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2003*

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EMBROIDERED BEDCOVER

English, early 18th c.

Professional embroideries of eighteenth-century England display the utmost level of virtuosity and grandeur. Covers such as this splendid piece were often part of a bed set, which consisted of valances, bolsters, and pillow cases embroidered *en suite*. Records specify that these highly embellished coverlets were sometimes given as wedding presents; a similar example in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum was presented to the Reverend John Dolbin and his wife on the occasion of their marriage in 1717.

False quilting, a technique that omits the padding between two layers of fabric, was a popular method of textile decoration in the first half of the eighteenth century. The cotton ground of this bedcover is entirely quilted with yellow silk thread in a swirl of concentric circles and tiny blossoms, executed in closely spaced back-stitching. Fanciful fruits, flowers, and leaves are worked in various stitches, including satin, long-and-short, and couching. Silver-gilt metallic wrapped thread and silk floss in shades of red, pink, green, and yellow create the luxurious design. The extensive and expert use of metallic thread establishes this magnificent bedcover as the product of a professional workshop.

Many influences of Eastern derivation can be seen in this embroidery. The quartered composition of symmetric corners and central medallion have parallels in Persian, Indian, and Chinese decorative arts. Equally important as prototypes for this category of needlework are the embroidered or painted Indian and Chinese textiles that were prized as imports. The link between English embroidery and the patterns of woven silks of this period is also evident; the spiky fruits and exotic, stylized flowers on this coverlet echo motifs found in the Bizarre silks of the early eighteenth century.

This piece relates to examples in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.90.19), the Art Institute of Chicago (1985.84A), the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1985.417), and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.95-1912).



MAN'S BROCADED SILK UNDRESS CAP
French, early 18th c.

In the eighteenth century, the conspicuous display of wealth and status extended to undress, or at-home wear. Although worn within the confines of the domestic interior, the semi-public nature of undress clothing provided an opportunity for sartorial show. Men and women of the elite received family members, friends, servants, and trades people in a variety of informal garments. For men, the cap and dressing gown were often made of expensive, patterned or embroidered silks, and numerous portraits survive from the period depicting male sitters elegantly attired in rich *déshabillé*.

This superb cap of Bizarre silk declared its wearer's elevated social standing as well as his taste for finery. The crimson red satin damask is brocaded with polychrome silk and silver *filé* and *frisé* threads; red and gold metallic cord and gold lace trim the edges of the crown and the brim; and the silk tassel adds an exotic touch. The cap is lined in green cotton, diamond quilted with red silk thread. The sculptural shape is achieved with a stiff interlining, probably of heavy paper. Caps served the very practical purpose of keeping a man's head warm when he removed his wig. As illustrated by this splendid example, they were also imposing undress accessories.

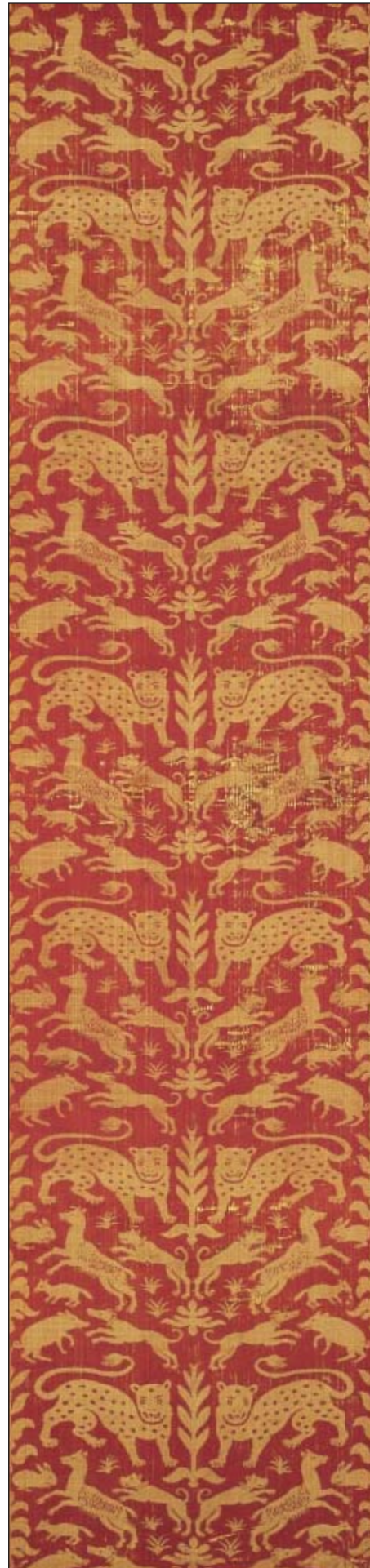
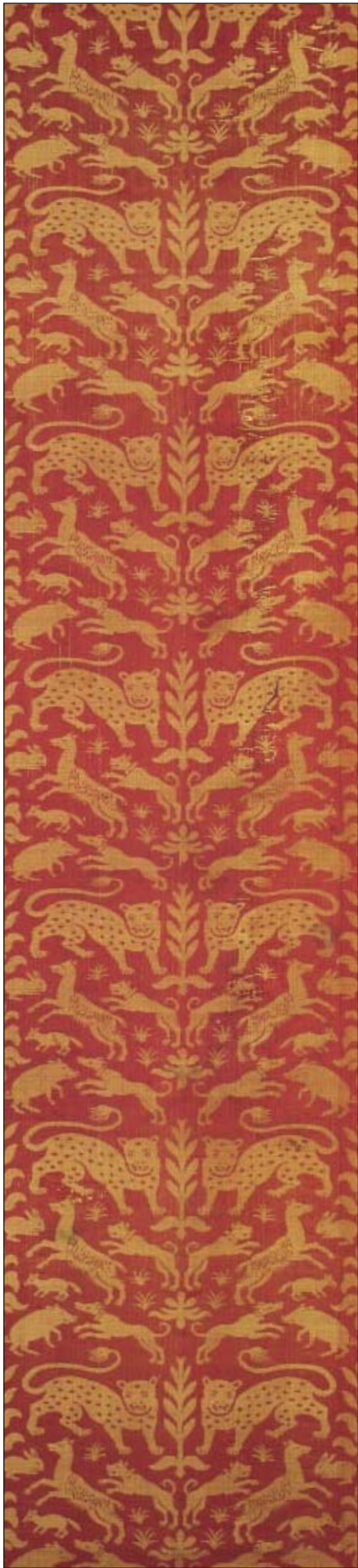


