



Georgina von Etzdorf

A unique opportunity to acquire the
Georgina von Etzdorf textile archive



Above a brick barn in Wilton, the ancient capital of Wessex, sits a small space.

Stepping inside, you immediately sense an aura of enterprise, imagination and artistry – a profusion of ideas. Years of creativity and hard work are represented here in more than 2,000 textile artefacts produced to delight and enhance, loved and celebrated by many, passed on by the efforts of a few.

The space holds the extraordinary Georgina von Etzdorf company archive and the history of a group of friends in their twenties, full of dreams, energy and inexperience. Determined to impact the world, to share their vision of a culture, a way of life and an aesthetic in which they truly believed, they plunged their creative enthusiasm into designing and printing fabrics and items of beauty and inventiveness.

Georgina von Etzdorf, Martin Simcock and Jonathan Docherty – three diverse, headstrong characters – met at art school in the 1970s and talked of setting up a different kind of company. They grew a community and set about realising their dream with discipline, naivety and poetry. They turned the staid conventions of the textile industry into a pleasure park of romance, colour and fun. Their journey spanned 20th century bohemia and the 21st century post-digital age; GvE accessories and clothing were produced and distributed worldwide between 1981 and 2006.

‘Art, design, print, fabric, colour, texture, movement, light, beauty, quality, vitality, freedom; this is not work, it is the way of life we choose to live.’

Martin Simcock, from Nilgin Yusuf, ‘Georgina von Etzdorf: Sensuality, Art and Fabric’, Thames and Hudson 1998



Front cover: ‘Bewitched’ fabric discharge screen printed on silk chiffon 1996

Opposite page: ‘Jetty’ design screen printed on cotton velvet 1992

Above: Martin Simcock, Georgina von Etzdorf, Jonathan Docherty, photograph by Kim Knott, The Sunday Times 1986

Pushing the boundaries

When the textile industry seemed unable to meet the challenge of reproducing their creations, they set about transferring their hand-painted designs to individual silk screens and printing them on luxurious fabrics. They worked at first in a garage, then in a barn in Odstock, Wiltshire. From these humble beginnings, the company Georgina von Etzdorf built an international printed textile and fashion brand selling into 400 high-end fashion retailers in 25 countries worldwide.

Inspired by their Arts and Crafts education at Camberwell School of Art and reinvented processes and innovations by Belford Prints in Macclesfield, Cheshire, the trio repeatedly pushed the boundaries, attracting an ardent following and electrifying devotees including Kate Moss, Mick Jagger and Diana, Princess of Wales.

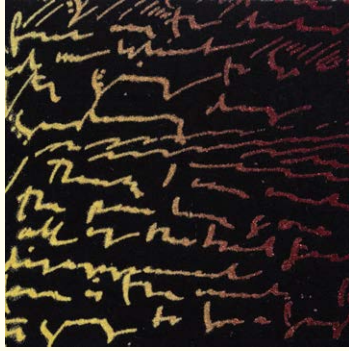
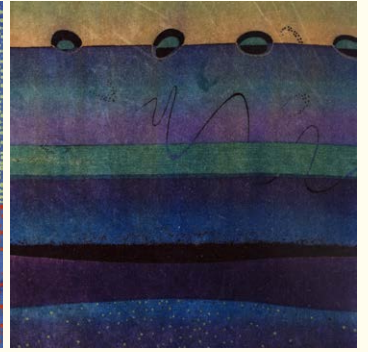
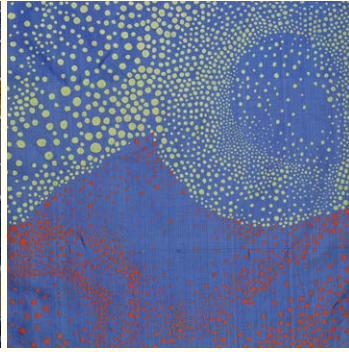
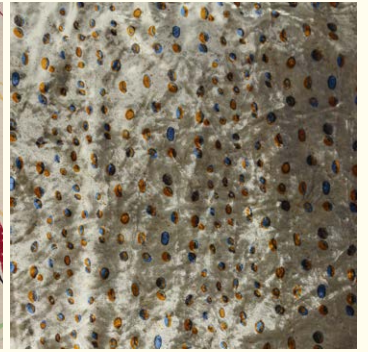
They produced fabrics, scarves, ties, women's and men's clothing and accessories in unusual and daring colours. Jewellery, gloves, bags and hats, rugs and printed wood furniture soon followed, created in collaboration with different artisans. Velvets, silks, linens, wool; printed, woven, knitted, knotted, brushed. Iridescent, exuberant, unstoppable design.

