

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Museum of Modern Art Exhibitions and Activities in Textiles

From the time the Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1929 for the purpose of "encouraging and developing the study of the modern arts and the application of such arts to manufacture and practical life," fabrics have played a major role in dozens of exhibitions and in Museum-sponsored competitions. During this period the Museum has also acquired for its own collection outstanding examples of modern fabrics from this country and abroad. American fabrics have been included in several exhibitions organized by the Museum and sent overseas by the government.

The popular series of exhibitions of objects available on the current market, called "Useful Objects" shows, inaugurated in 1939, almost always included some fabrics. The five year program of semi-annual "Good Design" exhibitions, sponsored by the Museum and The Merchandise Mart, included curtain, drapery and upholstery fabrics as well as floor coverings, table mats and towels.

But in addition to seeking out and exhibiting good fabrics available in department stores and fabric houses, the Museum has actively promoted better fabric design by sponsoring competitions in the field. In the famous 1941 inter-American competition, "Organic Design in Home Furnishings," prizes were awarded for the best woven and printed fabrics which were then manufactured and sold throughout the country. In 1947 the Museum sponsored a competition solely for printed textiles for the home and, out of more than 2000 entries, selected prize winning designs which were also manufactured and made available on the market. In addition the use of good modern fabrics in modern houses was demonstrated by the furnishings in two full scale houses designed by Gregory Ain and Marcel Breuer, which were built in the Museum garden.

In the series of historical exhibitions presented by the Museum to show primitive art related to the art of our time, fabrics have also been featured. In "Ancient Arts of the Andes," organized by Rene d'Harnoncourt, Director of the Museum, fabulous textiles woven thousands of years ago were displayed. More recently the Museum presented an exhibition of new and old fabrics from India, including rare cloths from museums and private collections here and abroad, as well as contemporary machine-made products. Modern fabrics, as a significant aspect of modern design, have also been included in several major theme exhibitions at the Museum, including the 20th Anniversary Year exhibition, "Modern Art in Your Life."