
Through Textiles: the Art of Mankind, author Mary Schoeser traces the artistry and cultural significance of textiles using both historical and contemporary examples. The scope is international, with the author making a point of including non-Western textiles. In that regard alone, it is an impressive undertaking.

Currently a Senior Research Fellow at the University of the Arts in London, Schoeser brings her expertise as a textile historian and curator to examine the role textiles have played in civilization. She highlights handmade and machine-made pieces arguing that the common denominator is a “craft approach.” By this, she argues, aesthetics and artistic intention, not just technique, play an important part in the textile’s design. Her ultimate goal is to inspire textile artists and collectors with her selections.

The full-color images dominate the book with brief thematic chapters and image captions acting as compliments. The text is not as in-depth as similar new works such as Beverly Gordon’s Textiles: The Whole Story, but the extensive image collection is the real focus of this book. The title pages tell readers that the book includes 1,058 color images. Just the number and quality of the photographs makes this large-format book a worthwhile purchase.

Of special interest is a list of additional resources provided in the back of the book. These five pages list not just other books, but they also list notable artists, manufacturers, collections, and galleries. This section neatly ties into the author’s goal of inspiring artists and collectors by helping them make connections, but it also aids researchers studying this tactile art form.

At first the book may look like a coffee-table volume because of its size and the number of images, but the extensive research required to produce it, and the insights into the role of textiles in human civilization make it more than that. For those new to the study of textiles, it introduces readers to the materials and techniques used to create them, how textiles fit into the wider context of design and craft, and how these techniques and viewpoints compare through time and across cultures. In addition, it is a useful reference for more experienced researchers because of its extensive collection of high-quality color images and captions. Ultimately, this work serves as an excellent resource for researchers at all levels.

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