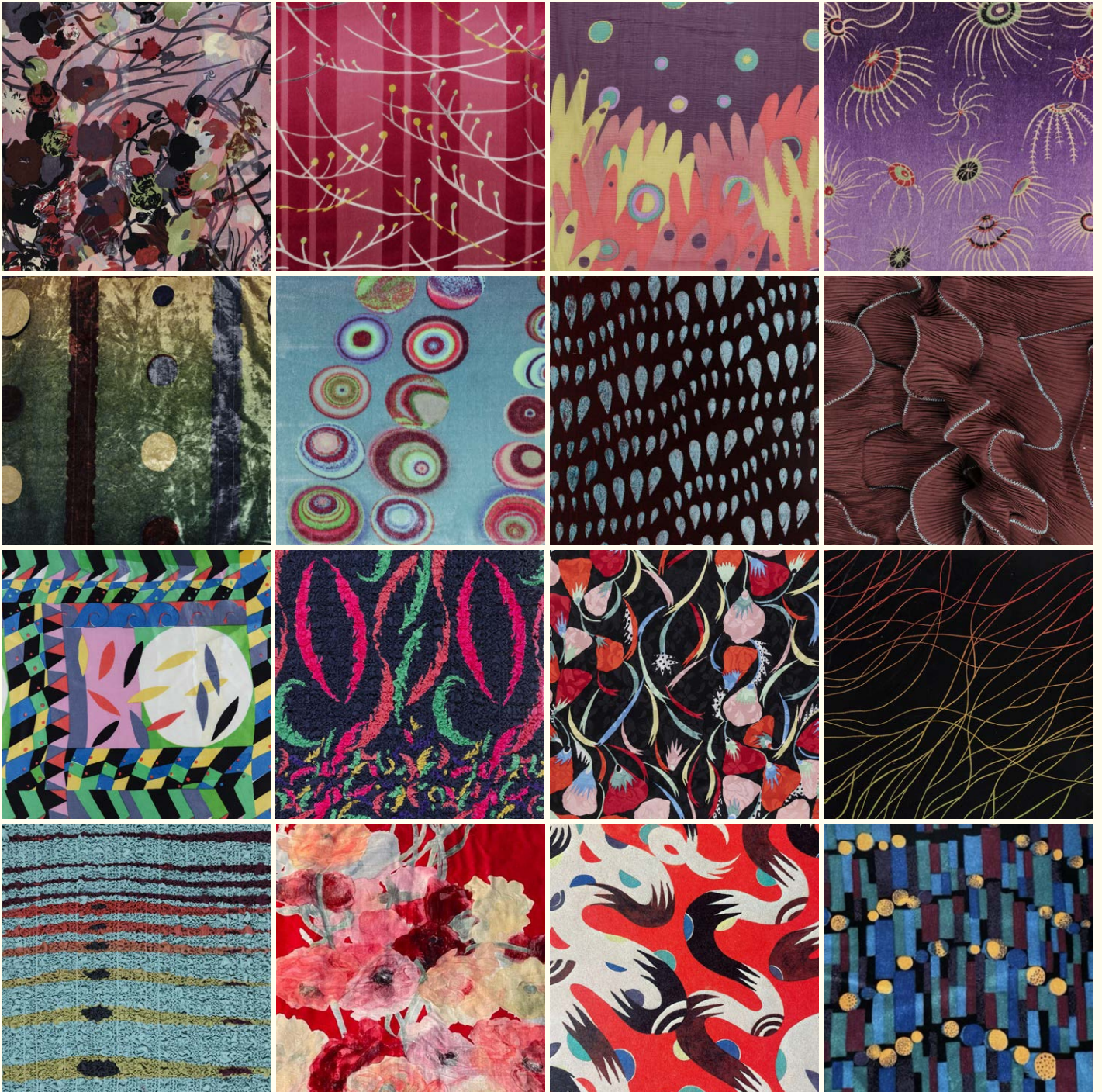


Above: 'Rosamundi' original artwork collaged and hand painted on paper 1994

Opposite page: 'Fiddlehead' original artwork hand painted in watercolour on paper 1988