SWEET MEAT PURSE
English, 1620-1630

A richness of colors and materials highlights the exquisite workmanship of this tent stitch purse. Silk threads in vegetal tones of greens and yellows form the purse's flowerheads, gourds, and veined leaves; silver metallic braid delineates the vines that entwine these lush motifs. Detailed shading of the fruits and flowers, achieved through the fineness of the embroidery, provides a naturalistic effect. The asymmetric arrangement of plants, which includes the unusual presence of gourds, appears against a green silk filet background. Sumptuous tassels hang from the purse's drawstring closure.

Small pouch-shaped purses of the seventeenth century are known as sweet meat bags since they frequently held fragrant flowers and herbs, but these needlepoint bags had other uses as well. They served to hold a variety of small and precious objects, and, while gifts in their own right, the purses frequently contained offerings that were presented to kings and queens. Given the beauty and refinement of this purse, it would not have been surprising to find it listed among the contents of a royal inventory.

5.5" H x 5" W





SILK DAMASK PANELS
Italian or Spanish, early 17th c.

From the mid-sixteenth through the seventeenth century, European nations experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth. Increased wealth, in large part a result of colonial enterprises and expansion in trade, brought tremendous profits to luxury markets. This financial impact was strongly felt in the textile industries, particularly among the leading European centers of silk weaving in Italy and Spain. Both of these countries produced exceptional textiles that blended design elements and weaving techniques of Eastern invention into a distinctly Western idiom.

The influence of Gothic Luchese silks can be detected in the woven imagery of these damask panels. Their semi-naturalistic treatment of animals is characteristic of early seventeenth-century decorative style. Hunting dogs chase deer, boars, foxes, and rabbits through a landscape indicated by little tufts of grass; the magnificent confronted paired leopards impart a heraldic dignity. An integral compositional element of this silk is the mirror image created by the symmetrical placement of the animals. These horizontal bands of motifs are counterbalanced by the overall vertical emphasis of the design, formed by a central axis of slender foliate shafts. The clarity of the crimson and yellow colors also contributes to the impact of the design.

It is difficult to pinpoint the differences between Italian and Spanish silks of this period. As early as the fifteenth century, Italian craftsmen were settling in various Spanish towns, bringing their design repertoire and weaving techniques with them. Native Spanish weavers were certainly influenced by the imports from Italy, and Italian fabrics were often created to appeal to Spanish sensibilities. While the national origin of this silk cannot be precisely determined, these damask panels nonetheless reflect the richness and sophistication of the burgeoning European silk industry.

Examples of this silk are in many American and European collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (00.599), the Art Institute of Chicago (1971.648), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (50.74.1), and the Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon (30725).

