

HAUSER & WIRTH

**REPEAT PATTERN:
SUSTAINABLE CHOICES
FOR WALLPAPER**

A CASE STUDY IN LOW-TOXIC EXHIBITION DESIGN

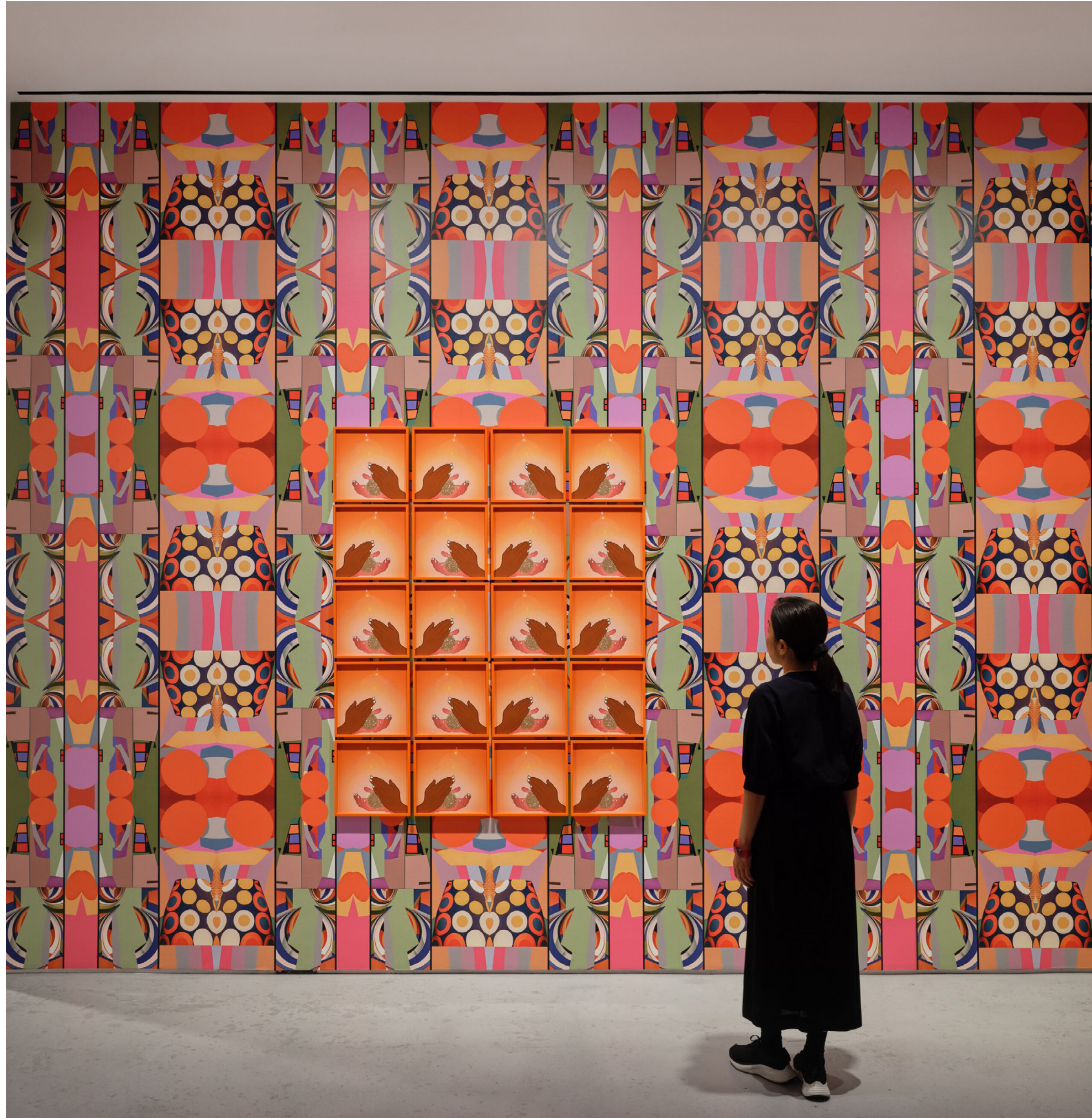
For Sonia Boyce's exhibition 'Improvise with what we have' at Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street our team partnered with the artist to trial a low-toxic, Type II non-woven wallpaper, a natural-fiber alternative that marks a meaningful step toward more sustainable exhibition-making.