A selection of designs and fabrics 1981–2006 © Georgina von Etzdorf

Archive content in brief

This archive tracks the Georgina von Etzdorf story. It's a stunning visual and tactile treasure trove. It encompasses garments and artefacts, original artworks on paper through development into textile designs, quantities of colour combinations, piles of fabric swatches and tests, numerous press cuttings, dye recipes, colour strikes, commercial records, retail profiles, revealing meeting notes, fan letters and hundreds of photographs.

The work of Georgina von Etzdorf is a uniquely influential piece of the jigsaw that is the British designer fashion industry. The beauty, quality and sophistication of its output is held in high regard, cherished by many, inspiring countless people.

It's a rich legacy, a story waiting to be told.

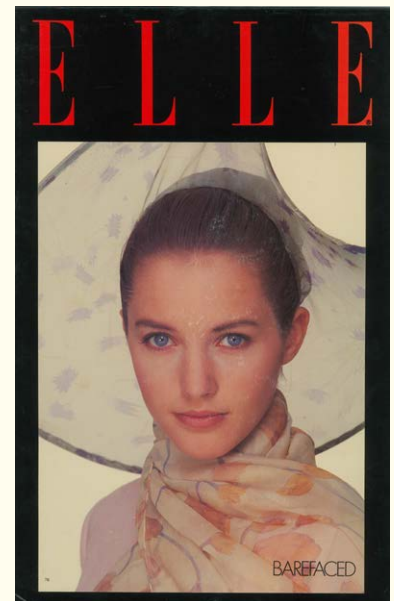
Top left: Diana, Princess of Wales in 'Poppy' hand printed wool challis dress 1982

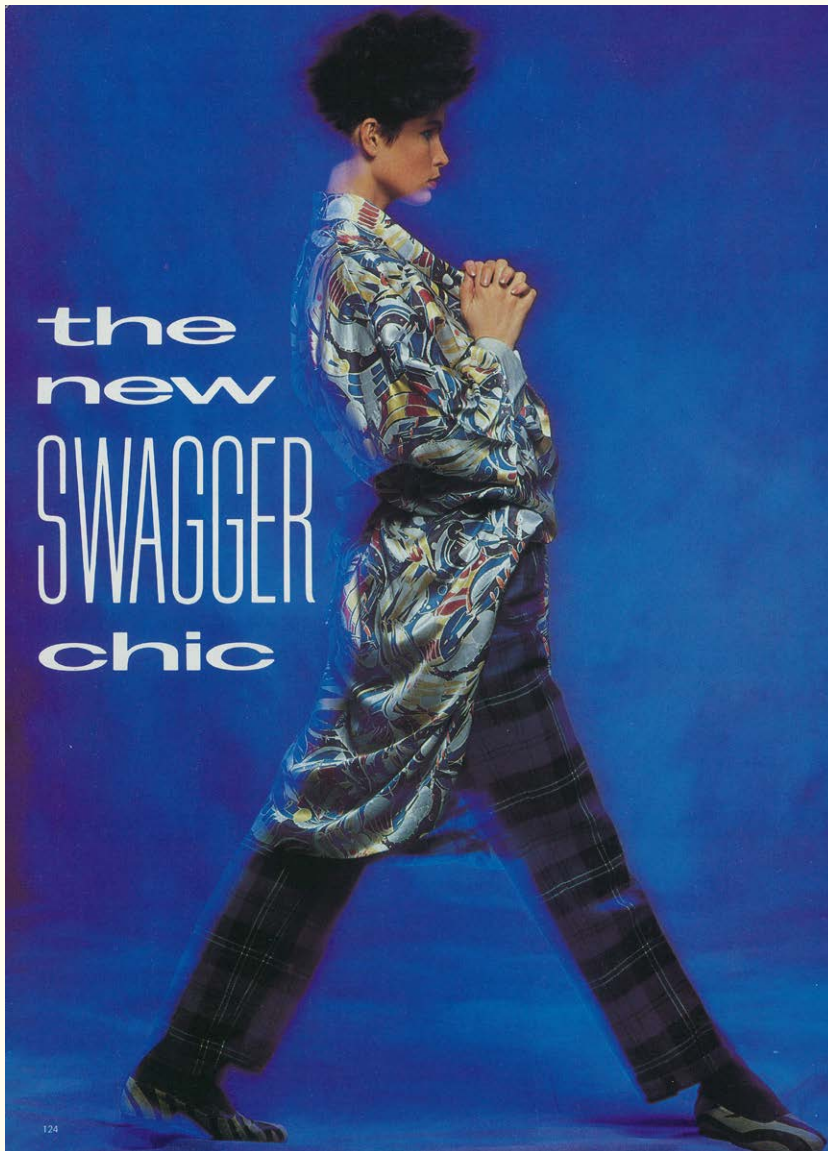
Top right: 'Starwars' scarf hand printed on silk chiffon 1982

