

# Tibor Reich — A Textile Designer Working in Stratford

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*Tibor Reich began his career as a textile designer and manufacturer in 1940s Britain. Operating from Clifford Mill, close to Stratford-upon-Avon, his company, Tibor Ltd, became one of the most innovative textile companies of the post-war period. His principal strength was that he had a well-developed awareness of the relevant processing technology and, at the same time, was appreciative of contemporary trends affecting art and design. He coped well under conditions of wartime rationing and his company rose to prominence in the wake of several particularly prestigious commissions. Clients included Concorde, Ercol, QE2, Lotus Cars, Coventry Cathedral and the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon. He showed a willingness to exploit the full potential of available technology and readily experimented with the newly available forms of fibres in the decades following the Second World War. The particular focus of this article is on identifying those factors of importance in Reich's rise to prominence. Some of his more important commissions are identified. Illustrations are taken from the Tibor Reich Collection, held at the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive (ULITA), the most comprehensive collection of Reich's work held by any museum or gallery worldwide.*

## INTRODUCTION

Born in Budapest in 1916, Tibor Reich became one of the foremost textile designers of his generation. From a base near Stratford-upon-Avon, Tibor Ltd, the company founded by him in 1946, forged a reputation for cutting-edge woven and printed textile designs that were popular with the general public and the business and entertainment sectors. The objective of this paper is to identify and discuss those factors which led to Reich's success and rise to the pinnacle of British textile design in the decades following the end of the Second World War. The stages of his career are charted briefly, from formative years in his native Hungary, and as a student at the University of Leeds, to the establishment of Tibor Ltd. and the various prestigious commissions accepted and completed by the company.

## EARLY INFLUENCES

Childhood visits by Tibor Reich to the family firm of A. Reich and Son, a smallware manufacturer in Budapest, may have been an early stimulus to later experiments with colour.<sup>1</sup> He once reminisced, 'As a youngster, at the age of five or six, I was taken into

my father's workshop in the factory where they were dyeing different yarns for ribbons for peasant costumes'.<sup>2</sup> Here he noticed cerise, kingfisher, bright emeralds, flame reds and deep oranges as well as the use of various metallic yarns.<sup>3</sup> Vibrant colours such as these dominated Reich's work for much of his career (Fig. 1). Other influences are apparent also.

Textile design in continental Europe during the first half of the twentieth century was influenced strongly by the ideas of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903–32) and the Bauhaus (operating in Weimar, 1919–25; Dessau, 1925–32; Berlin, 1932–33). The Wiener Werkstätte aspired to '... stand out from the general run of aesthetically unsatisfying, badly-finished, factory-produced merchandise and conventional handicrafts then available'.<sup>4</sup> The movement had significant textile and fashion divisions (founded in 1909 and 1910 respectively). Josef Hoffmann, one of the founders, worked closely with the painter Gustav Klimt whose portraits often featured richly coloured Wiener Werkstätte textiles.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that similar palettes featured often in Reich's renowned deep-textured weaves; often these were in double or other compound weave structures or else combinations of various simple weaves using brilliantly coloured yarns occasionally mixed with Lurex to give metallic-type effects.

In 1957, Reich acknowledged the important influence of the design perspectives associated with the Weimar Bauhaus.<sup>6</sup> This movement had the aim of creating well-designed, mass-produced items that combined artistic ideals and functionality. Bauhaus textiles contrasted with other areas of the Bauhaus aesthetic. As observed by Rowland (1990) the, 'Vivid abstract patterns, rich colours and textures ... provided a counterpoint to the austerity of [other forms of] Bauhaus design'<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 2).

Bauhaus textiles were both artistically and commercially successful, exploiting vibrant colours and showing the influence of artists such as Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian.<sup>8</sup> Gunta Stölzl (1897–1983), one of the major participants in the Bauhaus textile workshop, writing in the Bauhaus magazine in 1931, and making reference to woven wall hangings commented:

With the elements we had just conquered we attempted to make pictorial compositions, surfaces which would bring a wall to life ... Each different material had to be ordered according to its value: structure, colour, three dimensional quality, light, dark, key concepts such as soft- hard, rough- smooth. They had to be released from the unconscious, in order to become useful elements of new design.<sup>9</sup>

The design procedures and processes used by Reich, and the views and opinions attributed to him during his working life, are closely aligned to these perspectives on design expressed by Stölzl and Bauhaus contemporaries. In the later years of the Bauhaus, predominantly during the so-called 'Dessau period', from 1925 to 1932, the emphasis in woven textiles was towards design for mass production.<sup>10</sup> Full use was made of the potential offered by both Jacquard and dobby looms and there was extensive experimentation with newly available fibre types.<sup>11</sup> In the main, the focus was on the creation of design interest through the use of novel textures and innovative structures rather than through superficial decoration.<sup>12</sup> It is of interest to observe that such experimentation with processes and acceptance of the potential offered by new forms of fibrous raw materials were integral components of the textiles curriculum at the University of Leeds



FIG. 1. *Deauville*, 1960s, screen print on cotton. Pink, yellow and brown colourway. 140 × 140 cm. Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA).



