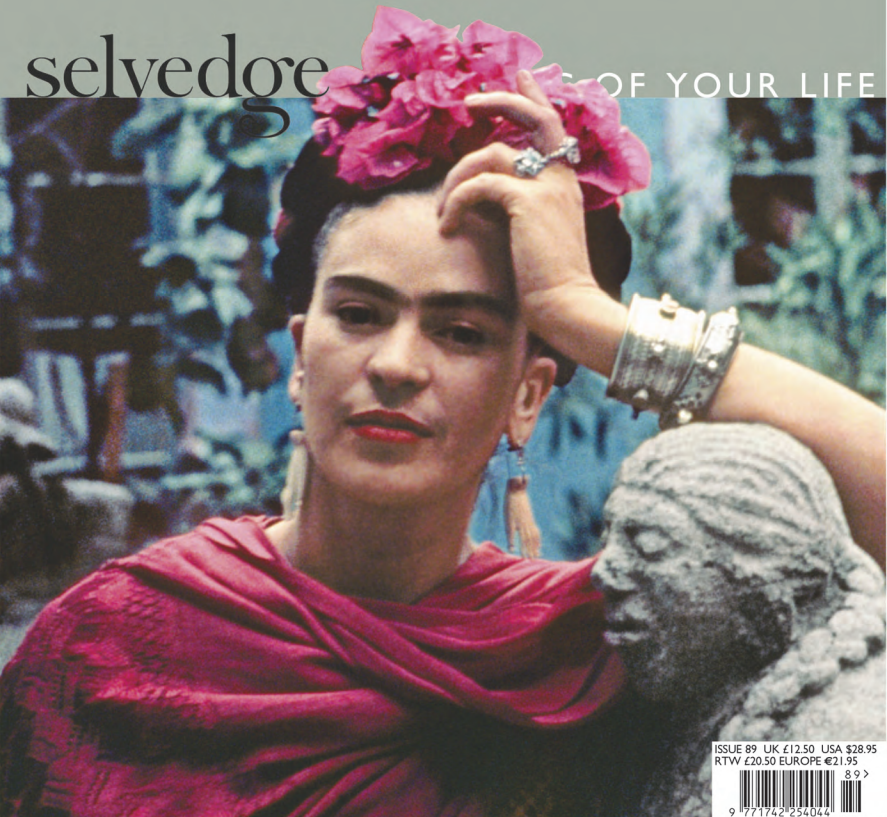


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Lilo James, photo: Tori Brancher

Aelwyd

Towards a contemporary Welsh interior

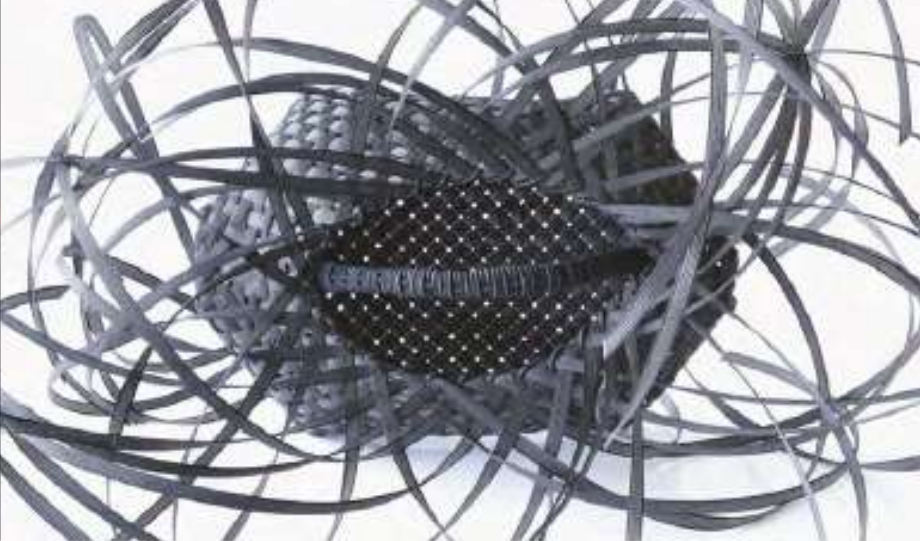
Gallery 2 Ruthin Craft Centre
20 July – 13 October 2019

The word 'Aelwyd' – Welsh for *hearth* – is synonymous with *home*. This exhibition explores our affinity with contemporary craft objects which, through their material, making, story or use, nurture a deep-rooted sense of belonging.

Curated by Elen Bonner



Claire Gwynn, photo: Yvonne Sparrow



Sarah Paramor, photo: Annie MacDonald

Basketry – function and ornament

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Curated by Gregory Parsons



Annie King, photo: Shannon Siz

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Cover: Frida leaning on a sculpture by Mardonio Magaña, Coyacán.
Photo by Nickolas Muray. © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives

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BIAS

CONTRIBUTORS

We asked our contributors:

Mark Tashler



In the year that the Bauhaus celebrates its centenary there are commemorative exhibitions and events taking place around the world. The school founded by the architect Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany, in 1919, was in operation for just 14 years before it was closed down by the National Socialist Party. Nonetheless, it is considered to be the most influential art and design school in history. Ironically, the

closing of the school led to its influence disseminating widely. Its founding principle that there should be no distinction between form and function is common and widespread today, but was revolutionary at the time.

We catch up with the Bauhaus alumni in mid-century Mexico, where the creativity of Clara Porset, Anni Albers and Cynthia Sargent, collided to create a design aesthetic that permeates every aspect of contemporary Mexican society. This aesthetic is rooted in an appreciation of materials, and a specific colour palette that originates in local flora and fauna, and is made up of indigo, cochineal and sea snail purple. Technical virtuosity has been inherited alongside a respect for the wisdom of the elders, as described in Eric Mindling's charming story. These elements ricochet in the striking contemporary designs of Fernando Laposse and Casilda Mut.

I am grateful to Marcella Echavarría who co-edited this issue. Without her enthusiasm, knowledge and hard work, our insight into this incredible culture would not have been possible. I have learned much from Marcella's passion for the music, food, culture and crafts of Mexico and I am delighted to share with you the intensity and energy of this extraordinary country.

Polly Leonard, Founder



MARCELLA ECHAVARRÍA



ANNE MENKE

I have lived in Mexico for 15 years and am in love with the culture, the people, the music, the food! Mexico is just rich in everything. I have travelled to many remote places in the mountains and on the coast to see the different indigenous tribes. You can find the most amazing textiles and embroideries in each of their cultures. For a fashion photographer, Mexico is an endless inspiration for photographs, decorating and styling. My invitation to photograph the Huichol people in the mountains of Nayarit is a highlight of my travels in Mexico.



NORMA SCHAFER

Mexico is a place of warmth, welcome, and limitless possibility for creativity, where talented artisans make beauty from simple raw materials, often while existing in basic living conditions. They are innovators who use local, organic materials and adapt ancient designs for contemporary use. Mexican artisans have a deep respect for heritage and the value of transmitting culture to their children. They are role models for living with sensitivity, sustainability, and heart. They inspire me to connect us to their world.



ANA ELENA MALLET

I am an independent curator, critic and writer based in Mexico. I have curated exhibitions of modern and contemporary design here, including the country's first exhibition dedicated exclusively to fashion. Mexico City is my hometown but also my inspiration. Everyday you can find things to discover. Traditions blend with contemporary life creating a new meaning for everything made here. From textiles to craft, from contemporary art to design, from street food to high end cuisine. Mexico is a full experience.

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- 20 July 2019, Patching and Mending with Tom Of Holland, London,
- 27 July 2019, Pin Cushions with Ruth Singer, London
- 7 September 2019, From Textile To Metalwork with Julia Griffiths Jones, London
- 14 September 2019, Folk Tales with Anne Kelly, London
- 8-15 August 2020, Julia Griffiths Jones, From Textile To Metal, Chateau Dumas, France
- 8-15 August 2020, Mandy Pattullo, Recycle, Repair and Reconsider, Chateau Dumas, France
- 22-29 August 2020, Susie Vickery, Making Historic French Mannequins, Chateau Dumas, France
- 22-29 August 2020, Emily Jo Gibbs, Illustrative pictures, Chateau Dumas, France

PRIZES THIS ISSUE

- One hundred Tetetlan commemorative canvas tote bags www.tetetlan.com
- Three Casilda Mut embroidered Arqueila blouses, worth £120 each www.casildamut.com.mx
- A luxury Angela Damman bag, worth £365 www.angeldamman.com
- A Madda Studio silk Nuno pillow, worth £270 www.maddastudio.com

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SELVEDGE ('selvɪdʒ) n. 1. finished differently 2. the non-fraying edge of a length of woven fabric.
[∴ from SELF + EDGE]



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BAUHAUS BLANKETS

Wallace Sewell Gunta Stözl Bauhaus blanket



Gunta Stözl was fundamental to the Bauhaus weaving department and when the school moved to Dessau, Stözl, who was a master of the weaving workshop, designed a blanket for the 'Prellerhaus' student dormitories, the so-called 'Prellerdecke' ('Preller' after painter Friedrich Preller and 'decke' meaning bedcover). The result was a bold interaction of horizontal and vertical, positive and negative.

This summer, as part of the Bauhaus centenary celebrations, designers Wallace Sewell have been commissioned to recreate the original 1926 Prellerhaus design by Stözl. Though the design has been lost, and none of the original 100 blankets survive, Harriet Wallace-Jones and Emma Sewell have recreated the blanket with help from Stözl's daughter, Monika Stadler, and archive drawings and photographs. Wallace Sewell have kept the Bauhaus design elements of the original, while also creating the blanket in two new colourways.

•••www.wallacesewell.com



This Summer, the Dulwich Picture Gallery will shine a spotlight on a brief but intense period of interwar printmaking, with the first major show of work by artists from the Grosvenor School of Modern Art. The Grosvenor School was a leading force in modern printmaking and the group were known for their iconic, vibrant linocuts that championed the energy of contemporary life - turning ordinary, everyday scenes into modernist compositions brimming with energetic and rhythmic imagery. From commuter experiences of public transport, to spectatorship at sporting events to scenes of working life, the Grosvenor School artists sought subjects that would be instantly recognisable, reflecting the idea that linocuts should be 'an art of the people for their homes'. The exhibition also places their work in the context of the avant-garde values of Futurism, Vorticism and Cubism, and includes work by Nash, Bomberg, and Nevinson as part of a selection of 120 prints, drawings and posters. Also included in the exhibition is Sybil Andrews' 1952 print *Coffee Bar* (right). Full of the movement and dynamism Andrews was noted for, this print is an effective and stylish depiction of fabric. ***

Cutting Edge: Modernist British Print Making, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 19 June - 8 September www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk

Sybil Andrews, *Coffee Bar*.



Modernist Linocut Fabric, Designed by Timorous Beasties. Displayed in The State Bedroom at Harewood House.

Timorous Beasties have taken over the 18th century State Bedroom at Harewood House, upholstering a Chippendale four poster bed with their fabric. They are taking part in Harewood's inaugural Craft Biennial, which hopes to challenge preconceptions and inspire debate around the role that craft can play in culture, identity and society. Each room hosts a different maker, who has been selected for their exceptional craftsmanship and innovation. Each maker has been given a particular location in the house, and has crafted a response to that space. In the State Bedroom, Timorous Beasties' specially commissioned 'Modern Love' fabric takes inspiration from the toile designs of the 18th century, in particular a design called 'Mouton Cheri'. The original toile design is a series of scenes that illustrate a 'boy meets girl' tale, with strong moral undertones. Certainly, such a fabric would be a stern warning if found hanging from a four poster bed.

*****Useful/Beautiful: Why Craft Matters, Harewood House, Leeds, 23 March - 1 September 2019** www.harewood.org

When **Jan Shearsmith**, the Science and Industry Museum's archivist, brought a mysterious package out from the archives he found a set of immaculate card folders with wonderful patterned labels. More surprises were to come. Inside each folder were 200 year old cloth samples, with colours as fresh and as vibrant as the day they were printed. Each folder has a picture inside the front cover that seem to have nothing to do with the samples inside, but are impressive works of art themselves. The museum knows very little about these samples, apart from that a company called Williamson Brothers was involved in their distribution. This company either printed cotton or exported printed fabric. The patterns and colours of the samples suggest they were likely intended for India.***www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk



CLEAN CLOTHES

Selvedge searches for sustainable solutions

Textiles is a thirsty industry, and as well as using water, the industry also pollutes it, as detergents and toxic chemicals flow untreated into rivers and oceans. Environmental problems, once thought to be the responsibility of manufacturing countries, are part of global supply chains. The polluted Buriganga River in Bangladesh is only a small step from the British high street. This has set a challenge to textile designers, for whom innovation and sustainable practices are not only favourable, but essential.

Solutions have been discovered in the sludgy wastewaters. Kaamera is the name given to the material extracted from sludge granules during a water purification process developed in the Netherland. Dutch designer Nienke Hoogvliet discovered that when combined with textiles, Kaamera increases the rate of dye absorption. Her project Kaamera Kimono combines this substance with natural dyes also extracted from

wastewater, creating soft organic colourations entirely from waste. Kaamera not only produces less polluted waste, it also uses half the amount of water as its chemical predecessors. Considering the gallons of water used to dye a pair of jeans, these discoveries are significant.

In the world of biotechnology, there are hints of a future of fabric dyeing almost entirely without water. Natsai Audrey Chieza works with pigment producing bacteria to grow colour onto textiles. By adjusting the growing conditions, rich blues, purples and reds bloom on the fabrics, and eventually, it may even be possible to grow print. By replacing the dye vat with a petri dish, the volume of water required is drastically reduced. Traditional dye processes that were once innovative now seem wasteful and out-dated. Instead, inspiring new discoveries suggest textile processes may be soon unrecognisable to the ones we know today.*****Sophie Vent**



HOW TO

Make paper flowers



*The ranunculus is a simple flower to craft as it is made from one continuous spiral of paper. There isn't much intricate, time-consuming cutting to be done, so it's a great place to start learning to make paper flowers. These can be made in a variety of colours, but making a few flowers of different shades of one colour makes a lovely selection, such as these in yellow. You could also try shades of pink. The ranunculus stems look wonderful displayed in simple vases, either individually or as a group.****

You will need:

- Ranunculus templates
- Pencil
- Green and your petal coloured paper
- Small sharp scissors
- Wooden skewer
- Hot glue gun and glue sticks
- White tack
- Large needle
- Cotton bud/Qtip
- Florist wire (24-gauge)
- Green florist tape
- Bone folder



Anna Bartelcher

1. Photocopy the ranunculus flower template onto your paper and cut it out. Do the same with the leaf using green paper and attach a wire stem with the single wire technique (see website for details). Take the end of the spiral-shaped flower template and tightly spiral the paper around a

skewer until you reach the centre. Hold in place for a minute or so before carefully removing the skewer, this will help the paper keep the spiral shape. Using the glue gun, apply some glue to the middle of the spiral, (the outside of your flower) leaving the centre glue-free. Place the tightly rolled spiral onto the glue and hold it in place whilst it sets. Set aside. Make a bud stamen, but only cover the cotton bud/Qtip in florist tape, not the whole wire.



2. Take the ranunculus flower head and place it face down in the palm of your hand. Using a pin or needle, carefully pierce a hole in the very centre, just big enough to fit the wire stem through.

3. Take the bud stamen and apply hot glue to the area between the plastic cotton bud/Qtip base and the wire. While the glue is hot, insert the wire stem through the hole in the centre of the flower head and push through until the stamen is as far down into the centre of the spiral as



possible. Hold in place until the glue is set. With florist tape, begin wrapping the stem of the flower from the top down. Place a leaf at around 6cm from the flower and wrap its stem tightly to the main stem with the tape. Continue wrapping until you reach the bottom, then cut or twist off the tape.

