks: The Carpets of Ivan Da Silva Bruhns," *Hali: The International Magazine of Antique Carpet and Textile Art*, no. 105 (July–August 1999): 78; and Yvanhoé Rambosson, "Les tapis de da Silva Bruhns," *Mobilier et décoration* 7 (June 1925): 192.
5 Susan Day has hypothesized that he may have received professional training given that his rugs have a similar construction to those produced in the Savonnerie region ("Maître du tapis," 5).
6 Alastair Duncan, *Art Deco Complete: The Definitive Guide to the Decorative Arts of the 1920s and 1930s* (Thames and Hudson, 2009), 255. Da Silva Bruhns's wife reportedly oversaw weavers in the manufacturing facility. Raymond [C]ogniat, "Da Silva Bruhns et ses peintures," *Mobilier et décoration* (January–February 1950): 35.
7 M. Valotaire, "Carpets by Yvan da Silva Bruhns," *The Studio* (February 1926): 87.
8 Rambosson, "Tapis de da Silva Bruhns," 192.
9 Sarah Sherrill, *Carpets and Rugs of Europe and America* (Abbeville, 1993), 365.
10 Marcel Weber, "Les tapis de Da Silva Bruhns," *Art et décoration* 46 (July–December 1924): 70.
11 On non-Western motifs in Da Silva Bruhns's designs, see Vaudry, *Arts précolombiens*, 350–88.
12 Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 216.
13 Day, "Maître du tapis," 7.
14 Quoted in Gabriel Henriot, "TAPIS de Da Silva Bruhns," *Mobilier et décoration* (October 1927): 122 (emphasis added).

15 See Joseph Masheck, *The Carpet Paradigm: Integral Flatness from Decorative to Fine Art* (1976; Edgewise, 2010). For an amusing glimpse into design reformers' polemical insistence on flatness in rug design, see the exchange in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* about the dangers of flowers within rug designs, which Masheck cites; Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854; Penguin, 1969), 51–52.
16 Sonia Delaunay, introduction to "Tapis et Tissus: Présenté par Sonia Delaunay," special issue, *L'art international d'aujourd'hui* 15 (1929): n.p.
17 K. L. H. Wells, *Weaving Modernism: Postwar Tapestry between Paris and New York* (Yale University Press, 2019), 160. Da Silva Bruhns quoted in Henriot, "TAPIS de Da Silva Bruhns," 123.
18 Delaunay, introduction to "Tapis et Tissus," n.p.
19 For the most trenchant denouncement of mass-produced rugs around this time, see Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Designer in Industry" ["1. Carpets"], *Architectural Review* 79 (1936): 185–90.
20 Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (Yale University Press, 2012), 8.
21 On the European automobile market in the 1920s, see James Laux, *The European Automobile Industry* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 73–102.
22 A.-H. Martinie, "Le tapis moderne," *Art vivant* (1931): 222.
23 Carroll Gantz, *The Vacuum Cleaner: A History* (McFarland, 2012), 86.
24 See, for example, Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des tapis marocains*, vol. 3 (Paul Gauthner, 1927), plates 35 and 37.
25 Raymond Cogniat, "Technique et esthétique des tapis nouveaux," *Art et décoration* (1931): 109. Cogniat positions rugs with such features as a middle path between two broader tendencies that define interwar France's tapis modernes. The first comprises rugs discrete in their use of color and design, whereas the second includes rugs with "strongly colored" and "flamboyant compositions" (107–08).
26 Vaudry, *Arts précolombiens*, 354.
27 Fabien Sollar, "Peintures et dessins de décorateurs," *Les échos des industries d'art*, no. 69 (April 1931): 25.
28 Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (University of California Press, 2009).
29 See, for example, Nell Andrew, *Moving Modernism: The Urge toward Abstraction in Painting, Dance, Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2020).
30 Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp, "Sophie Taeuber-Arp: An Introduction," in *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Living Abstraction*, ed. Anne Umland and Walburga Krupp with Charlotte Healy (Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 21.
