



The Catalogue

Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010 is accompanied by an extensively illustrated catalogue published by the Bard Graduate Center in collaboration with Yale University Press. Edited by Earl Martin, the book will provide an in-depth analysis of Knoll Textiles. The contributors include Paul Makovsky on the Knoll firm before the founding of Knoll Textiles; Susan Ward on the context for modern textiles in America from the late 1930s to the early 1960s and Knoll's key contributions during this period; Bobbye Tigerman, curator of decorative arts at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, on Florence Knoll and the Knoll Planning Unit; and Angela Völker on Knoll Textiles from 1965 to 2010. *Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010* makes a major contribution to modern design history by resurrecting the stories of nearly seventy-five designers who created textiles for Knoll from 1942 to the present in an extensive biography section, which provides previously unpublished and critical information.

Related Programs

Lectures, study days, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. For further information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.

Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours for adult and school groups are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and on Thursdays until 7 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. To schedule a tour, please call 212-501-3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

The Bard Graduate Center is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The admission fee is \$7 general, \$5 seniors and students (with valid ID); admission is free on Thursday evenings after 5 p.m. For more information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit bgc.bard.edu.

Support

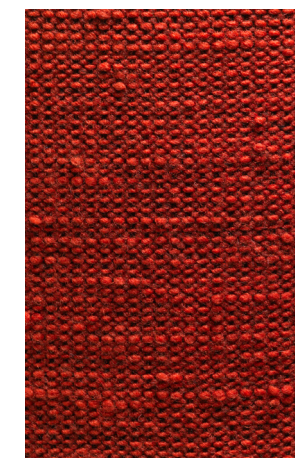
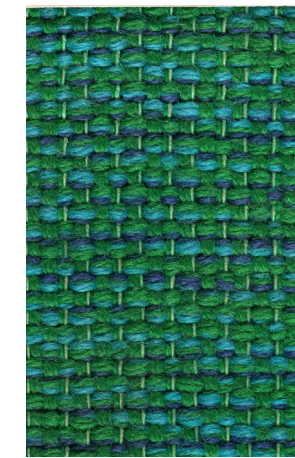
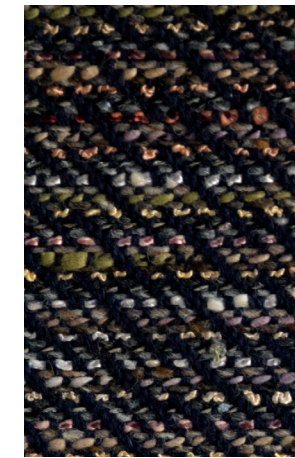
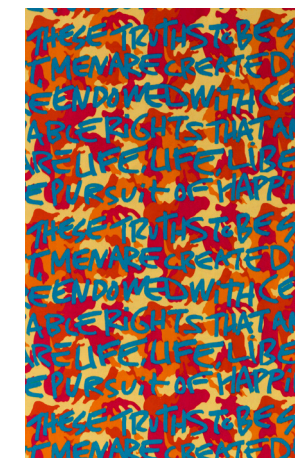
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KnollTextiles



Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010



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Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010

From May 18 to July 31, 2011, the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture (BGC) presents *Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010*, the first comprehensive exhibition devoted to a leading producer of modern textile design. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue consider the individuals and ideas that helped shape Knoll Textiles from its founding to 2010, with the goal of bringing the sartorial dimension of the Knoll brand and the under-recognized role of textiles in the history of modern interiors and design to the forefront of public attention. The lack of recognition of modern textiles is perhaps best exemplified by the iconic “Womb” chair by Eero Saarinen. While it is featured in most twentieth-century design collections, its fabric, usually a Knoll textile and a dominant design element of the chair, is rarely if ever identified.

The curators of the exhibition are Earl Martin, associate curator at the BGC; Paul Makovsky, editorial director, *Metropolis* magazine; Angela Völker, Curator Emeritus of Textiles at the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna; and Susan Ward, an independent textile historian. The exhibition comprises approximately 175 examples of textiles, furniture, photographs, and ephemera on loan from public, private, and corporate collections, including the Museum of Modern Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Smithsonian Institution, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum; Yale University Art Gallery; the Brooklyn Museum; the Knoll Museum; and the KnollTextiles Archive.

Interestingly, the lack of museological and historical interest in modern textiles became apparent as the various loans for this exhibition were secured. For example, key works from Knoll’s innovative handwoven collection of the 1950s were found in boxes of scraps preserved for more than fifty years in the attic of a former Knoll employee and large samples dating to 1948, the second year of production for Knoll Textiles, languished in storage for decades at one of America’s leading design collections without formally entering the collection until they were recognized by Bard’s curatorial team.

Another major contribution of this exhibition has been the discovery in private collections of furniture with its original upholstery. Not only were these rare examples of early upholstery on Knoll furniture brought to light, but a major conservation project was subsequently undertaken that revealed the challenges of properly conserving twentieth-century furniture—of preserving not simply the furniture form but also the textile covering it.