The Paper Florist by Suzi McLaughlin, £18.99, is available to Selvedge readers for £13.30, plus free UK P&P. T: 01235 759555 and quote the code 9952100025. To download the full instructions for this project visit www.selvedge.org



MOUNTAIN MAMA

The Huichol of Central Mexico







In the isolation of Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains the Huichol people were protected from the religious conversions brought by the Spanish. They are one of the last surviving pre-Columbian cultures and, like many indigenous peoples, they try to negotiate a relationship between tradition and modernity without losing their distinct and vibrant culture.

Established nearly three decades ago in the mountain town of Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco, The Huichol Center for Cultural Survival and the Traditional Arts addresses the economic, educational and health issues facing the Huichol people. The centre is staffed by local Huichols, and led by anthropologist Susana Valadez. This year the Huichol Center and Susana Valadez have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their decades long commitment to the raising the quality of life and protecting the ancient traditions of the Huichol people and culture.

The Huichols are known for their vibrantly coloured, intricately embroidered dress, and the meticulously hand crafted beaded jewellery that adorns their outfits and hats. While they have traditionally created beadwork for their own use, beadweaving is now a major source of income for this endangered tribe, allowing them to use their traditional art forms to maintain their families and cultural ways. It is a way of living that perfectly embodies the concept of balance, so central to Huichol culture. **•••LG thehuicholcenter.org**











GROUND RULES

Casilda Mut's traditional designs take flight



Claire Coello's designs for Casilda Mut are grounded in indigenous traditions, and that enables them to soar. This Mexican fashion house creates simple, feminine clothes that follow what Coello calls 'primitive' lines, which showcase the fabrics and traditional embroideries she loves. She is drawn to textiles with a thick, substantial feel - natural fibres like imported linens and cottons - that lend themselves to an enticingly minimalist silhouette.

For summer 2019 she's selected a black, cream, white and navy palette, all of which feature the weave of the textile as a design element. She complements this cloth with intricate, hand-embroidered motifs in vibrant colours.

Although Coello honed her technical skills at the Lanspac Fashion Institute in Guadalajara, coming home to Chiapas gave her designs meaning. She engages women artisans of the highlands of Chiapas to realise her vision, promoting both their creative and social development. As she puts it, the women 'narrate through seams and stitches,' telling 'stories of empowerment' through their work.

The relationship between maker, silhouette, textile and embroidery feels organic: a navy blue cross-over top with artfully frayed edges forms a flattering canvas for white 'flat stitches', a technique that takes some 14 hours to complete.

There is also a version in cream, with dark embroidery, its 90-degree angles echoing the precise edges of the cross-over style, softened by the long side ties. ▶





Coello is particularly drawn to the everyday-heritage possibilities of embroidery, and how 'generation after generation of artisans have been nourished,' as she says, by the 'geometric elements, the flora and fauna of the region where they develop their daily life'. This, what she calls the 'Mayan woman's world-view', serves as a meeting point for the everyday and the extraordinary.

For instance, a black sheath offers ease through its relaxed proportions, and sophistication via its wrapped-thread bib-collar necklace, in fuchsia, orange and white. Wrapped threads also elevate a simple bowed tie on a tunic, the bodice of which is framed by two tiers of delicate zigzag embroidery, in red and navy.

Casilda Mut's motto is 'unique and free' and Coello's clothes embody this sentiment. She cuts her patterns to float away from the body, giving each item a fluidity, allowing freedom of movement. She'll reveal a woman's skin through the deep V of a neckline, a short sleeve, or the pleated flounce of a knee-length dress, or hint at the female form as it moves underneath a generously cut jumpsuit or an oversized tunic. Her seams, which artfully frame a jumpsuit bodice or her embroidery, dance as a woman moves, and give each garment a bespoke quality when worn. This sense of weightlessness is apt for Casilda Mut, as 'mut' means a bird, in the Tzotzil language. As Coello says, 'Casilda Mut is the woman who gives us wings to fly'. And it is Coello's ability to combine past and present, tradition and innovation, that lets her clothes take

Ann Hep-

flight.*** **Kate Cavendish**



FAMILY TIES

The importance of the great grandmother in Oaxaca

*I learned from my mother
She learned from her mother
And she learned from her mother before
Going back as many generations as we can remember*

This I was told by the weaver. I was told by the potter. I was told by the woman masterfully making tortillas over the fire. It is the story of continuity, of connection, the pathway of words and silent teachings that link one's ancestors with this very moment. It is not so different, if you care to imagine, than the conduits between the roots of an ancient ceiba tree anchored deep in the decaying, nurturing compost of ancestral stories of life that has been, and life that will be again.

Imagine speaking the knowledge of your ancestors with your hands, what you create is a new chapter in the lineage of an ancient story that you keep alive by repeating it one more time. However, this telling of the story is not scribed on pages of paper, it is written with clay or cotton or maize.

I learned from my mother. She learned from her mother... I have heard this again and again as I've sat in conversation with the old-time people of Oaxaca. And each time I've heard it, with goosebumps I've had a sense of peeking into something much larger than the present moment. Something like the odd experience of lining up two mirrors face to face and seeing your reflection repeated seemingly into infinity.

Oaxaca is a state in Mexico, but it is so dense with stories, histories and legends that it feels like a nation unto itself whose geography is not only defined by mountains and river valleys, but extends into the dimensions of time.

I am a photographer. I wanted to create a picture of this. The reflection of the infinity of a person's culture, a culture's past in the present moment: the roots and the leaves and the nurturing compost, the stories spoken by hands, and the communities of people who keep them alive.

So for two years I travelled the breadth and depth of Oaxaca creating portraits of traditional people and their dress ways: hand-spoken stories expressed in clothing. It could have been clay or maize, but clothing is so beautiful, because it is worn by the very people who the stories are about. I don't mean store bought clothing, I mean the clothing of ancient communities, what I call community fashion. The clothing she learned to make from her mother, who learned from her mother before. The style of dress shared by all the members of her community. The clothing that is worn like a flag of belonging that joyously and artfully declares 'I am of We, and We are from Here'. Clothing that is the giant ceiba tree, the hands speaking through heddles, needles, dreams and threads, like faces in the mirror, the present and living echo of every generation that has come before. Mother, grandmother, great grandmother. And on and on. *****Eric Minding**
www.traditionsmexico.com







THE COLOUR PURPLE

Tixinda, the last Sea Snail purple

At low tide, a few shirtless Mixtec men walk along the humid Pacific coast of Oaxaca looking for sea snails. Dodging the waves, navigating wet rocks with bare feet, they look for sea snails known as *tixinda* to the Mixtec. After prying one off the rocks by hand or with a mango-wood stick, they press just the right part of the snail's 'foot' to encourage it to secrete a milky liquid. Left to their own devices, the snails deploy this liquid as a neurotoxin that paralyses the smaller shellfish they consume. To these seekers of *tixinda*, however, the secretion is a treasured and ancient dyestuff, and they apply it directly onto a skein of cotton yarn looped around a forearm.

Once 'milked', the snail is gently returned, unharmed, to its habitat to live another day. The cove where it lives will be visited only once per lunar cycle by the dyers, to give the snails time to recover. Dyeing occurs only from October to May so as not to interfere with the snails' breeding season. At first, the *tixinda* liquid stains the yarn a bruise greenish colour, but as the liquid oxidises, it turns first blue, and then a brilliant, colourfast reddish purple. 'This is one of the most ancient dyeing methods still in practice today,' comments author, photographer and tour organiser Eric Mindling. 'Mixtecs have lived on and near this coast for at least 1500 years, and they revere this practice as integral to their heritage as a people. For about three hours a day, as long as the water level is low enough, a dyer might encounter about 400 snails -

enough to dye a single 250-gram skein. That's 400 snails, lifted, milked, and settled carefully back onto the rocks one at a time over a few hours'.

The leader of these Mixtec dyers, Habacuc Avendaño, has made purple yarns this way for over 60 years. One skein per low tide, however, would have been a meager yield back in the 1950s and 60s, when he learned his craft. 'When I was little, there were many more snails back then, and larger ones,' he says. 'We would dye one coastal of yarn [about 40 skeins] during two weeks at the coast. Sometimes we would double- and triple-dye them to get very dark shades of purple'. Across the entire 2017 harvest season, his group was able to colour a mere 15 skeins of single-dyed purple yarn.

Patrice Perillie, founder of non-profit group Mexican Dreamweavers which supports the Mixtec dyers and weavers of Habacuc's community of Pinotepa de Don Luis, says with

dismay, 'We're heading rapidly towards the disappearance of this art. Snails large enough to produce dyestuff are fewer and fewer. The problem is the pressure put on the snail population by more and more people living here and visiting here. Local fishermen gather the snails, as well as little *lq̄pas* (a type of limpet), their favorite prey, and cut them up for ceviche'.

The few skeins Habacuc's group can currently dye go directly to the women of a 60-member weaving cooperative in Pinotepa de Don Luis. Habacuc's wife, Margarida (known as Teresita), is one of them. As an expert backstrap loom weaver, Teresita takes about three months to weave her community's traditional long wrap skirt, the *poshaunco*, which features bands of *tixinda* purple, cochineal red, and indigo blue. Ancient motifs, rich with meaning to their Mixtec creators, bring certain of these bands vividly alive. In Pinotepa there is still immense prestige associated with making and wearing *poshauncos*.

'These clothes represent the way things were always done, up to just a decade or two ago,' says Eric. 'Since less than 40 of these amazing garments can be made a year now - and maybe less than that - there is rarity and value to each and every one of them'.

To Habacuc and Teresita, this sense of value goes beyond colour and textile, and deep into Mixtec culture. The snail and the purple colour it helps them make are considered sacred. The ▶





colour is associated with womanhood, the lunar cycle of human fertility, and blood. 'The snails themselves are matriarchal in a way,' comments Patrice. 'The females are larger and produce more dye. They need a lunar cycle to recharge'.

The community's way of life was shaped around the making of purple, and the journey to the coast to dye yarns was a major event. A group of dyers would walk eight days to the coast. 'It was a real journey,' says Eric, 'involving several river crossings. The men would carry their own food, and when their tortillas, beans and coffee ran out, they would work in local farms to be reprovisioned. Once they reached their campsite on the coast, they'd stay for about three months before heading back to Pinotepa'. Habacuc made his first journey in 1956, alongside an uncle.

Dirt roads of the 70s and paved roads of the 80s have reduced the journey to a short drive, and the stay along the coast to a few days. The decline of the snail population, and the dwindling yield of purple yarns, give the abbreviation of the process an unfortunate logic. 'We're trying to educate local fishermen working the coves where the sea snail lives,' says Patrice. 'It's important that they not harvest them. But we may have only five years or so left for this very important art to survive'.
♦♦♦**Keith Recker. True Colors: World Masters of Natural Dyes and Pigments** by Keith Recker is published by Thrum Books in September 2019.



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THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Madda Studio honouring tradition through minimal design



Left: Compound Weave Rug in Collaboration
with Bonetti/Kozerski Architects
Right: Saxonia Blue Flat Weave Rug

The January fiesta honouring Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of sheep, has particular importance among the Tzotzil speaking Mayans of Chamula in the south-eastern state of Chiapas, Mexico. A couple of days before the fiesta, sheep owners, both men and women, visit their church carrying ribbons, salt and tzelpat, (a shrub used as fodder for goats, sheep and deer.) They first approach one of the annual cargo holders sponsoring the fiesta, and hand him the ofrenda (offering). The cargo holder takes it and first touches the robe of Saint John's statue, before placing the ribbons in a book hanging from the saint's hand. The worshippers then address each saint in turn. To Sebastian they say, 'Heed here, Lord Saint Sebastian, please watch over my sheep, make sure that nothing happens to them.' They then address Saint John and say 'Please Lord Shepherd, take care of my sheep every day, wherever they wander on this earth, wherever they drink water'.

The sheep owners return home with the blessed offering, and place the ribbons around the necks of their youngest sheep, assured that the flock is protected. This tradition has made eating sheep meat taboo. The sheep are never killed, only left to die of old age. The shepherds, who are all women, are also weavers, and they say of their flock, 'they are our brethren, they dress us, if we were to kill or eat them, the Yajval (Lord or Patron) would get very angry and would not give us any wool.' Sheep are not native to the Americas, they were introduced shortly after the Spanish conquest. The Spanish landowners who

distributed the sheep in Chamula, wary they might be eaten during the continuous famines, instilled these beliefs which are still held sacred.

Unlike llama and alpaca, the domesticated wool-bearing animals of the Andes, sheep were a novelty in Middle America. According to a 16th century Spanish-Tzotzil dictionary, they were named tushnuk or tunim chij, cotton-deer, in allusion to their physical similarity to deer, and their cotton-like fibre-giving quality. Today they are simply chij, sheep, and deer are tetikal chij, mountain sheep.

Spanish landowners exacted high tributes from the Mayans, which included spun wool and weavings. However, in this region they also selectively introduced certain parts of European technology used to transform wool such as shearing scissors and carding combs. These were made in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. What was not introduced in Chamula was the spinning wheel or the treadle loom. Instead, the shepherd-weavers continued to use the spindle-whorl and backstrap loom, which were both portable and compatible with being productive during the hours invested in shepherding. Indeed, this may be why it was not practical to introduce the 'modern' wheel and loom in Chamula, whereas this technology was in use in the urban centre of San Cristobal, 10 km away.

Adapting to this new fibre, the spindle grew to twice the size of the cotton spindle to adjust to the longer, thicker wool and the waist loom ▶



Tikashi Pichardo, Centro de las Artes San Agustín, Chiapas, Mexico

Below: Compound Weave Rug in Collaboration with Bonetti/Kozerski Architects
Right: Flat Weave with Marigold Stripe in collaboration with ALT for Living



Takashi Fukuda, Studio Saba, West Oakland, CA

sticks became heavier and larger. Wool is part of life here, and not only are the men's and women's costume of Chamula made of hand-spun and hand-woven wool, they are the specialists that weave sashes and men's coats for nearly a dozen communities that surround them.

To understand this context is to set the stage to fully understand the philosophy and values behind Madda Studio. An interior design project, the studio is spearheaded by Italian-born Maddalena Forcella who lived and worked with the artisans in Chiapas since 1993, before moving to Oaxaca a few years ago. In 2016 she joined forces with American born Marie Farneth who had experience of community development and homewares collaborations between artisans, designers, and architects. For the two women, foremost in importance is to encourage the preservation of culture and lifestyle, the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and skills, and to contribute to creating a sustainable work environment that delivers a stable income along the whole chain of production.

Their commitment to tradition includes the exclusive use of the 500 year old Chiapa breed of sheep whose care as well as processing the fibre, lies in the hands of Chamula women. The women wash the fleece with local plants and tubers in order to retain its natural sheen and deep, saturated colour fleece is dyed. Subtle nuances of shades of grey are achieved by selecting, carding and mixing diverse colours of

fleeces. In comparison with this natural process, Maddalena Forcella finds industrially washed and treated wool 'opaque and lifeless'. When she does use colour the natural dyes are processed by her from plants and flowers, not extracts.

All the wool is hand-spun by women using the ancient spindle and whorl. It is precisely the irregularity of each woman's hand and the varying tensions in the spinning that yield the rich textures that give this process its heart and soul.