FIG. 2. *Adena*, 1970s, screen print on cotton. Blue and green colourway. 124 × 140 cm. Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA).

for much of the twentieth century. It is clear that Reich adopted this experimental approach in the years subsequent to his studies at Leeds. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, he showed his willingness to experiment with the use of new fibres, such as Lurex, various cellulosic rayons and other man-made fibres including ICI's *Ardil*, a regenerated protein fibre from ground nuts (Fig. 3), and his readiness to exploit the design potential offered by the wide range of fancy yarns then available to British designers.<sup>13</sup>

#### ARRIVAL IN LEEDS

Tibor Reich left his native Hungary in December 1937, against a background of increased anti-Semitism triggered by the rise of Nazism across much of continental Europe. Earlier in the 1930s he began his formal training in textile manufacture by studying cotton theory and spinning at the Vienna School of Textiles.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after arrival in Leeds he visited the University and caught the attention of Professor J. B. Speakman (the renowned Professor of Textile Chemistry and Head of the Department of Textile Industries). Professor Speakman was keen that the enthusiastic young Tibor was given the opportunity to pursue studies relating to textile technology and woven fabric design. At the time, Leeds was regarded worldwide as the premier institute to study textile technology, science and woven fabric design. Within a matter of months, Tibor excelled

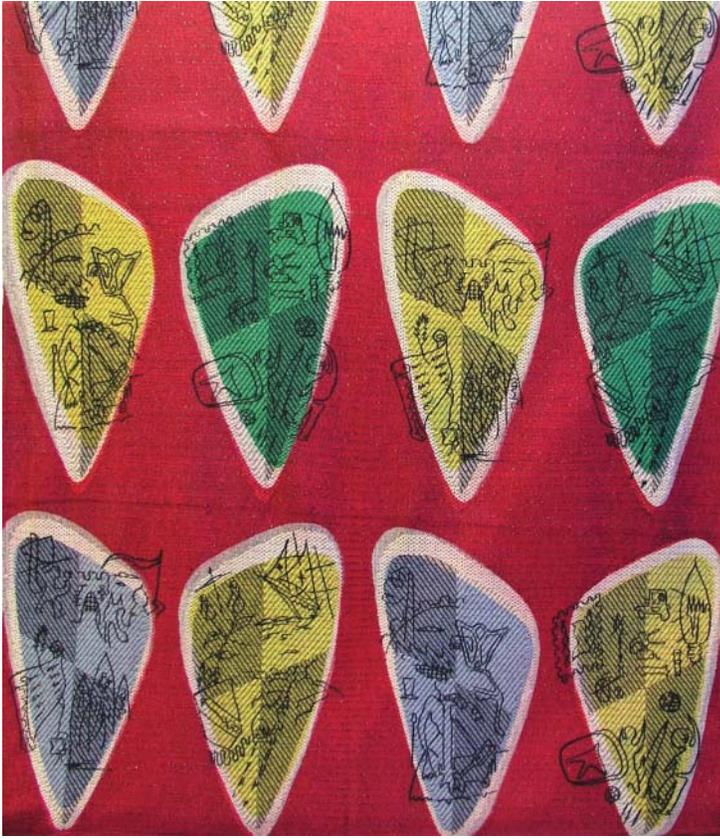


FIG. 3. *History of Shapes*, 1953, screen print on Jacquard woven fabric (with both weft- and warp-faced weaves). From *Ardil* (a regenerated protein fibre from shelled ground nuts) and *Lurex*. Produced for ICI as a wall hanging. In red, blue, green and white. 130 × 140 cm. Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA).

in his studies and achieved a first-class result in the City and Guilds of the London Institute examination in Woollen and Worsted Weaving.<sup>15</sup> He was also the recipient of departmental prizes for the best sets of handloom-woven patterns in 1938 and 1939, and was awarded the Diploma in Textile Industries in September 1941, following the submission of a thesis entitled 'The Economical Production of Novelty Fabrics'.<sup>16</sup> Associated with this thesis was a collection of ladies' coating fabrics, produced using old-stock fancy yarns (of the type then available in most weaving mills as leftovers from previous production runs).