Bottom left: 'Tangent' cotton velvet discharge screen printed scarf

Bottom right: 'Cornflower' printed silk organza hat and 'Minniver' tulip silk chiffon stole 1989

Opposite page: 'Wurlitzer' robe design hand printed on silk satin 1983





The archive occupies a room approximately 5 metres in each direction. All contents are carefully folded, hung, packed, labelled and catalogued.

Garments: 130 pieces

Swatches: 2,000 pieces

Scarves and shawls: 1,400 pieces

Men's ties and accessories: 170 pieces

Rugs, items of furniture: 7 pieces

Manchester Art Gallery 25-year retrospective exhibition, 2006:

8 64-litre boxes including 500 scarves and 15 fabric lengths

Boxes of paper artefacts and ephemera:

20 64-litre boxes of merchandising and marketing files and paperwork, including collection 'bibles', colourways, recipes, sales by product analysis, customer profiles and sales analysis, business plans, directors' quarterly meetings and the best of GvE PR

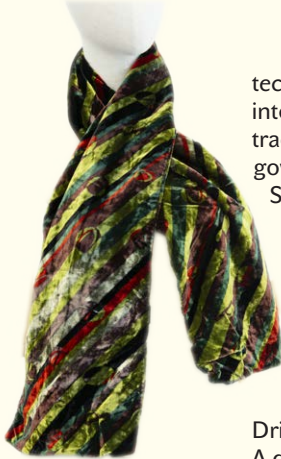
Artwork and design development:

Approximately 500 pieces, plus more than 100 original working artworks. Stored in two plan chests, portfolios and 64-litre boxes

How the story unfolded

1980s

The GvE design partnership is formed in 1981. Hand-printed fabrics are sold to Yuki and J&M Pallant. Donald Campbell uses the printed wool 'Poppy' design for a dress for Diana, Princess of Wales, much photographed. GvE expands into designing scarves and ties, initially targeting provincial high-end fashion shops. A GvE hand screen print production line is set up in a converted barn near Salisbury, Wiltshire. Fabric is sold to Caroline Charles and Anna Belinda. Scarves are stocked by Fortnum & Mason, Asprey, Liberty and Harrods. Export sales take off in USA, Italy and Japan. GvE men's accessory collection launches in Paris, bought by Crolla, Liberty, Paul Smith London. American retailers Bergdorf Goodman, Bendels, Barneys, Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus stock GvE. GvE wins the BKCEC Export Award 1986 with export sales of over £560,000. The retail partnership launches. Trevor Pickett opens a GvE shop in Burlington Arcade, London. Hats are produced in collaboration with Gabriela Ligenza; shoes with Emma Hope and Elizabeth Stuart Smith. GvE's first printed wood furniture collection is designed in collaboration with Peter Milne Furniture, London. A second GvE shop opens in Sloane Street, London. Discharge printed velvet, devoré and printed devoré



techniques and fabrics are introduced into the collections. Scarves become the trademark GvE product. Velvet dressing gowns are gifted by EMI to The Rolling Stones, Kylie Minogue, Elton John, Paul McCartney. Turnover tops £1.4 million.