Weaving is done by men in family workshops in Chiapas and Oaxaca using the treadle loom that was introduced after the Spanish conquest. A visible cotton warp is dyed to interact with the neutral wefts. The making of larger rugs is achieved by joining together woven strips. By creating a modular system that builds on the uniqueness of each strip they overcome what could have been a problem of alignment, and instead allow harmony in asymmetry to be the leitmotif of the studio.

Madda Studio aims to create timeless and minimalistic designs. Traditional materials and techniques meet the beauty and subtleties of the natural colours and the naturally dyed wool. As Forsella says, 'I am fascinated by how a craftsman and an artist are able to shape their own world and feel fully aware in the moment of creation, outside the boundaries of time... conscious of their purpose in the world, if only for a moment'. ♦♦♦ **Marta Turok**

Centre: Alt Project, San Vigorito, Oaxaca, Mexico



WOMEN OF THE CLOTH

The Mexican rebozo

When Frida Kahlo married Diego Rivera she wore an extravagant floor-length skirt with patterned tiers, a bow in her hair and wrapped herself in a fringed rebozo scarf. Kahlo passed away in 1954, but her iconic image remains. Feminist movements and popular culture uses her image on protest posters and memorabilia in which her rebozo shawl takes centre stage. It formed part of her unique wardrobe, drawing attention to her Mexican roots and hybrid heritage. However, this garment predates the artist's flamboyant style and is entwined with Mexico's artisanal past and textile future.

Rebozos are long and loose rectangular shawls made from a single piece of uncut cloth. They can be worn in a variety of ways, either covering the hair, layered across the torso or off the shoulders like a modern pashmina. Kahlo would pair hers with casual and elegant outfits alike and draped her rebozo across her chest with one side hanging longer than the other.

Rebozos emerged during the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century. They are products of this colonial period, combining native influences such as the shawl made from sisal fibre used to carry heavy loads, and the more tailored Spanish mantilla. At this tense time, punctuated by the arrival of new European travellers, the rebozo quickly became an indicator of social status in a richly diverse colonial community. For instance, the draping of the shawl could distinguish a married woman from a single one and the choice between a lustrous silk and a more modest cotton, pointed towards the wearer's

wealth. Later on, after the invention of cheaper synthetic fabrics such as rayon in the nineteenth century, decorative rebozos became more affordable and were eventually found across all layers of Mexican society. During the Mexican Civil War in the 1910s, the rebozo acquired a new meaning as a symbol of revolution; an image forged by the Adelitas women who fought for their country, weapon in hand and their child tucked in a rebozo.

Skilled weavers have created rebozos of incredible beauty with the native 'telar de otate' (backstrap loom). The technology is simple, but the textile is complex. The body-tensioned loom requires intense communication between the fabric and one's own movement. Brocaded decorations demand further attention and fine flowers and bold geometric motifs are made with the supplementary weft threads. The shawls length can range from 150 to 350 cm and a single long warp can create as many as thirty rebozos.

Admired for their bright and colours, rebozos often use natural dyes including indigo, cochineal and sea-snail purple. Some patterns are achieved with the resist dyeing technique 'ikat', known among Mexican artisans as 'jasje', in which weavers create colour sequences by tie-dyeing selected warp threads before they are woven.

Once carefully set up on the loom, the warp threads of the finished textile are knotted at both ends to form intricate finger-woven fringe called 'rapacejos', thus transforming the shawl into a rebozo. It is often the style and quality of

this elaborate twisted or knotted fringe that will determine the price of the piece. The rapacejos, or punta, is hand-knotted by a puntadora (fringe-knotter), and it can take up to three months to create a particularly luxurious example.

Today, rebozos are seen less frequently in cities, but they remain popular in rural Mexico. The regional rebozos differ in their styles, and the colour, pattern and quality of the weave help to locate their provenance. The rebozos in cool and mountainous Oaxaca are mostly crafted from warm sheep wool, whilst a tightly woven black and indigo rebozo is typical of the Michoacán region. Guerrero takes advantage of its source of silkworms to make striking silk shawls.

Beyond its demanding weaving and fringe-knotting technique, the rebozo has been widely recognised as a cultural symbol related to concepts of gender and nation. To Spanish speakers, the verb rebozo means to cover oneself, but the shawl has many names in indigenous communities too; in the Aztec language of Nahuatl it was referred to as 'cua nequealdapacholoni' translating as 'that which touches a woman'. The Mexican painter Dr. Atl even described rebozos as emblematic of his country, tracking the wearer throughout her life; '[it is] a temporary cradle for children of the poor, a kerchief with which women dry their tears, an improvised basket...The beauty of a Mexican woman is to be judged by her braids and her rebozo...it is my nomination for the ▶



Previous Page; Nickolas Murray Frida leaning on a sculpture by Mardonio Magaña, Coyoacán 1940.
Below; Jesus Zarate Escobar, weaver and Nancy, macramé fringe knitter, Rebozo, 2011, Tenancingo and Barrio San Martin, Tenancingo, Mexico. Cotton, metallic thread.



flag of Mexico'. Rebozos represent the multi-dimensionality of textiles and the deeply personal and emotional attachments wearers can form to them.

The rebozo and Kahlo's association with it, continues to inspire fashion trends today. Seville-based designer Rocio Peralta's 2013 collection 'Universo de Colores' showcased a rainbow of tasseled rebozos, whilst Mexican designer Lydia Lavin still turns to the voluminous silhouette of these scarves. Rebozos have been twisted into blouses, tailored into delicately embroidered coats and shaped into purses. The transformation of these shawls demonstrates a commitment to the symbolic power of the rebozo and a desire to uphold homegrown textile traditions.

Rebozo weaving workshops are few and far between, but can still be found in Michoacan, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí and Tenancingo de Degollado. These rebozos are the product of familial and generational knowledge, so it is not surprising that organisations work to prevent the decline of rebozo production and to protect the knowledge of their makers. Government funded organisations Amigos del Rebozo is devoted to preserving jaspé weaving, and the museum La Casa del Rebozo in Guadalajara celebrates the history of this textile. The need to pass on knowledge speaks of a serious fear of losing craftsmanship. Sharing these weaving and dyeing techniques, exploring the dimensions of the shawl and experimenting beyond its traditions, promises a stable, exciting and brightly coloured future for the rebozo scarf.*** **Lydia Caston**

: Museum of International Folk Art, IFAF Collection, FA.2012.6.1, © Museum of International Folk Art. Photo by Jim Chandler



NI EN MORE

Wear the fight

Ciudad Juárez, a city of 1.5 million inhabitants, is located in the north of Mexico and south of El Paso, Texas. It is a city riddled with low wage factories, with a reputation for crime and violence. It is a particularly dangerous place to be a woman.

But Juárez has not always been like this. There was a time when women could go out at night without the fear of being raped or murdered and when mothers didn't have to spend their lives searching for the bodies of their lost daughters. That time, however, is gone. Today gender violence is part of everyday life in Juárez. Fortunately, there are those who refuse to accept this. Seeking opportunity for change, Norwegian artist Lise Linnert, together with Juárez native activists and artist Janette Terrazas and Veronica Corchado, founded NI EN MORE, a social innovation project with aim to empower women in Juárez.

It started with a shared belief in the transformative impact of economically empowered women; the potential to collaborate across borders, the contribution of different skills, and a willingness to work hard. With one sewing machine, a small borrowed room and a name, they started. NI EN MORE is a mix of the Spanish, Norwegian and English words meaning 'Not one more'. Now, two years later, NI EN MORE is an act of resistance, solidarity and a small non-profit sewing studio for women in Juárez, that makes unique garments. The purpose is to provide a safe environment, fair wages, education and a warm place to be for women in need. This vision has

drawn women into the project who have a wide range of skills. Examples include Tine Mollatt, a Norwegian designer who created the initial four styles and donated the first 400 metres of fabrics, to illustrators, writers, photographers, and artists who are conscious of the importance of women supporting each other.

NI EN MORE not only creates one-of-a-kind botanical dyed garments, handmade, with materials sourced in Mexico, but even aims to nurture self-confidence and build skills that can contribute to long term financial independence. Hopefully, this confidence and experience can spread like seeds, helping to change other womens realities in Juárez.

The creation of the garments is aligned to NI EN MORE's philosophy: they are dyed one by one using slow, taking up to 60 hours to dye one dress. The attention to details and craftsmanship are also symbols of resistance to the exploitation happening every day in the low wage factories settled in Juárez.

The dreams are ambitious, but the project is still small. Even though they have stopped dying the dresses in a tiny backyard and now work from a small studio, NI EN MORE is still looking for funding so they can reach their goal for 2020, which is to be fully sustainable. The hopes of the makers are sewn into each NI EN MORE garment. When you see and wear one of their pieces, you contribute to providing a safe, full and happy life to the women of Juárez. ***
Berenice Hernandez www.nienmore.com

OLD HABITS

Joanne Arnett, the best dressed nun in the room

A friend recently asked if I wore a school uniform as a child. Yes, I did! Why do you ask? But I knew why she asked. I wear a few pieces over and over again, resulting in a variety of similar ensembles. I've only been intentionally dressing like this for a couple of years, but it was a habit I easily fell into. Thank you, Catholic school.

It started with an assignment given to fashion students in the illustration and design course that I taught. The goal was to introduce sustainable design solutions into coursework without making it all about sustainability. Students often pushed back against projects involving multiple use, or upcycling, so, like sneaking vegetables into a meal, I thought it might be easier not to mention sustainability at all. Instead, I made it a puzzle to be solved. Nine garments for six months. How versatile can you make the pieces? What fabrics will take you through the seasons? How must a garment be made to last, and keep the wearers interested, for more than the average six or seven wears? It was the only assignment where students became so interested in showing their work that they regularly asked if they could illustrate more than the project requirements. I was on to something. After a few semesters I thought, why not try it myself!

I spent a few weeks making sketches and debating what pieces would work for me. The reality was I simply did not have time to design and construct my mini wardrobe. If I was going

to put the project to the test I had to just dive in. I went to my closet and chose nine garments. My wardrobe consisted of a black dress, a black blazer, a tan blazer, a white shirt, a white and silver skirt, black leggings, a white V-neck t-shirt, a red V-neck t-shirt, and a black skirt. Outerwear did not count toward the nine garments, nor did accessories.

The dress was a simple cap sleeved sheath. The black blazer was light weight wool, cut to mid-thigh, with square shoulders. It's a tough world out there, I needed strong shoulders to let the world know I'm ready, don't mess with me. Plus, the lightweight wool made it wearable in warm or cool weather and it could be pulled from a suitcase without wrinkles. The front of the leggings were leather, in case I needed to feel like a bad ass. The white and silver skirt was actually two large linen aprons that could be layered in different ways, or broken apart and worn separately. The white shirt was also versatile. It could be worn tucked in or left out, wrapped and tied around my waist, or tossed on like a jacket. T-shirts could be worn backwards, providing both V and boat necks. And the black skirt was a full tulle froth that could be playful or subdued depending on what was worn under, or over, it.

Getting dressed each day became a game of how many ways the pieces could be combined. I never felt limited by having so few items to choose from. I could become anyone I wanted, from Karl Lagerfeld, (with those leather

leggings, white shirt, and black blazer) to Audrey Hepburn (tulle skirt over black dress). Some days I looked like a waiter at Café Flore (leggings, white shirt, the white half of the linen skirt), other days I could be headed to an Edwardian era tea (black dress with the tulle skirt worn high over the bust and tied with a sash). While no one ever said anything about how I was always wearing the same pieces, students did mention I wore a lot of black. I always responded that my goal was to be the best dressed nun in the room.

Unsurprisingly, this is a very cost-conscious way to dress. The nine pieces cost a total of \$499.18. Because the pieces had been purchased over the course of nineteen years (I know!), when the garment's cost was divided by the number of years I'd owned it the cost came down to \$26.26. That's less than 50¢ a day. Not bad!

Instead of banishing those pieces to the back of the closet at the end of the six months, I just kept wearing them. The experiment woke up a uniform habit I had learned as a child. It also demonstrated to me, and others, how simple it is to buy less, choose well, and make it last. (Thanks for the quote, Vivienne Westwood!) I have a responsibility to help students find ways to design thoughtfully. Many have said seeing me wear a fashionable uniform has inspired them to think more critically about what they design, which of course makes my day. ♥♥Joanne Arnett



DESIGNING MODERN MEXICO

Clara Porset, Anni Albers and Cynthia Sargent

Between 1930 and 1970 Mexico was the place to be for international artists and designers seeking new experiences. At the end of the Mexican Revolution, the government of the time created a project intended to unite a divided country around a new national identity. It was hoped that this identity would be a new meeting point for Mexico's citizens. The pre-Columbian past, indigenous culture, artisans and artists were all recruited to create this new Mexican national identity. The interplay between past and present was to become central to the foundation of a modern Mexican movement, where tradition and the handmade were in a constant dialogue with the technological advances and the social discussions of the time.

It was in this atmosphere that Clara Porset, a Cuban-born furniture and interior designer, arrived in Mexico City. She came as a substitute teacher, covering a summer school art history class at the Universidad Autónoma de México. Once in Mexico, Porset realised that this was the ideal environment for both her artistic development and political activity, and she quickly became friends with artists, architects and Cubans in exile. Xavier Guerrero, a pioneer of the Mexican muralism movement, was part of the group she mixed with and the two, with their shared interest in design and politics, clicked

immediately. In 1938 they married, and began their professional collaboration.

Guerrero was a painter and collector, and as a fan of Mexican folk art, he introduced Porset to the world of the handmade, the vernacular and essence of tradition. This was to be a source of inspiration in her designs for the rest of her life.

Porset did not limit herself to designing, she also carried out research, curated exhibitions, and spent time writing and teaching. Between 1940 and 1959 she collaborated with the great Mexican architects on residential projects, hotels and other spaces for private clients and public buildings. Luis Barragán, Mario Pani, Juan

Sordo Madaleno, Max Cetto and Enrique de la Mora, among others, were part of the long list of architects with whom she collaborated.

In 1952, Porset organised *The Art of Daily Life*, an exhibition of good design, made in Mexico. This was the first formal design exhibition in a museum in Mexico. Her intention was to show the best artisanal design in dialogue with industrial design. The exhibition, first shown at the Palacio de Bellas Artes and then in the newly inaugurated Universidad Autónoma de México, was well received by critics and defined a new territory where different disciplines could coexist in harmony.



Porset was always concerned with the social aspect of design and because of that she had an unprecedented goal: to present the best of the industry, the artisanal world and the art world, with the hope that united they would complement each other, and improve the quality of life for both users and makers. This exhibition represented a vision of how to value past traditions, how to put the present in context and how to look for a better future. The sum of it all resulted in Mexican modernism.

In 1934, the year before she travelled to Mexico, Porset had spent the summer at Black ▶

Below; Clara Porset, Wicker armchair, undated.



Right; Anni Albers, Study for Camino Real, ca. 1967, Gouache and diazotype on paper, 44x 40 cm

Mountain College in North Carolina. This was the place that hosted part of the Bauhaus diaspora. Josef and Anni Albers had arrived the year before, igniting a creative revolution at the school in their teaching on textiles and colour.

Meeting Porset at Black Mountain College inspired Albers and her husband to start thinking about Latin America. The three became good friends and it was Porset who invited the Albers to visit Cuba in 1934, and later Mexico, Peru and Chile. For Anni Albers Latin America represented a place of creativity. Everything from the wealth of pre-Columbian cultures and their impressive architecture, the traditional communities and their folk art expressions, to the leading painters of the time, all of them were to influence her work during those years.

The traditional weavers of Peru and their ancestral knowledge were an essential part of the spirit of Anni Albers' work, but Mexico left a powerful imprint on her aesthetic approach. She wrote to her friends Niba and Wassily Kandisky, 'Mexico was a country like no other, temples, ancient sculpture, the whole country is full of it...and folk art, still very much alive and good'. Starting from their experience in Mexico, the Albers together began an extensive collection of pre-Hispanic sculpture

that was exhibited at Yale University in 1970 when she was a resident artist there.