Throughout his working life he had fond memories of the time spent at the University of Leeds, and he believed that the skills developed there and the knowledge gained ensured he was receptive to the many advances in textile technology associated with the decades following the Second World War. In fact it is argued in this paper that his principal strengths as a textile designer were his knowledge of the relevant processing technology, his sophisticated understanding of the intricacies of woven fabric structure, his willingness to experiment with new raw materials and processing techniques, and a tendency to work with unconventional colour palettes in textile printing and with unusual structure combinations in woven fabric designs (Fig. 4).



FIG. 4. *Denby*, 1960s, screen print on cotton. In red, brown, green and white. 124 × 140 cm. *Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA)*.

#### EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, at the University of Leeds, much emphasis was placed on product development and students such as Reich gained an appreciation of not only the aesthetics of textile products but also the scientific and technical aspects of production. Reich spent many hours working on the various dobby and Jacquard looms, and experimenting with structures, colours and textures. His understanding of the geometrical complexities of fabric construction was achieved through the analysis of selections of fabrics held in the Clothworkers' Museum (the predecessor of the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive), as well as through the origination and production of extensive collections of handloom-woven and power-loom-woven samples. Subsequently, Reich entered a textile industry operating under wartime restrictions affecting the availability of raw materials and dyes; this prepared him to face the commercial and technical challenges of setting up as an independent designer and manufacturer, a rare combination in 1940s Britain. The discipline of working to a constrained budget and with limited resources was one of his strengths when operating as a designer in post-war Britain.

The period spent as a student at Leeds imbued Reich with a knowledge of weaving mechanisms as well as an understanding of the geometry of woven-fabric structures. Product innovations resulted. His work on dobby looms and experimentation with various setts, woven structures, fancy yarns and colour palettes led the path to his characteristic 'deep-textured' fabrics. He also gave consideration to the mechanical stages associated with the weaving process itself. In the early 1940s Reich patented a device for pattern weaving, the main purpose of which was:

... to provide an electromagnetically controlled loom for weaving patterns or designs and involving the printing of the conventional design of the fabric [presumably in point-paper form] as it is woven, punching out a paper tape representing the design woven and utilising such tape to reproduce automatically as many repeats of the design as may be required.<sup>17</sup>

While this proposal did not represent a radical breakthrough in pattern weaving, it none the less addressed a number of important issues relating first to the electronic selection of warp threads and, second, to the reduction in the lag time between the initial design idea and the production of a sample of woven fabric. The use of conventional mechanically controlled systems was time-consuming and involved the process of preparing designs on weaving point paper, and the subsequent setting of pegs for dobbie control or the punching of cards for Jacquard control before the pattern could be realized in the form of a woven sample. Reich's invention was aimed at dispensing with these usual preliminaries, in order that design ideas could be realized within a shorter time. It is interesting to note that some 20 years after the publication of his patent specification Reich lamented that it was:

... this gap in time between the idea and the finished product which waters-down the result. Very often it was six to nine months in the cumbersome conditions of the present day before the thought was translated into cloth.<sup>18</sup>

However, he anticipated a brighter technological future which would allow, '... the freeing of design in woven or knitted structures from the mechanical limitations, and the combination of present machinery with computerised controls'.<sup>19</sup> He thus forecast a development which is not far removed from the realities of modern-day textile design and production. Even by the 1990s designers had access to a wide range of computer-aided design and manufacturing systems which allowed preliminary design ideas to be produced in fabric form in a matter of minutes.<sup>20</sup> Towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, in the wake of the digital revolution affecting all types of design, the levels of sophistication and efficiency forecast by Reich had been reached (Fig. 5).

#### 1940S AND 1950S — A NEW DAWN FOR BRITISH DESIGN

While still a student at Leeds, Reich produced the design for his 'leopard skin' tweed, which was bought by the House of Molyneux and put into production as a fashion fabric for export to the United States.<sup>21</sup> Further designs were purchased by the Calico Printers' Association (Manchester), Digby Morton (London) and Callender and Company (London).<sup>22</sup> In 1941, on completing his studies at Leeds, Reich was employed as a designer by Tootal Broadhurst Lee Co. Ltd (Lancashire) where he worked on rayon cloth.<sup>23</sup> This experience was described some years later as having involved '... stultifying repetitive work'.<sup>24</sup> An export order of nearly \$100,000 from New York's Hambro House of Design in 1945 was the first step towards becoming a textile designer of international stature.<sup>25</sup> In August 1946 Reich established Tibor Ltd, and set up a small weaving studio at Clifford Mill, a few miles west of Stratford-upon-Avon.<sup>26</sup> It was



FIG. 5. *Corsica*, 1950s, Jacquard woven with interchanging weft-backed structure. Fotexur design. In yellow, black and brown. 130 × 200cm. *Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA)*.

from this base that Reich developed his distinctive deep-textured weaves and brilliantly coloured prints.

