



Portfolio

Textile Design

Simon Clarke

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Back cover image: Hussein Chalayan – Autumn Winter 2007/Catwalking.com

Frontispiece: Robot Fish Sea by Anna Glover

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Introduction

A textile design is a piece of cloth made by weaving yarns spun from natural and/or artificial fibres. While this process forms the textile, other processes contribute to its decorative and functional qualities. Principally, these are printed textile design, where the cloth is printed and finishes are applied to it; and mixed media textile design, which includes embroidery and fabric manipulation. This book describes how printed, woven and mixed media textiles are designed and produced, and explores how they are used for products and in specific market contexts. Historical and cultural references, design principles and methods, and approaches to developing a textile collection are also key themes, as is technology, which plays a pivotal role in enabling new aesthetics and product forms to be realized.

Textiles have evolved alongside mankind to transform the material world, and textile design is the primary element in clothing and interior decoration – and is also prominent in other fields from fine art to architectural engineering. Some of our most innovative achievements are represented by textiles, and this is reflected in the extravagant designs in haute couture, whether these are innovatory or new interpretations of classic recurring designs like animal patterns. Although regional geographies and related traditions have contributed towards its rich diversity, trade between these regions means they have seldom been truly isolated and has led to remarkable innovations in hybrid textile design.



Far left

The animal pattern – a recurring design classic – receives a new interpretation by Dries Van Noten in Look 35 from his autumn/winter 2009/10, women's collection, shown at Lycée Carnot.

Left

This all-white garment captures the creativity in textile design that can result from innovative collaboration, in this case between Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel and François Lesage, who has transformed fabric manipulation and embroidery to the level of art forms. Chanel, 2009 summer collection, haute couture.

Who this book is for

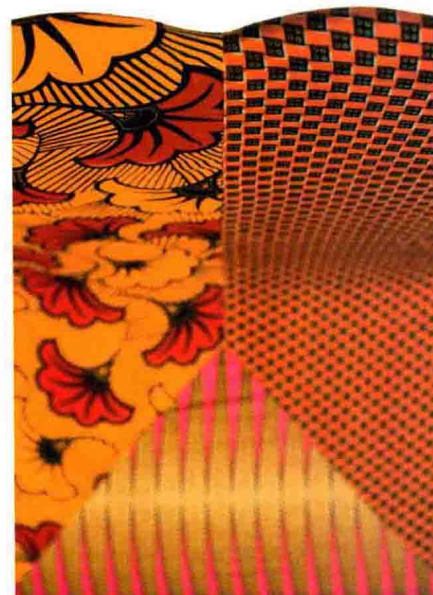
Textile Design is a broad and informative overview of textile design and provides insights into a wealth of aesthetics, production techniques and textile products – both historical and the latest cutting-edge innovations – to give a real sense of the potential offered by textile design. It is primarily for undergraduate, degree and pre-degree art foundation students who want to pursue a career in textile design: its aim is to introduce them to, and impart a real flavour of, what is now a multifaceted, multibillion-pound industry. It is also accessible to enthusiasts who simply wish to know more about textile design and production practices.

How to use this book

While *Textile Design* can be read from start to finish, it does not necessarily need to be read in a particular order. The intention is that students will find it useful at different stages in their studies as they develop interests in specific aspects of design and production, and that it will be a source of inspiration for further investigation. It will give a sound knowledge and understanding of the textile industry and the design and production methods – and language – used within it. It also describes the skills of a textile designer and the activities involved in the design and manufacture of a textile collection.

Historical and cultural textiles are a recurring source of inspiration for many textile designers, and **chapter 1** is a broad historical and cultural overview of their design, from the ancient world to the twenty-first century. It is not a comprehensive survey; rather, it gives a sense of how creative thinking and technology have developed over the passage of time.

Chapter 2 discusses printed textile design and examines how a design moves through the stages of preparation and manufacture in screen printing, digital design and digital inkjet printing, along with other finishing methods. Printed patterns from the figurative to the abstract suggest the range of subjects that may be drawn upon. Relationships between design and science, as well as environmental and eco-design issues, are introduced. Examples of



Above

Detail from the patchwork, wax-print patterns for the Binta chair designed by Philippe Bestenheider (2009). The patterns are reminiscent of those on fabrics worn by women throughout the African continent.

