After nearly 50 years of immersion in South Asian culture, connections to Indian friends, and appreciation of handcraft traditions, it’s no wonder that Dr. Donald Clay Johnson has amassed a collection of over 400 textiles that tell the story of his “other life”. With deep ties in Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, India, his annual visits often include excursions to local markets where the finest examples of textile work can be purchased. These textiles include examples of dyeing, block printing, weaving, and a plethora of embroidery traditions. Saris, shawls, and domestic textiles showcase the skill of artisans from South Asia including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

His host family lives in a compound named “Paritosh” for which his collection is named. Translated as contentment, this certainly describes Dr. Johnson’s pleasure in sharing a story about each piece in the collection. His method has been one of building personal relationships; purchases are not dependent on appearance, price, or provenance, but the desire to create and maintain relationships with people. The collection is shaped by working with knowledgeable dealers, enjoying the company of friends, and the goal of preserving a highly skilled cultural heritage.

Quality is more than thread count and stitch length, and this collection is positioned perfectly to identify the characteristics of quality, and how variations in materials, technique, and design elements change with developing markets and fashion influences. While quality contributes to value, the social and political messages in everyday objects can overturn standard measures of worth. The exhibition also traces the movement of design influences and technical evolution, both within the region, as well as the influx and export of ideas to other parts of the world.

Dr. Johnson will continue to collect as long as he sees interesting expressions of classic designs and techniques, and notices modern adaptations of handcraft traditions. Beyond being escorted to the shops, now his friends seek to go on the excursions he leads to find additions for his collection.

Dr. Johnson will be presenting lectures about his collection in June and August.
It’s marvelous, marvelous! Nothing will ever be as much fun. I’m going to photograph everything, everything!

Jacques-Henri Lartigue (French photographer; 1894–1986)

By now, you have seen examples of GMD’s ongoing project to create a digital collection database. Examples of this exciting project are on GMD’s website, Flickr page, and the University’s Digital Content Library (DCL). This project is the realization of numerous requests by students, scholars, and designers that GMD’s collection be accessible through the internet.

Funded in part by a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the primary federal source of funding for museums, this project was begun in February 2010 and will continue through the summer – longer if the IMLS proposal for Phase Two is funded. Under the original grant, GMD hired photographer Evan Baden and preparator Rebekah Njaa, two skilled professionals who have produced the amazing photographs. We also transferred the object records from the old database to a new one that will contain these beautiful photographs and will be accessible to all through GMD’s redesigned website.

The digital database by the numbers:

- 2,382 objects photographed
- 9+% of the collection photographed
- 28,545 object records in the new database
- 8,646 object records with photographs (includes photos taken before this project)
- 8,344 photos on DCL

This project has had an immense impact on GMD’s ability to serve the College of Design and the wider community. The photography process has enabled us to do condition evaluations and more accurate cataloging of the objects. The resulting photographs present each object in exacting detail, perfect for studying materials, construction, and surface ornamentation. The new records database has enabled us to synchronize information that was previously contained on several different systems, resulting in a better understanding of the number of objects in the collection - over 28,500!

How are you using the new photographs? When the website is launched, please let me know what you would like to see added that will enable you to engage more fully with this resource. Also, thank your legislators for their support of IMLS, providing museums like GMD the resources to meet community needs such as this digital database project.

Yours in design,
Lin Nelson-Mayson, GMD Director

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

POLARITIES: BLACK AND WHITE IN DESIGN
October 15, 2011—January 8, 2012
Curators:
Jean McElvain, PhD, Assistant Curator. Caitlin Cohn, GMD Graduate Assistant.

In Western cultures, black and white are often associated with concepts such as death, wickedness, cleanliness, purity, and peace. The social meanings attributed to black and white can be conflicting and varied. However, whether they are used for pragmatic issues of readability, stylistic effect, economy of means, or cultural standards, the use of black and white in designed objects is a conscious choice and is not incidental. Polarieties: Black and White in Design explores social interpretations of black, white, and black and white in objects throughout GMD’s collections.