Reich's cutting-edge designs were soon acknowledged as such and further success was to follow. In 1947 one of his hand-woven fabrics was selected by H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth as a wedding gift presented by the Woolgrowers of the British Commonwealth.<sup>27</sup> By the late 1940s he was collaborating with furniture manufacturers such as H. K. Furniture Ltd in the provision of appropriately designed upholstery fabrics for mass production.<sup>28</sup>

By the late 1940s Reich was producing intricately woven textural qualities, created by the juxtaposition of variably spun yarns and further enhanced by the figurative freedom offered by Jacquard selection. In 1949 he produced his first 'deep-textured' fabric called 'Stratford' as part of an order destined for the United States of America.<sup>29</sup> The essence of such fabrics is that they can be appreciated at a distance or studied closely to reveal complex textural effects and colour combinations. As noted previously, many of the colour palettes associated with these deep textured weaves call to mind the work of Gustav Klimt.

In 1951, the Festival of Britain marked the centenary of the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Festival Pattern Group, which had been formed in 1949 by the Council of Industrial Design, decided that designers should be given a design theme relating to crystal-structures. This complemented the overall aim of the festival as '... a shared exhibition of science, technology and industrial design'.<sup>30</sup> Two distinct types of development emerged from the event: the first was an interest in scientific advances showing depictions of magnified atoms and the second was the increased awareness of abstract and organic forms typified by the work of designers such as Lucienne Day and Terence Conran.<sup>31</sup> Tibor Reich was among the designers asked to exhibit at the Festival of Britain in 1951. An important outcome of the Festival of Britain was that it encouraged a stronger relationship generally between designers and manufacturers. Prior to this,

the vast bulk of British textile manufacturers regarded design as a secondary, largely incidental, activity, an attitude which was readily apparent in mills associated with traditional processing sectors such as the woollen and worsted industries of Yorkshire, some of which did not employ trained designers. Instead 'design' was considered to be a process of adjusting the structures and colours of fabrics that had been produced for decades; so design decisions were largely made by mill managers, many of whom held qualifications in textile technology rather than textile design.<sup>32</sup> From the 1950s onwards, many British textile manufacturers (e.g., Edinburgh Weavers Ltd) set up design studios on their premises, employed British-educated designers and allowed their production to become more design-led, rather than process-led; they thus improved greatly their competitive performance not only in British markets but also in continental European and American markets. The bulk of these designers were graduates from the British art college system and were therefore from an educational background which laid great stress on familiarity with current trends in art and, importantly, that design should draw on the characteristics of these trends. As a result, textile design in Britain in the decades following the Second World War was led by highly creative, well-educated and artistically aware individuals with sound knowledge of contemporary abstract art.<sup>33</sup> There were, however, occasional problems, particularly in the highly technical area of weaving, as these highly creative individuals often had difficulty designing within the constraints of the technology. As a consequence they often worked in close parallel with processing technologists who were fully conversant with the production parameters of the relevant processing technology. In the British context, therefore, designers such as Tibor Reich (along with many other Leeds textile graduates as well as graduates from a few other UK institutions) held an undoubted advantage; they were not only aware of contemporary trends in art and design, and thus what was fashionable and commercially viable, they had a well-developed understanding also of the relevant processing technology.

