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SCIENCE AND PRACTICE

Hand-Block Printing

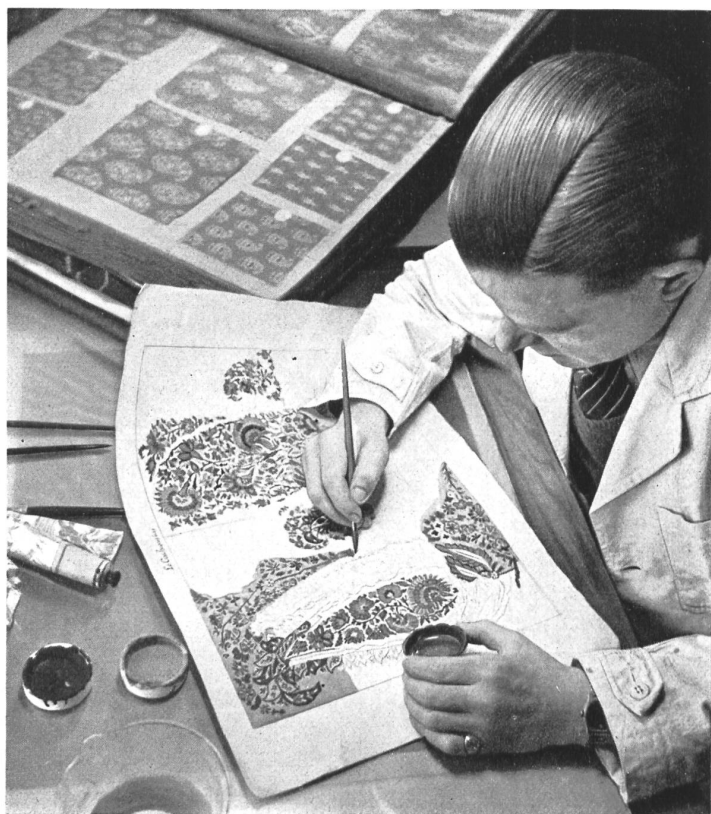


Even to-day printed fabrics can be seen drying in the open air, hanging from old «drying towers».

Such is the prestige of work done by hand that it continues to hold its place in all branches of industry, wherever the public demands not only a precision that the most perfect machine cannot provide but, on the contrary, a particular personal element that a machine does not possess. Who would think of buying a watch, all of whose parts had been assembled by a machine without any skilled worker having had anything to do with the matter, or a car whose engine had not been carefully checked and adjusted by the eye and hand of a mechanic? And just as a machine is unable to give this fineness of adjustment, so it cannot give the personal note that is demanded in a product intended as much for pleasure as for utility. The roller printing machine prints unfailingly, but without imagination, hundreds of thousands of yards of material... the precise transfers of screen-printing are too precise and, in spite of the perfection of the execution, or rather because of this perfection, certain customers no longer find in it the small detail which betrays the hand of man, which gives that personal touch and, in consequence, a special value to a printed fabric.

This is the reason why hand-block printing has continued to exist — to a modest extent it is true — right up till the present day in spite of technical progress, and this is what gives it the chance of lasting still longer.

The art of printing designs on fabrics by means of an engraved plate covered with colour comes from the Far East. Introduced into Europe by the Dutch, it passed in particular from the Netherlands to the canton of Neuchâtel where it gave birth to an industry which flourished over a period of two centuries (see «Swiss Textiles» No. 2 1950), and subsequently spread into other districts, such as Geneva for example, from where it was introduced into northern and eastern Switzerland, especially into the canton of St. Gall and the distant valleys of the canton of Glaris where it developed considerably. Before the first World War, there were in Switzerland more than twenty hand-block printing establishments, all working mainly for export. At the present moment the number of Swiss establishments where this technique is still carried out is very small and the clientele is no longer the same as before. Before the emancipation of the East and of the Balkans, before the hot and cold wars, crises and the iron-curtain, Switzerland delivered considerable quantities of hand-block printed



Preparation of a design for hand-printing.

