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The Benefit of Textile Design Research to the Textile Designer.

Abstract

If Textile Designers do not embark on and utilise textile research we will be left in a 'sole less' vacuum.

The following article aims to show the benefit of textile design research to the textile designer. Textile design is increasingly complex, and influenced by a number of factors such as ethical textiles, sustainability, fast versus slow fashion, new digital technology and science. It is therefore necessary for increased research by the textile designer into these areas in order to understand and gain knowledge that can be incorporated into the vast textile industry so that we produce the most relevant cloth and fabrics, that satisfy both consumer and ethical requirements.

“Work on good prose has three steps: a musical stage when its composed, an architectonic stage when its built and textile stage when its woven”

Walter Benjamin 1892-1940

[1]

Key words

Fibres, science, innovation, cross -discipline, slow fashion, research and technology.

Summary

In this article I intend to look at how textile design research is vital to the textile designer, and how the textile mills, which are investing in textile research and science, have the prospect a brighter future. I will also highlight that more support is required for eco friendly textiles and fashion if we are going to absorb the amount of clothing and textiles being produced in today's consumer market.

The Benefit of Textile Design Research to the Textile Designer.

At times it seems that textiles and textile Designers are worlds apart in their thought processes, aims and ideals. Textile designers are experimenting with fibre engineering using textile technology and sensory functions while traditional textiles still seems content on producing woollen and worsted cloth to the same historical specification, yet it is in fact imperative that they are interactive and remain so.

Historically, we only have to take 'Worsted cloth' to see the link between textile design and textile research. This cloth which is used by tailors to make men's suits and sold internationally takes its name from the village of Worsted in the English county of Norfolk, which has been a centre for the production of yarns and cloth since the weavers fleeing from the hundred years war arrived in the United Kingdom from Flanders in 1337. Worsted cloths woven by textile designers are very much at the forefront of International menswear designer collections today designed by brands such as Burberry, Gieves and Hawkes, and Ralph Lauren. Regency Dandy and sartorial advisor to King George IV Beau Brummell set the mood by promoting textiles through his stylish wardrobe. His attitude inspired other more contemporary Dandy's such as Sebastian Flyte the Oxford aesthete in Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead

Revisited [1945][2] and contemporary fashion writer Hamish Bowles, whose flamboyant and stylish images have helped, keep British menswear at the forefront of fashion for centuries. In the last fifty years UK Textile Industry has suffered greatly with increased competition from abroad and rising labour costs. Situated mainly in Huddersfield and the Scottish borders the Textile industry unlike clothing manufacturing [which has all gone off shore] remains intact. Although greatly reduced in numbers the UK mills still show in reasonable numbers at Premier vision in Paris and other global trade cloth fairs. It's interesting to note that the mills with the brightest future are those that have spent time working with textile designers and garment designers researching and innovating new yarns and creating new cloths. The result is that from a basic resource such as wool its possible to develop a variety of wool blends. Each has its own character and qualities but more importantly this innovation allows the designers to give the consumer a greater choice of texture, handle and performance in these new cloths. Softer finishing [Finishing is the mechanical and chemical processes used to improve the aesthetic, feel and performance of a cloth once it is woven] can change a cloth or fabric, fine super 150's and super 180's yarn counts have resulted in manufacturing shifts as a refined quality of make is required for these finer yarns. Interestingly prediction guru Li Edelkoort has predicted at the November 2009 International Mohair Summit in South Africa[3] a mohair trend due to its performance quality. Will the textile designers grasp the opportunity?

It has repeatedly been proved that when companies have invested in textile design they reap the benefits. Fox Brothers a cloth Mill based in Somerset exports its flannel worldwide particularly to the US and Japan used textile design to create the worlds lightest fine wool and cashmere flannel weighing 220gms. They were awarded the Queens Award to Industry in 2006 for the innovation. They also played a major part in the flannel trend that hit retail this winter [Collections Fall\ Winter 2009\10.] Richard Riley Managing Director of Reid and Taylor a woolen mill based in Langholm Scotland emphasized in an interview for Twist magazine in April 2010[4] that "sales of super luxury fabrics [super 180's quality] to China and Hong Kong have never been better." The cloth mill Clissold introduced new cloths woven in England and supported this with marketing around a buy British theme. The result was a rise in sales after exposure at 'Unica' a cloth trade fair in Milan in September 2009. While Halstead's also from the Yorkshire region has become renowned internationally for designing and producing a luxury Mohair cloth. Complementing this has been the textile print sector. The 'Text print' group which shows the work of British print designers at Premier Vision in Paris and Shanghai, exhibiting a high standard of print work and weave ideas bought by textile designers from all parts of the globe, particularly Asia.

