Friends of Textiles & Costume

Mark Your Calendars


This beautifully illustrated book tells the fascinating and multidisciplinary stories of the widespread desire for Indian chintz over 1,000 years to its latest resurgence in modern fashion and home design. Based on the renowned Indian chintz collections held at the Royal Ontario Museum, the book showcases the genius of Indian chintz makers and the dazzling variety of works they have created for specialized markets. These markets include religious and court banners for India, monumental gilded wall hangings for elite homes in Europe and Thailand, luxury women’s dress for England, sacred hangings for ancestral ceremonies in Indonesia, and today’s runways of Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai.

Figure 1 The ornate chintz book cover of Cloth that Changed the World.

The book can be pre-ordered through this website for $50 US: Cloth that Changed the World book link

Image provided by Dr. Sarah Fee

January 9, 2020 – FTC’s contribution to the Thursday Daytime lecture series will feature Karla Livingston and Kristiina Lahde, Technicians for the ROM’s Textile and Costume section
“Innovative Storage Solutions Textile and Costume Collections at the Royal Ontario Museum” will unveil behind-the-scenes techniques for housing and care of museum textile and costume collections.

Featured in this presentation will be their use of CEREX, a durable and smooth fabric made of nonwoven nylon, which has become an essential material for textile and costume storage at the ROM.

Images provided by Kristiina Lahde

February 15, 2020 – Opening in the European Temporary Exhibition Space "Florals: Discovery, Desire & Design" (check ROM website for announcement)

This is a companion exhibition to "The Cloth that Changed the World" that will examine the craze for plants and flowers in the 18th century and feature some of the ROM's Indo-European palampores (wall hangings) and fashion pieces.

Example of ROM palampore

934.4.12_4_ROM2016_15435_6

Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne.
April 4, 2020 – Opening in the Patricia Harris Gallery the Exhibition “The Cloth that Changed the World: India’s Painted & Printed Cottons”. The ROM’s website provides links to resource material available in advance of the Exhibition’s opening.

**Governor’s Appreciation Event**

On Wednesday, April 24th the ROM Governors sponsored a Donor event to recognize the many ROM and non-ROM members who support the various Friends groups.

The event included a reception and display/information tables representing the ROM’s various Friends groups. These groups support designated ROM collections through educational and fundraising activities.

Ava Marie Henye was on hand to provide information on various pieces of chintz.

Image of Ava Marie Henye and Sharon Allan provided by ROM Governors.

![Figure 5 Ava Marie Henye and Sharon Allan](image)

Josh Basseches, Director & CEO of the ROM and Susan Horvath, President & CEO, ROM Governors welcomed the donors and focused on their ongoing and generous support and contribution to the ROM. Dr. Sarah Fee, Senior Curator (Eastern Hemisphere Textiles & Fashions) spoke on “Indian Chintz in the 21st Century”. Her presentation provided an excellent primer for the upcoming exhibition: “The Cloth that Changed the World: India’s Painted & Printed Cottons”

This was the second Donor event sponsored by the ROM Governors in recognition of Friends donations. By supporting the Friends of Textiles & Costume, the FTC Committee is encouraged to continue its support of the ROM’s collection through newsletters, education and special events (i.e. ROM for the Holidays, March Break, Daytime Lectures).

There will be a Donor Event in 2020. Invitations will follow.
Highlights from the Friends of Textiles & Costume
Annual General Meeting

FTC’s Annual General Meeting was held Tuesday, May 21, 2019.

The meeting opened against a colourful backdrop of slides recalling past and recent textile and costume donations to the ROM's collections. These included fabric samples for clothing and interior decoration and fashion accessories and costumes from diverse locations and sources. The following is a list of some of the donations.