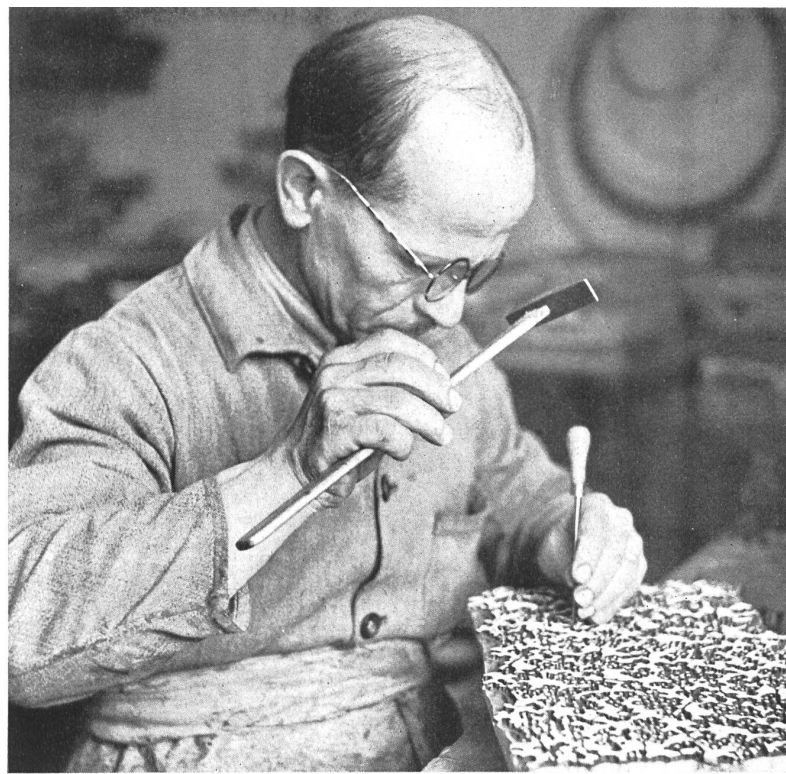
cottons to Asia Minor, Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania, the Far East and Africa. They were all very simple articles, always the same, each country, each district, each ethnic group buying one kind only to the exclusion of all others ; the slightest difference in the style of the pattern, in the arrangement of the colours or even in a single shade would often lead to the refusal of the whole consignment.

To-day hand-block printing is still carried out in Switzerland for certain articles such as handkerchiefs, high novelty pure silk or woollen squares, scarves, fabrics for ties and other articles with small repeats, particularly in classic styles, intended for clients who insist on the sign of work done by hand, that is to say small irregularities in register, not visible enough to give the goods a primitive appearance but which are nevertheless there and which give these prints that slight human touch, that character of exclusiveness that work done by machine does not possess. It is not a question of the manufacture of large quantities, but of comparatively small printings to which work done by hand is so well suited.

Hand-block printing is carried out by means of thick blocks of wood on which the designs are traced and then engraved by means of chisels, gouges and other instruments. In order to carry out stippled designs, having in particular to render half-tones, a method was devised of inserting in the block rigid brass wires, or pegs, whose ends must be absolutely flat and all on the same level ; then the whole plate was made by means of pegs and strips of brass driven into the wood, previously cut out according to the outlines of the design. Finally, for designs having to be repeated on the same plate, someone conceived the idea of making a mould of an original engraving and using this to make replicas in metal, which are then mounted on the block. When printing, the worker places the plate in the colour spread over a cloth, then applies it to the part to be printed, having for his only guide and assistance the outlines of the design traced on the fabric and the sureness of his eye and hand. Depending on the intensity to be given to the colour, the plate is sometimes applied a second time and the worker strikes it smartly with a short wooden mallet weighted with a stone or a lump of cast iron at its upper end. Naturally one plate is needed for every colour. After printing the fabric is dried and then submitted to the various processes necessary to the development of the colours. Next it is washed and then undergoes the final finishing operations necessary to its presentation.

As we have already pointed out, hand-block printing can nowadays no longer be the object of a very large industry and a very large trade, economic and social conditions being opposed to it. But it does exist and that is good, and what matters most is that it should continue to exist. It asserts in the face of invading mechanisation the supremacy of the human touch, and it is for this reason that we are glad that there still exists — even, and above all perhaps, in very highly industrialised countries — a clientele (and the size of this clientele counts less than the mere fact of its existence) to purchase its products.

