



*promoting UK Creative Industries for export*



**BRITISH EUROPEAN DESIGN GROUP**  
25 Stanmore Gardens, Richmond, Surrey TW9 2HN UK  
T +44 (0)20 8940 7857 F +44 (0)20 8948 2673 E info@bedg.org  
<http://www.bedg.org> VAT Reg 778 5204 00

# THE BRITISH EUROPEAN DESIGN GROUP EXHIBITION

# VISIONS OF A MODERN HERITAGE

A showcase of  
**British**  
INSPIRATION IN TEXTILE DESIGN

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## PRESS RELEASE

### VISION OF A MODERN HERITGATE

#### A showcase of British Inspiration in Textiles

From his early beginnings man has had three basic needs in his daily life – food for survival, shelter for protection and materials for clothing. First to shield his body from the adversities of nature – later to decorate himself with the insignia of social status, taste and fashion. Clothing, however, is only one application of the vast world of fabrics and textiles.

As Chloe Colchester writes in her book *The New Textiles*: ‘The design and manufacture of textiles is one of man’s oldest industries... But although textile making is an ancient activity, it is not a conservative one. The very centrality of fabric in human culture has ensured that it is at the forefront of both technological and artistic development.’

Processed natural and nowadays man-made fibres and fabrics have infinite, often invisible and more often irreplaceable functions in our life. Weaving was and probably still is the world’s largest cottage industry. It was also the first industry to be fully mechanized. The Spinning Jenny launched the Industrial Revolution and the advent of synthetic fibres revolutionized the way we think and work with fabrics. Technological progress has created new sciences such as synthetics engineering and microelectronics, which in return create new applications.

In Great Britain as well as in Japan, innovation in fabric and textile technologies and design probably has an older and stronger tradition than in any other creative discipline. One only has to remember the William Morris exhibition at the V&A, the famous Liberty prints and Tricia Guild with her Designers Guild collection of home textiles. Punk and Street Style have added an incredibly diverse new range of materials from rubber to recyclable waste and the computer age has opened the door to an entirely new universe of patterns.

And in Japan, the ancient textile heritage in weaving, dyeing, printing, embroidering, pleating and quilting has stretched from the most intricately embroidered robes for the emperors and the imperial courtiers, the fantastically strong multi-layered body armour of the Samurai warriors to the heavily quilted, hooded working clothes of the Japanese firemen, which, once drenched in water, could even shield them from the deathly blaze of fires.

And in the UK as in Japan, important heritage has survived intact into our contemporary lives irrespective of the evolution of massmanufacturing technologies. In the contrary, textiles, both in clothing as well as in home textiles are one of the very few consumer goods sectors, where individual even manual production methods are still accepted and appreciated.

Nevertheless, style and design in both countries have gone different ways. In Japan, the approach to surface design still seems to be deeply steeped in the aesthetic refinement of classical Japanese imagery and art. In Great Britain, on the other hand, the prevailing tradition among the next generation of British and British trained designers is an almost irreverent disregard for the classical visual heritage of their cultures and it is this testing out of visual and socially acceptable borderlines that is the real foundation of their design innovation. This can stretch from images of urban slums on screen-printed wallpaper to homeless tramps rough-sleeping on beautiful cast iron park benches shaded by rare cedars on 18<sup>th</sup> century French fabric and wallpaper designs.

The economic consequence of this innovation for the designers is also remarkable as it has led to a steadily growing number of small and medium sized businesses in this sector of the creative industries. As little of this work can be mass-produced, which safeguards it from copying for commercial exploitation, the resultant explosion of creative talent in the last four decades has secured the place of small and medium-sized businesses at the heart of the national economy.

‘Visions of a Modern Heritage’ showcases the very diverse work of a few surface and textile designers illustrating the above, ranging from original patterns to handprinted and embroidered fabrics. They are inspired by nature, technology, travel, recycling and popular cultures and show the incredible diversity of multicultural design talent working in Great Britain.

London, April 2010