The Albers were in Mexico for the last time in 1965 but in 1967, the architects Ricardo Legorreta and Luis Barragán travelled to meet them in New Haven with the intention of commissioning work from Josef for Hotel Camino Real, a large commission that Legorreta was leading with Barragán's advice. The hotel was planned to be one of the hosting

hotels for the 1968 Mexican Olympics. The hotel, inspired by colonial monastic architecture and pre-Hispanic constructions became a symbol of the national amalgamation of historical influences, combined with dash of modern spirit.

The Mexican architects were fascinated by the work of Annie Albers and she received a commission for a wall hanging for the hotel bar. The piece was made from industrial felt in red tones. This was an unprecedented palette in Albers' work, and the motifs were a series of triangles that invited association with the geometric figures of Montealban in Oaxaca. The piece was in place for the opening of the hotel and can be seen in the photographs that commemorated the event.

This textile work was one of a number of pieces Legorreta curated for the hotel, which also included a mural by Rufino Tamayo, a piece by Mexico-based painter and sculptor Mathias Goeritz, and a spectacular sculpture by the American artist Alexander Calder. Albers' wall hanging disappeared sometime in the eighties. Happily, it was recently recovered, restored and replaced on the wall where it was intended to hang, in homage to the profound love that Albers felt for Mexico. ▶





Right: Bartok designed between 1958 - 1960, 250cm x180cm New Zealand wool on a cotton lacking

Like Porset and Albers, the American textile designer Cynthia Sargent also took courses at Black Mountain College between 1945 and 1946. Her curiosity and creative force brought her to Mexico in 1951. She married fellow artist Wendell Riggs. Their shared interest in textiles led them to open a studio in Mexico.

By 1960, they had founded El Bazaar Sabado, an Saturday art market in an old house in San Ángel. The couple's idea was to create a space where artisans could offer their products to the public. It was about putting them in contact with their customers and, at the same time, giving them enough time to manufacture their handmade products. Saturday after Saturday, examples of craftsmanship such as jewellery, ceramics, and textile arts, were available for the public to buy. The project was so successful that it still continues.

Besides becoming important figures in the textile world with their company Riggs-Sargent, the couple also played a major role promoting artisanal design in Mexico. By 1954, Sargent started to work on hooked rugs that became objects of desire for interior designers and architects worldwide. Her Music Series, where every piece had the

name of a famous musician, was made up of more intricate pieces, inspired by the interaction between music, colour, geometry and abstraction.

In 1963 when her husband died, Cynthia Sargent opened a design centre in Mexico City's Zona Rosa, a bohemian neighbourhood full of nice restaurants, art galleries and shops. She wanted to promote the designers of her generation who were working on

handmade objects with the ultimate goal of showcasing them to a worldwide audience.

Tired of the cultural barriers and of being a woman alone in a country known to be chauvinistic, Sargent decided to sell her company, Diseños en Producción, in 1970. The workers bought the business and she remained as a designer for the brand that later became Tamacani. She continued designing for Tamacani as well as brands such as Morel's and Palacio de Hierro.

By 2006 Sargent had moved to Santa Fe in New Mexico to be closer to her children, and where she passed away. After years of producing important work followed by commercial success during the 1960s and 1970s, today her work is little known and deserves to be revalued.

Historically, Mexico is a country where patriarchal and chauvinist culture have prevailed, but during the 20th century there were a number of outstanding creative women who left an imprint not only on aesthetic discourse but also on wider society. Porset, Albers and Sargent are three women who have contributed greatly to a vibrant modern Mexico.

***Ana Elena Mallet



Photo courtesy of the Riggs-Sargent family archives/collection



RED THREAD

Lena Bergner from the Bauhaus to Mexico

The story of Lena Bergner is the story of a designer whose work was closely linked to the different ideological and cultural contexts in which she lived. From her Bauhaus training in the 1920s through to her decision to live in Mexico during the 1940s, politics and design were never far apart.

Bergner was born in Germany in 1906 into a family of Slavic and German origin, and grew up surrounded by both cultures. In 1929, at the age of 19, she enrolled in the Bauhaus textile workshop. Here, under the tutelage of Josef Albers, she acquired and developed her practical and artistic knowledge. As a 'Bauhäusler', she was encouraged to not only be a practitioner, but also a theorist, able to consider the relationship between material and form.

Colour was essential to Bergner's work, not just because it extended her visual vocabulary, but also because it strengthened the work in a three-dimensional sense. Painting had been spurned by both the Constructivists and the Bauhaus as an art form that did not speak of reality. Colour, however, was still considered approvingly as it was understood as an aspect of light. Bergner and her fellow weavers believed that when it came to the viewer's perception, aesthetic enjoyment was not only formed by the structure, but also by something innate in colour that triggers emotion.

Bergner's journey to the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s led to a clear shift in her designs from geometric abstraction to folkloric themes. During

her time there she developed fabrics for furniture factories, tuning her designs to government propaganda that exalted the socialist lifestyle. Bergner was ideologically committed to the USSR and it was while she was there that she made what are considered to be her most important and innovative fabrics, notably, *Metro*. This strong design, with its underlying reference to architecture and urbanism, established fabric as a medium worthy of critical attention.

Following ideological conflicts between the Bauhäuslers and the Soviet authorities, Bergner left Moscow in 1936 and travelled to Switzerland. Here she focused on designing and making hand-woven textiles. However, the rise of fascism in Europe led her to leave the continent, and in 1939, together with her husband Hannes Meyer and daughter Lilo, she emigrated to Mexico, settling in the country's capital.

Bergner arrived in Mexico at a time when Bauhaus inspired design education was popular. She was also able to contribute her knowledge of the textile industry she had gained while in the USSR. Bergner also wrote about her ideas in articles for *Arquitectura y Decoración*, and encouraged Mexican architects and designers to reflect on the aesthetic experiences viewers might have when observing textiles works.

In general, Mexican society in the early twentieth century viewed textile design as a craft product. This thinking was shared by the Mexican artists who were Bergner's contemporaries, who, in line

with the cultural policy of the time, were also developing a profile as educators and industrial designers supportive of the revolution. In their design work and teaching they strove to be political, highlighting the social concerns that would facilitate post-revolutionary unification. Their work aimed to achieve the integration of urban and rural, past and future, merging what art historian Karen Cordero described as 'the different cultural identities in Mexico'. This integration would result in an important change in the 'perception of manual and ethnic industry'. The growing dialogue between urban and rural regions, as well as the political climate, led art critics to idealise artists as workers producing objects that would support community progress.

From the time she arrived in Mexico, Bergner worked on contributing intellectually and practically to the socialist society. Although the government of Lázaro Cárdenas was about to end, Mexico in 1939 appeared like the ideal place for communist and socialist intellectuals, politicians, and artists to work. In tune with this mindset, and after reading the article 'Las industrias otomies del valle del Mezquital' ('Otomí industry in the Mezquital valley') by Francisco Rojas, Bergner drew up a program for a Bauhaus style textile education for Otomí communities, although she never managed to implement the project.

In the end, Bergner was unable to apply her skills in industrial and textile design directly in Mexico. Yet it was still a fruitful time for her as a graphic designer. She created the visual identity for the ▶



Previous page: Design drawing, for a textile, Abstract depicting men rowing, sails, birds, 1932, Watercolour on paper, 21 x 28cm

Left: Design drawing, for floor rug 1928, Watercolour on paper

catalogue and exhibition of the Management Committee for the Federal Program of School Construction between 1944 and 1946. When the school construction committee held an exhibition to exhibit plans for buildings and literacy programs in 1945, Bergner designed the layout and maps. A travelling exhibition, the show brought her work to different audiences across the country. Through her design work, including graphic design, Berger was committed to communicating the idea of a just modernity through a visual language. She wanted to create work that was aimed at a wide audience, not only an elite comprised of architects and designers.

Bergner led a dynamic political life in Mexico. She and Meyer were not only designers and curators of graphic exhibitions, but also political activists, present at important moments in the worldwide battle against fascism, as well as active in Mexico's domestic political context. Bergner believed in the values of the leftwing philosophy she had acquired as a young woman in Germany, and she continued to follow these ideals as she travelled the world.

Mexican society in the 1940s offered the perfect place for Bergner to live in accordance with her politics, while also developing her creative practice. With politics so much part of her life, it is impossible to refer to her artistic and design work without also thinking of her as a political figure. ♦♦♦Viridiana Zavala Rivera. Translated from Spanish by Laurence Nunny.

Gallery of Avaritia Cankern. Purchased by the Ashmolean, Oxford, December, First 1988

This is an offshoot version of an article first published on bahians.inimaginea.com/bahianmagazine.org.



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PUTTING ON A ZOOT SUIT

Examining race and class in the first truly american suit

The zoot suit was an icon of its time, born from the silhouettes of London's Savile Row, then adopted and exaggerated by young jazz-obsessed men and women across America. Amid a period of social and political turbulence just before World War II, the style was not only a means of dandyism, but also a badge of cultural identity for many African-American and first generation immigrant youths, including Mexicans.

Defined by its broad shoulder line, fitted waist, long jacket, pegged sleeves and trousers, the zoot suit existed against a backdrop of racial tensions. The 'zoot suit riots' of 1943 made headlines across America, and masked what was essentially race warfare between the military dress of white servicemen and unpatriotic dress of non-white zoot-suiters, whose voluminous suits defied wartime fabric restrictions.

For the wearer, the meaning of this exaggerated style was one of self-assertion. Not only did zoot-suiters form a community around this suit, but the pleasure of assuming this bold draped look spoke to underprivileged youths. But for many white Americans, the zoot suit was symbolic of gang activity or subversion, especially as racial tensions continued to rise. This led to riots that first broke out in Los Angeles against Mexican-American pachucos, then spread to urban areas across the country.

Like the young male pachuco of Southern California, their female counterparts, the

pachucas, also received negative press amid the riots. Various news outlets reported on young Chicano women battling servicemen amid the riots alongside their brothers, boyfriends, or friends, or attacking white women with knives that were allegedly hidden in their hair. These so-called 'zoot suit gangsterettes,' 'cholititas,' or 'zooterinas' were also said to be part of gangs called the 'Slick Chicks' or 'Black Widows'.

Their look was similar to zoot-suiters, and generally consisted of the broad-shouldered 'finger-tip' coat, a short knee-length skirt or pegged trousers, fishnet stockings or bobby socks, platform heels, saddle shoes, or huarache sandals, high pompadour hairstyles, and heavy make-up. Latinx historian Elizabeth R. Escobedo notes that strong lipstick and eye make-up was a means for these young women to actively embellish their Mexicanness. For some pachucas this look was an act of rebellion.

As first-generation Mexican-Americans, they were redefining their place in society – not only as ethnic minorities, but also as women from a cultural heritage strongly dominated by traditional Catholic values. Assuming a more masculine look with the zoot suit allowed these young women to rebel against what was expected as a Mexican woman, while also creating community for other like-minded Mexican-American women.

Like any curious young adult, some pachucas were confrontational and sexually provocative

as reported in both English and Spanish language press; however, other pachucas donned the zoot style simply because they wanted to be fashionable and visually affiliated with the latest trends.

As the zoot suit grew to be more of a fashion fad, even white females, like white males, began to don the style. In fact, when zoot suits were depicted on white men and women, the emphasis of the style was more on youth, music and dance rather than gang violence. In 1942, the St. Louis Post Dispatch described wearers of the style as 'usually excellent dancers, perfect gentlemen,' and that their female counterparts call their zoot look 'a juke jacket,' because it's worn when dancing to the juke box. It is worth noting that all zoot-suiters photographed in this article are not Hispanic.

Although the zoot suit fell out of fashion for both men and women by the end of World War II, underlying social issues of race would continue to evolve. Despite being a short-lived fad, this draped shape is an icon of its time and considered the first truly American suit. It was an exaggeration of the ultimate male uniform, the suit, and in its heyday the zoot suit was adopted widely in various communities throughout the country. During its reign in fashion, it not only granted its wearers, both male and female, a sense of strength and bravado, it also put a spotlight on the true diversity of American citizenry.***

Clarissa M. Esguerra

The full version of this article was published in *Vogue* www.vogue.com/print/gossip-columnists. The wearers of these bold suits were most likely entertainers. Alamy.com



A photograph of a modern building with a textured, reddish-pink facade. The building features a prominent diagonal line and a large, open rectangular space. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The ground is a light, sandy color. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and architectural.

HOMAGE TO THE CUBE

Luis Barragán explores colour theory



All images: Cande San, Ciudad de los Chiles, Mexico City; 006668 Luis Barragán, Cuauhtémoc 1902, Mexico City; 1985, photo: Armando Salas, Pintado, Monterrey 1916, Mexico City; 1990

At first glance, textiles and architecture appear to be poles apart. Architecture is associated with density and mass, while fabric is usually perceived as flimsy, lightweight and frail. Yet textiles have a long history as an architectural material, and continue to play a significant role in architecture today. Colours, textures and patterns inspire key elements of architectural design, often determining the sense of presence a building can convey. So while robust structures and tactile fabrics may seem to be distinct, or even oppositional, there are threads that bind the two together.

The relationship between textiles and architecture can be observed in the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán, whose buildings were imbued with points of reference that extended beyond the structures he designed. Launching his career at a time when architects were pioneering functionalist styles and understated modernist designs, Barragán



was unusual for his use of colour. He introduced the intense colours of Mexico to architecture, using natural tones seen in the country's landscapes, and vibrant hues taken from traditional textiles.

Barragán had practised as an architect in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. When he returned to Mexico, he brought the clean lines of European Modernism with him. Despite his admiration for the modernist aesthetic, Barragán's philosophy was at odds with Le Corbusier's vision of the house as 'a machine for living', a mandate many European and North American architects subscribed to. When in Mexico, Barragán gravitated away from European influences and began creating an indigenous Mexican style. His style was partially inspired by artist Rufino Tamayo and interior designer Jesús Reyes Ferreira, two men who placed vibrant colours, rich textures and textile know-how at the heart of their work. ▶



Together, the three researched traditional dyeing recipes to identify the purest colours in the Mexican palette. Barragán and Reyes Ferreira eventually selected three colours that would characterise their work for the rest of their careers. They created a palette of deep indigo hue, cochineal pink and a vibrant shade of sea-snail purple that coloured landscapes, buildings and indigenous embroidery. None of the colours were chosen arbitrarily; each had an enduring relationship to the country and its traditions.

In his youth, Barragán had been educated by Franciscan monks and was guided by Franciscan beliefs. His houses were constructed with traditional beam ceilings, heavy stone slabs, repeating terracotta floor tiles and rough stucco walls. The rooms were given contemporary proportions, with the rustic textures existing in contrast with white surfaces. These white planes

attested to the Franciscan values of serenity, silence and sanctuary, yet created space for expression and élan.

As he developed and championed a distinctively Mexican style, Barragán also set out to create 'emotional architecture' by making colour and texture central to his work. Colour was deployed in defiance of the pull of Franciscan austerity, saturating interior and exterior surfaces with a palette full of passion. Barragán designed in opposition to functionalism, appealing to the heart more than the rationality of the modernist mind. Warm white hues and earth tones were used to create serenity, while bold, vibrant colours made the atmosphere more dynamic, even romantic.

Barragán used bold hues to dramatic effect, as if applying the colour-blocking techniques of textile design directly to the surface of buildings. He also



combined colour with the original and dramatic use of natural and artificial light. Barragán typically designed hidden light sources that softened strong colours and subtly tinted the ambient light, giving his interiors a lyrical atmosphere.