R. CH.



Engraving a wooden block.

The photographs illustrating this article have been very kindly put at our disposal by the establishments F. Blumer & Cie, Schwanden, and Textil-Werke Blumenegg A.-G., Goldach.



Printing by hand. The worker holds the mallet in his left hand. With the handle, he strikes the block to ensure perfect contact with the cloth.

Swiss Office for the Development of Trade

Zurich and Lausanne

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VICTOR BOLLAG ZÜRICH

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Model-Gowns and Dresses for Sport Afternoon Evening

Sous-vêtements tricot et jersey

Les sous-vêtements féminins sont soumis aux caprices de la mode au même titre que les vêtements. Mais les transformations, dans ce domaine, sont moins accusées et se font sur un rythme plus lent. Une femme qui tient à être à la dernière mode dans sa toilette hésitera peut-être à sacrifier certaines habitudes — puisqu'il s'agit là, avant tout, de son confort pratique — et sera volontiers un peu conservatrice à cet égard sans être « vieux jeu » pour autant. Affirmer cela ne veut pas le moins du monde dire que les fabricants suisses de sous-vêtements bonneterie se contentent de rééditer toujours les mêmes modèles et que leur seul souci soit celui de la bienfaisance. Car, en aucun des domaines où il règne, l'éternel féminin n'abdique le moindre de ses droits. Pour les créateurs le problème est donc ardu, mais d'autant plus séduisant à résoudre : il leur faut faire toujours du nouveau sans cependant s'écarter de certaines données traditionnelles qui, il faut en convenir, correspondent à certains besoins permanents.

Malgré tout ce que nous venons de dire la nouveauté révolutionnaire n'est pas exclue, qu'elle soit imposée du dehors, comme l'adaptation rendue temporairement nécessaire il y a quelques années par le triomphe du *new look*, ou qu'elle ait son origine en dedans, étant alors une soudaine mise en concordance des formes sur des besoins et tendances jusqu'alors



His & Co. S. A., Murgenthal

« HISCO »

Elégante chemise de nuit, avec dentelles de laine, de la dernière collection.

Smart night-gown with woollen laces of the last collection.

Elegante camisa de noche con encajes de lana de la última colección.

Dieses elegante Woll-Nachthemd mit Wollspitzen ist der letzten Kollektion entnommen.

Photo Dorvyne



Chemise de nuit en charmeuse de rayonne avec entre-deux et volant de tulle.

Rayon charmeuse nightdress with insertions and net flounces.

Camisones de dormir, de charmeuse rayón, con entredoses y volante de tul.

Nachthemd aus Charmeuse-Kunstseide mit Entre-deux und Tüllabschluss.

Jos. Sallmann & Cie, Amriswil
« ISA »

Une nouveauté sensationnelle : la chemise de nuit courte en charmeuse de nylon avec broderie nylon.
A sensational novelty : a short nightdress in nylon charmeuse with nylon embroidery.

Una novedad sensacional : El camisón de dormir corto, de charmeuse de nilón con bordado de nilón.

Eine vielbesprochene Neuheit : das kurze Nachthemd aus Nylon-Charmeuse mit Nylonstickerei.

réprimés ou seulement négligés. A cet égard, nous citerons la création de la chemise de nuit courte qui semble répondre à un vœu longtemps informulé.

L'introduction du nylon dans la bonneterie suisse est certainement un événement d'une grande importance, d'autant plus que l'on entrevoit, pour un proche avenir, la fabrication de cette fibre — et d'un autre produit analogue le « grilon » — dans le pays. Les autres matières textiles continuent néanmoins à être fort prisées et nous pouvons encore présenter ici aussi bien les pratiques et douillettes parures de fine laine que des articles classiques en rayonne. La concurrence en diverses matières a ceci de bon qu'elle tend à assigner à chacune d'elles la place à laquelle ses qualités lui donnent strictement droit et à couper

Photo Lutz



Ryff & Cie S. A., Berne

« SWANETTES »

Sous-vêtements fins tricotés
pour dames et enfants.

Ladies' and children's knitted
underwear.

