

The LOW COUNTRIES

Land of Linen and Lace



The NORTH SEA

THE NETHERLANDS

● LEEUWARDEN
Fries Museum



● AMSTERDAM
Rijksmuseum



Goirstraat 96

● Zeeuws
Museum

● EINDHOVEN
Vlisco

● Museum
de Kantfabriek

● momu



● GHENT

Museum of
Industrial Archaeology
and Textiles

● ANTWERP
ModeMuseum

● CALAIS
135 Quai du
Commerce

● BRUSSELS
Grand Place,
Maison du Roi,
& Musée du Costume et
de La Dentelle

BELGIUM

FRANCE





The historic region of Flanders was formed of the land that hugs the North Sea from Calais in the south to Amsterdam in the north. Much of the area is in the west of what is Belgium today. For a significant part of its history Flanders has been battling the tides. The predominantly flat land flooded frequently but the North Sea also brought prosperity to the region making it a major cloth trading centre. Many merchants made their fortunes on one of the three pillars of Flanders textile trade; wool, linen and lace.

Wool was a vital commodity in the region and in early centuries forged close links with England. In 1331 England's King Edward III tried to poach Flanders' master weavers and over the next century the towns of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres traded with England and other neighbouring countries. Weaving imported wool was highly profitable and made Flanders one of the richest urban centres in Europe. Cultural development was accelerated, with achievements in the arts and architecture that rivaled those of Northern Italy – Flemish tapestries adorned the walls of castles throughout Europe and the Flemish Primitives created astonishing canvases..

Wealth brought education to the merchant class and led to precocious ideas about rights and personal freedoms. Architecturally these notions are embodied in the grand guild-houses that populate the market squares and, particularly, in the construction of secular belfries and ornate cloth halls. In Brussels and Leuven flat-fronted gables surround market squares now filled with tourist shops selling lace of dubious origin as well as patisseries and chocolatiers.

A rival for the economic importance of wool was linen which has an equally long history in the region.

The damp ocean climate and fertile soil of the region, interlaced with many small rivers, and the experience of the flax growers themselves made it ideal for linen production. Flemish flax crops were not only abundant but also of outstanding quality, a fact that touches on the high demand for Flemish lace in the 17th century, see pg 32. As Melinda Watt from the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art explains: "Flemish laces always rivaled the French due in large part to the unsurpassed quality of their linen thread. The combination of climate, soil, and the skill with which the flax crop was processed in Flanders produced thread with the sought-after qualities of whiteness, fineness, and strength that could not be replicated anywhere else in Europe."

Linen cloth from the area was also prized. Today Libeco, a collective of Belgian companies dedicated to the manufacturing and distribution of linen and linen products trace their roots back to 1275, when the town of Tielt erected an exchange for linen trade. Libeco are based in Meulebeke, a small village between Bruges and the French border. This region has always been known for its flax culture and prosperous textile industry. But the industry has suffered its share of set-backs.

Throughout the 18th century, until the middle of the 1800s, Flanders' textile industry prospered. But at this point there was a reversal of fortune. A primary factor was the mechanization and rapid expansion of the cotton weaving industry. With trade barriers in the form of import duties, Flanders was slow to modernize and fell behind its French and English competitors. Yet the industry never disappeared, enduring the hardship of two World

Wars: even so, the strength of the linen industry of Flanders has waxed and waned in the 20th century. Today, with the merger of Libeco-Lagae, the outlook for Belgian linen production is bright.

Climate, geography and politics have played starring roles in Flanders history as a textile hub but in recent years the spotlight has moved to an industry with more fluid borders – design. In the 19th century Brussels championed Art Nouveau and is recognised by UNESCO as a "world heritage" site. More recently the rise of Antwerp, Belgium's second city and biggest port, as a major fashion city caught many by surprise.

Most place the moment of transformation in the 1980s when the "Antwerp Six" (a feted group of avant-garde designers composed of Dries Van Noten, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, Marina Yee, Ann Demeulemeester and a "+1" which refers to Martin Margiela) hit the headlines, but their work could be considered the fruit of much longer labour. Last year, 2013, marked the 350th anniversary of Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the 50th anniversary of its fashion department.

What's certain is once that moment of change occurred it was capitalised on, and fashion designers and artists of note continue to emerge from the academy. Additionally, the Design Academy Eindhoven under the guidance of director Li Edelkoort also makes a global impact on the creative arts.

