

46 Years of the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design.

A successful formula combining teaching and industry

by SILVIA JAPKIN SZULC and DANIEL YACUBOVICH.

Photographs by SÍLVIA JAPKIN and DANIEL YACUBOVICH

Between 1979 and 1982 I studied Textile Design at the [Shenkar College of Engineering and Design](#), a period that left a profound mark on my life as both a professional and an artist. The experience was enriching, opened my eyes to new perspectives and conceptions of design, and allowed me to acquire a fundamental grasp of art, technology and history that forms the basis of my current knowledge.

Much of this personal enrichment was thanks to the international staff who taught my classes, including Nora Frenkel, a Chinese-born plastic artist, who had lived in New York and Tel Aviv, Tessa Smith, from Bristol in the UK, who directed the Department of Textile Design, Hana Krakover, Tamar Eitan and Neora Warshawsky, Israeli teachers of printing, knitting and weaving design;

Facade of the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design.





Entrance hall of the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design.

and Abraham Vailer, a staunchly Bauhaus teacher from the Netherlands who introduced us to the theory of form and colour, and much more besides.

It was my teacher of textile printing – Abbie Rotbart, from New York – who really opened the doors for Daniel and me. She put us in touch with other professionals at the school so we could write this article. Once arrangements had been made, we returned on a visit to Shenkar and reminisced about our time there.

The knowledge I gained at Shenkar shaped the tools I used to move into the Catalan textile industry. When Daniel and I arrived in Catalonia, in 1982, we created the Silvia&Daniel design studio, offering designs to companies in Sabadell, Terrassa, Mataró, Premià de Mar and Barcelona, and to others throughout Spain and Europe. I got in touch with the CDMT, which in 1990 hosted an exhibition of my work.

Thirty-four years after graduating, I proposed writing this article for Datatèxtil, to pay tribute to the internationally renowned Shenkar College, whose management model – based on those of similar institutions in the English-speaking world – places great importance on sponsorship and close collaboration with business and industry. Shenkar is a higher education institution specialising in design, which began its journey exclusively in the field of textiles, much like the ESDI in Sabadell. Today it offers tuition in multiple disciplines, including interior design, industrial design, jewellery design,



Printing workshop at the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design.

graphic design, and, of course, textile design, with specialisations in printing, weaving, knitting, fashion and interior design. The school also runs courses in technology and engineering.

In the summer of 2016, Daniel and I visited the graduate exhibition of work by students from the College's different departments. Over some four hours we were impressed again and again by the descriptions of final projects in all of the possible specialisations. During our visit, Abbie put us in touch with the director of the school archive, Tal Amit, with whom we arranged an interview, and we also met and talked with Youval Etzioni, a historian and teacher at Shenkar.

Historical overview

On a warm morning, in a bar facing the Mediterranean, we met with the historian and teacher Youval Etzioni. It was an enriching conversation, on the origins and the present-day of the production, aesthetics and economics of the local textile industry. To understand the current situation in Israel, Youval suggested looking at three facets.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there have been huge waves of immigration to Israel, and with every decade aesthetic influences have radiated from different parts of the world to the local textile and handicrafts industries. In establishing the Betzalel School of Fine Arts in 1909, its founder Betzalel Shats introduced a European ideology that merged with the local mentality of the Eastern Hebrew population, with its allusions to traditional Biblical symbols and the landscapes of the Holy Land. Until around 1935, these influences were mainly of Russian and Polish origin, manifested in textiles whose aesthetics combined aspects of Art Nouveau and Art Deco with motifs from Eastern Semitic ornamentation.



Design by Leo Khan:
Tower of David in Jerusalem.

Facet 1. It all began at the outset of the twentieth century, before the creation of the State, with the establishment of frameworks for education and vocational training. This brought into being, for example, women-only training workshops for the production of handmade decorative carpets, influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and incorporating motifs of mythological sites, such as the Tower of David in Jerusalem.

Facet 2. Built around industry and production methods; factories that were established in the 1920s and 1930s, founded by Jews from the city of Łódź (Poland), such as the great company *Lodzía*, which was owned by the industrialist Arie Shenkar.