Farr, in his book *Design in British Industry*, published in 1955, criticized the division that existed between designer and manufacturer. He considered how many firms used designers who had little to no experience of working on the loom:

The divorce between design and execution is a serious handicap to the designer. Although he has an accurate knowledge of the mechanical limitations of the looms available, he cannot tell how the colour and texture of the yarns will affect the pattern he has designed. Although for each new design a sample length is woven so that he can compare it with his original pattern on paper, the designer takes no active part in weaving the sample. Because of this designers are looked upon as originators of new patterns and not new fabrics. It follows that the designer's approach to the problem is a negative one. He adheres to the limitations set down and is not prepared to risk any combination of yarns which he has not tried before.<sup>34</sup>

Tibor Ltd was a rare exception to this rule, as Reich worked as both designer and manufacturer, giving him an insight into both stages of design and production. As indicated above, time spent as a student at the University of Leeds had helped to develop both of these skills. By 1950 Tibor Ltd was employing 45 weavers using both handlooms and power looms in the production of furnishing fabrics.<sup>35</sup>

## Tibor Reich

The 1950s was a successful decade for Tibor Ltd, with many notable commissions. In 1951 Reich produced furnishings for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. These included:

*Macbeth* (a heavy bouclé with gold thread in brilliant scarlet on dusky grey) for the bar, *Cymbeline* (a dull scarlet with square spots of gold thread) and *Cardinal* in burgundy for auditorium seats and in forest green for the dress circle bar couches.<sup>36</sup>

Further commissions included furnishing fabrics for public buildings, hotels and ships as well as for Mexican, Cuban and American airlines.<sup>37</sup> Several fabrics were designed for G-Plan (a large furnishing manufacturer) and upholstery fabric designs were commissioned by both Vauxhall and the Standard Motor Company. Ranges of carpet designs were produced for I. & C. Steele (of Banbury) in 1952 and for the Wilton Royal Carpet Factory Co. Ltd in the same year.<sup>38</sup> In 1953, Tibor Ltd collaborated with various manufacturers in the preparation of a touring exhibition consisting of fabrics coordinated with furniture and carpets. He worked with S. J. Stockwell and Co. (Carpets) Ltd in a new venture to sell their products as a package.<sup>39</sup> The carpets (also designed by Tibor Ltd), curtains and furniture were displayed together in magazine advertisements as well as in department stores. This gave the customer the potential to buy all their furnishings together without having to visit each section of the department store to choose individual product components. The principle followed was that the customer would be freed from matching colours and designs.<sup>40</sup> Reich developed further his deep-textured weaves using Jacquard looms and, in 1954, introduced the first texture print, *Raw Coral*.<sup>41</sup> *Isis*, a small-scale-figured effect, his best selling upholstery fabric, was produced in 1955 and continued to be produced for many years afterwards.<sup>42</sup>

Reich was a keen photographer and exploited the potential of photographic images in the development of patterns from a range of natural sources. One of his favourite sayings was, 'Nature designs best'.<sup>43</sup> In the mid-1950s he developed a system of pattern design, known as 'Fotexur', which used sectionalized photographic images (in positive and/or negative form) rearranged in regularly repeating patterns for application in either printed or woven form<sup>44</sup> (Fig. 6). Reich's first printed fabric to incorporate a design based on this method was entitled *Flamingo* and won the Council of Industrial Design award in 1957.<sup>45</sup> Fotexur weaves and prints were received enthusiastically by both manufacturers and consumers. Michael Farr saw this new technique as a step in the right direction for British design. He observed that the Fotexur method, although taking nature as its principal source, stepped beyond visual expressions that could be classified simply as floral or geometric.<sup>46</sup>

In the late 1950s Reich held consultancy positions with a number of companies, including the Bigelow and Sandford Carpet Company based in the USA.<sup>47</sup> Probably the most notable design produced by Reich in the 1950s was a wall hanging which was commissioned by ICI and entitled *History of Shapes*. This piece was woven on a Jacquard loom in *Ardil*, spun silk and metallic yarns. Subsequent to weaving, the piece was screen-printed with a narrative pattern consisting of a series of sketches depicting the history of Britain from ancient times.<sup>48</sup>

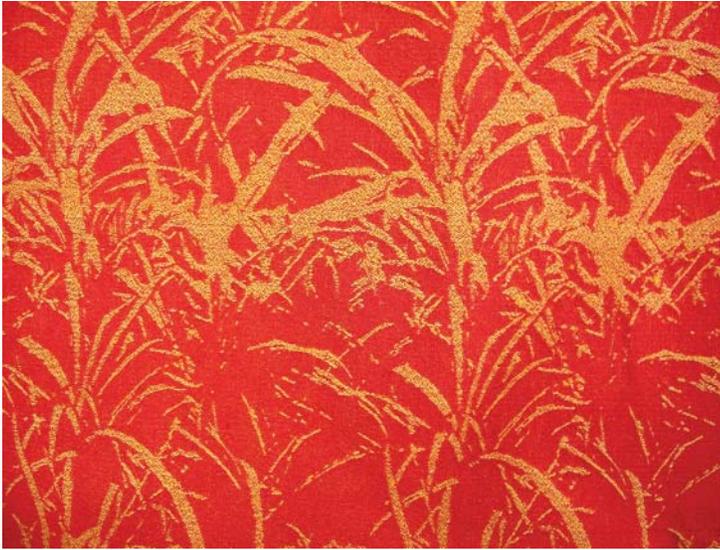


FIG. 6. *Pampas*, 1950s, Jacquard woven Fotexur design, with warp- and weft-faced weaves. In yellow and red. 130 × 200 cm. *Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA)*.

