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Celebrating Women

A Catalogue  
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for Women  
by Women  
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## BLOCK-PRINTED MUSLIN DAY DRESS

Probably British, ca. 1870–1874

Although fashion plates of the 1870s rarely illustrate dresses with elaborately patterned printed cottons, these were nonetheless widely worn, especially during the summer months. For visits to popular seaside resorts and leisurely games of croquet, women availed themselves of a wide variety of colorful chintzes and muslins, among other cool, lightweight fabrics that had the advantage of being washable. In June 1873, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* declared, “It is not possible to exceed the fresh beauty of a muslin costume worn on a hot summer's day, and ladies do less than justice to themselves if they deny their charms the most becoming of toilettes—muslin.”

The rich yet subtly hued pattern of this two-piece printed muslin day dress depicts the lush blooms of summer's bounty. Against a dark green ground, floral bouquets tied with bowknots and connected by ribbon streamers and delicate, intertwined feathery bands alternate in a half-drop repeat with similar bands in a continuous figure-8 in muted shades of red, pink, blue, green, burnt orange, and white. The construction and finishing of the machine- and handsewn dress suggest that it was made by the wearer. The long overdress with its sides gathered up into deep swags is probably one of the many iterations of the bustled, eighteenth-century-inspired polonaise style that was highly fashionable from 1870 to 1874. The ruffled bodice, skirt front, lower sleeves, and over- and underskirt hems are consistent with fashion illustrations from the early 1870s and reflect *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine's* observation in June 1873 that, “Nothing, in fact, is simple now-a-days—not even a print or muslin dress—no costume is made without flounces and *retroussés*.”

While the dress is likely British, the very fine, block-printed muslin was probably imported from Alsace, one of the major centers of the French printed cotton industry since the 1830s. Between 1869 and 1874, several spring and summer issues of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* highlighted the “ample choice” and superior-quality French muslins available from George Burgess, whose establishment was located at 65 Oxford Street. Although the descriptor “muslin” included a range of cottons, the sheerness of this particular fabric suggests it would have been identified as an “organdie” or a “jaconet,” terms that appear in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. In June 1871, the periodical averred that Burgess's muslins “are beautifully clear and fine, and the designs are very elegant” and that, “many ladies prefer the full, rich, exquisitely-shaded groups of flowers on the organdie muslins.” The following April, the editor informed her readers that “Mr. Burgess obtains his muslin goods from Koechlin Frères, Dollfus Mieg Steinbach, and Gros Odier,” all leading Alsatian firms.

Although these companies continued to manufacture dress cottons following the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), they were no longer entirely block printed, as is this particular muslin. Instead, motif outlines were created with engraved copper rollers. Thus, it is unclear whether the fabric for this summer toilette was purchased before the war and made up subsequently by the wearer, or, whether firms like Koechlin and Dollfus Mieg, in fact, continued to produce a limited number of these “delicious” muslins that were appreciated by foreign consumers. Interestingly, in August 1873, the editor of *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* advised her subscribers that muslins “bought at reasonable prices and well selected, are among the very few fabrics which may be laid by with advantage,” and she specifically referred to Burgess's French muslins “made by the celebrated Koechlin Frères” that were “now greatly reduced in price.”

MM









## COLLECTION OF EMBROIDERED BOTANICAL SLIPS

English, ca. 1640–1660

approx. 4 x 3 in. each

Gardens full of ornamental flowers were a relatively new sight in England in the seventeenth century. Until the reign of Henry VIII, horticulture was almost purely practical, yielding medicinal herbs and edible produce. Printed herbals began to stimulate popular interest in botanical pursuits in the sixteenth century, initially concentrating on the classification and curative uses of plants, but increasingly on their decorative potential. They also provided domestic embroiderers with ideal templates from which to create household furnishings that added color and arcadian joy to Elizabethan interiors.

“Slip,” the term used to describe a cutting from a plant used for grafting purposes, was also the name given to a type of embroidery that reproduced these botanical specimens. Rather than working bed curtains or cushion covers of rich woven silks—difficult to handle and costly to replace if one made a mistake—slips were embroidered in simple tent-stitch on small panels of linen canvas, easily held in the hand, and then cut and appliquéd to the surface of larger panels. As in an English Renaissance garden, individual flowers were typically isolated from each other and distributed in even rows of alternating motifs, to create a well-regulated “bed” of flowers in which the distinct charms of each specimen could be studied and appreciated.

Genteel amateur needlewomen made slips for personal use, but wealthier women could afford to commission sets from professional piecework embroiderers, or, in large households, from servants. This clutch of slips probably originated from some type of organized workshop, as it is part of a larger group now distributed amongst museums and private collections around the world. Once owned by educator, textile designer, and collector Margaret Simeon (1910–1999), the set comprises slips in every stage of production, from uncut sheets containing a dozen identical motifs, to “cuttings” like these poised for placement, to fully decorated bed hangings.

Several different forms of oranges—exotic hot-house commodities in England—as well as native fruits like quince, commingle in this assemblage. Bearded bi-color iris (called “Flower-de-luce” in the seventeenth century and prized for its roots’ medicinal and olfactory properties) and a yellow tulip are among the floral designs, though one of the most interesting is the nodding blue snake’s head fritillary (*fritillaria meleagris*). Discovered in the 1570s in France, the fritillary was the hottest flower in Elizabethan gardens, quite literally propagated by John Gerard’s popular *The Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1598). William Shakespeare was one of the first English writers to refer to the flower, and a figure holding a fritillary aloft on the illustrated frontispiece of Gerard’s book was recently identified as a portrait of the Bard himself.

Botanical slips were a practical way to bring the liveliness of the garden indoors, and to fix the beauty of otherwise ephemeral flowers. Indeed, as confirmed by a glance at their reverse, the silks used to embroider these plants are nearly as bright as the day they were made. Simeon’s bed hangings of white satin applied with identical slips are now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, where each motif is separated from its neighbor by a wriggling worm (T.322-1980, T.54-1983, T.119&120-1992). A sheet of tulips from this set is in the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York (1992-168-1), while a valance and sheet of uncut anemones are in the Art Institute of Chicago (1993.126, 1994.277). Other corresponding slips are in the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Collection at George Washington University, and in the Bryan Collection, Chicago.

WDG

## ***BRODERIE PERSE* SUMMER COVERLET**

English, ca. 1800–1825

104 x 112 in.

Quilts and quilt making have long been associated with the feminine. Throughout the nineteenth century, in addition to their role as moral guardians of the home, women of means were expected to create aesthetically pleasing domestic interiors. Among the middle classes, especially, quilts offered women the opportunity to demonstrate their artistic and stitching skills, as well as their knowledge of and access to fashionable textiles. This *broderie perse* bedcover dating to the early nineteenth century demonstrates the maker's sophisticated sense of design and proficiency with a needle and attests to the increasing availability of block-printed furnishing cottons. In use since the late seventeenth century, the term *broderie perse* refers to the technique of chintz appliqué that originally mimicked "Persian," or Indian-inspired, floral embroidery. The resurgence of the technique's popularity in Britain and the United States in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries was due to the success of the British printed cotton industry that manufactured these textiles—both block and roller printed—for consumers eager for the latest offerings.

Although many examples of *broderie perse* bedcovers present more elaborate, flowing compositions with individually cut-out motifs, the ostensible simplicity of this geometric design based on octagonal medallions with floral and foliate motifs on a plain white cotton ground nonetheless makes an imposing statement. The maker effectively used just three block-printed cottons in her masterful arrangement. For the impressively large central medallion (measuring twenty-five inches high by thirty-two inches wide), six of the smaller medallions, and the main borders, she selected a design with vertically disposed meandering flowering branches, madder- and indigo-dyed in vivid red, brown, and blue. Framing these medallions and the entire bedcover are printed borders with a floral-and-foliolate trail in more muted shades of pink, brown, blue, and green, edged with a small yellow-and-brown diamond pattern. The remaining twelve medallions with floral bouquets and similar diamond-patterned borders were ready printed—a novelty that both responded to and encouraged the vogue for *broderie perse*. For the wide borders, the maker cut lengths of the fabric with a single branch that undulates along the sides and across the top and bottom of the coverlet. At each corner, she inserted a triangular piece that creates an octagonal field, reinforcing the shape of the medallions. Seen together, the medallions suggest a display of large, faceted gemstones. The meticulously sewn bedcover lined with white cotton was probably intended for summer use. Its pristine condition speaks to the high regard in which this showpiece was held by the woman who made it as well as her descendants.



A crib quilt of the same date donated by Henry Ginsburg in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2000-9-3) features printed-to-shape oval and octagonal medallions and a floral-and-foliolate border that is very similar to the one in this example.

MM





## SILK LAMPAS

Attributed to Anna Maria Garthwaite

English (Spitalfields), ca. 1752

37.5 x 19.5 in.

Anna Maria Garthwaite's (1690–1763) extensive body of surviving designs for woven dress silks created between 1726 and 1756 as well as the thirty extant silks that have been identified with her attest to her consummate skill in this medium and the proficiency with which she responded to stylistic changes in fashionable taste over three decades. Although Garthwaite's professional career essentially began when she moved from York to London around 1730 at the age of 40, she quickly achieved success as a freelance designer, selling her patterns—up to eighty a year—to leading silk mercers and weavers in Spitalfields, the center of the English silk weaving industry. Her designs provide an invaluable record of high-end silk production during a period of tremendous creativity, when Spitalfields came to rival Lyon, its French counterpart.

Garthwaite's designs convey her impressive artistic gifts that included close observation of floral specimens and her thorough understanding of the complexities of drawloom weaving; the woman, herself, however, remains something of a mystery. As Natalie Rothstein, former Keeper of Textiles at the Victoria & Albert Museum points out in her magisterial study of eighteenth-century English silks, we do not know what drew Garthwaite, daughter of a Lincolnshire cleric, to this particular profession; where and from whom she acquired her technical training; and why, given her achievements and the longevity of her career, her name does not appear in contemporary diaries or correspondence, especially of those with whom she worked.

Dating to the latter years of Garthwaite's career, this lampas-woven silk—referred to as a “tissue” in the eighteenth century—illustrates the aesthetic in silk design at the end of the decade (1743–53) that Rothstein identifies as exemplifying an “English version of Rococo,” and the shift from naturalism towards greater stylization. The large-scale, asymmetric composition in ivory and aquamarine blue features a diagonal trail of curvilinear diamond shapes with leafy and scalloped edges entwined with a delicate floral meander and interspersed with scattered stylized and exotic floral sprigs on twisting stems. The shimmering blue background created by densely packed pattern wefts bound in a small zigzag pattern sets off the ivory faille motifs with subtle warp float details.