In 1934, Jews from Czechoslovakia created the most technologically advanced factory in the Middle East, [ATA](#). Until the late 1960s it remained a leading company in the production of spun fabrics, as well as everyday and quality work clothing, and a style of dress that portrayed the value of skilled



Design by Leo Khan: Jaffa Port.

labour, as defined within the bounds of Socialist ideology. The materials were cottons, knits and twills, in raw, white, khaki and mechanical blue. A “revival” outlet of this company has recently been opened in Tel Aviv, reproducing retro designs and the corporate logo.

In the 1940s, German immigrants founded new textile companies, predominantly in major urban centres.

The year 1954 was a turning point for textiles and fashion in Israel, which had gone largely unremarked until that time. Key figures in the change, Ruth Dayan and fashion designer Fini Laintersdorf, introduced a new concept of textiles under the brand name *Maskit*, producing women’s fashion collections that were available only through their exclusive outlets in major cities across the country. New designs were modelled at fashion shows. The designers strived to employ women, recent immigrants from Yemen and the countries of the Maghreb, who worked as weavers to manufacture modern fashions with ethnic influences. The designs were created by Fini Laintersdorf, Roji Ben Yosef, Ziona Shimshi and other collaborators.

An essential aspect of the *Maskit* phenomenon was its target market: mostly North Americans and other affluent consumers from the English-speaking world, who engaged with the project and its oriental aesthetic, which played to prevailing Western tastes. The key elements in this new production were long cotton tunics, polychromatic oriental embroidery, large format *panneaux* print designs with various ornamental motifs, accessorised with jewellery, large pendants and brooches, in metal and stones. The public with whom the *Maskit* project found favour, in the US and the UK, essentially represented the same stratum of society occupied by the founders of Shenkar College.

Facet 3. Artistic. The international textile crisis of the 1980s and 1990s had its effect on the scope of training options at design schools across the globe, including Shenkar, prompting a search for new aesthetic and artistic horizons.



Design by Ziona Shimshi.

Design by Roji Ben Yosef.

[See detail.](#)



Since the 1980s, a significant number of graduates from diverse schools have explored creative possibilities in the fusion of art and design, following the lead of the textile art pioneers of the 1970s, such as Jack L. Larsen and Sheila Hicks in the US, and Magdalena Abakanowicz in Poland. The influence of the Lausanne and later the Łódź Biennale also opened up new vocations among students and creators in the textile field.

