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# An Indian odyssey

From the coast of India to the shores of Europe

New course to discover  
from 1st July 2020



Press kit





# An Indian odyssey

## From the coast of India to the shores of Europe

The first indienne fabric arrived in Europe in the 16th century, in the holds of cargo ships run by trading companies. These soft, lightweight fabrics and their exotic, brightly-coloured patterns immediately caused a sensation in the West. In the 17th century, large palampore hangings found fame and success as Far-Eastern culture rose in prominence in Europe, alongside Chinese silks and Japanese lacquer.

Wall hanging with Peonies, India around 1790, painted and dyed



Palampore, India, for the European market, Coromandel Coast, 1750-1770

Less elaborate indienne fabric was also appreciated for its colours, which did not run or fade when washed. These imported fabrics were generally heavy cottonade cloth with flower prints on red backgrounds, but demand from European markets saw a shift towards ecru tones and other décor. This is a good illustration of how goods moved around the world, in the first era of globalisation in the modern era. In Persia and India, several production centres maintained and preserved these ancient techniques, providing products for Asia and Europe and printing the same décors well into the 19th century.





## A new introduction course

### Weaving beauty into fabric

Cloth can be enhanced and decorated during the manufacturing process, in which décors can be woven into the fabric or other materials - such as embroidery or dye - can be incorporated. The oldest and most common way to decorate cloth is with dye, and effects can be formed by knotting the fabric, applying wax or using templates.

A case in point is the "ikat" technique, in which dying and knotting are combined: the threads are partly dyed and partly protected from the dye, and these partially-dyed threads are then woven.

The silk weavers of Lyon became renowned for their silk brocade, developing a new technique in the 18th century to add more nuances of colour to their brocade.



Little sarong for kid, Indonesia, Java, 19th century

In the 19th century, loom-woven wool and silk reached a point where the fabric could imitate the shawls imported from India. Paris and Lyon would specialise in the production of extremely beautiful shawls, whose richly (or simply) decorated palm-frond patterns were woven on mechanical Jacquard looms. In the east, the Alsatian city of Mulhouse developed wool printing techniques and began producing excellent imitations, bringing fame to their manufacturers by the middle of the century.

### The art of fabric printing

Textile printing techniques all use the same principles as dyeing cloth: before the cotton fabric is submerged in the dyeing vat, the mordant (a chemical compound of metal salts) is printed on using a wooden board. This is what allows the colour to penetrate the fabric, revealing the patterns.

Cloth can also be printed using a copper panel with an engraving pressed into it; similar to the etching process, the ink here is replaced by thickened mordant



Piece of châle, wrought in silk, France, Lyon, 18th century





This process was developed in England and spread to France in the second half of the 18th century. It was taken up by the largest factories in the country, such as Nantes or Oberkampf in Jouy-en-Josas, which gave its name to this type of print.

While this technique can only be used for monochrome printing, wooden panels can be used to add colourful highlights. The wooden board (used alone or alongside other techniques) was used up until the middle of the twentieth century, in particular for extravagant prints using many colours.

## A revolution in technique

The Industrial Revolution gave rise to “rotary” printing using engraved copper rollers. This English technique was first limited to very small patterns and one, two or three colours, and became widespread among factories in Alsace. These machines were perfected throughout the 19th century, however, increasing the number of colours available.



« The farms », Oberkampf factory in Jouy-en-Josas, around 1795, copper plate printing

The 1930's saw the invention of “Lyonnais” flat screen printing, which applied the principles of silk-screening on a larger scale. Here, frames stretched a length of fine gauze, onto which photo-sensitive emulsion was applied to set the parts needing protection from the dye. As with previous block-printing techniques, a separate screen was needed for each colour. In the 1950's, this process was adapted to use a micro-perforated nickel cylinder, giving rise to rotary screen printing. This new method of printing grew in prominence in the second half of the 20th century, and is still used despite the arrival of digital technology.

In the 1960's, transfer printing was developed: here, a sheet of tracing paper is printed with a design, which can then be transferred to fabric. This process is mostly used to manufacture t-shirts. The digital revolution rocked the world of fabric printing, with designs now able to be printed in a single run. Nevertheless, it took time for this technology to become effective and competitive on textile supports.

Rotary screen printing

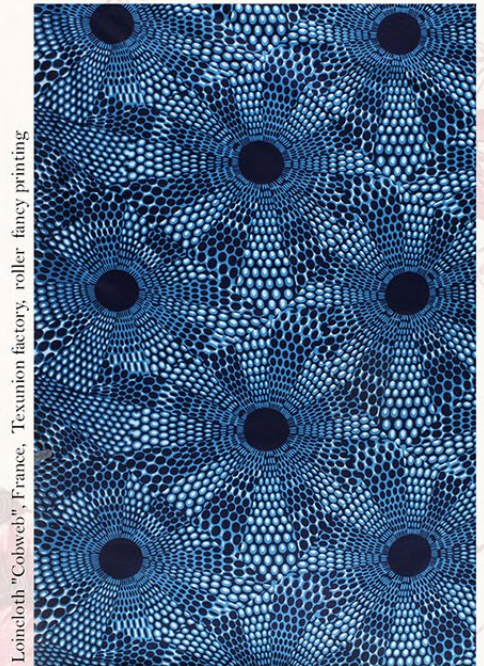




## African fabric techniques

African wax print fabrics are now known for their extremely colourful patterns, but this term originally applied to a printing technique derived from Javanese batik cloth. This is essentially a dyeing technique, with the preliminary application of wax and resin. In batik, this is applied manually, while with wax print it is pressed on using two engraved copper rollers. When the cloth is submerged in the dye, it penetrates the parts left untreated on both sides of the fabric - this is the characteristic feature of wax print cloth.

In Alsace, after the Second World War, companies began to manufacture fancy loincloths for the African market. These were first roller-printed, before manufacturers switched to rotary-screen techniques. For these prints, designers adapted and developed a new type of pattern, and wax now features rich, fantasy decorations which remain a source of inspiration to designers to this day.



Loincloth "Colowdy", France, Texunion factory, roller-fancy printing

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