The colors and weave structure of this silk are very similar to one designed by Anna Maria Garthwaite, illustrated in the 1999 *Cora Ginsburg* catalogue, n.p. Her notation on the drawing for that silk, dated October 27, 1752, which is in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (5989.12), indicates that it was purchased by “Mr. Sabitier” [sic]. John Sabatier, a master weaver in Spitalfields, purchased ninety designs from Garthwaite between 1742 and 1756. The silk's patterned serpentine bands and floral motifs also relate to two Garthwaite designs dating to 1751 (5988.14 and 5988.15) that she sold to the master weavers “Mr. Vautier” and “Mr. Paris,” respectively.

MM



## ALBUM OF STRIPED AND CHECKED FABRICS (*SHIMA CHO*)

Japanese, ca. 1850–1875

7.25 x 3.5 x 1.175 in.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, a *shima cho* (literally “stripe album”) served as a record of a family’s weavings usually compiled by the matriarch and added to over time. Women wove *shima*, a word which designates both striped and checked textiles, from cotton or *asa* (the term for hemp, linen, ramie, or jute), often homespun and dyed predominantly with indigo or other dark colors, as was dictated by sumptuary laws. These fabrics were used for everyday garments and household necessities but may have also been sold locally. With the advent of commercial manufacture and easy availability of machine-woven fabrics in the later nineteenth century, at-home weaving fell out of fashion.

Given the practice of reuse and recycling that underpins the Japanese philosophy of *boro* (literally “ragged” or “tattered”), these albums are often all that survive of certain types of well-worn folk textiles, which were repeatedly mended and patched. This book itself, possibly an account book of the late Edo period, has even been salvaged. Despite this economy, the fabric swatches reveal a more nuanced story in the wide array of patterns and weaves represented, some very simple and others highly intricate, with designs sometimes shared among family and neighbors. It is said that a bride may have even brought her family’s album as part of her trousseau to the new household, and that *shima cho* were passed from mothers to daughters as heirlooms. This is possibly lore rather than fact, but it attests to the respect these albums afforded across generations, as well as to the legacy of weaving as a domestic, feminine creation among the art forms of *mingei*, or Japanese folk crafts.

This *shima cho* contains 165 swatches of mostly cotton, as well as hemp, linen, ramie, and silk, on sixteen sheets (thirty-two pages). The variety of designs and techniques includes not only the typical stripes, plaids, and checks but also twilled *chidorigoshi* (houndstooth) and *kasuri* (warp- and weft-dyed ikats) in linen or hemp and silk. One outstanding striped swatch has the unusual addition of supplementary weft patterning. Another of silk and



ramie in white and brown reads as solid tan from afar; only upon closer inspection does the dense, diminutive weave and patterning reveal itself. A note in a period hand also identifies the otherwise unassuming striped plain-weave indigo-and-white cotton to which it is affixed as a “very good example” of this type of weaving.

While indigo blues and browns predominate, ten swatches contain traces of bright magenta and deep purple, hues that—thanks to their chemical manufacture—remain radiant today in contrast to some of the fading ochre pigments. In the 1860s, European firms exported recently invented aniline dyes like rosaniline and safranine to mainland Japan for use in imperial textiles and Noh costume. By 1880, increased importation meant that these dyes, as well as those newly developed, like methyl violet, were no longer prohibitively expensive, nor were they restricted to use by the elite. Synthetic pigments quickly became a potent and politically-charged symbol of Japan’s westernization under the Meiji emperor, with both its proponents and critics, the latter adopting the term “red prints” to describe the then popular woodcuts printed with what were considered garish colors.

With the abolition of sumptuary laws after the Meiji Restoration, domestic weavers began to adopt this novel and formerly inaccessible color palette for inclusion in their fabrics. Here, the sparing use of synthetic dyestuffs in such a small number of swatches suggests an early Meiji date, when home weavers might not yet have had ready to access such pigments, which would have still been considered luxuries. The variations in quality of weavings in this *shima cho* suggests that they were probably produced over several years spanning the late Edo and early Meiji periods by more than one woman within a family or community, only later having found their way into this album.

## ROLLER-PRINTED COTTON DAY DRESS

By Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, the cotton *Nature Morte* by Pablo Picasso for Fuller Fabrics American, 1955

By 1955, Claire McCardell (1905–1958) had already spent fifteen years as chief designer for Townley Frocks, and had rightfully earned her unofficial title of “high priestess of understatement.” Though it may seem counterintuitive to consider this energetic dress an understatement, it is characteristic of McCardell’s straight-shooting approach to “the casual American look, beloved by women who hate to look dressed up” (*Lansing State Journal*, January 10, 1956). The silhouette confesses no secrets or gimmickry: the wide, scooped neckline is modest; elbow-length sleeves afford easy transitions between climates; and the skirt’s knife-pleated fullness is crisp yet billows with movement. It is classic McCardell in simplicity, with only gumball-sized faux baroque pearl buttons—and a singular print—as adornment.

Though spartan in construction, this resort dress exemplifies McCardell’s respect for powerful patterns. She may be renowned for using solid colors, plaids, and calicos, but when McCardell ventured into print territory, she wasn’t always demure: in 1950, she splashed a “monastic” dress with life-size, long-stemmed roses, and in 1952, she used bold, geometric prints from Everfast Fabrics Inc.’s Panagra collection for rompers and evening gowns. However, her most indelible foray into print came with her use of Modern Master textiles, a series launched in 1955 by D.B. Fuller & Co. Impresario Daniel Fuller first approached Picasso in 1953 with the concept. Hailed in *American Fabrics* (Vol. 35, Winter 1955-56) as “the highest paid, most individualistic artist of his era,” Picasso had been known to turn down previous invitations. Because Fuller guaranteed a high level of fidelity to artworks selected for the finished product, Picasso accepted the challenge and coaxed compatriots Joan Miró, Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, and Raoul Dufy to collaborate. Fuller’s team aided the artists in selecting motifs from “milestone” artworks; these were translated into compact repeats for roller-printing. After three visits to France for the artists’ corrections and approvals, the designs were copyrighted—this mark, the artist’s name, and the pattern’s title were detailed on the selvedge. After two long years from concept to completion, the fabrics were launched in the fall of 1955.



In a major coup for both manufacturer and designer, *LIFE* magazine (November 14, 1955) published a five-page editorial featuring well-known models exclusively in McCardell Modern Master designs. Fashion editor Sally Kirkland explained she “...took the clothes to the painters’ studios in Europe where, in their first fashion photographs, the artists showed reactions ranging from extreme modesty (Chagall stayed out of the picture) to utter ham,” by which she meant Picasso. One photo shows Bettina Graziani with Picasso wearing a blouse made from *Nature Morte*. The *Times* of Munster, Indiana, affirmed this pattern’s pedigree: “Picasso’s vibrant cubist period is reflected in a brilliant orange cotton on which a cubist still life in black, blue and white forms close-set

medallions” (January 9, 1956). Indeed, *Nature Morte* features fractured snippets of newspaper and a pescatarian meal—it is one of the few patterns in the series that retains its French title, imparting an additional *je ne sais quoi* to discerning shoppers familiar with the pattern’s name.

References: McCardell garments made from Modern Master prints are found in a number of collections: The Museum at Fashion Institute of Technology (P92.9.1); Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (2013-5-1); Kent State Museum (1983.001.0440, 1983.001.0441ab, and 1983.001.0442ab); Maryland Historical Society (1998.19); and FIDM Museum at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (2020.5.36ab).







## COTTON LACE & PIQUÉ DAY DRESS

By Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks

American, 1952

Nothing screams “haute couture” more than lace—unless it’s cotton lace manipulated by Claire McCardell (1905–1958), and then it firmly states “American pragmatism.” For centuries, lace was a mainstay of European court fashions. Though men also accessorized their attire with lace for portions of history, by the twentieth century, it was the ultimate signifier of femininity. This McCardell dress—a confection grounded in practicality—is unusual in her oeuvre for its overtly dainty, historicizing materials, but typical in her use of cotton as a washable, easy-to-care-for fiber. Never sacrificing beauty, McCardell eschewed most trappings of “feminine” dress throughout her career: “She’s never gone in for a lot of extraneous do-dads and furbelows, but when one wears a McCardell dress, she mightly [sic] well knows that her curves are where nature put ‘em—and Miss McCardell believes in being womanly first, foremost, and always” (*The Decatur Herald*, May 27, 1952).

McCardell was no stranger to European fashions: in between her tenures at Townley Frocks (from 1931 to 1938, and again as head designer from 1940 until her untimely death in 1958), she designed for Hattie Carnegie, one of New York’s leading purveyors of sophistication influenced by continental modes. An admirer of couturière Madeleine Vionnet, McCardell demonstrated facility in slipping in-and-out of French fashion tropes—this dress borrows from fashion’s heritage, all the while remaining purely American. The top is formed from two panels of floral banded, machine-made cotton lace—not hand-made by bobbins or needle, nor silk or linen, as tradition would favor. Demure cap sleeves are cut-in-one with the bodice, and the bustline’s soft, supportive shaping is achieved through minimal ruching, not darts; only the lace’s gentle stretch was needed for the desired fit. The tea-length skirt is fashioned from bird’s-eye piqué, a variation of plain-weave fabric widely used in nineteenth-century America, and a spring-to-summer classic in twentieth-century sportswear. Precise cartridge pleating sublimates the skirt’s volume at the slightly dropped waistline, while narrow, corded self-fabric rouleaux encircle the sleeve cuffs and waist, and extend up the center front opening. Brass hook-and-eye closures—a McCardell hallmark—impart a hard-edged, almost industrial, contrast to the frill of lace. The fabric’s scalloped edge provides a decorative finishing touch in the deep décolletage.

What is most remarkable about this design, however, is the unlined bodice. An advertisement in *Vogue* (April 15, 1952), photographed by Richard Avedon, features this dress with titillating copy: “FABRIC: part pique, part baby lace. SHAPE: all cling and swing. DETAIL: your skin (except for a whiff of a bra) bare under the bodice.” The mere suggestion that visible torso flesh was an intentional “detail” for daywear, and that a brassiere was an accessory meant to be glimpsed, would have been risqué. However, the dress must have impressed retailers willing to gamble on adventurous clientele. *Vogue’s* “Buying Guide,” an index of advertisements and where to buy featured fashions, lists the panoply of American retailers that stocked it: from Beverly Hills to Niagara Falls, this model could be bought in 162 department stores and boutiques, for a price under \$50.