The history of Flanders is interwoven with textiles as finely as the most complex Brussels lace. Whatever your particular passion you will find objects and places that will inspire, intrigue and lead you to new areas of interest. ▶

Other places to visit • **The Old Factory Stitching Museum De Kantfabriek** Americaansweg 8, 5961 GP **Horst** Netherlands, ongoing Tues-Sun 2-5, T: +31 (0)77398 1650, www.museumdekantfabriek.nl • **Conservatory Lace Bayeux** 6 rue du Vienvenu, 14400 Bayeux, **Normandy** France ongoing Mon-Sat 9.30-12.30, 2.30-6, T: +33 (0)23192 7380, www.dentelledebayeux.free.fr • **Museum of Industrial Archeology and Textile** Minnemeers 9, 9000 **Ghent** Belgium, ongoing Tues-Sun 10-6, T: +32 (0)9 2694200, www.miat.gent.be • **Galerie Help U Zelven** Wihelmina Street, 9 7101 CM, **Winterswijk** Netherlands ongoing, Wed, Sat and 1st Sun of the month 12-5, T: +31 (0)543 531784, www.helpuzelven.nl • **Rubbrecht** Grand Place 23, 1000 **Brussels** Belgium, ongoing, Mon-Sat 10-8, T: +32 (0)2512 0218, www.enjoylace.com • **Den Haan & Wagenmakers BV** Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 97 1012 RE **Amsterdam** Netherlands, ongoing, Tues-Sat 10-5, T: +31 (0)20 6202525, www.dutchquilts.net • **Marolles Flea Market** Place du Jeu de Balle, **Brussels** Belgium, ongoing Mon-Fri 6-2, Sat-Sun 6-3, www.opt.be •••



Head to the "attic" of the Volkskundemuseum in Bruges to admire the antique lace collection. Elsewhere in the eight converted 17th century almshouses, you can see a classroom, cobblers, milliners, a tailor, pharmacy and a patisserie. The collection consists of objects that were part of daily life in the 19th and early 20th centuries. **Balstraat 43, 8000 Brugge, Belgium, T: +32 5044 8743, bezoekers.brugge.be**



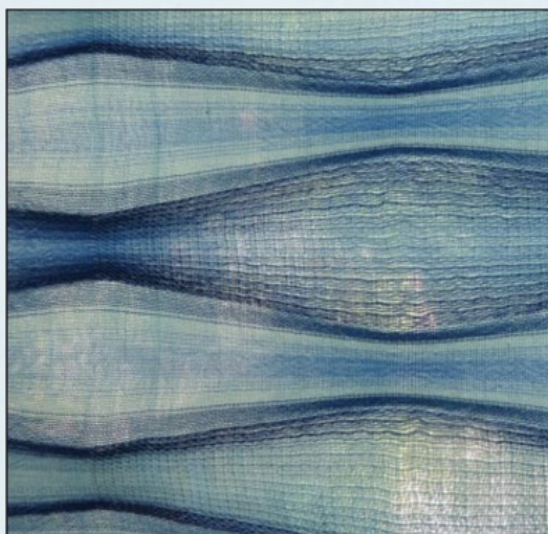
Dutch Design will be the focus at next year's ETN conference. Speakers include trend forecaster Li Edelkoort, Petra Blaisse, Bertjan Pot, Vlisco's Creative Director Roger Gerards and visits include Rijswijk Textiel Biennale, Zaans Museum and the VLISCO Factory. **The 17th European Textile Network ETN Conference, 16-17 May 2015, Museum of Ethnology, www.textiefestival.nl, www.etn-net.org**



Anne Chien



If lace holds your interest then the International Centre of Lace and Fashion should be at the top of your list of places to visit. Located in the Saint-Pierre district, the historic heart of Calais lacemaking, this cultural centre is housed in a factory typical of the 1870s. At the height of its activities, the Boulart factory – named after its builders – had 80 tulle and lace looms in constant operation. Once inside your journey begins in a darkened space with displays of lace from the 16th to the 19th centuries and need not end until you have discovered the innovative Haute Couture designs of Iris Van Herpen, see pg 22. **Iris van Herpen, until 13 April 2014, The Lace Museum (Cite internationale de la dentelle et de la mode) 135, quai du Commerce, www.cite-dentelle.fr**



City dwellers often bemoan their lack of outside space but perhaps they've been looking at things the wrong way? Dutch botanist Fedor Van der Valk's brought the outdoors in with his 'String Gardens' series. Without using a pot, he transforms plants and flowers into living ornaments using 3D crocheting techniques that took six years to develop. An array of plants and flowers are strung together with moss and grass to create a garden unlike any other. **www.stringgardens.com**



Six years ago WEEFNETWERK was set up to consolidate smaller weaving societies into one organisation. A team of dedicated volunteers orchestrate events and publish a quarterly magazine. This year homes, workshops, museums and galleries across Holland will participate in the West Weave Festival and display work, both traditional and modern. This is the third time that a week of weaving exhibitions has been organised. It will be followed in July by a Weversmarkt (Weavers Market) – over 150 textile stands will dominate a street in the historical city of Hoorn. **West Weave Festival, from 27 May-1 June 2014, Weversmarkt Hoorn, 16 July, www.weefnetwerk.nl**



View 17th-century treasures and portraits of lace-adorned merchants and nobles by Frisian painter Wybrand de Geest. **The Old Boys Network In The Golden Age, until 30 August 2015, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, www.friesmuseum.nl**