- Costumes from Yemen
- Ukrainian cushion covers, men's waistcoat and jacket
- Comme des Garcons fashions
- Dowry bag and skirt from India
- Marilyn Brooks clock handbag
- Die-cut felt jewelry from Toronto's Design Exchange
- A "Duchesse" 3-piece dress by Dior (Paris), epitomizing M. Dior's revolutionary "New Look" of the 1950s
- Tactile textile samples from the spectacularly innovative Iris van Herpen exhibition
- Samples of Indian textiles

It was announced that Dr. Sarah Fee has completed 10 years with the ROM in the Textiles and Costume Department and has been newly-promoted to Senior Curator.

In anticipation of Indian Chintz: “The Cloth that Changed the World”, Dr. Fee discussed preparation activities for the exhibition. At a June 2018 workshop, ROM staff and several international scholars viewed and selected over 100 pieces of textiles to be featured in the Exhibition’s catalogue. During one of her journeys to the south-east coast of India – The Coromandel Coast – Dr. Fee’s field research yielded important commissions and exciting purchases from contemporary makers, including samples of current developments and techniques in textile production (e.g., hand-painting and natural dyeing). In December 2018, another field trip was undertaken to Gujarat and Rajasthan by Drs. Sarah Fee, Alexandra
Palmer and Eiluned Edwards to investigate conservation and testing methods of Indian textiles—such as radio-carbon dating of Indo-Egyptian archeological finds (textile fragments), and digital printing to prepare an 18th century “cope” for display. Four textile pieces will be displayed at the Aga Khan Museum this Fall.

It was mentioned that planning is underway for an extension of the Chintz exhibition, to be located in the European temporary space. The tentative title of this exhibition is “Blooming Cottons” and the target dates are March - August 2020. The focus of this exhibition will be on the imagery and iconography of the “palampore” (bed cover), with its traditional animal, floral and bird decorations. Certain challenges were encountered in photographing the palampores for the Exhibition’s catalogue which resulted in more than 70 photo sessions being held to meticulously display the details of the images on the palampores.

The Executive Committee for the next year was confirmed as:

- Chair – Vera Hall
- Treasurer – Tom Lewis
- Secretary – Ava Marie Henye
- Past Chair – Pat Sparrer
- Newsletter Editor – Pat Sparrer
- Programs and Events - Betty Abrams

FTC contact: ftc@rom.on.ca

Textiles, Costume and Fashion in the Royal Ontario Museum Library

The Richard Wernham and Julia West Library, located on Level 1 (main floor) of the Museum at the end of the Chinese Architecture Gallery, contains a wide range of reference material related to textiles, costume and fashion. A large portion of the material is available electronically through publicly accessible workstations in the Library. The Library is open Monday to Friday, excluding holidays, from 10:00 to 5:00. Some examples of the reference material follow.

Berg Fashion Library – The Berg Fashion Library is an e-resource for those interested in or studying fashion. It includes full-text access to the Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion, reference works like Classic and Modern Writings on Fashion, the A-Z of Fashion, and The Dictionary of Fashion History, a directory of museums with collections in dress and fashion, a digital archive of
select museum exhibitions, 14,000 colour images, and more than 100 full-text academic e-books.

**The Vogue Archive** – This is a searchable archive of American Vogue, from the first issue in 1892 to the current month, reproduced in high-resolution colour page images, including advertisements, covers and fold-outs.

**Harper’s Bazaar Archive** – This is a searchable and viewable online archive through the University of Toronto Libraries’ e-resources. It provides digital access to the US (1867 to present) and UK (1930-2015) editions of the magazine. The ROM Library also houses scattered issues of Harper’s Bazaar in its original print formats in our Rare Book collections.

**Fashion Plates** – Fashion plates, illustrations used to inform contemporary consumers about fashionable styles of clothing, were used before the age of photography to chronicle fashion through other artistic media. Due to the appeal and value of fashion plates, many have been removed from their original context. The ROM Library & Archives’ collection of fashion plates primarily consists of intact journals and periodicals, cultivated by ROM librarians with the assistance of curators in the museum's Textiles and Costume department.

**Online Collections** – With the ROM being home to a world-class collection of 13 million artworks, cultural objects and natural history specimens, it is no surprise that the online catalogue of these items is a work in progress, supported by Nancy and Jon Love. At present there is a wide range of items (926) from the ROM’s Textiles & Costume collection.

