

Exhibitions

Artist Textiles - Picasso to Warhol Fashion and Textile Museum London 31 January – 17 May

This exhibition celebrated innovations and developments in textile design through the input of artists from the Modernist era through the 20th Century on both sides of the Atlantic.

It was quite a compact exhibition held over two levels but packed in a huge amount of work and corroborating information about the developments that took place in that time. Starting after the era of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, the attitude towards fabric design and production became much more geared towards mass production and availability at affordable prices and, by using well-established artists, this created the appeal to the consumer that would justify printing on a vast scale. These first steps came at a time when Britain was experiencing deprivation and rationing following the Second World War and started to promote the textile trade to aid economic recovery. Starting with British and then commissioning French artists, British manufacturers such as Ascher Ltd paved the way for the fusion of art and textiles that then developed further. On display were scarves by artists such as Henri Matisse (below left), Henry Moore (below middle) and Sonia Delaunay, with Salvador Dali (below right) and Marcel Vertes leading the way over the Atlantic.



The exhibition traced textiles through the 1950s and '60s, where Pablo Picasso produced a variety of textile designs (right). Picasso had started his work in this way by designing a scarf for the Director of the ICA in London, which he agreed could be sold to raise money for the Institute. From there, his designs were translated into clothes and interior design, 'except upholstery, by the maestro's wishes, Picasso's may be lent against, not sat on' (Look magazine, December 1963). His designs were even translated into a collection of après-skiwear for American skiwear manufacturer White Stag.

Moving into the 1960s, the main pioneer was Andy Warhol with his 'Pop' textiles. From the relative austerity of the post-war years, this collection of fabrics exploded into colour and bold motifs. Featuring several of the Warhol designs, this part of the exhibition really came to life.





Left to right: Buttons, Melons, Happy Butterfly Day, designs by Andy Warhol

As you can see, above it was really interesting to see Warhol's textile designs in close up. This section also featured illustrations by Saul Steinberg translated into fabric in the USA and Zandra Rhodes in the UK. A lot of printed textiles, some made into clothing, were on display. This was the most colourful and fun part of the exhibition.



Left to right: Saul Steinberg, Paddington Station; Zandra Rhodes and Sylvia Ayton; Zandra Rhodes, Mr Man and All Over Neon No 2.

It was a very enjoyable exhibition, with a huge amount of information about the history of textile design and production during the last century. The fabrics were brought to life by the outfits on mannequins, amongst panels of printed fabric, and there were magazines and articles from the 1950s and '60s on display, so you could see everything within the context of its time.

For the textile enthusiast, there was ample inspiration in the line, colour and designs on show, particularly as you could take photographs.

'Imagine...Lace' at Waddesdon **26 March – 26 October 2014**

A host of exhibitions can be viewed at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, throughout 2014. The summer programme has kicked off with several fascinating must-sees.

'Imagine...Lace' has been developed with selected artists and Lace 21, a group of contemporary lace-makers from The Lace Society, Ring of Tatters and The Lace Guild. Taking the art of lace-making into the 21st century, the group works on adapting traditional techniques and giving them contemporary outlets. The work on show at Waddesdon came from the artists visiting the house and finding inspiration for their work from a variety of sources. There is an extensive collection of lace from the late 17th and 18th centuries collected by Baroness Edmond de Rothschild, but it was not from these pieces that the majority of the choices were made. Instead, motifs from wall panels, patterns from screens and porcelain were some of the things that provided a starting point for this new work. You can see this in the pic (right) 'Tatted Rose', based on Sèvres porcelain design; © Photo and design: Jennifer Williams



What is interesting about this exhibition is that the pieces of new work are showcased alongside the things that inspired them. You have 'All of a Flutter' by Diana Pickford in the conservatory, inspired by the leaf-covered columns at the entrance to the house, leaves on the ornamental German organ clock and the aviary in the grounds. Made in bobbin lace, it celebrates the successful breeding and release of the Rothschild Mynah birds into the wild, and you can see the lace birds escaping their gilded cage (right).

