

CORA GINSBURG

Costume Textiles Needlework







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Costume Textiles Needlework



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### OPEN ROBE (*ROBE À L'ANGLAISE*)

English, ca. 1780–85; the cotton, Indian (probably Coromandel Coast), ca. 1770–80

A partial stamp inside this gown's left sleeve offers rare, tantalizing insight into its history. The words "Seized/Dover" indicate that the expensive, hand-painted-and-dyed Indian cotton was appropriated by British customs officials in this major port town, directly across the Channel from France. Throughout the eighteenth century, smuggling was a highly lucrative industry in Britain, and the bays and coves along the southeastern coastline of Kent provided cover for local sailors illicitly bringing in contraband goods or merchandise on which customs duties were required. Seamen who regularly engaged in smuggling were the most serious offenders, defrauding the Crown of expected income. But customs officials were easily bribed, and even naval officers and sailors—including those in the East India Company—as well as private citizens who traveled abroad often attempted to avoid paying duties on high-taxed purchases. Although the government repealed the fifty-three-year ban on the importation of Indian cottons in 1774, these fabrics continued to incur stiff duties, making them profitable contraband. In 1780, the Revenue Service documented the seizure of almost 1,200 pieces of calicos and muslins from domestic ports outside of London. In its effort to recoup lost funds, the government often sold confiscated commodities; between 1768 and 1800, forty pieces of Indian chintz were among the cottons disposed of at auction. This seized cotton survived possible destruction, perhaps through legal means or as the result of a financially beneficial arrangement between a customs official and an interested party, allowing it to be made into a fashionable *robe à l'anglaise*.

The dress's low and wide neckline, tight bodice with a deep center-back point, close-fitting elbow-length sleeves, and finely pleated, trained skirt point to a date of about 1780 to 1785. A band of lightly ruched self-fabric edged with bobbin lace adorns the neckline and shaped cuffs. In addition to the drawstring that secures the neckline, the bodice originally fastened with buttons, indicated by buttonholes on the left side. The gown would have been worn with a matching or white petticoat over a crescent-shaped pad known as a "false bum," which replaced wide panniers around this time and created an exaggerated roundness at the back. Probably made five to ten years earlier than the dress, the cotton's delicate, open composition reflects late eighteenth-century trends in European silk design that favored increasingly smaller floral motifs on a plain-woven, solid-colored ground. Here, diminutive red, pink, and blue exotic flowers and spiky leaves bloom along dark-brown, precisely rendered meandering stems that attest to the artisan's confident handling of his *qalam*, or pen.

The inside of an embroidered silk waistcoat front dated about 1750–59 in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.12&A-1981) is stamped: "Custom House/ SEIZED DOVER/GR II." Two late eighteenth-century dresses and a caraco-and-petticoat ensemble made from painted-and-dyed Indian cotton with similar meandering florals and foliage are also in the Victoria & Albert Museum (CIRC. 4-1920, T.121-1992, and T.299&A-1927).



Provenance: Lady Lucy Hicks Beach (née Fortescue), later Viscountess St. Aldwyn and first Countess St. Aldwyn (1851–1940)

MM

## OPEN ROBE (*ROBE À L'ANGLAISE*)

English, ca. 1785–90; the silk, ca. 1780

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, dresses with fitted backs began to replace the formal *robe à la française* (or *negligée*, as it was known in England), an open gown with double box pleats falling from the shoulder blades to the hem, and worn over a matching petticoat, that dominated fashionable women's wardrobes in Europe from the 1720s. Around 1780, however, one of these popular informal styles of dress worn by English women for most of the century was enthusiastically adopted by French women and dubbed the *robe à l'anglaise*.

The cut and silhouette of this elegantly understated silk gown correspond to the *robe à l'anglaise*. In the 1780s, its close-fitting bodice extended into an increasingly deep V at the center back, necessitating a separate skirt that was tightly knife pleated around the waist. This marked change from the flowing *robe à la française* required shaped pattern pieces for the upper body and expert stitching. The seamstress who made up this dress worked the silk and lining pieces together using running, whip, overcast, and buttonhole stitches in the bodice; in the skirt, she employed only running stitch to join the four full selvedge widths. The bodice is constructed from six pieces—two at the center front that continue to the side back seams and four narrow back panels with gracefully curved seams—and a single band of ruched self-fabric edged with gimp that embellishes the neckline. The tight, two-piece long sleeves with two small functional buttons at the wrist are also cut on a curve, reinforcing the wearer's correct bodily comportment that dictated posture with slightly bent arms. Sewn to the linen lining at the center front are two narrow linen bands with eyelet holes for lacing. On the inside of the skirt, three sets of linen ties and tabs indicate that the gown was worn *à la polonoise*—looped up to create three swags and reveal a matching, or contrasting, petticoat. In a satirical piece published in *The Lounger* on August 5, 1786, a young lady's maid comments on the contents of her mistress's extensive wardrobe that contains many variations in gown styles including “the stages of gradation ... from the *negligée* to the *polonoise*.” This dress, which would originally have had a full matching petticoat, survived with a length of silk, now used as a half-petticoat.

Concomitant with the change in silhouette was a shift from brocaded silks with expansive flowers to self-figured small floral or geometric patterns that could more easily be cut and shaped without disrupting the design. Here, rows of green and white sprigs interspersed with white spots, formed by continuous pattern wefts, stand out against the bronze-colored *cannelé* ground. In Barbara Johnson's album of her wardrobe covering the years 1746 to 1823 in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, engraved illustrations from contemporary fashion magazines and fabric samples of her gowns from 1780 to 1789 show stylishly dressed women in *robes à l'anglaise* and printed cottons with small, stylized florals that followed silk designs (T.219-1973).

MM









## COLLECTION OF PURSES

Northern European, late 16th to early 19th century

In early modern Europe, a purse did not necessarily carry the pecuniary associations of today. A variety of purposes—transactional, altruistic, nuptial, ornamental, and even hygienic—might be coded within its contents and indeed very fabric. The present collection offers a glimpse into two hundred years of purse production and consumption in France, Britain, Prussia, and the Netherlands, emphasizing the skill and finesse required of the makers, whether professional or domestic.

The earliest examples are two miniature purses from the end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century. Made of leather, silk, silver, and pearls with elaborate, oversized tassels, these were probably produced in a Dutch or German workshop. The cord lengths suggest attachment to a belt, though the purses may have been worn empty, as their worth was solely in their display.

It was customary to give a purse at a betrothal or marriage. In France in the 1670s and 1680s, a fashion developed for betrothal purses with pairs of painted enamel portraits—sometimes identifiable ladies and gentlemen of the court—which were produced in the workshops of Limoges. The vibrant body color and delicate line work of this example were achieved by painting very thin layers on a copper substrate, with a firing between each layer.

Three other examples showcase the many techniques employed by amateur embroiderers during the seventeenth century, working with or without the help of a professionally drawn pattern. A young girl likely made the miniscule bellows as a show of her skill with the needle. The spherical purse with four silver-wrapped, pear-shaped tassels, perhaps to hold a few coins or a small token, is entirely executed in queen (or rococo) stitch to create a geometric pattern. An earlier bag, also of geometric design, is worked in buttonhole stitch with couched silver-wrapped threads in plaited braid and woven wheel stitch, and tassels finished in long-and-short stitch. Called “sweetmeat bags” or “sweet bags,” they would have contained potpourri or perfumed powders.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the purse evolved from an object of gift giving and private use to an essential public accessory for women, which replaced hidden pockets. The *sablé* (beadwork) purse (see p. 4) is an interesting case of reuse, with a shield-shaped body dating to the early eighteenth century and a knitted silk stocking and steel ring from about 1790. A Regency knitted silk reticule of unusual design features tiny, dangling pink-and-red strawberries. The height of fashion in early nineteenth-century Europe, reticules (from the Latin *reticulum* for their netlike structures) were known satirically as “ridicules” thanks to their impractical size.

