
Artists’ Textiles: Artist Designed Textiles 1940-1976 is a beautifully produced paperback book devoted to artist-designed mid twentieth-century textiles, with an emphasis on printed fabrics for both clothing and furnishings. It details fabrics designed by artists better known for work in more traditional media, including, among others, Warhol, Picasso, Calder, Dali, Chagall, Matisse, Miro, Picasso, and Steinberg. The book’s footnoted text is informative, if a bit sparse, and its scholarly utility is enhanced by a biographical section covering artists, companies and cooperatives, an index and a bibliography. The publication’s primary strength, though, lies in the numerous full page color reproductions printed on sturdy glossy paper.

This visually enticing tome is one of several collaborative projects completed by the authors. Geoffrey Rayner and Richard Chamberlain run Target Gallery in London, which consists of their private design collection. Annamarie Stapleton is a nineteenth and twentieth-century design specialist. This volume is actually a significantly revised and expanded version of Artists’ Textiles in Britain, 1945-1970, published in 1999, and again in 2003 (with the subtitle A Democratic Art). There is noticeable overlap in this edition, but the inclusion of additional artists and illustrations, including a greater emphasis on American textiles, should override any concerns about duplication.

The book begins with an overview of artist-designed textiles made between 1910 and 1939 when such fabrics were primarily luxury items. This is followed by chapters on the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, tracing how avant-garde artists in a more inclusive post-war society embraced opportunities to infuse the lives of ordinary people with art through textile design. Manufacturers commissioned their designs for mass produced goods like headscarves, wall hangings, couture-oriented textiles and furnishing fabrics. The 1950s, the “apogee of artist-designed textiles in America and Britain,” saw artist-designed fabrics elevated to “high art” in exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and other respected venues. In the 1960s, the pop art aesthetic inspired textiles in Britain and America. Throughout this survey, textile companies, artists’ cooperatives and specific projects are delineated, shedding light on an often overlooked phenomenon.

This book is highly recommended for comprehensive collections supporting textile, fashion, and interior design programs. It is also recommended for other twentieth-century art and design programs, and may be of interest to a broader audience for its popular culture appeal. The authors claim to cover textiles not portrayed elsewhere, but there are other recent surveys that may suffice for libraries with limited budgets and/or less specialized needs. These include 20th Century Pattern Design: Textile & Wallpaper Pioneers, Twentieth Century Textiles. Part II, Neo-Classicism to Pop, and Twentieth-Century Fabrics: European and American Designers and Manufactures.

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