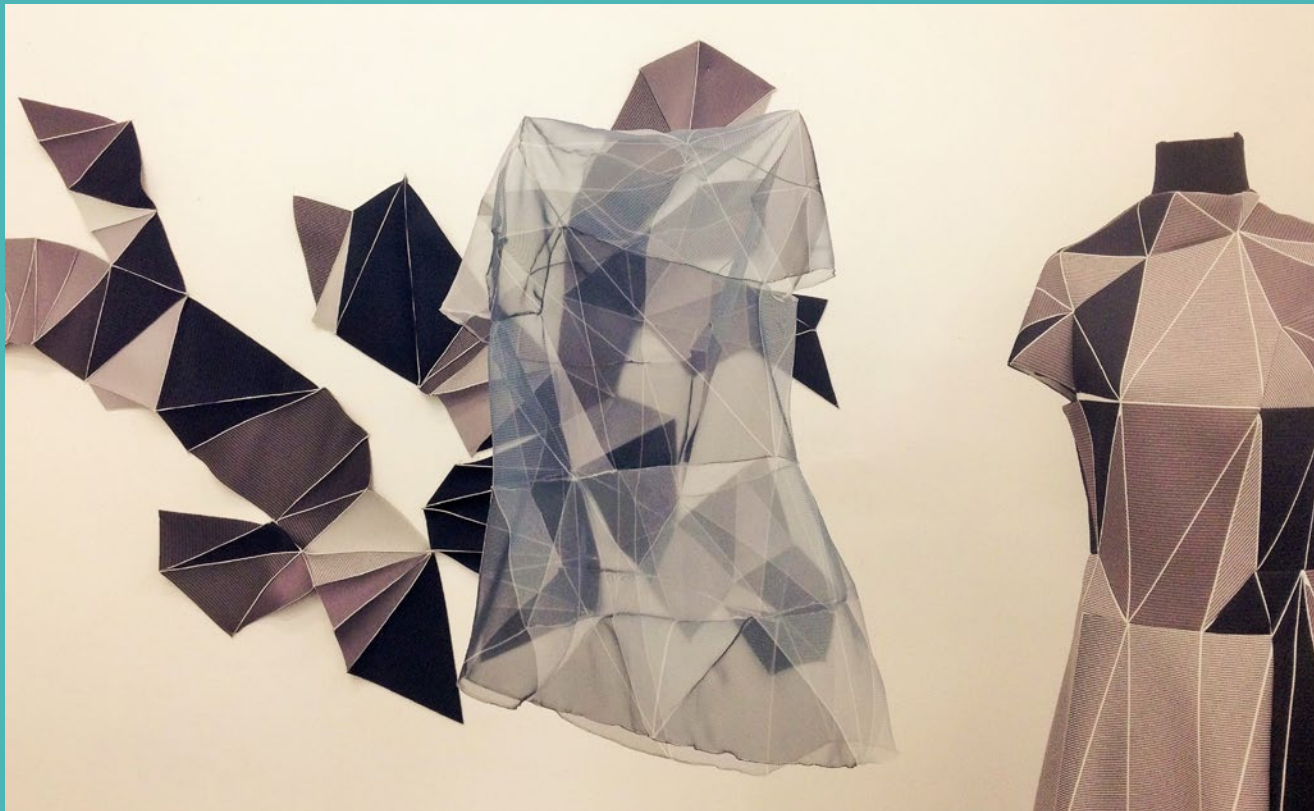
As the concept of textile art gained acceptance, the subject was gradually incorporated into the programmes of many design schools, among them Shenkar. Exploration of a new field brought new aesthetics, textile art, “artwear”, and installations dominated by statements of a spatial, material nature.

Freelance designers also created their own design lines and set up independent sales outlets. Today, as a result of globalisation, much of the industrial production is located in East Asia.

From its Origins to Shenkar Today

In the midst of the mass immigration of the 1950s and 1960s, the Government of Israel appointed a commission that in 1968 proposed the creation of a higher education institution for the training of professionals in the fields of textile design and engineering. The Ministry of Education, Finance and Labour became involved in the logistics of forming this new institution, setting up a dedicated committee whose function was to find qualified teaching staff. The search was carried out in the US and Europe through visits to specialised institutions, where many specialists were interviewed, some of whom were hired. Impressed by the project and excited by the prospect of employment, a considerable number of professionals from North America and the UK emigrated to Israel, where they took part in creating the various specialised departments. Shenkar's patrons included educational institutions and textile executives, among them the directors of Marks & Spencer. The institution was inaugurated in October 1970, with five departments: Textile Technology, Production Management, Marketing and Business Administration, Fashion Design and Textile Design.

The school found its home in a building that had formerly served as an ORT technological high school under the name Shenkar, which has been maintained to this day. Arie Shenkar was one of the country's first textile manufacturers. In 1925, he was the owner of the company *Lodzía* (a pioneer in the formation of the ORT school), later becoming President of the Chamber of Industry. Since that time, the building has been extended dramatically, and various wings bear



