

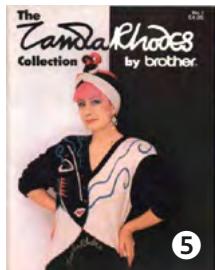
# Meet the artists



1 Zandra Rhodes at work, in her trademark pink hair and matching boiler suit 2 A fabric sample for her Knitted Circle dress design  
3 Zandra talks through print samples for her Lace Mountain Collection for FreeSpirit Fabrics 4 A stunning design from her A/W 2016 fashion show



Zandra created the Japanese-inspired 'Yamanashi' pattern for Rowan's Mag 59



5 + 6 Zandra produced a book of machine knitting patterns in 1980 for Brother 7 Designs on display at the Fashion & Textiles Museum in Bermondsey



The Screen Room is dedicated to screen-printing fabrics

## MEET THE ARTISTS

# Zandra Rhodes

In the first of a new series on influential textile artists, Katy Bevan looks at the 50-year career of Zandra Rhodes



**HAVING GROWN** up in the 1960s and '70s, I never thought I'd see certain styles being worn again – high-waisted jeans, oversized sunglasses and shoulder pads, to name a few. And now the graphic patterns and clashing colours of Dame Zandra Rhodes' iconic designs are back in fashion too.

Zandra Rhodes has been a fixture on the fashion calendar for more than 50 years, showing a new range at London Fashion Week in February 2016, and with no signs of slowing down. But then Zandra has always cut her own path, from her pink hair to her wild ethnic prints and her early fabrics, inspired by Pop Art, that bemused the fashion world.

"First and foremost, I'm a textile designer who loves pattern, and loves what pattern can do," she says. "The pattern comes first, then how the pattern changes when it's on the body."

Designs begin as sketches which are then developed into repeat patterns. Rhodes' studio in London's Bermondsey is lined with drawings and still has a huge room solely for screen-printing fabrics. Gauge-sticks line one wall, used to measure the repeats between the patterns to ensure accurate registration of the many colours, while on the other wall are the stacks of original screens.

The process for Zandra's knitwear follows a similar design process to making other clothes. Some of her early knitwear designs mimic the dressmaking process using 'cut and sew', where a knitted fabric is designed first then the garment cut out from that. For both processes, though, a paper pattern is created from an initial sketch, then a toile, or dummy is made from fleece, and the design marked on it with a pen to see how and where it hangs.

At this stage, the drape and design can be altered and relayed back to the paper pattern to make the adjustments. Swatches are made up by a knitter to Zandra's designs, resulting in the final garment and pattern.

Zandra told me she was taught to knit by her grandmother, and later caught the knitting 'bug'; at one point in the 1970s, she had a whole department of her fashion empire dedicated to knitwear. Rhodes believes in the power of making, and her knitwear became part of the new wave of 'designer' knitting which included Sandy Black, Patricia Roberts and Kaffe Fassett. Recent collaborations have been with Vogue to create sewing patterns, and with Rowan Yarns – she contributed the stunning 'Yamanashi' knitting pattern in Kidsilk Haze yarn to its current *Knitting & Crochet Magazine* 59.

Zandra's mother was a designer for the Worth fashion house, and a senior lecturer in fashion at Medway College of Arts. Inspiration came from books about textiles and embroidery left lying about the house. Zandra's famous Knitted Circle dress design was based on a chain stitch pattern, but was also inspired by her friends who were experimenting with textiles, knitting and different ways to make clothes and money. Her contemporaries include Marion Foale, Sally Tuffin and Sylvia Ayton, as well as Bill Gibb, Antony Price and Ossie Clark, who all studied at the Royal College of Art under its Professor of Fashion, Janey Ironside.

She attended Medway College of Arts, now part of the University of the Creative Arts (UCA), and where she became Chancellor in 2010. UCA now holds the Zandra Rhodes archive, available online as a digital study resource. Zandra

also supports young designers by giving them studio space in her Bermondsey base. The studio and her penthouse flat are in the same building as the Fashion and Textiles Museum that she founded in Bermondsey Street, London, in 2003. Now part of Newham College, the Fashion and Textiles

Museum is one of the only places to celebrate fashion and fabrics in this country, running regular courses for both emerging designers on Newham's tailoring courses as well as enthusiasts like us – perhaps her most important legacy. ☺

### •• I'M A TEXTILE DESIGNER WHO LOVES PATTERN, AND LOVES WHAT PATTERN CAN DO ••

[www.ftmlondon.org](http://www.ftmlondon.org) [www.thecrafter.me](http://www.thecrafter.me)