#### THE 1960S AND 1970S — CONTINUED SUCCESS

Design in the 1960s and 1970s was influenced largely by contemporary art. Mechanized screen printing was a popular choice for designers and manufacturers as it allowed the production of appropriate designs at economic costs. Shorter runs were economically viable using mechanized screen printing compared to engraved roller printing. Reich took advantage of the demand for colourful screen prints and, as a result, many of his fashionable 1960s prints were available at realistic and affordable prices.

In March 1960, Reich exhibited his so-called ‘Colotomatic’ range, based on a photograph of an atomic structure.<sup>49</sup> One particular design entitled ‘Atomic’ came in 14 colourways. Each colourway contained four tones of a single colour, and thus gave the appearance of depth in fabric form. There were three principal colour groups: red, blue/green and green/yellow.<sup>50</sup> The ‘Colotomatic’ range was intended to allow the consumer to mix colourways in one setting. Stephen Garrett, a design journalist of the day, commented:

By careful selection of the colourways . . . it should be possible to get the exact overall colour effect that is wanted. A ‘paint box’ is thus provided from which the right colours can be selected and mixed.<sup>51</sup>

This flexibility of design gave homeowners the opportunity to pick and choose colours to suit their moods. His ‘Colotomatic’ designs can be seen as a logical extension to his earlier work in pattern making and experiments in deep textures, as well as his collaboration with S. J. Stockwell & Co. Ltd, where the consumers were given guidance to choose designs for their home décor.

In 1960 Tibor Ltd produced an upholstery fabric design with the title ‘Buckingham’ for Ercol (the furniture company) and this fabric remained a bestseller for many years

subsequently. In 1961 more deep-textured fabrics such as ‘Ancora’ (which had a ‘knitted look’) were produced.<sup>52</sup> Further innovation followed in 1962 with the creation of a smoother look and the introduction of a multi-dye technique as well as the use of space-dyed yarns.<sup>53</sup> In the same year an exhibition of raw-silk type curtain fabrics was presented at the Ceylon Tea Centre in London.<sup>54</sup> The production of exclusive woven or printed wall hangings continued, with commissions from the Board of Trade, Coventry Cathedral and the University of Manchester and, in 1964, ranges of wall hangings and furnishing fabrics for the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon.<sup>55</sup> Apparently ‘six miles of fabric’ were produced by Tibor Ltd for the Piccadilly Hotel in Manchester in 1964 and, in 1968, woven curtaining fabric was produced exclusively for Windsor Castle Library.<sup>56</sup>

In 1965, following two years of research into the origin of traditional Hungarian designs, Reich presented his ‘Modern Magyar’ collection (consisting of coordinating prints and weaves) at his London showroom in Sloan Street.<sup>57</sup> The print designs were on 100 per cent cotton, and used a wide range of floral motifs sourced from traditional Hungarian embroidery<sup>58</sup> (Fig. 7). The weaves were produced with British spun yarns, dyed in a palette of colours typical of Hungarian traditional costumes. He commented that he had, ‘... discovered a fund of motifs which are as distinctive from district to district as are Scottish tartans’.<sup>59</sup> One example from the ‘Modern Magyar’ collection is ‘Matjo’ (sometimes spelt ‘Matyo’) a screen-printed textile named after a Hungarian province. The floral design managed to fuse both the styles of his native Hungary with the fashion for screen-printed floral patterns in the 1960s.<sup>60</sup>

One of the highlights for Tibor Ltd in the 1960s was a commission to design the first sets of upholstery and curtain fabrics for the Anglo-French Concorde (prior to trial flights in 1968).<sup>61</sup> Five Jacquard upholstery cloths, in natural and gold were used as curtaining fabric along with two carpet designs<sup>62</sup> (Fig. 8).



FIG. 7. *Anna*, 1960s, screen print on cotton. Heart, floral and peacock motifs, based on traditional Hungarian designs. 124 × 140 cm. Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA).

