

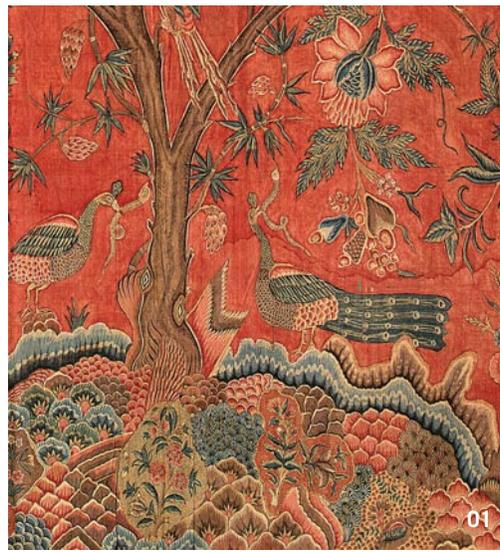
BIG 3 November,-Autumn 2013 Patricia Harris Gallery of Costume and Textiles, The Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queens Park, Toronto, ON M5S 2C6, Canada T: (416) 586 8000, www.rom.on.ca

"In these hard economic times" (a much over used phrase), museums are now looking to and using their own collections to organise shows because the big blockbuster touring shows are too expensive to mount and tour. We, the audience, are the beneficiaries of this crisis in that we are being given access to the "local" (perhaps another over-used phrase but applicable in this context.)

In this exhibition is a piece of French produced "Chintz" which is a woodblock printed glazed cotton textile. The floral pattern was designed by Baptiste Japui of Japui & Son of Paris. It has a 'big' repeat design almost 150cm in height. The ROM has three metres of this textile so you see the image twice. This piece comes from the Harry Wearne Collection, given to the ROM by his widow in 1934. The collection totals 1,238 pieces and features mainly 18th-19th century French printed textiles; but also includes important examples of Indian chintz made for the European market, and some European figured silks.

This textile is a show stopper, as are each of the individual pieces. While floral printed chintz may seem old fashioned and nostalgic these days, only popular in "country" or "Victorian" interior design schemes, this piece has retained the impact it must have had 160 years ago when it was exhibited at the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations", held in the Crystal Place in London in 1851.

This piece is outrageous, excessive and, if you know the process used in its production, astounding. One can imagine not just the physicality of carving the blocks, but also of using them for printing. While we know how the piece came to the ROM I wonder how it came into the hands of collector Harry Wearne. He was an Englishman who worked as a designer for the French wallpaper firm Zuber & Cie near Mulhouse before WWI, then moved to New York where he established himself as a designer of high-end furnishing fabrics for the American market. After the war, Wearne made frequent trips to France to buy antique printed fabrics which he used as inspiration for his own work.



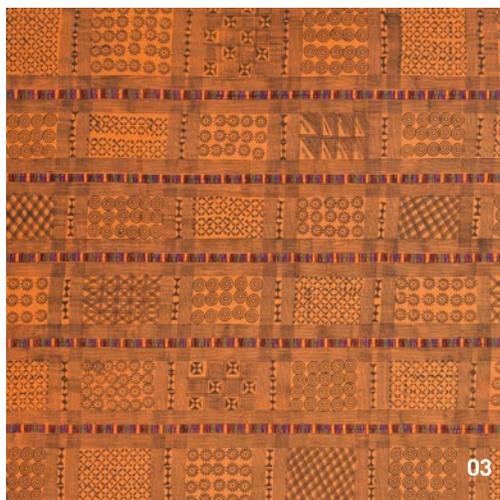
01

Gift of Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust



02

950.100.32C-A-B Sigmund Samuel Trust



03

Gift of the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust

Dr. Alexandra Palmer, Fashion Costume Curator in the ROM's World Cultures department states that "BIG is not just about size. Even the smallest textile can have big personal, social and cultural values that shift according to context. BIG brilliantly looks at the meaning of textiles and fashions from around the globe and across time." These pieces also represent top quality work created by skilled artisans from the four corners of the world. They range from Egyptian clothing to 18th and 19th century western costumes, to 20th century haute couture. Some have never before been on display.

Abstract Fibreglass furnishing textiles by Owens-Corning for Co-FabCo c.1950-1954 contributes another 'BIG'. Its innovation was that Fibreglass textiles did not shrink, stretch, swell, rot, burn or wrinkle and were resistant to sunlight. All-in-all a big time saver: low maintenance – no ironing – and ideal for the "servantless" needs of postwar housewives.

Most of the pieces come from deep in the museum's storage, but others have just arrived. Silk Ciselé Velvet from Lyon France Second Empire c.1869 is actually a holdover from the Gallery's previous exhibition but is BIG in its own right. It's cut, uncut and voided pattern is spectacular. This particular piece was recently on sale at Francesca Galloway, London. It attracted the attention of Anu Liivandi's, Assistant Curator, Textiles & Costume and co-curator of BIG, because the ROM has few examples of European figured silks that illustrate the various historical revivals and technical feats of the 19th century.

While the concept of BIG is an interesting way for the curators at the ROM to look at their collection and build a show, it is the selected objects that stand on their own and make this an extremely exciting exhibition. BIG is exclusively drawn from the ROM's collection of nearly 50,000 textiles and costumes. Further, it beautifully reflects the curatorial eye of those who did the original collecting. ●●● Joe Lewis

01 Detail, Hanging (palampore), mordant painted and resist dyed cotton, c. 1750, India for the Dutch market

02 Military man's rank badge, embroidered silk, 19th century, China

03 Adinkra wrapper, handprinted cotton, 1960s, Ghana