Provenance: These purses all come from the collection of Carrie Lauer Lehman (1865–1937). By the beginning of the twentieth century, Lehman had amassed a large and significant collection of early European costume, accessories, and textiles. After her death in 1937, her husband, Philip Lehman, donated part of the collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

MDA

















## EMBROIDERED PICTURE OF THE THREE FATES

English, ca. 1630–50

In this exceptionally preserved embroidery, a cartouche-filled border surrounds a central scene illustrating the three Fates of Greek mythology, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, who are known as spinners, drawing out the thread of life. Clotho spins the thread, Lachesis measures out the thread determining the length of a mortal's life, and Atropos cuts the length of thread that has been spun, signaling death. With their names written in on the picture in ink, the beauty and decorative nature of this needlework picture belies the Fates' presence as a reminder of mortality.

The second set of triplets from the marriage of Zeus and Themis, the Fates—or Moerae, derived from the Greek word *moira*, meaning “lot” or “share”—have the powers to assign mortals their lot, or share, of time to live. Depictions of these powerful women that appeared in European prints and drawings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have been possible design sources at the time this embroidery was worked. While, as here, the women are elderly and in nondescript clothing, the Fates are sometimes shown garbed in classical dress, sometimes nude, or, as in a French print in the Victoria & Albert Museum (13853:1), young and wearing fashionable clothing of the early eighteenth century. The three Fates can be seen among other figures of Greek mythology on an English beadwork mirror dated 1662 seated amid overscale flowers, also at the Victoria & Albert Museum (W.3-1952).

The sophistication of this picture's design indicates that it was drawn by a professional pattern drawer. The border offers a rich display of flora, fauna, and figurative motifs—a many-legged spider caught in a dense web, a sun and moon flanking a flaming salamander, three birds perched on grassy mounds dotted with seed pearls, a duck and pelican wading through reedy waters, a man fishing on the banks of a river with a three-dimensional basket to store his catch, a woman with long blonde hair sitting in a boat on a river lined with reeds, and dogs pursuing a stag. The interstices are filled with a plethora of decorative flowers, insects, birds, trees, and festooned draperies.

This needlework picture, with its ample display of expensive materials including silks and metallics, was executed by a highly skilled hand, probably that of a professional embroiderer. It makes use of extremely fine satin stitches, along with a profusion of purl and overtwisted threads to create dimension throughout the composition. The water elements are composed of varicolored blue silk threads wrapped with silver strip, couched in a zigzag pattern. Shiny silver lamella covers the sun and moon seen at the top, made three dimensional with wadded wool. Its white satin ground has survived remarkably intact. Edged with silver and gilt-silver bobbin lace and lined with salmon-pink silk, the embroidery originally had ribbon ties for use as a portfolio cover; the piece appears in G. Saville Seligman and Talbot Hughes, *Domestic Needlework: Its Origins and Customs Throughout the Centuries* (plate 31) in the chapter “Portfolios & Letter-cases.”

Provenance: Ex. collection Sir William Lawrence and Sir Frederick Richmond (1873–1953); sold at the Richmond collection sale, Christie's South Kensington (June 23, 1987, lot 138)

13 x 17 in.

DG





## PAIR OF WOMAN'S SHOES

English, ca. 1770

Restrained in color, yet far from plain, these embellished shoes of English origin occupy a transitional niche in eighteenth-century feminine footwear styles. In several key features, the pair date to the 1760s or early 1770s, clearly within the period the rococo aesthetic flourished in England. In others, the shoes' design anticipates streamlined modes soon to follow—but also, intriguingly, look backward toward the baroque period of the seventeenth through the early eighteenth century.

In some of its decorative elements and their placement, this pair is visually indebted to fashionable styles from the 1730s to the 1750s, rich with metallic passementerie. Scalloped silver bobbin lace—a mingling of reflective, hammered wire, and different weights of silver-wrapped thread—was couched in place along the upper edges of the tongues, quarters, and lachets, encircling the heels and applied in thick stripes down the center. Tiny spangles, each hammered from a snippet of coiled wire, accentuate the sparkling appearance of the bold silver-embroidered carnations, which stylistically feel removed from the delicate sprigs prevailing in the 1770s. It is possible the shoe fronts, cut separately from the quarters, were embroidered in the first quarter of the eighteenth century (and possibly earlier) and repurposed.

Of all the shoes' features, the heel and toe morphology provide the strongest clues to their age. These French heels—sculpted from wood in elegant proportion—are decidedly 1760s in form. Women in England adopted more practical heights than



their French counterparts; even for formal occasions, English heels in the first half of the century tended to have thick waists (the heel's narrowest circumference), which were less apt to fail. But in the 1750s and 1760s, heels could be higher and more attenuated. This extreme fashion inspired a satirical verse about the perils of extra loft, published in 1753: "But mount on French heels when you go to a ball; 'tis the fashion to totter, and shew how you fall." Further underscoring the proximity to 1770 as a manufacturing date, these shoes show no hint of the lower, arch-spanning Italian heel, which quickly took

hold after that point and grew ever smaller until it disappeared altogether in the 1790s. The almond-point toes with sloping profiles, not the gently rounded ones dominant in the 1760s, also suggest a date much closer to 1770 or into the 1770s; likewise, the lachets have slipped slightly lower down the vamp, a sign of fashions to come as the 1770s progressed. In contrast to peaked or pointed tongues which were in vogue with styles of the 1770s to 1780s, the tongues on these shoes are cut straight across, possibly the result of repurposing the embroidered fronts.

LW





## FIGURED SILK EVENING DRESS

English, ca. 1845–50

In the West, the twenty-first century's obsession with a thin female body as the ideal beauty type, and its promotion in the fashion press, has a long history. From the establishment of regularly published English and French fashion periodicals in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, colored plates disseminated to an increasingly wider audience consistently presented slender young women wearing the latest styles. Although editors often advised readers to dress according to their social standing, marital status, age, and complexion, those who were described as belonging to the “dumpy order” were perceived to face particularly difficult challenges. In April 1846, around the date of this evening dress, *The New Monthly Belle Assemblée* noted that “*corsages à basque*—that is, with jackets of different lengths and forms—will be made both in *redingotes* and robes. Some of these jackets have a jaunty effect, and are very advantageous to the shape; but I do not like the very deep ones especially for ladies of the ‘dumpy order.’” This derisive term, an ironic reference to the classical orders of architecture, appears as early as July 1823 in a satirical conversation published in Ackermann's *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions, and Politics* as well as in fashion-related publications and articles in the following decade.

Although the assumption by one writer in 1830 that a “dumpy woman” could only be “a dowdy” when she was “condemned to dress in a mode especially invented for some tall, slender arbitress of taste,” surviving garments, such as this luxurious lemon-yellow-and-white silk evening gown, are evidence that women with large figures ignored contemporary fashion “don't”s and dressed in the height of current trends. Between 1845 and 1850, the *Belle Assemblée* and *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* illustrated and reported on formal attire very similar to this gown noting details of “*corsages* [bodices] ... low and deeply pointed, with very short sleeves,” “*manchettes* [cuffs] of white lace,” and full gathered or pleated skirts “trimmed *en tablière*” that evoke both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century styles.

The gown's neckline was probably embellished with a deep lace collar known as a *berthe*, like this blonde silk example, seen in numerous plates. Woven on a jacquard loom, its figured silk with lush floral-and-foliage sprays was likely manufactured in Spitalfields (London), long the center of the silk-weaving industry in England, or one of its more recent competitors, such as Macclesfield. In January 1845, the *Belle Assemblée* included an illustration of Queen Victoria in a “dress of richly figured white satin, of Spitalfield's manufacture, the pattern most unique and splendid,” with a pointed bodice and a skirt with *tablier* trimming. Here, coordinating leaf-shaped silk ribbons with leaf motifs curve outward from either side of the waist to just above the hem, suggesting an eighteenth-century open robe. In March 1848, the same periodical commented on “several very splendid robes ... composed of white or yellow damask ... the low tight *corsage* ... decorated with a *berthe* of silver or gold blonde lace.”