93.75" H x 21.75" W each



NEEDLEWORK CASKET DEPICTING THE STORY OF ESTHER English, 1655-1665

The biblical story of Queen Esther was a theme often chosen by young girls to embroider in seventeenth-century England. While imagery of Esther appears in needlework pictures of the period, this well-known tale is also found on three-dimensional boxes or caskets. As seen here, the sides, doors, and top of the casket provided the embroiderer with panels on which to depict the traditional scenes that tell the story of the Jewish queen and her heroic devotion. On the casket's lid, Esther, escorted by her attendants, kneels before King Ahasuerus. The front doors of the casket illustrate Mordecai sitting at the town gate and King Ahasuerus riding on horseback. Other scenes include the procession of Mordecai through the town dressed in the king's apparel; King Ahasuerus in bed being presented the book that chronicles Mordecai's allegiance; the banquet at which Esther informs the king of the danger facing her people; and the hanging of Haman.

Embroidered caskets were made by young girls well-skilled at needlework. The components of the casket, including the wooden box, the silk satin drawn with selected motifs, and other needed materials, would have been purchased from a workshop. This casket features many of the charming elements that characterize seventeenth-century English needlework. Birds, insects, rabbits, and numerous other animals and flowers are interspersed among the imagery relating to the story of Esther. Drawn from pattern books, the scale of these plant and animal motifs differs in proportion from the figurative illustrations. Depending on the embroiderer's ambitions and talents, the motifs were executed using a variety of stitches. On this casket, polychrome silk floss, couched to the satin ground, creates rich and colorful vignettes. Striations of colors form the patterning of the canopied curtains that surround the king, as well as the stylish seventeenth-century clothes worn by the biblical characters. The casket's front doors open onto drawers with beautiful laid work in geometric and floral patterns. As is typically found in caskets of this type, behind the drawers lie secret compartments for storing treasures, and the lid of the casket lifts to reveal a mirror, two bottles, and compartments for writing instruments. The interior of the casket is lined with salmon-colored silk and paper. Accompanying the casket are two keys.

13.5" L x 10.75" W x 7.75" H





BROCADED KANAVAT BRIDAL VEIL
Russian (Kolomna, Moscow province),
early 19th c.

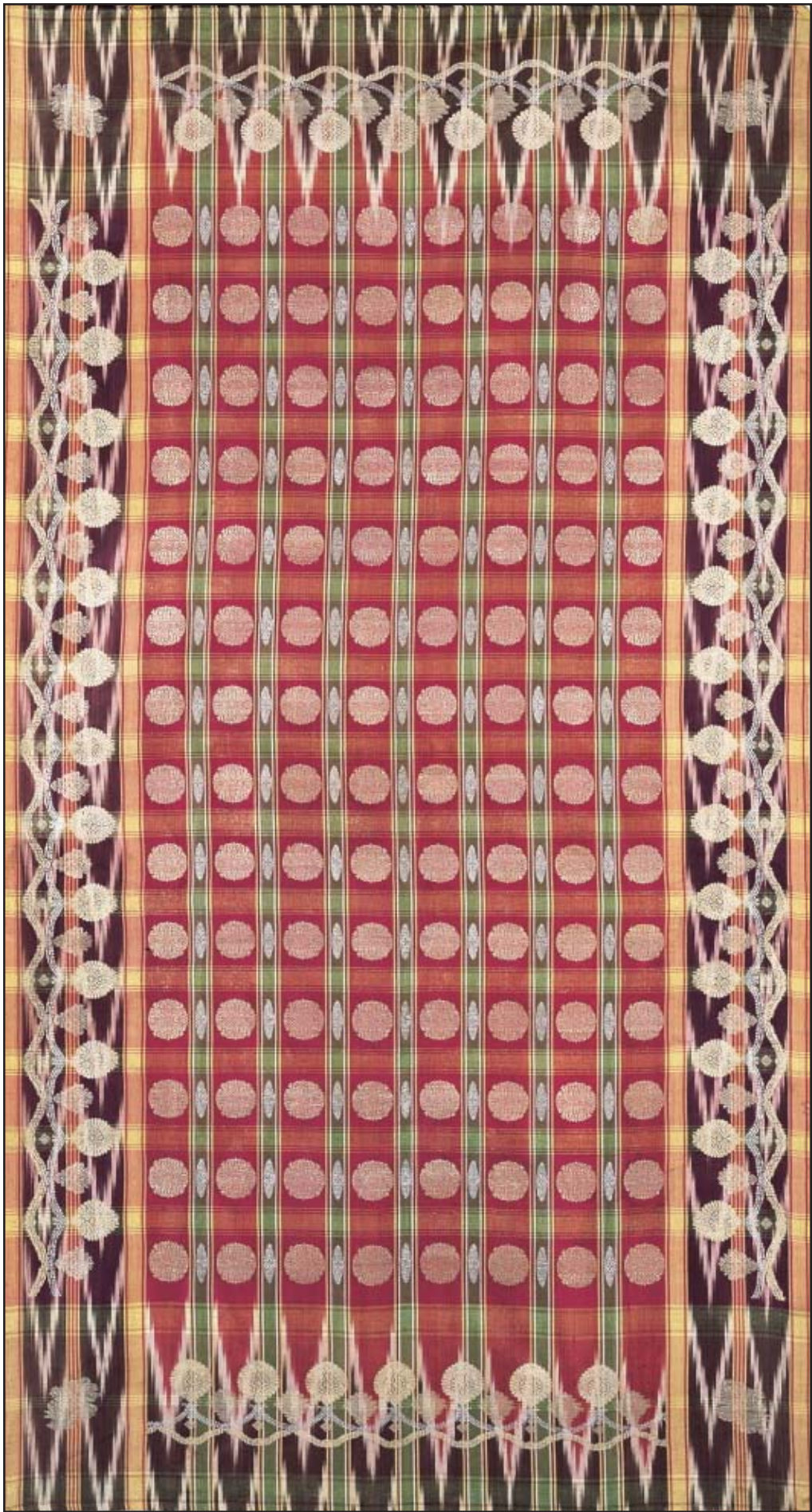
The Russian silk weaving industry was established in Moscow in 1714, and the city and nearby town of Kolomna remained major centers of production throughout the eighteenth century. In the 1780s, Guri Levin, a Kolomna merchant and owner of an important silk mill, specialized in the manufacture of kerchiefs with woven gold patterning. The mill was particularly renowned for its bridal veils of warp-dyed silk brocaded with gold and silver metallic threads.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Russia traded extensively with Persia and Central Asia. Amongst the goods imported from these regions were warp-dyed silks, which influenced the domestically produced Russian shawls. The Russian term *kanavat*, referring to a ribbed ikat silk, is of Persian origin.