Working closely with TWENTY2 Wallpaper & Textiles, our Exhibitions Manager Richard Dempsey selected a material free from PVC, heavy metals, formaldehyde and VOCs. Specifically, the wallcovering was made from latex-saturated cellulose and synthetic fibers, finished with a durable water-based acrylic coating and printed with latex inks containing a synthetic polymer resin.

This collaboration reflects our broader goal: supporting artists in choosing materials that lower environmental and human-health impacts without compromising visual or structural quality.



WHY LOW-TOXIC CHOICES MATTERS



In commercial and high-traffic settings, vinyl (PVC) wallpapers remain the default. They're inexpensive, fast to manufacture, and easy to apply yet their hidden costs run deep.

Vinyl-based products can off-gas, shed microplastics, and carry a significant ecological footprint from production through to disposal. For galleries committed to healthier environments, this raises critical questions about what we put on our walls.

VINYL VS. LOW-TOXIC ALTERNATIVES: A CLOSER LOOK

Though vinyl often appears more cost-effective upfront, sustainable wallpapers represent an investment in long-term health and wellbeing. Natural-fiber, low-VOC materials may cost more initially, but they support improved air quality, reduce ecological harm and avoid the toxic lifecycle associated with PVC.

COMPARISON CRITERIA

Criteria	Non-woven, Sustainable Wallpaper	Vinyl Wallpaper (Type II)
Material	Latex-saturated cellulose and synthetic fibers, water-based coating	PVC (polyvinyl chloride)
Impact	Renewable, biodegradable inputs	Petrochemical-based, high emissions
Health Impact	Low/no VOC, non-toxic inks and adhesives	Off-gasses VOCs, potential endocrine disruptors
Durability	Long-lasting, breathable, stable	Can peel, crack, and yellow over time
End of Life	Compostable or recyclable, and releases less toxins in landfill	Non-recyclable, releases toxins when incinerated



THE ARTIST'S CHOICE

‘Sustainability is always a priority for the studio when delivering short-term exhibitions, but we have often found that ecologically sound materials can’t match the quality of the readily available vinyls and papers on the market.

Type II non-woven was a revelation. Color vibrancy is vital for Sonia’s wallpaper and the tones on this material popped. The finish is superior to some of the more expensive wallpapers on the market and we were so impressed we will continue to use it for even our longer-term commissions.’

—Niamh Sullivan, Head of Production & Studio, Sonia Boyce Studio



DESIGNING FOR DISASSEMBLY: MINIMIZING WASTE

For Boyce's installation, every wallcovering panel was designed to be site-specific. Using precise gallery measurements supplied by Hauser & Wirth to TWENTY2 Wallpaper & Textiles, each print was formatted to fit the architecture. This approach dramatically reduced waste both in printing and in material disposal.

TYPE II NON-WOVEN

Width	Description	Content	Attributes
54"	Eco-friendly paper alternative to Type II vinyl with a smooth surface and matte finish. Highly durable, tear and scratch-resistant, and cleanable with a bleach and water solution.	Latex-saturated cellulose and synthetic fibres with a durable, water-based acrylic coating.	• Complies with Wallcovering Association Standards, W-102 for durability, scrubability and stain resistance • Class A Fire-rated based on ASTM-E84 standard for smoke generation and flame spread • Developed for high-traffic commercial and residential projects • Highly told and mildew resistant • FSC Certified ensuring responsible use of forest resources • Supports LEED credits, complies with Prop 65, RoHS and REACH requirements • Made in EU • Weight: 300 gsm, 19-mil thick

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Our research during this project expanded our knowledge of lower-impact options available locally in New York. Looking ahead, we aim to incorporate materials such as paper weave, grass cloth and textile grounds, and to pair them with Roman ECO-888 adhesive, which offers even lower environmental and health impacts.



Materials reviewed by Parsons' Healthy Materials Lab



Materials supplied by TWENTY2 Wallpaper & Textiles

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