

ART MUSEUMS of Colonial Williamsburg

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THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF EARLY PRINTED TEXTILES AT THE ART MUSEUMS OF COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG, FEATURING MANY NEVER-BEFORE-EXHIBITED PIECES, TO OPEN IN SPRING 2017



Williamsburg, VA (September 26, 2017)—In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, early printed textiles with their luminous colors and attractive designs were widely sought for fashionable clothing and home furnishings. Eighty examples of these stunning printed cottons and linens, many of which have never been exhibited before, will go on view in *Printed Fashions: Textiles for Clothing and Home* at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, opening March 25, 2017. The exhibition will illustrate the design, history and techniques of printed textiles during this formative era; these objects played their own important role in history, not just for their obvious aesthetic qualities, but also for their economic importance as trade goods and as examples of technological advances. *Printed Fashions* will remain on view through March 2019.

“Textiles are among the most fragile objects that survive from the past. They also afford us particularly detailed views into the lives of our forbearers,” said Ronald L. Hurst, Colonial Williamsburg’s Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator and vice president for collections, conservation, and museums. “Thanks to decades of effort and scholarship on the part of our textile curator Linda Baumgarten and her predecessors, the Foundation is home to a remarkably large and complete collection of printed textiles. This exhibition provides an opportunity to employ many of those beautiful objects to tell these very human stories.”

“The history of printed textiles may sound modern to today’s consumers,” says Linda Baumgarten, Colonial Williamsburg’s curator of textiles and costumes who organized the exhibition. “Traders shipping goods from the other side of the world in ships, domestic workers trying their best to respond to foreign

competition, people making the effort to dress in up-to-date styles despite their limited means and the importance of chemistry and mechanical expertise in the production of consumer goods: All of these concepts could easily represent textile production today as well as it did centuries ago.”

Although fashionable Indian chintzes had inspired European printers to begin developing competing technologies as early as the seventeenth century, it was during the eighteenth century that most of the technical advances were realized. Rather than using the Indian method of painstakingly hand-painting chemical fixatives known as mordants and then dyeing the textiles, Europeans developed laborsaving techniques to expedite the process. Blocks, copperplates and rollers allowed printers to apply pattern at a faster rate, often with delicate and intricate linear effects rivaling prints on paper. Experiments with chemicals yielded pencil blue and china blue techniques to solve the difficult challenges of patterning textiles with indigo blue.

Printed Fashions will include a variety of objects dating between 1700 and 1820 from India, England, France and colonial America. Among them will be men’s and women’s garments, women’s accessories, a doll dressed in original clothing from the 1770s, quilts and an Indian “palampore” bedcover in brilliant colors, a trunk lined with rare, early printed cotton, case covers for chairs, curtains and valances for tall-post beds plus study documents that show printing techniques, advances in printing chemistry and trends in design. Among the exhibition’s highlights is a stunning bed quilt, never previously exhibited, incorporated into which is a printed panel from India as the center focus. This panel, or “palampore,” was too small for the finished quilt, so the unknown quilt maker enlarged the bedcover with fine silk borders and then quilted the whole with closely spaced running stitches. The flowering tree at the center of the palampore is patterned with a large tree bursting with floral blooms, growing from the hilly ground. Later known as a “tree of life,” this design influenced English and American appliquéd quilts for a century after the first palampores entered the West.

Another featured object in *Printed Fashions* is a gentleman’s banyan made of stylish and expensive cotton from India. The delicate floral design was mordant-painted-and-resist-dyed, creating a colorful yet comfortable garment suitable for relaxing at home. By donning his imported chintz banyan, the man at leisure signaled his wealth and fashion sense. A textile swatch or sample book from 1783 is yet another must-see object in the exhibition; it unrolls to reveal more than seven feet of swatches with 430 samples in all. The colorful printed cottons were available for sale in a single year by a Manchester, England printing establishment. In less than a century, British manufacturers went from rudimentary early attempts at copying Indian imports to becoming a major printing industry.

To celebrate the opening of *Printed Fashions*, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation will host a symposium of internationally known scholars from March 26-28, 2017. Guest speakers will include Rosemary Crill, honorary research associate, Victoria and Albert Museum; Linda Eaton, John L. & Marjorie P. McGraw

director of collections & senior curator of textiles, Winterthur Museum; Susan Greene, author and independent researcher whose lecture is generously sponsored by Windham Fabrics, Inc.; Philip Sykas, research associate, Manchester School of Art, United Kingdom; and Barbara Brackman, independent scholar and researcher. In addition, twenty scholars from the United States and England will present juried papers on all aspects of textile printing and usage. The program will take place in the Hennage Auditorium at the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg. For more information, please see http://history.org/history/institute/institute_about.cfm.

An exhibition in formation for more than a decade, *Printed Fashions: Textiles for Clothing and Home* is certain to fascinate and delight decorative arts aficionados, fashion historians and design enthusiasts who will appreciate the many patterns that could easily have modern interpretations.

About The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg

The [Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg](#) include the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 5,000 folk art objects made during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum exhibits the best in British and American decorative arts from 1670–1830. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are located at the intersection of Francis and South Henry Streets in Williamsburg, Va., and are entered through the [Public Hospital of 1773](#). Museum hours from January 2, 2017, through March 16, 2017: Sunday to Thursday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Friday to Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. After March 16, 2017, hours are 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily.

About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 500 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center managed by Trilogy Spa, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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*Images (left to right): Quilt, India (center panel), Europe (quilting), 1770-1790, mordant-painted and resist-dyed cotton, silk, Museum Purchase, 1930-690; Man's Banyan, East Indian textile, worn in Britain, 1770-1790, mordant-painted and resist-dyed cotton, trimmed with silk, Museum Purchase, 1954-1010; Swatch Book (detail), Thomas Smith, Manchester, England, 1783, paper, cottons, and cotton-linens, block printed, Bequest of Grace Hartshorn Westerfield, 1974-569