Several members of the extended Levin family also founded silk mills in the Kolomna area, and *kanavat* veils with their respective woven-in signatures were highly regarded during the first half of the nineteenth century. The signature of Yakov Levin appears in the lower right corner of this example. The veils are characterized by rows of brocaded rosettes in the fields, zigzag patterned borders decorated with brocaded, stylized floral garlands, and rich, red and eggplant-purple coloration. Worn over the head and enveloping the figure, these sumptuous veils made a grand impression on the occasion of a woman's wedding.

A similar, Guri Levin bridal veil is illustrated in Olga Gordeyeva, *Russian Kerchiefs and Shawls*, 1985, figure 15. Other examples of Levin manufactory shawls are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1994.12) and the State History Museum, Moscow.

75.5" H x 46" W





GENTLEMAN'S TORTOISESHELL
TRAVELING MIRROR
WITH PORTRAIT MINIATURE
English, 1660s

For the man of leisure in the mid-seventeenth century, a mirror was an important aid in the ritual of the toilette which included shaving, arranging the wig, and perhaps applying black silk patches. At the beginning of the English Restoration, looking glasses, or mirrors, were still very much a luxury accessory, available only to the wealthy. The Venetians had significantly refined the art of mirror-making early in the century, and other Europeans quickly sought to establish their own industries. In 1664, the Worshipful Company of Glass-sellers and Looking-glass Makers was incorporated in London, and a highly successful glasshouse was founded in the previous year at Vauxhall by George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham. The precious and expensive silvered glass was appropriately framed in rich materials such as gold, silver, ivory, and tortoiseshell.

A charming oil portrait of a lady in fashionable dress holding a tulip adorns the inside cover of this traveling mirror. Portrait miniatures had been produced in England by well-known artists since the Tudor period, but the use of tortoiseshell, rather than vellum, as a painting surface was a phenomenon of the mid-seventeenth century. The mottled, golden brown tones of the tortoiseshell create a warm background for the soft shades of the figure, and harmonize with the peach-colored plume and tulip, delicate red bowknots, and fawn dress trim. One likes to imagine an affinity between the mirror's owner and the sitter, whose engaging image he contemplated during the progress of the toilette.

5.25" H x 3.5" W





PAINTED AND DYED PALAMPORE
Indian Export for the Sri Lankan market, early 18th c.

