TEXTILES

MARY SCHOESER

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The Art of Mankind

With 1,058 illustrations in colour

Thames & Hudson

For Terry McLean and his wise council

Mary Schoeser is a leading authority in the field of textiles and is Honorary President of the UK Textile Society. As an adviser on historic textiles and wallpaper, she has worked with organizations such as English Heritage, the National Trust, Liberty in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Schoeser has organized many textile exhibitions, including a collaboration with the Design Museum at the University of California, Davis, to highlight elements of their collection researched in connection with this book. Her previous publications include *International Textiles*, *World Textiles*, *Silk*, *Norma Starszakowna* and *Rozanne Hawksley*.

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Title page **English professional embroiderers**, *Silk embroidered and faux-quilted linen coverlet, c.* 1700–10. In 1910 this coverlet was in the collection of Sir Trehawke Kekewich, a barrister and judge who served as Recorder of Tiverton, Devon.

Opposite **Reiko Sudo and Hiroko Suwa for Nuno**, *Polygami*, 2010. Lengthy trial-and-error experimentation to see if woven structures could emulate Nuno's patented 'origami pleat' process finally yielded this origami weave technique, which allows the company to weave folded pleat patterns. This example is composed of 90% polyester and 10% cotton.

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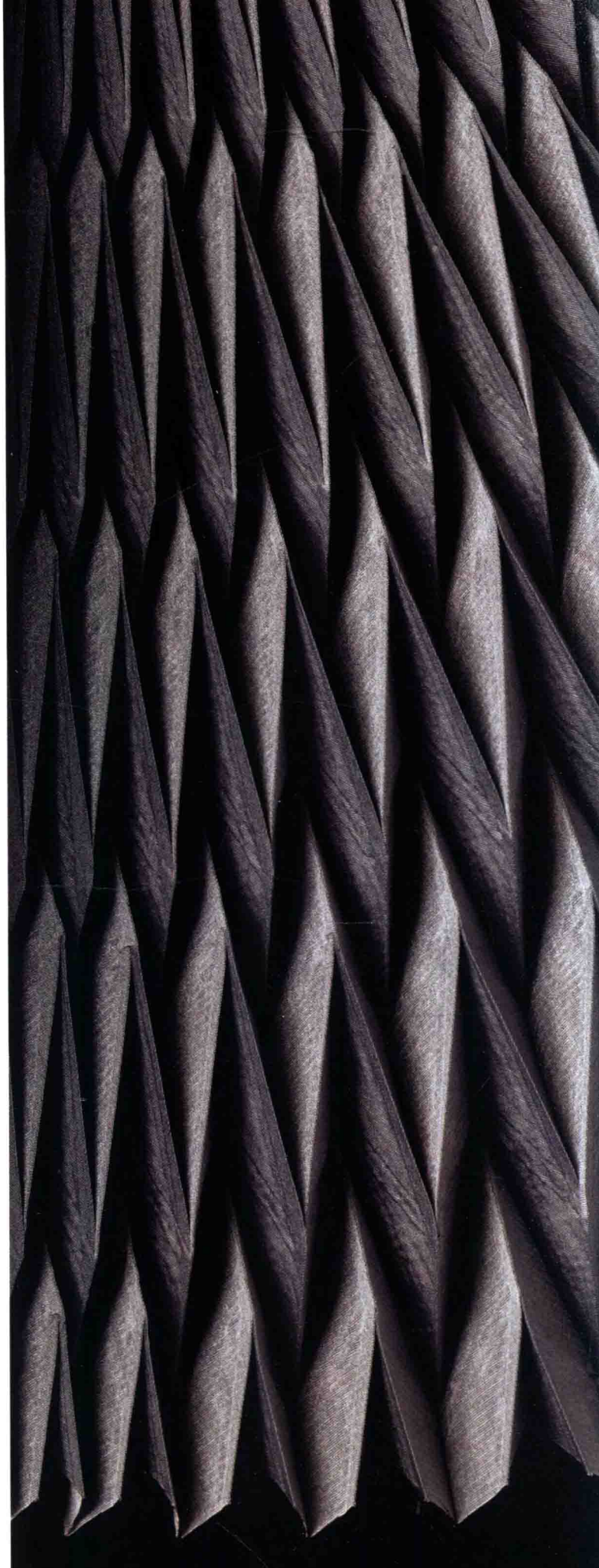
p. 8 **Angelika Werth**, *Madeleine, Boxing, Marie Antoinette*, 2002–10. One of a series of twelve felted merino wool and silk dresses made for historical figures and their imaginary engagement in athletic activities. Werth references Pliny the Elder's suggestion that wool felt treated with vinegar would resist iron and fire: 'The Madeleines are like that, too, made of the strongest stuff.'