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## **LIVERPOOL BLOCK-PRINTED SILK**

By Rosa Krenn for the Wiener Werkstätte

Austrian, ca. 1910–1912

Founded in 1903 by architect-designers Josef Hoffman and Kolomon Moser to create furniture and furnishings, the Wiener Werkstätte would become one of the most influential design collectives committed to the cause of handcrafts until its closure in 1932. With the establishment of its own, in-house textile and fashion departments in 1910 and 1911, respectively, the Wiener Werkstätte gained widespread commercial popularity and recognition in the realm of pattern design that coincided with a shift from producing woven fabrics to an emphasis on printed cottons and silks. Although lively compositions and vibrant coloring characterize many Wiener Werkstätte textiles, the large number of designers who contributed both abstract and representational patterns over three decades resulted in a wide range of styles and idioms—historicist, modernist, vernacular, and exotic.

The intriguingly titled *Liverpool* is by Rosa Krenn (1884–1970), one of the many, still largely unknown women designers whose work contributed to the success of the Wiener Werkstätte, including its textile department. Krenn first attended the Prague Kunstgewerbeschule and subsequently, between 1909 and 1913, she studied at the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule under Josef Hoffman and the ceramicist Michael Powolny. An article on the latter institution in the 1911/12 issue of *Kunstgewerbeblatt* illustrates one of her ceramic pieces—a Madonna and Child, now in the collection of the MAK (WI 1140)—that she fabricated while a student in Powolny’s workshop. Krenn also designed at least one piece of furniture—an elaborate marquetry cabinet (H 1397, also in the MAK) that was shown in the 1912 exhibition at the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna, marking the founding of the Austrian branch of the Deutscher Werkbund.

Krenn’s silk demonstrates the high-end production of Wiener Werkstätte printed fabrics. At least eight separate blocks were used to create *Liverpool*’s dense, stylized floral and foliate pattern—one for each color. On the off-white ground, rows of large purple and pale pink flowers with deep and light salmon-colored details, smaller flowers with curlicue stems in purple, pale green, and two shades of blue, and similarly colored flowerheads nestle among a thicket of whimsically shaped green leaves outlined in dark blue. Although subtle in its overall palette, the design’s juxtaposition of complementary secondary hues, emphasized by the simplified forms of the motifs, is visually striking. The soft drape and sheerness of the plain-woven silk suggest it might have been used for a tunic blouse or as an inset dress panel. Photographs of models in Wiener Werkstätte ensembles as well as its fashion illustrations around 1910–1912 often show a patterned silk used in conjunction with a solid-colored fabric. In addition to wearing Wiener Werkstätte clothing and accessories, enthusiastic female patrons could also decorate their interiors with coordinating—or even matching—fabrics, and thereby fully embody the workshop’s adherence to the principles of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

A panel of *Liverpool* is in the collection of the MAK (WWS 436) as are several other Krenn printed silks and linens with stylized plant and animal motifs and two colorways of a textile design for the Wiener Werkstätte. In April 2021, the MAK will open its exhibition, “Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,” focusing on the approximately 180 women (including Krenn) whose talents in graphic, fashion, textile, ceramic, and toy design were instrumental in the development of early twentieth-century Viennese arts and crafts.

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## BLOCK-PRINTED LINEN

By Ruth Hildegard Geyer-Raack for the Deutsche Werkstätten Textilgesellschaft mbH. (De-We-Tex)  
German, 1928  
93.5 x 50.5 in.

Despite her fame as a painter, interior decorator, and textile designer during her lifetime, Ruth Hildegard Geyer-Raack (1894–1975) is little known today compared to her female contemporaries at the Bauhaus. Her interest in reviving and updating traditional furniture forms separated her from the German avant-garde, but this was then viewed as a strength. In 1929, *Vogue* used Geyer-Raack as the prime example of the “radical rationalists” in German decorative arts who “perpetrate fewer atrocities in the name of a style than does the other group in their zealous, self-conscious effort to be different” — presumably referring to the Bauhaus, where Geyer-Raack had, in fact, briefly studied between 1920 and 1921.

However, Geyer-Raack’s general omission from design histories until recently may be the result of her precarious political position in the interwar period. In 1922, she married the Berlin government official Hugo Geyer, very likely the same man who later served as senior councilor of the Reich Ministry of Transport and who was imprisoned by the Allies following the Second World War. Such problematic ties to the Nazi party might explain questions about Geyer-Raack’s career, including her retreat from the Bauhaus, her increasingly restrained and traditionalist design aesthetic in the 1930s and 1940s, and her continued representation in German home decorating journals during the War years.

Her career was most impacted by her education in the capital, studying at the Vereinigten Staatsschulen für Freie und Angewandte Kunst under the architect Bruno Paul. By the mid-1920s, she was known for her murals and interior decors and in 1928 provided wall paintings for the *Deutschen Kunstausstellung* in Dusseldorf. Three years later, she organized the Cologne *Internationale Raumausstellung*. A 1936 article in *Innen-dekoration* (vol. 47) attributed Geyer-Raack’s excellence as a decorator to what were considered the vocation’s “special requirements”: being a woman and trained painter, a combination rendering one sensitive to “delicately [weaving] together” nature and art. In the postwar period, she moved away from textile design in favor of industrial design, producing publications, and lecturing. In 1955, an eye disease led to her blindness, though she maintained a studio practice until her death in 1975.

In 1924, she had established her own studio in Berlin, working with De-We-Tex, the textile branch of the Deutsche Werkstätten in Hellerau, Dresden. Many extant textiles by Geyer-Raack recall those of De-We-Tex’s lead designer, the architect and fellow muralist Josef Hillerbrand, whose compositions combined geometry and florals. This fabric, however, best represents Geyer-Raack’s own distinctive artistic vision, as it translates the hallmarks of her highly stylized mural paintings—Jurassic plant forms, life-sized figures, and animals—into an imaginative, naïve composition for drapery. Vignettes of frolicking fauns and dark- and light-skinned ladies in colorful dresses and pajamas pick flowers and lounge under parasols in the shade of enormous trees. The lively color palette, printed on a dusty rose linen, warms the neoclassical structure that, in light of her husband, might be read as a concession to the overbearing architectural style that would shortly become government-sponsored.

The designer evidently favored this fabric personally, having used it for cushions in her living room, photographed in *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* in 1928 (pp. 254, 255). Beyond her Berlin apartment, the fabric also retailed across the Atlantic, as this length retains its paper label from Macy’s, New York.

Geyer-Raack’s textile designs were included in the 2019 exhibition “Against Invisibility — Women Designers at the Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau 1898 to 1938” at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.







# ***GOLDEN HARVEST, ORIANA, AND VAN GOGH***

## **SCREEN-PRINTED COTTONS**

By Althea McNish for Hull Traders, Ltd.

British, designed 1959–1961, printed ca. early 1960s

*Golden Harvest*: 57.75 x 49.5 in., *Oriana*: 74 x 61.5, *Van Gogh*: 56 x 49.5

Althea McNish (1924–2020) is remembered as the first Black British designer to gain international fame. Like so many twentieth-century artists and designers from the African diaspora, McNish has only in recent years begun to receive due credit for her important contributions to design history.

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and a descendant of the Merikens—former African slaves who fought for England during the War of 1812—McNish showed an early interest in art. She worked alongside her mother, a dressmaker, and taught herself to paint with guidance from artists like Sibyl Atteck. Her father owned a pharmacy where she mixed medicines, a skill she said aided her in concocting solutions for screen printing. In 1951, she relocated to London, where she studied at the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, Royal College of Art, and Central School of Arts and Crafts, where fellow graphic designer Eduardo Paolozzi encouraged her to work with textiles.

Her painterly technique and the vibrancy of her palette set her fabrics apart from those of her British contemporaries then gravitating towards Op and Pop Art, including Paolozzi. Such colorful, Caribbean warmth was no accident. Plants, flowers, and fruit from the Tropics proliferate, intentional symbols of her Trinidadian identity and what she later recalled as homesickness. She was a prominent Windrush-generation voice advocating equality for Black people in Britain and a founding member of the Caribbean Artists Movement, which promoted Caribbean art and design through exhibitions, events, and lectures. In 1973, McNish organized the Caribbean edition of the BBC production *Full House*. She also served as a Carnival Queen judge at the Notting Hill Carnival, begun in response to the racism and violence faced by West Indian immigrants and their descendants in the wake of the 1958 white riots. From the 1980s, she and her husband, jewelry designer John Weiss, published studies about the Merikens.

Liberty & Co. and Ascher Ltd. acquired designs by McNish while still a student in the 1950s. Soon, she counted Biba, Dior, Lanvin, Mary Quant, Cavendish, Danasco, Edinburgh Weavers, Heal's, and Hull Traders among those using her designs for dress and furnishing, but McNish's relationship with Hull Traders would be the longest lasting of her career. Produced by Hull Traders between 1959 and the early 1960s, these three designs exemplify McNish's flair for line and color. She developed *Golden Harvest* while at the RCA, drawing inspiration from the wheat fields she observed during a study trip to Chipping Campden, the artists' commune in Essex. First printed by Tofos Prints, the design became part of Hull Traders' collection in 1959 and remained its best-selling fabric until at least 1975, when it was used in the residence of the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

In 1959, McNish was commissioned to produce murals for the luxury ocean liner the SS. Oriana, and it is possible that the design that became its eponymous textile was an unused study for the murals. Her gestural marks across the pale-yellow ground emphasize the movement of the rust-orange flowers that appear to dance in the wind.

*Van Gogh's* horizontal bands of pink and orange are overlaid with sunflowers drawn loosely in black. Although not a replica of any painting by Van Gogh, the design exudes the dynamism of his still lifes. The sunflowers are depicted just past their prime, with drooping flowerheads, drying petals, and leaf damage from mealy bugs, unexpected reflections on the circle of life. Perhaps it is unsurprising that McNish considered the Dutch painter “very tropical,” probably a reference to his bold use of color and certainly a personal connection for her.

Samples of *Golden Harvest* and *Oriana* are in the V&A Museum (T.178-1989, T.179-1989). Lengths of *Van Gogh* and *Golden Harvest* are at The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester (T.10271, T.10269.1,.2).





## SCREEN-PRINTED LINEN-RAYON

By Paule Vézelay for Bauret-Warin

French, 1946

128 x 50 in.