Similar floral-patterned silks dating to the mid-nineteenth century manufactured by leading firms in Spitalfields and Macclesfield are in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.33A-1959, AP.418:1, and AP.382:1). A silk evening dress with a similar design dated about 1845 is in the Kyoto Costume Institute (AC553 78-2-9A and AC555 78-2-9C).

MM

















## BROCADED SILK COVERLET WITH GOLD GALLOON EDGING

French or Italian, ca. 1735–40

Opulent in its forms, palette, and materials, this coverlet is a superb example of a particular moment in eighteenth-century silk design and weaving techniques. Although floral-and-foliage motifs had dominated woven dress silks since the seventeenth century, in the 1730s, the painterly rendering of these elements on paper by designers trained in botanical studies and their subsequent translation into cloth by weavers created a highly three-dimensional luxuriant appearance. This plastic, spatial quality, or “naturalism”—a term adopted by textile scholars in the 1960s—is achieved by the sophisticated shading of colorful pattern wefts, often enhanced by the overblown scale of the motifs. While French designers and Lyonnais merchants including Justin Courtois and Jean Revel are credited with introducing and perfecting the naturalistic style in silks, it was copied in other European weaving centers.

In this coverlet, the dense asymmetrical composition of stylized flowers at the peak of their bloom, feathery leaves, and generously rounded pomegranates brocaded in lustrous polychrome silk and glistening silver-gilt threads stands out against the bright green twilled silk ground. While not entirely realistic, the range and combination of hues—blues and greens, pinks, deep red, yellow, white, and black—are typical of naturalistic silks, emphasizing their visual impact, and the forward-curving petals and leaf tips seen here reinforce a sense of depth. Depicted in various states of maturity, pomegranates were popular motifs in these silks; in this design, the flower-topped fruits are just beginning to open—a jagged split at the side anticipates the release of the seed clusters within. Contrasting with the smooth silk wefts bound in twill, three types of metal-thread floats—*filé*, *frisé*, and strip—used in the large foliate sprays and flowerheads add a rich textural effect.

Repurposed from a woman’s dress, the coverlet is made from uncut lengths of silk and smaller rectangular and shaped pieces joined by almost invisible seams hand stitched with green silk thread and edged with geometric-patterned gold galloon. Inherently valuable and prized for their beauty, lavishly brocaded eighteenth-century gowns could be kept long after they had gone out of fashion. In the nineteenth century, they might have been worn as fancy dress, appeared on the stage as theatrical costume, or used as artists’ props. At the turn of the twentieth century, these showy garments were sometimes made into coverlets for the art market and sought after by wealthy consumers. Attached to a corner of this coverlet’s pink silk taffeta lining is a lead seal with the words “Antichita Arte” on one side and “R. Uffici[?]” on the other. Lead seals were used on textiles in Western Europe since the thirteenth century to indicate quality, origin of manufacture, and the payment of tax or duty. In this case, the wording suggests that the seal postdates the unification of Italy in 1861, and that it most likely relates to duties imposed on the export of antique objects. The seal is also a physical reminder of the silk’s multiple incarnations and journeys from two-dimensional cloth to three-dimensional dress and back again, and from Continental Europe to the United States over the course of almost three centuries.

Provenance: Ex. collections Rudolf Nureyev (1938–1993) and Ann Getty (1941–2020)

88 x 77 in.

MM













## EMBROIDERED WOOL BEDCOVER

American (New England), ca. 1820s

For early colonial settlers in New England, staying warm on cold nights was a necessity that also warranted self-expression. Their answer was the bed rug, a large coverlet with two or three widths of homespun wool decorated all over with crewels. Women personalized these practical textiles with grand, floral compositions and, occasionally, with signatures and dates, bespeaking their pride in these labors of love.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, embroiderers adapted designs to utilize less wool, which consequently required significantly less time and effort to produce. The tradition of signing and dating also declined. This ca. 1820–30 bedcover, worked in crewels across three joined panels of twilled herringbone wool and without a maker's initials or name, is an example of this evolution.

Centering around an oversized, six-armed pinwheel, or starburst, and pine cone with a framing serpentine vine and borders of tripartite hillocks and sawtooths, the composition bears the hallmarks of early nineteenth-century American domestic embroidery. These elements appear in various permutations in extant bedcovers from Massachusetts and the Connecticut River Valley, including those at the American Folk Art Museum (1995.32.1), Old Sturbridge Village (26.108.27), Philadelphia Museum of Art (2020-37-1), and Winterthur Museum (1952.0340.005, 1956.0602, and 1969.0554), as well as New York examples made by Polly McCall (Winterthur Museum, 1975.0236) and her relative (published in *Antiques Magazine*, December 1932).

Setting this bedcover apart from these and other surviving ones, however, is its combined flamboyance and minimalism. Here, enormous, fantastic florals and fruits terminate in multicolored tendrils, stems, and curlicues, with expanses of negative space between them. The latter design choice is not unique; an example from about 1830, at the Wadsworth Atheneum (1945.30), has a similar division, with sizeable visible areas of twilled brown wool.

In this case, the needlework's probable execution by multiple hands may have necessitated the negative space, with fewer areas of embroidery crossing seams and thus requiring continuity. Along the rounded, lower edge's outer border, patterns and yarns change at each seam. The makers utilized an unusual variety of stitches: New England laid, running, outline, stem, fishbone, herringbone, and buttonhole as well as French knots. While differences in palette might result from making do with available crewels, the variations in motifs, stitches, and yarn quality (with single and double ply alongside fluffier wool) point to the involvement of more than one woman, perhaps even at different times. The reverse provides further evidence for this; the back of the central length shows more economical use of wool than on the flanking panels.

In its florid though pared-down aesthetic, this bedcover is a rare, late example of a distinctive category of American women's work seldom produced after the 1840s. By the mid-nineteenth century, embroidered coverlets were rendered all but obsolete due to industrialization and the popularity of professionally woven jacquard coverlets.

87 x 76 in.

MDA



## SILK-EMBROIDERED LINEN COLCHA

Spanish (probably Castile and León), ca. 1725–75

Worked in bright silk flosses on four joined lengths of undyed ribbed linen, this Spanish coverlet may have been intended as a wall hanging, table cover, or summer bedcover. The traditional catchall term “colcha”—used both on the Iberian Peninsula and in Spanish America—reflects the multipurpose nature of such large-scale fabrics destined for the home.

The motifs resemble those on folk embroideries from the Sierra de Francia mountains in Salamanca, a region of Spain recognized by UNESCO for its needlework. This history is especially visible in the representations of the royal double-headed eagle; lion with crested mane and curlicue tail, a symbol of the region; and encomiendas, elaborate medallions of floral and geometric design. These medallions are arranged at a 45-degree angle, surrounded by three concentric outer borders, including two with arabesques, birds, carnations, and stylized rosettes. Here, the inclusion of ladies within the central field and a complete border frieze containing men and women—possibly a festival or procession—separates it from most surviving Serrano embroideries and other Spanish examples of the period.

The composition reinforces Spain’s leading role in the early modern global trade network connecting Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The arabesques and floral medallions illustrate influence from Islamic traditions as well as China, whose textiles for export were fixtures of the Iberian economy. The figural procession also relates to those portrayed in contemporaneous embroideries from the colonies of Mexico and the Philippines. This coverlet’s embroidery technique and use of a linen ground, however, confirms its origin in mainland Spain. A linen towel with similar silk-embroidered motifs, including rosettes, carnations, birds, and a double-headed eagle, is in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas (CE23574).