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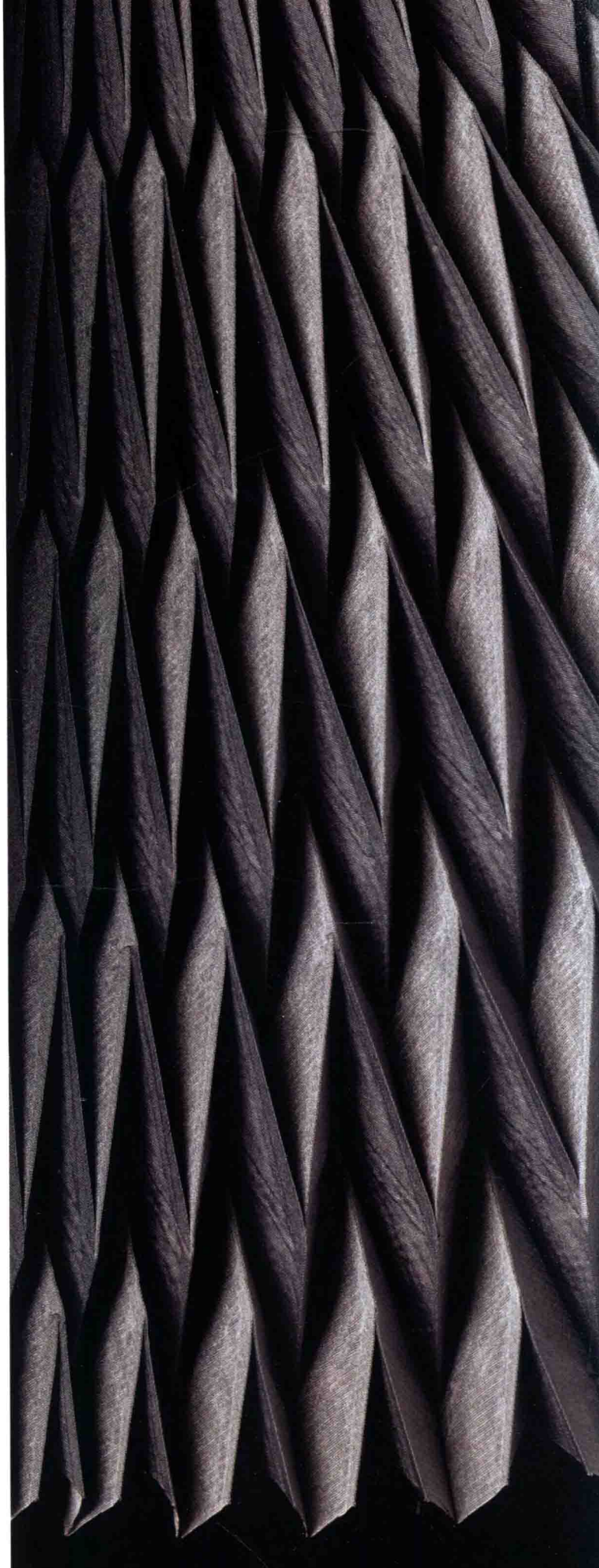