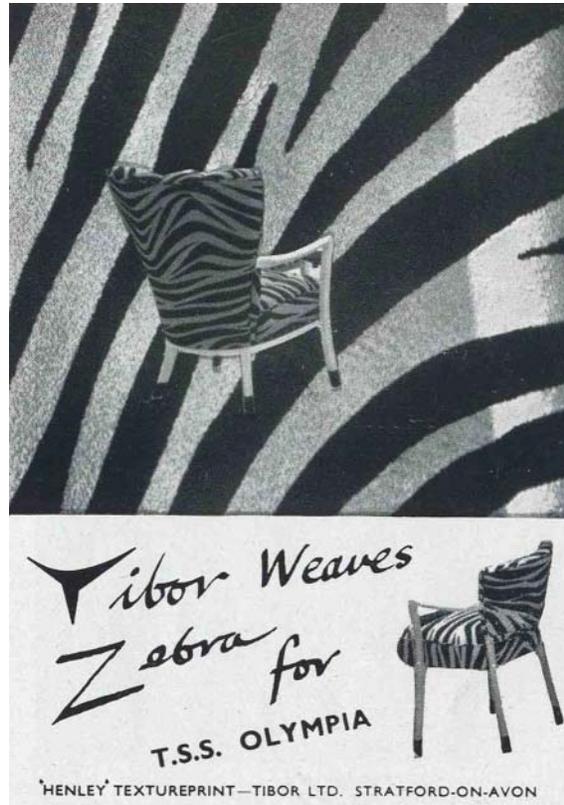


FIG. 8. Tibor Ltd. promotional brochure.  
*Image used with kind permission from the Reich family.*

The year 1969 saw the anniversary of the first Shakespeare festival in Stratford-upon-Avon organized two hundred years previously by the actor and writer David Garrick (1717–79).<sup>63</sup> It became known as ‘Garrick’s Jubilee’. Amongst other designs (Figs 9 and 10), Reich produced a panel called ‘Portraits’ to celebrate this bicentenary. The panel depicted images of Shakespeare and Garrick. He commissioned local artist Freda Goitein to produce the portraits in mosaic and then screen printed the mosaic images (using screens prepared from photographic separations, with one screen for each colour).<sup>64</sup> He also reproduced a hand drawing of Shakespeare’s birthplace as a print on Irish linen, and this was sold to the general public as a souvenir either for use as a tea towel or as a wall decoration.<sup>65</sup>

The 1970s were devoted primarily to designing fabrics for schools, hospitals and colleges.<sup>66</sup> A few large-scale woven hangings were still produced; one such piece entitled ‘Taming of the Shrew’ was exhibited at the Jerusalem National Theatre during the Shakespeare Festival in 1977.<sup>67</sup> The substantial contribution made by Reich in the field of textile design was recognized in 1973 by the award of the Textile Institute Medal



FIG. 9. *Agincourt*, 1960s, screen print on cotton. Shakespeare range, commissioned for the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon. In black, yellow and red on white fabric. 124 × 140 cm. Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA).

for Design.<sup>68</sup> By the 1970s Clifford Mill employed over 40 weavers on both hand and power looms and ‘Tibor’ cloth was sold at major department stores across the world. Clifford Mill closed in 1978 (due to the risk of flooding) and soon afterwards Tibor Reich retired.

The woven fabrics held in the Tibor Reich collection at the University of Leeds International Textiles Archive (ULITA) exhibit several interesting features. His life’s work was overwhelmingly focused on furnishing-weight cloths and many of the fabrics are woven using plain-weave derivatives. The use of more advanced weave structures is also evident. There are many Jacquard samples which display a sophisticated knowledge of complex weaving and demonstrate amply Reich’s technical understanding. Analysis of a large number of woven pieces held in the Leeds Collection has provided an insight into some of Reich’s working methods. Two of these are worthy of note. First, in common with many designers, is the use of blanket warps as convenient means for producing a large number of different samples with the least amount of machine downtime. The second is the use of a restricted range of warp yarn colours, allowing the weft yarns to provide distinguishing features.



FIG. 10. *Romulus*, 1960s, screen print on cotton. Shakespeare range, commissioned for the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon. In grey, gold and black on white fabric. 124 × 140 cm. *Tibor Reich Collection, University of Leeds International Textile Archive (ULITA)*.

An insight into Reich's theoretical and practical understanding of woven fabric structure can be gained from examining the structural characteristics of the items held at Leeds. He used simple structures in novel and inventive ways and also possessed a sophisticated understanding of the complexities of Jacquard weaving. A willingness to use unconventional colour combinations is also readily apparent. While using traditional methods of working, including blanket warps, Reich showed a willingness also to explore innovative and non-commercial methods.