Vernacular pictorial textiles like this demonstrate the persistence of regional fashions, even in the face of the French court’s pan-European sartorial dominance. Here, men and women dressed in festive attire alternate with soldiers carrying swords. The brightly colored garments may be, in part, embellished for added visual interest, but the vibrant hues are nonetheless in keeping with northern Spanish folk costume. While the men wear justaucorps (full-skirted coats with wide cuffs), the ladies are depicted in traditional clothing of front-lacing bodices, multicolored petticoats, and layered shawls. Their decorated blouson sleeves likely reference actual embroidered sleeves, a typical feature of dress in Salamanca. Likewise, their updos are reminiscent of the knotted and ribboned hairstyles worn by women in the village of Candelario.

This colcha, a rare surviving record of folkways in mainland Spain as well as the reach of the Spanish Empire by the eighteenth century, is highly unusual, and possibly one of a kind, in its synthesis of local and global motifs and influences.

Provenance: Ex. collection Elinor Merrill (1895–1993)

97 ½ x 67 in.

MDA













## PAINTED-AND-DYED COTTON COVER

Indian (Machilipatnam) for the Iranian market, ca. 1800–30

Indian cotton cloth had long been a Persian import via Armenian merchants traveling by land, but the oceanic reach of the European East India Companies opened horizons during the seventeenth century. Operating via *farman*, or royal edict, the East Indian Companies identified the Persian Gulf as a vital marketplace for woolens, spices, sugar, and cottons. Britain and the Netherlands sent huge quantities of chintzes through the ports of Hormuz and Bandar Abbas, making the Persian Empire one of the most important consumers of Indian cotton and junctures for re-export to the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Central Asia.

As Britain's imperial dominion over the Indian Peninsula had grown by 1800, Persian diplomacy was a mercantile and political necessity to thwart feared French, Russian, and Afghani invasions. Cotton was one solution. European tastes for chintzes had also moderated by this time, so developing designs for new markets—prayer mats, hangings, and covers with typically Islamic mihrabs and cypress trees—was key. By the mid-nineteenth century, these were so popular that artisans in and around Isfahan made block-printed imitations. Later, Indian cotton imports were banned to protect Iran's local textile manufacture.

This cover is an exemplar of the extremely fine *qalamkari*—literally “pen work” in Persian—achieved by painters in Masulipatam (modern-day Machilipatnam) in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the main production center for drawn and printed cottons shipped to Persia. The floral-and-foliage tendrils with birds are hand drawn and painted with resists. Such symmetrical compositions—central medallion, densely filled ground, corner ornaments, and running border of large *botehs*—derived from Persian carpets and could be used to cover furnishings and floors. The resulting textile has a quality uncharacteristic of most Indian and Iranian cottons of the period. The palette of purple, red, blue, yellow, and green is achieved through successive baths of madder, indigo, and possibly pomegranate rinds or myrobalan fruit for yellows. The green—created by layering indigo and yellow dyes—retains its richness despite yellows often being fugitive. A thin surface glaze remains.

The reverse bears three stamps revealing the cotton was exported via the United East India Company: an orb with pennon and cross, having the letters “U E I C” and possibly “L O”; a rounded rectangle possibly containing the Tamil *ka*; and a circle with three illegible numerals. Identical Company orb stamps have been found on late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cottons, including a palampore at RISD Museum (1989.097). Similar numeric stamps appear on a palampore exhibited at the 1855 Exposition Universelle, in Paris (Victoria & Albert Museum, IS-5423). An additional inscription in Telugu, untranscribed but maybe a reference to a workshop, runs along one border.

Provenance: Ex. collection Prof. Kurt Hermann Weil (1895–1992), thence by descent. Weil, an aviation engineer, founded Junkers Luftverkehr Persien. He acquired this textile while working as consultant to the Shah of Iran in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

94 ½ x 56 in.

MDA

























## WOOL-AND-SILK CURTAIN OR PORTIÈRE

Woven by J. and J. S. Templeton, Glasgow; design attributed to Bruce J. Talbert  
Scottish, ca. 1870–75

The rich patterning and combination of contrasting colors accented with muted hues in this large-scale curtain would have made an impressive statement and served as an integral component in an Aesthetic movement interior. A tour de force of jacquard loom capabilities, the wool-and-silk curtain was woven by J. and J. S. Templeton, a branch of James Templeton & Co., established in 1839. Based in Glasgow, both firms produced high-end carpets, but curtains were a specialty of J. and J. S. Templeton from the 1860s until a fire destroyed the factory in 1886. In its 1871 publication on the International Exhibition held in London, the *Art Journal* included engravings of three curtains by Templeton, all very similar to this example, with elaborately patterned fields and borders. The accompanying text highlights the company's recent innovation in the manufacture of these complicated designs:

This class of curtains is the very successful result of an attempt, originated by these manufacturers some years ago, to weave the curtains as a *complete whole*, instead of attaching the parts, or border, by sewing—a marked and manifest improvement. These curtains afford admirable subjects for graceful and effective designs, and for judicious and harmonious blending of various colours. The artists thoroughly comprehend their work, displaying taste and knowledge, and rendering their production valuable Art-teachers.

The artist likely responsible for this curtain is Bruce James Talbert (1838–1881), an influential industrial designer of the British Aesthetic movement, who collaborated with Templeton over many years. A drawing by Talbert, *A Study of Decorations and Furniture*, published in *Architect* on July 24, 1869, in the collection of the New York Public Library, depicts a small seating area with bay windows separated from a larger adjoining salon by a substantial pair of portières with outsized flowers.

The composition of luxurious curtains and portières often imitated the tripartite division of walls into frieze, filling, and dado, each with its own coordinating design, that were a hallmark of fashionable homes in late nineteenth-century Britain. Here, the field and deep lower register suggest filling and dado, respectively. Inspired by Indian Mughal floral carpets, the curtain's red-and-white central field presents a leafy ogival network enclosing stylized sprigs and corner motifs with small flowering vases, bordered by wide arabesque bands. In the multicolored section below, two large flowering vases flank lobed ogives with bouquets above multiple horizontal bands with stylized floral and geometric motifs. Ornate passementerie rosettes decorate the curtain's top edge and the manufacturer's insignia—the initial *T* within a shield shape—is woven into the two lower corners.

This curtain is illustrated in *Arts & Crafts Textiles in Britain*, plate 6. Similar curtains attributed to Talbert and woven by Templeton are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2015.545), the Powerhouse Collection (85/1905), and the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.77&A-1976). Two other curtains attributed to Talbert for Templeton were sold by Lyon & Turnbull (October 31, 2018, lot 34) and Christie's (September 12, 2002, lot 60).

Provenance: Ex. collection Ann Getty (1941–2020)

141 x 70 in.

MM



## BROCATELLE LENGTH

Italian or Spanish, ca. 1575–1600

High Renaissance in every aspect, this brocatelle (a compound weave of silk and linen, satin faced with supplementary weft patterning bound in twill) is a testament to the technical skill and imagination of southern European weavers who, in the sixteenth century, crafted an entirely new artistic style using elements from the neoclassical past and the Islamic East. In this composition, rampant lions flank a central floriated urn containing pomegranates, tulips, and a single central artichoke, all framed by a large ogive, surrounded by birds and grapes, and surmounted by a crown.

Confronting felines were a prominent feature of Italian and Spanish luxury silks from at least the thirteenth century, inspired, in part, by those depicted in the Central and West Asian textiles that were traded in Europe for centuries. Writing in 1899 about a brocatelle similar to this one, with leopards instead of spotted lions, the British textile and lace historian Alan Summerly Cole noted in *Ornament in European Silks* that “the collared leopards almost take one back to the 14th century.” Likewise, the ogive is adapted from earlier fifteenth- and sixteenth-century textiles from Bursa.