Below

The form of Bestenheider's Binta chair was influenced by African wood-carved seating. The difference, though, is that the polyurethane rubber form provides a more comfortable experience.





Clouds, a modular room-dividing system which absorbs sound, made from textile pieces held together by elastic bands. Conceived by innovative furniture, product and interior designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec in 2009 for textile manufacturer Kvadrat.

designers, design studios and manufacturers of printed textile design provide the context for particular design and printing topics.

Chapter 3 examines the creative and technical attributes of woven textile design, from weaving on a hand loom to using digital design and powered jacquard techniques. References to designers, design studios and manufacturers, and their design work contextualize creative and manufacturing approaches.

Chapter 4 follows a similar format to chapters 2 and 3, but the subject is mixed media textile design and its focus is the creative and technical potential of embroidery and fabric manipulation. Both areas are in a state of flux as designers take advantage of the burgeoning range of technologies that has developed in recent years. Embroidery techniques using hand, machine and digital techniques are examined, and are contextualized in relation to innovative artists and designers, and traditional and new ways of fabric manipulation are discussed.

Chapter 5 introduces ideas and different perspectives on a range of key design principles and methods used by textile designers. The main themes are design tools, concept/trend predictions, colour, drawing/imagery, pattern, and visualizing textiles in the context in which they will be used.

Chapter 6 explores the design process and how it leads to a collection of finished designs.

Chapter 7 examines what is involved in studying for a degree in textile design and there is also information about the career directions open to graduates, with references to textile design products and markets discussed in earlier chapters.

Textile design presents unique opportunities for individuality once the basic design and technical knowledge have been acquired: two designers working on the same project brief invariably come up with two different interpretations of a theme because of their differing perspectives and perceptions. This is the magic of textile design.

1.

Context



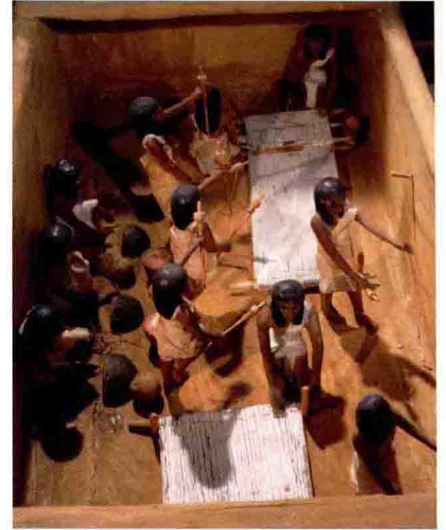
Within a concentrated time scale of just over 200 years a remarkable diversity of thinking and creativity has evolved in textile design. While this is certainly the result of developments such as the technological innovations of the Industrial Revolution, the invention of synthetic fabrics in the twentieth century and, most recently, the digital revolution, the inspiration that fuelled this evolution – and continues to inspire modern textile designers – is firmly rooted in the remarkable variety of imagery, design styles, patterns and techniques that has been created over the past 4000 years.

This chapter looks at the historical and cultural contexts in which textile design has evolved, and provides insights into the creative and technical capabilities of its early craftsmen, as well as highlighting the work of key twentieth-century designers. It also describes the complex trade relationships that have existed and, in some cases, continue to exist in the field of textiles, and discusses the environmental and ethical challenges that textile designers face in the twenty-first century.

This opulent Sunni textile is an example of a complex geometric pattern based on mathematics, an art form for which the Islamic world is renowned.

Early history

Ancient Egyptian wall paintings that show figures wearing patterned and embroidered fabrics indicate a developed textile infrastructure – a view supported by the discovery of funerary models of weave workshops that date from 1950 BC. The most famous of these, the Meketra, contains figures preparing **yarns** and weaving at looms. It suggests a workshop space in a building, perhaps in the lower floor of a house and slightly below ground, a location that would have helped to maintain the level of humidity necessary for weaving fine linen. Also in Egypt, but more than 2000 years later, Christian iconography was a prominent feature of textiles designed for the Church, which subsequently established itself as a source of influence and patronage for textile designers throughout Europe. During the expansion of Islam in the eighth century the figurative textiles of the Shi'ia Fatimids and the geometric patterns of the Sunni reached new creative heights. The range of styles and production techniques from these and other early civilizations is extensive and many contemporary textiles have evolved from this rich resource.