Barragán is often described as a minimalist architect, but his integration of colour into his designs challenges the term. By using colour in such unique ways, Barragán transformed the line and spaces of modernism into his own brand of effusive style. His supporters speak of the 'deep humanism' expressed in Barragán's work, which used colour to trigger human interactions. It seems that Barragán saw colour as a tool for softening spaces, creating warm and inviting arenas where residents could relax, and intimacy could unfold.

Often described as Barragán's seminal work, the Cuadra San Cristobal residence and ranch



combines key elements of his architectural idiom. Built between 1966 and 1968 in Mexico City, the house, external courtyards, walled gardens and outbuildings showcase Barragán's signature saturated colours and smooth vertical planes. The walls and freestanding structures manipulate light and shadow to dramatic effect, softened by falling water and shallow basins that reflect light. Here, the choice and deployment of colour reveals that the tones Barragán chose to work with had to harmonise with the azure-blue sky overhead and the yellow earth of the Mexican landscape.

At a time when architectural theorists, feminists and design historians are investigating the extent to which architecture can be interpreted as gendered, it's interesting to consider Cuadra San Cristobal and Barragán's other seminal works in this way. Barragán's implementation of colour and texture have been described as warm, elegant, sensual and



female. This is a striking contrast to the descriptions, such as static, male and robust, that often characterise modern architecture. Barragán's works were not intended to make architecture more feminine, but to introduce soft forms that harmonised with his ambition to make buildings more tactile and interactive.

Today, Barragán's work continues to inspire. One of Longchamp's most acclaimed Spring/Summer collections was influenced by the architect's buildings in Guadalajara. Vibrant motifs were printed on bags, scarves and garments with shapes and colours that referenced Barragán's style. Louis Vuitton's Spring/Summer 2016 collection, directed by Nicolas Ghesquiere, resonated with Barragán's legacy of colour and geometry, and was even photographed by Patrick Demarchelier at the Cuadra San Cristobal. Light artist James Turrell has cited Barragán as an influence in his land art, while

the minimalist architect John Pawson revisited interest in Barragán through publications.

As Barragán's work is revisited today, the significance of the textile in architecture is being rediscovered. Barragán's legacy reminds us that the cutting edge in architecture is not always sharp, but colourful, sensuous and soft.

The dynamic exchanges taking place between architecture and textiles are creating a new range of possibilities that take both disciplines in exciting new directions. Not only does today's generation of textiles provide new inspiration for architects, they also present fresh possibilities for urban planners and developers. As the role of colour in buildings and public space is reconsidered, the potential to experience the built environment as a tactile arena could change our experience of architecture forever. **Bradley Quinn**

ON THE FRINGE

Tassels and fringes



Fringes of red fringe are seen at the court of the Sultan of Morocco.



Woman's shawl detail, England, 1830s, V&A

Throughout history fringes and tassels have decorated the soft furnishings of our homes and our clothing. Tassels dangling from a mortarboard declare academic achievement, those on a Court mantle display orders of royal honour received, and allegiance given. Tassels have appeared on the battlefield from shako to sword knot: they have weighted theatre curtains and tantalised the audiences of burlesque. Fringes, tassels and pompons have been used to denote love, status, religious devotion, and even as protection against evil spirits: they appear in cultures throughout the world in settings from the most rustic to the lavishly ornate.

Fringing is perhaps the most natural way to decorate the edges of a woven item, to tie off the warp threads left loose as the piece is cut from the loom. To fringe the sides without losing the integrity of the weave, alternate weft loops are cut along the selvedge edge. For the enhanced version, the threads are sectioned and tied in a series of knots or threaded with beads before the ends are left free. In some cases the knotting pattern becomes such a feature as to become a net and ultimately macramé. Eminently portable, fringed hangings have long been a feature of nomadic cultures. The Uzbek yurt hangings are particularly rich in colour and tassels. Similarly, the canopies over the ornate floats carried shoulder high through Spanish streets during Semana Santa, the week before Easter, swing with rich gold and red fringing.



Woman's shawl detail, Morocco, 19th century, V&A



Pope Pius XII's large red Qur'anic hat, NTEHOTO / Alamy



Saddle Cloth, Pakistan, 1900, V&A



Wall Hanging, Gujarat, India, mid-20th century, V&A



Quilting, family of the Parliament Buildings in Albany, Georgia, Porphyria Geronzi, Albany

Non-woven textiles may also have fringes applied as a separate trim with extra knots of yarn added to knitted items, or fringing cut into leather as in the traditional garments of various Native American peoples. Tassels of soft leather strips adorned with beads, shells, feathers or porcupine quills could also be added.

In the 14th book of the Iliad, Homer tells of how Hera, queen of the gods, tired of her husband's preoccupation with the war, determines to seduce him away from the battlefield of Troy. She applies perfume, braids her hair and carefully dons a 'girdle fashioned with a hundred tassels'. To double the effect she also borrows Aphrodite's girdle which 'has been crafted with all the bewitchments ... love, lust and flirtation' and will grant that whatever she envisions in her mind will come true. As promised, when she meets her husband Zeus he is entranced and seduced by the sensual sway of the tasselled girdles that enhanced her womanly charms.

Neolithic women also knew the power of a carefully crafted tasselled girdle or skirt as Stone Age Venus figurines from as Russia, Ukraine, Serbia and Macedonia will attest. At Egved in Denmark, the grave of a young woman revealed that she was buried wearing a belt intricately woven with many tassels of wool cord forming a skirt of about fifteen inches long, each finished with a knot to add weight and sensual swish to her movements. ▶



Cup with long tassel, Handbarrow of silk, Spain, 19th century, V&A



Woman's Belt, Jelling, Jelling, north Jutland, 10th century, V&A



Tassel, cross knit stitch, stem stitch, camelid wool, Peru, 900x1100 MB



Wickiwoot, sheepskin, exterior embroidered, Balkans, Romania, BM



Sheviev coat, BSH, felt, embroidered with wool and trimmed with tassels, MB



Wedding glass, women, embroidered, headband, wool, silk, linen, Palestine, P238,

In the Jewish faith, according to the Bible, Numbers 15:38 the Lord told Moses: 'you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them'. Known as tzitzit, the tassels were added to men's outer wear, but as modern clothing is generally without corners they are worn on the prayer shawl or the small tallit, poncho-like garment worn under the shirt. The edict continues in ecclesiastical dress with fringes on the liturgical stole, ornate tassels on the cardinal's hat and a pompon topping the biretta. The Islamic fez also has a devotional silk tassel to represent the single hair by which devout Muslims would be raised up to paradise by Allah.

Although the term 'tassel' and 'fringe' are sometimes used synonymously, tassels are distinguished by being constructed separately, the threads or cords tied at the top with the bottom free. They have a three-dimensional quality frequently augmented by additional knots or a thread-covered wooden core that gives additional weight and substance. The pompon is a more frivolous cousin to the tassel, and is also constructed independently by binding yarn around a doughnut shape template, tightly tying the centre and cutting to release the threads into a fluffed sphere.

Lama Bolivia, Mar, lining // Alamy





Antique felt for wall hooks. China Hoares Wild Place Photography / Alamy
Women's bonnets (dang) (Punjab, India, mid 19th century) (K&K)



Throughout the world marital status is indicated with fringes and pompons. In Kachin, northern Burma, the young Jinghpaw women traditionally make bachelor belts for their sweethearts, weaving them with long red tassels headed by black pompons. On the Peruvian island of Taquile, the size and number of a woman's shawl pompons indicate her marital status while single men advertise their availability with a white tassel on their mostly red caps.

In the Andes unmarried men would knit their own white topped Ch'ullu Soltero caps, their designs displaying to potential brides their ability to plan ahead. The women of the Black Forest area of Germany would traditionally wear hats decorated with red pompons until their marriage, when they would wear black. In Serbia, Romania and Macedonia, vestiges of the fringed skirt remain as an apron with tasselled ties worn by married women, and even Aphrodite's girdle, woven with the irresistible powers of love and desire, is echoed in the Greek 'zostra' and the girdle of St Brigit in Ireland, which is believed will help a woman to conceive, or protect her during labour.

The uniform of the Evzone, the Greek Presidential Guard, includes fringes, tasselled garters and 'tsarouchia', the traditional heavy shoes decorated with pompons, said to conceal sharp objects to take assailants by surprise. In contrast, one of the most popular designs for the tiny lotus shoe worn by women with bound feet was lapis blue silk with pink silk floss pompons.*** Sarah Jane Downing

Sundals, South, Pakistan - 21st century. Given by the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi



centaughing (Uruz Kopp Jigah), panned Afghanistan, 18th



Shawl (Jampoo) (19th century) (K&K)

BAG OF TRICKS

Angela Damman spins green gold in Yucatán



A simplified, naturalistic form repeats across the surface of a honey-toned pouch designed by Angela Damman. Chosen not just for its pleasing shape, this form is in fact a fly's wing, inspired by the artist Katherine de Barrueta, and her series on the fragility and beauty of these much-threatened pollinators. The wing design represents Damman's commitment to the country she now calls home, and her desire to grow a business rooted in gente, sustainable cultivation and traditional processes.

When Damman and her husband moved from America to Mexico in 2008 they were hoping to build a life that was meaningfully connected to the land. By 2012, Damman, artist turned entrepreneur, had set up a business designing and making bags, cushions and rugs, with every process, from growing the plants, extracting their fibres, drying, dyeing, spinning and weaving, all within a 50-mile radius of her home in Yucatán.

For everything she designs and makes, Damman mainly uses two materials, Henequén (similar to sisal but not as strong) and sanseveria (often known as mother-in-law's tongue). Henequén, Mexico's green gold, yields a fibre ideal for rope and twine. It was used by the Mayans to make string, hammocks, and rugs - all present in Angela Damman's lexicon. The nineteenth century boom in henequén production made Yucatán, which was producing almost all of the rope used in the world at that time, one of the richest states in Mexico. But the industry all but disappeared with the introduction of synthetic fibres. Sanseveria, the other plant Damman uses, has a reputation as an

almost indestructible houseplant. Not native to Mexico, it was cultivated because of its strong and resilient fibres which are softer and finer than the native henequén, making it ideal for thread making. Damman's Brujar bucket bag, made with spun sanseveria fibre, nicely plays on this sense of fineness, and with unapologetic show is lavishly layered with 1500 fringes.

A combination of skilled labour, imagination, and appreciation of Mexican style and contemporary design aesthetics are what gives Angela Damman's tactile accessories their appeal. This cultural hybridity, found in Mexico's cuisine, agriculture, architecture and visual culture, is central to her designs. From hammocks made from handspun sanseveria thread, to pom-pom like fringed bags, her sense of luxury, style and personality, as well as a sense of the place she now calls home, is writ large across her pieces.

As well designing bags and homewares, Damman continues her practice as an artist, producing textile sculptures and bespoke objects made using henequén and sanseveria fibres. Her conceptual work *Ascension of 13* was inspired by the relationship between Mayan myth and culture and the henequén plant. Damman has also created a large chandelier made of raw sun-whitened henequén, and another two-meter tall chandelier made of nearly 40,000 meters of hand spun organic sanseveria. This more experimental work shows the aesthetic and technical possibilities of the plant fibres, ensuring the place of these natural and sustainable materials in the contemporary design vocabulary. **Laura Gray**





WITHOUT CORN THERE IS NO COUNTRY

Fernando Laposse's act of resistance

Corn is Mexico's most important crop. Tortillas are part of every meal. Physically, and economically, corn sustains much of the population. No wonder then that the slogan of a popular national campaign promoting food security is 'Without corn there is no country'. This is precisely the motto of Mexican artist Fernando Laposse. His solo show *Transmutations* opened in February at Archivo Arte y Diseño, Mexico City. With corn at its heart, the show was praised for its beauty, relevance, depth, and for bringing crucial topics to the table. *Transmutations* shows the transformation of sissal and corn husk, generally discarded materials into art. These materials have been altered, both formally and conceptually by Laposse, in a way that

demonstrates the potential positive impact of innovative design thinking on environmental and social problems.

With corn symbolic of the rural life of Mexico, Laposse's work is a designer's reply to the question of how to improve the quality of life in rural communities without sacrificing tradition. As Laposse himself has said, 'I am more interested in design in relation to the people who produce it, the stories behind things'.

Fernando Laposse is a London-based Mexican designer with a BA in product design from Central Saint Martins. His work is rooted in

experimentation. His use of sissal and corn husk carries a sense of the *Arte Povera* tradition, in which cheap materials were 'reactivated' as legitimate materials for making art. Laposse is also interested in crossovers between product design and gastronomy. Through his design work, he hopes to question patterns of consumption and the politics of food production by creating new materials and covetable handmade design objects.

In 2017 Laposse was the inaugural winner of the Future Food Design Awards, a Dutch award that invites designers to challenge the way we view food and to contribute to a more sustainable food system. His winning project, *Totomaxtle* (meaning



husk) started in 2015 when Laposse visited Santo Domingo Tonahuixtla, a small village of Mixtec farmers and herders in south west Mexico. There he met Delfino Martinez who was running a reforestation and composting project. The project used pesticides and hybrid seeds without Martinez understanding the impact of those chemicals on plants and the soil. Laposse started by explaining the labels on those pesticide bags and proposing that together they plant native heirloom corns.

Totomoxtle's byproduct is an innovative design material that harnesses the brilliant spectrum of colour seen in the corn husks, but at the heart of the project is a commitment to regenerating

traditional agricultural practices in Mexico, restoring biodiversity and creating a new craft that generates income for impoverished farmers.

To create a material that can be used in design products, *Totomoxtle* focuses on the husk, a part of the plant that is usually ignored. To begin the project, sixteen varieties of corn were planted to produce beautiful colourful corn and leaves. Once grown, each husk is carefully cut and peeled off the cob, ironed flat and glued onto a paper pulp or textile backing. At this point the material is ready to be cut by hand or lasered into small pieces that are reassembled to make marquetry for furniture or applied to surfaces.

Native corn runs the risk of becoming a super-crop or super-food as has happened in Bolivia and Peru with quinoa, where it has become a luxury export-only crop, creating profit for middle-men and leaving indigenous populations eating industrialised food.

In Tonahuixtla, the site of the *Totomoxtle* project, the tortillerias do not buy local corn because it is too expensive. Instead they buy pre-mix hybrid corn which is cheaper and faster to turn into tortillas. However, with this new material and craft work started by Laposse's project, farmers can make money from transforming the husk, eliminating the pressure of having to sell the grain. ▶



Historically, making fibre from plants has been an important business in Mexico. Sisal was the main material used to make rope and fishing nets. In colonial times, the production of sisal products rose dramatically. This gave rise to a large industry in the Yucatán Peninsula where this material was planted, harvested, produced and exported. In fact the name sisal comes from the Port of Sisal in Yucatán and was adopted over the indigenous name 'ixtle' as it was easier to pronounce.

The rich elite or 'hacendados' in Yucatán became one of the wealthiest groups in Mexico as most of the sisal of the world came from this one region. But by the 20th century a series of events brought

sisal production in Mexico to a grinding halt. The instability caused by the Mexican peasant revolution in the 1920's and subsequent land rights reforms made the production of sisal unstable. Its price further increased when indigenous Mayan workers demanded higher wages. The invention of cheap plastics such as nylon in the 1940's was the final blow to this industry as the demand for sisal rope and twine plummeted. Although the sisal industry in Mexico never recovered, the indigenous communities continue to use it for their crafts. Mexico's long relationship with the material, as well as its sustainability, meant that it appealed to Laposse, 'It's a plant that requires virtually no water to be grown and can be

harvested in five years. Once harvested its core is used to make everything from agave syrup to tequila or mezcal and its leaves can be crushed to make the fibres, nothing is wasted'.