A length of an identical brocatelle is in the collection of the Abegg-Stiftung, acquired through Cora Ginsburg, Inc. in 1994. This is the only other known example of this textile. However, the silk’s composition closely relates to a group of polychrome and bicolor brocatelles featuring rampant lions and maned leopards with ornamental vases or ogives, all variously attributed to Italy and Spain. These include lengths and fragments in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago (1907.452); Cleveland Museum of Art (1953.496); Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (1896-1-26, 1902-1-417, 1902-1-607, and 1902-1-781); Metropolitan Museum of Art (34.29); Museo del Tessuto di Prato (75.01.322, 75.01.410, and 81.01.29); Museo Nazionale del Bargello (3 F, 4 F, 11 F, and 81C F); and Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire (see Isabelle Errera, *Catalogue d’Étoffes Anciennes et Modernes*, no. 254). Rather than the heraldic pose seen on the present silk, the lions on those other extant silks are positioned differently, turning outward toward the selvages, or twisting their bodies. Lions similarly disposed to the ones seen here appear in a fragment in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (65/218).

Nearly three hundred years later, this precise pattern had its own renaissance, as a length of it must have served as the model for a red-and-yellow furnishing silk of identical design produced either in France or England in the mid-nineteenth century, when Renaissance revivalism reached its zenith. A fragment of that silk is in the Victoria & Albert Museum (T.407-1993).

32 ½ x 19 in.

MDA











## MOORISH REVIVAL JACQUARD-WOVEN SILK SAMPLES

French (Lyon), ca. 1860–80

Minute differences in the patterns and color combinations of these two silks illustrate how in the nineteenth century Lyon's famed silk manufacturers brought dynamism and singularity to even the most derivative of revivalist fashions. In this case, the compositions are clearly inspired by the Moorish style that captured the attention of European artists, designers, and artisans after the Welsh architect Owen Jones published his studies of the Alhambra palace complex.

Jones had visited the Alhambra on two occasions, in 1834 and in 1837, publishing his findings in *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra* (London: 1842–45) and expanding its illustrations in his widely disseminated *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856). In the latter, Jones stressed what he understood as the perfection of the Alhambra's ornamental proportions, spatial arrangement, and coloration.

The silks' designer undoubtedly drew on Jones's rendering of the Alhambra's stucco work in plates XL and XLI, adapting to fabric the colorful three dimensionality that Jones believed the palace's artisans had excelled at: "On moulded surfaces they placed red, the strongest colour of the three, in the depths, where it might be softened by shadow, never on the surface; blue in the shade, and gold on all surfaces exposed to light." Here, gleaming yellow (one pale and cool, one rich and warm) commands a weft-faced twill pattern of interlocking and overlapping architectural elements and volutes. Red creates depth against the yellow, and the blue and white warp-faced satin contrasts their combined heat. A central golden node from which all scrolls and florals appear to emanate and terminate provides the main compositional artery—what Jones called the "parent stem" underlying all Moorish stucco work.

Where these patterns diverge from the Alhambresque path is in their secondary coloring and references to the glories of early modern European silk production. Green and purple are seen only in the Alhambra's tilework, not stucco, but this pattern mingles all of these hues in novel, strikingly vivid aniline shades. The flower heads with open green and purple petals are a florid amalgam of the artichoke and pomegranate motifs of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Turkish and Italian silks, while the guilloche bands and rosettes look to a more recent, local history: the neoclassicism of the First Empire, when Napoleon revived and restored Lyon's formerly flourishing silk industry.

The thoughtfully articulated revivalism and technically advanced weaving are sure indicators that these were produced at one of Lyon's powerhouse silk manufactures in the 1860s or 1870s, when the mania for Moorish-style ornament peaked. The numeric stamps specifying the *patron* numbers have not yet been attached to a particular firm; however, Mathevon et Bouvard, Lemire, and Lamy et Giraud were known for their *mauresques*. Related silks attributed to these firms are published in Sue Kerry, *Neo-Classicism to Pop: Pt. 1. Late 18th & 19th Century Textiles* (2007), pp. 80–85. Other examples are in the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and Mobilier National (GMMP 1657).

Each: 39 ½ x 21 in.

MDA













1 y M 3  
2 y M 3  
5 J H O 5  
3 e 1



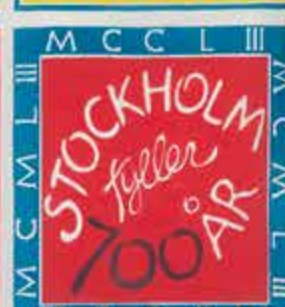
1 y M 3  
2 y M 3  
5 J H O 5  
3 e 1



1 y M 3  
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5 J H O 5  
3 e 1



1 y M 3  
2 y M 3  
5 J H O 5  
3 e 1





## UNCUT PRINTED COTTON PANEL OF HANDKERCHIEFS

Josef Frank for Svenkst Tenn  
Swedish, 1953

The textile designs of Josef Frank (1885–1967) are frequently described in terms of their abilities to defy time and place; their “timelessness” has allowed them to thrive well beyond their debut. This example of Frank’s work, however, presents the opposite quality of being fixed at a historic moment for Sweden, his adopted home. It also is a rare artifact of economical manufacturing, and an even rarer example of Frank’s imagination applied to accessories.

Rather than a comprehensive, overall approach, the panel consists of six individual patterns for commemorative handkerchiefs. Svenkst Tenn, Stockholm’s mecca of modern design, commissioned Frank to create these in honor of the city’s 700th anniversary. From May through September 1953, Sweden’s capital transformed its fashionable downtown park, the Kungsträdgården, into an amusement ground for performances and events; the festivities crescendoed in June with a world music festival attended by tourists from across the globe. Easily portable, small luxury souvenirs, such as fine cotton handkerchiefs, would have appealed to a wide variety of Svenkst Tenn customers in that jubilee year.

In his organized fashion, Frank laid out three rows of repeating squares, with two designs alternating per row. The first row has white-ground squares scattered with the letters “Stockholm” coiled in an inward spiral, bracketed by significant dates; alternating with this is a colorful square bearing the original Seal of Stockholm, known from an imprint dated 1296. In the row below is another square utilizing the unprinted white ground as a backdrop for Sweden’s coat of arms, adorned with Saint Erik, surrounded by ribbons, confetti dots, and a prismatic border. It alternates with a cheerful, yellow Stockholm-themed square. Designs in the last row are rendered exclusively in red and blue. One proclaims “Stockholm fyller 700 år” (Stockholm turns 700 years) in freehand script, contrasting formally with the border; the other square—a loose tangle of emblazoned red strands—bears the strongest resemblance to other patterns in Frank’s oeuvre, in particular his *liane* (climbing vine) style.

Frank usually provided precise color instructions for the printer’s reference. For this panel, he would have indicated the three primary colors by marking red, blue, and yellow dots on a card, or paper, along with the secondary *övertryck*, or overprinting. Overprinting is an economic method to both reduce the number of screens needed for a design and the number of required inks. Frank’s emphasis on clarity in the primary colors is evident, yielding a limited but bright array.

88 x 48 ½ in.

LW



## GLAZED PRINTED COTTON

Helen Ashbee Cristofanetti for Socota SpA  
Italian, 1956

If the name Elena Cristofanetti is far down the list of those synonymous with Italian design, it is for good reason: it isn't really her name. Yet, "Elena Cristofanetti" is definitely associated with the dynamic, artist-designed textiles movement in Italy in the 1950s, a decade that exploded with dynamism in mid-century patterns. The confusion around Elena (or H el ene, as she was also sometimes called) is a product of the artist's maiden name being obscured by an Italian surname acquired through marriage, with her first name altered to fit. She began her life as Helen Christabel Ashbee (1915–1996).