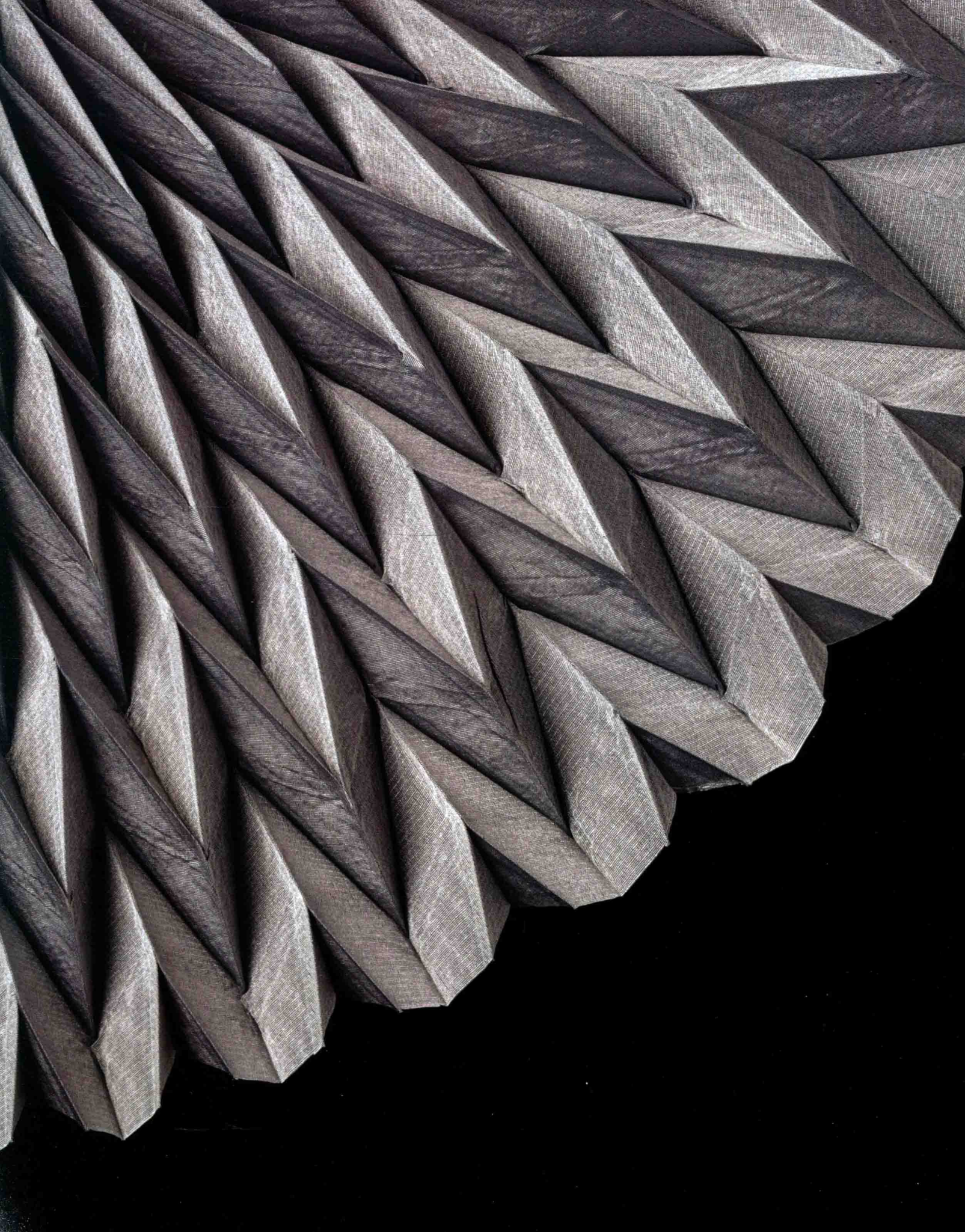

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INTRODUCTION

From ancient textiles to those of the 21st century, there exists a continuum of creativity, handed down from generation to generation and inspired anew by exposure to the work of past makers. There have been moments in this story when many feared that the art of textiles would become submerged in a monotonous stream of yardage produced by machines, which began to replace the action of human hands with the invention of William Lee's stocking frame in 1589. Automation was gradual at first, and for centuries textile production still required human intervention. By the 1830s, however, much of this work had taken the form of 'machine-minding'. Fifty years later members of the European and North American Arts and Crafts movements were united, decrying the increasing industrialization as soulless. Part of their artistic response to mechanization was to investigate handmade textiles from other cultures or earlier eras, collect them, reintroduce their manufacturing techniques, and hold them up as standard-bearers. This ensured that, from the 19th century onwards, art textiles continued to be produced alongside developing technology for mass production. Beginning in the 1960s, entirely new machines began to emerge that were hundreds of times faster and, ultimately, controlled by computer. Never has it been easier to introduce new textile designs than in the 21st century: scan, load and press 'go'. Yet textile artists have once again chosen to turn away from the logic of mass production, with the result that today there are countless individuals and small enterprises that create extraordinary textiles in very limited numbers.