Black and white often evoke minimalism, as exemplified by the tenets forwarded by the Bauhaus in 1920’s Germany. White, beige, and black were said to provide the purest design expressions, while the use of color was viewed as decorative and unrelated to function. However, prior to World War I, black and white were often used more ornamentally. For example, print work of Victoriana, toile fabric design, and garments with elaborate lace and beadwork frequently employed the use of black and/or white.

The notion that black and white are not colors is, arguably, a technicality. People generally agree that a statement like “brown is the new black” indicates that black is the most basic and sophisticated choice available to consumers. Even if someone considers black and/or white to be dull, it is within the context of color choice. This exhibition will feature objects from GMD’s apparel, textile, decorative arts, and graphic design collections and explore how black and white are used to varying effects.
I always think of spring as a time of new beginnings: a time when birds migrate, animals give birth to their young, crocuses pop out of the ground, and grass turns from brown to green. Even the air we breathe seems fresher.

At GMD the first sign of spring is the annual “Dig Design” Garden Party. This year’s fundraiser will take you to “A Night in India” on Friday, May 20. From entertainment by Ragamala Dance to Indian-inspired hors d’oeuvres and henna painting, we want you to experience the culture of India and at the same time support GMD by bidding on our incredible Silent Auction items. Please help us reach our goal of $10,000 that will support our museum, which is the only museum in the Upper Midwest devoted solely to design, including costume, decorative arts, graphic design, and textiles.

Since my term as President of GMD’s Advisory Board ends in June, this is my final article for the newsletter. I have been fortunate and thankful to work with a number of Board of Director leaders during my five-year tenure at GMD—some for a brief stint and others for several years. The job of the board members is extremely challenging and time consuming, especially given that the board members are truly engaged in leading the organization. All board members volunteer a great deal of their time to the museum, which is an astonishing commitment given the fact that they serve as CEOs or senior management or educators of their organizations. So I am truly humbled and deeply appreciative when a person agrees to accept the position as your next President and provides what I believe is transformational leadership.

Such a person is Dan Avchen, Chairman and CEO of Hammel, Green and Abrahamson, Inc (HGA), a 620-person architectural/engineering firm headquartered here in Minneapolis. Dan is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and has been on the GMD Advisory Board for five years. I know that Dan is deeply loyal to GMD and will use his knowledge of the industry to be a great board leader and an effective partner of the museum. Other new offices joining Dan are Bill Conway, AIA Professor, School of Architecture, U of M, as Vice-president, and John Schulz Advisereting/Design Management/ Fashion & Retail Management Director, The Art Institutes International Minnesota (AIA) as Secretary. This is the “dream-team” for GMD! Please join me in welcoming Dan, Bill, and John to their new positions.

At the time I joined the GMD Advisory Board, I was the owner of SHO Inc., a graphic design firm in the Twin Cities and believed the value I brought to the GMD board was mainly in the form of fundraising and business management. At the time I assumed the role of President, GMD was concerned about finances due to heavy budget cuts. It was clearly a time for both action and change, and the Board adopted a strategic plan that called for GMD to focus on its Mission, Membership and Money, the most important of which at the moment was Money. Those were difficult times and required difficult decisions. The GMD Advisory Board and GMD staff rose to the occasion, creating events and fundraising resulting in a museum that is now fiscally stronger. In this respect, I believe I have served my purpose on the Board. As GMD approaches the celebration of its 35th anniversary, the association can proudly look back upon its historical roots and foundation. The original vision of Margot Siegel and the Founding Friends Board has come to fruition, resulting in a sustainable, vibrant organization that must now build upon this foundation to lead the museum into a future of both challenge and opportunity. Thank you for allowing me to play my part in the continuing effort as I migrate back to graphic design.