**Support the Library’s textiles, costume and fashion publications**
Publications, whether journals or books, are vital research tools for museum curators, staff, students, researchers and the general public. Several of the publications the museum now holds are scarce and many are not available elsewhere in the city. With the increasing costs of acquiring these items, donations are welcomed and will be acknowledged in the Library’s Reading Room.
Check out the [Library’s website](#) for a list of publications that would benefit from support. Click on ‘Adopt a Journal/a Book’ on the panel on the right

**Textiles, Costume and Fashion throughout the ROM**

One expects to find items from the ROM’s textiles, costume and fashion collection in the Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume. That is not always the case as many items can be found in other galleries or incorporated into special exhibitions.

The Gallery’s current exhibition “Gods in My Home: Chinese New Year with Ancestor Portraits and Deity Prints” (closed September 29, 2019) contains a display of the Collection’s Chinese badges that were used to denote a bearer’s rank by insignia affixed to the uniforms. The recent exhibition “Treasures of a Desert Kingdom, The Royal Arts of Jodhpur India” included jodhpurs and a lengthy sash from the ROM’s collection.

Here is a sample of textiles and costume items that may be found in the Shreyas and Mina Ajmera Gallery of Africa, the Americas and Asia-Pacific.
Twill skirt, Mexico, 1964
- 2/1 chevron twill, black ground striped regularly in purple and bright red
- three loom pieces woven at pinotepa de don luis on body-tension loom (joined vertically) with selvages on four sides
- worn wrapped around body, and held in place by a vatu or belt
- purple stripes are probably imitation; caracol dye (sea snail)

ROM image 964.276.9

Japanese robe, Abashiri, Hokkaidō (Island), Japan, 1850-1888
- made of bark cloth; elm fibre; cotton : tabby;
- appliqued; embroidered Ainu robe.
- Groups of double ends of blue cotton forming stripes.
- Usual straight cut with blue cotton applique around neck, cuffs, bottom and across back and shoulders,
- with band of blue cotton embroidered with curving patterns in chainstitch in lighter blue cotton.

Image L2001.18.213 (On loan from Victoria College)
Silk Shawl, Imerina, Madagascar, 1880-1945

- Shawl of brocaded silk called akotifahana or kotofahana,
- Two seamed widths
- Reeled white and purple silk, warp faced tabby with supplementary weft floats
- White centrefield with white brocaded motifs of two columns of large conjoined lozenges flanked by lines with small leaves.
- Along each selvedge purple brocaded motifs of stacked leaf-like forms in double columns, flanked by narrow purple and white stripes.
- Long tiered knotted mesh fringe.

ROM image 2013.33.1

How the Friends of Textiles & Costume Support the ROM’s Textiles & Costume Collection

By distributing donations received from its Friends, the Friends of Textiles & Costume supports the ROM’s work on its Textiles and Costume collection. At its Annual General Meeting in June 2018, the Committee agreed to provide funds for an intern.

Angela Weiser has been working with Dr. Sarah Fee by inventorying and identifying the animals included on the ROM’s chintz pieces: mammals, insects, reptiles and birds. ROM natural historians, under the direction of Debra Metsger, followed this work by providing commentary that will accompany the Chintz exhibit.
At the June 2019 FTC Committee Meeting, approval was given to support 4 additional interns who have been working over the summer on the preparations for the 2020 Chintz exhibit and to help with processing acquisitions.

One intern, Enya Barbeau, has focused on incorporating Carole Tanenbaum’s donation of 180 pieces of 20th century costume jewellery into the ROM’s collection by photographing, measuring, organising cataloguing data and re-housing the jewellery into storage boxes.

Photo source – Kristiina Lahde

The other interns, Antonia Agnastopolous, Rose Liu and Chandni Rana, assisted with object and image research for the Indian chintz exhibition and catalogue, updating catalogue records for release on e-museum, preparing releases for social media and hosting the YPC event centred on Indian chintz.

