

Propaganda

It has been suggested that the socio-political context of an epoch in which an artist works determines the type of art that is produced. Textiles are no exception to this.

Although all the textiles we have spoken about can be considered a form of propaganda, textiles have also been employed in more outwardly political ways. Through pastimes and fashionable objects, visual images were used to project desired perceptions of nations. These images were used as propaganda, reinforcing the political views of the time through less obvious ways and reflecting popular events that occurred. This is evident through domestic and everyday objects such as handkerchiefs or quilts. The ability of these objects to denote deeper historical and political meaning is often overlooked. But it is through these objects we can see what the popular topics of the time were.

Garfield and Arthur Quilt

DATE: 1880

MEDIUM: Pieced quilt; printed, cotton plain and twill weave fabrics; printed, cotton plain weave handkerchief

ARTIST: Possibly Annie Ensminger Kready (American, 1871-1956) or Louisa Ensminger (American, 1850-1899)

ORIGIN: United States, Pennsylvania, Lancaster County, Manheim Township

DIMENSIONS: 215.7 × 218.9 cm (84 7/8 × 86 1/4 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Gift of Shelly Zegart

REF NO: 2001.459

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This quilt incorporates a promotional handkerchief in the centre of a decorative pattern. This handkerchief shows James Garfield and Chester B. Arthur, the 1880 Republican candidates for president & vice-president of the United States. It gives us an insight into the time and how political imagery was used in everyday life, even in domestic objects that are associated with comfort. Garfield won the election, so it is likely that this quilt would have been displayed in celebration of his victory. The quilt promoted the political party, just like the MAGA hats did during Donald Trump's presidency.

Do you think the floral imagery could signify something more?



*William Penn's
Treaty with the
Indians
(Furnishing
Fabric)*

DATE: 1880

MEDIUM: Cotton, plain weave; copperplate printed

ARTIST: After engraving by John Hall (English, 1739–1797) after painting by Benjamin West
(American, 1738–1826)

ORIGIN: England

DIMENSIONS: 215.7 × 218.9 cm (84 7/8 × 86 1/4 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Textile Purchase Fund

REF NO: 1969.210

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The images in this panel are an interpretation of William Penn (1644-1718) signing a treaty with the Native Americans. The panel was adapted from a 1775 print by John Hall after a painting by Benjamin West (1738-1826). Penn was a prominent English Quaker leader and founded the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The treaty allegedly stated that Penn was a friend of the Indians, that he intended to declare peace and harmony. However, there is no documentation of the treaty being signed, since it's thought to have been destroyed by Penn's son. The only authentication that the meeting took place is through artworks. The artworks cannot prove or disprove the formal agreement. They serve as a collective memory. It is only through works such as this textile that we can learn about this event.



né à Besançon le 26 février 1782
mort à Paris le 22 mai 1882



Handkerchief

DATE: 1860/1900

MEDIUM: Cotton, twill weave; copperplate printed

ARTIST: Celestin Nanteuil (Illustrator)

ORIGIN: France

DIMENSIONS: 72.4 × 82.3 cm (28 1/2 × 32 3/8 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Gift of Mrs. Chauncey B. Borland

REF NO: 1962.754

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This handkerchief is of Victor Hugo, a renowned French writer of the time. He is surrounded by pictorial interpretations of his novels, plays and poems including 'Notre Dame de Paris'. This draws attention to the talent of France, idolizing this figure whilst associating their culture with the success of a well-known novelist. By owning a design in the fashionable form of a handkerchief, you were also expressing your knowledge. Objects such as this signify the power of France as a cultural hotspot.

Perhaps it could act as a point of discussion amidst the bourgeoisie? What commodified objects could you buy today that signify a country's power and cultural status?

Stage of Europe December 1812 *(Handkerchief)*

DATE: 1813-1815

MEDIUM: Cotton, plain
weave; copperplate printed

ORIGIN: England

DIMENSIONS: 78.1 × 89.5
cm (30 3/4 × 35 1/4 in.)

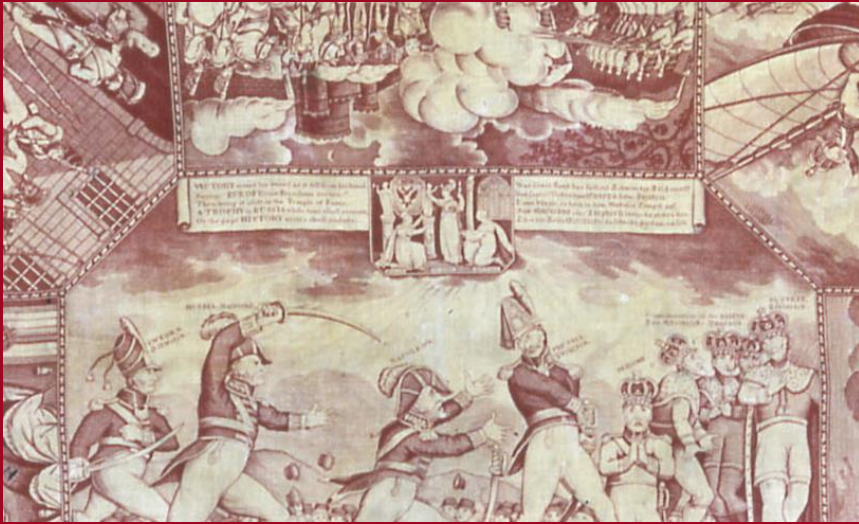
CREDIT LINE: Gift of
Mrs. Chauncey B. Borland

REF NO: 1962.756

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This cotton handkerchief shows Europe in December 1812. It contains a deeply political and opinionated design that insults Napoleon. The eight scenes around this show a range of Napoleon's misdeeds. The central scene is Napoleon being attacked by Sweden, Russia and Prussia with four crowned figures representing Austria and the Confederation of the Rhine.



In the four corners we see well known German figures of the time and in the centre a plaque conveying figures of Europe, Victory, and History with a verse in German.

How does critiquing Napoleon through art benefit his opponents? Was visual criticism more accessible and emotive than written propaganda?



*Has this exhibition changed your perspective on
textiles as an art form?*