Laposse believes that new technology, particularly the development of new biodegradable materials, may not necessarily be the answer to the environmental problems the world is facing, 'There are a great number of solutions that can be found by looking back to the historic use of materials. With my sisal furniture and installations I try to present sisal in its raw form and to show people how simple it is to go from plant to final product. For this I make the whole process



myself, from harvesting the plants to crushing them to make fibres, combing and knotting them by hand to make hairy objects, furniture and installations. I doubt that the sisal industry will regain its previous glory anytime soon but with my pieces I try to adapt and reinterpret the ways that it is still used in Mexico by indigenous communities. Hopefully this will help to inform consumers of the skill and time needed to produce traditional weaves'.

When asked about the next step for his work, Laposse explains that he is not taking the easy road which would be to go to a place already producing colourful corn. He is committed to

staying in Tonalhuixtla where change happens sustainably and gradually. 'It is not about going to a place and getting raw material, it is about long term commitment. My dream is that one day I can look back and say: I started a new craft', he says.

With *Totomaxtle* Laposse was able to reintroduce traditions that had been lost as the result of socio-economic change. This tiny little town in the middle of nowhere between Oaxaca and Puebla, can share their act of resistance against global pressures, and tell their story through materials, skills and beautiful objects. Similarly, with his *Lufa Series*, Laposse sought to change the perceived value of a material by putting the loofah's qualities

of lightness and translucency to use in a contemporary design context. *Lufa Series* sees the humble bathroom loofah functioning as a key aesthetic element of chic lamps, screens and desks. In this way, Laposse shows how design and beauty are forces that have the power to reverse change.

He knows that he will never change the nature of the global corn trade, but rather than lose heart, Laposse concentrates his energy on improving the situation in a small town in the mountains of Mexico. Perhaps this story will gain in strength, and who knows where it may extend to in the future. *** **Marcella Echavarría**



WOVEN IDENTITY

Finding meaning in the hand-woven textiles of Chiapas



Long before the Spanish conquest of the Americas that began with Mexico in 1521, Mayan land was contiguous and vast. Mayan peoples spanned what we now know as Chiapas, the Yucatán Peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador.

The iconic textiles of Chiapas are part of a greater Mayan landscape where cloth has few boundaries. The meaning embedded in the garments spills across political borders where there are more similarities than differences. Today, clothing serves, as it did then, as cultural markers to identify the wearers, where they belong, their status and ethnic pride. For hundreds of years, conquerors enforced laws based on such clothing styles to track and contain movement. Independence is part of indigenous way of life.

Walk down any street in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, now and it is easy to identify where a woman comes from by the textile she wears. This progressive town in the Chiapas highlands is a trading hub for many Mayan communities located within a few hours drive. Today, a woman wears her *traje* (indigenous dress) with dignity and self-respect. Usually, she has woven the garment she wears herself, sitting for months on the hand-woven palm petate mat, working the back strap loom for a few hours each day between household and childcare chores. The most intricate festival huipiles can take a up to a year to weave.

A gala or festival huipil will include a signature unique to each weaver. It will also include sacred spiritual symbols that have personal meaning, telling a story that each woman wants to convey. No one huipil will be a duplicate of another, but the same symbols – or iconography – will be there, from one huipil to next. The size of design or placement in the cloth also varies.

In the remote mountain village of Aldama Magdalena, women become weaving masters by the age of twelve. Their designs are mathematic. They count warp threads and dream their designs. A local cultural anthropologist tells me that ▶



Previous Page Left; Huipil, c. 1984. Tzotzil Maya, Magdalenas, Chiapas, Mexico, Cotton and wool.

Previous Page Right; Child's huipil, c. 1980. Tzotzil Maya, Magdalenas, Chiapas, Mexico, Cotton.

Opposite; Sra. Valdomero Ruiz, Huipil for festive or dress occasions, 1960s. Tzotzil Maya, Magdalenas, Chiapas, Mexico. Cotton and wool.

Mayan women wrestle with design problems as they sleep. They wrestle with saints and angels. The designs talk to them through Santas Marta, Magdalena and María. The complexity of adding supplementary weft threads to the warp to create a figure is worked out this way. The technique is also called brocade or brocado.

In Chiapas highland villages where women weave cotton garments, they purchase commercially spun thread that comes from other parts of Mexico. Sometimes the thread is synthetic, often shiny polyester, called estambre. The fashion now is to incorporate sparkly coloured, silver or golden threads into the textile. In some villages, thread colour preferences change each year with changing fashion trends.

The spirit world is strong in this part of Chiapas. The Mayan cosmivision is reflected here in the cloth that women weave – a magical world that hinges upon the ever-present duality of the human and the divine. The patterns that emerge are mythic and surreal. Lady Xoc appears as a powerful female figure, adapted from the Late-Classic (681-742 AD) lintel carvings at the renowned archeological site of Yaxchilan on the Guatemala border. Her symbol is replicated in the cloth of three Chiapas villages — San Andres Larrainzar, Aldama Magdalena, and Santa Marta.

Woven huipil bodices can also look like contemporary art. The ones from Tzeltel-speaking San Juan Cancuc look like a kinetic graphic print. Triangles represent the universe. Frogs symbolise the coming of rain. The diamond is a sacred sense of location. Put your head through the opening of the huipil and you are at the center of the universe. The center of three panels is called mother, and it is here that the most elaborate woven figures appear. It might depict the sacred ceiba tree, centre of the universe with the four cardinal points, woven over the wearer's heart. Lightning, rain, baby chickens, horses, monkeys and dogs can figure prominently. So do the creation symbols of sun, moon and stars. One of the world's oldest symbols, the double-headed eagle represents day and night, good and evil, woman and man.

Cloth may also tell the Maya creation story of corn; stalks, tassels and kernels ask for good planting and harvesting seasons. Snakes protect the wearer from evil.

Some figures have no meaning at all and serve to fulfill the weaver's aesthetic. When a woman is asked about the designs and why she includes them or weaves them this way, her answer is usually because it's how she learned from her mother and grandmother.

Women from the nearby municipality of Tzotzil-speaking San Juan Chamula work in wool, not cotton. They raise and shear sheep, then card the wool to prepare it for the drop-spindle before weaving on a wider version of the back-strap loom. The preparation is intensive. They weave fleecy wrap-around skirts held in place by woven cinch belts. They weave thick wool chals (shawls) to protect them from the heavy mist and winter chill of the mountains. They weave tunics and vests for their men. They weave coverings for palm mat floor beds. The Spanish imported sheep to the Americas. The Chamulans have put it to good use and this trade is their identity.

As the world becomes smaller, as television and smart phones and internet penetrates even the most remote areas, change is inevitable. The risk, of course, is assimilation and loss of cultural cohesion. There are rewards for blending in and becoming mainstream, moving from rural village to faster-paced city: access to education, better jobs, improved health care and less discrimination. The uniform of Western dress is the great leveller and it is seen especially among the young people who want to fit in.

Women dream about more than calculating mathematical designs as they puzzle out a weaving pattern. They dream to expand selling opportunities, to educate their children and pass on their traditions. They depend on tourism and often work through cooperatives and NGOs that help fulfill these dreams. We can help support and sustain them by visiting and purchasing the beautiful cloth they make. **---Norma Schafer. This article is dedicated to the memory of my friend, historian and guide, Patrick Murphy Ruiz. I learned so much from him.**



FIG. 1000 11

RADICAL EXPRESSIONS

Can textiles upend the cultural hierarchy?

This summer, Dovecot Studios will exhibit Grayson Perry's tapestries at the Edinburgh Festival. Juxtaposing Perry's machine woven jacquard artworks with the work of one of the world's leading hand woven tapestry studios will, we hope, create an interesting conversation about fine art textiles.

Certainly, Dovecot is keen to highlight the fact that a new generation of high profile artists are working with textiles. This May, Blain Southern's newest gallery space in New York will open with an exhibition of work by Abdoulaye Konaté. In 2018, one of the most talked about works by Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes in her show at the White Cube Gallery, Bermondsey, was a 16 metre-long tapestry, her first foray into the medium. The previous year, Chris Offill's tapestry *The Caged Bird's Song*, woven at Dovecot, was unveiled in a major exhibition at London's National Gallery. Moreover, the 2017 Venice Biennale, the Olympics of contemporary art, was literally overflowing with fabric: large textile installations by Sheila Hicks and Ernesto Neto attracted Instagrammers and the Arseneal was filled with textile-based work by Leonor Antunes (who represents Portugal in the Biennale 2019), Petrit Halilaj, Maria Lai and Franz Erhard Walther, among others.

For some of these artists, textiles are a place of reinvention. Perry exhibited his first tapestry in 2008 and has since used textiles to challenge both himself and his audience. 'I always work with traditional media' says Perry. 'Each historic category of object has accrued, over time,

intellectual and emotional baggage. I depend on this to add inflection to the content of the works'. His approach is conceptual, playing with the idea of tapestry as a costly and luxurious medium to depict everyday dramas, issues and people.

For other artists, the materiality of textile appeals. Ghanaian artist El Anatsui has said that it is the motion of fabric which appeals to him. 'The idea of a sheet that you can shape and reshape. It can be on the floor, it can be up on the ceiling, it can be up on the wall, all that fluidity is behind the concept'. His draped sculptures, sewn together from aluminium bottle-tops and copper wire, are currently the subject of a major exhibition at Haus der Kunst in Munich, where they reference local and global issues with dazzling visual effect.

Textiles also offer artists a complex way to explore and question gender. Rosemarie Trockel, the renowned German contemporary artist, came to prominence in the 1980s with works made from machine-knitted wool that referenced the kitchen. She explains her use of yarn as a comment on the male-dominated art world and on the established hierarchy of art forms, which places painting above crafts.

The fact that increasing numbers of contemporary art galleries and museums are showing textiles gives a new impetus for younger artists to work in the medium. In the UK alone, recent exhibitions on Artist Textiles (Fashion and Textile Museum, 2015), Sonia Delaunay (Tate, 2015), Richard Tuttle (Whitechapel, 2017), Hannah Rygggen (Modern Art

Oxford, 2017), Entangled Threads & Making (Turner Contemporary, 2017) and Anni Albers (Tate Modern, 2018) have all given important attention and analysis to textiles as a fine art medium. Furthermore, textiles are more evident in recent histories of modern art. In its centenary year, for the first time, the weaving school of the Bauhaus has received more attention than the schools of painting, sculpture, architecture and furniture.

Publication has not only increased the visibility of fine art textiles but also the volume of discourse. This helps artists to connect their ideas with historical practice. In an exhibition of new work at Parafin Gallery in London, Lithuanian artist Indr Šerpytė has used traditional ceremonial sashes from the Baltic to create intersecting layers on the canvas, which she believes connect her national identity to histories of modernism, abstraction and the Readymade.

Yet, as Trockel's work highlights, the position of textiles in the cultural hierarchy is problematic. Weaving is one of the oldest mediums of artistic expression and textiles are preminent in humankind's early history, from Egyptian and Pre-Colombian cultures to medieval English art. However, the status of textiles as a fine art has declined since the emergence of pictorial practice and the elevation of the individual artist that characterised the Renaissance.

There are important historical moments when textiles have received as much institutional, curatorial and critical recognition as the finest of

art forms. For example, in recent exhibitions about 17th century collectors Charles I and Charles II, their tapestries were highlighted as being their most valuable acquisitions; and in the 19th century, William Morris and other Arts & Crafts Movement proponents successfully created and argued for the pre-eminence of art textiles.

However, in the 20th century, textiles have increasingly been categorised as a craft or creative industry, and the value of fine art textiles in the commercial market has weakened when compared with painting or sculpture.

The art market plays a crucial role in public appreciation as well as the value of different art forms. Indeed, since the 1990s, the expanding power of the market has dominated our relationship with aesthetics. Art movements, styles and media are still central to how museums and universities present art, but the market controls the availability of contemporary art, and much of what gets said about it. As a result, for over 30 years, conceptual artists, money and celebrity have dominated the art world.

So what does the improved visibility of artists working with textiles mean for both the market and for critical engagement with this work? Writer and curator Glenn Adamson highlighted the opportunity for conceptual artists to embrace the art of making over 10 years ago, 'The well-made thing is exerting a new fascination on our leading contemporary practitioners...The increasingly public role of contemporary art in which it ▶



Previous page: Abdoulaye Konaté, *Composition N°20 PM Ben*, 2015, Textile, 217 x 148cm

Below: Chris Ofili, *The Caged Bird's Song*, 2014–2017, Wool, cotton, and viscose, Triptych, left and right panels each 280 x 184 cm, centre panel 280 x 372cm

Right: Grayson Perry, *Its Familiarity Golden* 2015, Tapestry, 240 x 343 cm Edition of 9. Accompanied by a signed and numbered certificate



is expected to participate in a populist shift in museums and galleries has motivated artists to see fine workmanship in the battle for attention and acclaim'.

An art market that values craftsmanship in parallel with concepts offers exciting possibilities for textiles and contemporary art. It should also offer opportunities for a new generation of critics who understand materials and the making processes.

Working with textiles involves a spectrum of hard-won skills: weaving, tapestry, embroidery, crochet and knitting, matched by a technical appreciation of yarn and dyeing. Yet the language with which critics and art curators describe textiles can be imperfect or inaccurate. For textile experts, Grayson Perry's

tapestries are not tapestries at all, which are traditionally woven by hand. They are more accurately described as Jacquard loom weaving.

While some contemporary artists approach their work in textile with particular facility, others set out to work collaboratively. But, as Dovecot can attest, the way in which critics and curators describe collaborative endeavour can be problematic. For example, a tapestry created in dialogue between an artist and the weavers offers rich possibilities to push the creative process and create surprising artistic outcomes. Dovecot's experience is that the public want to understand the process of collaboration. Yet critics invariably prioritise the individual

artist's ideas, skill and celebrity above recognition of the collective.

Dovecot is the penultimate venue for Grayson Perry's tapestry tour, which will also be his first major solo show in Scotland. What is interesting about this stage of the tour is that Dovecot is best known as a gallery of contemporary craft, whereas Perry's work has previously been shown, for the most part, in museums and galleries of art. We hope the juxtaposition will not only provoke discussion but also revitalise the value and status of hand woven tapestry as a fine art. *****Celia Joicey Julie Cope's Grand Tour: The Story of a Life by Grayson Perry, at Dovecot Studios from 25 July - 2 November.**

Celia Connell Collection: 2013-2019. Purchase supported by Art Fund with a contribution from The Wilson Foundation and a donation from Maths and James Grant. Courtesy of the Artist, Penguin Press, and Victoria Miro, London. © Guyton Perry





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SHOP TALK

We go shopping at Onora Casa

If there is one must-visit store in Mexico City, it is Onora Casa. In the affluent neighbourhood of Polanco, Onora Casa is part art gallery, part folk art museum and part design store. Founded by Maggie Galton and Maria Eladia Hagerman, Onora presents homewares produced in collaboration with artisans throughout the republic. Maria lives in Los Angeles and is on a mission to elevate Mexican folk art, while Maggie is a New Yorker turned 'chilanga' (as residents of Mexico City are known) and a well respected designer. Together they created Onora with the purpose of supporting high quality artisanal work and expanding the market for folk art so that it can prosper for many more generations. After five years in business, they have a cult following in Mexico.

