

Bernat Klein: Exhibition to honour textile designer who took fashion world by storm from the Scottish Borders

Article by Brian Ferguson
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He is the Serbian textile designer and artist born into a Jewish family who escaped persecution by the Nazis going to art school in Jerusalem – then took the fashion houses of Europe by storm after relocating to Scotland.

Now the life and work of the late Bernat Klein, whose celebrated tweeds and mohairs were inspired by the landscape around his home and studio in the Borders, are to be honoured in his adopted country.

The National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh has announced plans to stage a major exhibition drawn from a vast archive of Klein material it acquired in 2010 – four years before he passed away at the age of 91.

It will recall how colourful tweeds and mohairs created in Galashiels came to dominate international catwalks throughout the 1960s thanks to collaborations with Pierre Cardin, Dior, Nina Ricci, Ronald Patterson, Yves St Laurent, John Cavanagh, Hardy Aimes, Mattli and Victor Stiebel.

It will explore how Klein, a champion of modernist architecture and design, designed fabrics for fashion and interiors, working as a colour consultant and industrial designer for various British and Scandinavian firms.

The Klein archive held by the museum encompasses more than 4,000 items, including garments,

textiles, paintings, design development work and press material.

The exhibition will also feature displays of newly-acquired work demonstrating Klein's influence and legacy, including by textile designers Ascher Ltd and Tibor Reich.

Klein was born in Senta, Yugoslavia (now Serbia) in 1922, into a family involved in the textile industry.

Klein originally studied fine art at the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem and painted throughout his life, taking inspiration from the natural world, and experimenting with colour and texture.

Klein was heavily influenced by modern art and colour theory, and fascinated by the work of French post-Impressionist artist Georges Seurat.

He went on to study at Leeds University and was employed by various companies in Scotland and England until he set up his own company in Galashiels in 1952.

In the early 1960s, Klein produced a range of ground-breaking woven womenswear fabrics, which featured bold colour effects and unexpected combinations of materials, such as velvet ribbon with brushed mohair. Klein experimented to perfect a technique called *space-dyeing*, which allowed a single cloth to contain multiple colours.

His breakthrough into the European couture market came when his mohair tweed fabric was chosen by Coco Chanel for her spring collection in 1963.

Klein lived in the Borders in a specially-commissioned Modernist house designed by architect Peter Womersley.

The National Museum, which is staging the exhibition between November and April, said it would chart a 60-year career as a textile designer, artist, educator and colour consultant.

Lisa Mason, assistant curator of modern and contemporary design at the museum, said: «Bernat Klein was a key figure in Modernist design, and one of the 20th century's most celebrated textile designers.

His archive is remarkably broad and rich, and this stylish exhibition will display some of its highlights, examining his exceptional contribution to the design world and his ongoing legacy and influence.

The Scottish Borders were his home and inspiration for six decades, and the exhibition will also explore the story of the relationship between his work, the landscape and the local textile industry.»

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