

"Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass", June 10, 2014-March 8, 2015

"Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass", "The Garden," Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)

Floral motifs long have been a mainstay of textile design. By the early 15th century, as expanded trade routes connected the world in ways never before experienced, patterning burgeoned into a hothouse of new and exotic species. Design, art, science, and trade followed the same paths, mingling to yield innovations on many fronts. Botanists exulted in a new wealth of cultivated plant varieties whose forms were documented in prints, many of which served as inspiration for textile pattern design.

Made in Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Persia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, the works in this gallery reveal not only the importance and versatility of flowers in design language, but also a network of design communication that remains important to this day.

Spanning 1500 BCE to now, the RISD Museum's extensive costume and textiles holdings include more than 26,000 objects. The displays in this gallery are curated to encourage the study and creative interpretation of a broad range of objects by juxtaposing different cultures, time periods, and media.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

William Kilburn, textile designer
Irish, 1745-1818
Dress, ca. 1790
Cotton plain weave, block printed
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.028

William Kilburn was celebrated in his day for his talent for drawing patterns for block printing, and this seaweed-patterned fabric shows his mastery for representing botanicals.

Trained in Dublin as a textile printer, Kilburn was renowned as one of the four best calico printers of his day. Once he arrived in London, his designs were immediately successful. He honed his skills earlier as an illustrator for William Curtis's *Flora Londinensis* (1777–1798), a botanical treatise that attempted to represent every plant growing in the environs of London.

Kilburn gave a length of fabric similar to this to Queen Charlotte, wife of England's George III.



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William Morris, designer

British, 1834-1896

Lodden (furnishing textile), 1884

Cotton; plain weave, block printed

Gift of Mrs. Robert Fairbank and Mrs. Donald Crafts 1988.096.6

Arts and Crafts leader William Morris was one of many English architects, botanists, and fine artists who worked in textile design and manufacture in the mid-19th century. He excelled at rendering botanical subjects as complex repeating patterns, employing neglected techniques such as plant dyeing, hand dyeing, and block printing.

This pattern of dense vegetation undulating into ogival shapes illustrates Morris's conviction that good design depicts perpetual motion. It also shows the lasting influence of exotic florals introduced into the design lexicon centuries prior and the more recent impact of Charles Darwin's writings about evolution and the growth of plants.

Ojibwe; Great Lake and Central Woodland Native American style

Bandolier Bag, 1875-1899

Linen plain weave and cotton velvet with glass-bead embellishment

Gift of Margaret McCarthy 1991.027

Bandolier bags, modeled on European shot pouches, were worn by Native men on formal or festive occasions. Also called friendship bags, they often were made as gifts to other groups. This exuberant piece from the upper Midwest features highly stylized vegetal and floral motifs expertly crafted in glass beads imported from Italy or Czechoslovakia. Floral beadwork motifs were introduced into the Native American design vocabulary by French nuns who established themselves in Quebec in the early 17th century and moved westward.



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Mexican

China Poblana, ca. 1925

Blouse: Cotton plain weave with bead and sequin embellishment;
Skirt: Felted cotton plain weave; printed and with sequin
embellishment; Shawl (Rebozo): Rayon plain weave with ikat-dyed
patterning

Gift of Barbara White Dailey 1996.84

This richly embellished ensemble incorporates elements from cultures that mingled in Mexico during three centuries of Spanish rule. The floral beadwork on the blouse marks the influence of Spanish nuns who taught domestic embroidery using imported glass beads. The skirt's felted red ground references British woolen trade cloth, and the printed tulip motif at the hem derives from a centuries-long fascination with this flower, a native of Central Asia and a prized cultivar in Ottoman Turkey and the Netherlands. The silhouette of the blouse and skirt reflect Western European tailored fashion, while the unstitched length that forms the rebozo maintains indigenous clothing traditions.

The china poblana became known as the Mexican national dress for women in the early 20th century. Its origins are shrouded in myth and folklore, with many narratives stemming from the name, which was also applied to the beatified Catarina de San Juan, a 17th-century visionary brought to Mexico as a slave from her native India by Portuguese pirates.

Indian; Portuguese

Marriage Quilt (Colcha), 1700s

Silk plain weave with silk chain-stitch embroidery

Jesse Metcalf Fund 1996.99

With the establishment of its colonial trade center in Goa, India, in the early 16th century, Portugal was flooded with imported Indian luxury textiles, which left a distinct mark on furnishings such as this marriage quilt, or colcha. Abounding with painstakingly embroidered carnations and scrolling vines on a silk ground, it was either made in India for the Portuguese market or crafted in Portugal as a version of the Indian originals. The artisans who made this piece substituted the carnation—a flower indigenous to the Mediterranean—for a lotus-blossom motif that would have been more familiar to the Asian market.