Onora's palette is neutral with a few seasonal accents, and the materials change according to Maria and Maggie's travels across the country. In their collaboration with artisans they aim to keep the core of technique and tradition in place, while allowing space for creativity. Maggie and Maria say that the concept of luxury is changing rapidly, 'Mexicans used to dream of expensive, global brands. Today, luxury means to know the history and the time it took for someone to make something of quality and meaning'. They have beautiful talavera from Puebla, hand blown glass from Oaxaca, hammered copper pieces, pottery from Jalisco, leather from León, and also feature the work of designers like Margarita Cantue, Marisol Centeno and Oscar Hagerman. ***
Marcella Echavarría, Onora Casa, Lope de Vega 330 Polanco, Mexico
www.onoracasa.com



A NATION'S SHOPKEEPER

Remigio Mestas Revilla

In Mexico, the name Remigio Mestas is synonymous with exquisite textiles, impeccable quality and a deep respect for local cultures and traditions. Day after day he grew up watching his mother come to the city to sell her textiles, sometimes for next to nothing. He witnessed the work that went into making and fetching these pieces from different weavers around Oaxaca, and, observing the way that people bargained with his mother over shawls, he realised that there was a lot of confusion around recognising what was handmade and what wasn't.

Mestas went on to study accounting and today he is a successful entrepreneur with five shops in Mexico and many exciting projects. He describes himself as 'an accountant by profession, a traveller by passion and an artisan by craft'. His shops, called Los Baules de Juana Cata, are living museums full of treasures; shawls, tunics, shawls and fabrics, produced in small numbers and made using the finest materials such as native cotton dyed using Mexico's magical colours of sea salt purple, cochineal and indigo.

Mestas is, before anything else, a traveller and an admirer of textile traditions. He travels by foot, bus or horse to remote places, such as the lagoon of Chichahuaxtala, where he works with local groups who are known to produce textiles of great quality. He works with these makers to create pieces of subtlety and balance. His main focus is Oaxaca's coast where there is an immense wealth of traditions and materials.

For Mestas, traditions do not disappear, they are transformed. However, before transformation they have to undergo a process of reaffirming their identity and their origins. This work consists of researching long lost techniques sometimes available only as oral history, or in the very fabric of old garments.

Mestas's process is intuitive and methodical. When he identifies a textile that is not being made anymore, he contacts the president of the municipality who in turn introduces him to the family that used to make it. In reviving old techniques, he is committed to providing continuous work and to bringing a new generation into the craft of their families. His goal is to provide a platform so that weaving can continue as a meaningful and profitable lifestyle in rural Oaxaca, slowing migration and restoring a sense of wellbeing to the communities.

Mestas's success in retail is partly the result of his contact with the entire making process, from cultivating the cotton to selling the pieces nationally and internationally. Even his production and sales teams come from indigenous rural communities linked one way or another to textile traditions. This contact with all aspects of the process allows Mestas to come up with creative solutions to the problem of disappearing textile traditions in Mexico. On the production side, Mestas has focused on improving the raw materials. For that purpose, he has travelled the world learning different ways of planting, spinning and treating natural fibres.

He has also experimented with natural dyes such as marigold, cochineal and indigo. In fact, reviving indigo in Miltepec is one of his latest obsessions and now there are seven families producing this ancient dye. 'What we do is not about fashion. We are going back to the traditional way of dressing where colour was a source of protection, healing and identity', affirms Mestas.

Every year, Mestas 'adopts' three communities and works with them to develop textiles that he can sell. The more established communities have a representative to act as a bridge between the makers and the market. He or she brings the raw material to Mestas to make sure the quality is up to his standard. As Mestas explains, 'To improve quality or to return to a quality that has disappeared requires a big investment, a serious commitment and a long-term vision'. This is part of Mestas's aim. 'The more I learn about traditional textiles, the more I realise that they will never be paid fairly. This is why I am obsessed with turning master artisans into artists so that their work will be valued as art'. In any case, and as a good accountant would, Mestas does not lose sight of what the customer perceives as a fair price and this is where design comes into play. Pieces range from the very intricate, to simple, minimal beautiful pieces. These pieces contribute to the communities where they are made, providing guaranteed work, and giving scope for creativity. Every piece is part of a bigger vision and a long term project that should be an example to follow worldwide.*****Marcella Echavarría**



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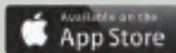
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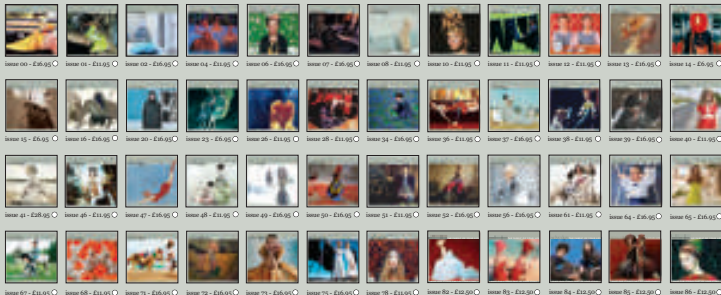
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Crafted by talented artisans living across the pueblos of Yucatán, each Angela Damman bag is made with Henequen (Sisal) fibre. Damman's designs come to life in the hands of artisans trained in dyeing, weaving, embroidery and fine sewing. The henequén and sanseveria plants, which grow without the need for fertilisers and herbicides, help rural economies flourish, while being environmentally sustainable. This Angela Damman luxury handbag is even more special as it is made in limited numbers, worth £365.***www.angeladamman.com



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***www.maddastudio.com



READ



The catchphrase 'labour of love' certainly applies to this portrayal of Frome, a town in southern England, in its heyday. The author was so drawn to a set of unexamined 18th and 19th century workbooks that she felt compelled to write about them and their context. In her own words, her book on the social and industrial history of Frome's cloth trade, 'is about the town, the workers, the dyers and the making of cloth'. In some ways it is about much more, as the word 'trade' implies.

The opening chapters cover the dye story, beginning with the history, production, and dyeing methods for woad/indigo. The woad plant was Europe's source of the all-important indigo blue dye until it was supplanted by more concentrated imported indigo dye pigment. Demand for woad was so great in the 16th and 17th centuries that thousands of tons were produced annually, notably in France and Germany, but in England too. Two chapters focus on Frome's 18th and early 19th century dyehouse pattern books (which can be seen at Bath's reference library and the National Archive). Although they need conservation, the actual samples of both dyed-in-the-wool and finished woollen cloth – whether in blues, madder reds, fustic yellows or other colours and combinations – remain vibrant: a wonderful testimony to the dyers' skills.

Later chapters bring alive the social history of dye houses and their owners, clothiers and workers, through the abundant legacy of archives, portraits and surviving buildings. Frome in its glory days flourished with manufacturing of various kinds of woollen cloth, with all the workers 'men, women and children as deeply tinged as ancient Britons with dark blue'. The town's cloth, both dyed and undyed, was shipped far and wide. But increasing competition and industrialisation led to a devastating decline in the 19th and 20th centuries, the last mill closing in 1965.

The meticulous research includes many notes and a useful glossary and bibliography (which has a few oddities). Thanks to the spacious book design, the reader turning full-page reproductions of leaves



from the dye books almost joins the dyers at work in the 1700s. A mechanised textile industry using synthetic dyes is the norm today; this book reminds us of a time when hand weavers and natural dyers were highly skilled, producing an astonishing range of cloth and colours. Colorimetric testing on contemporary 18th-century archives proves that dyers then could colour-match as precisely as industry does today. The tide is turning against the unsustainable fast fashion and textile industries; there is much to learn from artisans of old. --Jenny Balfour-Paul, 'Woad to This' and the Cloth Trade of Frome by Carolyn Griffiths, Frome Society for Local Study, 2017, £24, fsls.org.uk

READ

This latest tome in Phaidon's medium specific series offers another indication that textiles are finally receiving the attention many feel is long overdue. Compiled by an international nomination committee and overseen by editors Louisa Elderton and Rebecca Morrill, the result is a seemingly encyclopaedic survey that tops 300 pages and covers 110 artists. The scale of the book suggests an effort to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible and the editors have not left themselves open to criticism that one region is over represented at the expense of another. But despite these efforts, this publication is far from inclusive. The nominators represent a specific cog in their respective geographic locations in the art world, which makes this survey frustratingly homogenous. As a result, *Vitamin T* creates a very particular map of a very particular use of textiles, circulating in a very particular type of space. Jenelle Porter's introduction is written from a distinctly American perspective. Scandinavians would be dismayed when reading the historical overview to see no mention of the tapestry weaver Hannah Ryggen; fibre (whichever way you spell it) is not a term with currency in European discourse.

The relatively brief texts on each artist often rely on material already in print. This is curious because the artist's questionnaire supplied by Phaidon asks useful questions about, for example, why textiles may currently be experiencing an increased interest and if the use of textiles in daily life is a help or a hindrance to the textiles standing as a fine art material? Attention to these themes would have been a useful inclusion and helped to offset the confusion created by the alliterative title which emphasises threads. It would also have been fascinating to see where each artist studied. Few, I would wager have made it into this highly networked world of contemporary art without the entry ticket of a recognised arts education, but more, I suspect, may not have even studied textiles. Elderton and Morrill admit in the Preface that some artists declined the invitation to be included in the book. This is a truly refreshing admission, experienced by many but voiced by few. While textiles is enjoying a welcome from contemporary art, there remains anxiety for some around what exactly a material categorisation of their practice means for their artistic identity. *Vitamin T* is an inspiring publication for the textile community, but it is based on difficult preconceptions.

The editor's Preface defends the book's subtitle assuring readers that 'this survey embraces pluralism' rather than 'segregated categories'. The challenge is that it can't be a survey organised by material which also, as the editors conclude, 'aims to unravel those categories, to unpick the divisions between them and to weave together new patterns of thinking about art'. *Vitamin T* maps a certain type of collectable textile that circulates today in sanctioned spaces of contemporary art. There is nothing wrong with this, other than the fact that textiles are also so much more.*** Jessica Hemmings, *Vitamin T: Threads and Textiles in Contemporary Art*, Phaidon Press, 2019, £49.85, [Selvedge readers save 20% using the code VTA20 at \[www.phaidon.com\]\(http://www.phaidon.com\)](#)



VIEW



Textile Traces: Personal Stories in Cloth, Llantarnam Grange, Cwmbran, Wales, 25 May - 20 July 2019, lgac.org.uk

A significant element of Ruth Singer's thoughtful work in recent years has been an exploration of stitching as therapy; how emotional pain can be processed via engagement in textile craft. As Singer explains, 'Developing and making a new series of work during and after distress is about more than just keeping my hands busy, it is about processing my thoughts and making my feelings physical and external'.

A case in point is her collection of 46 'Memorial Pincushions' that form part of this installation. This grouping was created at Gawthorpe Hall in 2015, partly inspired by the pincushions in their historic collection, but also made in memory of a beloved aunt who had died prematurely; each pincushion representing a year of her curtailed life. As Singer elaborates, 'They celebrate her vibrancy, her love of history. Some include antique textiles, pieces of her own cloth and details which I think she would have appreciated, like medieval pins from the River Thames'.

Pincushions make poignant (literally, as the name derives from the Latin 'pungere', to prick, pierce or sting and so figuratively to vex, grieve, or after trouble or afflict) memorials; useful places to park and safely ensconce dangerously sharp emotions. Once given to mark the great landmarks of births, marriages, new homes and deaths, pincushions are also very personal and everyday items. As

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craft projects, they are small and portable, relatively easy to tackle in the geographical dislocation and psychological disturbance that can follow emotional trauma. In many ways they typify Singer's creative areas of concern. The traditionally pieced patchwork examples also seem central to her often precise and mathematical work, where textile and emotional expression mingle, slot together, tessellate and generally become more manageable.

Pieced patchwork, in particular, English pieced patchwork, offers an intriguing opportunity to combine both paper text (used as the foundation templates) and textile elements. In English pieced patchwork, one can select salient scraps, offcuts and oddments, and combine them into a new whole, with text (or expression) carefully cut (edited) and then literally captured inside cloth.

In the early days of English pieced patchwork, the paper itself was an expensive commodity, which was created from textile rags (paper only became more affordable after the 1860s with the introduction of wood pulp), hence its careful repurposing into these laborious artefacts. Three hundred years ago, piecing over paper would have been very much a lady's luxurious leisure pursuit. But the subsequent history of the craft, from the appearance of the first printed hexagon in Godey's *Lady's Book* in the 1830s, to the 1930s revival, and the appearance of pre-cut patchwork packs in 1970s Laura Ashley shops, is a story of increasing democratisation.

Singer records the meticulous English pieced patchwork process in her *Patchwork Prints* series (2017). These monoprints on paper with hand-stitched details were part of her continuing research into ways to record textile processes. She sees print as a way to take a record of the patchwork with tacking and papers still in place, and the use of sepia ink gives the prints the feel of an x-ray. Details of loose threads, weave and paper texture invite a greater level of scrutiny.

Singer often revels in highlighting the back, the workings, the wrong side, the technical, the humble innards of textile creations. This can be seen in her *Sewn Up* quilt series (2011-13) where she turned the proof pages of one of her early books into a quilt. The first quilt incorporated 665 folded squares, with no textile portions at all. This is a rather brilliant ultimate extension of the protracted English pieced patchwork process where only the resonant and stabilising personal paperwork remains.

"How does one fit these pieces back together?" seems to be a fundamental question posed by much of Singer's work, which examines emotional aftermath. And as little scraps of distress are shaped, folded, and given sharp, precise, intentional edges, some comforting order is restored where the vertices meet. An emotional turmoil – which might otherwise threaten to engulf or overwhelm – is somehow processed, regulated and neatly contained within those determined folds.*****Eirlys Penn**
Left Ruth Singer, Sewing Box I

Sorolla: Spanish Master of Light, The National Gallery, London, 18 March - 7 July 2019, nationalgallery.org.uk

Even though Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida is more commonly known as the Spanish 'master of light', he could just as well be called the 'master of cloth'. In his early career he worked on depicting the realities of life, even if that meant his subject matter was sometimes sombre. He documented scenes from sick children playing at the beach, to fishermen sweating on boats churned by a tempestuous sea, all painted quickly and energetically en plein air. Perhaps the most touching of his early works, *Another Marguerite!*, tenderly and compassionately documents a murderess waiting in a jail cell.

Sorolla was a prolific portrait painter, and while he did not enjoy this kind of work, it supplied a steady stream of income. He modified his dislike by painting portraits outdoors, where he could hone his depiction of light. In a portrait of his own family, *My Wife and Daughters*, also painted in the open air, he combined the traditional techniques he learnt from Goya and Velasquez, with bright, impasto colour work.

During the next few years Sorolla worked with unusual rapidity, producing dozens of large-scale pieces in a short space of time. His most prolific work in terms of his depiction of traditional Spanish dress began in 1911 when he received a commission from the founder of New York's Hispanic Society to produce a ▶

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© Museo Sorolla, Madrid

mural depicting life in rural Spain. During the next eight years he travelled throughout the provinces of Spain, painting figures in each region, dressed in local costume. In *Types from Salamanca*, Sorolla depicts two women wearing traditional Salamanca costumes which are composed of intricate layers of wool, silk and cotton. The culmination of his travels through the country was a huge mural titled *Visions of Spain*, based on the hundreds of paintings and sketches he had made.

Sorolla produced fourteen large-scale murals depicting several Spanish provinces, each around four metres tall, and seven metres wide. In these paintings and others Sorolla paid close attention to the depiction of fabric, especially when painting en plein air.