Indian painted and dyed cottons, so highly sought after by Europeans in the eighteenth century, were also produced for export to Asian markets including Indonesia and Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). The export of palampores and other types of Indian textiles is documented in surviving accounts from various East Indian trading firms. The Dutch East India Company brought significant numbers of Indian textiles into Sri Lanka, a Dutch colony until 1796. This cloth was found in Sri Lanka and shares characteristics with the few other Indian examples known to have been made for this neighboring island. A marked feature of Sri Lankan and Indonesian market palampores is their significantly smaller size than examples traded to European cities.

The beauty of this palampore derives in part from the sensuous form of its flowering tree. Shades of reds, blues, and a purplish black frequently seen on examples from Sri Lanka, provide its rich and saturated coloration. The cloth's exotic flowers and leaves are finely rendered and filled with delicate patterning. The distinctive tree motif of this piece appears on a related palampore that was made for the Indonesian market and found in Sumatra. Both textiles have a similar floral border that differs stylistically from those seen on painted and dyed cloths designated for an English clientele. The ability of Indian craftsmen to adapt their sophisticated techniques and designs to diverse markets contributed to the widespread trade in Indian textiles in the eighteenth century.

See John Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East*, 1998, fig. 143.

72" H x 45.5" W





COUNTED STITCH EMBROIDERY
Chinese, early 15th c.

The technique of counted stitch embroidery appears in many of the exceptional pieces of needlework that survive from fifteenth-century China. Silk threads, in deep tones of reds, blues, and greens typical of Chinese textiles, are worked on a silk gauze to form the sumptuous and symbolic elements seen in this example. Three long-legged phoenixes, or *Feng-Huang*, perch among the blossoms of flowering tree peonies. The mythological phoenix, which rose from the ashes of its pyre, appears as a symbol of Chinese empresses and the energy of the universe. A quality of richness in this embroidery derives from its sensuous design, vibrant colors, and sophisticated execution. The prominent red diamond lozenge pattern extends into the flowers and phoenixes, blurring distinctions between motifs and background to create a sense of unity. This rare embroidery was found in Tibet where it had been used as a banner in a monastery.

32" H x 7" W





REDWORK CUSHION COVER
English, mid-17th c.

Embroidered cushions, with ornamentation from the simple to the richly elaborate, often decorated seventeenth-century European interiors. For domestic needleworkers, cushions presented the intimacy of working on a small scale. This example illustrates a style of seventeenth-century English embroidery, known as redwork, that appears as well on curtains, workbags, and other household items. Using the monochromatic palette of red wool on a fustian ground, the vibrancy of the allover design is achieved by the simple yet effective use of various stitches to shade and outline the stylized leaf motifs. The large knotted, arabesque-like leaves, alternating with smaller leaf motifs, relate to woven silk designs of the period. In areas of the cushion, traces of the drawn outline of the pattern can be seen, providing a view into the maker's process. The cushion may have been made to adorn the embroiderer's home, or intended as a gift for someone fortunate to receive this finely handwrought example of an English woman's work.

20" H x 25" W



MAN'S FLAMEPOINT WALLET
English, initialed S.M. and dated 1757

Rich, gradated colors and crisp, zigzag repeating designs are characteristic features of eighteenth-century flamepoint embroidery. Its use throughout the period on objects both large and small, from bed hangings and upholstery to pincushions, attests to its continuous appeal as a practical and highly decorative technique. Generally, the tightly spun crewel yarns are worked in Florentine and related stitches on a finely woven canvas ground; here, brick stitch creates the sharply delineated, black outlines of the flame pattern as well as the transition of hues from red to green.

Flamepoint wallets were especially popular from the 1740s to the 1790s. A man's wallet, often embroidered by a female member of his family, might contain important correspondence, documents, and currency. The owner of this handsome example had his initials and the year in which the accessory was made engraved into the scallop-edged silver clasp. The wallet opens to reveal a lining of bright crimson satin damask, probably sewn from fragments of a worn-out garment. Although the judicious re-use of expensive fabric was common in the eighteenth century, the wallet's maker added this surprise element of luxury for S.M.'s appreciation.

4.75" H x 7.25" W





INDIGO RESIST COVERLET
American, 1780s

Blue resist textiles were fashionable decorations used throughout eighteenth-century American and English homes. The bold florals of this coverlet characterize the designs that gave these textiles their wide appeal. The striking contrast of the blue shades against the stark white background was achieved by the sophisticated use of indigo dye and resist techniques. The addition of white dots as decorative elements, known as *picotage*, is often seen in blue resist textiles of this period. To create this effect, resist paste was printed onto the fabric using a wooden block with attached iron or brass pins. While the complexities of indigo dyeing were many, this plant remained the most common blue dyestuff until the invention of artificial indigo in 1880.