The remarkable abstractions of Paule Vézelay (1892–1984) have earned her an important place in the history of modern art. After studying painting in London, Marjorie Watson-Williams relocated in 1926 to Paris, where she joined the avant-garde, changing her name “for purely aesthetic reasons” and abandoning representational art. Although the 1930s were a difficult time for her personally—her tumultuous and passionate relationship with the Surrealist André Masson ended in 1932—Vézelay’s art reached a new zenith after a string of successful exhibitions and her admission to the group *Abstraction-Création* in 1934. She remained in France until the outbreak of World War II, when she returned to her birthplace of Bristol.

Vézelay had a lifelong obsession with what she termed “living lines,” the primordial, biomorphic shapes that populated her two- and three-dimensional compositions. She also understood the creation of these forms as an automatic process determined “by a power far greater than any I could claim as my own.” In 1951, two and a half decades after she had first become interested in the abstract, Vézelay was appointed president of the British arm of *Le Groupe Espace*, the international collective concerned with spatiality in art.

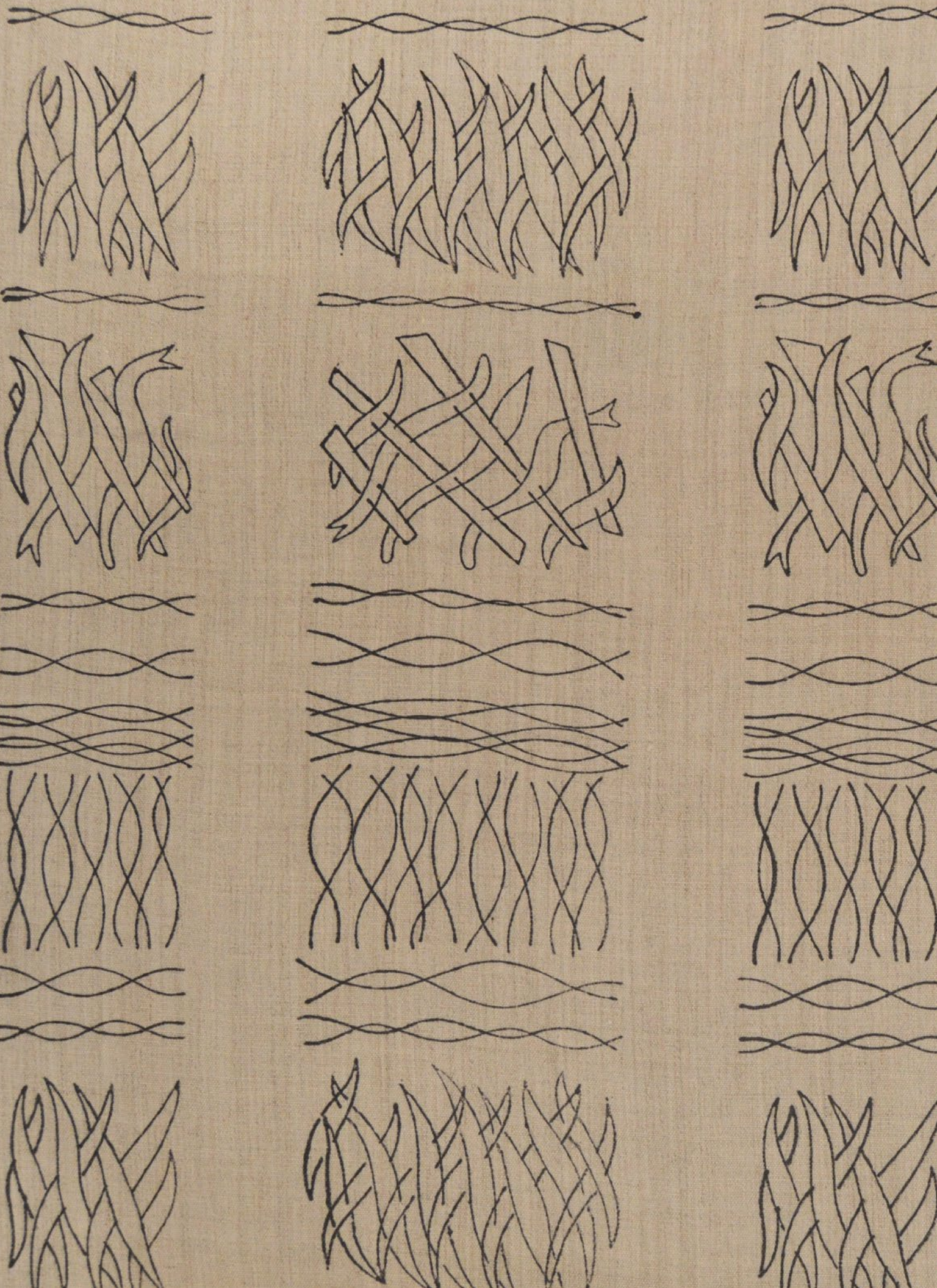
In the late 1940s, Vézelay formally entered the world of textiles, producing silk designs for Ascher Ltd. By the following decade, Heal Fabrics and Edinburgh Weavers also manufactured her designs, which blended her evolving minimalism with the novel atomic modernism then popular in British interior decoration.

This screen-printed linen, manufactured by the firm Bauret-Warin in 1946, is the earliest known textile that Vézelay designed and the only one known to have been made for the French market. Keen on promoting artist textiles to a discerning public, Bauret-Warin briefly produced a line of high-end printed fabrics and woven tapestries from designs commissioned by painters like Serge Poliakoff and André Lansky. In 1946, *Art et décoration* featured this fabric among its new offerings for the season. The composition relies strongly on Vézelay’s “living lines,” which here merge into attenuated helices and over- and underlap to form a loose basketweave, arranged in thin columns. Given the development of her art as well as her other textile designs by the late 1940s, this composition probably dates to more than a decade prior to its printing, while Vézelay was still living in France. It closely resembles the drawing used on the invitation to the vernissage of Vézelay’s first solo exhibition in 1937 held at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher-Myrbor in Paris.

Vézelay’s foray into textile design has been read as an aberration in her career precipitated by economic necessity. However, she may have understood something that few had yet noticed by midcentury: that this other medium might bring with it a new kind of experimental modernism. In a 1959 interview, she was emphatic that the public “would be bewildered” if her textile designs appeared as oil paintings in an art gallery. Her fabrics thus may have actually been an integral part of her artistic practice, allowing for her unfettered vision of “living lines,” blurring the boundaries between two and three dimensions, and reclaiming the automatic and uncontrollable through the more mechanical field of design.

A length of this textile is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago (2003.102).

MDA



## SWADDLING BAND (*FASCIA*)

Italian, early 17th century

145.5 x 9 in.

From ancient Roman ex-votos to Andrea della Robbia's roundels on the facade of the orphanage of the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence, the swaddled baby has endured for millennia as a symbol of infantile comfort and happiness and a common metaphor for security and support. Swaddling, or tightly wrapping infants with cloth strips, was historically believed to ensure a child's healthy growth, warmth, and physical and psychological well-being. Although the practice largely fell out of favor by the eighteenth century, when its actual safety for a child's development was challenged, the use of swaddling bands continued in some parts of Southern and Central Europe well into the twentieth century.

In early modern Italy, swaddling bands were among the many ritualistic objects presented by the expectant father or by family and friends to a mother after childbirth, along with *deschi da parto* (birth trays) and *scodelle* (sets of maiolica bowls for foodstuffs). Elaborate bands with embroidery, lace, or both, like the present example, were reserved for the wealthier class and might have been used during baptismal rites or presentations. Alessandro Vitali's 1605 portrait of the infant Federico Ubaldo della Rovere depicts the future Duke of Urbino wrapped in especially sumptuous swaddling with gold and silver embroidery and lace (Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 55). These ornate cloths would have been wrapped over plain linen bands, offering another layer of perceived protection for the infant and ensuring that the precious outer textile required few, if any, washings. The small number of extant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century swaddling bands in collections today are decorated with embroidery or lace, having survived because they held value as beautifully wrought textiles.

The freeform design of scrollwork and diminutive florals embroidered in satin stitch and backstitch, as well as the imperfect lace edging, reveal the domestic origins of this swaddling band. The maker—possibly a relative or friend, or even the pregnant mother herself—has applied a matching needle lace edging of knotted and looped red silk and silver-gilt-wrapped threads. The lace pattern closely relates to plates published in Giovanni-Battista Sessa's pattern book *Le Pompe* (1557). This fine plain-weave linen strip has been sewn to a wider and coarser plain-weave linen tapering to a sharp point at one end, a feature of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century swaddling bands.

Two paper labels affixed to the linen and lace affirm this swaddling band's status as an object of curiosity for future generations of women as well. In the nineteenth century, it was in the collection of a "Mme de Flaux." This may be the comtesse de Flaux, a well-known collector of embroideries in fin-de-siècle Paris and lender to the seminal 1883 exhibition of textiles under the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs.

MDA





## COTTON PIQUÉ DRESSING GOWN OR PEIGNOIR

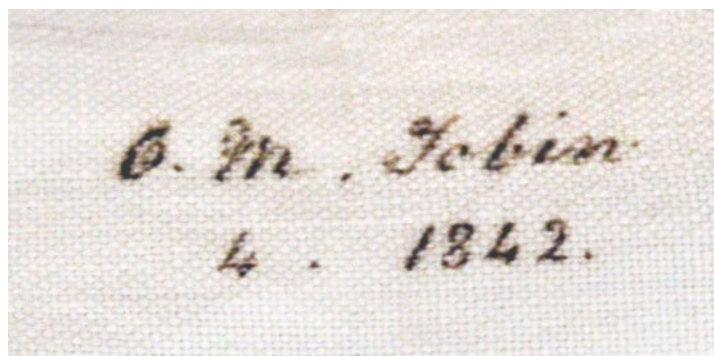
English, ca. 1842

The elaborate hairstyles of the 1840s required women to spend many hours at their toilette curling, pomading, smoothing, and styling their locks to picturesque perfection. The most characteristic style was parted down the center and flattened over the crown to the ears, the hair then cascading in loose sausage ringlets, known as *tire-bouchons* (corkscrews) or *anglaises*, as the look was considered particularly English. “Ringlets à l’Anglaise is the decided fashion for the front hair; they are immensely long, falling even as low as the neck,” reported *The Court, Lady’s Magazine, Monthly Critic and Museum* in February 1842, the year this gown was probably made. Cotton dressing gowns or peignoirs—a word derived from the French *peigner*, to comb—such as this, protected underclothes from the various unguents used to tame the mane, and provided a welcome respite from the restrictions upon the female body imposed by contemporary fashions.