This is not to imply that machines have been rejected. Far from it: many new technologies are at the heart of artistic invention today. Equally, many man-made materials have been modified in response to aesthetic demands, whether from designers and makers, or from those who wear and use textiles. The knowledgeable consumer is very much a part of today's renaissance in textile arts. My hope is that this book will contribute to this knowledge, for above all its focus is how to look at textiles – or, rather, how to look at and really *see* them. Over the past forty years, the first-hand sight of hundreds of thousands of examples has convinced

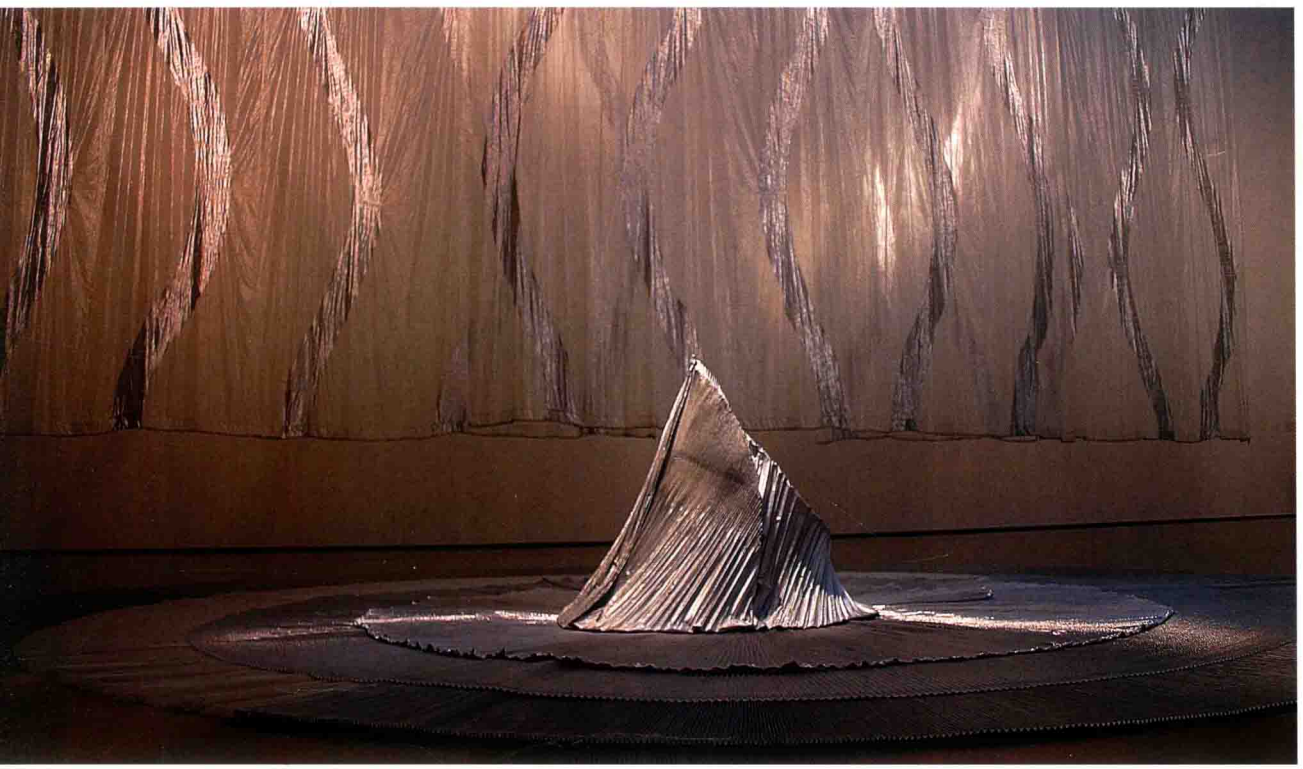
Central Asian artist, *Painted silk fragment*, 8th–9th centuries. This fragment was found in the Toyok caves, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China – a place where the Buddhist culture of the Turfan Plains and that of western regions converged along the ancient silk routes.

me that textiles are beautiful, inventive, expressive, and more. They reveal the human compulsion to engage with texture, colour and storytelling. They record our ever-changing feelings of play, joy, wonder and profound thoughtfulness. They preserve skills, encourage creativity and represent continuity.

