

TECHNO TEXTILES / Sarah E. Braddock and Marie O'Mahony.--New York, N. Y. :

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One undeniable, and to some, unsettling, truth about any facet of present day art is its unwavering reflection of contemporary life. When the arts are then merged with innovative technologies created within state-of-the-art industries, we are presented with a dynamic new arena, one that reflects how we surround and define ourselves with what we have created. *Techno Textiles*, subtitled *Revolutionary Fabrics for Fashion and Design*, boldly and quite beautifully lays out this merger of art and technology, in this case textile technology, and the way new discoveries have been incorporated into not just fashion, but also into design, architecture, and art. *Techno Textiles* is an artfully presented, glistening mirror of contemporary art and culture via the revolutionary fabrics that have recently been created around the world.

Authors Sarah E. Braddock and Marie O'Mahony have worked within this topic for some time: in 1994 they co-curated the Crafts Council touring exhibition *2010: Textiles and New Technology*, with an accompanying catalogue. Braddock is a Lecturer in Textiles at Goldsmith's College, University of London, while O'Mahony is a textile and technology consultant for companies in Europe and the United States. Their combined knowledge of this burgeoning field is comprehensive and they move easily within the text of the book between the science, aesthetics, utilization, and visionary qualities of new fabrics.

Techno Textiles is divided into three sections: Innovations, Transformations, Reference. In *Innovations*, the authors discuss the future of fibres and fabrics, electronic textiles, engineered textiles, and textile finishes. At the outset we learn about the revolutionary development and uses of microfibres; regenerated, or natural chemical textiles; and new flexible fabrics, such as metallics, foams and rubbers, and glass and fibre options. The informative text is heavily illustrated with images appearing on almost every page. References to electronic textiles comprise information on computer aided designs, virtual reality, and living in space with examples of old and new spacesuits. Of equal interest is the presentation on the cyborg that explains how the miniaturization of technology has impacted garment and product designers. Engineered textiles are exactly that: geotextiles, non-woven materials, hybrid materials, glass, even ceramics. The discussion of textile finishes illustrates how thermoplastics, printing, laminates, and chemical treatments can alter the original state of a material into something altogether different and unique.

'Transformations' then translates these innovations within the disciplines of fashion, design, architecture, and art. It is fascinating to picture some of these synthetic materials as actual clothing. Most seem to be the antithesis of our flesh - cold, metallic, electronic, inflexible. But displayed in *Techno Textiles*, they appear whimsical, futuristic, and more beautifully complex than we could ever have imagined when polyester first came on the scene. An example will amuse slide librarians: a 1996 Paco Rabanne dress fashioned from slide mounts into a three-dimensional outfit complete with earrings!

One triumph of *Techno Textiles* is the way the authors close the gap between materials and people, between clothing as functionality and clothing as art, or architecture, or science. Equally fascinating are the myriad of other transformations presented. The design examples range from Herman Miller chairs to cycle helmets. Architectural fabrics have specific needs that relate to type of structure, mobility requirements, and energy uses. A crossover between the architecture and art section appears with a photograph of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin*, in its very elegant, wrapped glory. Art is also represented in murals, sculpture, and, in the book's last illustration, a woman's garment, bringing to full circle the human element within constructed materials.

Techno Textiles is chock full with 269 exciting illustrations. The 142 color images are clearly the most tantalizing. Many pages seduce with extravagant shapes and colors, especially when geosynthetic fabrics are enlarged to resemble beautiful lattice work and complex capillary systems. Where the illustrations are black-and-white, I wish they were in color, and when they are in color, I wish I could actually feel the surface of the fabric or object.

Few books cover the range and depth presented in *Techno Textiles*, though the authors do cite a slightly older title, *New Textiles: Trends and Traditions* (Chloë Colchester, N. Y.: Rizzoli, 1991) that covers similar topics. Those interested in further research can consult the book's closing Reference section. It offers an excellent bibliography, that covers not only books, periodicals, and exhibition catalogues, but conferences, academic papers, and select Web sites. Also included in the closing section are technical terms, biographies and histories, and a directory of addresses. *Techno Textiles* is highly recommended for the wide scope of art, architecture, and design collections.

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