Chandni reconstructed a chintz bed based on the ROM disassembled bed 934.4.15.

Photo source – Chandni Rana
The Story of My “Wing Chair”
by Patricia Harris

The story begins with Louise Hawley Stone’s purchase of a wing chair from Waddington’s Auctioneers as a gift for Gerard Brett. In 1946, Gerard Brett came from London’s Victoria & Albert Museum to be the new Director of ROM. He had a special interest in textiles, which attracted him to ROM’s Textile and Costume Section and Katherine B. (Betty) Maw, Curator of Textiles. They married about a year later. Then unfortunately, within the following year, Gerard was diagnosed with multiple scleroses. He transferred from ROM Director to curator in the European Department. By and by, the gift of the wing chair was a welcome support.

Several years after Gerard died (about 1990), Betty Brett (nee Maw) gave the chair to our Textile Endowment Fund Committee (TEFCo). TEFCo was an earlier version of the Friends of Textiles & Costume Committee, with a mandate to promote the Textile and Costume Section and to raise funds for acquisitions. Before the Committee disbanded, the chair became TEFCo’s last fund-raising project.

To start, Flavia Redelmeier had the chair restored and covered in white muslin.

Then the issue became “How to market the chair?” Flavia and I had many discussions about our options. Would we sell raffle tickets, offering the chair as is? Or upholster it with needlepoint canvasses, of our design, or the buyer’s? Since the TEFCo members were all needlewomen, it was anticipated that everyone would participate.

Photo source – Pat Harris

During one of our telephone calls, when I was at our farm, my husband, sitting in the living room, overheard my end of the conversation coming from the kitchen. He called out, “How much to you expect to make? I’ll buy it!” My answer was “No, no. This is to be a group project.” But after several days of this banter, the
Committee accepted his offer. TEFCo received a donation and the wing chair became my personal project and... TV watching chair!

My decisions.

1. I chose to upholster the chair with needlepoint canvases. I had a huge bag-full of needlepoint yarns, accumulated leftovers from many previous projects.

2. The design theme would be the creatures living at our farm.

3. I found an upholstery company in the Don Valley where they drew out the chair shapes in the size required for the inside back, seat and inner wings, allowing for the inevitable shrinking that happens with stitching.

4. In needlework shops, I had admired the original designs painted by Geoff Boughton-Smith, of Monomania. Since he also undertakes private commissions, I made an appointment to meet Geoff at his home studio, taking the paper patterns, photographs and nature field guides.

I think this ambitious project amazed Geoff. He had two questions. “What size of mono canvas would I choose to stitch on?” I preferred ‘14 stitches to the inch’ which would permit more rounded shapes. “What colour background, light or dark?” For me, light is easier on the eyes. We settled on grey/blue pewter. (Note: Originally, I chose pewter grey for the background but when the images were finally stitched and I was ready to work on the background, this colour yarn was no longer available. My final choice was a light greenish-blue.)

In due course I was invited back to inspect Geoff’s designs. They were wonderful and daunting! I asked for only one major change, the porcupine on the seat bristled uncomfortably! He changed the animal to a sweet resting, white-tailed fawn.

A needlepoint friend advised me that if I ever expected to complete the project, I should rise early every morning to stitch for an hour. This was not my idea of fun. I ended up having sporadic stitching times, as I juggled major gardening seasons, ROM projects, and life.
I started stitching, (about 1994-5) in a well-lit corner of the living room, next to a window. I even carried a canvas and my stitching frame to the cottage.

Photo source – Pat Sparrer

I set a series of short-term goals with my long-term goal to complete the project by 2020. Over the past few years my daughter has been encouraging me, “Hurry up, I don’t want to finish your project myself.” So, about twenty-five years later, I have completed the work ahead of my goal, stitching “fini 2017” on the hidden bottom edge of the back, 2018 on the other pieces and my initials. (A date is very helpful for future reference).

