

REPORTS

TECHNOLOGY AND DIVERSITY IN TEXTILES

A symposium report by Jutta Stahlhacke and Prof. Bob Jerrard, University of Central England in Birmingham



Maria Blaisse: 'Rubber Arms', 1996, costume for 'Kuma Guna'

The Symposium held on Friday 20th February was part of a series of events celebrating the merging of Loughborough University and Loughborough College of Art and Design. Organised by the Colleges Multi-media Textile Department it also saw the opening of the touring 'Multi Media Textile' exhibition (see *TF 1/98*, p. 16).

Textile Designers are looking increasingly towards technology for new materials and inspiration. Their training and routine practice currently prepares them little to work in a technical, scientific context.

The approximately 200 visitors were provided with fascinating insight into textile development and research, with certain themes reoccurring throughout the event: i.e. cross disciplinary working and innovation, environment and also the importance of lightweight structures, be it natural as in spiderwebs or sophisticated chemical coatings.

Sara E. Braddock, lecturing in Textiles at Goldsmith's College presented a talk on 'Fabric Finishes for Fashion' which looked at new functional as well as aesthetic qualities achievable with techniques like holographic lamination, silicone coating or thermoplastic molding. Together with Marie O'Mahoney who chaired the symposium Sara co-authored the recently published *Techno-Textiles* book (see *TF 1/98*, p. 16).

Fritz Vollrath a zoologist from Aarhus University in Denmark and Research Fellow at Oxford University gave a fascinating talk about the evolution and mechanics of spider webs. Spider silk is stronger than Kevlar and twice as elastic as nylon and used by

spiders in various forms of webs to optimum performance.

Tom Barker from DCA-b Design Consultants, talked about the use of fabric for sustainable architecture design. His concepts, learning from nature but also solving the challenges involved in using contemporary materials, was illustrated through projects like the RENEUE energy building in Wandsworth and the Millennium Village in Greenwich. Here the functional requirements of sustainable social and private housing were addressed by proposals for reactive designs like a multi-layered breathable wall design.

Illustrating her work with several videos, the Dutch designer Maria Blaisse gave an insight into her work crossing the boundaries of fashion, industry and performance. Exploring costumes in movement her hat collection for Issye Miyake, including her famous 'Flexicaps' and her new Kuma Guna series, uses industrial materials like rubber laminates and nonwovens and technology.

Adriaan Beukers from Delft University in Holland gave an overview of the history and development of lightweight textile reinforced structures. These high performance structures are used for materials from packaging to aircraft construction.

Biruta Kresling, an architect and researcher in Biomimetics, explained with samples and some practical hands-on exercises her work observing biological structures. Concentrating on folding she demonstrated how sophisticated manipulation can change the mechanical behaviour of paper or textile membranes.

Susan Mossman introduced the concept and details of the Science Museums new 'Challenge of Materials' Gallery opened in March 1997.

As a designer I was fascinated by descriptions and aesthetics of these new developments. As a researcher I am still hungry for more detailed information. Over lunch an industrial visitor remarked that she did not gain the factual information she had expected. Some of the processes and finishes described, especially by Sara Braddock, made me feel very uncomfortable; I would have appreciated some awareness and mention of the environmental impact and the designers/producers environmental concepts when techniques like chemical blistering were mentioned. Technology in combination with good design should be one of the leading drivers to further sustainable development in the textile industry.

FROM ANCIENT LACES TO CONTEMPORARY ART

Renata Pompas

Thanks to an initiative by curator Stefania Moronato, the Italian Centre of Textile and Costume History Studies housed in Mocenigo Palace, Venice, Italy, was much invigorated. From 27 February to 30 April 1998 it hosted the exhibition, "From Ancient Lace to Contemporary Art". As the title suggests, the lace technique is a thread linking the historic part of the exhibition, which showed laces dating from the 16th to 18th centuries, with the work of two contemporary fibre artists, Wanda Casaril and Thesly Schoenholzer.

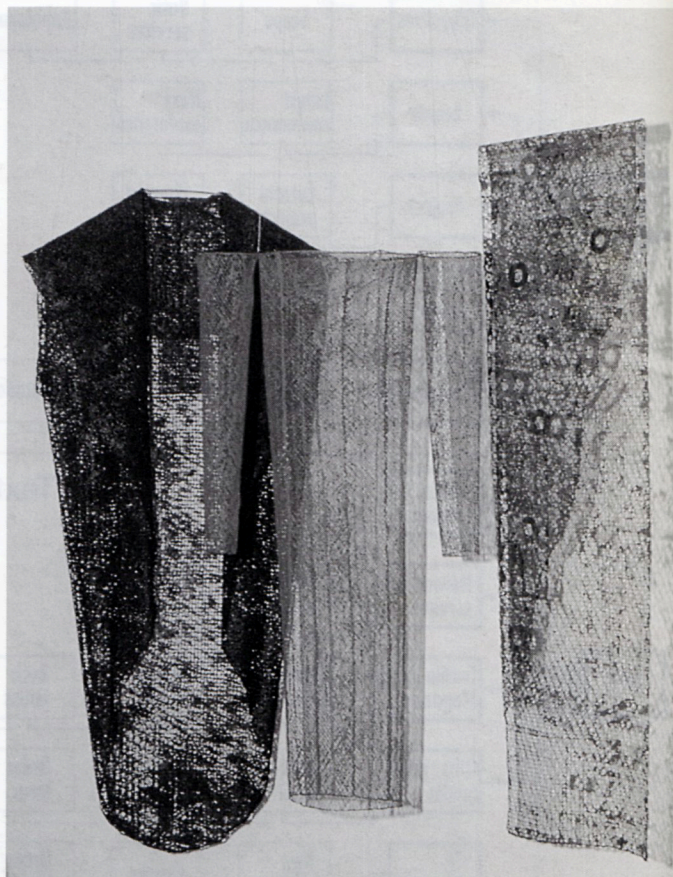
The historic part showed 41 pieces chosen from the museum's extensive collection that numbers more than 500 pieces. Most of them were Venetian products, although there were also some examples from France, Spain, Flanders, Britain, Belgium and Northern Italy. The selection illustrated many lace techniques using either needles or bobbins, with examples ranging from handmade 16th century laces to mechanical samples dating from the 19th century. - Next to this historic documentation, Venetian

artist Wanda Casaril's installations unfolded. Despite their monumental dimension, they seemed very light and precious, their abstract texture almost organic, and their open structure very modern.

The works of Thesly Schoenholzer, a Swiss artist who has lived in Florence for many years, were enclosed like mummies in the museum hall's glass cases, but still arranged with care to show their connection to the present. Schoenholzer's refined art is characterised by her search for a symbol's reduction to its essence. In Venice she showed 14 small-format pieces and 15 samples of mechanical lace. She used lightly interlaced thin threads to produce slender graphic structures of minimal dimensions; these are organic in their growth and development of basic shapes, abstract in the geometrical structure of their patterns, and dialectic in their dynamism of shapes that are never closed or finished.

Exhibition address

Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, San Stae 1992, I-30100 Venezia; tel: +39-41/721798



Installation by Venetian artist Wanda Casaril, 1998