The coverlet is lined on the reverse with a blue and white English copperplate-printed cotton with scrolling vines and exotic flowers manufactured at Bromley Hall, Middlesex. The paper impression for the design, inscribed "P.13 Talwin & Foster," is at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

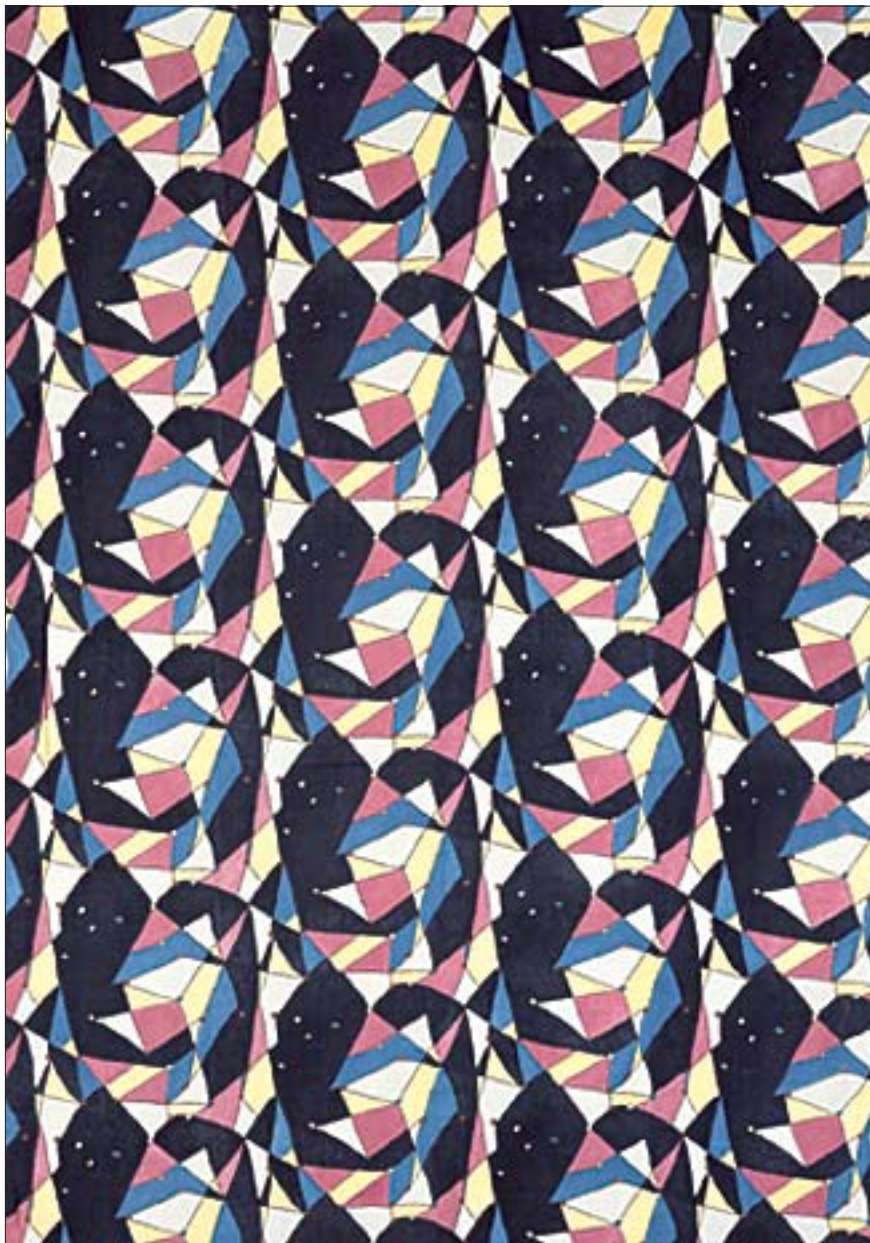
Examples of this blue resist are in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg (CWI54-173) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (34.59.1). An illustration appears in Florence H. Pettit, *America's Indigo Blues*, 1974, plate 2. An example of the copperplate on the reverse of the coverlet, from the collection of the Winterthur Museum, is illustrated in Florence Montgomery, *Printed Textiles*, 1970, plate XXI and fig. 235.



BLOCK-PRINTED GLAZED COTTON
DESIGNED BY SERGE POLIAKOFF
1946
73.5" H x 49.5" W

Russian-born painter Serge Poliakoff (1900-1969) devoted only a brief period of his career to textiles, but his place in the history of artist-designed fabrics in the twentieth century is well deserved. At the age of eighteen, Poliakoff fled to Paris to study music, but by the 1930s he had shifted his concentration to painting. During this time he met Wassily Kandinsky and Robert and Sonia Delaunay. Through his friendship with these artists, color became a defining characteristic of his work.