The third of four daughters born to Charles Robert Ashbee, the English architect-designer who was central to advancing the Arts and Crafts movement, Helen spent her early life in England and Jerusalem. Artistically inclined and skilled at needlework, Helen studied at the Royal College of Music in London. Her marriage, in 1938, to Thornton Page, a professor of astronomy at the University of Chicago, took her away from her viola studies in Salzburg on the cusp of the Anschluss. When they divorced in 1945, Helen turned to designing textiles. It was in New York City that she married the Italian abstract painter Francesco Cristofanetti. After several years in New York City, the couple moved to Paris in 1947. Their marriage was short-lived, however, due to her husband's untimely death in 1950, after which Helen switched to three-dimensional forms, finding her true m etiers in sculpture and jewelry.

Ashbee's painting style is displayed in four related compositions—each approximately twenty-nine-inches tall, and twenty-six-inches wide—that comprise the abstracted figural imagery repeating on this crisp, glazed cotton fabric. Each rectangle is bounded with washes of taupe and dabs of muted colors keyed to the larger patches of color within the central motifs. Pumpkin, gold, mossy green, dusky blush, and bright cherry red predominate; one composition, tinged with plum and brick, bears her signature. The buff-color ground is untouched in the center of each gestural grouping of dark charcoal forms, swaying gently with movement and shoring the design's internal structure. Though this fabric was produced by the Italian firm Socota SpA, Milan and Como, Ashbee's study for a fabric proposed to the Manifattura Jsa is strikingly similar; titled *Incontro* (Encounter), it depicts mingling figures surrounded by mottled tones. In both paintings and sculptures, Ashbee showed a fondness for attenuated proportions, underscoring the influence of Alberto Giacometti, a neighbor to her studio in Paris.

Under her married name, Ashbee won second prize for her work in a competition organized by Socota for the X Triennale di Milano in 1954. Three years later, this design was illustrated in *Forme Nuove in Italia* and awarded a prize at the XI Triennale di Milano. In 1969, Ashbee left Paris for Puglia, Italy, forming the Bufolaria di Alessano, an egalitarian, creative, self-supporting community—very much inspired by her father's defunct Guild of Handicraft. Ashbee's work was exhibited in her lifetime in Paris, Venice, Rome, Milan, and Hamburg.

91 x 47 ¼ in.

LW











## PRINTED SILK CHIFFON AFTERNOON DRESS

Jean Patou

French, ca. 1926–27

This airy printed silk chiffon *robe d'après-midi* (afternoon dress) epitomizes the mid-1920s design sensibility of Jean Patou (1887–1936), the successful couturier and elegant man about town. Following contemporary fashion trends, the dress presents a V-neckline with self-fabric ties; a loose, straight-cut bodice and slightly dropped waist; long sleeves embellished with a frill at the fitted wrist; and a rippling, flounced skirt. These features, as well as its floral-patterned chiffon, are all characteristic of late day dresses shown in the pages of leading French fashion magazines in 1926 and 1927. In April 1926, *Femina* reported that printed silk chiffon was a favorite choice for “our lightweight dresses” and in July, the editor declared, “silk chiffon triumphs at the moment; nothing is more summery.” In March of the following year, the magazine informed readers that “the new collections confirm the success of printed materials and the vogue for extremely lightweight fabrics,” including chiffon. In April, an article on afternoon dresses that highlighted the continued preference for printed silk chiffon and crêpe illustrated two models by Patou with draped skirt fullness similar to the present dress.

In his lengthy quote that appeared in the February 1926 issue of *Femina* in its article on the spring collections, Patou emphasized his partiality for *flou* (literally, “blurry”) fabrics including silk chiffon and the elegant line created by godets, the labor-intensive technique used to create the uneven, undulating skirt that provides the main visual interest of this dress. He noted that while he often employed pleats for his popular sports and promenade ensembles, this type of construction was easy to copy—a constant cause of concern for Parisian couturiers. Here, the numerous godets attest to the highly refined sewing skills of the seamstress who carefully cut into the delicate chiffon and inserted the long triangular-shaped pieces into the two overlapping panels, which wrap around the lower body from opposite sides. According to Patou, “dresses with godets are infinitely more difficult to make,” requiring “a much more in-depth knowledge ... than for pleats.” Although the manufacturer of this sheer silk with its scattered stylized flowers, buds, and leaves on curving stems in pale aubergine and white has not been identified, Patou often patronized the high-end silk weaving firm Bianchini Fériet, based in Lyon. In March 1927, *Femina* included a sketch of a Patou day dress made from silk crêpe specially commissioned from Bianchini Fériet by the designer.

In addition to the dress’s silhouette, the label, stitched to the right proper side seam, indicates a date between 1925 and 1929. The locations of three of Patou’s branches at fashionable seaside resorts—Cannes, Biarritz, and Monte Carlo (perhaps the wearer purchased her fluttering dress at one of these shops)—appear above his signature and the address of the Paris couture house at 7, rue St. Florentin. The Biarritz and Cannes branches opened in late summer 1925 as probably did the Monte Carlo boutique. The latter, however, was a short-lived venture, closing in 1929.

MM







## CIRÉ SILK EVENING ENSEMBLE

Callot Soeurs

French (Paris), 1935

Forty years of sartorial ingenuity are distilled down to their purest and most seductive form in this glossy black satin ensemble by Callot Soeurs, emblematic of the ultimate French expression of Hollywood glamour and sex appeal. It also portends the demise of one of Paris's leading couture houses.

Since opening in 1895, Callot Soeurs was renowned for draping directly on the body and their choices of materials. Eldest sister, Marie, later Madame Gerber and head of the *maison* from 1920, moved away from lacy romanticism toward straightforward constructions with precision and opulent fabrics. Following her death in 1927, her son Pierre headed the business, embracing his mother's approach.

Popular since the 1920s, ciré or *laqué* satins—so called for their waxy finish—were a mainstay through the 1930s. In Winter 1932, Callot made “considerable use of cire on shiny or matt surface satins,” as *Women's Wear Daily* wrote on February 9, 1933, and featured mannequins at the 1933 Bal Laqué, the Epiphany celebration at the Paris society restaurant Ciro's. Attendees adhering to the “lacquered” theme received a cake slice, and those who found *fèves* (trinkets or prizes) hidden within won vouchers for a garment from one of the participating *maisons*, including Callot.

Wrapped from neck to toe in an oil spill of inky ciré silk, the wearer of this dress must have made a head-turning entrance. A long length cut on the bias winds around the body, creating a serpentine column. With tapered, long sleeves and a wrapping self-fabric belt terminating into the train, it is probably a modified version of model 63, *Hématite Royale*, registered on April 4, 1935, as an “evening dress of black ciré satin, Prystal [Bakelite] motif at the shoulder.” A narrow bias panel at the back right hip flows freely into the skirt as a secondary train that could be draped over the shoulder, as with a similar Callot dress photographed in *Femina* in April 1935. Hidden closures at the back require a second pair of hands to get the wearer in and out. Like the registered model, this dress likely once had a shoulder ornament, though it retains its accompanying satin-lined colobus fur cape (not pictured). Monkey was arguably the most fashionable fur of the interwar period, when neither conservation awareness nor the Western extraction of Africa's natural resources registered with the public. No stranger to utilizing furs, Callot understood the contemporary appeal of colobus and its elite associations.

The ensemble's silver-screen drama belies the underlying tensions at this moment in the house's history, however, as Callot Soeurs was soon to become another casualty of the economic uncertainty of the 1930s. Five years after taking over the business, Pierre Gerber planned a liquidation and unrealized merger with Louiseboulanger in 1933. Ultimately, in 1937, he sold the name to Marie-Louise Calvet. As such, this dress and cape represent something of a swan song for the veteran *maison*.