Dutch artist Claudy Jongstra does much more than pay lip service to the idea of working with raw and natural materials. Committed to the concept, she and her team raise sheep, keep bees, cultivate a botanical garden and grow their own plants for dyes. Together with her partner, Marleen Engbersen, they explore how to create a softer, more human atmosphere and work with architects to create large-scale art installations. "People have great careers, but they have lost their connection with nature," explains Claudy; through her work she hopes to reawaken it. www.claudyjongstra.com



Christien Meindertsma's work can be found in the permanent collection of the V&A London, MOMA New York and the living rooms of the design conscious. This versatile Dutch artist and designer, a graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven, caused quite a stir in 2008 with the launch of her 'urchin poufs' produced under her design label Flocks. She is also one of 20 artists included in the Museum Arnhem's exhibition 'Threads', which highlights artists whose work explores textiles and could be seen as a metaphor for the 'interweaving' of artistry and craft. **Threads, until 17 August 2014, Museum Arnhem, Netherlands, www.museumarnhem.nl, www.christienmeindertsma.com**

At the Audax Textile Museum in Tilburg old and new merge to create an unusual visitor experience. There's a textile factory with a collection of objects spanning three centuries which illustrate the development of textile techniques and machinery from the 19th century onwards. Returning to the present day the 'Textile Lab' showcases up-to-the-minute experiments with fabrics and the work of contemporary designers. Currently on show is the exhibition Body Jewels which demonstrates how jewellery has evolved in recent decades into art, fashion and almost unwearable objects. **Body Jewels, until 15 March 2015, TextielMuseum, Goirkestraat 96, 5046 GN Tilburg, www.textielmuseum.nl**



Dutch artist Marian Bijlenga is fascinated by dots, lines and contours, by their rhythmic movements but also by the empty space they confine. Instead of drawing on paper, she draws in space using textiles. She works with thread, fabric, horsehair, fishscales and parchment, materials which are soft, light, flexible and open to endless development. For Marian transparency is a prerequisite: by leaving space between the structure and the wall the object is freed from its background and interacts with the white wall. It becomes what she calls a "Spatial Drawing". www.marianbijlenga.com, browngrotta.com

Diamond dots I-2011-40 x 40cm, horsehair, fabric, stitched





Since 1846 Dutch company Vlisco has been creating textiles that have influenced the fashion landscape in West and Central Africa. These textiles display true Dutch craftsmanship and as such were known as ‘Hollandais’. Today they lay claim to being “the only brand creating authentic Dutch wax fabrics”, using a wax process which originates from batik techniques. And they protect their copyright vigorously, employing a fulltime Brand Protection department of legal, technical and intellectual property experts, dedicated to making sure that consumers get authentic Vlisco products. www.vlisco.co

Zeeland is a province on the west coast of The Netherlands and consists of a number of islands of which the capital is Middelburg. The museum in Zeeland shows the rich culture of ‘Sea Land’. Traditionally every island had its own costume and the women’s caps could be easily distinguished from one another. The shapes referred to the region, social origin and the religion of the wearer. However the stars of the museum collection are probably the Zeeland Tapestries. Ranked among the jewels of Dutch cultural heritage they were commissioned by the States of Zeeland between 1593 and 1604. **Museum of Zeeland, Abdij (plein), 4331 BK, Middelburg, www.zeeuwmuseum.nl**



Tilleke Schwarz is a dutch artist who describes her work as a mixture of “drawing, ideas and fooling around”. As always Tilleke’s humour draws on truth – in this case the blend of laughter and tears from her Jewish background. Folk art and daily life are also sources of inspiration. A member of the 62 Group, Tilleke uses hand embroidery to create visual poetry or “maps of modern life” and embraces graffiti, icons, texts and images from samplers. The viewer is invited to decipher the connections or to create them. www.tillekeschwarz.com, www.62group.org.uk



Mens waistcoats 1840-1850

It seems unlikely but according to the Costume and Lace Museum, in the mid-20th century, the City of Brussels owned just a few pieces of Brussels lace. This lace, a product that carried the reputation of Belgium’s capital throughout the western world, was exhibited in the Maison du Roi in the city’s Grand-Place. Today, thanks to a concerted effort to redress this, Brussel’s textile heritage is better represented. Since its inauguration in 1977, the Costume and Lace Museum has built up a rich and varied collection, including costumes, lace, embroidery and accessories. The approach to expanding the collection has been diverse. Curators have conserved existing items while, aware of the need to enrich the collection, the public authorities have encouraged purchases from leading auction houses abroad. Rather than putting items of interest up for public sale, antique dealers keen to preserve the heritage of their own country sometimes take the initiative to first offer them to the Costume and Lace Museum. Finally the collections expand with every exhibition – each one prompts a wave of gifts related to the show from captivated visitors. Curators can expect an influx of 1930s fashion with the opening of their latest. **30's Fashion Expo, until 1 February 2015, Costume and Lace Museum, Rue de la Violette 12 1000 Brussels, www.costumeandlacemuseum.be**