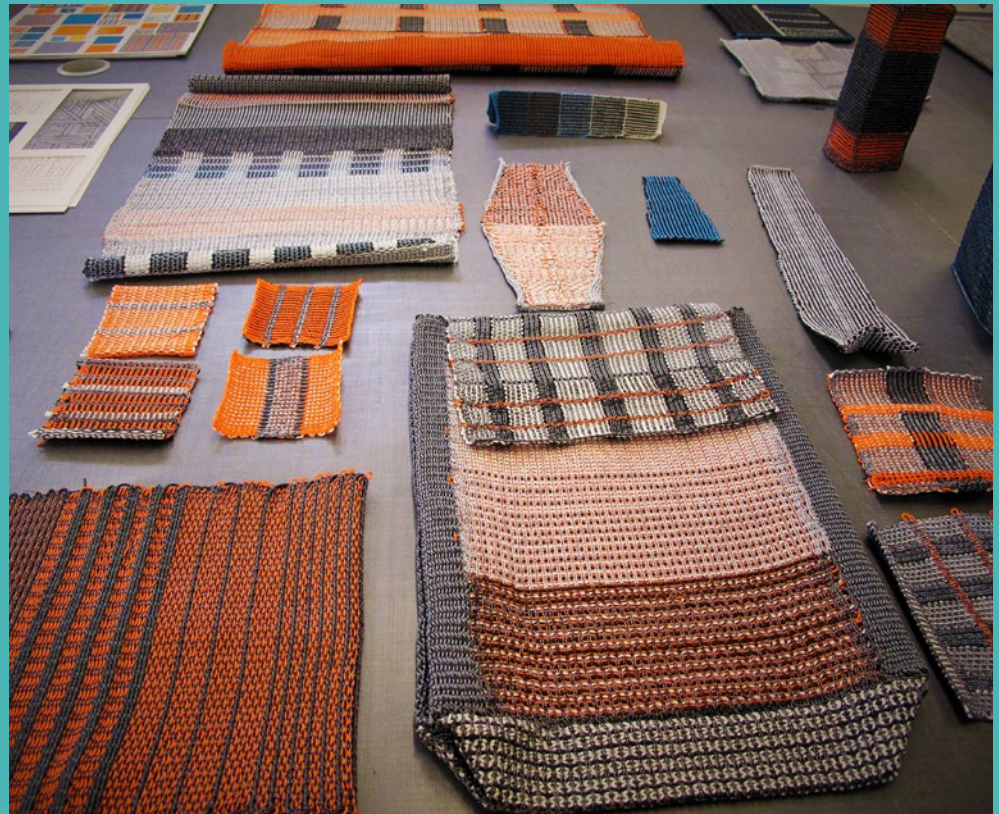
Designs by Shiran Nissan.

the names of different patrons. New buildings opened include those housing the library and archive, while a new archive building is currently being constructed to store the huge volume of textiles and clothing donated from around the world.

Since its beginnings, Shenkar College has always maintained strong links to the textile industries, which have provided finance and supplied resources for applied use in the specialised training it offers. Guided tours of manufacturing facilities have always been a key component of Shenkar's courses, to show how the theory studied at the college is put into practice. Companies typically grant summer scholarships, to enable students in diverse technological and design areas to gain practical experience.

Admission to the school has always been extremely demanding (in my year, 18 students out of a total of 100 applicants were accepted, and just 13 of us completed our studies). Scholarships are mainly awarded by private sponsors (I obtained a scholarship for study materials – this was before computers, and we used many tubes of gouache, papers and brushes). Those of us studying textile and fashion design participated in contests and grant calls held in partnership with industry, and in fact one of my designs was chosen to be marketed by a local company. Some students had the opportunity to work in design studios or textile factories in the US or UK, completing work placements in the summer months. This intense cooperation between the textile industry and the school is a fundamental value of the institution.

During my studies, the degree qualification (BA) was awarded by an American university. Since 1983, Shenkar has awarded the degrees of B.Des and B.Tech, authorised by the national commission for higher studies, which oversees the qualifications framework adhered to by all Israeli higher education institutions.



Designs by Narkis Sharon.

After the international textile crisis in 1995, Shenkar began to build a more multidisciplinary structure, with the creation of the Department of Plastics Engineering, and in 1998 the Department of Jewellery Design was opened. In 2001, Production Management (Textiles) was extended to become Industrial Engineering and Management, and the year 2003 saw Industrial Informatics changed to Computer Engineering. In the 2002-2003 academic year, the departments of Graphic Design, Industrial Design, Interior Design and Electronic Engineering were integrated into the new structure of the Faculty of Design, and all technical departments were joined under the umbrella of the Faculty of Engineering. In 2008, the Department of Multidisciplinary Art was opened.

