

**Peggy Stolz Gilfoy, *Fabrics in Celebration from the Collection.*  
Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1983. 391 pp.,  
262 illus., 32 colour plates, \$45.00 (cloth), \$35.00 (paper)**

**John E. Vollmer**

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Housser textual style is no longer appropriate and the lavish illustrations do not adequately cover the material. With the frightening escalation in the cost of colour printing, it is regrettable that such an opportunity was missed to produce a much-needed, pithy and critical book on these national heroes.

ANN DAVIS  
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PEGGY STOLZ GILFOY *Fabrics in Celebration from the Collection*. Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1983. 391 pp., 262 illus., 32 colour plates, \$45.00 (cloth), \$35.00 (paper).

It is appropriate that the Indianapolis Museum of Art in choosing to reflect on the accomplishments of its first 100 years has selected to celebrate its little known, but significant textile holding. *Fabrics in Celebration from the Collection* – the title of both an exhibition and the catalogue reviewed here – documents 168 textiles from a collection of over 7,000 fabrics and costumes representing cultures from across the world and ranging in date from Pre-Columbian Peru to contemporary America.

Begun in the 1880s, the collection includes many important donations made prior to 1940, but for most of the century being celebrated by the Museum it was relegated to storage. In many ways, the catalogue and exhibition are tributes to the Museum's textile curator, Peggy Stolz Gilfoy. Since her appointment as Curator of Textiles and Ethnographic Art in 1975, she has reclaimed this important collection from the oblivion of storage and developed it into one of the better managed textile holdings in North America.

*Fabrics in Celebration from the Collection* is an attractive, sensitively-designed book. The typography is easy to read; the photographs of uniformly high quality integrate well with text. The descriptive catalogue itself documents the fabrics in the exhibition. Separate entries, each fully illustrated, some with details, are organized into eight sections: Indonesia, India, China,

Japan, Eastern Islam, Western Islam, Europe and America, Africa and [indigenous] America. Among the real surprises in this collection are remarkable Indonesian fabrics acquired at source prior to 1930, and fabrics from Tunisia and Morocco which are seldom seen in North American collections. Thirty-two pieces are also reproduced in colour, one fabric per page with a brief identification, making this section easy to use with the text.

In addition to the catalogue, there are lengthy preliminary sections: the history of the collection and of its more interesting donors, the history of the curatorial department, explanatory notes by the curator on the rationale for the catalogue, a conservator's report by Harold Maitland, outlining the methodology used for examining the collection, a note on the structural analysis by Katherine Dolk-Ellis, curatorial assistant, whose detailed technical descriptions accompany each piece, and a glossary of technical terms. The volume contains also a very lengthy bibliography citing literature consulted, an index, and an appendix presenting the results of tests conducted on the composition of precious metal threads by L. P. Stodulski, D. Nauman and M. Kennedy.

*Fabrics in Celebration from the Collection* seems to want to rectify years of neglect on many fronts simultaneously. Despite its impressive table of contents, however, the book is not entirely successful as a catalogue to the collection it celebrates. The variety and sheer volume of data it contains threaten to overwhelm the reader. Each bit of information is directed at a separate audience. In trying to serve too many masters, the catalogue risks satisfying none.

The 'masterpieces approach' for selecting pieces which 'represent the best the collection has to offer,' not its numerical or geographical range, exacerbates the problem of focus for this book. Some of the items truly are masterpieces of their types (e.g., n<sup>o</sup> 14, 18, 81, 123); many are good examples, and some are only significant in relative terms when compared with the collection itself. This form of connoisseurship, all too common in museum publications, is, ultimately, a matter of personal taste. This reviewer is not taking exception to the author's selection; however, such value

judgements have shortcomings as an organizational principle for a catalogue to a collection, particularly when there is no critical discussion of how this value system is defined, or what purpose it really serves in promoting an understanding or appreciation of fabric.

In contrast to the aesthetic choices made for each item, the curatorial rationale for discussing the pieces as reflecting 'the wide ranging use of techniques, materials, distribution and influences unique to the textile arts' has imposed geographical groupings and chronological arrangement. Unfortunately, the level of generalization in the overviews, introducing each section, contributes little real understanding or insight into the fabrics themselves or to the cultures which used them. These views and the entries for individual items read much like a decent guide to an exhibition installation. Like such guided tours, information can be distorted through factual error or oversimplification. For example, the date of the embroidered coverlet (n<sup>o</sup> 28) is given as 1850, but is certainly closer in date to 1750 (possibly a typographical error). Catal Huyuk is an archaeological site in Turkey, not northern Iran as stated on page 152. The suggestion that the flared hems of the short Persian coats (n<sup>o</sup> 52 and 53) reflect the influence of 17th-century European women's hip pads is neither substantiated nor convincing. In other areas, particularly when faced with the precision of the technical descriptions, information about the alterations to garments would be appreciated: the sleeves of the Tekke Turkman coat (n<sup>o</sup> 70) are reset incorrectly, or the embroidered cuffs and neck facings of the Chinese coat (n<sup>o</sup> 34), which do not match the tapestry-woven silk coat fabric, were not part of the original construction.