MDA















## WOOL JERSEY AFTERNOON DRESS

Madame Grès

French (Paris), ca. 1945–46

Over her decades-long career from the 1930s to the 1980s, Madame Grès, née Germaine Émilie Krebs (1903–1993), was renowned for her finely pleated, full-length matte—often white—silk jersey evening dresses inspired by classical Greek statuary. Dissuaded by her parents as a young woman from becoming a sculptor, this art form, nonetheless, remained a significant influence on her work as a dressmaker. Draping fabric on the body was Grès's preferred construction technique that she continually explored and refined. In Spring 1947, *La Femme Chic* dubbed Grès “the sculptor of enchantment,” declaring that “fabric can refuse nothing to her hard, imperious fingers,” and also acknowledging that although her pleated dresses suggested flowing, unstructured garments, “here everything is premeditated.”

For her pleated daywear, Grès employed wool jersey, frequently patronizing Rodier, a prominent French textile firm. This bottle-green afternoon dress from about 1945 to 1946 is distinctively Grès in its modeling of supple material and its reflection of the fashionable silhouette at the end of the war. In both years, *La Femme Chic* and *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode de Paris* illustrated day dresses by leading Parisian designers with pleated bodices, narrow waists, and just-below-knee-length skirts that emphasized the hips with pleating, drapery, and flounces. Here, on either side of the V-neckline, tight, shallow pleats extend from the shoulder seams to the bust from which they radiate outward, molding the front of the upper body, with the fabric lightly pleated at the sides. The collar continues over the shoulders, falling into two points at the nape. According to *Women's Wear Daily* in August 1946, Grès's softly draped raglan sleeves, close-fitting below the elbow, produced a “charming, modernized 1830 ‘little woman’ look.” The skirt is constructed from two long pieces of the fine wool knit—totaling approximately 290 inches at the hem—turned sideways and seamed at the center front and back. Grès manipulated the fullness across the entire front with more shallow pleats from waist to hem and concentrated them, accordion-like, at the center back from the top of the derriere. In November 1945 and again in Spring 1946, *La Femme Chic* illustrated a sketch of a similarly pleated black wool jersey afternoon dress by Grès, noting, in the first issue, that “the emphasis is at the front of the dress.” This garment's color may be a clue to its date. In December 1945, *La Femme Chic* reported that, following wartime restrictions on textile production, fashionable colors were back in vogue. The editor announced that green and red were the new stylish hues, adding that the former—the color of hope in France—was used by well-known couturiers including Grès, who favored both “dark green” and “Veronese green.”

A black wool day dress by Grès with an asymmetrical neckline, a wide, shaped pleated band over the bust, and pleating at the lower front skirt, dated about 1945, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1981.264.4a,b), and a brown wool jersey day dress with pleating over the bust and through the midriff and hips, dated about 1946, was sold by Kerry Taylor Auctions (December 8, 2020, lot 90).

MM











SCHISSEK PRINTS

VAT DYE HAND PRINT

SCHISSEK PRINTS







CHINA SHOP by GEORGE NELSON

CHINA SHOP by GEORGE NELSON









## ***PAVEMENT, CHIPS, AND CHINA SHOP PRINTED COTTONS***

Irving Harper for George Nelson/Mil-Art Company, Inc.  
American, 1949

In its July 1949 Merchandise Cues section, *Interiors* lauded “Schiffer’s Superlative Stimulus,” referring to the Schiffer Prints Division of Mil-Art Company, Inc. and its high-profile fabric collection. This was one of the first “name collections” to arrive on the postwar entrepreneurial scene, and the magazine noted: “The only ordinary things about the “Stimulus” collection of printed upholstery and drapery fabrics are the prices.” Milton and Lathrop Schiffer’s concept was risky but prestigious: give artistic talents, none of whom were professional fabric designers, carte blanche in creating a collection of unusual caliber. The article noted the trade’s excitement at the June preview, which “had plenty to ‘oh’ and ‘ah’ about” given the participants: Salvador Dalí, Edward J. Wormley, Ray Eames, Abel Sorenson, Bernard Rudofsky, and George Nelson.

In the article’s lower corner is a detail of *China Shop*, captioned as Nelson’s contribution. Nelson was a famed proponent of American modernism, with an eponymous firm at which many now-recognized talents worked behind the scenes. These three textile patterns, clearly marked as Nelson for Schiffer Prints, were, in fact, designed by Irving Harper (1916–2015). A leading industrial designer of the age, Harper trained as an architect at Brooklyn College and Cooper Union, New York; in 1947, he joined George Nelson Associates, Inc. and remained there for seventeen years. During that time, Harper originated some of the century’s most iconic designs for Herman Miller, one of Nelson’s clients (and for which Nelson was design director): the infamous *Marshmallow* sofa and the swooping Herman Miller logo were both Harper’s work. Though he was given credit for advertisement campaigns, Harper worked in relative anonymity—company policy was to credit the firm, not the individual, in consumer-facing media.

The *New York Times* described Harper’s designs for Nelson as having the “neat, uncluttered look” of the firm’s work for interiors. Each pattern is characterized by orderliness, but where *Pavement* feels regimented and spiked with linear exactitude, *Chips* and *China Shop* are more organic. Wedges of varied shape and size, with dark shadows suggesting whittled edges, are nestled closely in *Chips*; *China Shop* repeats stylized ceramic vases, carafes, and bowls offset occasionally with finely dotted lines. According to *Arts & Architecture*, another publication impressed with Mil-Art’s idea, this pattern came in several colorways, including the “brown, copper, and turquoise on gray” and pink, blue, and gray version on white seen here. Simple formulas—embodied by these three designs—reflect Harper’s admiration for basics and style parameters: “Look at Mozart, who had this strict classical framework ... you see that within that formula, he got results he might never have gotten if he had all the options in the world.”

Proof that Harper’s so-called formulaic approach had staying power: in 2001, Harper collaborated with Maharam to reintroduce *Pavement* and *China Shop* as part of the company’s “Textiles of the 20th Century” line.

*China Shop*: (left) 41 x 50 in.; (right) 47 x 50 in.

*Pavement*: 52 x 50 in.

*Chips*: 108 x 52 in.

LW



## EVENING COAT

Elsa Schiaparelli; buttons made by François Hugo  
French (Paris), ca. 1941

Crafted at a precarious time in Europe, this evening coat by Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973) presents elements both expected and unusual in this couturiere’s oeuvre. Known best for melding fine art and fashion into alchemical oddities, Schiaparelli also excelled in tasteful simplicity and restraint. On occasion, she accomplished both in a single garment.

Schiaparelli frequently used textured materials and embroidery to convey her ideas, but this silk satin garment’s élan comes from its subtlety in cut and color. The silhouette elicits a frisson between strict and romantic, and downplays the ingenuity in construction: in back, the streamlined bodice and skirt are cut from two seamed panels of fabric, each with a notched indentation accentuating the waistline. In front, bodice and skirt are cleverly pieced from two panels per side. Floor-length skirt panels, pleated into the waistline, are attached to darted panels covering the torso. Cut in a single, lengthy piece, these skirt panels also form the plackets and side panels. Rounded lapels were sewn with slight torsions, resulting in soft, semi-folds, echoing the volume in the puffed, long sleeves shaped with darts. Pale shades like this *eau de nil* (a watery, grayed blue-green) were not at peak stylishness in the early war years, and silks such as this were scarce materials for Parisian couturiers. The use of this fabric suggests Schiaparelli’s atelier, which remained partially active during World War II (though the designer spent much of that time in the United States), and relied on materials leftover from previous seasons or otherwise in stock. In pairing this historicizing color with eye-catching, twisted-serpent buttons, Schiaparelli might have been indulging one of her Orientalist moods—or referencing the Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli found on her family tree.