—Linda Hersom, President, GMD Advisory Board
David Anger and James Broberg recently donated about 500 scarves designed by Vera, a vibrant addition to GMD’s collection.

Born in 1907, Vera Neumann née Salaff was the third of four children whose parents encouraged their children’s creative tendencies. Vera’s father took her to the Metropolitan Museum of Art every Sunday and paid her 50 cents for each sketchbook she filled.

In 1928, Vera enrolled in Manhattan’s Traphagen School of Art where she learned to apply her talent to create commercial art. She met George Neumann in the late 1930’s and they married in the early 1940’s. George, originally from Vienna where his family had owned a prominent textile business, encouraged her to design textiles based on her paintings. In 1945, Vera, George, and their friend Frederick Werner Hamm launched a textile company.

Each of Vera’s scarf designs was based on one of her original paintings. She used a wide variety of painting media, most often a brush technique that she learned in Japan. Vera started the trend of signatures on scarves, adding her signature on the bottom right-corner. She later added a small lady bug, symbolizing long life, good luck, and good health.

For more information on Vera: Vera: The Art and Life of an Icon by Susan Seid
RAPSON HALL

ELADIO DISTE: A PRINCIPLED BUILDER
May 25–August 1, 2011
HGA Gallery

This exhibition explores the work of one of the lesser-known geniuses of 20th Century architecture, Eladio Dieste. Trained as an engineer, he is known for his mastery of “reinforced masonry.” Dieste invented appropriate structural types that he exploited with daring. This exhibition is curated by Stanley Anderson, Professor of Architecture at MIT. Support provided by the Minnesota Masonry Education Fund in the College of Design and the Masonry Society for the 11th North American Masonry Conference.

SPECIAL EVENT

DIG DESIGN: THE ANNUAL GARDEN PARTY FUNDRAISER
May 20, 6–8 PM
HGA Gallery, Rapson Hall, East Bank Campus
A fun-filled evening featuring:
♦ Entertainment by Ragamala Dance
♦ Silent auction
♦ Henna painting
♦ Sari draping
♦ Indian Hors d’oeuvres
Tickets $50 each; $25 students with valid ID
For information or to buy tickets, call 612.624.7434 or email lutzx106@umn.edu by May 16.

MCNEAL HALL

BEYOND PEACOCKS AND PAISLEYS: HANDCRAFTED TEXTILES OF INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS
June 11 to September 25, 2011

Co-curated by Hazel Lutz and Anna Carlson from Donald Clay Johnson’s Paritosh Collection of South Asian Textiles, this exhibition will show the broad variety of surface design techniques employed in South Asia. It will also reveal connections of South Asian textiles to American fashion and DIY movements.

Events and Related Programs

Opening Party: Friday, June 10, 6–8 PM
Gallery tour by exhibition curators. Free and open to the public.

Public Lecture: Sunday, September 18, Donald Clay Johnson, the collector of the textiles, will present a lecture about his collection. 2 PM. Free and open to the public.

The Jerome Joss internship is awarded annually to a College of Design graduate student to develop a public program based on GMD’s collection. Jessica Barnes (MFA candidate, Graphic Design) is this year’s Joss intern. Barnes’ project entails working with the museum’s collection of Emigre graphic design journals. She will be designing a web-based interface focused on the publication’s history and influence.

The Lila Bath Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) internship is awarded to an undergraduate Apparel Design student each year. The internship involves working as a collections assistant at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio and the development of a project based on that experience. Misty Karges (undergraduate, Apparel Design) is this year’s recipient. Her project will explore the stories that traditional southwestern costume tell about the culture through their history, construction, and embellishments.
The Goldstein Museum of Design acknowledges the following for their generous donations:

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Judy Nelson

In Memory of Laurie Snow
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BEYOND
peacocks & paisleys
Handcrafted Textiles of India and its Neighbors

JUNE 11 - SEPT 25