The cultural significance of textiles through the ages is reflected in the fact that so many were produced and, even more remarkable given their relative fragility, that so many have survived. A large proportion of the very earliest textiles exist today because they were buried as grave goods. They show not only extraordinary technical sophistication, but also the important role textiles have always played in ritual. Possessing real monetary worth and exchange value in this life, they represented wealth and power, were given as gifts, used to pay taxes, and were exchanged for other goods or services, even for peace. Alliances were sealed, allegiances sworn and passages to heaven bargained for with textiles. Religious sites, such as tombs and monasteries, and religious garb, whether Buddhist robes, Hindu saris or Christian vestments, preserve what were judged at the time to be the finest cloths. By extension, belief in the divine right to rule ensured that the repositories of kings and caliphs overflowed with exquisite textiles. The homes of aristocrats and, later, of magnates made wealthy through the Industrial Revolution also boasted impressive textile legacies, as items were preserved or handed down from generation to generation; even relatively humble householders bequeathed garments and furnishing fabrics to their heirs. Among many cultures, cherished textiles are passed along lines of descent: cloths constitute an important part of a woman's dowry and represent her lineage. Although this practice is today associated with non-Western traditions, this belies the fact that ancestors' textiles are equally prized by many in the West.

Some textiles, passing through the auction houses or the hands of dealers, ended up in the ownership of collectors – a group whose tastes and passions preserved large quantities of textiles long before museums as we know them began to emerge, in around 1850. Dealers and collectors have continued to amass knowledge and to enrich the many institutions that preserve cloth within their walls. Curators, too, have exercised their own tastes through acquisitions and the acceptance of donations. The text that follows features many contemporary

Edouard Benedictus (attributed), *Furnishing fabric* (detail), *c.* 1925–27. The incorporation of man-made fibres into furnishing fabrics was given a boost in 1925 when this influential French designer began to collaborate with Brunet, Meunie et Cie., a Parisian firm specializing in cloths made of what was then called artificial silk. Benedictus also collaborated with Tassinari et Chatel in the making of matt cotton and shiny fibranne (viscose) cloths, the fibres shown combined here.



textiles, but also chronicles a few of these collectors and collections, primarily those that I have come to know well.

Contemporary textiles are displayed alongside historical examples to demonstrate the persistence of skill and creativity, as well as the remarkable range of possibilities offered by the same or very similar techniques. The majority of the textiles discussed and illustrated here are handmade, and those that are not show the inventive exploitation of machinery's capabilities – an 'attitude of the hand', as it were. In grouping objects together to highlight certain approaches and themes, I have been encouraged by the words of the designer Jun-ichi Arai, and his desire to make 'a small amount of things, and being able to make a great variety of them in a limitless way … . Each individual has a different fingerprint. I think that's the kind of variety that I'm looking for. But it's not something that you can do yourself. You need the collaboration of hundreds of thousands of people.' I have been fortunate to have such collaborators, among whom I count the unnamed makers of many of the textiles illustrated within these pages. The extraordinary visual richness of this volume has also been made possible by the many contributing named textile artists, who have further demonstrated their generosity by providing websites and email addresses (see 'Resources') where possible. And realizing this project would have been impossible without the support of three people associated with the Design Museum Collection at the University of California, Davis: senior lecturer emerita Jo Ann Stabb, curator Adele Zhang, and photographer Barbara Molloy.

By focusing on superb textiles from around the world, irrespective of their age, my aim is to inspire textile artists, those who are new to collecting, and those whose choices will shape the future of textile arts.

Jun-ichi Arai, *Untitled* and *Volution*, 2006. Renowned for his juxtaposition of ancient and new materials and techniques, here Arai also demonstrates his reverence for textiles in the broader cultural sphere. He has created a central form of aluminium-coated polyphenylene sulphide (pps), pleated by compression, and a sweeping wall-hanging using a 'melt-off' technique. This is his own patent, related to devoré, which removes the metal elements of a pps slit-film cloth (also his own patent).