Today the institution is known as the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design (see www.shenkar.ac.il/en/galleries).

The Graduate Exhibition

The annual exhibition showcasing graduates' work serves as a "letter of introduction" for future professionals looking to move into industry and the commercial sphere. Their projects are presented in different spaces throughout the College, displayed alongside their newly printed business cards. During the exhibition period, the graduates are on hand to meet visitors, to explain their work in greater detail. Teachers from different departments also host guided tours for groups interested in the projects, as we ourselves experienced in the area of industrial design. The graduate exhibition is commonly reported on in the media, the press inevitably focusing on the more innovative and interesting work. The final year Fashion Design exhibition is widely known, with [shows](#) attracting sizeable audiences.

Designs by Daniela Makmil.



Glasses by Yonathan Landsberg.



Design by Maayan Bronfman.



Designs by Shany Abraham.

When Daniel and I visited the exhibition, we saw works from Jewellery, Industrial Design, Interior Design, and others, and we could clearly see the influence of aspects of textile theory in the work produced in other disciplines, such as in jewellery and industrial design.

The exhibition devoted to Textile Design was entitled “Material-Action-Prototype”, the accompanying booklet explaining that it aimed to shed light on the richness of textile design in everyday culture and as an aesthetic, material and visual discipline. The designs on display encompassed a great variety of formats: clothing, fabric design, materiality projects, video, experimental processes, crafts, and “smart” objects. The materials employed ranged from the traditional – cottons, wools, foulé, knits and printed fabrics – to the contemporary – plastics and fused materials, 3D printed and “smart” materials, conductive fibres, and so on. The work addresses themes such as the body, its functions, wrappings and textures; a blending of ritual ceremonial elements and their modification and transformation for contemporary life. The exhibition presented a rich synthesis of fusions and the functions of fabric as a cultural material that is both everyday and festive, unworked and elaborate, spiritual and physical, local and global. The main conceptual undercurrents were manifested in the form of alternative skins, anthropometric wrappings that explore aspects of local cultures and their borders, addressing questions such as the route to the object, meditation, the soft monument, deep surface, fusion, morphogenesis and ceremony.

Visit to the Rose Fashion and Textile Archive

The director of the archive, Tal Amit, greeted us with a smile in the lobby of Shenkar College and accompanied us to the building where the archive is currently located. In a space crowded with textiles and clothing, stored in boxes or under white sheets, Tal introduced us to Paulina Jevlevsky, curator and restorer at the archive, which was inaugurated in 1986 by Aliza Baguinsky and Ira Lev. The first major donation the archive received was a collection of textiles and clothing from the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York. It currently holds collections from all over the world, including Chimú textiles from Peru, and pieces from Japan, Russia, Hungary, Romania and many other countries. According to Tal Amit, one of the outstanding features of the archive is that, true to its home in a leading design school, it contains a world-class collection of Israeli textiles, acquired through active searching and generous donations.

The textiles in the archive date back to the early twentieth century, including samples from each decade up to the present day. All of the fabrics and clothing, which include accessories such as hats, gloves, buttons and spectacles, have been donated from different parts of the world. According to Tal, one of the core objectives of the archive is to preserve memory and to safeguard historical, anthropological and social values through local and international fabrics and fashion. One feature unique to Israeli textiles lies in the fact that until the 1950s, due to the State's arduous struggle for survival, fashion was absent from everyday manufacturing and aesthetic production. Even so, today the archive seeks to recover artefacts of this industrial and aesthetic practice, which have until recently remained largely unseen by the public.

Recalling his days as a student, Tal explains that it was impossible to gain access to the whole archive. As a fashion student, for example, looking at designs of evening gowns, he might be shown just 30 or 40 examples from which to learn and draw inspiration, along with bags and other accessories. One of the new objectives is therefore to create a digital documentation centre, accessible to students and teachers alike.

In the archive hall, we are shown a large *panneaux* by the artist Bernard Rice. The material is a raw cotton fabric printed in black ink, where the artist displays an expert handling of tonal gradients. For this piece, the landscape is styled after initial woodcut designs (engravings in wood), giving it an expressionistic feel.