As did many artists of the twentieth century, Poliakoff sometimes applied his talents to commercial design. In 1945, he met Jean Bauret, an industrialist with a keen interest in the art and artists of avant-garde Paris; over the next four years, Poliakoff produced a collection of more than fifty patterns for Bauret to print as furnishing textiles. Though Poliakoff submitted some representational compositions with birds, leaves, and clouds, Bauret was most impressed by the artist's progressive, painterly designs, with their monumental repeats and unusual color schemes.



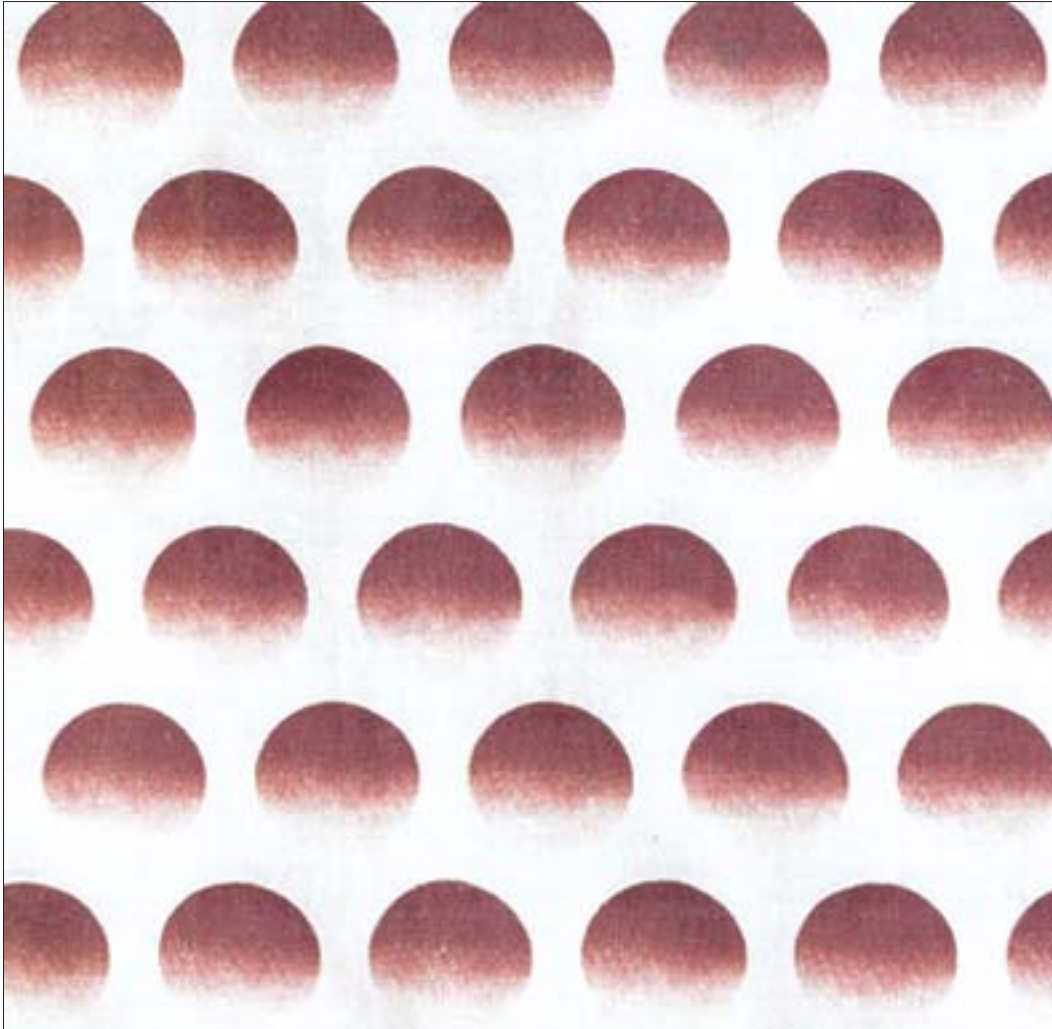
BLOCK-PRINTED VISCOSE
DESIGNED BY SERGE POLIAKOFF
1946
52.5" H x 49.5" W

Poliakoff's musical training is evident in his rhythmic repetition of shapes. These particular designs are studies in saturated colors and lively motion, achieved through interlocking abstract forms. In keeping with his paintings and lithographs, there is a distinct emphasis on flat surface. The face of the cotton fabric is glazed, highlighting the puzzle-piece composition.