Finas prendas interiores de
punto para señoras y niños.
Feine gestrickte Unterkleider
für Damen und Kinder.



Photo Dorvyne

court aux velléités d'hégémonie de l'une ou l'autre, ce qui est tout à l'avantage du consommateur. Il n'empêche que les fabricants s'efforcent sans cesse, sous la pression de la concurrence, d'augmenter les qualités d'usage de leurs produits. Mentionnons à cet égard l'emploi de la laine décatie, plus douce et irrétrécissable, et les grands progrès réalisés dans la fabrication de la rayonne qui supporte la cuisson et dont les couleurs, incorporées à la masse avant le filage, sont solides à la lumière, à la cuisson et à la transpiration, sans parler d'autres qualités, de toucher par exemple, que nous devons à l'industrie du perfectionnement.

Quant à la coupe et à la façon des sous-vêtements de bonneterie, elle est toujours étudiée et, à l'heure actuelle, elle se maintient dans une note de féminité simple, sans sécheresse, mais aussi sans agressivité, sans trop de froufrouantes exagérations. Il semble que nous soyons parvenus à une période de calme et d'équilibre... pour combien de temps ?



Hochuli & Cie, Safenwil

« HOCOSA »

Lingerie fine pour dames, en fin tricot.

Dainty lingerie, in fine tricot.

Bonita ropa interior, de punto fino, para señoras.

Hübsche, feingestrickte Damen-Unterwäsche.

Photo Droz



Jakob Laib & Co., Amriswil

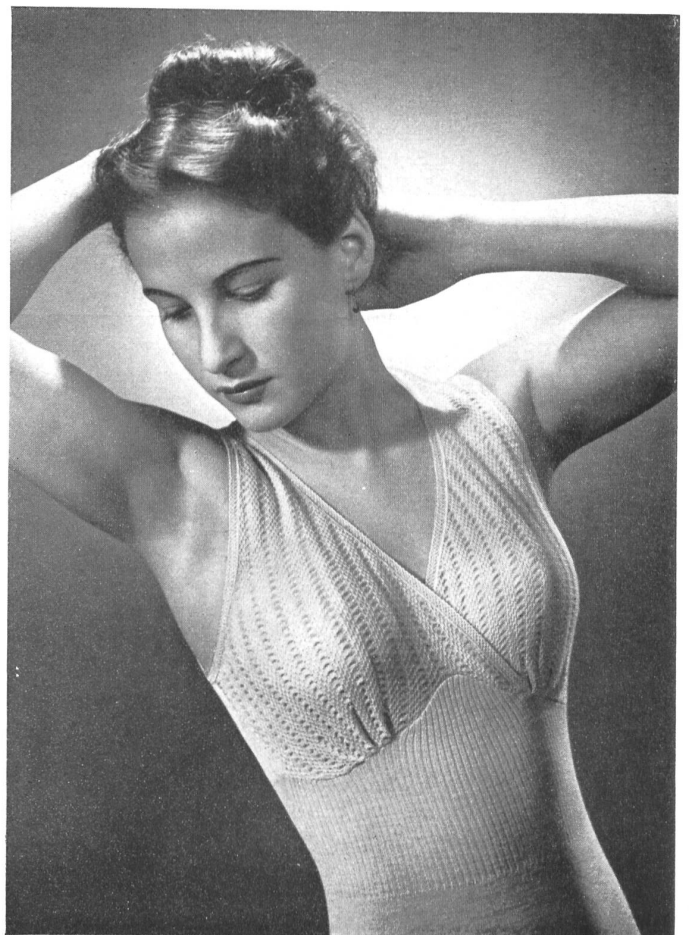
« YALA-Fixcolor »

Combinaison-jupon en charmeuse avec ravissante garniture de dentelles.

Charmeuse slip with attractive lace trimming.

Combinación-enagua, de charmeuse, con encantador adorno de puntilla.

Unterrock aus Charmeuse mit reizender Spitzengarnitur.



Ruegger & Cie, Zofingue

« molli »

Lingerie fine tricotée, pour dames.

Ladies' fine knitted lingerie.

Lencería fina de punto.

Fein gestrickte Unterwäsche.

Photo Droz