In contrast with the exuberant romanticism of the 1830s, the 1840s were “droopingly sentimental,” in the harsh words of twentieth-century English fashion historian C. Willet Cunnington. He was also a physician, who, rather dubiously, considered the fashions of the 1840s unhygienic for both body and mind because of the severe constraints they placed on women’s movement and therefore, he believed, on thought. Consumptive chic was the style, and women who wanted to be *à la mode* cultivated an ethereal pallor as well as a willowy fragility in their dress, inspired by bohemian waifs known as *grisettes* and famous courtesans like Marie Duplessis, transformed into tragic heroines by writers like Alexandre Dumas  *fils* and Victor Hugo. Boned bodices “tight to the shape” sculpted the torso into an elongated cone, tapering to a hand-span waist made all the more dramatic by enormous bell-shaped skirts. Gigantic billowy sleeves, fashionable only a few years before, disappeared, replaced by long skin-tight sleeves set in below the shoulder and high under the arm, confining women to a demure “passivity of mind and body,” as Cunnington put it.

Arrayed in a flowing dressing gown such as this, the wearer would have been equipped to meet servants or family members in relative comfort, but without sacrificing decorum. Cut generously from sturdy white cotton piqué, the gown could be left loose, or drawn tightly at the waist with an attached self sash. Three bands of ruching below the shoulder on the sleeves are the only other concession to fit, the rest of the sleeves left loose to allow the inhabitant a full range of motion. The wide spreading collar forming a cape over the shoulders ensured that fallout from makeup or hair could be easily brushed off. Delicate ruffled mull trim gives the garment a sense of its eighteenth-century precedents, the combing jackets worn during the intricate ritual of dressing the hair with powder.

An elegantly inked inscription on the interior waist reveals the original wearer’s name, O.M. Tobin, and conveniently



provides the date of 1842. The addition of the number “4” indicates that she had at least three other similar dressing gowns, suggesting Tobin was quite well-off. Its perfect state of preservation, as well as a note accompanying the gown signed by Tobin’s granddaughter that confirms its provenance, demonstrates that the garment remained a treasured heirloom for female members of the family for generations.

WDG







## EMBROIDERED CORD-QUILTED COTTON CORSET

American, ca. 1830–1835

This embroidered cord-quilted corset illustrates the return of foundation garments for women in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Around 1800, at the height of the vogue for columnar gowns of sheer, white cotton inspired by classical antiquity, women discarded the rigid, boned silk or linen corsets that had been an integral element in the process of getting dressed throughout the eighteenth century. While some daring young women abandoned these undergarments altogether, most women adopted high-waisted cotton or linen corsets with minimal reinforcement. By 1810, as the fashionable female silhouette expanded across the bodice and hem, heralding the influence of Romanticism in dress, hip-length corsets reappeared. However, these longer corsets differed significantly from those worn just a few decades earlier. Rather than creating a hard casing that molded the torso into an inverted cone, characteristic of the eighteenth century, early-nineteenth-century corsets both followed and subtly emphasized the rounded contours of the female body and afforded a relatively greater degree of comfort.

Although women could patronize specialized corset makers—many of whom regularly advertised their latest wares in British and French fashion periodicals—this example was undoubtedly made by the wearer, who embroidered her initials “E.D.” at the right hip in brick-red cotton thread on the white cotton lining. Sewn and embroidered with rust-colored silk, the corset is constructed from two curved front and two back pieces of twilled brown cotton, with gussets set in over the breasts, and separate shoulder straps. The wide set of the straps indicates a date of around 1830 to 1835 when the dress neckline fell slightly off the shoulder. The cord quilting is both decorative and functional, as it



provides a modicum of reinforcement at the bust, waist, abdomen, and back. Backstitching secures the straight and serpentine lines of quilting, while the stylized floral sprigs below the waist are worked in chainstitch. At the base of each gusset—a point of stress—are small radiating motifs embroidered in satin stitch. At the center front is a slot for a busk—probably made of wood and now missing—that kept the wearer’s posture upright, and two whalebones—one on each side of the center back lacing holes set with bone eyelets—extend from just below the shoulder blade to the hip. The edges of the corset are bound in white cotton.

Over her corset, the wearer would have donned an ample petticoat and a dress with voluminous, gigot sleeves, a tight-fitting bodice with a narrow waist, and a full, rounded skirt—the signature, hourglass silhouette of the Romantic style in fashion.

This corset was exhibited in “Fashioning the Body: An Intimate History of the Silhouette,” Bard Graduate Center, New York, April 3–July 26, 2015. It is published in Denis Bruna, ed., *Fashioning the Body: An Intimate History of the Silhouette* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2015), p.160, fig. 123.

MM

## HOLLIE POINT SAMPLER

By Mary Hardmeat

English, 1717

6 x 6 1/4 in.

In early modern England, perhaps no textile art was more closely associated with girlhood and womanhood than the sampler. Previously used primarily by professional embroiderers and lacemakers to document stitches and designs, samplers became the common way for young ladies to practice needlework. The wealthiest families would have employed private tutors to educate their young daughters in sewing, while girls of the gentry class might attend a seminary or boarding school, establishments that were generally looked down upon by the aristocracy. Other middle- and working-class mothers taught their daughters to sew at home or, in the later eighteenth century, sent them to the local dame school.



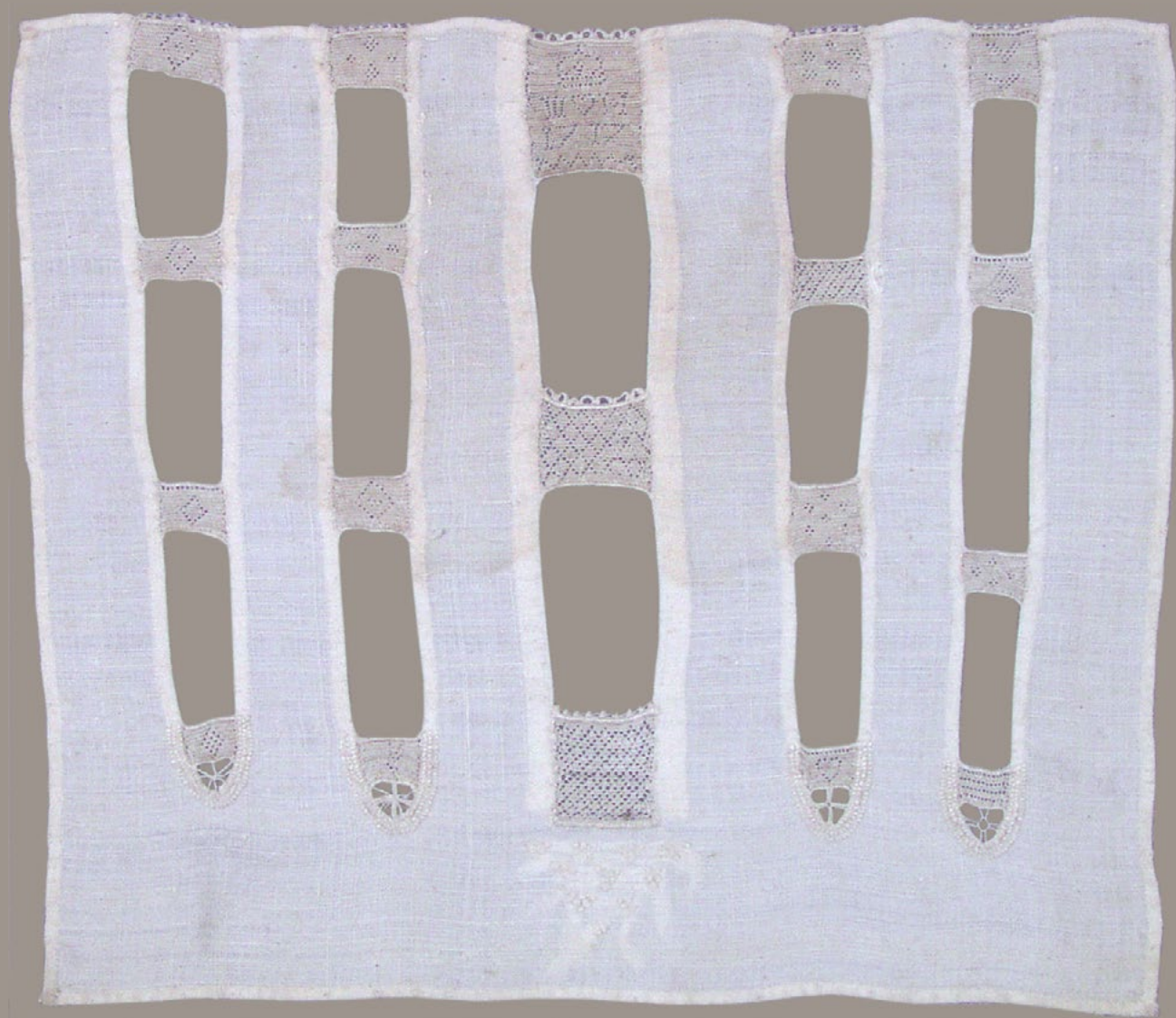
Of the popular lace forms produced in eighteenth-century England, most were the domain of professional lacemakers. Hollie point, however, was a uniquely domestic production, thus best suited to a girl's needlework education. This needle lace is made up of rows of hollie stitches, twisted buttonhole stitches worked over horizontal threads to create a design that appears in the voided spaces. Sometimes referred to as "holy point," it was believed to have been first made for Church textiles and vestments. The corruption of the name more likely refers to its use on infant's garments possibly for baptism, as most extant hollie point survives as insertions in baby caps and shirts.

One can imagine the maker of this 1717 sampler, identified as Mary Hardmeat, learning the art of hollie point in preparation for the future arrival of a child. In addition to the date, her initials "M H" with a heart, and a surmounting crown, she created a variety of

miniscule designs: diaper patterns, single diamonds, chevrons, hearts, and tiny flowers. Just as the hollie stitch itself creates an image within the negative space, the inserts bring visual interest to what had been empty areas between the linen's cut strips. Drawn work finishes some of the tiny hollie stitch panels and embroidered stylized clusters of grapes form an inverted triangle.