Cover: top row, left: Stephen Sprouse. *Graffiti Camo*. 2003. Polyester velvet, screen printed. KnollTextiles Archive. Center: Jhane Barnes. *Rainbow Twill*. 1983. Wool, rayon, and polyester. Knoll Museum. Right: Evelyn Hill Anselevicius. Handwoven upholstery. 1955. Wool, plastic. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Middle row, left: Franz Lorenz. *Scotch Linen*. 1950. Linen. KnollTextiles Archive. Center: Eszter Haraszty. *Fibra*. 1953. Linen, screen-printed. Smithsonian Institution, Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum. Right: Angelo Testa. *Campagna*. Linen, screen-printed. Smithsonian Institution, Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum. Bottom row, left: Paul Maute. *Cato*. 1961. Wool. Knoll Museum. Right: Peter Eisenman. *Diamond Back*. 1991. Wool. Knoll Museum.

Background

Knoll has been a leading proponent of progressive furnishings and interior design since the early 1940s, when the company was formed under the direction of Hans Knoll, who had come to the United States from Germany to expand the family furniture business. Fundamental to Hans Knoll’s success was the partnership he began in 1943 with Florence Schust, a talented graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art who had studied architecture both at the Architectural Association in London and with Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Hans and Florence were married in 1946, and her contacts gave the company access to many leading modern designers. In addition to her experience and contacts, Florence Knoll brought a strong commitment to innovation and adherence to quality.

By 1944, after creating what could easily be characterized as one of the most progressive lines of modern furniture in the United States at the time, Knoll introduced the Planning Unit. This division of the company, with Florence Knoll as its director, was devoted to creating complete interiors, primarily for the contract market. Although Knoll had been experimenting with textiles since 1942, the firm formally added textiles as a third division in 1947, thereby unifying three key areas of the corporate design field within a single company brand.

The Exhibition

Organized along four themes, *Knoll Textiles, 1945–2010* first considers the formation, shaping, and dissemination of the brand over time. The curatorial focus here is the importance of Knoll’s leadership and design directors who took risks to enhance innovation, promoted creativity, embraced new ideas and gave resources to develop them, ultimately leading to success within the design industry. This section also considers the significance of Knoll’s promotion and marketing of textiles.

The exhibition then focuses on the Knoll designers and the innovations in materials and methods of production associated with textiles from 1945 to 1965. Florence Knoll shifted the traditional vision of textile production, bringing it in line with a modern sensibility that used color and texture as primary design elements. In the early years, the firm took remarkable risks by hiring young, untried designers along with leading proponents of modern design to create textile patterns. The core group of designers from the early years included Astrid Sampe, Marianne Strengell, Sven Markelius, Angelo Testa, Stig Lindberg, Eszter Haraszty, Suzanne Huguenin, and Evelyn Hill Anselevicius.

The third theme considers the ways in which the textile division thrived in conjunction with the success of the Knoll Planning Unit from the 1940s through the 1960s. As Knoll obtained many of the most important corporate commissions of the 1950s, the textile division received large orders for textiles

that were used to upholster furniture and to serve as interior fittings, such as space dividers, window casements, and wall covers. Knoll used textiles in ingenious, unprecedented ways to convince clients to accept the Planning Unit schemes. One of the most important was the paste-up, a presentation method that used textile swatches and wood samples to produce a miniature mockup of an interior, a method Florence Knoll brought to the Planning Unit from her student days at Cranbrook. Major projects examined in the exhibition include Knoll’s impressive showrooms in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and elsewhere, as well as major office interior projects, such as the Alcoa building (1952), the suburban campus of Connecticut General Life Insurance (1957), a research center for the H. J. Heinz Company (1959), and the offices of Columbia Broadcasting System (1954 and 1965).

The history of Knoll Textiles after Florence Knoll’s retirement in 1965 is the focus of the last section of the exhibition, which traces the increasingly international approach of Knoll Textiles during the late 1960s and 1970s, when the design direction shifted to Europe and designers such as Wolf Bauer and Marga Hielle-Vatter came to the fore. The innovations and emphasis on design continued through the late 1970s and 1980s, when designers Jhane Barnes and Nob + Non, as well as architect Robert Venturi, created groundbreaking collections for Knoll. The pioneering use of materials has continued to the present day, as seen in the designs of Suzanne Tick and Dorothy Cosonas and in Knoll Luxe, a new line of fashion-forward, environmentally friendly textiles.

Astrid Sampe. *Rugby* on a model 71 chair. Ca. 1955. Fiberglass shell, foam rubber, wood legs, wool and nylon upholstery. Private collection. Overleaf: Sven Markelius. *Pythagoras*. 1953. Linen and cotton, screen-printed. Smithsonian Institution, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum.