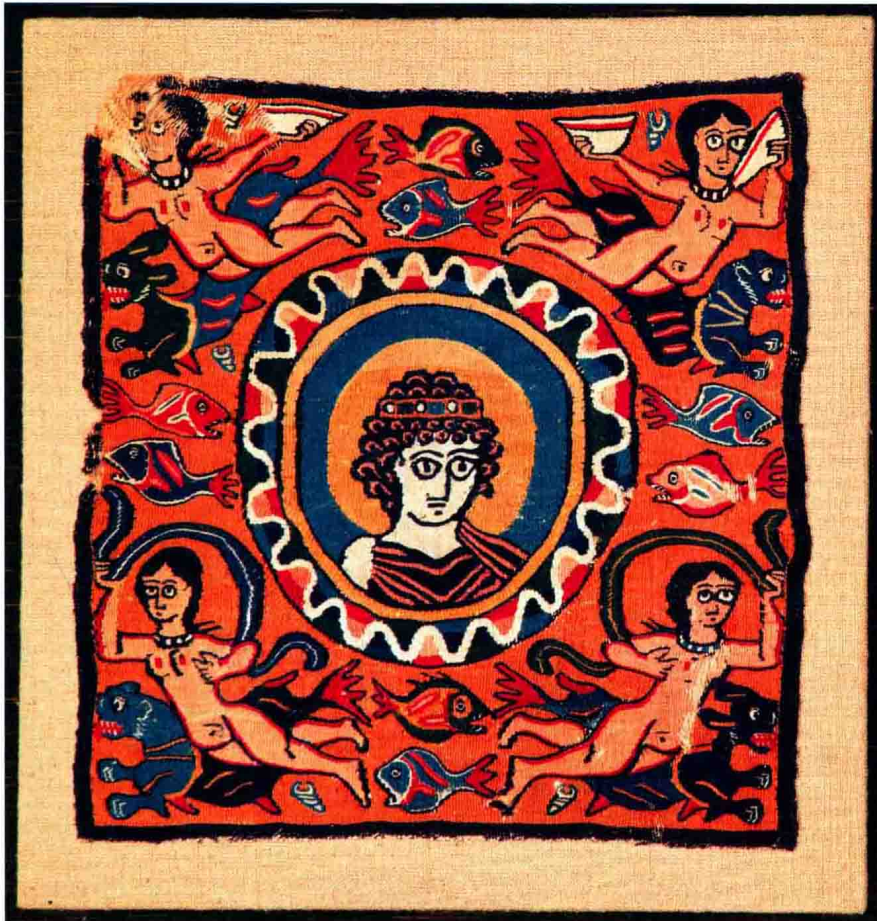


Above

The Meketra tomb model gives an insight into how textiles were woven in ancient Egypt. Three young women crouch behind platforms preparing roves for splicing, and in front of them three women are spinning, each with two spindles. There are two horizontal ground looms with two weavers; a woman crouches at the far end of one of the looms. Two women unload two spindles to transfer the spun yarns on to a group of three pegs set into the wall.

Left

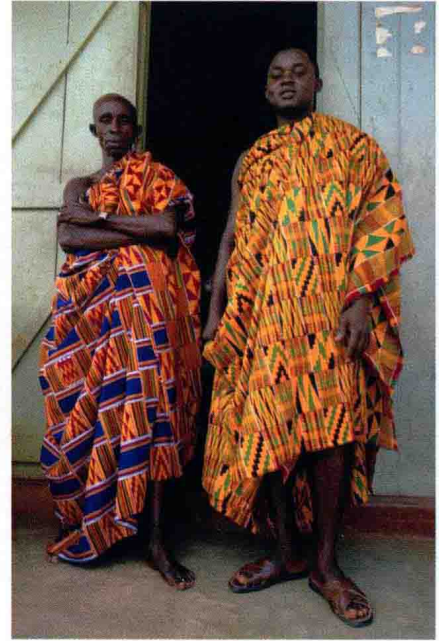
Coptic textiles typically feature decorative borders and a large central motif portraying a priest or devotee who seems forever youthful. In this design the border includes mythical beasts and flying angels.