Since the early seventeenth century, band samplers had been a common instructional format for learning whitework techniques, but the unusual shape and composition of this sampler, as well as the focus on the hollie stitch, must have been the product of a particular school or teacher. Dated hollie point samplers are usually from the second third of the eighteenth century or later, making this an early example. An identical sampler, initialed and dated "S ♥ D / 1716" with a crown and an embroidered inverted triangle, is in a private collection and must have been made under the same instructor. A hollie point sampler of a related shape dated 1741 and formerly described as an "infant's face cloth" is in the Norfolk Museums (1922.135.16). Another whitework sampler (without hollie point) by Mary Hardmeat, dated 1716, was formerly in the same collection as the present sampler and is published in M. Finkel & Daughter, *Samplings XXIV* (2003), p. 27.

MDA



## ***ZAIDEE AND HER KITTENS SET OF FOUR PLACEMATS***

By Virginia Lee Burton Demetrios for Folly Cove Designers

American, designed 1948–1949

12 x 18 in. each

Sketch, transfer, gouge, “butter,” and jump! This action sequence describes the basic printing process for textiles made by the Folly Cove Designers, a collective mainly comprising women from the Cape Ann community in Massachusetts, which gained national acclaim for their distinctive prints with regional flair. The organization commenced informally in 1938 when Virginia Lee Burton Demetrios (1909–1968), author and illustrator celebrated for her children’s books, bartered design lessons for her neighbor in exchange for her son’s violin instruction. As more housewives in the area joined in, the enterprise snowballed into a 1940 group exhibition in Demetrios’s barn-based studio.

In 1941, Folly Cove Designers was professionally launched to sell their hand-block-printed furnishing and table-top fabrics; soon, they expanded their line to include apparel such as peasant skirts and blouses, bathing suits, and the occasional evening dress. Three years later, the designers hired member Dorothy Norton to operate wholesale and retail affairs. This decision parlayed into high-profile business agreements: in 1945, Lord & Taylor purchased non-exclusive rights to five designs, and from 1945 to 1947, F. Schumacher & Co. printed select Folly Cove patterns, paying royalties to the collective. Folly Cove Designers never advertised in magazines or newspapers, but stimulated buyer’s interest through annual showcases and by participating in museum and art gallery exhibitions. Their publicity pinnacle came in a four-page photo-essay in *LIFE* (November 26, 1945), highlighting production steps and finished products, described as “quaint and humorous” and “distinctly Yankee in flavor.” The group’s infamous technique, whereby the transfer of print to cloth was accomplished by jumping vigorously on the cut linoleum block, was pictured with a caption noting “slighter women are abandoning foot stamping for hand presses.”

One of Demetrios’s best-selling patterns, “Zaidee and Her Kittens” is a quintessential example of a Folly Cove design that, when printed in one pattern unit, is ideal for a placemat. The motif’s “spine” is a feline family tree, with Zaidee and her mate (a tom, slightly bigger and more bristly than his consort) flanking the base; above them, branches support infinite striped, spotted, and solidly-coated offspring of ever smaller proportions. Though Demetrios may not have had a scientific approach in mind, the pattern is fractal in structure. According to the laws of nature, fractals repeat at different scales and are formed from copies repeating in smaller copies of themselves. Demetrios was certainly adhering to fundamental principles she laid out for students who aspired to join the collective: homework exercises could revolve around the selection of a single natural motif, progressing from repeating the motif in two to five different sizes, each progression being twice as large as its precedent.

This set of placemats, with purposefully frayed, self-fringe margins, is printed in one of the collective’s “mellow antique” colors; an original hang tag, inscribed in Demetrios’s handwriting, accompanies the set. America House, one of the group’s best-known retailers, advertised this design on the back cover of *Craft Horizons* (November–December 1955); it is also illustrated in *Folly Cove Designers*, Cape Ann Historical Association (1996), p. 30. Identical placemats are in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2011.2072) and Rhode Island School of Design Museum (1991.014.44).

LW



FOLLY COVE DESIGNERS  
FOLLY COVE COLLECTIBLE HANDICRAFTS  
20-10000 2010  
WE DESIGN, WE INSPIRE!  
Hand made in the USA





## **LOVERS SCREEN-PRINTED LINEN**

By Anirnik Oshuitoq for Kinngait Studios

Inuit (Kinngait, Nunavut), ca. 1966

36.5 x 48.5 in.

The history of Kinngait Studios (formerly Cape Dorset Studios) is necessarily rooted in the colonial past of Nunavut (Dorset Island) and the traumas inflicted upon the Inuit people by the Canadian government. The idea for the Studios and what would become the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative (WBEC) were part of a larger governmental plan of forced resettlement, Christian education policy, and coercion to join the wage economy. At the same time, the Studios, which have been Inuit-run under the WBEC since about 1959, also represent the repossession of both traditional Inuit spiritualism and settler culture. That repossession was politically evident as recently as December 2019, when Cape Dorset—so called after Edward Sackville, 4th Earl of Dorset, a proponent of colonization there—was finally formally renamed to Kinngait, the area’s Inuktitut name meaning “mountains”.

The textile-printing workshop established in the late 1950s at Kinngait is another marker of that reclamation, uniting the centuries-old practice of sewing “skin pictures” with modern printing techniques. Until recently, the Studios’ textiles received little attention compared to the more famous works on paper. The rediscovery of a group of fabrics, however, prompted the Textile Museum of Canada’s current exhibition, “Printed Textiles from Kinngait Studios.” Many textiles included in the show date to the mid-1960s, when the WBEC invested in screen-printing technology. By 1966, this process was largely outsourced—possibly in the hopes of mass manufacture—to the Toronto-based Eskimo Fine Arts Division of Canadian Arctic Producers Ltd. The following year, Kinngait textiles won the Design 67 Award, and some were featured in the furnished apartments of architect Moshe Safdie’s Habitat 67. Despite Expo 67’s successes and marketing in Montreal and Toronto, high production costs and low sales—annual projections were around \$30,000 CAD, but profits barely exceeded \$5,000 CAD—led the WBEC to shutter the textile-printing workshop in 1968. This linen by artist and sculptor Anirnik Oshuitoq (1902–1983) is an important document of this short-lived but significant enterprise.

Born in 1902 aboard the ship the Arctic near Kimmirut, Nunavut, Anirnik Oshuitoq developed her artistic practice late. She lived a nomadic lifestyle until the 1960s, when she settled at Kinngait with her daughter and fellow artist Ningeega Oshuitoq (1918–1980). Anirnik, a well-respected elder in the community, quickly became involved in the Studios. Between 1961 and 1974, she produced numerous stonecuts, stencil prints, and lithographs as part of the annual Cape Dorset Print Collection, and also contributed to Kinngait sewing projects. She continued to work as a graphic artist until her death in 1982.

Anirnik provided drawings for two textile designs for Kinngait Studios: *Lovers* and *Fabulous Geese*. The large-scale design of *Lovers* is printed with just two screens in a bold palette of dark olive and persimmon. The composition depicts two human figures in profile facing one another, with noses, spindly fingers, and the soles of their feet on the verge of touching. A row of circles follows in a vertical line from their open mouths to their outstretched hands, suggestive of conversation, kissing, and communication, as well as a more profound spiritual connection. This length, with a selvedge handwritten in ink, was likely a strike off.

*Lovers* and *Fabulous Geese* were among the award-winning fabrics shown at Expo 67, and *Fabulous Geese* was used to furnish a children’s art classroom in the Canadian Pavilion. Both designs also received praise in the press before the Fair; a photograph accompanying an August 1966 article in the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* shows the sales manager for Canadian Arctic Producers Ltd. holding Anirnik’s fabrics. Even with this visibility, it is unlikely they were produced in great quantity, making this linen a rare survival of Kinngait Studios’ forgotten textile history.

## MAYA SCREEN-PRINTED LINEN

By Ruth Reeves for Morley-Fletcher, Ltd.  
American (New York), designed 1931, printed 1947  
92 x 46.75 in.

But there is more, much more in Ruth's vision than making nice dyes and pleasing outlines, or even of mastering some of the ancient art secrets of the past. She sees design sources...in the living of life....  
— *Women's Wear Daily*, December 5, 1934

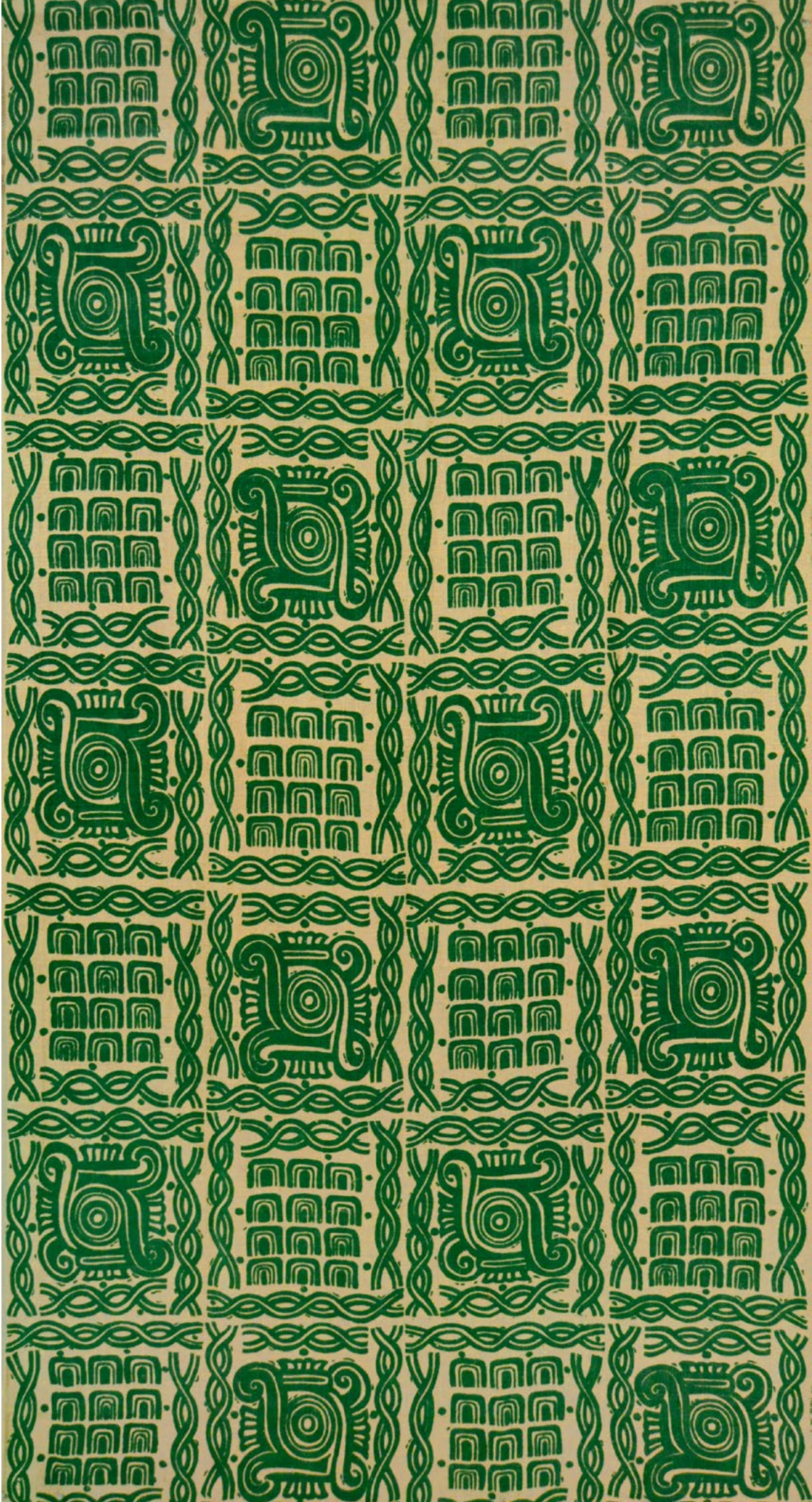
Ruth Reeves (1892–1966) translated American rhythms onto cloth, steeping herself in “the living of life” wherever her peripatetic urges steered. Her most enduring legacy, however, is as a designer who channeled the ancient for her vision of modernism. Reeves studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, the California School of Design in San Francisco, and the Art Students League in New York, all between 1910 and 1914. In 1916, she met Morris De Camp Crawford, research editor for *Women's Wear*, who encouraged Reeves to explore museums for inspiration; this quickly led to her work as an illustrator for the publication, providing sketches of fashions derived from ethnographic costumes. Between 1921-1927, Reeves lived in Paris, studying with Fernand Léger and in the same social circle as textile artist Raoul Dufy. Upon her return to the states, she designed textiles for H.R. Mallinsons & Co. and W. & J. Sloane, and, in 1932, contributed carpets and wall coverings for New York City's newest architectural jewel, Radio City Music Hall.