Novelty buttons—a defining feature of Schiaparelli’s tailored work—were sufficiently eccentric enough to elicit buzz in fashion reporting. Made from a bevy of unusual materials (mirrored glass, glazed ceramic, celluloid, bells, and coins, to name a sampling), Schiaparelli’s buttons often reflected collection themes or referenced personal quirks; with the support of noteworthy artisans and artistic collaborators, Schiaparelli imagined pianos, mermaids, lips, and other surreally inflected forms as functional fasteners or ornamental accents. These cast-metal buttons in the shape of twisted serpents, speckled with pools of blue enamel and studded with ruby strass, were made by François Hugo (1899–1981). Great-grandson of the French author, Hugo was sought after for sculptural, novelty couture buttons. He became known as the go-to goldsmith for Europe’s leading artists: Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, and others. His collaborations with Schiaparelli were most audacious.

An identical coat made from satin in the couturiere’s signature shocking-pink hue with turquoise nugget buttons, bearing a “Schiaparelli Paris” label and *patron* (model number) label stamped “50928,” was sold at Kerry Taylor Auctions (December 4, 2008, lot 73).

LW









## GALASSIA PRINTED COTTON-RAYON SATIN

Lucio Fontana for the Manifattura Jsa  
Italian (printed in Busto Arsizio), 1955

When Luigi Grampa, textile impresario and founder of the high-end manufacturer Jsa, tapped artist Lucio Fontana to create patterns for him in 1954, the collaboration could not have come at a more significant moment in Italian design history. In the post-World War II period, Italy endeavored to resecure its place as a leader in the arts and to earn new renown in the fields of craft and design. Italian institutions—aided by the U.S. government’s postwar economic efforts—organized international exhibitions of the latest products, including *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (1950–51) and opened retail spaces like the House of Italian Handicraft in New York City.

Since the Middle Ages, textiles had brought great wealth to Italy and thus were integral to the country’s cultural rebirth. Design competitions were held from 1951 to bolster Italy’s still struggling industry and to breathe new life into this category of patrimony. Publicized in the pages of *Domus* magazine, the textile contests held at the IX, X, and XI Triennali in 1951, 1954, and 1957, respectively, drew global interest and over four thousand entrants at one time. Also, during the mid-1950s, *Domus* editor Gio Ponti introduced a monthly report highlighting the latest fabrics. Within the next few years, the magazine’s editorial coverage of Italian fabrics peaked, effectively functioning as free advertising for firms.

The present textile by Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), *Galassia* (Galaxy), was chosen as *Domus*’s cover in June 1957. As its name conveys, *Galassia* interprets the cosmos’s infinite constellations and remote planets, using a striking, minimal palette of ochre yellow, charcoal gray, and white against a mottled, muted beryl-green sky. Designed in 1955—the same year the United States launched its first satellite—the textile evokes the concurrent Space Race of the Cold War. At the same time, *Galassia* is intensely self-referential; Fontana’s two-dimensional view of the universe corresponds with his own techniques of puncturing and slashing canvases.

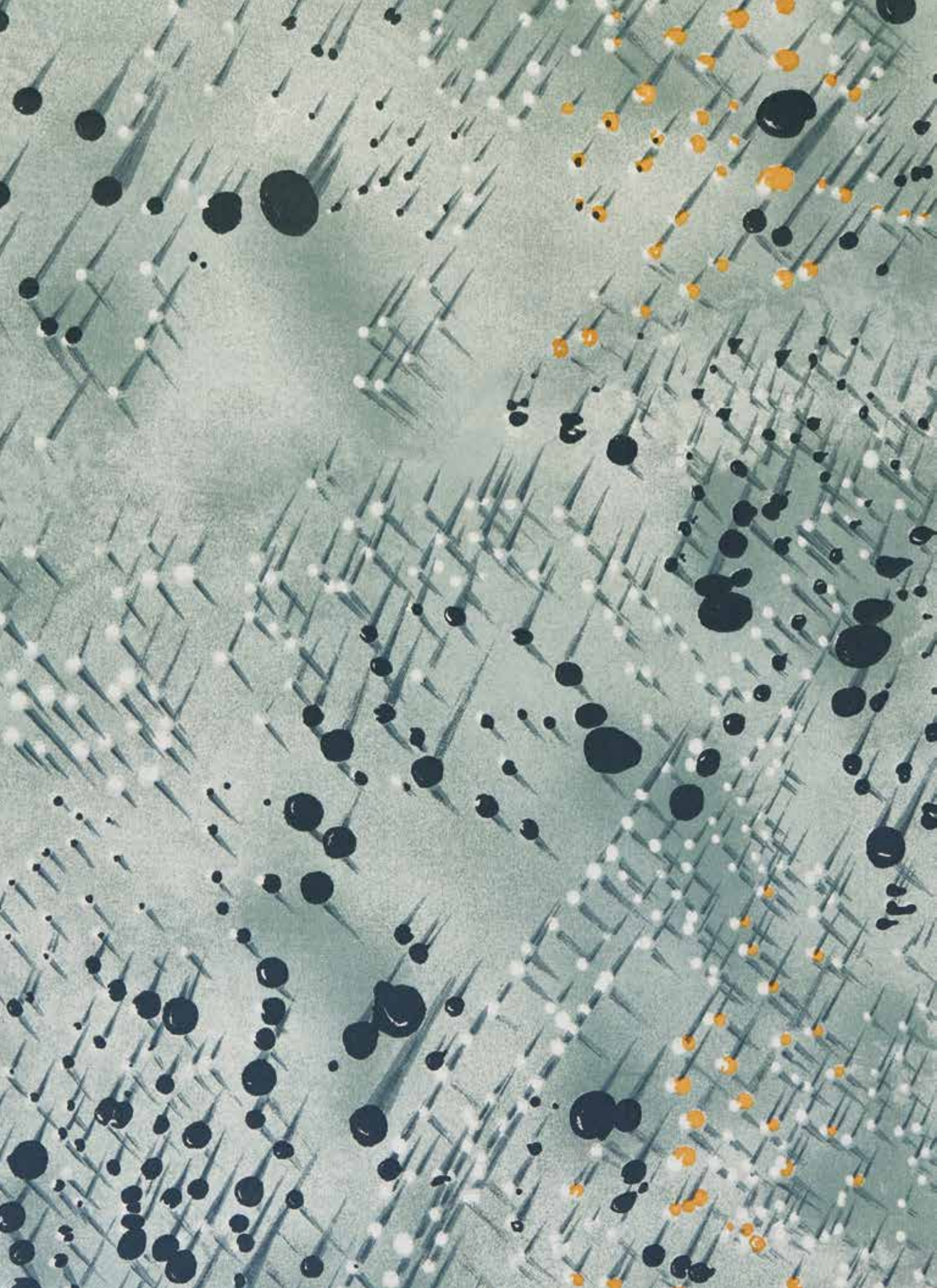
In addition to showing his first fabric for Jsa, *Concetto Spaziale* (Spatial Concept), at the X Triennale, Fontana served as a juror at the textile competition. His involvement alongside trained textile and industrial designers such as Fede Cheti and Marco Zanuso opened another door for Italian manufacturers: that of the artist-designer, inspired by the painters, sculptors, and architects who lent their well-known aesthetics and names to fabric design in the United States, Scandinavia, and Britain.

Having already garnered widespread recognition for his spatial “concepts” and “environments,” which would only continue to gain momentum in the last decade of his life, Fontana was an obvious choice enabling Jsa to bridge art and design on the international stage. Unusually, however, Fontana remained one of the few fine artists on Grampa’s roster of textile designers in the company’s nearly thirty-year history.

A length in this colorway is in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (2023-13-1). A printed-velvet version is in the Branchini-Grampa collection in Busto Arsizio.

92 ½ x 53 ⅛ in.

MDA





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