Following this, our hosts spread out some woven fabrics by the German artist Leo Khan, who, while living in Germany in 1936, decorated the synagogue of

Design by Bernard Rice.
See detail.



Bruchsal, which was destroyed by the Nazis on the Night of Broken Glass. Khan emigrated that same year and launched the first Israeli textile printing company in 1937, in the city of Ramat Gan. These fabrics were designed in the years 1936-38.

The first piece shown to us is characteristic as a piece of memory, stamped with woodblocks in monochrome ink. The design shows representations of elements of the national landscape, such as the Tower of David, Haifa Bay and Jaffa Port, among others. The scenes sit adjacent to one another, and looking at the block size used, border composition and the inclusion of some botanical details, we can see that the artist was familiar with and influenced by *toile de jouy*.

We were also shown a linen fabric, decorated with three-color linoleum prints in red, blue and brown. The designs here are landscapes decorated with



Design by Leo Khan: Kibbutz.

Design by Leo Khan: Haifa Bay.



Design by Yohanan Simon.



vegetal borders and including representations of traditional labour, such as working the fields and fishing.

One of the interesting aspects of archival work, says Tal, is its occasional detective nature, discovering the history behind the textiles, and how they made the journey from the artist into the hands of the owner who donated them.

In the 1940s-50s, the active painter and illustrator Yohanan Simon began to work in textile creation, along with his wife Fini Laintersdorf; the artist also wrote and illustrated children's stories. Possibly this latter activity influenced a fabric displaying two-colour silkscreen prints, with the design featuring figures of a primitive ethnic character. This textile is reminiscent of the time when the artist lived and worked in a kibbutz, an Israeli collective agricultural community.

Fashion

Roji Ben Yosef emigrated from Bulgaria to Israel in 1948, and two years later her family opened a workshop with two embroidery machines, which later became the company *Rikma*. Their work was applied to women's clothing, paving the way for a more modern style of decorative and colourful designs.

In the 1960s, Ben Yosef made contact with the textile company ATA, which was in a production crisis brought by the government's policy to promote the manufacture of household fabrics and fashion, while ATA was largely a producer of spun fabrics. Roji proposed that ATA make a collection of highly



Design by Roji Ben Josef.

Design by Ziona Shimshi.



coloured embroidered fabrics, which her company *Rikma* would then use for fashionable garments. Roji's vision was pioneering in the emergence of a new aesthetic firmly rooted in the culture of her adoptive country: light, materiality, the influence of the clothing of the nomadic Bedouin and Arabs, and of the Jewish immigrants of Yemen, Morocco, Libya and Afghanistan.

In the 1970s, she began a search to find and employ artisans in Arab towns (Hebron, Ramalla) to produce embroidered fabric featuring local folk art, like Hamsa and Kafia motifs and the Bethlehem stars she introduced, with which she styled new fashion lines. In ideological terms, Ben Yosef was a designer who not only sought aesthetic integration with the cultural milieu to which she had emigrated, but also held on to the hope of reconciling cultures through artistic creation.

The new textiles that Roji Ben Yosef developed were highly successful and firmly established her reputation as a leading designer in Israel and on the international stage.



▲ Work by Julia Keyner.
► Glasses by Fini Laintersdor.



Ziona Shimshi, an Israeli ceramist and artist, made fabrics for Roji Ben Yosef and for the [Maskit company](#). Today she continues to develop her artistic work and is an active campaigner for human rights.

Julia Keiner, a German artist and designer, founded the Department of Weaving at the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem in 1941, bringing Bauhaus concepts to the teaching and production of woven fabrics, which were used in fashion and interior design.

Fini Laintersdorf, Roji Ben Yosef, Ziona Shimshi and Julia Keiner, whose textile and clothing designs we saw in the archive at Shenkar, are the founding designers of the Israeli textile industry. They embody the longing to reconcile a natural vision of the Middle East with the legacies that each of them, together with other designers in the country's history, brought with them from their native European cultures. ●

**Dedicated to the memory
of my teachers Nora Frenkel and Tessa Smith Agassi**