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Jan Kath's Spacecrafted

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The German carpet designer Jan Kath's new rug collection **Spacecrafted** launched last week at IMM Cologne. Faithfully recreating lustrous galaxies and distant star systems in knots of wool and silk, **Spacecrafted** is a significant achievement in terms of its treatment of colour within the craft of carpet making.



Kath's collection of five rugs is a near photo-realistic representation of nebulae. While this degree of resolution is not new to carpet manufacture, the depth and richness of colour within **Spacecrafted** is surprising. It is this use of colour that lends the work a three-dimensional quality.

"I had the idea in mind for many years, but the technology wasn't there to do it," says Kath. "Carpets need to be super high-resolution to achieve an image like that, which has always been possible to do. But in order to achieve a three-dimensional effect, an enormous amount of colour is required.

"Usually for a photorealistic rug you would need about 20 or 25 colours, whereas ours have about 60, rising to 80, with each colour executed in wool and silk. That's the complicated thing. Someone wouldn't think we had worked with that many colours, but when you come close to the rugs you see tiny differences in shade."

The management of this degree of colour is handled technologically. Kath works with a modified version of the rug design computer programme Galaincha. Scanning a photograph for reproduction as a rug, the doctored programme analyses the number of colours required to create a successful transfer into wool and silk. "We are using it as a tool to give the carpet industry a fresh injection and a boost," says Kath.

Yet this focus on technology is married to an emphasis on craft. **Spacecrafted** is created in Kath's workshop in Nepal, using materials that are hand spun on site. Much of the work is done in "kitchens", where the yarn is dyed and the resultant rugs washed and finished. The collection uses 150 to 200 knots in each square inch.

"The procurement of raw material is the same as it was 500 years ago," says Kath, explaining his reliance on tradition. "I try to use only local and traditional techniques, as I see myself as a preserver of that. I'm pretty sure the knowhow of how to weave a handmade carpet will be gone very soon. From one to the next generation, if that chain breaks just one time it's gone. By giving contemporary input, we're helping to sustain a tradition."

The collection also draws on Kath's own background. His interest in space developed as a child when looking at the stars through his father's telescopes. "We would spend nights and nights watching little dots and I remember very well when I first started looking at the moon or Saturn through his telescope." The final images were sourced from satellite imagery and photographs taken from private collections.

This sense of retrospection however contrasts against the forward-looking nature of the contemporary carpet industry. Also shown at imm were carpets created by Martí Guixé for Nanimarquina and Bertjan Pot for Golran. The production of carpets seems to be becoming increasingly relevant and interesting for mainstream designers.

"My generation is now emerging," says Kath, who was born in 1972. "All of us grew up with rugs and knew the importance of them, even though we may not have liked them any more and had thrown away the ones our parents and grandparents had. For 10 or 20 years, we all had polished concrete floors. The carpet industry was there for so many years and now I feel it's there again. If you look at the industry in general, never before has there been such interest and variety."