Though Reeves journeyed to Guatemala on a Carnegie Institution fellowship in 1934, it was years earlier, through her exploration of artifacts at the American Museum of Natural History and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, that she developed interest in pre-Columbian artistic heritage. In 1916, Reeves likely attended a lecture given by Herbert J. Spinden (assistant curator of anthropology at the AMNH and a proponent of museum-based design education)

on Mexican and Central American textiles; he highlighted Aztec water motifs, several of which were strikingly similar to elements found in Reeves' 1931 design, *Maya*. Also known as *Double Headed Serpent*, this textile reveals Reeves' experience with stone or ceramic depictions of cosmological Mayan glyphs rather than indigenous weavings. In luminous jade green on a flaxen ground, stacked “U” shapes and swirling squares are arranged in a muscular grid separated by twisted strands that may reference the criss-crossing ornament of a Mayan “serpent bar,” a



From *House and Garden* (September 1948)



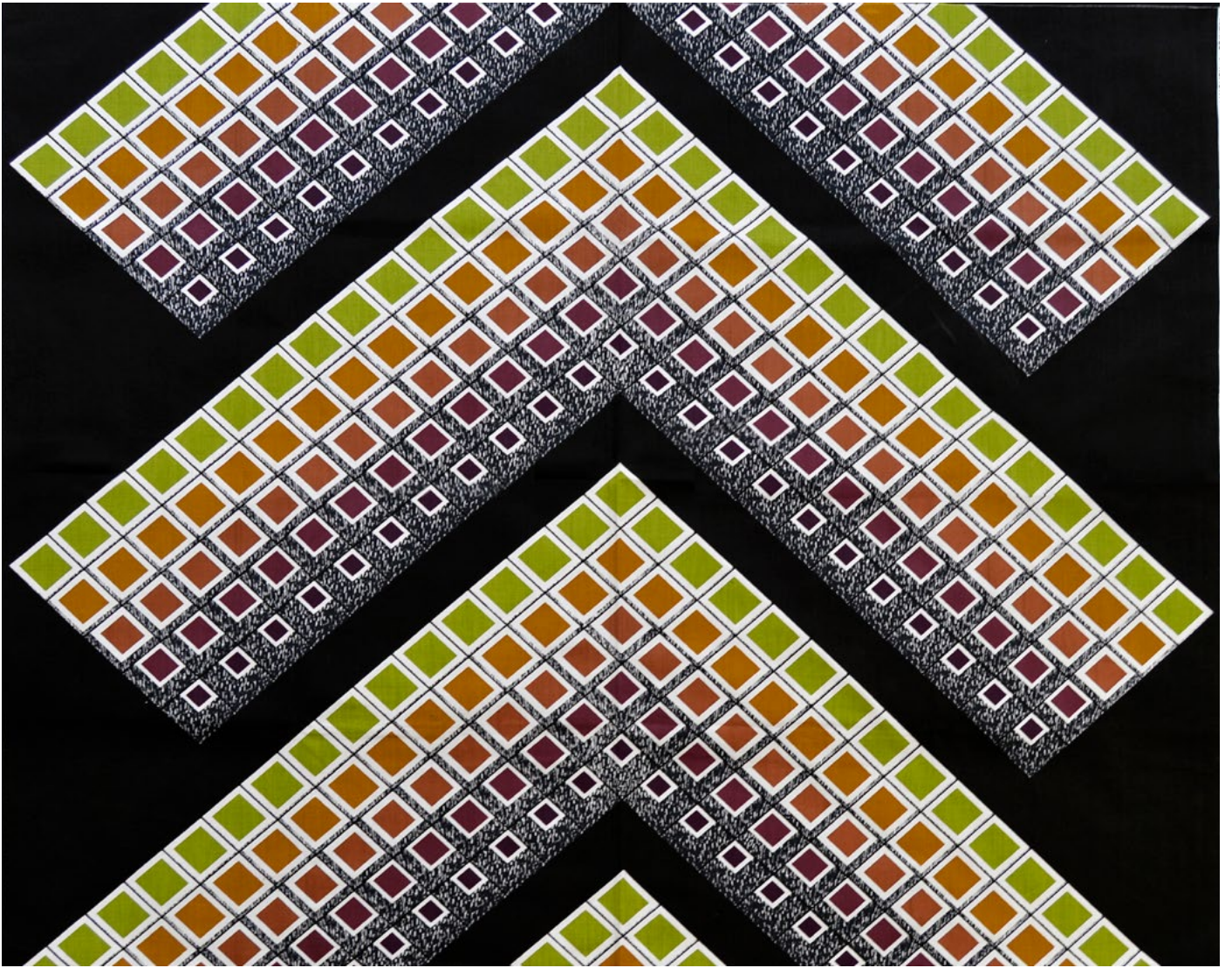


ceremonial staff terminating in stylized mouths, or the undulating two-headed snakes of Aztec lore. Because Reeves vocally advocated against designers lazily copying archaeological motifs, it is challenging to pin down the source(s).

This design's longevity is a testament to Reeves' transformation of pattern rooted in temporality into a timeless statement. *Maya* was a darling of modern-minded publications, featured in *Design* (September, 1931), *House and Garden* (February, 1932), and *Decorator's Digest* (March 1935). It returned to prominence in the late 1940s in an invigorated field of modernist fabrics. This time, *Maya* had a new layer of mystique: "executed in subtly brilliant South American hues," it was one of seven Reeves prints "imbued with things primitive" revived by Morley-Fletcher, Ltd. on natural linen imported from Peru, and pictured as chair upholstery in the *Miami Herald* (November 2, 1947). In 1948, *Maya* was exhibited at the Akron Art Museum, and included in round-ups of noteworthy textiles in *Arts and Architecture* (March 1948) and *American Fabrics* (Vol. 5, Winter 1948). Coming full circle, it was featured again in *House and Garden* (September 1948) gloriously enrobing a curved sofa.

An identical panel of *Maya* is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago (2018.209).

LW



## **GRADIENT SCREEN-PRINTED COTTON-POLYESTER**

By Evelyn Redgrave for Heal Fabrics

British, 1972

51 x 48 in.

By the early 1970s, the London-based firm Heal Fabrics (founded in 1941) was one of the leading producers of avant-garde furnishing textiles in postwar Britain, with a well-established international reputation. A converter rather than a manufacturer, Heal's acquired patterns from freelance designers which were then printed by commission. Tom Worthington, the company's visionary director from 1948 to 1971, was widely credited with Heal's commercial success. Throughout his tenure, Worthington selected cutting-edge work from a large roster of creative young designers, many of whom trained at the Royal College of Art and Hornsey College of Art, in London. One of these talents was Evelyn Redgrave (b. ca. 1944), who began selling her work to Worthington in 1969, while still a student at Hornsey. In March 1970, the journal *Design* noted that Redgrave had been appointed a "consultant" at the firm and that she was also "designing wallpapers for the American market." Since full-time employment "as a designer for printed textiles" was uncommon, these artists had to create patterns for "a wide variety of surfaces." In 1974, Redgrave became one of Heal's directors, a position she held until 1977. In an article published in the London *Times* in March 1974, Redgrave identified what she looked for when creating a new collection: "First of all a textile design should be visually interesting. It must also hang, fold and repeat well and at the same time be fresh and functional." Following her departure from Heal's, Redgrave set up Tarian Design, where she continued to produce innovative furnishing textiles.

Screen-printed on a blend of cotton and Terylene (a synthetic polyester fiber), *Gradient* exemplifies the inventive and dynamic patterns that characterized Heal's output, particularly during the three decades following the war. Dating to 1972, Redgrave's oversized design features wedges filled with interlocking squares, graduated in size, in shades of pea green, olive and chestnut brown, maroon, and deep purple on flecked navy-and-white, against a rich, black ground. The following year, in 1973, Redgrave reprised *Gradient's* impressive scale, geometric forms, and tonal gradations in *Harlequin* (lengths of the latter are in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2010-38-20) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.476:3-1999, 4-1999)). The Op and Pop art-influenced patterns by Redgrave and other Heal's designers of the late 1960s and early 1970s took full advantage of the development of mechanized flatbed screen printing in the 1960s that facilitated a greater degree of experimentation than block or roller printing. These colorful, audacious furnishing textiles were perfectly suited to the minimalism of contemporary architecture and interiors where they would have made a strong statement.

