Bombay to Bauhaus: Design Influences in Churchill Weavers Textiles from 1922-1949

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Introduction
Churchill Weavers, a nationally known handweaving center founded in 1922 in the Cumberland foothills in Berea, Kentucky, created a marketing niche by promoting the Modernist look in its textile products. Modernist textiles focused on woven structure, texture, yarn and fabric properties as the major design elements. Bauhaus artists codified and disseminated a theory of modern textiles as Europe rebuilt in the interwar period, while in America Modernist textiles were commodified as a marketing trend in early 20th century consumerism. Eleanor Churchill, co-owner and the company’s first designer was influenced by textile designs from India, from Modernist textiles, and from Swedish design traditions.

Churchill’s Modernist Textiles
- The Churchills in Ahmednagar, India: David Carroll Churchill 1901-1917, Eleanor Churchill 1912-1917
- Bauhaus influence in Berea, Kentucky: Anni Albers, Bauhaus weaver and teacher arrived at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1935; Berea College Art Department hired faculty trained by Bauhaus masters or their graduates. The Bauhaus-Modernist look was discernible in Berea, Kentucky.
- No direct link was found between Churchill Weavers designers and the Bauhaus, but Bauhaus ideology crossed the Atlantic in journals, photographs, products marketed at international exhibitions, and in theory carried to the United States by its graduates and exiled faculty.
- Modernist style: Churchill Weavers experimented with newly manufactured yarns-cellophane, rayon, and textured novelty yarns, while other handweaving centers in Appalachia reproduced traditional patterns. Churchill Weavers embraced the modern, not unlike Swedish weavers producing better designs for everyday living, and Bauhaus weavers with their prototypes for industrial production. Churchill Weavers commodified a Modernist look which assured it’s handwoven products a place in the textile market, and employment for local workers in a rural Kentucky college town.

Summary
Modernist textiles of Churchill Weavers inspired by machine-age modernism, Swedish, and Indian textile traditions were uniquely designed fabrics for women and men to wear and to beautify their homes. The company was guided by an innovative woman whose skills as a designer were matched by her ability to manage a small business and keep it growing through a depression, Second World War and recovery, and to provide strong leadership in a male dominated industry. Churchill’s Modernist textiles embody some intersectionalities that make for a rich narrative.
- The intersection of European feminism and a theory of modern textiles led by the women of the Bauhaus Weaving Workshop, paralleled by Swedish designers with their interest in good design for all classes of society;
- Intersections of architecture and public policy on modern housing in inter-war period Europe and in the United States, and textiles designed for those modern interiors.

Methods
- Oral histories conducted with a granddaughter of the Churchill Weavers founders, and two retired Chairs of the Berea College Art Department
- Research in the Churchill Weavers Collection (documents and objects) at the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, Kentucky
- Research in the Special Collections of Berea College’s Hutchins Library, Berea, Kentucky
- Literary review- see Bibliography in Appendix
Appendix

Poster illustration details and citations

1. **Kashan shawl** close-up, 2/40 wool in warp and weft, 1928
   Churchill Weavers Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, 2007.45. Box 12-22

2. **Kashelle stole**, wool/rayon, 1934
   Churchill Weavers Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, 2007.45. Box 31-738

3. **Placemat** in jute, linen, cellophane, 1938
   Churchill Weavers Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, 2007.45. Box 31-2255
Bibliography


Glover, Christina. “Anni Albers’s Modernist Philosophy In Thread and Text.” *Electronic Theses,*