Viewing his subjects in daylight, Sorolla captured sunlight playing and reflecting off white cloth, treating the fabric as an important element within the composition. He applied paint thickly, giving the fabric depicted on his canvas a sense of texture and movement as it stretches across a figure, or is pulled in many directions by numerous hands as in his painting *Sewing the Sail* (1896). While his work does not solely deal with cloth, Sorolla's paintings are an example of the importance of textiles in communicating cultural identity in the visual arts. *****Liberty Leonard-Shaw**
Right: Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, Couple from Salamanca, 1912, Oil on canvas, 203x121 cm

Sara Berman's Closet, National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, until 2 September 2019, nmajh.org

It began in a retrofitted Tribeca elevator shaft called Mmuseumm. Soon, it was lured uptown to the much grander setting of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; then it crossed the country, to Los Angeles. Now Sara Berman's Closet is receiving its most full-fledged showcase yet at Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History, located across from Independence Hall.

In its other iterations, the exhibition was restrained to literally the size (and contents) of a closet, spun off from a real one which belonged to the mother of New Yorker illustrator and book author Maira Kalman. In Philadelphia, visitors begin at a recreation of the closet, set in a white cube on the museum's plaza, before proceeding to the uppermost floor where a sign that reads 'a small and monumental story' leads them to a display of artworks and artifacts.

As Kalman and her son Alex note in a book based on the exhibition, the narrative is one of, 'How a life is formed. How meaning is found. How mistakes are made. And how we have the courage to go on'. The book, and the original paintings created to illustrate it, are also on view in Philadelphia, where they gradually reveal the long and winding road of Berman's life.

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Born in Belarus in 1920, Berman moved with her family to the Middle East when she was twelve, married a man called Pesach, bore two children, Maira and Kika, and witnessed the formation of the State of Israel. The four eventually moved to New York City, but when the girls entered college, Berman and Pesach returned to Tel Aviv. At 60, however, Berman finally admitted to herself that things weren't working out. She packed one suitcase, left her husband for good, and returned to Greenwich Village. One Friday, 'in a burst of personal expression' Berman made a decision to wear only white from that point on. The meaning that her descendants find in that quirky move is the crux of this poignant exhibition.

Fashion, it turns out, had always been a running thread in the crazy quilt of Berman's life. Her mother was quite the seamstress and sewed outfits copied from European women's magazines for her daughters. Berman grew into a 'ravishing' and 'funny' young woman, attracting many admirers, including the celebrated orchestra conductor Arturo Toscanini, who proposed marriage. His wool pinstripe trousers hang on one wall, as does a heavily sweat-stained but intricately embroidered men's undershirt once worn by Berman's father and an orange monogrammed sweater that Berman knitted for the family dog, Pete. But, of course, it is the pared-down array of garments that she owned as a middle aged woman, and lovingly starched, ironed, folded and stacked, that visitors will be most interested in. As delineated in the exhibition, they include: seven

bras, twelve t-shirts, thirteen pairs of socks, one robe, two nightgowns, thirteen blouses, six fluffy sweaters, seven white hats, and an uncertain number of pants and underpants (as well as some miscellany in this cabinet of curiosities: tablecloths and bed linen, a potato grater, a cookie press, three watches, and a bottle of Chanel perfume).

The presentation of this modest closet has grown into quite the project for the Kalmans, who are keen on reinterpreting it each time it appears and are even exploring the idea of developing an opera based on Berman's tale. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the recreation of this minimalist's dream of a closet was placed in dialogue with the lavishly appointed and ornately carved dressing room of Arabella Worsham, a New York, Belle Epoque-era socialite.

In Philadelphia, the exhibition takes on connotations more closely aligned with notions of diaspora and immigration, particularly those related to the Jewish experience. Here, too, ideas of independence are more directly explored. This is particularly fitting given the proximity of the museum to many of the founding sites associated with the American Revolutionary War.

Wearing white, say the Kalmans, became a 'liberation' for Berman. Has there ever been a truer testimony to the power of the wardrobe we choose and its significance in defining us?

***JoAnn Greco

Image: Sara Berman's Closet.



Courtesy: Museum

VIEW

Camp: Notes on Fashion, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA, 9 May - 8 September, 2019, www.metmuseum.org

Camp: Notes on Fashion is a witty pursuit of the realm of the uncanny, the politically incorrect, and the inadequate. In a time of political dystopia and anxiety-ridden news, fashion curator Andrew Bolton offers an ironic endeavour which plays with the meaning of fashion itself, that is, the simulacra of the self.

Every fall, the world of fashion impatiently awaits the Costume Institute's grand announcement of its future spring show. This much-anticipated event captured in the documentary film *First Monday in May* (2016) is also the theatre of a glamorous spectacle. The MET Gala, a benefit dinner orchestrated as a red carpet runway show, is co-chaired this year by Alessandro Michele, Gucci's Creative Director, Lady Gaga, Harry Styles, Serena Williams, and Anna Wintour, Editor-in-Chief at Vogue and active patron of the Costume Institute. How will the celebrities, socialites and major fashion influencers reinterpret and reclaim the meaning of this new exhibition and dress up for the gala? The sartorial responses will unquestionably be bold, disruptive and unconventional.

Ambitious in its premise, this year's exhibition takes its title from the seminal article *Notes on 'Camp'* by Susan Sontag (1933-2004). What is the meaning of 'camp' style? Sontag, American

writer, philosopher, and political activist, elevated the term by outlining its profound ambiguity. For her, it is not a strict rule, but a 'sensibility' that embraces the 'love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration'. Camp is a cultural and visual posture which offers a hyperbolic, stylised expression of irony and transgression. Sontag found camp signifiers in a wide range of artistic expressions from the Art Nouveau movement, the swirls of Tiffany lamps, to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, but also on screen, in the humorous sexual freedom of Mae West.

Though Sontag successfully captured the powerful resonance of camp as a concept and propelled it into 1960s fashion and culture, the exhibition reaches back far beyond that point. The curators provide a historical perspective on this aesthetic, going back to the French court of Louis XIV. The king asserted his authority in Versailles by establishing intricate rules of etiquette, of which dance and costume were the most salient elements. To attract the king's favours and ensure their status, courtiers would compete in flamboyant attire, which Andrew Bolton identifies as the first examples of camp style. In his book *Camp*, Mark Booth traced the origins of the term to the French ancient verb 'se camper', which means to pose boldly and act exuberantly. Also, 'camper un personnage' means 'playing a character', which speaks to the theatrical quality of such an attitude.

For the first part of the 20th century, showcasing 'camp' behaviour was only used to pejoratively

designate homosexuality, especially what was considered effeminate male behaviours. In her essay, Sontag downplayed the homosexual connotation. By broadening its meaning, the concept was eventually absorbed by pop culture. In the 1960s, members of the gay community claimed their distinctive connection to camp by playing with cross-dressing and drag performance. This frivolous and provocative expression of camp spirit through dress, language, and bodily gestures, deeply challenged normative patterns and still finds resonance in the present day. It paved the way for non-binary gender representations and sexually-fluid identities. It also found a mainstream outlet with the enormous success of tv shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

The exhibition cleverly explores the wide prism of camp from its historical initial forms, gender-driven representations to pop and political stances. Mark Booth wrote that 'camp art can be good art created with the worst of intentions'. This statement fully applies here with designers pushing the limits of good taste and pastiche. Thom Browne's whimsical dresses printed in trompe l'œil overplaying a preppy school girl uniform mirror the work of Alessandro Michele for Gucci, with a mint green cape printed with a cartoon-style black and red outline over a pink ruffled lace knit. Alessandro Michele, who arrived as the creative director of Gucci in 2015, has become one of the major architects of this playful mannerism, where high-spirited elegance meets gender-fluid eccentricity.

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The show also elaborates its theme with contemporary examples of high and low culture, reversing the hierarchy of taste by walking a fine line between fashion statement and parody. Establishing style at the intersection of chic and cheap started in the 2000s when fast-fashion giant H&M invited Karl Lagerfeld for a capsule collection. Known as 'masstige', when fashion-hungry clientele feasts on mass-produced goods labelled as luxury products, this is still a booming niche in fashion. Luxury brands also want to be more accessible to their consumers. For instance, plain sportswear socks branded Balenciaga by Demna Gvasalia are sold online for \$99 and already out of stock. Virgil Abloh, also featured in the exhibition, moved from his high-end streetwear brand Off White to Louis Vuitton. Here, the designer revisits the black dress by stamping it with the meta-legend 'little black dress.' Abloh marks his understanding of fashion codes, pointing to the social stereotypes associated with this classic ensemble.

Beyond the ironic detachment, by playing with identity dynamics and issues of class, camp sensibility reveals its transgressive and liberating power. Susan Sontag considered that camp was 'disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical'. This exhibition demonstrates, on the contrary, the many ways that camp fashion has become a site of resistance and freedom, as long as it is worn with a wry smile.*** **Magali An Berthon**

Right: Rothola Dresses, Christian Francis Roth, 1980s



VIEW

Ella Doran: Sheep to Seat, Fleece to Floor, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 15 June - 15 September, www.ysp.org.uk

Ella Doran is a doyenne of surface pattern design. From her early pioneering work with photographs of pebbles used as surfaces on coasters and mats, through to her new work inspired by the textures, landscapes and colours of Yorkshire Sculpture Park, she is all about patterns and the stories behind them.

Doran's collaboration with Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) goes back several years. In 2017 she worked on a range of products for the YSP shop during their 40th anniversary celebrations. While working on that project inspiration struck in the form of the numerous sturdy sheep that roam the dips and hills (not to mention the Henry Moore sculptures) of YSP. Doran thought about how to use their wool to make products, which could be linked back to the original source of inspiration. She did this in the exhibition *Sheep to Seat, Fleece to Floor*, which opened in June.

For the past ten years or so, alongside running her homework design business, Doran has been working on projects aimed at engaging the public with the reuse, rather than the throwing away, of chairs. At the V&A and the RSA she has been imbuing chairs with new life, allowing them to communicate, in a very accessible way, the idea of designing for longevity. At the same time Doran was developing her knowledge around design thinking and the circular economy, where waste

is minimised and resources are exploited to their full potential. Both strands of her profession fed directly into the YSP exhibition project. As Doran thought of the sculpture park's sheep and their wool and those reused chairs, she thought she might make a chair at YSP. But the project grew into something much bigger, that has taken two years and working with many different local businesses to make happen.

Doran thrives on collaboration. Of this exhibition she says, 'I wanted to create an immersive room set to celebrate the wool that I have managed to retain and trace through all its cycles'. The exhibition narrative follows the textile processes that Doran has worked through with her multiple collaborators in Yorkshire. Bringing the various threads together were the farmers Platt who tend the woolly beasts and Haworth Scouring (where Doran was excited to learn the saying 'where there's muck there's brass' originated), where the soiled wool, literally, was cleaned. Camira, who wove a sumptuous jacquard wool in Doran's Waterlake design. Alternative Flooring, who made the wool into a floor runner using Axminster looms and Julian Mayor who designed the angular chairs which were made from storm-felled YSP oak by Coakley & Co, and upholstered in the jacquard wool. There will also be wallpapers on show, one featuring glorious swatches of colours picked from the surroundings at YSP, and another inspired by the bark patterns of the park's trees. Doran's photography and a film by Paul Wyatt will illustrate the final pieces of the exhibition story.

Doran hopes to build on the relationships, processes and what she has learned from this exhibition project, to somehow fund another one. Perhaps next time they can call it *Sheep to Seat, Fleece to Floor*. And back again. As Doran says, it could all become a cycle of its own. Her work will be for sale in the exhibition, as well as stocked in the YSP shop, allowing visitors to take home a piece of the story. The lovely shop at YSP is always worth investigating. This is good both for visitors, because it is a treat to browse and buy nice and unusual things, and good for the park, as the shop is an important source of income. Done the way they do it at YSP, neither art nor commerce are devalued.

Sheep to Seat, Fleece to Floor is a celebration of Doran's design skills, her love of Yorkshire Sculpture Park and her tenacious pursuit of a circular economy within her own design business. And it's about wool. As she says, 'Wool is such a circular material and has amazing qualities of warmth, non-flammability as well as being highly recyclable. Wool is one of our countries' underused resources'. The wool in this exhibition could not have been more locally sourced: shorn from the backs of the handsome Beltex and Texel sheep that roam freely amongst the sculptures at YSP. In fact, often the first thing you photograph and the last thing you remember after you leave the Park, are those sheep peppering the Yorkshire hills and delightfully 'disrespecting' the Henry Moore sculptures. ♦♦♦Jane Audas
Right; Ella Doran at British Wool, Bradford. Storyboard.

VIEW



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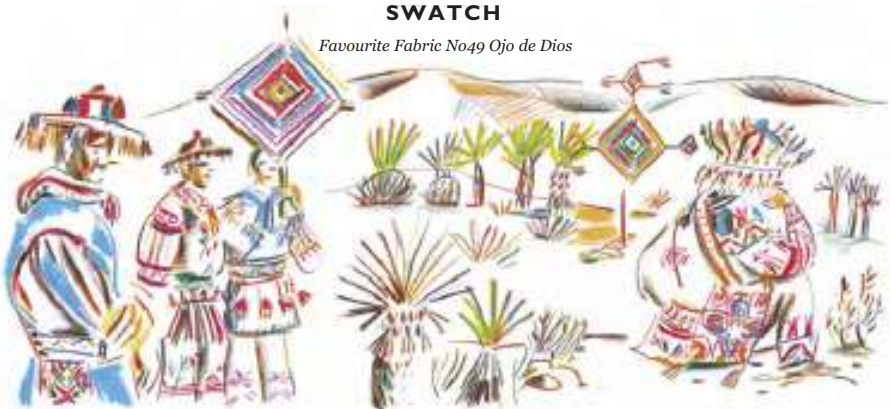
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SWATCH

Favourite Fabric No49 Ojo de Dios



Once upon a time the gods looked down with benevolence upon the people below, keeping them safe. The 'Ojo de Dios' were made to thank the gods for their blessings. These ritual offerings were woven with brightly coloured yarns around a frame of two sticks tied to form a cross. The resulting rhombus represents the eye, along with the prayer that the eye of the god would rest upon the maker.

'Ojo de Dios' in Spanish means 'the eye of god', but the concept predates the Spanish conquest of South America. It is thought to originate with the Huichol Indians of the Sierra Madre Occidental region of Mexico, a remote mountainous area

that was not brought under Spanish rule until 1722. Even then the Huicholes were able to assimilate Christian ideas without losing their own ancient traditions. In turn, the 'Ojo de Dios' was also adopted by the Catholic Spanish who associated it with the Evil Eye.

Originally known as 'Sikuli' ('the eye' in the Huichol language of Wixáritari) they symbolise the ability to see and understand things that are unknown and unknowable. They are used on the pilgrimage that the Huicholes make each year, a journey of several hundred miles to San Luis Potosí to gather peyote. Before returning, the Shamans perform rituals and eat enough peyote

cactus to produce a hallucinogenic state so that they can communicate with the gods and ensure the regeneration of the Huicholes' souls.

The earliest 'Sikuli' or 'Ojo de Dios' date to 500AD, and they were made in different colours, each with their own significance. Some had a black centre or a mirror representing the pupil of the eye through which the Gods could see. A folk belief relates that when a baby is born the father weaves the centre of a protective 'Ojo de Dios', so that the gods can see the child to watch over them. He weaves a new band of colour, thereby renewing the request for protection, each year until the baby is five. **Sarah Jane Downing**

A woman with blonde hair is standing in front of a large, weathered stone building with arches. She is wearing a sleeveless, knee-length dress with a complex geometric pattern in shades of brown, tan, and black. The dress has a fitted bodice and a slightly flared skirt. The background shows a bright, sunny day with a clear sky and a distant building with many windows.

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