Also there are pieces such as 'Light Up Leaves' by Angela Brown and Judy Boothby, who have created a beautiful helix of white and metallic leaves mounted inside a clear tube, which is lit from within by LED lights. The work was inspired by the tapestry borders and gilt-bronze tapestry mounts and the piece is displayed alongside these. The beautiful black and gold stole 'Gilded Cage' by Gail Baxter, inspired by the doors of a Meissen bird cage and worked to resemble the plumage of the beautiful birds kept in the aviary. The title reflects both thoughts on those birds and muses on the feelings of the ladies who have lived at Waddesdon through the generations. Worked in wire and wood, the bowl 'Fleur' by Ann Allison, in silver-plated wire was inspired by an 18th century lace motif, and 'Light and Shade', a table lamp made in sycamore and brass by Jennie Starbuck, which was inspired by an enamelled metal lamp, taking its design from a 19th century Brussels' needle lace parasol.



The placing of these new pieces in situ in the house, following the natural progression of a tour around the rooms, is a joy to experience. When you think you have seen it all, you chance upon a whole host of accessories, wall panels and decorated dresses.

What struck me about the work on show is that it reacts against the thought that lace-making is old-fashioned. On show amongst the splendour of Waddesdon Manor, you would be forgiven for thinking that traditional pieces would sit most comfortably, but everything contained within breathes new life into its surroundings. Shawls, bowls, lightshades, fans and gloves were all on display, and a lot of them take on the appearance of modern textile art. This exhibition is definitely worth seeing, particularly as there are demonstrations of lace-making and a variety of lace-making and tatting workshops on offer throughout the year.

Sewing for Pleasure, Fashion, Embroidery & Stitch Show and Hobbycrafts, NEC Birmingham, 20-23 March

A huge show spanning several of the large halls at the NEC, it was a wonder I managed to see all I did! This was a fabulous display with all the variety you can find in the name of the show, including a really good selection of textile art exhibitions.

Tangent Textiles is a group of artists, some of whom come from the Sutton Coldfield Creative Stitchers, who meet to exchange ideas and keep up to date with the textile world.



There were some beautiful pieces here (above right, Una Smith's 'Linear Evolution'; right Margaret Fairhead's 'Spiralling Creations', Caroline Lindsay's 'Tree of Life' (far right detail) and Pauline Barnes' 'Urban Rainbow' (bottom)).



Gillian Travis' stand showed a wonderfully colourful array of her quilts, promoting her books (see Book Reviews) from her trips around the world. I picked up one of her kits, which you can see in Product Reviews.



Another colourful stand was that of Hilary Beattie and Jenny Rolfe, who joined forces to showcase some of their quilts included in their new book 'The Shape of Nature' (see Book Reviews). Always providing a lively atmosphere, the quilts and new pieces of work were bright and beautifully made. Jenny and Hilary had created a bird kit for sale (right) which is featured in the Products section.

Below: Three Leaves, Jenny Rolfe
Right: The Shape of Nature 2, Hilary Beattie



Bobby Britnell was also exhibiting shoes for her challenge 'Hands Up for Uganda', which was featured in News in the September 2013 issue.

There were some fantastic shoes on display, see the News Section for more.



The exhibition by Nolitex was also worth a look. Working under a theme of what nature means to them, whether taken from the view of someone looking outside from the inside, exploring the nature of time passing or bringing the outside in, there were some striking pieces. I particularly liked Liz Welch's work, of hands and faces (below) and Janet Wain's figures were beautiful.



From left: Liz Welch, 'Talking But Not Talking', middle and right, Janet Wain's 'Sunshine and Shadows'



The highlight of this exhibition was the installation of swathes of folded and stitched silk: 'Memory Strands'. Conceived by Elizabeth Saunders, it developed with her textile group and grew into a community effort with students from Peter Symonds' Sixth Form College helping the concept to grow into reality.



Finally, a beautiful collection of pieces were shown as Gathered Memories. Created by Elizabeth Saunders and her textile group, the theme of the collection was the concept of memory – whether fading, lost or the personal nature affecting the artists' work. The handmade books by Jenyl Church were beautiful and delicate (below left), the rusting techniques of Ann Louise Smith's wall hangings explored architectural decay (below centre) and 'Open Book' by Elizabeth Saunders used pages from an old book where each piece was folded in a unique way. Piecing the pages back together was aimed at creating a new time span and it made a statement on 'Rekindling Old into New' (below right).