1990s

GvE fabrics are shown at the 'Colour into Cloth' exhibition, Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York. GvE ties and scarves feature in Dries van Noten's menswear collections. A design studio and showroom opens above Chanel in Knightsbridge, London. Designs and products are acquired by the V&A, the Smithsonian, Farnham Craft Study Centre, Manchester Art Gallery, Salisbury Museum. GvE shops open in Barneys New York, Anglobal in Tokyo, Selfridges and Fenwick, London. Stand-alone shops open in Ledbury Road and Ellis Street, London. GvE sells wholesale across 26 countries worldwide, and products feature in magazines and newspapers globally. Georgina awarded Honorary Doctor of Design, Winchester School of Art. The home furnishings collection launches. GvE sets up an R&D department with Loughborough textile design course graduates. The first hand-beaded, embroidered designs are produced in collaboration with Indian artisans. Handmade 'couture' items are added to the scarf collection, using innovative fabrics developed with Jacob Schlaepfer, Switzerland. Georgina is appointed Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) by the Royal Society of Arts, London. Sales peak at £6 million. GvE sales and distribution move to a purpose-built space designed by Simon Conder, shortlisted for the RIBA Sterling Prize.

A hand-woven rug collection is designed in collaboration with Christopher Farr. Georgina is awarded a University of the Arts London Fellowship.

2000s

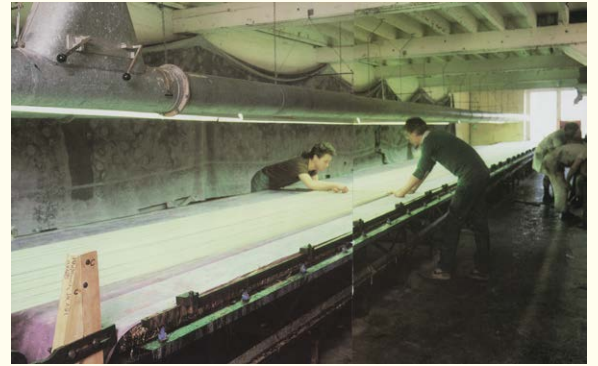
Martin is appointed Professor of Design Research at Southampton University. The 9/11 attacks have a major impact on trade; GvE staff reduce from 50 to 15. GvE launches the 'scarves as jewellery' and recycling concept. A Manchester consortium (Manchester Art Gallery and MMU) seeks Lottery funding for a contemporary textile collection, including the GvE archive. A retrospective exhibition to celebrate 25 years of GvE is planned. The 2005 London bombings further affect trade; Ledbury Road and Ellis Street shops close. June 2006, GvE company closes. 'Georgina von Etdorf: 25 years of sensuous textiles' show opens in Manchester, September 2006 showcasing GvE's creative and artistic achievements. In 2011 Martin sets up and still runs Bread and Flowers, a Wiltshire-based catering business specialising in progressive, social cooking. In 2017 Georgina and Jonathan launch GvE&Co, designing and producing printed fabric, wallpaper and accessories for home interiors, also in Wiltshire.

Above left: 'Cipher' scarf discharge screen printed on bouclé velvet 2001

Above: Nilgin Yusuf, 'Georgina von Etdorf: Sensuality, Art and Fabric', Thames and Hudson 1998

Opposite page, left: 'Stained Glass' velvet devoré screen printed stole, photograph by Howard Sooley 1996





Hand screen printing at GvE HQ in Odstock, Wiltshire

‘The GvE design philosophy elevated craft, making art accessible, changing the perception of what print and pattern could be. They relentlessly experimented with unusual fabrics and textures, pushing materials and techniques to their limits. This revolutionary approach perfectly mirrored my aspirations.’

Patricia Belford, alchemist printer, pioneered new print techniques in collaboration with GvE

‘GvE is a rare fashion bird, transcending time and trends; flying above them, and in the face of them. Working at Vogue UK in the 80s, I was an early fan. I fell in love with the prints, colours, textures, as well as the company. Georgina, Martin and Jonathan created a poetic, timeless and truly magical brand – not only about the product, but about a way of living.’

Lucinda Chambers, Co-founder Collagerie and Colville

‘So inventive, so bold, playing such a consequential part in the British designer fashion scene. I do hope the GvE archive can be kept together, and made available to researchers and the public alike.’

Margaret Howell



Martin, Georgina, Jonathan, Wiltshire 1991

If you are interested in purchasing the archive or a curated selection, please get in touch. We also welcome proposals from a consortium who might share the cost of acquiring, conserving, promoting and exhibiting the archive. Alternatively, if you can broker an introduction to others, we'd love to hear from you.

To find out more, or arrange a visit, please contact

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