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Indonesian; Javanese
Skirt Cloth (Kain Panjang), ca. 1946-1950
Cotton plain weave, wax-resist printed (batik)
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2005.82.1

This unusual pattern alternates a vignette of a woman in traditional dress speaking into a microphone with a scene of a woman and boy listening to an SRI national radio broadcast. It was created using a traditional technique known as batik, in which wax is drawn or stamped on cloth before it is dipped in dye.



Batik achieved international attention in the 19th century as it met new design influences from Java's many trading partners, immigrant artisans, and colonial settlers, particularly from the Netherlands and China. These new influences brought colorful flowers, birds, and butterflies to batik design, which was previously dominated by the blue and brown geometrics favored by Javanese royal courts.

Junya Watanabe, designer
Japanese, b. 1961
Comme des Garçons, design label
Tokyo
Dress, 2008
Cotton plain weave, printed; rayon and polyester braid
embellishment
Museum Purchase 2009.61.1

Junya Watanabe is a master of shaping and manipulating carefully chosen, often technically advanced material. This dress, designed for his Spring 2008 collection, exemplifies the designer's keen interest in sculpting novel creations replete with historical references.



Collaborating with Liberty of London, Watanabe employed yards of the English firm's renowned Tana Lawn fabric, patterned in tribute to the Indian export textiles eagerly consumed in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a twist to the story of East-to-West trade, Watanabe worked with Liberty fabric produced in Japan to develop a silhouette that references the Indian dhoti, a traditional garment worn by men.

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Suno, design label
American, est. 2008
Max Osterweis and Erin Beatty, designer
Dress, 2009
Cotton plain weave, wax-resist printed
Museum Purchase 2009.65

This limited-edition dress by the New York label Suno showcases a wax-resist-printed kanga fabric collected in Kenya by the firm's founder, Max Osterweis. Kanga fabrics are rectangular lengths made to be wrapped around the body and designed with a border, a central pattern, and often a Swahili saying. Made and sold for decades in East Africa, they were originally fabricated by machine in the Netherlands in imitation of Javanese hand-drawn wax prints.

The Swahili phrase forming part of the floral border—"Wewe ndiye dawa yangu" or, roughly, "You are my medicine"—was popularized by Tanzanian musician Remmy Ongala.

Sabrina Gschwandtner
American, b.1977
The Enchanted Loom (Part II), 2010
16mm film, polyamide thread, and LED lights
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2013.32

In *The Enchanted Loom (Part II)*, Sabrina Gschwandtner links American folk quilt traditions with contemporary conceptual content, splicing 16mm film strips to build the pattern.

The individual squares read as variations of the octagonal star design, a popular quilt configuration. Closer inspection reveals frames of film picturing dress models (from the film *What Is a Dress?*), the faces and hands of women quiltmakers (from the pioneering work *Quilts in Women's Lives*), and views of the brain (bleached frames from *The Enchanted Loom*, an experimental science film), highlighting new and old ways that patterns emerge from unexpected relationships.



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Oscar de la Renta, design label

Oscar de la Renta, designer

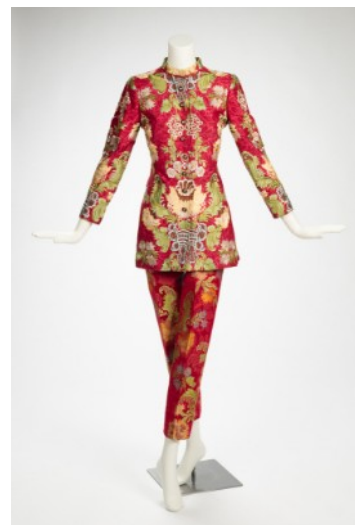
Dominican, 1932-2014

Woman's Pantsuit, late 1990s

Jacket: Printed silk plain weave, with silk and metallic-wrapped yarn embroidery and coiled metal strip, metal spangle, and rhinestone embellishment

Gift of Mark Pollack 2013.69

The coordinated fabrics that make up the jacket and trousers of the Oscar de la Renta suit explicitly refer to the exuberant naturalism of late 18th-century silk woven textiles. This circa 1800 Portuguese or Spanish example features vases framed by floral garlands and doves holding olive twigs; such patterns reflect the aristocratic taste for pastoral themes and the idyllic country life, as expressed by the Neoclassical aesthetic style.