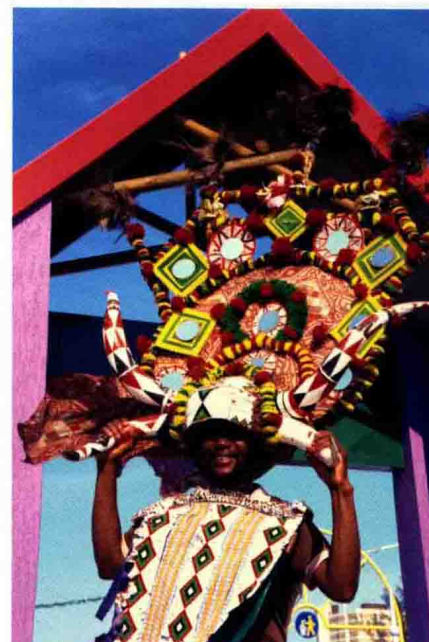


Cultural interchanges: African cloths and beads

The influence of trade on African textiles is apparent in two unique cloths, one of which is found in West Africa and the other in the east. The **kente** cloth of Ghana is designed from strips of woven fabric which are sewn together to produce a length of fabric – a strip-weaving technique that is likely to have been introduced into the country by trans-Saharan caravans that brought textile craftsmen, some of Arabic descent, to Ghana along with trade items. With the rise of royal patronage and the increasing purchasing power of the Ashanti people, local weavers began to construct kente cloth made entirely of silk, and the fabric became established as the regalia of the Ashanti aristocracy and royal court. Colours and patterns are bold and symbolic, and often relate to Ashanti proverbs. The most complex pattern is Adweneasa, which means 'My skill is exhausted' or 'My ideas have come to an end', and announces that there is no room on the cloth for any more pattern. While kente cloth is traditionally made of silk, contemporary versions are woven from cotton and **rayon**/viscose yarns.

The printed **kanga** cloth of East Africa displays proverbs in printed roman text, in Swahili, although the text would originally have been in Arabic:





both formats reflect trade influences in this part of Africa. The design content in kanga cloth is broad and shows regional and external influences introduced by mercantile traders and colonialism in the late nineteenth century and earlier. One group of designs displays political and commemorative themes that refer to contemporary African events. However, they probably have their origins in designs produced to mark the coronations of George VI and Elizabeth II. They also show stylistic traits from Chinese iconography: China was, and remains, a supportive trade and development partner in East Africa's textile sector, and the Chinese revolutionary graphic style and typical related themes are notable in a design that celebrates 20 years of the Tanganyikan African National Union (1954–74) and was printed in 1974.

Bead decoration has a similar history to cloth in Africa in that it was originally introduced as a trade item in exchange for ivory, slaves and animal skins. Beadwork continues to have aesthetic and cultural significance among the Masai in East Africa and the Zulu of South Africa, who continue to rely on imported plastic beads. Among the most dramatic examples of beadwork design are the headdresses and garments worn by Zulu rickshaw pullers on the Durban beachfront, who once provided the city's main means of transport. Beadwork is still important in KwaZulu-Natal, where successful co-operatives run by women are making a key contribution to regional economies.

Above, left

Chinese and Tanzanian textile designers developing kanga designs at the Urafiki Textile Mill in 1968. The collaborative venture between Tanzania and China continues.

Above, right

Photograph of a Zulu rickshaw puller on the Durban waterfront in South Africa. The bold use of colour and pattern with large amounts of beadwork is indicative of traditional Zulu culture.

Opposite, top

Ashanti noblemen wearing strip-woven kente cloth.

Opposite, bottom

This kanga design was first produced in the late 1960s, and celebrates the modernizing and industrializing of Tanzania. Its style suggests a Chinese revolutionary graphic – unsurprisingly, given that the Urafiki Textile Mill employed Chinese textile and graphic artists.