At this level, such criticism seems petty. It should not detract from the Herculean efforts of the author, who is a noted African specialist; but it does point out a major pitfall posed by this genre of descriptive catalogue. Perhaps the broad, comprehensive survey of a medium cannot be done in a single catalogue, or with a unique, but imperfect collection. It is unlikely that a curator of painting would ever attempt to discuss the developments in pictorial art from all periods and places with less than 200 examples.

At another level, the inclusion of the detailed technical descriptions raises questions. The technical documentation, which provides a consistent set of data for all 168 items, is certainly one of the more impressive aspects of the catalogue, but only of relevance to a specialist interested in structure. Without some interpretation they remain virtually meaningless to others. The reader – specialist or generalist – is not made aware of what purpose these data are supposed to serve in the context of the book. Reference to the numbers of examples in each category of fabric represented in the catalogue might have better served both specialist and generalist in arriving at an appreciation of the unique strengths of the Indianapolis textile holding.

A final word is reserved for the technical appendix, 'Analysis of Precious Metal Threads' by Stodulski, Nauman and Kennedy. It is the most important original contribution in the catalogue, even if the rationale for including it is questionable. A hundred and twenty-four samples from fifty-four pieces in the Indianapolis collection were subjected to microscopic observation, atomic emission spectrography and scanning electron microscopic x-ray analysis. The results of the study have been tabulated and present data, which for the first time point out compositional differences in precious metal threads used in textiles from one culture to another. While this is very much a preliminary study, it offers a basis for further work that may yet help determine provenance and possibly date for undocumented fabrics.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art is to be congratulated and should be encouraged to continue its support of this important research. I sincerely hope we will not wait for the next centennial to see other aspects of this collection celebrated in print.

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PETER NEIVE COTTON *Vice Regal Mansions of British Columbia*. Vancouver, Elgin Publications Ltd., for the British Columbia Heritage Trust, 1981. 118 pp., 57 illus., \$22.50.

Peter Cotton was a precious source of inspiration to a generation of students of British Columbia architecture. A pioneer restoration architect and architectural historian with a distinguished career in both government service and private practice, Cotton's achievements include the restoration of Fort Langley and Craigflower Manor, numerous articles on the history of British Columbia's buildings, and dynamic leadership in preservation organizations. His many friends and colleagues were saddened by his premature death in 1978.

One of those colleagues, Martin Segger, urged Cotton to publish his incomplete manuscript on the history of Government House, which had been written in 1957-59 after the building was destroyed by fire and while Cotton was serving as an architect for the provincial government. The task proved arduous. Cotton died as he and Segger were working on the project. Two subsequent collaborators, provincial archivist Dr. Willard Ireland and journalist Elizabeth Forbes, also died in the course of helping to reconstruct the manuscript. Segger persisted in his role of general editor and finally prepared the work for publication with the help of archivist David Mattison (who assembled the photographs and plans) and editor Anne West. The British Columbia Heritage Trust financed the project. The result is an attractive and well-produced monograph, the first of a continuing series projected by the Trust.

Cotton's history of the many homes provided for British Columbia's lieutenant-governors (and, before them, her governors) is a tale of political wrangling as much as of architecture. Time after time the elected legislature resisted the demands of the heads of state that they be provided with a fitting home – a debate which recurs regularly today among other provincial legislatures – and of one rush after another to meet a deadline to finish that resi-

dence. Architecture as such certainly took a back seat in the debates.

The first 'vice-regal mansion' was, in a manner of speaking, the cabin aboard HMS *Driver* occupied by Governor Richard Blanshard in 1850; the next was the room offered him in Fort Victoria. The Hudson's Bay Company agreed to erect 'a moderate sized but respectable house' for the governor the next year, just as Blanshard retired. Accommodating the head of state remained a disorganized task for some time, and was complicated further by the existence of twin seats of power in Victoria and New Westminster.

Not until 1865, when Governor A.E. Kennedy bought Cary Castle, a miserable stone house on a hill east of downtown Victoria, did British Columbia acquire a Government House with any claims to permanency. But in 1894, just when a series of additions had made it a decent enough mansion, Cary Castle burned. The house was rebuilt, burned again in 1957, and rebuilt yet once more (directed, in part, by the results of Peter Cotton's research). Each new design retained sufficient continuity that today's Government House can safely be said to be descended from Kennedy's Cary Castle.

Cotton chronicles the events meticulously; however, his analysis of the architectural qualities is regrettably less thorough. The design of the Government House of 1901-03, a collaborative effort by the premier Victoria architects Samuel Maclure and F.M. Rattenbury, is described only by citing two newspaper articles. The book reproduces the plans, but offers no exterior views other than its burning and burned ruins.

In contrast to the paucity of architectural detail, Cotton offers extensive and interesting comments on social and political episodes. The legislature's tight-fisted refusal to replace the worn hall carpet during Fordham Johnson's tenure, A.N. Richards' threats to find alternate accommodation because the province would not pay for his utilities, and other such events shed light on the oft-ignored human aspects of government architecture. They also make a good read.

The book is an important addition to a neglected genre in Canadian architectural writing: the