Ultimately, very few of Poliakoff's designs were manufactured. Pleased with the fruits of their collaboration, Bauret proposed an exclusive commercial relationship with the artist. Concerned with compromising his artistic integrity, Poliakoff declined the offer. He was unwilling to reconcile the decorative focus of textile production with his intellectual and creative aspirations.

Similar printed textiles by Poliakoff are in the Musée de l'Impression sur Étoffes, Mulhouse.





ROLLER PRINTED COTTON POLKA DOT DRESS
English, ca. 1830

Experimentation and innovation were hallmarks of the rapidly expanding English printed textile industry in the first half of the nineteenth century. Discoveries in both dyestuffs and printing techniques radically changed the appearance of dress and furnishing cottons, while concurrent developments in spinning and weaving increased production and made these cottons available to a wider clientele. The op-art like effect of ombre polka dots in this day dress illustrates the exciting, new design sensibility of the period.

The “rainbow style,” as it was called, was initially introduced as a wallpaper printing technique on the continent and was soon adapted for textile production in England by 1824. Notes in a swatch book from a Lancashire printer in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum refer to its first use in that year. Applied originally to wood block printing and subsequently to engraved copper roller, the “rainbow style” required a high degree of technical expertise to achieve the soft, shaded coloring. Immediately successful, it remained fashionable for dress fabrics and accessories into the mid-nineteenth century.

Romantic influence on women’s dress was at its height around 1830, and the modish silhouette incorporated details such as full, leg-of-mutton sleeves inspired by late sixteenth-century styles. The hourglass shape emphasizing a small waist was often further enhanced by decorative trimming on the bodice front and at the wide hem. As is vividly conveyed by this example, the ideal woman of the period was a dainty figure whose dress combined an overtly feminine and historicizing form with an avant-garde pattern that represented the latest in textile achievement.



APPLIQUÉ FELTWORK TABLECOVER
American, mid-19th c.

The technique of appliqué feltwork appears in the 1700s, but it was during the middle of the following century that feltwork achieved widespread popularity among women eager for new styles of handwork to decorate their homes. The tablecover's design, with its central medallion and scrolling border, follows a traditional textile form, but its coloration of vivid hues against a strong dark background appealed to mid-nineteenth-century tastes. The embroiderer's skillful use of appliqué felt creates the tablecover's prominent three-dimensional motifs. Layers of felt petals, and strawberries padded to suggest ripeness, add a degree of naturalism to the artificial arrangement of flowers and fruits. Pansies, roses, daisies, and bluebells mix with sweet peas, lily of the valley, and fuchsias. The result is a striking example of needlework as it was practiced by talented women following the patterns and dictates of embroidery designs created for mid-nineteenth-century interiors.

51" H x 51" W



CREWELWORK CURTAIN
English, dated 1723 and initialed S.V.

From its origins in the seventeenth century, English crewelwork took its design sensibility from the lushness and exoticism of Indian textiles. As the popularity of crewelwork continued into the eighteenth century, English domestic embroiderers adapted the traditional dense motifs and palette of blues and greens to changing tastes. This evolution of style can be seen in the curtain worked by S.V. in 1723. The curtain retains many Indian-inspired elements yet possesses a sense of delicacy and openness. Craggy hillocks at the lower edge are shaped by French knots; five shades of green wools give an ombré quality to the serpentine vines and fanciful leaves; and delicate pink flowers accentuate the verdant landscape created by the embroiderer S.V. on her canvas of fustian cloth.

90" H x 74" W (detail shown)



ROLLER PRINTED VELVETEEN BY ALPHONSE MUCHA
French, ca. 1898-1900

The Czech artist Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939) was a leading proponent of the Art Nouveau style in turn-of-the-century Paris. Mucha was best known for his posters depicting sensual, languid women with abundant, flowing hair, including the celebrated actress Sarah Bernhardt with whom he worked from the mid-1890s. Mucha's skill as a draughtsman and decorative designer brought him commissions for a wide range of graphic projects, from large-scale advertisements for cigarette paper, champagne, and railroads to magazine and book illustrations.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Mucha produced a limited number of furnishing fabric designs incorporating his distinctive female figures and lush vegetal forms for the studio of C. G. Forrer in Paris. *Femme à marguerite* was manufactured by one of the major Alsatian printing firms, Scheurer, Lauth & Cie, in velveteen, cotton sateen, and a heavy-weight ribbed cotton in a number of colorways. A lithograph of the design is in the Bibliothèque Forney, Paris. Mucha's textiles were also available in Britain through a London-based printing firm. A related velveteen, *Byzantine*, is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (T.316.1965). The refined elegance of Mucha's furnishing cottons would have perfectly complimented an Art Nouveau interior, in which they were used as screens and pillows.

28" H x 30" W