In 2010, the Philadelphia Museum of Art acquired Evelyn Redgrave's personal archive, published in the *Cora Ginsburg Winter 2009–2010* catalogue, pp. 30–31, that includes examples of her own fabrics for Heal's as well as several by other designers, press releases, black-and-white and color photographs of the firm's stands at trade fairs, information sheets on the designs, swatches, and tear sheets and reprints of articles from *The Ambassador* and *Household Textiles International*.

MM





## **BOTTLES ROLLER-PRINTED RAYON**

By Jacqueline Groag for David Whitehead, Ltd.

British, designed, 1948, reworked and printed 1951

47 x 42 in.

Jacqueline Groag's (1903–1986) textile designs are paradoxical: feisty in color and form, yet delicate and intricately layered; sophisticated, yet executed with child-like wonder. This reflects her early training at Vienna's Kunstgewerbeschule (1926–1929) under Franz Cizek, whose coursework de-emphasized adult inhibitions and put primacy on naiveté, an approach which resonated with Groag. But her stylistic development was also indebted to Josef Hoffman's instruction. Groag concentrated on carpet, wallpaper, and textile designs in his architecture classes, and his strict brand of decorative rationalism gave structure to Groag's freestyle whimsy.

It is through these professors that she connected with the Wiener Werkstätte, to which she sold fabric designs on a freelance basis for several years. Though this is among her grandest accolades, Groag's work for British firms in the years following World War II is the most adventurous of her career. Her experiences in Paris in the 1930s, supplying silks to couture houses like Schiaparelli and Chanel and furnishing fabrics for Rodier, prepared her for international renown. Political turbulence, economic depression, and anti-Semitism in Austria forced Groag (a secular Jew) to seek clients elsewhere; after the 1938 *Anschluss*, Groag and her husband, both Czech citizens, returned to Prague but fled to London in 1939. Paralleling the wartime influx of European designers to the United States, Great Britain also sympathetically received emigres. There, Groag flourished—pre-war success clinched her dominance in this adopted homeland. Her designs were cover material for *The Ambassador*, Britain's analog to *American Fabrics* magazine, and featured in the groundbreaking exhibitions *Britain Can Make It* (1946) and *Festival of Britain* (1951). Groag's floral prints even graced royalty: in 1946, couturier Edward Molyneux selected one manufactured by F.W. Grafton for a dress he designed for Princess Elizabeth, soon-to-be Queen.

David Whitehead Ltd., a subsidiary of a nineteenth-century firm that, under John T. Murray's direction, skewed boldly into mass-market modernism, had Groag rework this pattern in 1951. Originally commissioned by architect David Lennon in 1948 for the Rayon Design Centre, an eighteenth-century home in Mayfair converted into an industry showcase, Groag harmonized this design with its neoclassical plasterwork interiors. She bridged centuries by using “greyed” colors popular in mid-century schemes—putty-tinged mauve, olive-drabs, and dusty turquoise—enlivened by pops of vegetal chartreuse and magenta. Sketchy outlines are rendered in black, and dark steel-toned counterpoints impart gravity throughout the jaunty pattern. Project-specific architectural references, rather than vessels, are more relevant than the pattern's unofficial title implies: elongated silhouettes mimic columns, while line drawings in the interstices unmistakably depict Ionic volutes and florid Corinthian capitals. Sprinkled throughout are quatrefoils, identifiable shorthand for Gothic ornament, enshrined in “rose windows.” Though attuned to the neoclassical residence, Groag's fragmentary collage of historic architecture might also reflect the omnipresent reality of post-Blitz devastation in London. No matter the inspiration, this approachably modern, economically-produced pattern—one of twenty such exhibited by David Whitehead Ltd. at the *Festival of Britain*—dovetailed with Murray's ethos for the firm that “The Cheap Need Not be Cheap and Nasty” (*Design*, December 1950).

This fabric is illustrated in *David Whitehead Ltd: Artist Designed Textiles 1952-1969* (1993), pp. 23, 26, and in *Jacqueline Groag, Textile & Pattern Design: Wiener Werkstatte to American Modern* (2009), pp. 42–43. Samples are in the V&A Museum (CIRC.282A-1951 and CIRC.282B-1951). A panel of this textile was exhibited in “Designing Women: Post War British Textiles,” Fashion and Textile Museum, London, March 16–June 16, 2012.

LW

## THREE PAIRS OF SHOES

By Beth Levine for Herbert Levine, Inc.  
American (New York), ca. 1951–1971

Beth Levine's (1914–2006) footwear has earned her the well-deserved title of the most important female shoe designer of the twentieth century. Her clever and often quirky designs—like the “Spring-o-lator” mule, “No Shoe,” “Stocking Boot,” “Cinderella,” and “Kabuki”—balanced comfort and experimentation, and used materials of the highest quality and novelty, from Staron silks to buffalo fur to astroturf. A favorite of First Ladies Jacqueline Kennedy, Lady Bird Johnson, and Pat Nixon as well as celebrities including Marilyn Monroe, Barbra Streisand, and Cher, Levine's shoes also outfitted the feet of models for Halston, Geoffrey Beene, Pauline Trigere, Adele Simpson, and Adolfo.

Born Bessie Katz in Patchogue, NY to Lithuanian immigrants, Levine began her career in footwear not as maker but as mannequin, thanks to her sample-sized 4B feet. In 1938, she found work in Manhattan as a shoe model for Palter DeLiso, Inc. and soon became a stylist and eventually head designer at I. Miller. In 1946, she married Herbert Levine. Two years later, the couple purchased a shoe factory. Aware that a woman's name might paradoxically hurt ladies' footwear sales, they founded Herbert Levine, Inc. Nevertheless, her name appears alone as the “genius” behind the shoes in some of the earliest press. In 1953, she received her first honor from the Formal Wear Institute. The following year, she and her husband won the coveted Neiman Marcus award.

These three pairs of shoes demonstrate the evolution of Levine's footwear silhouette over two decades, as well as her commitment to quality and playful experimentation. The rounded-toe ruched-vamp slingbacks probably date to 1951, when Levine produced at least one variation of the shoe in leather with a criss-crossing Parisian ankle strap. This printed silk version, with a pattern reminiscent of designs by Marcel Vertès, retailed at the Beverly Hills boutique Joseph Salon.

The pink satin lace-up heels illustrate Levine's interest in juxtaposing tradition and modernity as well as femininity and masculinity in their combination of a man's oxford with the silhouette of an eighteenth-century lady's shoe. These probably date to about 1962, when Levine embraced an historicizing Louis-heel shape.

The ca. 1971 pair of synthetic satin boots represent a period of success for Levine during the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1966, she designed the famous go-go boots worn by Nancy Sinatra. The following year, fittingly dubbed the “Year of the Leg,” Levine's boot designs that blurred the line between hosiery and shoe earned her a Coty Award.

The block-dyed fish motif appears to be unique among Levine's shoe designs. The fabric was probably made by fellow Coty winners Will and Eileen Richardson, the husband-and-wife duo behind Up Tied, the New York-based tie-dyed fabric business favored by Halston at the same moment when he looked to Levine for shoes. The Richardsons used a nearly identical fish motif on a swimsuit and headscarf shown in *Look* magazine in 1971.

Levine was the only shoemaker to ever receive two Coty awards. She won her second in 1973, just two years before Herbert Levine, Inc. closed its doors after apparently refusing to bow to pressures of mass production. The closure came at a time when Levine's shoes remained the gold standard in footwear, a testament to her insistence on quality even at the business's expense. Over the next decades, she continued to work with designers, in addition to teaching and lecturing, where she inspired a new generation of shoemakers. Her influence still permeates contemporary footwear design, from Martin Margiela's “Topless Tabi” and Benoît Méléard's take on the “Harem” sandal to the mass appeal of vinyls and plastics.









## IRIDESCENT COATED DENIM ENSEMBLE

By Vivienne Westwood

British, 1992–1993

My clothes have a scent, a feeling of “I know it but I don’t know what it is.” They have a certain nostalgia which, for me, is how I would define glamour.  
—Vivienne Westwood

For nearly fifty years, Vivienne Westwood (b. 1941) has been the reigning *agente provocatrice* of English fashion. From anarchist to OBE to environmental activist, she has continued to evolve while maintaining a passion for history that ensures her clothes are not mere disposable fashion but rather “part of the story of human culture,” as she put it. Almost from the beginning of her career, her influence has been international in scale. An ardent Francophile, she has shown her collections just as often in Paris as in London, along with Milan, New York, and Tokyo. Essentially a voracious autodidact, she has incorporated references to historic fashion, decorative arts, and fine art into her clothing in order to create a sense of timelessness.

This three-piece painted denim ensemble—worn by a man but entirely unisex—represents Westwood’s passion for experimental textiles, ranging from marbled cottons and slashed satins to metallic-printed mohair tartan and stretch velvets. She has pushed the boundaries of traditional textiles often, as here, where the frayed edges and exposed seams call attention to, rather than hide, the fragility of fabric and historically-inspired patterning. The teal metallic coating on the surface of all three elements of this ensemble recalls the iridescent wings of the jewel beetle used to embellish textiles in Southeast Asia and subsequently appropriated by western fashion in the 1820s. With regular wear, this glaze would inevitably age to form a “patina,” typifying the designer’s longstanding interest in the representation of decay and destruction in high fashion.

Since the 1980s, Westwood has viewed denim as an economical means of bringing historical techniques and allusions to the masses. In her seminal 1991 “Cut and Slash” collections—her first designed in collaboration with former student Andreas Kronthaler, who became her husband and permanent co-designer—she used denim as a literal canvas on which to project historical patterns, from Renaissance-style slashing to jeans printed with esoteric eighteenth-century bizarre silk patterns. For her Fall/Winter 1992 “Always on Camera” collection, blue denim served as the backdrop for screen-printed photographic reproductions of Marlene Dietrich, creating a fractured image of female modernity. She continued exploring denim’s expressive potential as a material cypher with “Grand Hotel” (Spring/Summer 1993), transforming the material into facsimiles of seventeenth-century Venetian lace. Westwood undercut the associations of wealth and status tied to these historical references by playing upon denim’s modern connotations of youth and sex, creating body-baring cropped jackets or, as here, utilizing classic 1950s patterns to subvert the image of the rockabilly rebel.

WDG



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