#### IN CONCLUSION

Tibor Reich was a textile designer and manufacturer, with a deep understanding of not only the aesthetic and structural aspects of woven textile design, but also the relevant processing technology. This was in contrast to many contemporary British textile designers who, in the main, were graduates of the British art college system which traditionally placed an emphasis on design evolution and development, rather than

design realization (where design went hand in hand with the relevant processing technology). Tibor Reich's success as a textile designer working in post-war Britain probably stemmed in part from his capability in handling both sides of the design and manufacturing coin. This, allied with his creative flair, inventiveness, willingness to experiment and entrepreneurial awareness, ensured commercial success in a market hungry for newness and innovation. From his base at Clifford Mill near Stratford-upon-Avon, he exploited continuously the full potential of both dobby and Jacquard looms in the production of his deep-textured fabrics. His products provided a new perspective on British domestic furnishings. This perspective can be attributed partly to his early years as a student at the University of Leeds during the 1940s, a time of wartime rationing restrictions. He recognized the benefits of new fibres and novelty yarns, and insisted that '... even the most inexpensive cottons for domestic and school use should look exciting'.<sup>69</sup> Also of importance on the road to commercial success was the inventiveness of Reich himself, manifested in several spheres of design activity including 'Fotexur', a systematic means whereby edited sections of negative or positive photographic images were assembled in repeat form and were used as the basis for the repeat structures in printed or woven textiles.

Reich collaborated on numerous occasions with furniture and carpet manufacturers and created an extensive series of wall hangings and other fabrics for public buildings in the UK and abroad. His list of clients included Cunard, Concorde, the Lotus car company and the Shakespeare Anniversary Council. His commissions were numerous and included fabrics for the British Royal Family, 10 and 11 Downing Street, several embassies and national airlines, the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, Coventry Cathedral, the University of Manchester Theatre, numerous cruise liners and, as noted above, Concorde. His work on G-Plan and Ercol furniture epitomizes fashionable design of the 1950s and 1960s. His designs are still popular and very collectable today. Tibor Reich died in 1996 at the age of 80.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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<sup>13</sup> M. Farr, *Design in British Industry: A Mid-Century Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 79.

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<sup>17</sup> T. Reich BP566733 (1945).

<sup>18</sup> Anon., 'Tibor Ltd — An Eventful First 21 Years'.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> S. Tandy, 'Computer Printing', *Textile Horizons*, 16, no. 6 (1997), pp. 26–28.

<sup>21</sup> Anon., 'Information sheet accompanying exhibition of Tibor Reich's work' (Warwickshire: Warwickshire Museum, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Anon., 'Student Records'.

<sup>23</sup> Anon., 'Information sheet accompanying exhibition of Tibor Reich's work'.

<sup>24</sup> Farr, *Design in British Industry*, p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., 'Information sheet accompanying exhibition of Tibor Reich's work'.

<sup>26</sup> Anon., 'Tibor Ltd — An Eventful First 21 Years'.

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<sup>28</sup> M. Farr, 'Blends and Contrasts', *Design*, no. 97 (January 1957), pp. 34–37.

<sup>29</sup> Hann and Thomson, *Tibor Reich 1916–1996*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> N. Ikoku, *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection: British Textile Design from 1940 to the Present* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), pp. 10–11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Conversations with past mill managers and museum personnel in Yorkshire.

<sup>33</sup> Ikoku, *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>34</sup> Farr, *Design in British Industry*, p. 80.

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<sup>36</sup> M. J. Pringle, 'I would I were a Weaver', *Shakespeare at the Centre*, 5, 1 (2005), p. 4.

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<sup>39</sup> Farr, 'Blends and Contrasts', pp. 34–37.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Anon., 'Tibor Ltd — An Eventful First 21 Years'.

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<sup>45</sup> Anon., 'Shakespeare Festival Celebrations', promotional brochure (Stratford-upon-Avon: Tibor Ltd, 1969).

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., 'Tibor Ltd — An Eventful First 21 Years'.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Royal Shakespeare Company website available at: <http://www.rsc.org.uk> [accessed 19/02/2009].

<sup>64</sup> Anon., 'Shakespeare Festival Celebrations'.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>68</sup> Anon., 'Convocation 1973', *Textile Institute and Industry* (December 1973), p. 333.

<sup>69</sup> Anon., 'Tibor Ltd — An Eventful First 21 Years'.

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