But the chair still had to be upholstered. Following the recommendation of an interior designer and long-time friend, Ralph Neal of Upper Canada House, the upholstery was superbly completed by Rick Dors. The chair looks magnificent – too precious for lounging grandsons?

Photo source – Pat Harris
Both Flavia and I have taken turns sitting in my “Wing Chair”.

Photo source – Pat Harris

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When I sent pictures of the finished chair to Geoff Boughton-Smith, he replied, “In my 41 years of needlework design I cannot recall another work that can even compete with this spell binding work of yours.” He added, “For God’s sake don’t let anyone sit on it!” which has created a dilemma as the chair still provides comfortable support!

**Traversing the Fashion Industry to Becoming a Fashion Enthusiast**

*By Tess Aviado*

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How does one start from scratch in a new world? I came to New York City in 1978, and began studying the “rag trade”, along 7th Avenue in the fashion district in Manhattan. I learned that the numerous show rooms needed as many samples of ladies’ and children’s wear for the semi-annual market weeks and found employment in that field. During this time period, fashion buyers from across the United States and other countries would scramble to be the first to get the most
attractive fashions for their stores, at the least price, one year in advance. The bottom line and delivery times, along with designing with the minimum textile yardage and the least intensive labour became the challenge. To be competitive, mass production moved overseas, largely to Hong Kong.

Following the stock market crash in October 1987, the garment industry in New York City dramatically changed. In the existing economic environment, my employer could no longer justify its existence and closed. As a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology and my New York garment industry work experience, I decided to use my credential elsewhere and moved with my family to Toronto in 1989. Although I had to start again from scratch I found the opportunity to use my observation and assessment skills to fit in to the Toronto fashion environment. At the same time, I attended Dr. Alexandra Palmer’s course at the University of Toronto, entitled “Inventing Style”, which focussed on the Paris haute couture industry. My design direction took a different turn, opposite from my New York experience, incorporating generous yardage of textile, intensive labour, complex patterns and experimental methods of execution.

While my home studio became a sort of laboratory where design and research were carried out, I faced a dilemma of identifying clients for such fashions when cheap imports and readily accessible “off the rack” clothing were readily available. My designs came to the attention of a woman who appreciated their beauty and quality. She introduced me to her circle of fashionable ladies and their daughters whose manner of dressing was governed by their Jewish faith. Finally, I found my niche!

My challenge then became providing quality and modest formal attire all the while blending in with contemporary society. This small religious community inspired and challenged me to give my best for there were certain criteria for these garments. Textiles composition relating to the principle of blending and mixing from like origins had to be strictly adhered to: i.e. linen and cotton fabrics could be mixed as they both come from plants but linen (plant) and wool (animal) could not be mixed as their origins are different. At the same time, wool from sheep, cashmere and mohair from goats, and angora from rabbits could be mixed or blended with silk, as its origin came from the cocoon of the larvae of the mulberry silkworm which was considered to be a “like” origin. In the beginning, to assure my clients that their garments contained acceptable fibre combinations, laboratories were used to confirm textile compositions.

In addition to fibre composition, the designs of the garments had to conform to strict rules for modesty which included covering the two bones at the base of the
neck (sternoclavicular joints), the shoulders, elbows and knees. These rules can be challenging to any designer who wants to create with a universal appeal, but with some ingenuity and imagination using colour combinations, a variety of details and finishing touches, and good fit, the final results were interesting too and becoming to the person wearing it. Working within this niche was extremely challenging and extremely rewarding and meaningful.

Having overcome these challenges, I looked to expand my horizon further. Recalling my tour of the archives of the Museum that was part of Dr. Palmer’s course, and observing staff’s expertise, I found myself at the Royal Ontario Museum. My finite view of the fashion garment industry has now expanded as I am able to revel in the textiles and costume of the past, witness the development of fashion and textiles over the centuries, and see their future evolve. Volunteering with the Friends of Textiles and Costume has only made my experiences better and I look forward to continued and new experiences in this field.