



Silk Designs of the Eighteenth Century: From the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

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The designs of 18th-century woven silk in England and France exemplified skills acquired over two millennia: in their range and quality, they have perhaps never been excelled. The artists who supplied their patterns were well known in their day but, by the 20th century, they had been completely forgotten. Yet through their work, and that of the weavers, commercial productions intended for ladies' dresses were transformed into works of art. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, contains an important and extensive collection of these silk designs, some bound as they were originally, others loose, and still more as samples of fabric in pattern books. This book reproduces in over 250 colour plates, a selection of designs, along with a brief history of the collection, providing a sourcebook of inspiration for designers and a record for students of costume and textiles. The designs changed with the season and this work illustrates how fashion evolved, from the extravagances of the "bizarre" silks of the 18th century, through the "lace" patterns and three-dimensional effects of the 1720s and 1730s, to the Rococo of the 1740s, the stylization of the 1750s and 1760s and, finally, to the Neo-Classicism of the 1770s and later. The diversity in motif and pattern ranges from floral arabesque to bold stripe, and subtleties of texture contrast with colours as brilliant as they were two centuries ago.

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