31 See, for instance, G. Rémon, "Tapis modernes: Les dernières créations de da Silva Bruhns," *Mobilier et décoration* (1929): 102.
32 On the wider relationship between textiles and modernist abstraction, see Lynne Cooke, "Modernist Histories: Braided, Interlaced, and Aligned," in *Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction*, ed. Lynne Cooke (University of Chicago Press, 2023), 1–31.
33 See, for example, Markus Brüderlin, ed., *Ornament and Abstraction: The Dialogue Between Non-Western, Modern, and Contemporary Art* (Fondation Beyeler, 2001).
34 Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Ivan R. Dee, 1997).
35 Tim Ingold, "Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (2004): 330–31.
36 Weber, "Tapis de Da Silva Bruhns," 67–70.
37 I borrow the phrase "abstract picture" from Louise Curtis's description of Ivan da Silva Bruhns's rugs in the Manik Bagh palace. Louise Curtis, "Visions photographiques d'un architecte: Eckart Muthesius et le Palais Manik Bagh," in *Moderne Maharajah: Un mécène des années 1930*, ed. Raphaèle Billé and Louise Curtis (MAD, 2019), 68.
38 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap, 1999), 20.
39 One reason for this association is that Da Silva Bruhns won an award for a rug he displayed at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels*, the very exhibition that caused this movement to take off. Day, "Maître du tapis," 5.
40 Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton, "The Style and the Age," in *Art Deco, 1910–1939*, ed. Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (V&A, 2003), 22.
41 Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (MIT Press, 1983), 120.
42 See Gaston Varenne, "L'union des artistes modernes," *L'amour de l'art* (September 1930): 371–72. On the relationship between luxury and modernism in German architecture and design—where modernist objects designed for the home were often informed by "egalitarian ideals" despite remaining out of reach for most consumers—see Robin Schuldenfrei, *Luxury and Modernism: Architecture and the Object in Germany, 1900–1933* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 138.
43 Benton and Benton, "The Style and the Age," 22.
44 Raphaèle Billé and Louise Curtis, ed., *Moderne Maharajah*, 82.

45 Billé and Curtis, *Moderne Maharajah*, 82.
46 Anni Albers, "The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture," *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 40.
47 See Andrew, *Moving Modernism*. Kinesthesis describes the "the sense of muscular effort that accompanies a voluntary motion of the body," such as walking, and the accompanying perception of sensations; *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Kinaesthesis," accessed November 6, 2023, http://www.oed.com.
48 Wells, *Weaving Modernism*, 8; Amin Jaffer, *Made for Maharajas: A Design Diary of Princely India* (New Holland, 2006), 18.
49 Thomas Piketty, *Les hauts revenus en France au XX^e^ siècle: Inégalités et redistributions, 1901–1998* (Grasset, 2001), 129–35.
50 Géraldine Lenain, *Le dernier maharaja d'Indore* (Seuil, 2022), 143, 179.
51 Wells, *Weaving Modernism*, 160–62. While Da Silva Bruhns also sold tapestries at his showroom, as this advertisement makes clear, rugs constituted most of his output.
52 Day, "Art Deco Masterworks," 79.
53 René Chavance, "Da Silva Bruhns et l'art du tapis," *Mobilier et décoration* (1933): 63.
54 Such compositional similarities are what make me believe the accuracy of the photograph's caption in figure 9, which states that Da Silva Bruhns was responsible for the model bedroom's rugs and tapestries.
55 Adam Jolles, *The Curatorial Avant-Garde: Surrealism and Exhibition Practice in France, 1925–1941* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 141.
56 Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (Yale University Press, 1995), xi, 61–104, 114–18.
57 Day, "Art Deco Masterworks," 79.
58 Wells, *Weaving Modernism*, 163.
59 Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (MIT Press, 1993), 46.
60 Day, "Maître du tapis," 8.
61 See, for instance, the painting *L'annonciation* reproduced in [C]ogniat, "Da Silva Bruhns et ses peintures," 35 (bottom left).