The most creative and influential channel is when textile designers reflect on current textiles trends and after reflection work closely with textiles designers and cloth mills to produce yarns and cloth, which relate to the contemporary consumer and satisfy's sustainable demands. We still need ideas, especially during a recession in order to generate business .We have an oversaturation of products on the market but do we yet understand the idea of slow fashion, slow food, and slow textiles? Can such a terminology exist, fashion is fast, constantly changing and moving forward with new ideas, yet in our eagerness to create the new we have also arrived at a point of over

consumption, so its time to slow down. It is worth noting that textiles designers have played an important part in highlighting an ethical message, which textile mills have finally started to support. Globally we have become more concerned about ethical trading and the working conditions of those who make our clothing, and the impact of garment production on the world we live in? It started as a trend; a niche attitude based on concerns but has grown through communication in stature so that there are now large amounts of clothing that can be bought on desirability and which are also eco friendly. Yet have we gone far enough? Having travelled extensively recently from Helsinki in the north to Sri Lanka in the south I am still concerned that the vast majority of consumers are unperturbed about where or how their clothes are made, or for that matter how little they can be produced for. Interestingly Sri Lanka has worked with textile designers, and garment designers and undertakes great efforts to provide eco friendly yarns, manufacturing and put something back in to the surrounding communities and landscape.

However there is a new breed of company flying the ethical flag in the west including 'Pachacuti' who make Panama hats from Ecuadorian co-operatives: they who guarantee a fair wage and are therefore proving it is a viable option. However there needs however to be a greater enforcement of ethical and sustainable fashion or textile standards .Are we transparent or does transparency need to be the 'norm' [eg. supported by every high street store].

Are there enough natural resources available for the amount of garments being produced, and, will it be the textile designer's responsibility to highlight the potential problem and encourage designers to make more efficient use of limited resources and utilise new fibres?

The fashion cycles need to change, as in this new period of global warming they are less relevant. We no longer have such a defined winter and summer seasons. Textiles and fashion should adapt a strategy derived from the slow movement. Experiences and craft are the new modesties as luxury becomes vulgar rather than about high value. There is an opportunity to make something that more likely to appeal for its uniqueness.

It is craftsmanship rather than its price tag. Labour intensive skills and experience are crucial to the process; so there is a definite shift in emphasis. It's moving towards a more localised experience such as handcrafted textiles from Yorkshire as opposed to mass produced cloth in vast quantities from China.

The future needs cross-discipline projects in order to expand and develop information sharing. The challenge will be our ability to utilise science into the textile industry. Science and technology are moving at such a pace that textiles can become full of sensory qualities. In design thinking terms it's about 'Think, 'Touch' 'Reflect' and 'Analysis'. The ideas will come out of the research. If this is applied to textile research then new construction of yarns may arise. The textile cloth mills therefore need to listen to textile designers whose otherwise valid research will remain in the research vacuum leaving us with a 'sole less' future instead of a woven path to success.

References:

1. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project
by Beatrice Hanssen Continuum International publishing 2006.
Chapter 7 PAGE 282, point 24.
2. Jocks and Nerds by Richard Martin and Harold Koda
Published by Rizzoli 1989. The dandy page 188.
3. Twist magazine –World Textile publication Ltd.
Article on Reid and Taylor ,April 2010 p 36.
4. Twist magazine –World Textile publication Ltd article on International Mohair
summit ,December 2009 p18.

Footnotes.

Premier Vision-Twice yearly Fabric trade fair in Paris France.
Unica Twice yearly Fabric trade fair Milan Italy.
Texprint an organization whose aim is to link the best newly graduated textile designers with the textile and fashion industry. It is a non-profit making registered charity.
Burberry is a British Luxury clothing and accessories brand with stores and franchises worldwide.
Gieves and Hawkes is a bespoke garment maker situated on Savile Row London with a retail clothing collection.
Fox Brothers is a wool and cashmere textile manufacturer
Based in Somerset England.
Reid and Taylor supplies woollen and worsted luxury fabric to the leading fashion companies worldwide. Based in Langholm Scotland.
Clissold is a textile mill based in Yorkshire England making fine British woolens and worsted cloth.
William Halstead is a textile weaving mill in Bradford Yorkshire
Specialising in wool and Mohair cloth.
Pachacuti hat brand importing fair trade panama hats from Ecuador
Hamish Bowles is the European editor at Large for Vogue Fashion magazine. He is a recognised authority on Fashion Design.

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