Indian

Mat, late 1700s

Cotton plain weave, block printed and hand painted

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 37.006

Reminiscent of a Persian carpet design, this cotton mat is organized around an ornate central medallion, corner segments, and framing borders. This formal arrangement is offset by playful creatures—monkeys and birds—inhabiting the swirling foliage of exotic flowers. Highly skilled artisans working in several stages produced this kalamkari chintz, or cotton cloth painted and printed in many colors using a brush (*kalam*), patterned woodblock stamps, and mordant dyes. For centuries, Indian artisans held the secret to printing fine cotton fabric with colorfast dyes and enjoyed a monopoly on the export of such designs, produced according to the tastes of clientele spanning the globe



Chinese; Indian; Parsi? Parsee?

Blouse (Choli), early 1800s

Silk plain weave with silk chain-stitch embroidery

Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.284

This blouse's embroidery, depicting songbirds amid vines blossoming with delicate flowers, catered to the tastes of the wealthy Parsi community living in India. Known in India as Parsis, Zoroastrian exiles fled their Persian persecutors in the 8th century, settling in the Gujarat state of West Central India. They ultimately made fortunes as merchant intermediaries on the trade routes between China and Europe. Their mercantile exchanges brought to the Indian market Chinese silk satins and unique embroidered pieces, such as this one,



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that showed the combined influence of Persian, Chinese, and Indian design elements.

Persian

Woman's jacket (yahl, ausin sambusedar), ca. 1850-1900

Cotton, silk, brass buttons; plain weave, painted, block printed, braid trim

Gift of Mrs. Richard Lisle 63.027

This Persian-made fabric, created by printing with mordants and resist dyeing, owes much to Indian patterning and printing techniques, which were imitated for centuries from Japan to the Americas. Acknowledgment must also be given to Persian artisans who developed a botanical design language that was embraced and cultivated by India's Mughal rulers in their royal workshops in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The silhouette of this jacket, popular from the 17th through 19th centuries, represents a crossroads of influence: the sleeves which narrow to a point derive from coats worn by Central Asian horsemen, while the flanged hips draw from the expanded skirts of 17th and 18th-century European women's dresses.

French, Jouy

Fleurs Tropicales et Palmiers (Tropical Flowers and Palm trees), 1787

Cotton, linen; plain weave, woodblock printed, quilted

Gift of Mr. Francis C. Whitehead 69.136.18

Made in France, this textile exemplifies regional European interpretations of *indiennes*, or printed cottons from India. Immensely costly commodities, *indiennes* were contraband during the first half of the 18th century because their popularity threatened local wool and silk industries.

By 1759, when the French government repealed the ban on both imported and locally produced cotton textiles, the renowned Oberkampf factory in Jouy-en-Josas quickly sought to meet the demand, first utilizing woodblocks—as seen here—and later copperplates to make the repeating patterns. Today this region is still associated with fine floral and narrative-printed cottons, commonly known as *toile de Jouy*.



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Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo, designer
Spanish, 1871-1949
Furnishing Textile Length, ca. 1920
Cotton plain weave, resist printed
Gift of Barbara Deering Danielson 82.308.48G

This fabric's large-scale floral and foliate pattern refers to the lush colors and textures of 17th-century Italian or Ottoman velvet. Spanish-born Venice-based artist Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo stencil-printed and hand-painted pigment that was impregnated with bronze powder onto a red cotton ground. He then discharge-dyed the fabric, carefully removing color from select areas.

The art and ornament of the Italian Renaissance, Persia, Byzantium, and classical Greece inspired Fortuny to experiment with new printing, draping, and pleating processes. Beginning in 1909, he accumulated 18 patents for printing silk and cotton fabrics with many layers of color.

Portuguese; Spanish
Textile Length, ca. 1800
Silk satin compound weave
Museum Collection S50.155

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Philippine
Scarf Length, mid 1800s
Piña (pineapple-leaf fiber) plain weave with piña embroidery
Gift of Esther H. Baker 14.403

Fine fibers culled from the leaves of the pineapple plant give this scarf length its gossamer appearance. Some believe the pineapple was introduced to the Philippines from the Americas in the 1500s by Spanish sailors working trade routes connecting Manila and Acapulco, Mexico.

Already skilled at making textiles out of abaca, or banana-leaf fiber, Filipinos created luxury piña-cloth garments and textiles for a wealthy local clientele. Piña textiles were also exported across the world, sold



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as an alternative to lace. By the 17th century, Chinese and Indian immigrant artisans added new embroidery techniques and design motifs, seen in the exquisitely worked traditional Indian flowering-tree motif that graces the central field.